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On the Right Track: Exploring Influences Contributing to Successful Track-Switching of Indians Working for a U.S. Company

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On the Right Track: Exploring Influences Contributing to Successful Track-Switching of Indians Working for a U.S. Company

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education in Higher Education

by

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to explore how Indian managers assessed the influences leading to their transition from technician to manager when working for a company in the U.S. This study was based on interviews with fifteen Indian managers who had track-switched from a technical job to a management position in the U.S. in a U.S. company. The interviewees were asked five questions about what they believed made them successful in track-switching, and the consensus among interviewees was that for a technician to track-switch effectively, the technician had to have excellent technical skills. In addition to technical skills, the technician needs to develop soft skills based on effective communication. Interviewees said that their desire to become managers was based on fulfilling a higher role of responsibility in the company and serving people so that those they served could be successful. Successful teamwork was central to the motivation for track-switching. To take advantage of opportunity to track-switch, the interviewees counseled finding mentors who would provide advice about track-switching and about working as a manager. Most of the interviewees found that their work environment provided opportunity for track-switching, but technicians had to take advantage of those opportunity by being ready to make the move into management. Interviewees did not note that training within the company prepared them to track-switch. Of the five interviewees who mentioned training, only one cited in-house training the interviewee participated in at a different company than the one in which he was employed. Interviewees were emphatic in giving credit to their family background in India as preparing them for success in their careers because their family and close friends all stressed the need for excellent performance.
Acknowledgments

I would like to thank everyone who helped make this project possible and who supported me with their time, patience, understanding, input, and encouragement. Specifically, I would like to thank my dissertation chair, Dr. James Hammons, for all the time and effort he invested in me and in this project. He was always available to meet with me and to provide guidance. He spent countless hours reviewing and editing drafts and offering important insights. His mentorship, however, goes beyond the scope of this project. He has impacted my life in a very positive and meaningful way both personally and professionally. I am deeply grateful for the opportunity to have been his student and to have learned so much from him.

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Without the immense love and encouragement from my family, I would not be where I am today. My parents are my heroes and I am grateful every day for the sacrifices that they have made for me. Their overwhelming love, patience, support, and encouragement are the reasons
that I have been able to reach my goals. Their hospitality and desire to befriend internationals is the reason I, too, desire to help internationals navigate American culture, and the reason I chose my dissertation topic. Everything that I am, I owe to my parents.

Without my best friend and sister, Heidi, I would not have been able to laugh through some of the tough times or persevere through the disappointments. She has always been the sunshine in my life and is always there to pick me up and offer practical advice.

Lastly, this project would not have been possible without those who so generously gave their time to participate in this study. I genuinely enjoyed talking with each participant and I am grateful that they were willing to share their time and their experiences to help other Indians track-switch in the U.S. These participants are hard-working, generous, talented, remarkable trail-blazers and the future is bright for them and other Indians who come to the U.S. and who care about people as much as they do. I admire their dedication to their work, their families, and the people they serve, and I am thankful for the opportunity to share their experiences with others.
Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my remarkable parents, Dr. Bruce and Carmen Speck. I love you both very much.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction

In the U.S., it is common for employees in technical fields to advance in their careers by moving from their technical career track to a managerial career track. However, there is often a disconnect between the years of formal education and training that technicians undergo to be successful technicians and the skills and training needed to be a successful manager. This gap in training often makes track-switching an unclear process (Biddle & Roberts, 1994; Blano, 1996; Brimm, 2015; Dittmann, 2009; Evans, 1995; Hill, 1993; Hood, 1990; Thilmany, 2004; Pandey & Pandey, 2015). As Badawy (1995) notes, the transition of “technologists into managers is one of the most formidable tasks and challenges facing management in the twenty-first century” (p. 4).

Now, consider that the U.S. workforce is increasingly dependent on employing people with technical skills from other countries, particularly India (Banerjee, 2009; Cohen & Evans, 1995; Cohen, Ravishankar & Duberley, 2015; Sabharwal & Varma, 2015). Once employed in the U.S., highly skilled Indian technicians, just like other technicians, discover opportunities to track-switch and advance in managerial positions. However, track-switching for people from a different country may be further complicated by their language challenges and knowledge (and acceptance) of U.S. culture. In fact, how Indian technicians can track-switch effectively is not well-documented because so little research has been devoted to an increasingly important part of the U.S. workforce.

Statement of the Problem

There is little literature devoted to the influences contributing to the success of Indian technicians when track-switching from a technical position to a management position in the U.S. Yet, skilled labor forces from India are a growing population in the U.S. workforce (Banerjee,
As the world becomes more global and as corporations continue to hire from an international market, it is important to understand what track-switching skills are needed for those who speak English as a Second Language (ESL), and who come from a different culture. India is an especially large outsourcer of technical leads (Ewers, 2007; Levina & Kane, 2009; Pandey & Pandey, 2015); at least 62% of India’s IT professionals who live outside of India work in the U.S. (Kapur, 2002). In fact, over 70% of applicants approved for the H-1B visa, which is the visa for highly-skilled workers in the U.S., are Indians (Zong & Batalova, 2015).

Once in the U.S., skilled Indian technicians become aware of attractive management opportunities that would advance their careers. Although technically qualified, they, like many technical professionals in other occupations, do not make the transition into management because they may not attempt to market the use of their own abilities, are not motivated, do not see opportunities for track-switching, and may not believe their work climate and their environment outside of work facilitate their desires to move into management. Although some literature focuses on the managerial skills needed for successful track-switching (Badawy, 1995; Biddle & Roberts, 1994; Dittmann, 2009; Howard, 2003; Huff, 2010; Omurtag, 2009; Prives, 2010; Thilmany, 2004), to my knowledge, no study focuses on the influences that contribute to the successful transition of Indians from technician to manager in the U.S.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to explore how Indian managers assessed the influences leading to their transition from technician to manager when working for a company in the U.S. With this new knowledge, perhaps technicians from India who want to track-switch in a U.S. company will have a clearer roadmap on how to do so. Furthermore, executive decision-makers
can use this information to invest in programs that will prepare employees for track-switching opportunities.

**Setting**

The major company in which many of my participants worked for was a multinational corporation, one of the largest companies in the world by revenue and one of the largest private employers in the world. As is typical of many global organizations, this company outsourced jobs to other companies or vendors and these vendor companies were where my other participants worked. However, because my methodology included soliciting participants by snowballing, one participant worked for a start-up company and not in a corporate environment. Nevertheless, all participants cited similar track-switching strategies.

