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Reaching the Board: Factors Facilitating the Progression of Marketing Executives to Senior Positions in British Companies

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The scarcity of marketing executives on the boards of directors of large British companies has been the subject of much discussion in recent years. Yet empirical research into the antecedents of board membership for marketing managers has been sparse. This study surveyed senior marketers in 209 registered companies in the food and beverages manufacturing sector with the aim of establishing some of the main factors that distinguish marketing managers who had attained board level positions and those who had not. Possible determinants of board membership covered by the investigation comprised the personal background of the manager (elite credentials, functional specialism, knowledge of general and financial management, social behaviour, emotional intelligence), the competitive environment of the business, whether marketing performance was measured systematically, and the degree of the sales orientation of the firm.

Introduction

According to a survey completed by the Chartered Institute of Marketing in 2006, only 14 of the UK FTSE 100 companies had a marketing director on their main boards (Ronay, 2006). Corresponding figures for 2004 and 2005 were 12 and 11 companies respectively (Gray, 2004; Hadden and Duckworth, 2005). Similar situations applied in earlier years (see Baker and Holt, 2004; Campbell, 2000; Curtis, 1997; Perry, 1998). Finance executives, conversely, routinely sit on main boards (Gray, 2004; Perry, 1998). Furthermore, marketing directors have been observed to remain in their jobs for shorter periods than their finance counterparts (Murphy, 1998), staying for an average of just 18 months (Campbell, 2000). Indeed, within Rogers and Buchanan's (1989) sample of 89 British companies that had appointed a marketing director for their first time, the majority had dismissed the appointee within 2 years. Finance directors on the other hand tend to remain with their employing companies for several years (Simms, 2003).

The absence of marketers from board level positions has been deemed unfortunate on the grounds that marketing plays a key role in the profit making process of businesses. Indeed, according to Ronay (2006), it 'has been demonstrated very clearly that marketing makes a more significant contribution to the bottom line than any other business function' (p. 34). It followed, Ronay (2006) continued, that companies that did not give marketing the attention it deserved (e.g. through their not having marketers on their boards) would fail to meet their full potential. Hadden and Duckworth (2005) similarly commented that because marketing generates a company's revenues and can raise income per customer, someone representing the marketing function should have a voice at the top level of decision making within the firm. In many companies, competitive advantage arises directly from successful marketing (Curtis, 2004). If there is no marketer on the board, marketing budgets might be cut in tight financial situations when, objectively, they should be increased in order to stimulate revenues; there may be a lower probability of a firm delivering customer-focused strategies, and new market opportunities might not be exploited (see Doyle, 2000; Gray, 2004).

This paper addresses the issue of how marketers can improve their chances of attaining board level positions. It does this by examining the impacts on the board room promotion prospects of senior marketing staff of the main factors that prior literature in relevant fields has suggested will inhibit or stimulate an individual's advancement to a seat on a company's board. The investigation contributes to previous work in the area by testing simultaneously the impacts on the likelihood that a manager will attain a board level position of key personal and organizational variables within a functional area (marketing and sales) that has proven to be especially problematic (for reasons outlined in later sections of the paper) in this respect, and in an industry sector (food and beverages manufacture) where marketing is known to be critical for success. It applies theories of social behaviour relating to ingratiation and emotional intelligence to a specific business setting and explores their usefulness in relation to a sample of practising managers occupying top jobs in UK companies. Rao and Schmidt (1995) noted that very many of the studies undertaken within the 'impression management' sphere of social behaviour have made 'excessive use' of laboratory experiments and student samples (p. 92). Also, the authors commented, these investigations had focused too heavily on specific variables (notably ingratiation) without taking other contributory factors into account. The present study incorporates the potential impacts of ingratiation and emotional intelligence in a wider framework and employs a survey methodology involving a sample of real-life executives. Thus the effects of social behaviour variables on board room entry are assessed relative to other influences, adding thereby to the growing empirical literature in the impression management field.

Specific contributions arising from the current research include the empirical confirmation of the critical roles of training and experience in financial and general management for securing board level appointments (an issue frequently mentioned by practitioners but rarely tested in a formal fashion), the examination of organizational traits alongside personal characteristics, and the demonstration within the UK context of the possibility that certain modes of social behaviour can substitute for elite credentials among people from non-elite backgrounds who are seeking places on company boards. (Most prior work on connections between social behaviour, elite credentials and promotion to senior corporate positions has been completed in the USA. For reviews see Higgins, Judge and Ferris (2003), Judge and Bretz (1994), Linden and Mitchell (1988) and Westphal and Stern (2006).) An important contribution of the present paper is to test empirically the proposition (see Curtis, 1997; Gray, 2004; Marsh, 2001) that existing board members who are not marketers tend to recognize and value the sales management function to a significantly greater extent than they value other marketing specialisms, leading to sales managers having a higher probability of being promoted to the board. Specifically, the study assesses the possibility that sales specialists have higher levels of 'emotional intelligence' than other marketers, and that it is the exercise of this emotional intelligence that in reality is associated with advancement to board positions rather than sales specialization *per se*.

Research questions

The study reported in the present paper examined two major research questions.

1. To what extent do the personal characteristics of a particular marketing executive determine the likelihood that the individual will ascend to a board level position, as opposed to remaining in middle management or in a senior management post below the level of the company's board? The personal attributes considered are (i) whether the individual has elite social credentials, (ii) the degree of his or her general (rather than marketing-specific) management knowledge and experience, (iii) the nature of the person's social behaviour, and (iv) whether the manager possesses high emotional intelligence in apposite areas. By 'board' is meant the top executive decision making group in a substantially sized business. In public limited companies, board members

(directors) are elected by shareholders, invariably on the advice of a company's managing director and existing senior directors. In private limited companies the owners of the business select directors; likewise in non-limited liability enterprises. Businesses can be established under a variety of legal structures. The study outlined below was not concerned with any specific form of business (limited company, partnership, holding or subsidiary company, family owned, foreign owned etc.) but rather with the circumstances of the individuals who make it to the top tier of their employing enterprises irrespective of how these enterprises were set up in the first instance.

2. What are the features of companies that do have marketing directors on their boards? Is it the case that (as a substantial amount of literature in the field implies) firms with heavy sales orientations are more inclined to value sales executives and hence appoint them as directors? Does the intensity of the competitive environment in which a company operates exert an influence on this matter? Do firms that formally measure marketing performance have a greater propensity than others to have marketers on their boards?

The paper proceeds as follows. First the pre-existing (largely practitioner) literature on the reasons why so few marketing managers achieve board level positions is reviewed and the special role of sales managers is considered. Then the (mainly academic) literature on the various pathways to entry to corporate elites is examined, focusing on certain forms of social behaviour. The sampling frame and the methodology employed in the course of the investigation are explained, and finally the results, conclusion, limitations and implications of the study are stated. Prior literature on director selection processes suggests that two main types of factor, personal traits and organizational traits, substantially differentiate between senior managers who do and do not attain seats on company boards (Burgess and Tharenou, 2004; Demb and Neubauer, 1992; Hillman and Dalziel, 2003; Useem and Karabel, 1986; Westphal and Stern, 2006). Research has established that an individual's knowledge and experience of specific management functions can help the person achieve a board level position, notably knowledge and experience of the finance function (Baker and Holt, 2004; Campbell, 2000; Gray, 2004; Hadden and Duckworth, 2005) and of general executive management (Bartram, 2003; Burgess and Tharenou, 2004; Doyle, 2000; Harrington, 1996; McDonald, 2006). Other personal characteristics repeatedly reported to represent facilitors of progression to board membership by the literature in the field are certain forms of social behaviour towards pre-existing board members (see Dornhoff, 2002; Judge and Bretz, 1994; Lorch, 1989; Sandler and Woody, 2003; Vonk, 1998; Westphal and Stern, 2006) and the use by a manager of 'emotional intelligence' (see Carmeli, 2003; Dulewicz and Higgs, 1999; Gardner and Stough, 2002; George, 2000; Langley, 2000). An individual's possession of elite social status, evidenced by the person having certain elite credentials, has also been advanced on numerous occasions as a major determinant of whether a manager makes it to the top (Burgess and Tharenou, 2004; Dornhoff, 2002; Kirchmeyer, 1998; Useem, 1984; Westphal and Stern, 2006). A further strand in the literature on top level promotion processes emphasizes the roles of organizational procedures and processes (e.g. the use of measurement metrics) that make particular types of job function more salient to existing board members (Campbell, 2000; Fisk, 2003; Gray, 2004; Harrington, 1996; Marsh, 2001; McDonald, 2006; Tylee, 1996) and of special environmental forces (such as intense competition) that cause certain business functions to be regarded as especially important (Bennett, 2003; Palmer, 2002; Subramanian and Ishak, 1998).

Whilst it is acknowledged that a myriad of other variables have the potential to contribute to a person rising to a board level position (personal ambition and the need to achieve, motivational considerations, job involvement etc.) the present study focuses on the above-mentioned primary factors previously discussed in the literature in the area, in the context of a particular business function (marketing) in a single country, i.e. the UK. The investigation of other possible influences on progression to a board of directors is clearly a matter for future studies within the context outlined. Details of the individual and organizational traits that the above-mentioned literature has identified as being especially relevant to the study are provided in the following sections.

