**FACILITATORS AND BARRIERS TO THE ASSIMILATION OF MARKETING EXECUTIVES INTO SENIOR MANAGEMENT ROLES**

Abstract

Purpose

The study examined the factors that might contribute to the ease with which marketing executives in UK charities who have been promoted to senior general management positions adjust to the occupancy of these roles.

Design/methodology/approach

Thirty-seven individuals with functional marketing backgrounds currently holding top general management positions in large fundraising charities were interviewed using a frame-worked occupational autobiographic narrative approach. The research was informed by aspects of newcomer adjustment theory, notably uncertainty reduction theory.

Findings

Social and personal considerations were much more important determinants of the ease of assimilation into top management positions in charities than were technical job-related matters. Role ambiguity constituted the main barrier to smooth adjustment. Mentoring, planned induction programmes, the nature of a person’s past work experience and the individual’s social status critically affected how readily a marketer fitted into a top management role. Disparate sets of factors influenced different elements of managerial newcomer adjustment (role clarity, self-efficacy and social acceptance).

Research limitations/implications

As the participants in the study needed to satisfy certain narrowly defined criteria and to work in a single sector (large fundraising charities) the sample was necessarily small. It was not possible to explore the effects on operational performance of varying degrees of ease of newcomer adjustment.

Practical implications

Individuals promoted to top management posts in charities should try psychologically to break with the past and should not be afraid of projecting a strong functional professional identity to their new peers. These recommendations can be expected to apply to organisations in general which, like large charities, need senior management mentoring and induction programmes to assist recently promoted individuals from function-specific backgrounds; job descriptions for top management posts that are clear and embody realistic expectations; and ‘shadowing’ and training activities for newly appointed senior managers with function-specific backgrounds.

Originality/value

The study is the first to apply newcomer adjustment theory to the assimilation of functional managers into more senior general management. It examines a broader range of potential variables affecting managerial newcomer adjustment than has previously been considered. Relevant issues are examined in the context of an important sector: fundraising charities.

Key words: Newcomer adjustment, uncertainty reduction, role ambiguity, charities, senior management development.

Introduction

A neglected aspect of the study of managerial career development concerns the factors that help or hinder a manager who currently undertakes a function-specific role (e.g., marketing, HR, operations) to fit easily into a more senior *general management* role at the top level of an organisation. The limited literature that exists pertaining to this matter has tended to focus on the consequences of lack of organisational intervention and/or support for managerial career development (Russell, 1991; Stevens, 1996; Barnett and Bradley, 2007), on the elements of programmes needed to facilitate internal promotion to higher levels (e.g., Prince, 2005), and on socialisation processes (as discussed below) and the establishment of useful personal networks (Chandler and Kram, 2005; Saks, Uggerslev and Fassina, 2007). However, the identification of variables with the potential to affect the sound assimilation of a functional executive into senior general management has not been a substantive topic of career development research. In the present study these variables are posited to comprise organisational factors involving planned induction and mentoring and organisational attitudes towards a particular business function; plus personal considerations including an individual’s background knowledge and experience, occupational self-identity, social status, and the person’s approach to learning about a new senior management role.

The investigation addresses this issue using the example of marketing executives who obtain general management positions at the board level. Marketing is a relevant functional area to investigate in the current context because, as described below, marketing executives can experience special problems when entering the highest echelons of general management. Moreover, the research examined the issue in a sector, large fundraising charities, where the promotion of marketers to the top level of an organisation’s senior management might be especially problematic (see below for a discussion of this point). Charities represent a relevant sector for the conduct of the present research, for several reasons. The sector is large and important, comprising 189,000 fundraising organisations in 2014 with a combined annual income of £3 billion (Charity Commission, 2015). Many charities are substantial multinational enterprises in their own right (Bennett and Ali-Choudhury, 2010) and the sector is highly competitive (Bennett, 2005). British charities today undertake much contract work on behalf of government, and increasingly apply ‘commercial’ strategies and practices to their operations (Bennett, 2013). Careers in charities have attracted growing amounts of attention as the charity sector has expanded, and there is a considerable degree of cross-over of executives between commercial and nonprofit sectors. A survey of 398 senior managers in charities completed by Bennett (2013) found that 66% of these individuals had high career orientation. Research has established that high career orientation is accompanied by the desires to move to better jobs within an organisation (Blau, 1985), to plan and manage careers effectively (Yamamoto, 2006), and to engage in self-analysis of career-related strengths and weaknesses (Briscoe, Hall and DeMuth, 2006).

Investigations of this nature are important because it is known that satisfactory adjustment to a fresh and more demanding managerial role is significantly associated with several desirable work-related characteristics including job satisfaction, job performance, intention to remain and commitment to an organisation (see Bauer, Bodner, Erdogan, Truxillo and Tucker, 2007). The research reported below was based on newcomer adjustment theory, especially aspects concerned with uncertainty reduction. Newcomer adjustment theory posits that an entrant to a new occupational role will be assimilated more easily if certain organisational and personal factors accompany the person’s transition (Ashforth and Saks, 1996; Saks and Ashforth, 2000; Bauer et al., 2007). Uncertainty reduction theory (also known as initial interactive theory [see Berger and Calibrese, 1975]) argues that, because newcomers to higher level and more demanding positions are often plagued with uncertainty about their ability to cope with the demands of their fresh roles, organisational measures and personal initiatives designed to reduce role ambiguity will facilitate assimilation (Katz, 1985; Miller and Jablin, 1991; Saks et al., 2007). Uncertainties can arise about how to behave in a new role and about the beliefs and attitudes expected of a person occupying the fresh role (Berger and Bradac, 1982). Uncertainty reduction theory proposes that uncertainty is unpleasant so that people deliberately seek to reduce it, e.g. by obtaining information and through learning about the thinking and attitudes of new peers in order to predict the behaviour of new peers (Berger and Calabrese, 1975). Adherence to learned norms can reduce feelings of uncertainty and facilitate identification with a particular desired group (Hogg, 2000).

The mannerswhereby newcomers learn how to accommodate and succeed in fresh roles may vary (Jones, 1986; Bauer et al., 2007). An individual might seek to learn proactively or reactively (Ashford and Black, 1996; Cooper-Thomas, Anderson and Cash, 2012). A proactive approach may be termed ‘doing-learning’ and could involve assertive networking, experimenting and testing; independently investigating new possibilities; and constantly seeking to change situations (perhaps making mistakes) and then learning from outcomes (see Miller and Jablin, 1991; Kim, Gable and Kim, 2005; Cooper-Thomas, et al., 2012). (Some studies have concluded that doing-learning behaviour can act as a buffer against stress during the newcomer assimilation process [see Ashford and Black, 1996].) An alternative approach to the mechanism of learning about higher level work could be referred to as ‘learning-doing’ and might entail a more reserved and sequential strategy (Lapointe, Vandenberghe and Boudrias, 2014). Here, according to Ashford and Cummings (1983), Miller and Jablin (1996), and others (see Cooper-Thomas et al., 2012) the individual spends much time in observation and reflection, waits and is guided by others, and is constantly open to feedback and advice.