**Framework for Factors Contributing to Track-Switching**

A concept of performance evaluation in the workplace was developed by Cummings and Schwab (1973), and it is the model I used for the factors that would influence track-switching. Their model did not include opportunities, which is an essential factor to look at for my study. In other studies that my dissertation advisor (Hammons) supervised, he added opportunities to the Cummings and Schwab model. Dr. Hammons suggested that I add opportunities as a factor in my study as well. In addition, Cummings and Schwab (1973) include “environmental” in relationship to the workplace which I call “work climate.” I use the term “environment” to refer to external influences, which also was not included in the Cummings and Schwab (1973) model. So my advisor also added that. Using the Cummings and Schwab (1973) model, and the categories my advisor included, I formulated my research questions.

**Research Questions**

This study focused on the effects of five influences of track-switching. The five
influences included ability, motivation, opportunity, work climate, and environment. The central question that this study sought to answer was:

1. What influenced the successful track-switching of an Indian technician who had transitioned into a management position in a U.S. company in the U.S.?

To effectively address this central question, several sub-questions had to be answered. These were:

a. From your perspective, what unique abilities helped you to make the transition into management?

b. Why did you want to become a manager?

c. How did you take advantage of or create opportunities to become a manager?

d. How did the climate at your work influence your decision to become a manager?

e. What were the elements in your life outside of work that influenced your decision to become a manager?

**Significance of the Study**

This study is timely because as Indian technicians continue to contribute significant expertise to U.S. companies, many may find management positions desirable and will want to learn how to make the transition from their technical positions to a management positions in the U.S. The importance of this study is twofold. First, it will help determine what track-switching training is available, especially whether U.S. companies are actively engaged in promoting track-switching among Indian technicians. If such training is common, then Indian technicians might have reasonably high expectations that when they track-switch, they will have significant company support in the form of formal training to be successful. If such training is not common, then various issues regarding the accommodation of Indian technicians to the expectations and
nuances of being a manager in U.S. culture would be in question. Determining what kind and what level of training is critical for gauging support Indian technicians need as they seek to track-switch in a U.S. company. Second, it will provide a package of strategies that Indian technicians can consult as they consider whether track-switching is feasible for them and what they can do to prepare themselves for a management position in the U.S.

**Definition of Terms**

Defining terms in this study is important because, although many terms in this study are in common use, some terms were more narrowly defined in the context of my study. I created these definitions using a combination of common dictionary meanings, my own knowledge of industry terms, and the work situations of my participants. To ensure consistent understanding among readers, I provide the following definitions:

1. *Manager.* A person who has authority or control over a business, division, project, or task and who may be responsible for one or more persons.
2. *Technician.* A worker in a technology field who is proficient in relevant skills and techniques, and in some cases has a practical understanding of theoretical principles.
3. *Transition.* The passage from an earlier to a later stage of development.
5. *Ability.* Either innate or acquired individual characteristics affecting a person’s capacity to perform tasks.
6. *Motivation.* The internal drive a person possesses to marshal personal abilities to perform tasks, in this case, moving from a technical position to one in management.
7. *Opportunity.* Events or circumstances that provided the technician with the chance to pursue a management position.

8. *Job Climate.* Conditions inside the work environment that influenced successful track-switching.

9. *Environment.* Aspects outside the work climate that influenced successful track-switching. Examples of these influences included participants’ home life, hobbies, family, and friends.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

Literature Search and Review Process

This chapter reviews the literature relevant to the factors contributing to successful track-switching, and the literature on Indian technicians in the U.S. To gain an understanding of what research exists in track-switching, I first used the University of Arkansas’s Google Scholar, Ebsco, and ProQuest databases. I searched each of these databases using the key terms: career transition, manager, effective management, how to be a good manager, skills needed to be a manager, how to become a manager, management skills, engineering and management, computer science and management, IT and management, technical careers and management. These searches delivered a wealth of sources and confirmed that there is a great deal of interest in exploring how technicians can successfully make the transition into management. Next, using the same databases, I narrowed my focus to the literature related to the factors that I explore in my study and used the search terms: soft skills, management and soft skills, motivation and management, management opportunities, management training, communication and management, work climate and management, abilities and management, and mentoring.

Finally, I turned my attention to the literature on highly-skilled immigrant workers in the U.S. and narrowed the search to Indian immigrants with a technical background. I used the University of Arkansas’s Google Scholar, EBSCO, and ProQuest databases and searched with the keywords: Indian manager, Indian technicians in the U.S., skilled immigrant workers, Indian immigrants in the U.S., skilled Indian workers in the U.S., Indian and American managers, cross-cultural management, and, Indian managers in America. In addition, I made an appointment with the business librarian at the University of Arkansas to ensure that I was accessing the appropriate databases and using the best search terms. In fact, the business librarian
was able to find no more sources than I had on the track-switching of Indian technicians in the U.S. I was then satisfied that I had exhausted my search on track-switching and the literature related to Indian technicians in the U.S. The articles and studies that I found from my literature are summarized below.

**Overview of Literature on Track-Switching**

The literature on track-switching is addressed to both technicians and managers, but the advice for managers, who are given criteria for selecting technicians, particularly for management training programs, can be included under advice to technicians. Based on Cummings & Schwab’s (1973) performance evaluation model and my own advisor’s adaptation of it to include opportunities and environment, I have organized the literature into the following factors: ability, motivation, opportunity, work climate, and environment. I discuss how each factor relates to the Cummings and Schwab (1973) model and the relevant literature below.

**Ability**

As stated by Cummings and Schwab (1973), “Ability . . . refers to individuals’ current capacities to perform some task or set of tasks” (p. 8) and is an important factor when considering if someone is or is not a good fit for a position. I have organized the abilities needed for successful track-switching into five types: technical expertise, effective communication, ability to adopt a global perspective, the ability to work with people and their unpredictable behavior, and the ability to motivate others.

The first of these abilities, technical expertise, is important for those technicians who want to move into a management position. Only those technicians with a high level of technical expertise should consider a manager position (Badawy, 1982; Biddle & Roberts, 1994; Howard, 2003; Kasprzak, 2013; Prives, 2010; Thamhain, 2014). Determining technical expertise is not
based on impressionistic data; rather, technical performance is authenticated by those in management or by one’s peers (Cummings & Schwab, 1973).