Individual traits

Occupational background of the individual

Lack of financial knowledge. The absence of marketers on company boards contrasts starkly with the strong representation of finance executives in board level positions (Baker and Holt, 2004; Campbell, 2000; Harrington, 1996). For example, a survey of 200 UK companies with more than 100 employees conducted by the Chartered Institute of Marketing in 1998 found that less than 50% had a board level marketer, compared with 88% that had a finance director on the board (49% had a board level human resources director) (Perry, 1998). Gray (2004) also cited evidence suggesting that 'most' top executives emerged from the field of finance (p. 32). Baker and Holt (2004) similarly observed how finance executives rather than marketers 'tend to get the top jobs' (p. 559). The finance function, according to Harrington (1996), was 'invariably represented on company boards' (p. 15).

Hadden and Duckworth (2005) attributed the dearth of individuals with marketing qualifications and backgrounds at the highest levels of UK company management to marketers having 'very different personalities from those who are board members' (p. 30), particularly in relation to finance executives. Marketers were often as much concerned with creativity as with bottom-line financial considerations. Hence, compared to people with financial backgrounds, they might find board room cultures unappealing, even alien. Also the higher rate of turnover among marketing managers meant that few of them would stay with a single company long enough to climb to the top of the corporate ladder. It is relevant to note in this connection a study undertaken by Curtis (1997) which found that brand managers (often considered to be among the most creative people in the marketing profession) held down a specific job for an average of 2.2 years (compared with 6 years for other functional specializations) and were around 13 years younger than colleagues who earned similar salaries in other departments (see also Bainbridge, 2000).

As finance executives seemingly enjoy a higher status than marketing managers, evidenced by their far greater ability to achieve seats on the board (Campbell, 2000; Gray, 2004; Harrington, 1996; Perry, 1998), it follows that a marketer who is well informed about and has a sound understanding of financial management (gained through training or experience or a mixture of the two) will presumably be better equipped to ascend to a board level position than other, less financially-literate, marketers. Thus:

> *H1*. Marketers who are knowledgeable about the finance function are more likely to attain board level positions than marketers who are ignorant of the finance function.

Lack of general management skills among marketers. Apart from the issue of marketers' alleged ignorance of the finance function and of its critical importance for commercial organizations, marketing executives have been criticized for not possessing all-round business skills (Simms, 2003). It has been argued that marketers tend not to see the big picture (Doyle, 2000), to focus too narrowly on creating customer (as opposed to shareholder) value (Fisk, 2003), to fail to recognize the contributions of other parts of the organization (Hadden and Duckworth, 2005), to be primarily interested in the creative aspects of their work (Tylee, 1996) and to see their role as being more about execution than about strategy (Baker and Holt, 2004). All the above might impede a person's progress to the board (Gray, 2004; Harrington, 1996; McDonald, 2006). A study undertaken by Hadden and Duckworth (2005) noted 'a preference among marketing professionals for fast-moving, innovative and changing work environments' and 'a greater willingness to allow subjective views and personal values and feelings to influence decisions' (p. 31). These inclinations were not always compatible with board room responsibilities and the development of company-wide strategies designed to maximize shareholder value. Hence a narrow focus on marketing would have a negative impact on an individual's promotion prospects. Bartram (2003) similarly concluded that marketers who aspired to board positions needed to 'connect their thinking more with the overall objectives of the business and its stakeholders' and to be more 'commercial' in outlook (p. 35). Such considerations caused Gray (2004) to suggest that marketers had to learn to act as 'business people first and marketing experts second', and to become involved with areas such as investor relations and corporate governance (p. 32). Marketing managers needed to acquire competence and experience in leadership *generally* and to contribute to entire business strategies, rather than simply devising promotional campaigns. The above implies that a marketer who has acquired (via previous jobs, teamworking, training or a combination of these) substantial experience of business and management *in general*, and who is able to see issues in the context of a wider picture that extends beyond marketing, should have a better chance of attaining a position on a board. Accordingly:

> *H2*. Marketers who have extensive experience of business and management functions other than marketing are more likely to attain board level positions than marketers with little or no experience of non-marketing functions.

Experience of sales. Notwithstanding the apparent advantages resulting from a person having substantial experience of finance and general management, it does appear that *sales* (rather than general marketing) managers have a significantly better chance of making it to a company's board (Curtis, 1997; Marsh, 2001; Zimmerman, 2002), suggesting that success in selling and sales management is more likely to be recognized by top management and hence to lead to promotion than are achievements in other marketing fields. Marsh (2001) reported details of a number of companies that had promoted sales executives to board level positions and noted that, notwithstanding their sales specializations, these individuals had been given control of budgets (e.g. for brand management, direct marketing, advertising) that had little to do with sales *per se*. Curtis (1997) also observed direct connections between excellent selling performance and rapid advancement through a company's ranks. The salaries of senior sales executives have been found to be higher than those of general marketing managers (see Curtis, 1997; Manna and Smith, 2004; Marsh, 2001), due perhaps not only to performance related pay packages linked to the achievement of sales targets, but also to the status and value allegedly ascribed to the sales management function by company directors in non-marketing roles. Curtis's (1997) survey of 1000 heads of marketing in UK companies revealed that 57% of the sample came from sales backgrounds. Moreover, the personal characteristics of these senior sales executives matched those of company directors in general in terms of their average age (41 years), lengths of tenure as heads of marketing (4 years), experience of sales or marketing management (13 years) and possession of a university degree (74%). Zimmerman (2002) found that company chief executive officers (CEOs) with marketing backgrounds tended to have specialized in sales.

The most common reason advanced for the relative ease with which sales managers sometimes ascend to board level positions is the possibility that non-marketers typically see concentration on sales as the bottom line where marketing activities are concerned (McDonald, 2004). Sales multiplied by net margin determines cash inflow, which many top managers regard as a primary indicator of a firm's success (Gray, 2004). Thus, the contribution of the marketing function is *clearly* demonstrated by increases in profitable sales (Marsh, 2001). Furthermore, according to Zimmerman (2002), experience of sales management helps a person to exercise strong leadership, and experience of leadership is likely to be highly regarded by existing members of a company's board. In consequence, sales managers might be allocated responsibilities beyond their sales role (e.g. control over advertising budgets or the strategic management of brands), hence extending and consolidating their overall competence (Marsh, 2001). Zimmerman (2002) noted how sales managers would probably be capable of understanding and interpreting a company's brands (due to their being as close to the firm's customers as it is possible to be) whereas brand managers might not be able to stimulate sales. It followed, Zimmerman (2002) continued, that sales executives who aspired to top positions within companies should take measures to understand how the *whole* business worked (e.g. by volunteering to serve on strategy and planning committees), should let their superiors know of their desires to assume extra responsibilities, and should network extensively. Sales managers needed to undertake tasks outside their marketing roles in order to broaden their experience. The fact that sales executives with experience of selling and of leadership in a sales management role occupy board positions more often than other marketers (see Curtis, 1997; Marsh, 2001; Zimmerman, 2002) suggests that sales specialists who possess substantial experience of the sales function at a managerial level have a better chance of being promoted to the board than have marketers whose careers have not specialized in sales. Stated formally:

> *H3*. Marketing executives who specialize in sales are more likely to attain board level positions than marketers who specialize in other areas or who are general marketers.

Possession of elite credentials

In Britain, as in the USA and many other western nations, individuals with elite social and educational credentials have been found to be overrepresented among the members of the boards of large companies (Kirchmeyer, 1998; Singh and Vinnicombe, 2004; Westphal and Stern, 2006). Thus the social status resulting from having elite credentials might help a person to attain a seat on the board, irrespective of other considerations (see Westphal and Stern (2006) for details of the empirical literature supporting this proposition). Elite status could result from having attended certain expensive schools, from possessing influential family connections, belonging to important social networks, or having exceptionally highly valued academic qualifications (e.g. an MBA from an internationally famous university) (Kirchmeyer, 1998). It has been argued that it is the possession of certain elite credentials (e.g. having gone to educational institutions that cater for people from upper-class backgrounds, membership of elite clubs and societies, and operating within upper-class networks) that helps accelerate a manager to a board position, rather than the person's performance (Dornhoff, 2002; Palmer and Barber, 2001; Useem, 1984; Westphal and Milton, 2000). An elite education might assist an individual to perform well in a managerial job. Equally, however, less socially privileged managers might turn in excellent performances. Possibly, therefore, the overrepresentation of people with the above-mentioned elite credentials could result substantially from a pre-existing social elite (consciously or unconsciously) restricting entry to board level positions to executives who have elite credentials similar to their own (Dornhoff, 2002). Accordingly it is posited that:

> *H4*. Marketers who possess elite credentials are more likely to attain board level positions than marketers who do not possess elite credentials.