The study makes a number of contributions to the career development literature. It applies newcomer adjustment theory to the assimilation of functional managers (marketing executives in the present investigation) into more senior and more broadly general management roles (a topic that to the best of the author’s knowledge has not been researched in any depth) and explores relevant issues in a non-profit sector (fundraising charities) where the adjustment of marketing executives to participation in the higher echelons of management might be especially difficult (due perhaps to negative perceptions of the marketing function among key stakeholders). The investigation employed an occupational narrative interview protocol to develop a new model that integrates newcomer adjustment theory with literature concerning factors associated with the promotion of individuals to senior management positions. The research extends current knowledge of newcomer adjustment theory and practice in a number of ways. Firstly it identifies certain antecedents of newcomer adjustment relevant to an individual’s easy assimilation into a senior management role (i.e., functional professional identity, existing attitudes towards a particular occupation held by new peers, knowledge of finance, a newcomer’s social status) that have not been considered extensively by previous literature in the field. Secondly the study enriches newcomer adjustment literature by investigating interactions between core elements of newcomer adjustment (role clarity and self-efficacy) and a person’s line of approach to learning about the norms and demands of a fresh senior managerial role (doing-learning versus learning-doing). Thirdly the investigation provides a test of the applicability to a new context of variables previously employed in newcomer adjustment research such as planned induction and mentoring, and fourthly it develops a model wherein a freshly appointed senior manager’s approach to learning about the new role mediates the effects of an individual’s experience of general management on elements of newcomer adjustment. Outcomes to the study identify the critical role of a newcomer’s social status in facilitating easy adjustment, and show that disparate sets of factors impact on particular elements of newcomer adjustment. The results offer a prescription for organisational actions to ease the entry of functional executives to top management positions.

The article proceeds as follows. Firstly, the theory of newcomer adjustment underlying the study is outlined and the factors that might facilitate satisfactory newcomer adjustment in the current context are briefly examined. Then the frame-worked autobiographical interview methodology employed in the course of the investigation is described and the sample selection criteria are specified. Next the outcomes to the interviews are stated and an emerging model is proffered. Finally the implications of the results for individuals and for organisations are presented. An outline of the interview schedule used in the course of the investigation is given in an Appendix to the paper.

The newcomer adjustment process

Kohler, Rohm, de Ruyter and Wetzels (2011) observed how the process of adjusting to a fresh and unfamiliar occupational role consists of task and social transitions whereby a person gains knowledge and learns the behavioural patterns expected of the new position. Feldman (1981), Fisher (1986) and Bauer et al. (2007) suggested that the process comprises three elements, namely (i) obtaining role clarity, (ii) acquiring feelings of self-efficacy in respect of the new role, and (iii) gaining social acceptance. This was because, according to the outcomes of these and other studies, effective newcomer adjustment requires (i) an understanding of job tasks, priorities, etc. (role clarity), (ii) learning the tasks of the new job and gaining confidence in the role (self-efficacy), and (iii) coming to feel accepted by new peers (social acceptance). Also these factors have frequently been found to be associated with job satisfaction, performance, and organisational commitment (Saks et al., 2007).

Uncertainty reduction theory relates to newcomer adjustment theory in that, according to Bauer et al. (2007), attempts at uncertainty reduction typically occur as an antecedent of newcomer adjustment. Uncertainty reduction theory posits that newcomers typically want to increase the predictability of interactions between themselves and new peers (Berger and Calabrese, 1975). Actions aimed at achieving this allegedly enhance role clarity and feelings of self-efficacy, thus easing a newcomer’s adjustment to a fresh role. Uncertainty reduction contributes to a person’s assimilation into a new role by creating an understanding of what is needed in the position (role clarity), of how well the person is functioning (self-efficacy) and of the quality of newly established relationships (social acceptance) (Miller and Jablin, 1991). The last of these (social acceptance) is more likely perhaps if uncertainty is reduced via extensive social interaction between the newcomer and new peers (Saks and Ashforth, 1997). Uncertainty reduction is associated with various personal tactics of newcomer adjustment, e.g., selection of sources of information, intensity of information search and of contact with others (Allen, 2006). Organisational tactics can reduce uncertainty and hence improve newcomer adjustment (Jones, 1986) (Saks et al., 2007).

*Obtaining role clarity*

Role clarity means understanding what exactly is expected of a person in a new position (Kohler et al., 2011), the job tasks and priorities attached to the role and the special demands and requirements of the work. In terms of uncertainty reduction theory, role clarity helps a newcomer to increase the predictability of interactions with new peers (Berger and Calabrese, 1975) and to create manageable environments (Falcione and Wilson, 1988). Role clarity may increase as social interactions with fresh colleagues develop and as the individual learns from these contacts (Bauer et al., 2007). Thus, information seeking is likely to develop role clarity and hence facilitate newcomer adjustment (Berger and Bradac, 1982). The learning that results adds detail to the role and assists the incumbent to match the person’s expectations to the role’s requirements (Bauer et al., 2007). Absence of role clarity may affect detrimentally a person’s sense of ‘fit and assimilation’ into a new role (Saks and Ashforth, 2000 p.46). Role clarity is needed on technical and functional aspects of the position (Comer, 1991), on the social norms associated with it, and on the ‘beliefs, values, orientations, behaviours, skills and so forth necessary to function effectively within an organisation’s milieu’ (Ashforth and Saks, 1996 p.149). Role clarity allegedly reduces anxiety, with consequent benefits for performance (Kohler et al., 2011). It is helped by the presence of formal induction procedures, precise organisational configurations, regular reviews, and clear statements from an organisation’s CEO (Saks et al., 2007)

*Acquiring feelings of self-efficacy*

Self-efficacy involves an individual’s self-belief in being able to master the duties attached to a new job. Thus, according to Bandura (1977), it describes the ‘conviction that one can successfully execute the behaviour required to produce successful outcomes’ (p.126). A newcomer with substantial self-efficacy in relation to a higher level job will believe in his or her ability to accomplish specific tasks associated with the role (Lu, Siu and Cooper, 2005, Ballout, 2009) and to fulfil comprehensively and competently all its demands (Rigotti, Schyns and Mohr, 2008). Low self-efficacy individuals, moreover, are allegedly more prone to experience stress because, according to Katz (1985), occupancy of a new and unfamiliar occupational role can result in a ‘high anxiety-producing situation’ (p.137) with the individual being plagued with doubts as to his or her capacity to cope with the new position. Moving from a function-specific job to a top level general position that carries heavy (and sometimes disturbing) responsibilities might expose a manager to levels of stress the person has not experienced before (Chen and Spector, 1991).