The second ability needed for successful track-switching is effective communication. Effective communication entails listening to the feedback of team members and supervisors, being sensitive to nonverbal communication signals, and asking questions about people’s understanding of what they need to do to make a project successful (Biddle & Roberts, 1994; Dittmann, 2009; Huff 2010; Omurtag, 2009; Thilmany, 2004; Treher et al., 2011; Pandey & Pandey, 2015). Employing effective communication strategies impinges on other aspects of management, such as team building and project management skills. Effective communication skills, then, are vital for many management responsibilities. However, although communication skills are highlighted to becoming a manager, it is also noted that communication skills are developed through trial and error (Badawy, 1995; Thamhain, 2014; Thilmany, 2004; Pandey & Pandey, 2015).

The third ability a technician needs to become a manager is to be able to adopt a global perspective. In essence, a technician should change his/her perspective from being an operator working on a project, often with a great deal of isolation, to a manager who must take a global perspective of the project in the context of the organization’s strategic goals (Ananthram and Nankervis, 2013; Armstrong, 2000; Barkema et al., 2002; Barner, 1997; Bhatnager, 1999; Buchel, 2005; Dillon, 2001, Gray & Larson, 2000; Huff, 2010; Thamhain, 2002). This change in perspective comes with a change in responsibility. A technician’s focus is on the technical aspects of the project. Technicians often have a limited scope of work. They have specific tasks assigned to them, and given their high-level of expertise, they are generally free to complete those tasks without much external influence. A manager’s focus is on the entire team and the
project as a part of the organization’s interface with other units within the organization, such as shareholders, and the world beyond the organization, including customers and vendors (Hill, 1992; Newell & Rogers, 2002; Thamhain, 2014). As Thamhain (2014) points out, “Managers today, especially in engineering and technology, must be capable of dealing with not just the technical challenges, but also economic, political, social, and regulatory issues, and the associated uncertainties and risks” (p. 363).

The fourth ability is to work effectively with the unpredictability of human behavior. The literature frames this as the ability to work effectively with people regarding their personal and professional needs and emotions (Thilmany, 2004; Treher et al., 2011; Howard, 2003; Huff, 2014). But the technician’s world tends to be black and white regarding available solutions to technical problems that may take little account of people’s non-technical needs and emotions. Indeed, a virtue of being a technician is that problems have solutions or they do not. Either the available technology can be manipulated to solve a problem or the problem requires the development of technology that realistically can be created. This is not to say that technicians have no creative input into solving problems. They do, but as Thilmany points out, “Managing a group of people is an ambiguous job” (2004, p. 5). And as Cerri, who coaches engineers to address the unpredictability of human behavior, said in an interview, “We pick a technical field because that’s the way we want to move in the world. . . . If we wanted to be involved with people, we would be therapists” (Thilmany, 2004) . . . or managers. The way a technician wants to move in the world is to solve problems that yield to technical solutions. Managing people requires a different perspective that includes the unpredictability of human behavior.

The fifth ability technicians need to transition into management is the ability to motivate others. Motivation is not a simple concept, and the literature focuses on how managers can
motivate employees to achieve goals and increase productivity (Arnolds & Boshoff, 2002; Biddle & Roberts, 1994; Dittmann, 2009; Evans, 1995; Lazaroiu, 2015; Schmid & Adams, 2008; Tudor, 2011). From a technician’s viewpoint, motivation is primarily personal. If a technician is professionally engaged in a project, he or she is motivated by the technological challenge. The need to motivate others is not necessarily a key component of the technician’s job. A manager, however, is responsible for creating an environment where the team can be successful in reaching their goals--on time and within budget (Thamhain, 2014). Managerial responsibility requires skill in motivating others.

The abilities the literature identifies are often in embryonic form when a technician assumes a management position, so the abilities are potential indicators of management success. The development of skills over time may determine whether or not the manager can become successful. Using the perspective of successful managers who have made the transition from a technical position to a managerial position is vital in informing hopeful management candidates about what lies ahead in a management position.

Motivation

The Cummings and Schwab (1973) model discusses three different dimensions of motivation: 1) employees’ needs/goals, 2) employees’ anticipation that they have the necessary ability to meet the goal and the employees’ belief that their performance will satisfy the goal, and 3) an employee’s ability to maintain motivation over time to continue to meet goal expectations. The literature on track-switching recognizes career advancement as the primary motivation to become a manager (Arnolds & Boshoff, 2002; Badawy, 1995; Badawy, 2002; Igbaria, Parasuraman, & Badawy, 1994; Lazaroiu, 2015). Economic incentive can be part of the motivation for career advancement. As Badawy (1995) notes, “Many technologists think that the
only way to improve their financial status is to move into management since the reward system in most organizations is geared toward managerial advancement as an index of success” (p. 56). Badawy (1995) goes on to state that technicians may desire managerial positions to obtain status, authority, and power because they feel they will become obsolete in their technical field if they do not advance to become a manager. Career advancement also includes career satisfaction (Arnolds & Boshoff, 2002; Badawy, 1995; Igbaria, Parasuraman, & Badawy, 1994; Lazaroiu, 2015). Technicians who want to add a new dimension of meaningfulness to their work may find that track-switching can provide them with a different kind of work satisfaction.

**Opportunity**

Opportunity refers to the possibility of advancing to a management position. This can occur either within the technician’s current organization or the opportunity may lie outside the current organization. Opportunities follow from motivation because once a technician is motivated to become a manager, the process of enquiring and searching begins. Opportunities for technicians to transition to a management position are generally aided by mentorship, management/leadership training programs, and/or the company’s own performance and promotion process (Little, 2016; Manikutty, 2005; Matthews, 2013; Meyer, 2017; Plakhotnik, 2017; Sillett, 2015; Watson, 2001).

**Work Climate**

The environment within an organization is often referred to as “climate.” Although Cummings and Schwab (1973) use the term “environment” in their construct, I use the term climate because it is consistent with the term used in management literature and because I make a distinction between climate and environment in this study. Organizational climate is generally thought of in terms of an employee’s perception of the workplace and, as such, is often difficult
to objectively define and assess. However, two major aspects that influence an employee’s view on work climate are managerial leadership and the organization’s reward system (Chaudhary, Rangnekar, & Barua, 2012; DeConinck & Moss, 2016; Hu & Liu, 2017; Lazaroiu, 2015; McCall et al., 1988). As Cummings and Schwab (1973) note:

It is within the organization’s power to materially influence how successfully the individual can carry out his portion of the collective objectives. Part of this influence stems from the authority and reward systems developed by the organization to coordinate, control, and compensate the activities of its employees. (p. 36)

Work climate helps a technician determine if it is feasible to track-switch in his or her current company or whether he or she must look elsewhere.