Ingratiatory behaviour

It has been argued that the continuing existence of corporate elites dominated by the same types of people implies the operation of homosocial reproduction systems that prevent others from ascending to the highest levels of management in leading companies (Dornhoff, 2002). Nevertheless, some individuals obtain top management positions without elite credentials, even within companies with highly exclusive boards of directors (Dornhoff, 2002; Useem and Karabel, 1986). How then do managers from non-elite backgrounds make it to the board? Certain modes of social behaviour allegedly assist managers (with or without elite credentials) to ascend to board level positions. Specifically, Westphal and Stern (2006) cited an extensive volume of academic literature which has suggested that the adoption by an aspirant junior or middle manager of a particular form of social behaviour (referred to as 'ingratiatory behaviour') when dealing with the top management of a company (especially its CEO) could provide an alternative pathway to the board for someone lacking elite credentials. Research in the field of organizational behaviour has found that ingratiation towards superiors often increases the likelihood of junior managers being recommended for top positions in companies (Judge and Bretz, 1994), leading to faster career advancement (Gordon, 1996; Higgins, Judge and Ferris, 2003) and subsequently to top level appointments (Linden and Mitchell, 1988; Lorch, 1989; Westphal and Stern, 2006). The link allegedly occurs through ingratiation engendering positive feelings towards a subordinate on the part of the senior person who has been ingratiated (see Vonk (1998) and Westphal and Stern (2006) for details of investigations supporting this proposition).

Ingratiatory behaviour seeks to improve the perpetrator's attractiveness in the eyes of the person's superiors and to 'gain favour' (Kumar and Beyerlein, 1991, p. 619). It involves conforming to the opinions of superiors, making statements that validate these opinions, flattery, and doing favours for those in charge (Gordon, 1996). The employment of ingratiatory tactics has been found to result in better performance evaluations for subordinates, higher salary increases and faster promotion (see Westphal and Stern, 2006). Individuals who ingratiate themselves to senior colleagues are more likely to be invited to attend informal meetings of corporate 'inner circles', to be asked for advice, and to be socially accepted by an existing corporate elite (Westphal and Khanna, 2003, p. 361). (Social acceptance has been found to represent a major criterion for promotion to higher levels of management (see Kristof-Brown, 2000).) The power of ingratiation as a means for influencing a superior's behaviour towards a subordinate has been accounted for in various ways. Acts of submission and deference to a superior affirm the latter's higher status (Vonk, 1998) and this affirmation can generate attraction and liking for the deferential person *even when* the superior recognizes that he or she is the target of ingratiation (Sandler and Woody, 2003). Moreover, conformity to the opinions of a superior supposedly engenders similarity attraction bias, which then triggers liking (Byrne, Clore and Worchel, 1966). It flatters the superior because it validates his or her judgements, thus generating a sense of indebtedness towards the ingratiator. The act of giving personal favours to a superior (e.g. providing confidential information, completing onerous tasks normally undertaken by the superior) is another means for creating 'norms of reciprocity', as the superior will often feel obligated to return the favours bestowed (Westphal and Stern, 2006, p. 173).

Marketing managers who seek entry to board level positions may or may not possess elite credentials; but even if they do, the fact that marketers represent a minority group *vis-à-vis* appointments to company boards could mean that they will experience more difficulty than others in being accepted, especially in comparison with finance directors. Hence marketers might need to engage in significantly more ingratiatory behaviour than their non-marketing colleagues, who might not have to expend as much energy on 'fitting in' (Singh and Vinnicombe, 2004). The above-mentioned considerations suggest:

> *H5*. Marketers who exhibit high levels of ingratiatory behaviour towards their superiors are more likely to attain board level positions than marketers who exhibit low levels of ingratiatory behaviour.

Possession of emotional intelligence

Empirical studies have found that, irrespective of a manager's employment of ingratiatory behaviour, an individual's capacity to advance to a board level position can depend substantially on his or her possession and application of 'emotional intelligence' (for details see Carmeli, 2003; Dulewicz and Higgs, 1999; Langley, 2000). Salovey and Mayer (1990) characterized emotional intelligence (EI) as a set of skills 'relevant to the accurate appraisal and expression of emotion in oneself and in others, the effective regulation of emotion in self and in others, and the use of feeling to motivate, plan, and achieve in one's life' (p. 185). The theory of EI posits that emotions can be cognitively managed, i.e. that thinking and feeling work *together* (George, 2000). EI extends, according to Goleman (2001), to the management of personal relationships and to the abilities (i) to induce desirable responses in others and (ii) to regulate the emotions of others. An emotionally intelligent person has the capacity to understand and manage the moods and emotions of his or her superiors, to appraise how superiors feel, and hence to use this information to influence superiors' emotions in ways that make superiors receptive to and supportive of the individual's career ambitions (Gardner and Stough, 2002). Managers with high EI should have smoother interactions with their bosses because people who can accurately perceive and understand their superiors' emotions are 'better able to respond flexibly to changes in their social environments and to build supportive social networks' (Kerr *et al.*, 2006, p. 267). Thus, high EI should enhance an individual's ability to solve personal career advancement problems and to address career issues and opportunities in more effective manners (George, 2000).

A study of 98 senior managers completed by Carmeli (2003) concluded that high EI was significantly associated with a variety of desirable managerial characteristics, including commitment to an employing organization, dedication to a career, superior job performance, the ability to control stress and to succeed in stressful environments, and the elimination of career obstacles. A similar investigation undertaken by Dulewicz and Higgs (1999) found that EI explained a greater proportion of the data on the career progression of 58 British and Irish managers than either cognitive intelligence or any one of 16 personality trait variables. Langley (2000) examined differences in EI scores between middle and (board level) senior managers within a global manufacturing company, finding that board level senior managers scored significantly higher in three EI dimensions: emotional awareness, emotional flexibility, and 'aligning with the goals of a group and the organisation' (p. 179). The senior managers were substantially more in control of their emotional states than middle managers. Thus, Langley (2000) concluded, disparities in EI seemingly represented a useful tool for identifying the 'promotion readiness' of middle managers (p. 181). (Further literature that suggested that high EI was associated with successful senior management was reported by Carmeli (2003).) Possibly, the positive relationships between high EI and managerial effectiveness claimed by the above-mentioned literature can be explained by Zaccaro's (2001) observation that social skills (particularly persuasion skills) become increasingly important as managers ascend organizational hierarchies.

> *H6*. The higher the level of a marketer's EI the more likely that the person will attain a board level position.

Successful sales management and the possession of EI

Several authors have claimed that the possession of high EI is positively associated with successful selling and sales management (e.g. Chang, 2003; Chrusciel, 2006; Langhorn, 2004; Sojka and Deeter-Schmelz, 2002; Treasure, 2002). Manna and Smith (2004) commented that findings of this nature were hardly surprising considering that the pragmatic management of emotional exchanges with customers in ways that cause customers to perceive a salesperson favourably is an essential requirement of a salesperson's job. Specifically, Manna and Smith (2004) continued, the sales function required self-awareness, self-regulation, self-motivation, social awareness and social skills, all of which were aspects of EI. Their own study of 515 sales representatives concluded that EI correlated significantly and substantially with the above-mentioned attributes. Chang (2003) similarly asserted that EI was a more reliable predictor of employee success in selling than IQ. This was because sales people with high EI were emotionally flexible, able to play on their strengths, aware of themselves and of how others saw them, and hence capable of interacting successfully with others. Accordingly:

> *H7*. Sales executives have more EI than generalist marketing managers or marketers in other specialist areas.

Success in selling will often result in promotion for the salesperson involved (Curtis, 1997; Marsh, 2001; Zimmerman, 2002). To the extent that EI is found in greater quantity in effective salespeople than in marketers in other fields, the promoted individuals will exhibit relatively high EI. If it is in fact the case that EI helps a person to climb the corporate ladder, then sales executives who make it to board positions are likely to have substantial EI. The question then arises whether the high proportion of people with sales backgrounds found among board level marketers might be due more to these individuals having achieved their directorships *in consequence of their possessing high EI* than through the sales function being measurable and highly valued by pre-existing board members.

Organizational characteristics

Extent of a firm's use of marketing metrics

Problems associated with the measurement of direct connections between specific marketing activities and profitability are frequently cited as major reasons for top management's reluctance to recognize the value of the marketing function (see Baker and Holt, 2004; Gray, 2004; McDonald, 2006), and hence for top management's failure to promote marketers to the board (Black, Wright and Bachman, 1998; Doyle, 2000). Thus, for example, claims that a marketing campaign has increased public awareness of a company's product or has changed consumer attitudes towards the business may not be regarded as worthwhile achievements by a firm's main board (McDonald, 2006). Consequently, marketing might be deemed to represent a *cost* rather than a crucial long-term investment (Fisk, 2003; Tylee, 1996). Difficulties experienced by marketers when seeking to measure and justify the effectiveness of companies' advertising campaigns have also been known to cause concern and scepticism among non-marketing (especially finance) directors (Harrington, 1996).

Research findings have demonstrated that top management doubts about the evidence underlying the supposed contributions of the marketing function may be widespread. Baker and Holt (2004), for instance, interviewed 81 non-marketing senior executives and found that a large majority of them perceived marketers to be 'unaccountable, untouchable, slippery and expensive' (p. 557). Numerous comments made by sample members alleged that marketers were unable to demonstrate returns on investment, frequently operated outside formal organization structures and rarely accepted responsibility for failure. Likewise, a survey of 100 marketing and 100 financial directors in leading UK companies completed by the Institute of Practitioners in Advertising in 2000 found that the financial directors generally held negative opinions of marketing, supposedly because of its alleged lack of accountability (Campbell, 2000, p. 12). Financial executives were mainly interested in sales and profitability whereas marketers embroiled themselves in 'soft' measures such as brand awareness, corporate reputation or levels of recall of a firm's advertisements. One-third of the financial directors in the sample claimed that their companies made no attempt whatsoever to measure marketing effectiveness. Harrington (1996) observed how finance directors in companies that operated systems of marketing metrics to measure marketing performance held significantly more positive attitudes towards marketing than those in firms where measurement was lacking.