*Gaining social acceptance*

Social acceptance occurs when a person feels liked, accepted and appreciated by his or her new peers, thus helping the individual to adapt to the new peers’ collective norms and values (Kohler et al. 2011). This enables a newcomer to enjoy more positive relationships with colleagues, leading to easier adjustment to a fresh role. A sense of social acceptance can lead to reduced uncertainty about the newcomer’s ability to complete a fresh role, hence improving the individual’s sense of self-efficacy. It may also diminish the newcomer’s stress levels (Saks and Ashforth, 2000). Planned induction and mentoring can assist a person gain social acceptance, as described in a later section.

Stress and the adjustment process

Allen, McManus and Russell (1999) noted how each of these elements may impose considerable amounts of *stress* on the incoming individual, and that certain organisational policies (notably planned induction and mentoring) can help a newcomer deal with stress experienced when taking on a fresh role. Stress can arise from the demands of a job (Ellis et al., 2015), from uncertain expectations surrounding the person’s new role (Saks and Ashforth, 1997), from lack of feedback and from the absence of interaction with key people in the organisation (Katz, 1985). Allegedly, stress can contribute to ‘lower physical and psychological output from employees’ (Ellis et al., 2015, p.204) and may seriously impede successful assimilation (Saks and Ashforth, 1997; Bauer et al., 2007).

Factors facilitating easy adjustment

Bauer et al’s (2007) meta-analysis of the possible antecedents of successful newcomer adjustment identified a number of variables relevant to the process (although the literature in the field has examined assimilation into jobs generally and at all levels, rather than investigating how individuals fit into top management roles following promotion). The variables in question are discussed below and relate to the possession of prior knowledge and information (cf. Saks and Ashforth, 2000; Saks et al., 2007), social factors (cf. Berger and Calabrese, 1975; Ashforth, Saks and Lee, 1998), and organisational policies designed to facilitate easy assimilation (see Falcione and Wilson, 1988; Bauer et al., 2007). Additionally, and as little is known about the variables that might help an individual fit into a top management role following promotion, it is instructive to enquire as to whether factors known to facilitate *appointment* to senior management positions also improve a person’s ability to adjust to a new senior general management role. These considerations were summarised by Bennett (2009 and 2011a) and involve (i) a person’s experience of financial management, and (ii) the individual’s and the organisation’s perspectives on marketing, as opposed to other business functions. Relevant variables, which may be organisational or personal in nature, are discussed below.

*Organisational factors*

Planned induction

Organisations can deliberately and systematically ‘socialise’ an individual into a senior management role (cf. Chao, Kelly, Wolf, Klein and Gardner, 1992). Van Maanen and Schein (1979) defined organisational socialisation as a process that ‘entails the learning of a cultural perspective --- for interpreting one’s experiences in a given sphere of work’ (p. 212). It can facilitate newcomer adjustment by helping to equip a person with the knowledge and skills needed for a new higher level job and to determine how an individual ‘learns the beliefs, values, orientations, behaviours, and so forth necessary to fulfil a new role and to function effectively’ (Ashforth and Saks, 1996 p.149). Relevant activities could be designed to provide the newcomer with information about organisational power structures, formal and informal relationships at the top of the organisation’s hierarchy, jargon unique to the new role, the goals and values of others at the apex of the organisation, and the organisation’s traditions, customs, etc. (Chen and Klimoski, 2003). Planned induction contributes to the core elements of newcomer adjustment through informing individuals of the phases they need to go through and by providing formal role models (thus improving role clarity) (Bauer et al., 2007) and by reducing the degree of uncertainty experienced during early socialisation (helping a person’s social acceptance) (Saks and Ashforth, 1997). Also the technical and operational support offered during a planned induction programme can induce greater feelings of self-efficacy (Nelson and Quick, 1991; Bauer et al., 2007).

Mentoring

The newcomer could be assigned a ‘trusted organisational insider’ to mentor the individual, to serve as a role model and help and ‘groom’ the person to function effectively in his or her new and unfamiliar senior management role (Bauer et al., 2007 p.714). A mentor can introduce a newcomer to top management norms of behaviour, attitudes and networks (Michel, 2007) and provide valuable emotional support (Seibert, Kraimer and Liden, 2001). Formal peer mentoring, according to Allen et al. (1999), can be highly efficacious in reducing stress. Campbell (1997) suggested that mentoring by a non-specialist senior manager is especially useful for helping a functional manager to focus on broad managerial issues. Mentoring contributes to the core elements of newcomer adjustment by providing feedback that improves both role clarity and social acceptance (Allen et al., 1999; Bauer et al., 2007), by reinforcing an individual’s self-esteem and hence self-efficacy (Saks and Ashforth, 1997), and by explaining an organisation’s goals and internal politics (enhancing role clarity) (Allen et al., 1999).

Top management’s attitudes towards marketers

Research has suggested that the qualities of marketing executives have not always been held in high esteem by the top managers of large organisations (see Bennett, 2009). For example, a study of 81 non-marketing senior executives completed by Baker and Holt (2004) found that a large majority of the respondents regarded marketers as ‘unaccountable, untouchable, slippery and expensive’ (p.557). Hadden and Duckworth (2005) suggested that marketers have ‘very different personalities from those who are board members’, with the result that marketers might find top management board room cultures unappealing, even alien. There is evidence to suggest moreover that anti-marketing bias has been present in a number of large UK charities (see Bennett and Savani [2004] for details of relevant literature). Expenditures on marketing might be assumed to take money away from a charity’s philanthropic activities and/or that gains to one charity resulting from marketing will mean losses for others. Attitudes of this nature could interfere with a newcomer’s feelings of self-efficacy (through questioning the person’s usefulness – see Bower et al. [2007]), could reduce role clarity (via an unwillingness to share information [Jones, 1986; Allen, 2006]), and inhibit social acceptance due to lack of support (Allen et al., 1999) and less satisfactory relationships (Lu and Tjosvold, 2013).

*Personal factors*

Knowledge and experience of general management

Functional specialists (and especially marketing managers) have often been criticised for their alleged lack of general business knowledge (for details see Baker and Holt, 2004; Turner and Miller, 2007; Bennett 2009). Specifically, functional managers have been accused of concentrating on task-centred micro issues while ignoring the bigger picture (Doyle, 2000), of failing to recognise the contributions of other business functions (Hadden and Duckworth, 2005), and of not ‘thinking as business people first and as functional experts second’ (Gray, 2004 p.32). Such considerations suggest that individuals with substantial experience of general management (acquired through previous jobs, training, or a combination of both) and with generalist skills and managerial mind-sets should be better able to adjust to the occupancy of board level positions with organisation-wide rather than function-specific responsibilities (Gray et al., 2007).