Environment

Because environment is a category I included that is not included in Cummings and Schwab (1973), I attempted to find in the literature on track-switching reference to a technician’s environment outside of work as it related to advancement into a managerial position. My search did not yield any evidence that an employee’s environment outside of work is given consideration when advice about track-switching is provided. However, a technician’s environment seems intuitively to have some influence on whether the technician will even want to aspire to a management position. Certainly, environment in the literature on track-switching has yet to be investigated.

Overview of Literature on Indian Immigration to the U.S.

Indians are one of the fastest growing immigrant communities in the U.S. (Banerjee, 2009; Cohen, Ravishankar & Duberley, 2015; Sabharwal & Varma, 2015; Varma & Varma, 2009), and this generation of Indian immigrants has high levels of training to be doctors, engineers, scientists, professors, and technicians (Bhatia, 2007; Cohen, Ravishankar, & Duberley, 2015; Zong & Batalova, 2015). The literature on Indian immigration to the U.S.
focuses on the Indian immigration diaspora (Cohen, Ravishankar, & Duberley, 2015; Sabharwal & Varma, 2015; Varma & Rogers, 2004; Varma, 2007), and the diaspora in relationship to its impact on trade, economics, and policy (Banerjee, 1998; Chand, 2012). But few studies discuss Indian career advancement in the U.S., specifically in the technical sector, and to my knowledge, no studies discuss the track-switching of Indians in the U.S. Below I discuss the studies that do relate to Indian career advancement in the U.S.

One category of study addresses the glass ceiling Indian professionals experience in the U.S. (Chand, 2012; Fernandez, 1998; Kumar, 2013; Varma & Rogers, 2004; Varma, 2009; Varma, 2010; Varma, 2011). Regarding possibilities for advancement after Indian professionals have been hired in the U.S., Varma (2010) notes, “After they begin working, they are viewed as foreigners, outsiders, passive, unassertive, lacking higher level communication skills, and more equipped for technical rather than leadership work” (p. 1069). Although Varma is studying India-born professionals who are in faculty and research roles, her observations also can and do apply to a variety of Indian professionals who are similarly situated. For example, she notes that such professionals’ “human capital rests largely in their higher education, training, and technical skills. They have little social capital as they remain outside the necessary social networks due to their nationality, race/ethnicity, language, and culture and, thus, miss crucial opportunities for further career advancement” (p. 1069). She goes on to note that her interviewees “were unable to break into ‘the old boys club,’ a social network into which India-born faculty and researchers are seldom welcomed. They face the ‘silicon ceilings’—the barriers that block qualified Indian immigrants from moving forward to top decision-making positions within public and private organizations” (p. 1069).

One outcome of the glass ceiling is that, to get ahead economically, Indian professionals
become entrepreneurs. Clearly, becoming an entrepreneur is not an option for all Indian professionals who are employed in the U.S. In particular, it does not seem realistic to suggest that Indian technicians who desire to track-switch in a U.S. company are necessarily either motivated, equipped in terms of particular skill sets, or economically able to become entrepreneurs. The transition from technician to entrepreneur is not a natural fit for everyone qualified to be a technician, even an exceptional technician. As noted above in the literature on track-switching, the typical career progression for many technicians in the U.S. is a management position; therefore, track-switching for technicians is normal. The issues Varma (2010) raises about barriers to Indian employees are relevant to any discussion of track-switching for Indians. As Evans (1995) notes, regarding barriers, U.S. companies should offer better support service for their Indian employees. Evans’ study explored the experience of Indian employees on the H-1B visa in an American corporate environment. Her findings suggest that companies in the U.S. with Indian employees need more support services, such as English classes and training handbooks that include both written and visual instruction.

Another category of study examined motivation for Indian professionals immigrating to the U.S. Varma (2015) conducted a study of 51 faculty members in science and engineering and found that most of them came for advanced education, most commonly doctoral programs, and they had financial support to immigrate and support themselves. After completing their education, they stayed in the U.S. for four reasons: research prospects, work environment, career goals, and personal preferences (pp. 376-67). Varma, however, did not discuss track-switching.
Gaps in the Literature

The gap in the literature regarding Indian technicians’ transition to management is particularly surprising because Indians are a significant population in the U.S. workforce, and the Indian population continues to grow (Banerjee, 2009; Cohen & Evans, 1995; Cohen, Ravishankar & Duberley, 2015; Sabharwal & Varma, 2015). As I have shown above, I conducted extensive reviews of the literature regarding: (a) factors contributing to track-switching in the U.S., and (b) the career advancement of Indians in the U.S. In seeking to integrate the two bodies of literature, I found that they really did not fit together. The literature on factors contributing to track-switching in the U.S. gave little space to the unique and significant population of Indian technicians who aspired to management positions. That body of literature was written from a cultural perspective that took little interest in cultural differences that impinge on track-switching for foreign professionals. The second body of literature, career advancement of Indians in the U.S., raised various issues regarding how and why Indians immigrate to the U.S., but paid little attention to how they advance regarding track-switching. However, this second body of literature does acknowledge cultural issues when making a transition to U.S. culture. These gaps provided an opportunity for my study to investigate critical areas regarding the track-switching of Indian technical professionals who work for a U.S. company and who have made the successful transition to a management position.
Chapter 3: Methodology

Overview

The purpose of this study was to determine the influences contributing to the successful track-switching of Indians who worked for a U.S. company in the U.S. A qualitative methodology was chosen for this research project because qualitative research allows for an issue to be explored, especially issues that require a complex understanding and that can only come from talking directly to people, rather than relying on previously-collected data or research (Creswell, 2013). As Creswell (2013) also noted, a qualitative study is used to “empower individuals to share their stories, hear their voices, and minimize the power relationships that often exist between a researcher and the participants in the study” (p. 48). The empowerment and equalizing aspect of qualitative research was especially important for my study because my participants, far from being victims, were part of a vulnerable immigrant population that may not have otherwise felt empowered in their lives in America.

Research Design

The qualitative method that I chose for this study is known as a narrative design. The purpose of a narrative design is to “develop an explanation grounded in the experience of many individuals” (Creswell, 2012, p. 21). A narrative design, while focusing on “the lived experiences of the participants” (Heppner & Heppner, 2004, p. 137), also acknowledges the researcher’s own influences or “filters,” whether they be cultural, educational, or societal. In qualitative narrative studies, the emphasis is on the interactive process, and the researcher strives to interpret the stories of the participants by asking open-ended, exploratory questions. This design is particularly fitting for a study, such as this one, that includes ESL-speaking participants from another culture. In a narrative study “the researcher is most interested in exploring the
experiences” (Creswell, 2012, p. 507) of the individual being interviewed. My decision to use open-ended interview questions was essential because it allowed my participants who did not speak English as their first language the flexibility to interpret and articulate their own unique experiences. Because the same open-ended questions were asked of each participant, this reduced the likeliness of researcher bias in interpreting answers as themes and patterns emerged, and as individual stories began to create a bigger picture for the researcher (Patton, 2002).