A major criticism of the marketing profession in recent years has been its (supposed) failure to understand that, nowadays, the 'success' of a business is often measured in terms of short-term shareholder value-added, not in relation to improvements in intangibles such as brand image (even though capital values frequently depend on these intangibles) (McDonald, 2006, p. 426). Shareholders have property rights over companies, and reasonably demand competitive returns. Therefore, it has been argued (see Black, Wright and Bachman (1998) and Doyle (2000) for details of relevant literature), the *primary* task of company management is to maximize returns to shareholders. Marketing activities such as market segmentation and diversification, mass media advertising, product line extensions, image building and price cutting may increase sales, but simultaneously could create *unprofitable* customers and hence lower earnings per share. Thus, according to Doyle (2000), marketing expenditures should be concentrated on tasks that *demonstrably* enhance shareholder value, e.g. brand building that earns measurable price premiums, or customer loyalty programmes that induce (measurable) repeat purchases at low cost to the firm.

Such considerations have prompted several authors to recommend marketers to set clear criteria for 'successful' advertising and marketing performance and to provide more hard data which finance and other non-marketing directors could understand and relate to (see Fisk, 2003; Hadden and Duckworth, 2005; Harrington, 1996). McDonald (2006) in particular claimed that marketing would never make it back to the board room unless marketers created 'rigorous processes for assessing whether a market strategy will create or destroy shareholder value' (p. 429). Similar sentiments were expressed by Gray (2004) who argued that the need for 'fact-based analysis which plainly demonstrated the economic benefits of marketing' implied that marketers had to improve their financial and economic knowledge and competence (p. 33). Lack of fluency in the language of finance, Gray (2004) continued, has led to marketers not being able to translate their activities into the quantitative jargon of the board room, resulting in the marginalization of the marketing function within the corporate power hierarchy. The establishment of definitive criteria for measuring marketing performance implies the operation of a formal system of marketing metrics, i.e. internal and external measurements (financial or derived from the market place) related to marketing and its links with organizational performance (Ambler, 2000). Formal metrics typically relate to matters such as market share, customer perceptions of brands and organizations, and customer retention, profitability and lifetime value (see Barwise and Farley, 2004).

The above-mentioned considerations suggest the first hypothesis tested in the course of the present investigation.

> *H8*. Companies that operate formal metrics systems for measuring the performance of the marketing function are more likely to have a marketer on their boards of directors than are companies that do not use marketing metrics.

The firm's competitive environment

Palmer's (2002) survey of 256 senior marketing executives suggested that the marketing function was deemed to be more important within a business the more intense its competitive environment, the shorter the firm's product life cycles and the more demanding customers' requirements. In these circumstances it might be more common to find a marketer in a board level position (Fisk, 2003; Simms, 2003; Zimmerman, 2002) because, within such environments, firms may need to take marketing more seriously and thus require a marketer on the board. The degree of uncertainty surrounding and the volatility within an organization's environment have also been found to affect corporate expenditures on marketing (see Bennett, 2003; Subramanian and Ishak, 1998; Wilson, 1999). Competitive intensity can itself contribute to environmental volatility, defined by Wilson (1999) as 'a combination of radical and frequent change with a significant level of perceived uncertainty' (p. 20). Arguably the marketing function assumes critical importance in volatile environments, leading perhaps to enhanced status for senior marketing personnel. Thus:

> *H9*. The greater (a) the competitive intensity and (b) the volatility of the environment in which a company operates the more likely that it will have a marketer on its board.

Possible moderating influences

Three potential moderators are proposed. The first hypothesized moderating influence concerns the relationship between a person having a sales background and the probability that he or she will attain a seat on the board. An implication of the apparent tendency of firms to appoint sales managers to top positions is that companies which exhibit strong 'sales orientation' may be more likely to appoint marketing directors (albeit people with sales backgrounds) to their boards than are businesses low in sales orientation. Sales orientation was defined by Guenzi (2003) as a firm's distinct and strategic preference for identifying and acquiring new customers, as opposed to maintaining and strengthening relations with pre-existing customers. The sales oriented approach focuses on the creation of short-term profitable transactions rather than on building long-term affinities with customers in order to retain and develop their custom. Sales orientation becomes manifest in the concentration of the firm's marketing resources on the completion of as many one-off sales with as many customers as possible in the shortest period of time (Coviello *et al*., 2002). It has been found to be more prevalent in situations where a firm's customers are relatively homogeneous, have similar needs and are not psychologically 'involved' with a product (implying that they do not want deep and/or long-term relationships with a supplying company) (see Guenzi (2003) for a detailed review of the possible antecedents of a company's sales orientation). Such considerations suggest that a firm which is heavy in sales orientation will value the sales function highly and hence be more likely to promote people with sales backgrounds to board level positions. In other words, the impact of the fact that a person has a sales background on the likelihood that he or she will attain a place on the board will be greater in a firm that has a high level of sales orientation. Formally stated,

> *H10*. The relationship between a marketing executive having a sales background and the probability that the person will be a member of the company's board of directors will be stronger the greater the company's level of sales orientation.

The second possible moderating influence involves the connection between the possession of elite credentials and entry to the board. Ingratiatory behaviour could moderate this relationship because, apart from its potential role in assisting people who lack elite credentials to attain senior positions, ingratiatory behaviour could serve to *reinforce* elite networks and promotion systems. Westphal and Stern (2006) observed how the possession of elite social and educational credentials often determined whether an individual would be admitted to a managerial position *in the first instance*, but that thereafter the person's further advancement might depend critically on the degree of his or her ingratiatory behaviour. Access to management posts might still be restricted mainly to elite candidates with direct and indirect social ties to incumbent top executives, because the latter may feel more confident of the 'social fit' of a person from an elite background (Useem and Karabel, 1986). Nevertheless, newcomers who show great deference to their CEO might be expected to advance more rapidly than others. This implies a positive interaction effect of having elite credentials and engaging in ingratiatory behaviour on the likelihood of achieving a seat on the board. Hence:

> *H11*. The relationship between a marketing executive having elite credentials and the probability that the person will be a member of the company's board of directors will be stronger the greater the extent to which the person engages in ingratiatory behaviour.

Similar reasoning can be applied to the potential existence of a moderating effect on the connection between the possession of elite credentials and board membership of the extent to which an individual has EI, i.e.

> *H12*. The relationship between a marketing executive having elite credentials and the probability that the person will be a member of the company's board of directors will be stronger the greater the degree of the person's EI.

The study

The sampling frame for the present investigation comprised senior marketing executives in 1171 registered companies operating in the food and beverages manufacturing sector. Marketing is known to be a particularly important success factor in the manufacture of food products and beverages (Curtis, 1997; Fenn, 2006). The sector had 5833 registered companies in 2005 (Fenn, 2006) and the UK's third highest marketing spend (Advertising Association, 2006), after retailing and financial services. Both the retailing and the financial services sectors cover widely differing types of businesses. Thus, for example, retailing can involve anything from a shop to an international chain of supermarkets, while financial services incorporate enterprises ranging from a major commercial bank to an expert insurance broker. Quite different influences are likely to pertain to these disparate genres of firm within retailing and financial services so the decision was taken to restrict the investigation to the food and beverages sector, which is more compact, less diverse and less fragmented. Industry-specific intra-sectoral research is arguably superior to cross-industry studies (see Ricks, Toyne and Martinez, 1990) because (i) a relatively homogeneous sampling frame is considered (so that 'like is compared with like'), (ii) there is at least partial control for the effects of extraneous factors (e.g. government regulation) that might affect all businesses within the sector, and (iii) the results have immediate and unambiguous implications for the particular sector concerned.

Two independent salary surveys completed in 2005–6 found that the food and beverages manufacturing sector paid its marketing executives the third highest average salaries of all sectors in the country (MPM, 2006; PSD, 2005). Most of the companies in the sector are large (median turnover £21.5 million), and the sector is intensively competitive. Fenn (2006) noted that it was extremely difficult for small companies to thrive in the food and beverages manufacturing sector, characterized as it is by 'low margins and a lack of pricing power' (p. 18). Twenty-five per cent of all companies in the sector had made a pre-tax loss in their most recent financial year. Selling occurs through a multiplicity of channels, and a wide range of marketing methods and systems is required (Fenn, 2006). It is reasonable to posit that the value of the marketing function will be recognized by top managements in these circumstances, implying that a substantial number of marketers will occupy seats on company boards.