Knowledge of the finance function

it is known that within businesses, a person’s possession of an accounting or finance background greatly facilitates the individual’s chances of occupying a senior management position. An analysis of the top 100 FTSE companies completed by the recruitment company Robert Half (2013) revealed that 52% of their CEOs had an accountancy or financial management background. Just eight per cent came from marketing or advertising. Ten of 18 new FTSE 100 CEOs appointed during 2013 were former financial managers. In the USA, Hyde, Landry and Tipping (2004) found that 80% of Fortune 1000 companies had a finance director. Rogers (2012) observed a similar breakdown at sub-main board level within UK FTSE 100 businesses. It follows that knowledge of finance should help a person who is not a financial specialist to fit into a top management role.

Functional professional identity

It is relevant to note in this connection that a functional executive’s work experience is likely to have been specialist in nature and to involve function-related rather than wider managerial duties (Bennett, 2011). Functional managers will probably, according to Simms (2003), have progressed their careers through taking *essentially similar* jobs at higher levels in different organisations, possibly leading to the development of competencies that are not easily transferred to other areas (Dickmann and Harris, 2005). Specialist functional experience, in the words of Finkelstein and Hambrick (1996), provides a ‘lens’ through which a manager ‘sees business problems and solutions’ (p.91), and this lens might not be useful in very senior management positions (Ritchie and Eastwood, 2006). Specifically in the context of marketing, Hekman, Bigley, Steensman and Hereford (2009) argued that the manner in which a marketer *identifies* with membership of the marketing profession will affect the individual’s organisational perspectives and behaviour. A strong identification might influence how a marketer interacts with managerial colleagues and how the individual perceives his or her role as a senior manager (cf. Davis, 2002). Hence, a marketer who moves into top management and who does not eschew narrowly based marketing-related attitudes and self-images might find it difficult to relate to other senior managers, who may possess broader management experience (Hales and Tamangani, 1996) and an organisationally orientated world view (Bennett, 2011).

Elite social status

In many countries, people from elite social and educational backgrounds are overrepresented in the top managements of large organisations (Westphal and Stern, 2006; Bennett, 2009; Robert Half, 2013). In 2012, 29% of the CEOs of the UK’s top 100 FTSE companies were graduates of the universities of Oxford or Cambridge (Robert Half, 2013). A survey of 209 marketing executives who had attained senior positions in British companies completed by Bennett (2009) revealed that nearly two thirds of the sample had been privately educated (75% of individuals in the highest roles) and that a third had attended a ‘top 20’ British university. It could be that elite credentials ease a person’s assimilation into a senior role after appointment, given that so many existing top managers are themselves likely to possess elite credentials. An elite newcomer might already be ‘in tune’ with the norms and values of existing senior managers, and might already possess influential connections and belong to important social networks (Dornhoff, 2002; Westphal and Stern, 2006). High social status newcomers may be more likely to be invited to attend informal meetings of ‘inner circles’, to be asked for advice, and to be socially accepted by the existing managerial elite (Westphal and Khanna, 2003 p.361).

The above mentioned literature implies a model relevant to the assimilation of functional executives into top management positions that is based on newcomer adjustment theory; with role clarity, self-efficacy and social acceptance being determined by variables concerned with uncertainty reduction (mentoring, planned induction), by personal characteristics (e.g., social status, pre-existing occupational identity, knowledge of finance and general management), and by an individual’s approach to learning about the norms and demands attached to a new senior management role (learning-doing or doing-learning). Accordingly, an exploratory study was undertaken to evaluate the relevance of such a model in the context of recently promoted functional managers. The study aimed to identify influential variables and to establish directions of association. The final model emerging from the investigation is shown in Figure 1. Its derivation is explained in subsequent sections.

Research method

A sampling frame for the investigation was created from a collection of sources. The criteria for inclusion in the sampling frame were that an individual should currently occupy a main board level position in a large charity, should have moved into a top management position within the last four years, and should have a marketing background and have been employed as a marketing executive prior to entering senior general management. Individuals moving sideways from a senior management post in one organisation to a senior post in another were not considered. A period of four years was selected on the grounds that a participant might not remember events accurately if they occurred considerably more than four years ago. Two participants matching these criteria were recruited from the Advisory Board of the authors’ home university and six more from contacts in a marketing professional body with which the authors were affiliated. All six were listed in the professional body’s membership directory as occupying board level positions in large charities and, when approached, confirmed that they met the abovementioned criteria. The websites of the UK’s largest (by income according to Charity Commission data) 200 charities were scoured for information on the identities of their top managers and likely prospects (33 in number) were contacted by letter or email and were asked whether they satisfied the relevant criteria and, if so, if they would be kind enough to participate in the study. A further set of contacts was available from lists of people who had participated in previous studies of charity management completed by the authors and their associates. Individuals who, when approached, agreed to take part in the research were asked to snowball the request for participation to anyone else they thought might satisfy the abovementioned selection criteria.

Eventually, 37 people agreed to be interviewed, all of whom matched the population of interest. Twenty-nine of the interviews were conducted face-to-face at the respondents’ premises; eight were completed via Skype and follow-up email correspondence. The interview schedule is summarised in the Appendix to the paper. This also shows the literature sources used to inform the prompts for the structural questions. The open-ended sections of the interviews were analysed using the NVIVO package. Codes for the interviewees’ comments were created *via* the constant comparison technique (Bogdan and Biklen, 1982). Thus provisional codes were allocated following the examination of the responses of the first person interviewed, and the remarks of the second and subsequent respondents were then allotted to these codes wherever possible. New codes were created for emerging categories and sub-categories and, where apposite, pre-existing codes were revised (see Fontana and Frey, 2000) until a set of mutually exclusive and collectively exhaustive codes was defined. The exercise was completed by two people independently. Differing interpretations of emerging theories (which were few in number) were resolved through discussion. Table 1 lists the characteristics of the participants, all of whom were employed in large organisations (all of which had some form of marketing department). Whilst sample members were board level senior managers, none were chief executives. Table 1 indicates that 55% of the participants had been internally promoted. No differences in the pattern of results could be discerned between the responses of these individuals an people who had been recruited from outside. None of the interviewees exhibited any unusual characteristics in terms of their backgrounds or demographics likely to make them untypical of functional executives recently promoted to top management positions.