**Identification and Selection of Participants**

I used homogeneous purposeful sampling as my primary sampling tool to select my first three participants. These participants met the qualifications to participate in my study. Namely, they were Indian technicians who had transitioned to a management position in a U.S. company in the U.S. and had maintained their management position for at least a year. The secondary sampling tool that I used to identify participants for the study was snowball sampling (Creswell, 2012). Snowball sampling requires that the researcher asks participants to identify persons who would also be qualified to participate in the study. Since I own a business that offers English language and leadership coaching to ESL professionals, I had access (via my clients) to Indian technicians working in a U.S. corporate culture. I asked three of my clients to identify others in their workplace who might be willing and qualified to participate in my study. Then I also asked each person referred to me for other contacts. All participants were originally technicians from India. These participants were, at the time of the study, managers working for a U.S. company for at least one year in the U.S. In qualitative inquiry, “In depth information from a small number of people can be very valuable, especially if the cases are information rich” (Patton, 2002, p. 244). I was able to interview 15 participants based on the referrals that I received.
Securing IRB Approval

For my study, I needed to gain the approval from the University of Arkansas to conduct the necessary interviews. I followed the University of Arkansas’s procedures and submitted the IRB protocol form to the University of Arkansas Institutional Review Board. The University was made aware that human subjects would participate in the study, and that I did not anticipate any risk to participants. The board reviewed all required materials and found the proposal to be within their guidelines for research using human subjects. These approval form is included in Appendix A. In addition, all identified and selected participants were asked to sign an individual consent form (Appendix B) prior to conducting the interviews.

Interview Protocol

The interviews used open-ended questions (Appendix C) that asked about participants’ ability, motivation, opportunities, work climate, and environment that contributed to their successful track-switching. Each interview consisted of a recorded GoToMeeting session lasting on average about an hour. I chose GoToMeeting as the mode for the interviews because maintaining the privacy and confidentiality of the participants was a priority. I also chose GoToMeeting instead of an in-person interview for the scheduling convenience of my participants. The participants worked full-time and finding a meeting place that was quiet, private, and available after-hours and on the weekend was not practical. Participants who may not have been willing or able to take the time to meet me for an interview were able to share their experiences with the convenience of a GoToMeeting interview. Each interview was recorded, transcribed, coded, and analyzed to provide data to answer the research question and sub-questions. A follow-up email including the transcription of a participant’s interview was sent to each participant so that he or she could check the interview for accuracy. This follow-up email
also allowed me to ask clarifying questions. In addition, the interviewees simply asked that I make sure their grammar was accurate in the quotes that I use and they entrusted me to make the necessary changes.

I conducted a pilot test for two reasons. One, to make sure that my interview questions made sense to participants and that I did not need to make changes in the interview protocol. As a trained English instructor accustomed to working with non-native English speakers, I wanted to ensure that participants would understand the vocabulary and grammar I used in my interview questions. Two, I wanted to test the GoToMeeting technology and ensure that the audio and video capabilities worked properly and would not interfere with the interview process.

**Trustworthiness**

To ensure trustworthiness in my study, I employed several strategies. I established an audit trail of the communication with my participants in a secure location. I saved participants' audio recorded interviews, initial transcriptions, and member-checked transcriptions on a secure device. After the interviews were initially transcribed, I reviewed the transcriptions again while listening to the interview recording. I then sent the transcriptions to each participant for member-checking and incorporated any changes that they wanted me to make. Most of them did not ask for any changes to be made but simply asked that I check for grammar errors in their speaking. Additionally, I took off all personal identifying information on the transcriptions to protect the anonymity of my participants and to mitigate against research bias when analyzing the data.

**Qualifications of Researcher**

I was particularly qualified to do this study for the following reasons. One, I have over ten years of teaching/coaching experience with ESL students and professionals. Two, my master’s degree is in teaching English as a second language, and I have Teaching English as a
Second Language (TESL) certification. Three, I have lived and worked in countries outside of the U.S., and I am sensitive to cultural differences. Four, because of my international experiences, I am aware of the challenges ESL professionals experience during the acculturation process. Five, I currently own a business that provides coaching to ESL professionals, particularly Indians, on communication, leadership, and other skills they need to be successful in America, including their work environment.

**Data Analysis**

After each interview, a third party transcribed the interview and then I listened to the recorded interview along with the transcription and made any necessary corrections. Then, I e-mailed participants individually and asked them to member-check their transcription for accuracy. Once I received the transcriptions back from the participants, I began analyzing the data. The data were analyzed by each sub-question that I asked participants. Through the analysis process, I was able to organize the data and see themes emerge. When themes emerged that I saw fit under one or more sub-questions, I made a decision to discuss them under the sub-question that made the most sense to me. For example, the topic of mentoring was brought up by participants under various sub-questions but after analyzing the theme of mentoring in the overall study, I saw it fit best under the category of opportunities.

**Delimitations of the Study**

This study was delimited in three ways. One, the study focused on the influences leading to a successful transition of Indian technicians to a management position in a U.S. company. Two, it included only participants who had served as managers in their current position for at least one year. Three, this study did not evaluate the performance of the managers in their managerial role; it simply focused on the factors influencing their transition.
Limitations of the Study

This study was limited in several ways. One limitation of this study was that English was not the native language of the participants, even though they were fluent in English. A second limitation was that I did not speak the participants’ native language. However, because participants were fluent enough in English that they were selected for managerial positions in a U.S. company, this was not thought to be an issue. In addition, participants were screened for adequate English fluency before the interviews. Three, even though I relied on snowballing sampling, I was able to choose participants who met the qualifications of this study. Specifically, the qualifications were that participants were technicians from India who had successfully made the transition to a management position in an American company and had held their management position in America for at least a year and were fluent in English.
Overview

The purpose of this research study was to interview Indian technicians who had made the transition to management in a U.S. company and to explore what factors they identified that enabled them to make that transition. To conduct this study, 15 participants, three females and 12 males, were selected through snowballing and each subject was asked five open-ended interview questions. These questions asked about the five factors related to making the transition from a technical position to a management position: unique abilities, motivation, opportunities, work climate, and environment. I chose participants who were Indian technicians from India, had transitioned to a management position in the U.S., and had been a manager for at least a year. To protect anonymity, I used plural pronouns when referring to participants and I changed the name of any company the participants referred to in the interviews and replaced it with “the company” in their quotes. For the purposes of this study, I identified participants by a designated number that appears along with their quotes.