A questionnaire was drafted and pre-tested via (i) discussions with four marketing executives holding senior positions in food and beverages manufacturing firms and with several experienced academic marketing researchers in the author's home university, and (ii) a mailing to 100 companies drawn at random from the sampling frame. Seventeen replies were received, the analysis of which enabled ambiguities in the wordings of specific items to be corrected and a couple of excessively overlapping items to be removed. The final version of the questionnaire (see later) was then mailed to the remaining 1071 companies in the sampling frame. After a follow up, 209 usable replies were received (19.5%). Thereafter a slip was sent to 100 non-respondents asking them to tick-off one of seven possible reasons for their decision not to respond. Seventeen people returned the slip, of which nine stated that they had been 'too busy' and five that it was company policy not to complete questionnaires. Hence there was no evidence of response bias within the sample. Average values of the replies to the items in the first and last 50 questionnaires received were compared, no meaningfully significant differences emerging.

Contact addresses for the companies in the sampling frame were obtained from *Kelly's Industrial Directory* (Reed Business Information), *Kompass United Kingdom* (Reed Business Information) and the Jigsaw database (Jigsaw Data Corporation). The 414 addresses from the last of these gave the name of a senior marketing person arranged by job title. Fifty-eight individuals appearing under the title 'Marketing Director' were identified and 356 under other senior marketing management titles. Otherwise the questionnaire (and a covering letter) was addressed to the 'Director of Marketing' in each of the remaining companies in the sampling frame. Although many of these companies would not have a board level director of marketing, the term 'Marketing Director' is routinely used to describe the head of marketing in a business, so a letter addressed to the 'Director of Marketing' should in principle arrive on the desk of the highest ranking marketer within an enterprise. (All the publications of the Chartered Institute of Marketing and the main marketing magazines employ the title 'Marketing Director' to denote the head of marketing in a firm.) Of the 209 respondents, 35 (16.7%) described themselves as board members, 44 (21%) as occupying positions immediately below board level, 77 (37%) as 'other senior management' and the remaining 53 (25%) as middle management. None characterized themselves as junior management.

The final version of the questionnaire is summarized in the Appendix. It began with a general section asking for details of the respondent's company and personal background, followed by queries concerning the individual's current job and extent of general business experience. Thereafter the questionnaire covered company characteristics (use of metrics, sales orientation, competitive intensity and environmental volatility) and personal qualities *vis-à-vis* ingratiatory behaviour and EI.

Measurement of variables

An individual's 'elite credentials' were defined in terms of the person's school education (private or state), the individual's highest level of qualification on leaving education, whether the manager had an MBA and, if the person had a university degree, the status of the institution he or she had attended. To measure the last of these (university status), institutions were categorized into six groupings according to their positions in the 2006 UK university league tables published by the *Times Higher Education Supplement*. About 8% of the UK population are privately educated, overwhelmingly from the top end of the UK income distribution (Biggs and Dutta, 1999). Thus, the fact that a person has been educated privately is commonly used as a proxy to indicate high social class.

Competitive intensity (five items) and environmental volatility (three items) were assessed through questions suggested by Wilson (1999), as modified by Bennett and Kottasz (2000). The degree to which a firm applied a sales orientation to its marketing activities was measured by five items based on the sales-related elements of the 'transactional' marketing orientation scale developed by Coviello *et al.* (2002). Each query (see the Appendix) had three options, the first of which (coded at value 3) represented the extreme sales orientation approach and the third (coded at value 1) the extreme opposite approach. The average value of a person's responses to the five items gave a measure of his or her assessment of a firm's sales orientation. (A factor analysis revealed that all five items loaded onto the same common factor – see Table 2 later.) Several authors have developed taxonomies of the marketing metrics used most often by companies (see for example Barwise and Farley, 2004; Clark, 1999; Davidson, 1999). The primary groupings of metrics have been found to comprise measures of market share and penetration, customer retention and profitability, customer satisfaction, corporate image, and advertising effectiveness. Accordingly the questionnaire contained six items concerning these matters, formed from Bennett's (2007) review of summary marketing performance measures.

Four items were employed to assess the extent of an individual's general management knowledge and experience. These items were informed by the suggestions of Zimmerman (2002), as were two further items that explored this matter specifically in relation to financial management. The degree of a person's ingratiatory behaviour was estimated via the 13 items of Westphal and

Stern's (2006) 'Ingratiation Scale' (p. 181) (itself derived from Kumar and Beyerlein, 1991). EI is a multi-dimensional concept with many interpretations and approaches to measurement. Indeed, according to Kerr *et al.* (2006) the field has 'become inundated with a deluge of different tests all purporting to be effective assessments of an individual's EI' (p. 265). Kerr *et al.* (2006) listed nine alternative EI inventories reported in the academic literature. A cursory search of the Internet conducted by the author in 2006 generated more than 30 commercial EI tests offered for sale by private management consultancies. As the current research involved an executive's capacities to understand and react to his or her superiors' emotional states in manners that cause these superiors to act favourably towards the person in question, the decision was taken to focus on the dimension of EI commonly referred to as 'regulating emotions in others' (Salovey and Mayer, 1990). This relates to a person's abilities (i) to monitor, evaluate and adjust to the changing moods of others and (ii) to regulate and alter the affective reactions of others, specifically by inducing positive feelings towards the person in others that result in behaviour that is beneficial to the individual concerned (Carmeli, 2003). Eighteen relevant items based on the inventory developed by Schutte *et al.* (1998) were used for this purpose. The Schutte *et al.* (1998) measure of EI has been robustly validated and was itself derived from other validated EI scales (for details see Carmeli, 2003). It has been found to overcome certain difficulties observed in other EI measures and is based on a rigorous academic model of the EI construct (Carmeli, 2003). In all sections of the questionnaire, items that were adapted (rather than reproduced verbatim) from pre-existing inventories were modified using the amendment procedure recommended by Engelland, Alford and Taylor (2001). Thus, two independent adjudicators ensured that candidate items fell within the domain of the relevant construct, fully expressed its meaning, and were worded using vocabulary compatible with that of the target respondents.

Creation of variables

Whether or not a person had specialized in sales was measured via a binary variable that assumed the value of one if the individual reported that this was the case, and zero otherwise. This binary variable arose from a forced choice questionnaire item (see the Appendix, question 2) that required the individual to select from various options (e.g. having specialized in sales, branding etc.). A forced choice approach was adopted because the aim was to distinguish individuals possessing heavy sales backgrounds from others. This is a categorization issue whereby the respondent will know whether he or she has specialized in sales, so that an easy-to-use response format is appropriate (see Poon, Leung and Lee, 2002). As a continuous variable that asked participants to express whether they had, for example, 'some' or 'a lot' of sales specialization would have been confusing and may have led to inconsistent interpretations (Wilson, 2003), it was decided to request the respondents to self-report their specialisms in terms of definitive categories. A single measure was employed for this variable because (unlike 'general management experience' (see above)) just a single construct (i.e. sales specialization versus some other or no specialization) was involved (Edwards, 2000).

Binary variables were also employed to indicate whether the manager (i) had been privately educated and (ii) had an MBA degree. Educational level was assessed on a five-point scale corresponding to the categories shown in the Appendix, item 3. An individual was regarded as having attended a high status university if the institution fell within the top 20 (of 168) UK higher education institutions listed in the university league tables published by the *Times Higher Education Supplement*. Each of the multi-item measures (for sales orientation, use of metrics etc.) was factor analysed. Unidimensional solutions emerged in all instances (see Table 1 for summary diagnostics and correlations between variables), except for 'emotional intelligence', where items (i) and (xi) loaded onto unique factors. Hence, consequent to the removal of these two EI outliers, composite variables were formed for all the multi-item measures, including EI. A person's highest level of qualification and whether or not the individual had attended a high status university correlated significantly and substantially with whether or not the manager had been privately educated (Kendall's tau = 0.63 and 0.69 respectively). Hence, the fact that someone had been educated privately was employed as a single indicator of the person having elite credentials.

Table 1. Correlation matrix and summary statistics

	Mean	Standard deviation	Cronbach's alpha	Eigen-value									
1. General business experience	3.8	1.1	0.86	3.1	1								
2. Knowledge of financial management	3.2	1.0	N/A	N/A	0.19	1							
3. Use of marketing metrics	2.9	0.9	0.86	4.8	0.04	−0.03	1						
4. Sales orientation	1.9	0.8	0.89	3.9	−0.06	0.08	0.15	1					
5. Competitive intensity	6.0	0.8	0.91	4.0	0.09	0.00	0.21	−0.16	1				
6. Environmental volatility	5.9	0.9	0.91	2.4	0.03	−0.02	−0.08	−0.06	0.32	1			
7. Ingratiatory behaviour	3.9	1.0	0.90	10.0	0.20	0.16	−0.02	−0.07	0.09	0.00	1		
8. Emotional intelligence	4.0	1.0	0.88	15.2	0.20	0.14	0.09	0.05	−0.09	0.07	0.19	1	
9. Individual has a sales background[a]	0.19	N/A	N/A	N/A	−0.08	−0.09	−0.10	0.14	0.00	−0.06	0.20	0.47	1
					1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9

[a]Figures relate to Kendall's tau. All the other figures are Pearson correlations.

This was done because it was not possible to aggregate or average the three 'elite credentials' measures in meaningful ways, and the inclusion of all three would have led to technical problems in subsequent regression analyses. (The significance levels of regression coefficients may be overstated in the presence of multicollinearity of this magnitude.) It should be noted, however, that the private education item is to be regarded as a proxy for the wider concept of a person having elite credentials. The two 'knowledge of financial management' items were highly correlated ($R = 0.79$) and thus were combined.