A qualitative research methodology was applied involving a frame-worked autobiographical narrative interviewing protocol designed to elicit information from elite participants. Interviews began with open ended invitations to participants to present autobiographic narrative accounts of how well they felt they had ‘fitted in’ to their new senior management roles and of the events and occurrences that had facilitated their absorption into the *milieu* of top management, plus the issues or occurrences that had created problems (cf. Bamburg, 2006). Autobiographic interviewing involves the participant recounting events, experiences and feelings that occurred during an episode in an individual’s life and to present these as a coherent narrative (Harding, 2006). It explores the meanings the interviewee attributes to his or her thoughts and actions within the relevant period, and may be reinforced by subsequent semi-structured questioning (Miller and Brewer, 2003). The interviewees were *not* asked to recall events chronologically but instead were left to describe matters that had made the deepest impact. Whilst the chronological approach to interviewing typically extracts a more precise sequencing of events spanning a period of transition than does other methods, it might not bring out the occurrences and feelings that were most important to the person at the time. Also it could induce superficial and/or irrelevant information (Harding 2006). Narrative autobiographical interviewing, conversely, enables the participant to look back on events and report only the events and feelings that were the most salient, irrespective of their order of occurrence (see Miller, 2000). Thus the interviewee presents a narrative that ‘makes a coherent story out of experience’ (Robinson and Hawpe, 1986 p.111), and which combines recollections with personal interpretations.

Once a narrative had begun the interviewer refrained from intervention until the interviewee had finished. Then, consequent to the conclusion of the open ended part of an interview, the participant was led back to aspects of the issue not already mentioned and was invited to discuss *specific* themes and topics related to the research agenda. Additionally, all the respondents were asked to rate on a scale between one and seven how easily they believed they had adjusted to their new management positions. Responses pertaining to various themes mentioned during the open ended parts of the interviews and to topics in the frame-worked sections were counted and cross-tabulated. This process allowed the identification of the most common concerns and issues among the participants; thus supplementing the views expressed by specific individuals and providing wider and fuller detail about relevant issues (Johnson, Onwuegbuzie and Turner, 2007). In isolation, neither the open ended nor the closed elements of the interview schedule were *of themselves* adequate to furnish complete perspectives on, and understanding of, the issues covered by the investigation (see Brewer and Hunter, 2006). The open ended introduction to an interview *contextualised* the responses explored in the frame-worked section.

The frame-worked section of the interview procedure was relevant given that the study had a clear thematic focus and since frame-worked interviewing methods (see Gale, Heath, Cameron, Rashid and Redwood, 2013) facilitate the identification of communalities and differences in qualitative data. Hence conclusions can be reached clustered around themes and particular research questions related to the study. This is useful when, as in the present case, interviews with participants cover similar topics and issues. A further advantage is that because, as mentioned above, interviewees may close their memories of difficult and painful experiences, an open ended approach might not draw out dialogue about disagreeable past episodes. As noted by Rapley (2004), moreover, a participant’s responses to an open ended interview can in part be created by the way the interviewer speaks, listens, adopts facial expressions and makes gestures.

To validate the accuracy of the interviewees’ responses the researchers requested the participants’ permission to approach the chief executives of their charities and ask a few simple questions about how easily a person’s CEO had believed the individual had fitted into a senior management role, assuming the CEO had been in post when the interviewee had taken a senior management position.

As the interviewees were members of the main management boards of large UK charities (many of which are in effect substantial multinational enterprises), the elite status of the participants had to be taken into account. Interviewing elite people can involve problems arising from an imbalance of status between the interviewer and the interviewee. Allegedly, elite interviewees dislike answering simple closed questions, preferring instead to voice their opinions at length without interruption and to ‘articulate their views explaining why they think and what they think’ (Aberbach and Rockman, 2002 p.674). Moreover, according to Harvey (2011), they are (i) prone to challenge interviewers on the relevance of specific questions, and (ii) more likely than others to seek to legitimise their attitudes and behaviour in order to try to establish a certain self-image based on their presumed elite status. Thus, following the advice of Aberbach and Rockmann (2002) and Welch et al. (2002) on the conduct of elite interviews, great care was taken to demonstrate the interviewer’s professional credentials and standing in the academic world, to draw attention to the interviewer’s institution and the notable people associated with it, to explain in general terms why the questions were being asked, and to emphasise that no-one else in the interviewee’s organisation was capable of participating in the enquiry.

Findings

*Open ended responses: Importance of social factors*

When asked what had *helped* a person adjust to occupying a senior management role (rather than simply working simply as a functional marketing executive), the participants overwhelmingly (and without cue) discussed *social and personal considerations* rather than technical issues or particular occupational duties. Only two of the 37 interviewees mentioned their job expertise in relation to easy (or less easy) absorption into their new roles. This confirms the importance of gaining social acceptance as an element of newcomer adjustment (see Feldman, 1981; Bauer et al., 2007). Helpful social factors that were frequently mentioned included the participants’ employment of interpersonal skills to secure acceptance (mentioned by 23 of the respondents), especially the outward display of self-confidence (18 mentions) and determination (15). The value of engaging in flattery towards new peers was referred to in some way or other by 12 of the respondents. Clearly, these comments underscore the desire of most of the participants to secure the social approval of new peers. Eleven of the participants stated that it was useful to express openly and forcefully that they *‘shared the same values’* and/or interests as new peers. The need to change one’s perspectives was noted by in some way by twelve of the respondents, e.g. by *‘being prepared to break with the past’*, to *‘prepare oneself mentally for the new role’* and to *‘decide who you are and what you want to be’*. Role clarity regarding the requirement that a newcomer display specific values and perspectives was seemingly a desirable attribute facilitating newcomer assimilation in most of the sample organisations (cf. Ashforth and Saks, 1991; Saks and Ashforth, 2000).

Role ambiguity

Many of the issues that allegedly *hindered* a person’s assimilation into top management involved aspects of role ambiguity (see below for a further discussion of this matter). The most common complaint was that the new role was not as had been explained at the interview for the appointment (eleven mentions) or was not clearly defined(ten mentions). Prior literature has frequently identified unclear expectations of a new role as a barrier to newcomer adjustment (see Kohler et al., 2011 for details of relevant literature). Examples of role ambiguity often related to social or pseudo-social factors, such as not knowing when to be formal and when to be casual (five mentions); not understanding new social norms (eleven mentions), and not being ‘in’ on cliques outside marketing’ (five mentions). These comments accord with the findings of previous research concerning the need for formal job descriptions (e.g. Saks et al., 2007) and for information on work requirements (Kohler et al., 2011) and on its social as well as functional aspects (Comer, 1991). Eight of the interviewees commented how it was necessary, in the words of one individual, to *‘get to grips with a different sort of atmosphere in* (top) *management meetings’*. Also it was dangerous to be *‘too open’* with new colleagues (eight mentions). Specific problematic issues arising during transitions referred to by the respondents included having to deal with (external and internal) complaints unrelated to marketing (eight mentions); needing to supervise non-marketing staff (in terms of not knowing about the latter’s work and not wanting to alienate these individuals (eight mentions), and having to set performance standards for the charity as a whole, not just for marketing. Becoming a member of the top management meant, in the words of one of the interviewees, having to *‘create a sense of direction and commitment among everyone in the charity, not only my own department; I had to help create an overarching organisational purpose’.* Again these findings demonstrate the critical importance of role clarity in effective newcomer assimilation.