The purpose of this chapter is to provide both the data and an analysis of the data collected from the interviews. The responses for each of the five interview questions included selected relevant quotations as examples of interviewees’ responses. A copy of my interview questions can be found in Appendix C.

Response to Interview Questions

This section presents the study’s five open-ended interview questions, and includes a summary of the participants’ responses. Direct participant quotations that are relevant or insightful are provided for each interview question. As pointed out in chapter three, the respondents reviewed their transcriptions and entrusted me to correct grammatical errors in their
Quotes.

**Question 1: From your perspective, what unique abilities helped you to make the transition into management?**

To better understand what abilities my participants needed to make the transition into management from a technical position, I asked them to specify those abilities they thought aided them in track-switching. In analyzing Question 1, I organized interviewees’ responses about ability into a process of self- assessment that included four components, assessment of (1) technical skills and job performance, (2) soft skills, (3) image, and (4) training. Because several participants discussed training programs when they mentioned preparation for becoming a manager, I chose to include training programs under the abilities section.

From interviewees’ discussion of unique abilities necessary to become a manager, I gleaned that they saw introspection and self-assessment as necessary to discern whether, when they had decided to pursue track-switching, they believed they had the unique abilities needed. In stressing the need for introspection in preparing for a management position, one interviewee said, “I spent a lot of time actually being introspective first, trying to figure out what was actually making me be more interested in the leadership side.” (#12) This introspective approach to self-assessment seemed to have brought participants to a recognition of the following four components they stated as prerequisites for a leadership position.

**Self-Assessment of Technical Skills and Job Performance**

First, participants’ self-assessment entailed evaluating their technical expertise in their job. Interviewees assumed that anyone in a technical position who aspired to a management position needed to be not just technically competent, but also be an excellent technician. As one interviewee noted, “You get your foot in the door for any job based on performance.”
Performance means everything.” (#6) Another interviewee affirmed the necessity of technical performance: “[T]he way I got this job is again, my work, my work ethic. People at the leadership level observe you and when they feel they have an opportunity where your skills can be put to use, they look at you.” (#5) In this interview’s mind, work ethic was tied to technical skills, and others agreed. One interviewee also talked about self-assessment of technical skills from the viewpoint of total job performance: “The intention was that whatever I do, I do it diligently, and I started my career from a technical standpoint or view, and after that I’ve just been more into making sure I deliver on time and do what I’m supposed to do diligently and working into the position that I am in today.” (#15) In summary, the interviewees seemed to agree that being competent as a technician is the cornerstone of building an image that suggests management potential.

Self-Assessment of Soft Skills

The second component interviewees discussed was the need to assess their soft skills, which included how they communicate and interact with people within a team and how they do so outside the team. Interviewees used people skills and soft skills interchangeably, and one of the repeated concerns was that technicians from India are not trained in soft skills.

The need for soft skills. “There’s very little emphasis on soft skills” in Indian culture, according to one interviewee, “and a lot of emphasis on how good you are in your technical skills.” (#9) This interviewee went on to say, “For a lot of the people who are unable to make the transition [to management], they are very good in technical skills and they have very strong knowledge of the industry and the domain, but what is not typical to obtain is the soft skills.” (#9) Although they acknowledged that soft skills were critical to managerial success, developing those soft skills was not, as one interviewee commented, a “written down rule that you can
follow all the time.” (#9) Additionally, there is no rulebook for managing people because “Unlike machines, human beings have feelings, so you’ve got to understand those feelings.” (#10) In their view, the contrast between machines and people certainly applies to the transition from a technical position in which a person works with machines, particularly computers, to a management position, where, as one interviewee stated, unlike machines, “People are not predictable. People are not black and white.” (#5) Soft skills, according to the interviewees, focused on communication skills, so interviewees affirmed the focus of soft skills as effective communication.

**Communication as the focus of soft skills.** As pointed out earlier, interviewees agreed that communication skills was the most important factor when talking about soft skills. Part of their emphasis on communication skills may be based on their experience as non-native speakers working in an environment where English was the language used. When interviewees talked about communication skills, they were not focused on using proper grammar or being an articulate speaker. What they seemed to say was that communication skills meant a manager can get his or her point across in such a way as to influence others. As one interviewee noted, “You have to amend and blend with people that you are working with. Make changes to yourself. The way you interact to make other people comfortable, and also be willing to work either for or with you. That part becomes an important aspect while you are working with people.” (#9)

Several interviewees also discussed communication skills in relation to communication within the team and communication outside a team. Within the team, participants identified communication with motivation, cultural sensitivity, team building, and listening. Outside the team, participants identified communication with project management expectations, dispute resolutions, client expectations, and promotion of good job performance.
**Communication within the team.** Interviewees clearly saw the management role as people management. Technical competencies, whether related to technology, budgets, spreadsheets, or the like, were assumed. People management was not assumed but was seen as the core skills needed to be a successful manager. People management included both team members and those constituents outside the team. This next section addresses interviewees advice about effective communication within a team.

**Communication and motivation.** Interviewees believed passion for the job was shown through communicating commitment and was helpful in influencing team members to show a similar passion. “Passion, it’s true, is important, but beyond the passion you show as a team, and how much you are able to motivate your team to show that same kind of passion, it does wonders, those soft skills in addition to coming up with the proper tech solutions.” (#3) Clearly, passion or deep commitment to a task by managers was seen as necessary to excite passion in the team. Another view of passion was expressed by an interviewee who said, “One of the other things that I also think is important as a leader is to not just think about work. Your job is to inspire, to motivate, not just for work but to make yourself and them better people in general.” (#2) In short, respondents seemed to be saying that communication skills are not just the ability to say something in correct English but the skill to engage, excite, and influence team members to attain the greatest good.

**Communication and cultural sensitivity.** Interviewees also recognized that communication skills are interwoven in culture. In U.S. culture, a manager needs to learn how to connect with all sorts of people. As one interviewee noted,

One aspect that I find that is largely ignored is that you have to have the ability to connect with people, to motivate, to encourage people, to know how to do that. It is very difficult if you had a cultural myopia. If you’re completely outside the cultural norm, a joke may offend you. A joke that is completely acceptable in U.S. culture may offend you as an
Indian person. You may reactive negatively. You may shy away from confrontation. That’s kind of what I see are the big barriers. The U.S. culture is open. It’s dialogue. We expect to disagree. Point, counterpoint. It is not to be taken as a representation of your entire identify if you disagree on a point. (#5)

This interviewee goes on to cite football and religion as two topics that need to be negotiated, and says these topics may be barriers to effective communication. This interviewee rejected cultural myopia, affirming that understanding the dynamics of U.S. culture was necessary to communicating effectively in that culture.