Table 1 (which includes information on the variable formed to indicate whether a person had a sales background) shows that there were no substantial correlations between any of the composites. In particular, ingratiatory behaviour was not correlated with EI, confirming the independence of the two constructs. The Cronbach's alpha values denote sound internal consistency for each set of items (as expected from adaptations of these previously validated inventories) and the eigenvalue for the dominant factor for each construct explains most of the variation in the data.

Findings

Table 2 shows the characteristics of the respondents, categorized with respect to occupational status. Very few of the managers (four out of 209) had an MBA degree so this variable was not included in the remainder of the analysis. None of the 35 board members or the 44 senior managers in positions immediately below board level had an MBA. This may appear odd, given the popularity of the MBA degree in British universities, but it needs to be pointed out that the survey was completed in a *manufacturing* industry. The largest employers of MBA graduates have been found to be banks, financial institutions and consultancy groups (Hoare, 2004), as opposed to manufacturing businesses. (According to Caulkin (2006), management consultancy absorbs a third of all MBAs graduating from the top US business schools.) Alden (2007) reported that, until recently, investment banking had been the major career of choice for British MBAs. In the 5 or 6 years preceding 2007, Alden (2007) continued, entrepreneurship and careers in finance other than investment banking had been most popular among MBA graduates of the main UK schools. Also the survey covered *all* of the UK, whereas, according to the Association of MBAs, two-thirds of all UK MBA holders reside in the southeast of England (Simpson, 2000, p. 765). The focus of interest in the present study, moreover, was marketers in *board level* and other *very senior* positions in manufacturing companies. Lock (1996) noted how, by the 1990s, the MBA had become a *basic* qualification for management, so that advancement beyond middle management could not be expected simply because a person had an MBA degree. Hoare (2004) in the same vein quoted the director of external relations at a leading UK business school who commented that 'increasingly em-

Table 2. The respondents

	Board members (N = 35)	Senior managers immediately below board level (N = 44)	Other senior managers (N = 77)	Middle managers (N = 53)
Average age	46 years	46 years	40 years	38 years
Average period in current job	4 years	3 years	4 years	3 years
Average length of experience of marketing	14 years	15 years	10 years	9 years
Average period with the company	10 years	8 years	9 years	7 years
Average length of managerial experience	12 years	12 years	10 years	6 years
Female	1 (3%)	3 (7%)	4 (5%)	6 (11%)
Has specialized in sales	10 (29%)	16 (36%)	10 (13%)	6 (11%)
Has specialized in some other marketing area	6 (17%)	12 (27%)	38 (49%)	27 (51%)
Is a general marketer with no specialization	19 (54%)	16 (36%)	29 (38%)	20 (38%)
Has an undergraduate degree and/or postgraduate qualification	27 (77%)	36 (82%)	55 (72%)	45 (85%)
Has an MBA	0	0	2 (2%)	2 (4%)
Was privately educated	26 (76%)	27 (61%)	51 (66%)	26 (50%)
Attended a high status university	9 (33%)	13 (36%)	14 (25%)	11 (25%)

ployers are not targeting MBAs for managerial jobs' (p. 19). This situation, according to a partner in a large firm of headhunters also quoted by Hoare (2004, p. 19), was particularly true of firms in manufacturing. Hay and Hodgkinson (2006) similarly observed how the possession of an MBA often improved a person's 'career confidence' (p. 119), but that 'traditional career advancement does not necessarily follow the attainment of an MBA degree' (p. 119). A further consideration is that research has suggested that significant career advancement to the most senior levels of company management is likely to accrue mainly to MBA graduates of the 'top schools' (see Baruch and Peiperl, 2000). A survey undertaken in the USA by *Business Week* (2006) found that, whilst an MBA from a top-10 US business school 'opened the door' to the corporate hierarchy, only 71 of 500 highest paid executives in the US top 100 companies had MBAs, and of the 71 no less than 50 had an MBA from one of three institutions (Harvard, Stanford and the Wharton School in Pennsylvania). In 2004 only one in 4000 alumni of top-10 US business schools were among the five highest paid managers in any of these 100 companies.

Only one of the 35 board members was female, and just 13 (6%) of the other managers were female. Most of the respondents were in their mid-40s and had been with their companies for 8 or 9 years. As might be expected, the board members had occupied managerial positions for longer periods than others. The figures for length of marketing experience and the time a person had been employed in his or her present job are compatible with those emerging from prior research in the area. For example, Curtis's (1997) survey of 1000 marketers found that people holding the title of marketing director had been in marketing for about 13 years, having spent around 4 years in their current position. PSD (2005) concluded that the average head of marketing in the retail sector had been in post for between 8 and 12 years. Marsh (2000) similarly observed how it normally took at least 10 years to move from a junior to a senior marketing role (longer for women). According to Simms (2003) this was because a significant period was needed for an aspirant to a board level position to engage in careful career planning and hence to acquire the necessary 'financial literacy, commercial acumen and strong interpersonal skills' (p. 27). Typically, Simms (2003) continued, 10–14 years were required for a person to 'plug his or her skills gap', often through moving from department to department in order to obtain a thorough grounding in all aspects of business (p. 27). The Table 2 figures for the ages of the respondents also conform to past findings, as a number of surveys have found that marketing directors are a little younger than other board members, usually in the 40–50 years old age band (see Bainbridge, 2000). As regards the lengths of service and experience of the 53 middle managers in the sample, these correspond broadly with the outcomes to a survey reported by Hay and

Hodgkinson (2006), wherein middle managers who evidently possessed good career prospects normally had around 7 years of managerial experience, were aged under 40 years and had been in their current job for 2–3 years. Table 2 also indicates that people with sales backgrounds tended to occupy more senior positions: 29% of the directors and 36% of the executives whose jobs were immediately below board level reported that they had backgrounds in sales. The overwhelming majority of the respondents were university graduates, with many having attended a 'top 20' university. Well over half of the managers in the sample had been privately educated prior to entering university. Three-quarters of the members of company boards had been privately educated. Overall, the picture that emerged of a 'typical' senior marketing executive in these large registered British companies was that of a male graduate of a relatively prestigious university who was in his mid-40s, had attended a private school and had been with his present company for about 9 years.

Tests of the hypotheses

The 40 individuals in the sample who reported that they had sales backgrounds did in fact exhibit significantly higher EI than the other respondents (mean value of 4.9 compared to 4.0 for the all sample data, $\rho < 0.01$), and the correlation between the two variables was substantial (Kendall's tau $= 0.47$, $\rho < 0.01$). Thus, Hypothesis 7 is accepted, in line with the previous assertions of (for example) Chang (2003), Chrusciel (2006), Langhorn (2004), Manna and Smith (2004) and Sojka and Deeter-Schmelz (2002). The remaining hypotheses were tested via a logistic regression intended to predict whether a particular individual was or was not a member of a company's board. All nine of the independent variables referred to in Hypotheses 1–9, plus the three moderators described in Hypotheses 10–12, were entered simultaneously. Table 3 gives the results, including the coefficients and associated chi-squared statistics for independent variables that failed to attain significance at the 0.05 level. The regression correctly allocated 79% of the respondents. (Application of Huberty's procedure confirmed that this was very substantially and significantly superior ($Z = 8.418$, $\rho < 0.001$) to random allocation (Huberty, 1984).) It can be seen from Table 3 that, other than Hypothesis 8 concerning the use of marketing metrics and Hypothesis 9 relating to the competitive intensity and volatility of a company's environment, all the hypotheses are accepted. A close examination of the data for the competitive intensity and environmental volatility composites revealed that the overwhelming majority of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that their companies' operating environments were both highly competitive and extremely volatile, so there was insufficient variation in the data for the impacts of these variables to be assessed. The rejection of Hypothesis 9 would contradict the implications of studies completed by Palmer (2002) and Subramanian and Ishak (1998), who found significant connections between high competitive intensity and companies' elevations of the status of the marketing function. A similar situation *vis-à-vis* lack of variation in the data applied to the rejection of Hypothesis 8 regarding the use of metrics (seemingly in contradiction to the arguments of, for example, Doyle (2000), Gray (2004), Hadden and Duckworth (2005) and Harrington (1996)). Only 17 of the 209 companies (8%) fell in the top two categories for this variable; 100 firms (48%) were in the bottom two categories. It is clear that few enterprises in this particular sample attempted to measure their marketing performances in rigorous manners, so it remains an open question whether the overt demonstration of the benefits of marketing via the presentation of formal metrics will help marketers rise to board level positions.

The acceptance of Hypothesis 1 for people who had achieved board membership confirms the findings of Zimmerman (2002) and Gray (2004) that marketers with a substantial knowledge of the finance function appear on company boards more frequently than marketers without such knowledge. Acceptance of Hypothesis 2 is consistent with an extensive pre-existing literature which has suggested that the acquisition of all round business skills and experience of other functions greatly facilitates a person's chance of attaining a seat on the board (see Bartram, 2003; Fisk, 2003; Hadden and Duckworth, 2005; Simms, 2003). The positive outcome regarding Hypothesis 3 is in line with the previous findings of Curtis (1997), Marsh (2001) and Zimmerman (2002) that sales executives are more likely to occupy seats on the board than are marketers with alternative types of background.