*Responses to closed questions*

The interview transcripts were perused independently by two academics to ascertain the

proportions of the sample falling into various categories with respect to the ‘closed questions’ within the interview schedule. Eleven of the interviewees had been formally mentored after appointment; seven had undertaken a planned induction programme. Fourteen members of the sample reported that they possessed wide ranging general management experience prior to their new appointment; eight stated that they had extensive experience of financial management. Twenty of the 37 interviewees indicated that they possessed a strong marketing professional identity. Close examination of the transcripts identified 16 individuals whose comments suggested especially high self-efficacy.

High social status as a facilitating factor

It was evident from the interviews that the possession of high social status greatly facilitated easy assimilation into top management: a phenomenon observed in many studies of private sector organisations (see Westphal and Khanna, 2003; Westphal and Stern, 2006; Bennett, 2009). ‘High’ social status was defined in terms of a person having been privately educated at school and having attended a university ranked in the top 30 institutions listed by the 2014 *Times Higher Education* university league table.) Only about eight per cent of the UK population are privately educated (Bolton, 2012), overwhelmingly from the top end of the UK income distribution (see Biggs and Dutta, 1999), and two-thirds of these privately educated pupils go on to attend leading universities [Paton, 2013]). Twenty-one of the 37 participants (57%) met this criterion. Eight of the remaining 16 participants had attended university; three of them at a ‘top 30’ university. Connections were visible between the interviewees’ reports of how well and quickly they had become accepted by their new peers and their social status. Fifteen of the 21 high social status participants reported easy and rapid social acceptance by their new peers. The finding concerning social status is not surprising, perhaps, in view of the fact that most of the participants noted that the pre-existing top managers of their charities mainly comprised people of high social status.

Closed questions: Role ambiguity

As regards role ambiguity, it emerged that 27 of the 37 participants could be said to have experienced a significant amount of role ambiguity during their transitions into top management. A common complaint was that many of the respondents had to assume responsibility for attaining targets in unanticipated and unfamiliar areas thus creating confusion concerning the criteria to be applied when the participants’ performances were appraised. Twenty-seven of the 37 participants (73%) mentioned this matter in some way or other. Examples of concerns included having to supervise activities outside of themarketing area and thus having to establish ‘*what “success” in these other areas actually looks like’* and ‘*having to cut costs and let* *people go in departments I knew nothing about’.* Role uncertainties extended to ‘unknown’ value systems (cf. Saks and Ashforth, 2000). Fourteen participants made remarks about initial uncertainty regarding the values they were supposed to expound in their new roles. One person explained the issue as follows:

*‘It turned out I was expected to subscribe to (organisational) values I had never heard about. Values seem to be different at this* (senior management) *level. I mean we are supposed to “project” values I did not know we actually have’.*

Negative influences on role ambiguity

On cross-tabulating the results, it appeared that role ambiguity was less of an issue among the participants who (i) had undergone some form of mentoring and/or planned induction programme; (ii) were of high social status; and (iii) possessed wide-ranging experience of general management (cf. Bennett, 2009; 2011). Eight of the eleven respondents who had been mentored and five of the seven who had experienced planned induction indicated that mentoring and induction had caused them to be better informed about the definitions and parameters of their new roles. Only eight of the 21 high social status participants mentioned significant issues concerning role uncertainty. This outcome might be due perhaps to existing senior executives (many of whom would themselves be of high social status) being more inclined to discuss with a high social status newcomer candidly and extensively all aspects of the latter’s role, including ‘unofficial’ and complementary dimensions. Only six of the 14 people with wide-ranging experience of general management mentioned the occurrence of substantial role ambiguity during their absorption into senior management, suggesting that this past experience endowed these individuals with more realistic expectations about unplanned ‘role extensions’ and with greater ability to seek out information concerning relevant matters.

Self-efficacy

Feelings of self-efficacy were generally high among the sample members who, in the main, believed they had fully mastered their new roles within one or two months of appointment. Expressions of perceptions of self-efficacy were evidenced by statements such *as ‘I soon had a firm handle on the case – it took me only a short while to get things sorted’; and ‘Within a month I felt totally on top of everything’*. Six of the 16 sample members who had self-efficacy scores in the top third of the spectrum had experience of the finance function (only eight people in the total sample possessed such experience); ten had wide-ranging general management experience; nine had been mentored (82% of the mentored group); five had undertaken a planned induction programme (i.e., 71% of the people who had completed an induction programme); eleven were of high social status. Such outcomes are generally compatible with the findings of previous studies (see Lu et al., 2005). The importance of general management experience derives perhaps from managers who possess such experience having acquired the abilities to switch easily from one managerial area to another and to coordinate the activities of teams involved in different and varied kinds of work (see Gray et al., 2007; Bennett, 2011). High social status might have facilitated a sense of self-efficacy due to feelings of confidence gained from more extensive communications with high social status peers who already occupied senior positions (cf. Westphal and Khanna, 2003).

*Non-influential variables: Stress, anti-marketing bias, and professional identity*

Certain variables that prior literature has suggested could affect newcomer adjustment in the present context did not figure prominently in the participants’ responses. For example, none of the interviewees reported having experienced dysfunctional levels of stress during their transitions into top management. Individuals who did comment on stress mentioned relatively minor issues such as ‘*being stressed that new peers will not understand the* (marketing-related) *language I use’.*  Collectively, the people making these (relatively unsubstantial) remarks did not exhibit any particular characteristics. Thus it was not the case that stress was lower the higher the degrees of role clarity (Kohler et al., 2011), self-efficacy (Katz, 1985; Saks and Ashforth, 2000) and social acceptance (Saks and Ashforth, 2000).

No meaningful evidence of anti-marketing bias within the sample charities emerged from the interviews. Whilst negative prejudice against the marketing function has been observed in previous studies (see for example Bennett, 2009), criticisms of marketing now seem to have disappeared, due perhaps to competition for donations having intensified, with a consequent increasing recognition of the need for marketing. *‘We are all marketers now, even the most hide-bound trustees see this nowadays’* one of the interviewees commented. Similarly, a person’s possession of a strong professional identity as a marketer (rather than as a general manager) did not constrain an individual’s satisfactory absorption into top management. Twenty of the interviewees stated that being a marketer meant much more to them than being a senior general manager. None of the 20 indicated that this constituted a problem. On the contrary, a majority (12) of the group of 20 suggested that a marketing professional identity represented an *asset* when dealing with new senior management peers. This contradicts the findings of some previous studies which suggested that a strong marketing professional identify might represent a problem for marketers entering senior management (see Sims, 2003; Bennett, 2011a).