**Communication and team-building.** Communication also related to building and sustaining an effective team. As one interviewee noted, “As a manager you want to be able to communicate and delegate work to your juniors, but at the same time you want them to be happy that you are their manager and leading them. So it works both ways. So team spirit is really important to being a manager.” (#9) Several interviewees’ comments reinforced the belief that creating and maintaining team spirit was a goal of effective communication. One interviewee expressed his belief that the manager must be knowledgeable about the life of team members. In this interviewee’s words:

You’ve got to make sure you are able to relate things, you know what is happening in their lives, to keep them motivated because the project goes to all kinds of situations, good and bad and sometimes there are challenges. You need people at times working late in the evenings, early mornings, weekends. When that happens, it becomes a lot easier if the person himself or herself is more motivated to it, and they want to do it for success of the project versus they’re doing it for you. (#10)

They also felt that communicating effectively within the team required expressing praise for team efforts. “So number one is putting people first, giving credit to the associates. If things don’t go well, you take the responsibility. Accept this is your career change, so that’s number two.” (#8)

The importance of knowing how to work within a team can extend beyond the team. As
one interviewee noted, “And if your senior management sees that you’re recognizing others’
ideas, giving them credit for where it’s deserved, that’s definitely one of the things where having
a team spirit is important to growing your team.” (#9) Growing a team means the leader is
putting the team first, and to do that, the leader must learn to listen to team members, the topic of
the next section.

**Communication and listening.** As noted above, communication skills also involve
listening skills. One participant explained, “Personally I feel that for any person to be successful
at being a manager, they need to have their soft skills. They need to make sure that they are
able to communicate with their associates. Mostly listen to their ideas.” (#14) This participant
went on to note that technical expertise can be a barrier to communication.

And one of the fallacy of being a technical person, even for me, I easily tend to give
directions because I know the technology so well, and being in that it is not about telling
them what to do but helping them grow into the position, so we have to really listen, and
just provide guidance, and ask open-ended questions. I don’t just say, “Do you think this
is the right way to do?” The answer would be yes or no. Always ask an open-ended
question, like “How would you handle this?” You should be able to give guidance to the
associates, have an open mind, listen to them and you should sharpen your soft skills.
That’s the most important thing for being a manager. (#14)

**Communication and ethical standards.** According to interviewees, managers have a
responsibility to ensure team members understand the manager’s ethical standards.
Communication has an ethical component. As one interviewee noted, it is a matter of knowing
who you are so that you can be true to yourself and clearly communicate your values to others.

One important thing is as a leader, we need to know who we are and communicate this to
our associates. . . . We all have different moral values and principles, but not everything
is visible to the other people. You behave in a way and people make an opinion of you,
but you’ve got to say, “Hey, this is me.” What you stand up for. . . . You tell that and then
you live and lead by example. (#8)

As interviewees pointed out, the obligation to communicate ethically may require
challenging accepted norms. One participant told of a time when cost overruns, in principle, had
to be contested:

If you were getting this work done for yourself and you had a contractor waiting for you and knew it would cost $30,000, would you tell him I’ll give you $40,000 to do the same work? No, you won’t, so be honest to the shareholders. Always think about them. Always be entrepreneurial. Think about as if it’s your own money. Think about you’re investing your money. If you have that kind of feeling, you know what, people will see it. You will get better results than anyone else. (#5)

**Communication outside the team.** Interviewees also discussed the communication skills needed for various constituents outside their team. One participant talked about communication skill as being able to break down a technical concept for a non-technical audience so that “any person who does not have any technical background can understand what the problem areas are that the business is facing and how a particular problem can be resolved and managed properly.” (#1) “Any person” means those outside the team who do not have technical expertise. This view of communication skills requires translation abilities. “In addition to that,” another interview affirmed, “the skill set that is required is the ability to communicate to people, different sorts of people, not just one kind or one nation or one nationality or one race, but ability to communicate across people, understand people, work with them and build the skills to problem solve, having tough conversations with all kinds of people.” (#11)

In the section that follows, I have grouped interviewees’ responses about communication outside of the team into four categories: Communication and project management expectations, communication and dispute resolution, communication and client expectations, and communication and job performance.

**Communication and project management expectations.** In large part, the project management expectations interviewees had in mind were those held by people outside the team, including intra-team project management expectations. Interviewees affirmed that communication was central to managing a project, and Indian technicians, according to one
interviewee, “know how to communicate, but they don’t communicate in a timely manner” to those outside the team. This interviewee went on to observe:

To make sure if there is a challenge in a commitment that has been given, it has to be brought to the table sooner rather than probably the last few days. If it’s a six-month project and you’re facing a challenge, it has to be brought forward in the first month or the second month instead of realizing that in the fourth or fifth month we will not be able to complete a project. So according to me the most important part is communication, but that involves communicating with your team, communicating with the sponsor of the project, communicating with the stakeholders, so that is definitely something which is very important. (#10)

In short, interviewees were saying that a manager needs to communicate possible delays in a project early enough so that their supervisors can make decisions about how to proceed. As one participant explained, the relationship between communication and project management, “Communicating is the most important thing,” but “then it all comes to the basics of project management, call it risk management, issue management, project management, which starts with creating an individual project plan which has a combination of quality, a combination of risk-management issues, and a combination of your technique and process toward procurement, communication, stakeholder management, so all that goes there.” (#10) What this participant affirmed was that project management is based on a reasonable assessment of the risks involved in completing the project, and risks, although not always foreseen, must be managed effectively by keeping everyone in the communication loop, including those outside the team.

**Communication and dispute resolution.** Another component of communication is dispute resolution. As one interviewee stated, “Resolve disputes. We have to have the desire to resolve disputes, which are common among any individuals anywhere.” (#11) An important part of dispute resolution is negotiation because resolving disputes includes attempting to help people find a way to compromise. As one interviewee noted, “When you work with people, you’ve got to work with people and be able to negotiate.” (#5) Dispute resolution is a critical
component of working with people, including team members and constituents outside the team.