Table 3. Probability of a person holding a seat on the board

	Beta	Wald chi-squared (1 df)	ExpBeta
General business experience	0.22	4.84*	1.25
Knowledge of financial management	0.19	3.91*	1.21
Use of marketing metrics	0.04	1.01	1.04
Competitive intensity	0.06	1.02	1.06
Environmental volatility	− 0.01	0.09	0.90
Ingratiatory behaviour	0.41	8.88*	1.51
Emotional intelligence	0.38	8.01*	1.46
Individual has specialized in sales	0.29	5.50*	1.34
Individual was privately educated	0.54	10.12*	1.82
Moderator 1: 'Ingratiatory behaviour' times 'Individual was privately educated'	0.26	4.96*	1.30
Moderator 2: 'Emotional intelligence' times 'Individual was privately educated'	0.22	4.80*	1.25
Moderator 3: 'Individual has specialized in sales' times 'Level of sales orientation'	0.27	4.99*	1.31

Dependent variable is one if the individual is on the company's board, zero otherwise.
2LL ratio (196 df) = 224.7. Nagelkerke's pseudo $R^2 = 0.63$.
*Significant at the 0.05 level or below.

Private education was used as a proxy for elite credentials, as it happened to correlate significantly and substantially with other dimensions of this matter. (Similar results arose when these other dimensions were employed as independent variables in the regressions.) The finding that elite credentials are associated with promotion to board level positions (Hypothesis 4) confirms the outcomes to a large amount of prior research in the field (for details see Dornhoff, 2002; Useem and Karabel, 1986). Past research supporting the proposition that ingratiatory behaviour leads to substantial advancement (Hypothesis 5) has been extensive (see Gordon (1996), Kristof-Brown (2000) and Westphal and Stern (2006) for information on relevant studies) and is corroborated by the present investigation. Previous research in the field of EI has repeatedly concluded that high EI is associated with relatively rapid promotion to the top echelons of organizations (see Carmeli, 2003; Dulewicz and Higgs, 1999; Langley, 2000). The acceptance of Hypothesis 6 is fully compatible with these prior studies. Both the EI composite and the variable indicating whether a person had a sales background were included in the regression because, whilst they were significantly correlated, the magnitude of the correlation (Kendall's tau = 0.47) was below the threshold at which multicollinearity is normally considered to create technical problems (see Aiken and West, 1991; Kline, 1998). Moreover, the overall pattern of results was unaltered when each of these variables was removed in turn from the regression. Otherwise there was no significant multicollinearity among the independent variables. All the moderators were mean-centred using the procedure specified by Aiken and West (1991) in order to avoid multicollinearity. The final column (ExpBeta) of Table 3 lists the 'odds ratios' of the independent variables, i.e. the change in the probability that a particular individual will fall in the board director category consequent to a unit change in the relevant independent variable. Values of ExpBeta greater than one indicate an increase in this probability; values less than one show reductions in the probability. Thus, for instance, a unit increase in a person's general business experience (see Table 3) is associated with a 25% increase in the probability that the individual concerned will be a member of a company's board.

Table 4 repeats the logistic regression analysis but this time compares the 121 people who described themselves as senior managers (whether just below board level or otherwise) with the 53 respondents who regarded themselves as middle managers. This regression correctly allocated 72% of all the cases (Huberty's $Z = 6.348$, $\rho < 0.001$). The only difference from the outcome to the regression involving board members was that knowledge of financial management did not distinguish senior managers from those who described themselves as middle managers. Hence, with the single previously mentioned exception, Table 4 demonstrates that the same set of factors explains progression from middle manager to senior manager as determines

Table 4. Probability of a person being a senior manager rather than a middle manager

	Beta	Wald chi-squared (1 df)	ExpBeta
General business experience	0.38	9.05*	1.46
Knowledge of financial management	0.06	0.08	1.06
Use of marketing metrics	0.01	0.03	1.01
Competitive intensity	– 0.03	0.07	0.97
Environmental volatility	– 0.03	0.07	0.97
Ingratiatory behaviour	0.29	5.60*	1.34
Emotional intelligence	0.24	4.90*	1.27
Individual has specialized in sales	0.23	4.80*	1.26
Individual was privately educated	0.29	5.47*	1.34
Moderator 1: 'Ingratiatory behaviour' times 'Individual was privately educated'	0.24	4.66*	1.27
Moderator 2: 'Emotional intelligence' times 'Individual was privately educated'	0.27	4.99*	1.31
Moderator 3: 'Individual has specialized in sales' times 'Level of sales orientation'	0.30	5.11*	1.35

Dependent variable is one if the individual is a senior manager, zero if the person is a middle manager.
2LL ratio (196 df) = 228.02. Nagelkerke's pseudo $R^2 = 0.59$.
*Significant at the 0.05 level or below.

advancement to the board. In other words, similar variables establish whether marketers and marketing are taken seriously by the very top managements of companies (hence facilitating the promotion of marketers) regardless of the initial status of the individual marketer.

Conclusion

This study has confirmed empirically the suggestions of a substantial number of (mainly practitioner) authors who have argued that certain factors can significantly predict the promotion of a marketing manager to a board level position. The highest probability of achieving a place on the board applied, it seems, to an individual from an elite background who engaged in ingratiatory behaviour, who exercised EI, worked as a sales executive in a company with a heavy sales orientation, and who possessed a sound knowledge of general management (particularly in relation to business finance). Apparently, ingratiatory behaviour and EI improved a person's prospects of reaching a company's board, irrespective of social background. It is clear nonetheless that elite status represented an extremely powerful advantage on the route to the top. The moderating influences of both ingratiatory behaviour and EI on the impact of elite status on the probability of a marketer holding a board level position were positive, indicating that people who entered senior management positions from elite backgrounds had a great deal to gain from ingratiation and the application of EI when dealing with their superiors. To the extent that individuals with elite credentials entered senior management more easily than their less privileged colleagues, this implies that homosocial reproduction within board rooms occurred and confirms the findings of a large number of prior studies in the field. However, it is relevant to note in this connection the possibility that CEOs might (consciously or unconsciously) have signalled to their most favoured subordinates cues which indicated that they expected more ingratiatory behaviour from these individuals than was demanded of less favoured subordinates. If managers with elite credentials were favoured to substantially greater extents than others, then a CEO's demands for more ingratiation from people who have elite backgrounds would presumably have triggered extensive ingratiatory behaviour on the parts of these socially privileged individuals. Hence, promotion to the board could have resulted as much from the conduct of a CEO as from subordinates' initial desires to ingratiate. Further research is needed into this possibility.

The outcomes to the study have implications both for managers who desire board level positions and for their employing companies. Marketers who want to reach the board need to identify their knowledge and experience deficiencies and the tasks and roles (including teamworking roles) they will have to undertake to make good their inadequacies. This may require their spending time in jobs outside the domain of marketing. Careful career planning is essential (see Simms (2003) for further information on desirable career development activities for marketers). The study has confirmed empirically the proposition (replete in the practitioner literature) that knowledge of the finance function and experience of general management significantly help an individual reach the board. Hence marketers should actively seek training and staff development in these areas, as it is clear from the results that marketers who attend courses in other subject areas and/or who obtain further business qualifications in non-marketing fields are likely to have a considerable advantage when applying for a seat on a company's board. Also, aspirants to board level positions should not be too anxious to change companies too frequently in order to advance their careers. They might be better advised to remain with a single firm and learn all aspects of its business, especially *vis-à-vis* the management of its finances.

Another important implication of the outcomes to the investigation is that marketing managers who aspire to board level positions should be acutely aware of the importance of ingratiatory behaviour, EI and adherence to social norms that will help them to 'fit in' with board room environments, and possibly to seek training in such matters. The results provide evidence that social behaviour involving ingratiation to superiors and an appropriate use of EI can assist a person's progression to a board room position *even if* the individual does not possess elite credentials. It follows that marketers in search of promotion to the board need to manage proactively their modes of social behaviour towards CEOs and other pre-existing board members. Staff development in interpersonal influence skills and processes should therefore be highly beneficial to aspirate board members. Overall the results support the view that marketing managers have some degree of personal control over their access to board level positions. Useem and Karabel (1986) argued that ingratiatory behaviour in particular might be critically important for managers who do not possess elite social and educational credentials (e.g. people who did not attend exclusive private schools and famous universities, who do not belong to elite social networks or display any other indications of an upper-class background). Such individuals will not have the direct and indirect social ties to incumbent top executives in large companies enjoyed by their more socially privileged colleagues.