*Opinions of the interviewees’ chief executives*

Twenty-three of the chief executives in charge of the 37 interviewees were in post when the latter had been recruited and agreed to take part in short telephone conversations intended to validate the participants’ assessments of how readily the latter had adjusted to their new senior management positions. The chief executives were asked to indicate on a scale of 1 to 7 as to how well the newcomer in question had fitted-in to a top management role (7=very well; 1=not very well), and were then requested to state (in an open ended fashion) what had helped the person in question to settle in, and what had hindered assimilation. There was a broad correspondence between the chief executives’ views on these matters and those of the interviewees: the Pearson’s-R comparing the seven-point ‘how well did the person fit in’ scale completed by the chief executives and that reported by the (then) newcomers was 0.84. The two main items mentioned by the chief executives for the ‘what helped’ category related to (i) the person having entered with good interpersonal skills, described for example as the ability ‘*to get on with people’*, to ‘*communicate well’* and ‘*be a team player’*; and (ii) self-confidence in the sense of for example ‘*being ready to take on the job’*, exercising initiative and ‘*rising to the challenge’*. These themes were also reflected in the themes mentioned by the interviewees in 77% of cases. The two main items specified in respect of ‘what hindered’ were reported to involve the entrant’s uncertainty regarding the requirements of the new role (e.g., the person being unsure what to expect or not knowing what the role would involve) and the individual having problems with having to undertaking a wider range of (unfamiliar) managerial duties than the newcomer was used to, with ‘*thinking like a manager’*, or with having to assume greater levels of responsibility. These same issues were stated by 72% of the interviewees.

Approaches to learning

As regards the interviewees’ approaches to learning how to accommodate their new senior management roles, analysis of the interview transcripts did reveal the presence of two contrasting types of approach to coping with the demands of higher level work. One group of (13) respondents appeared to follow a ‘learning-doing’ approach to succeeding in their new roles; another group (comprising 15 people) seemed to have a ‘doing-learning’ orientation. .

Individuals in the *learning-doing* cluster had apparently sought to adjust to their new senior management roles in steady and evolutionary manners, obtaining advice and information in the first instance, and acting only after careful reflection. *‘There’s no point in charging in like a bull in a China shop’* one of the members of this category stated. *‘I needed to learn not what to think about these new responsibilities but rather how to think; how to interpret contexts before making decisions’* opined a further member of the group. Seven of the individuals in the learning-doing group had been mentored (representing 64% of the mentored newcomers). Possibly, the experience of being mentored induced people to be more circumspect in their approach and to understand that success in a top management role requires a large amount of learning and reflection. Half of the learning-doing individuals possessed strong marketing professional identities. This finding is not surprising, perhaps, considering that participants high in this characteristic might have felt they needed longer and more structured learning processes to enable them to transfer their orientations away from marketing and towards more general management.

Members of the *doing-learning* set tended to act first and learn lessons later. ‘*The buck stops with me and I like to take the bull by the horns*’ stated one of these respondents. *‘I never shy away from conflicts, even when I am unsure of myself’,* commented another. *‘You learn to be a top manager by being a top manager’* opined a third. These individuals had seemingly preferred to implement their ideas immediately following appointment, rather than search for advice and information from others. Eight of the 16 individuals high in self-efficacy fell in the doing-learning set, suggesting that doing-learning was associated with greater self-confidence in performing the new role. Doing-learning respondents were generally less likely to report role ambiguity: only four of the 27 individuals who had noted the presence of role ambiguity belonged to the 15-strong doing-learning category. It seems therefore that feelings of certainty about the parameters and expectations of a newcomer’s role were more prevalent among individuals who chose to be proactive in those roles. Additionally, the interviewees who reported that they possessed extensive experience of general management were more likely to favour doing-learning approaches (five out of 14 of this group of people). Such individuals may have possessed more realistic perceptions of their fresh top management roles, leading to greater willingness quickly to engage in decisive actions.

Discussion and conclusion

This paper has examined a previously unexplored topic in the theory and practice of newcomer adjustment, namely the circumstances in which a specialist functional executive can fit easily into a senior role at the top level of an organisation. Uncertainty reduction theory posits that factors and situations that help reduce feelings of uncertainty within a newcomer will facilitate adjustment; notably an individual’s mode of information seeking and learning, social status, and organisational activities such as planned experience and mentoring. In the present study, mentoring, planned experience and social status impacted on all three components of newcomer adjustment, confirming the value of uncertainty reduction theory in the current context. The investigation additionally included variables known to facilitate a functional executive’s *promotion* to (as opposed to assimilation into) senior management, i.e., knowledge and experience of general management and of finance, occupational identity and attitudes among existing top managers regarding newcomer’s functional specialism. The outcomes to the study match conventional criteria for quality in qualitative research (see Lincoln, Guba and Guba, 1985). It is clear from the results that many of the participant’s experiences were similar and that their stories represented common realities within the sample, thus indicating the consistency and likely dependability of the main results. The confirmability of the outcomes is evidenced by their validation by many of the participant’s chief executives, the independent cross-checking of (audio recorded) responses by several researchers and by the clear willingness of the interviewees to provide information. (There were no instances of participants demurring when asked specific questions.) Outcome credibility and transferability are suggested by the coherence of the results to the outcomes to prior research in the newcomer adjustment field and to their applicability (given the previously mentioned similarities of managerial behaviour in commercial and nonprofit domains) to other contexts. Collectively the interviewees suggested that role ambiguity constituted the major barrier to easy adjustment to occupancy of top management roles (cf. Saks and Ashforth, 2000; Kohler et al., 2011). However, formal planned induction (especially mentoring) greatly assisted newcomers in clarifying the expectations and contexts of their new positions. Possession of extensive experience of general management frequently contributed to an individual’s degrees of role clarity and self-efficacy (again substantiating much prior research concerning this matter).

A model emerging from the outcomes to the study and showing the positive influences on easy assimilation is presented in Figure 1. Mentoring and planned induction (as suggested by Bauer et al., 2007; Michel, 2007; Rigotti et al., 2008), and the possession of high social status (see Dornhoff, 2002; Ballout, 2009) influenced all three dimensions of the adjustment process: experience of general management affected role clarity and self-efficacy (cf. Lu et al., 2005), though not social acceptance and the latter was influenced by experience of finance. Experience of general management seemingly encouraged individuals to adopt a doing-learning approach. The employment of doing-learning approaches impacted on role clarity and self-efficacy but not on social acceptance. Learning-doing approaches were favoured more by individuals with a strong functional professional identity than by others. People with experience of financial management were also likely to exhibit high self-efficacy. It seems therefore that variables connected with promotion to top management may also impact on assimilation into top management.

On the basis of the outcomes to the study certain personal and organisational tactics might be said to improve the ease of absorption of a functional specialist newly entering senior general management. On the personal level, some of the respondents mentioned the need to take care vis-à-vis levels of ‘openness’ when communicating with new colleagues and the desirability of displaying the ‘right’ values. It seems from the results moreover that marketers in top management roles have little to fear from projecting to new peers their professional identities as marketing specialists. Indeed, it appeared that the ‘fresh perspectives’ that marketers brought to a board room were welcomed by the people already there. Organisational tactics for facilitating managerial newcomer adjustment include the provision (if they do not already exist) of sound mentoring and planned induction systems, clear job descriptions that avoid any possibilities of mismatches of expectations, well thought out organisation structures, and readily accessible information systems. A number of the interviewees also mentioned the need for clarity in respect of the sorts of organisational values (a number of which might be tacit and informal) they were expected to uphold. To help newcomers who do not possess widespread experience of general management and/or of finance, organisations could devise programmes to assist freshly appointed senior managers from specific functional fields such as marketing to help deal with this particular shortcoming. For example, a newcomer with a purely marketing background could spend short periods shadowing executives in other functions (e.g. finance). Completion by newcomers of short courses in general management may also be worthwhile for individuals with primarily functional experience. Government and private charity support organisations obviously have a potential role to play in providing relevant short courses and planned experience programmes.

*Possible areas for future research*

The study employed a qualitative methodology to explore the situations that prevailed within 37 charities. A quantitative survey of a larger sample of organisations could test the model (see Figure 1) emerging from the investigation. Specifically, a quantitative survey could examine a number of sectors (commercial as well as non-profit), and functional specialisms other than marketing. Three areas arising from the outcomes to the research are especially worthy of further study. Firstly, it would be useful to examine the effects on an individual’s managerial performance of the person’s adoption of a doing-learning approach, a learning-doing approach, or neither. Secondly, additional research into the performance consequences of a managerial newcomer’s level of social status is required. This has been a neglected area of non-profit (and indeed commercial sector) research which is, nonetheless, important given the heavy concentration in many countries of high social status people in top management positions. Thirdly, the fact that within the current investigation the interviewees failed to mention any *negative* factors associated with high self-efficacy requires further attention. For example, does high self-efficacy sometimes lead to excessive and unwarranted self-confidence among managerial newcomers with damaging consequences for performance. Are high self-efficacy managerial newcomers prone to assume dysfunctional levels of risk?

APPENDIX. THE INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Introduction

Please think back to when you first made the transition from being just a marketing executive to being a senior manager at the top level of your organisation and the period shortly thereafter. How readily did you make the transition and how easily did you fit into your new top management role? What are the things that helped you to adjust to your new top management role and what sorts of things hindered your assimilation into your new role?

Structured questions

*General*

On a scale of 1 to 7 how easily do you think you adjusted to your new senior management role?

*Role clarity*

Sample prompts (informed by Bauer et al., 2007)

How quickly and easily did you come to understand what *exactly* your new top management role involved; its tasks, priorities, responsibilities, obligations, relationships with others? What helped and what hindered?

*Self-efficacy*

Sample prompts (informed by Bennett, 2011)

How quickly and easily did you begin to feel that you had fully mastered your new role and had become fully self-confident in your ability to complete the role satisfactorily? How soon did you feel you could solve difficult and/or unexpected problems arising in your new role and that you had the same level of competence as your senior management colleagues? What helped and what hindered?

*Social acceptance*

Sample prompts (informed by Allen et al., 1999; Kohler et al., 2011)

How quickly and easily did you come to feel that you were liked, accepted and trusted by your senior management colleagues? What helped and what hindered? In general, how did you get along with your senior management colleagues?

*Knowledge and experience of general management*

Sample prompts (informed by Zimmerman, 2002)

Prior to assuming your top management role what was the extent of your understanding of how an entire business works, not just the marketing function? How well do you understand the language of business functions other than marketing? (Information on the interviewee’s actual work experience was gathered separately.)

*Knowledge and experience of the finance function*

Sample prompts (informed by Zimmerman, 2002)

How extensive is your working knowledge of financial management? How well do you understand the language of accounting and finance?

*Marketing professional identity*

Sample prompts (informed by Bennett, 2011a)

To what extent do you regard yourself more as a general manager than as a marketing manager? Do you identify more with the marketing profession than with general organisational management? Is being a member of the marketing profession a matter of great importance to you?

*Social status*

Sample prompts (informed by Bennett, 2009)

If you completed a degree, which university did you attend? Did you attend a state school or a private school?

*Planned induction*

Sample prompts (informed by Van Maanen and Schein, 1979)

Were you given systematic training and induction for your new senior management role? If so did the induction programme have coherent stages and a clear timetable? What was included in the programme?

*Mentoring*

Sample prompts (informed by Allen et al., 1999)

Were you allocated a mentor to help you adjust to the new role? Briefly, what did the mentoring process involve? Did the mentoring focus on emotional support, feedback and appraisal, provision of information and advice, help with networking?

*Attitudes towards marketing within the organisation*

Sample prompts (informed by Gaski and Etzel, 1986)

What was/is the general attitude towards the marketing function among your top management colleagues? For example, did/do they tend to believe that marketing expenditures take money away from beneficiaries, that charity marketing should be tightly regulated, that gains for one charity secured by marketing mean that others lose out?

*Stress*

Sample prompts (informed by Ashforth and Saks, 1996)

Did you experience much stress during the transition? Did you have any physical symptoms of stress, e.g., difficulties in sleeping, appetite disorders? What caused the stress?

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TABLE 1. PARTICIPANTS’ CHARACTERISTICS

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Average age (years) | 44 |
| % male | 76 |
| Average length of service with current employer (years) | 8 |
| Sector in which the person worked prior to entering current post (%):   * Charities * Public sector * Commercial sector | 63  33  14 |
| Average period spent in marketing management prior to new appointment (years) | 10 |
| Average period spent in general management prior to new appointment (years) | 3.5 |
| % externally recruited to current post (rather than internally promoted) | 45 |
| Average period since the person entered top management (years) | 2.1 |
| Average turnover of the employing charity (£m) | 12.9 |
| Sector in which the charity operates (%):   * Helping and caring * Medical * Animals * Overseas * Other | 32  26  16  16  10 |

FIGURE 1. AN EMERGING MODEL

Experience of general management

High marketing professional identity

Mentoring and planned induction

Experience of finance

High social status