For their part, companies that wish to equip marketers for board level positions (and hence to benefit from marketers' inputs when making strategic decisions) should develop career paths for senior managers that include the development of a *broad* range of skills. This implies interdepartmental planned experience programmes that incorporate systemic training in budgetary control and financial management. Professional bodies concerned with the training of marketing managers (e.g. the Chartered Institute of Marketing) have much to contribute in this respect via the provision of short courses in non-marketing subjects to senior marketers with board level ambitions (see Baker and Holt, 2004). The judicious application by companies of training, career planning, appraisal and feedback systems designed to broaden senior marketers' experience and perspectives should result in more marketers reaching the very top of their organizations (cf. Bolino and Turnley, 1999), with consequent improvements in corporate decision making and strategy. Hence, through having marketers on their boards, enterprises will have greater customer focus, and a wider range of competencies will be brought to bear on strategic planning and new business development (Gray, 2004; Marsh, 2001). A company will be better able to 'speak the language of the customer' (Simms, 2003, p. 28).

Executives with sales backgrounds exhibited more EI in the dimension of EI considered in the course of the study than their counterparts in other specialisms or amongst marketing generalists. This finding corresponds with the predictions of an extensive literature on the topic (see above). The ability to regulate the emotions of others helped determine the likelihood that a person would achieve a directorship. Hence, it seems that the possession of EI by sales people (resulting from inclination or from the experience of selling, or from both) can in part lead to managers from sales backgrounds having higher probabilities of obtaining positions on company boards, *independently* of the fact that CEOs and other pre-existing board members might value the selling function more highly than other aspects of marketing. Perhaps therefore the presumption that the selling function has special properties (e.g. salience of outcomes, direct contributions to cash inflows) which cause CEOs and other directors to regard sales managers in a particularly favourable light is sometimes overstated. This clearly is an issue worthy of further investigation, including an examination of potential relationships between (i) the natures of the sales training received by sales managers, (ii) EI and (iii) promotion readiness. Additional research into connections between competitive intensity and the status of senior marketing executives within a company would be useful, as the data emerging from the present study did not contain enough variation to enable this question to be addressed properly. Another valuable line of further research would be the completion of longitudinal studies to establish the career progression patterns of particular individuals who have and have not made it to the board.

A number of limitations apply to the investigation. The sample size was modest and restricted to a single sector, i.e. food and beverages manufacture. However, the response rate achieved was comparable to those obtained in other studies of this nature and there was no evidence of response bias. Also, the industry sector surveyed was one in which it was reasonable to expect that the marketing function would be taken seriously, and hence that marketers would rise to board room positions. Thus it was possible to identify significant pathways to top jobs among companies within the sector. Another limitation of the research was that the ingratiation and EI measures were self-reported. It was not feasible to check these self-assessments against the opinions of the superiors of the managers involved. Dyadic studies would be necessary to compare CEOs' and subordinates' assessments of the latter's EI and ingratiatory behaviour. A further limitation was the need for parsimony in the EI instrument employed in the investigation, and hence the decision to focus on just one dimension of EI, i.e. regulating emotions in others. This was deemed the aspect of EI most relevant to the study. It would of course have been useful to incorporate other dimensions of EI into the questionnaire (perceiving one's own emotions, understanding emotions, internal regulation of emotions etc.), but each extra dimension would have required the addition of a dozen or so further items to an already crowded document (some EI inventories have well over 100 items). The substantial lengthening of the questionnaire that this would have entailed is likely to have greatly reduced the rate of response. Fresh studies might explore the influences of these other EI dimensions on a marketing manager's promotion potential.

Appendix: The Questionnaire

About yourself

1. My age is ______ years. I am male/female and have been in my present job for ______ years/months. I have worked in the general field of marketing or sales for ______years/months. I have worked in the sector in which my company operates for ______ years. I have held a managerial position for _____ years. My company has approximately ______ employees.
2. My job title is ____. I would describe my background in relation to marketing as (please tick one of the following):
   - having specialized in sales ______
   - having specialized in brand management ______
   - having specialized in some other specific area of marketing ______
   - being a general marketer with no particular specialization ________
3. On completing my education my highest level of qualification was: GCSE/A-levels or equivalent/undergraduate degree or equivalent/Masters degree/PhD
4. I do/do not have an MBA degree. I attended a (please circle) state school/private school.
5. If you completed a university degree please state the name(s) of the university or universities you attended. ____
6. I am/am not a member of the board of directors of my company.

7. If you are not a member of the board of directors, how would you describe your position? (Please tick)
   - Immediately below board level ______
   - Middle management ______
   - Junior management ______

Your general business experience

Source: Zimmerman (2002). Seven-point scale: 7 = agree very strongly; 1 = disagree very strongly.

(i) I regard myself as a business person first and marketing specialist second.
(ii) Prior to assuming my current position I had a good understanding of how the entire business worked, not just the marketing function.
(iii) I have very substantial working experience of areas other than marketing (e.g. human resources, operations, finance).
(iv) In general I understand the language of business functions other than marketing.

Knowledge of financial management

Source: Zimmerman (2002). Seven-point scale: 7 = agree very strongly; 1 = disagree very strongly.

(i) I understand the language of financial management.
(ii) I have a sound working knowledge of financial management.

Use of marketing metrics

Source: Bennett (2007). Seven-point scale.
We have formal systems and procedures for measuring:

(i) customers' reactions to our advertisements (e.g. the measurement of ad recall or ad-likeability)
(ii) financial returns to advertisements
(iii) public awareness and image of the company and its products
(iv) overall market share and/or penetration of specific markets
(v) customer retention and/or profitability
(vi) customer satisfaction

Sales orientation

Source: Coviello *et al.* (2002).
Please select one option for each of the following.

(i) The core purpose of our marketing is to (a) reach as many potential customers as possible, or (b) appeal to a limited number of pre-selected customer groups, or (c) build relationships with specific customers.
(ii) The primary aim of our communications is to (a) communicate with as many potential customers as possible, or (b) communicate with carefully targeted customer segments or individuals, or (c) facilitate personal interactions with specific customers.
(iii) Our marketing activities are mainly intended to (a) reach out to new customers, or (b) service existing customers, or (c) develop ongoing relationships with customers.
(iv) We (a) do not seek feedback from our customers, or (b) seek some feedback, or (c) gather large amounts of feedback from our customers on their views of the company and their satisfaction with the product/service.
(v) Our market research focuses mainly on (a) establishing the size and structure of the potential customer base, or (b) studying customer behaviour, or (c) finding out the preferences, needs and specific characteristics of particular groups of customers or individuals.

Competitive intensity

Sources: Bennett and Kottasz (2000); Wilson (1999).

(i) The company faces intense competition in all its customer markets.
(ii) Fresh forms of competition are arising all the time.
(iii) Other companies in our sector quickly react to any marketing initiatives we introduce.
(iv) New competing firms regularly enter our markets.
(v) If we are successful in our activities, competing firms immediately copy the things we have done.

Environmental volatility

Sources: Bennett and Kottasz (2000); Wilson (1999). Three items: seven-point scale.
The environment in which this company operates is (a) highly uncertain, (b) extremely turbulent, (c) subject to radical and unexpected change.

Ingratiatory behaviour

Source: Stern and Westphal (2006).

(i) In talking to the CEO, I often express agreement with the CEO's viewpoint on strategic issues, even when I do not completely share his/her opinion.
(ii) Over the past 12 months, I have often challenged the CEO's opinion on strategic issues.
(iii) In speaking to the CEO, I often point out attitudes and/or opinions we have in common.
(iv) In speaking with the CEO over the last 12 months, I have pointed out weaknesses in his/her strategy for the company.
(v) In talking to the CEO over the past 12 months, I have often complimented the CEO on his/her insights on particular strategic issues.
(vi) In the past 12 months, I have often expressed to the CEO that I enjoy working with him/her.
(vii) In talking to the CEO over the last 12 months, I have given him/her advice on a personal or career matter.
(viii) I have done personal favours for the CEO in the past 12 months.
(ix) Over the past 12 months, I have given the CEO advice or other assistance on strategic matters that are outside my area of responsibility, even without the CEO asking for it.
(x) In the last 12 months, I have disagreed with the CEO's point of view on strategic issues.
(xi) When discussing strategic issues with the CEO I often play devil's advocate.
(xii) I would compliment the CEO if he/she were to make an insightful comment about an important strategic issue.
(xiii) Over the past 12 months, I have sought to reassure the CEO about the soundness of his/her strategic judgement.

Emotional intelligence

Source: Schutte *et al*. (1998). Seven point scale: 7 = very often; 1 = hardly ever.

(i) I am aware of the non-verbal messages I send to others.
(ii) I present myself in a way that makes a good impression on others.
(iii) By looking at their facial expressions, I recognize the emotions people are experiencing.
(iv) I compliment others when they have done something well.
(v) I am aware of the non-verbal messages other people send.
(vi) When another person tells me about an important event in his or her life, I almost feel as though I have experienced this event myself.
(vii) I know what other people are feeling just by looking at them.
(viii) I help other people feel better when they are down.

(ix) I can tell how people are feeling by listening to the tone of their voice.
(x) It is easy for me to understand why people feel they way they do.
(xi) I know when to speak about my personal problems to others.
(xii) I arrange events others enjoy.
(xiii) When somebody upsets me, I think about what they said and then usually find a solution.
(xiv) I find it easy to make others excited about things.
(xv) I can pick up on what the 'vibe' is when other people are talking about something.
(xvi) I find it easy to calm people down when they're worried or stressed.
(xvii) I can make my friends relax when they get stressed.
(xviii) I can tell when someone feels the same way as me about other people without talking about it to them.

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