**Communication and client expectations.** Interviewees also recognized the necessity of communication to ensure customer satisfaction. As one interviewee noted, “One of the most important things is managing the client expectations . . . . That’s the number one thing.” (#3) This meant, from this interviewee’s perspective, taking initiative. “They want you not just as a follower of orders. They want you to come back with positive and constructive feedback of the direction that particular project is taking.” (#3) This focus on taking initiative to ensure customer satisfaction is a skill that is not necessarily part of the technician’s job. As this interviewee concluded, “It’s not just hard work. You have to work smart. Working smart can be put down in one phrase: how to increase productivity.” (#3) In other words, what clients want is high productivity, so the manager is responsible for managing client expectations regarding productivity.

**Communication and saying “no”**. Another aspect of managing client expectations that relates to audiences outside the team but within the company is knowing when to say “no.” One interviewee provided a rationale for saying “no”:

When I commit to something I have a relatively good chance of success whether it be the project or a deliverable or something like that. Like right now, about an hour ago, I was in a meeting with the professional development committee and they gave me like ten things to follow-up on, and I had to tell all of them, “No,” this is not what I intend for this project or this event. I have to focus on this, this, and this. You can see the disappointment in their faces, but you can’t say “yes” to everybody and everything. You have to have a very clear idea of what it is that you’re trying to do to be able to manage the situation. (#6)

It is important to note that a major reason for saying “no” is to ensure quality performance. If technicians cannot guard their performance so that quality is not compromised, their performance will not be at the standard management desires. They will be noticed, but negatively.
Another interviewee reinforced the need to say “no” to protect the integrity of the team: I feel like when people say “people skills” they conjure up this image of someone saying “yes” all the time to everyone and satisfying everybody. That’s quite the opposite, actually, of what people skills are. You have to be able to protect your team from scope creep--a common term used meaning people throwing work at you. You need to be able to say, “No, this is not really what my team does. I can help you in this area and that area, but this is not what my team does. If we start doing this then it will just never end.” So you have to be comfortable. I think one unique skill, one thing I look for in my management is the ability to establish boundaries, to very nicely and clearly establish boundaries. Because if you don’t, your team cannot rely on you to protect their interest, their work-life balance, their growth and career. Then your superiors can’t rely on you to manage a project, manage a budget, manage a P&O. So I think a critical component is to say “no” when it is needed. (#5)

Self-Assessment of Image

Lastly, participants stressed the need to develop an image for being management ready. For those who want to track-switch, the advice of managers who have made that transition is to cultivate an image of being a potential manager. They provided five tactics for grooming an image of preparation for management: Being proactive, changing mindset, asking for work, informally managing people, and acclimating to corporate culture.

Being Proactive. A foundational tactic for cultivating an image of management readiness is being proactive. As one interviewee commented, “You just cannot be sitting at your desk and put your head down and say, ‘I’m going to do a good job. People will notice or they won’t.’ So performance, exposure, all that.” (#6) The interviewee went on to say, “If you have performance
and maybe your manager knows about it, but not many more will know, how do you have an image out there of great performance? It’s not just performance, but how do you create an image for yourself? What do people think of you? How have your interactions been in the past, and so on.” (#6) This calculated approach to managing your image is part of a PIE (Performance, Image, Exposure) model of management the interviewee learned while working in another corporation, so the interviewee was passing on principles of track-switching that had been endorsed by a major corporation.

**Changing mindset.** As already noted, the switch from technician to manager requires changing the way a technician thinks. Cultivating an image is based on having a changed mindset or as one participant said, “You have to think like a leader.” (#2) For this participant, thinking like a leader meant making “the journey from an individual contributor to a leader.” (#2) This participant went on to explain: “It’s almost like going from just being a student or just being single to being a mom. When you become a mom, you recognize that you are responsible for this new life. You’re accountable. You have to keep this child fed and alive, an educator and such, and that’s all your responsibility. That sense of responsibility, ownership is a change within.” (#2) Thinking like a leader means thinking about how to lead people, not simply doing well as a technician.

**Asking for work.** Being proactive also includes taking responsibility for additional work. For one interviewee this meant that a technician enthusiastically looks for opportunities to volunteer for more work. When asked how this interviewee would assess potential management candidates, the interviewee said,

First of all, I would look for personal commitments, personal responsibilities, activities that were given to you. You do it with a lot of interest and take ownership. Ownership is one of the big issues when you are in a growing stage. . . . You take interest in doing and taking on more work, taking more responsibilities . . . if you can deliver the small piece
[of work] in a bigger way and . . . if you do a small piece of work and ask for more, you will definitely get loads of it. Basically, don’t sit on your hands. If you don’t have work to do, don’t wait for the work to come to you. You have to go to the work. . . . People recognize good work and responsibilities. (#7)

**Informally managing people.** Another way to take initiative and cultivate the image of being a manager is to begin informally managing people. When a technician influences people who are not direct reports, management can perceive that as showing leadership ability. Here’s how one participant put it:

That’s a good sign of whether you can manage people or not, so how you behave when you don’t have people reporting to you. You get the job done by working with people, influencing them without being their direct manager. . . . You can influence people who are not reporting to you, so, hence, you should be able to influence people who are reporting to you. (#6)

Interviewees noted that another way to approach cultivating an image of being management ready or to informally manage people is to become a mentor. “When I had mentees,” one interviewee explained, “that I was able to both learn from and hopefully contribute to their career, that helped me get a sense of leadership skills without actually being a ‘manager.’ From there, I think management picked up on the fact that I was being proactive in having mentoring relationships, putting together mentoring circles. That helped me get into that leadership role.” (#12) Informally managing people demonstrates that the technician has the ability to work with people to get the job done and go beyond the scope of a technician’s duties.

**Acclimating to corporate culture.** Interviewees perceived that being proactive in developing an image of a managerial candidate required a successful reading of corporate culture, including assimilating to the culture. But, as one participant noted, the rules for assimilating are unwritten: “You start learning the intricate rules of the company, what works, what doesn’t work. Nobody puts it on a piece of paper and tells you this is what it takes for you to be a people manager. These are the people you need to network with. These are some of the
unwritten rules of behavior you are expected to exhibit.” (#6) In sum, adaptation to a corporate culture also required a sensitivity to culturally appropriate behaviors, and because such behaviors are often assumed by native speakers, an Indian technician seeking a management position needs to pay particular attention to cultural signals without the advantage of a rule book for guidance.

Track-switching is not limited to upward mobility in the company that currently employs a technician. Reading the internal politics of any company where a management opportunity exists was essential. Understanding how the internal politics of an organization works was another skill that helped technicians know which company fits their management style and, once hired, knowing how to assess internal politics of the company once the track-switching was accomplished. As another interviewee said about “fit,”

Another big part of the switch is whether you’re a culture fit or not, and it’s not the culture like American culture. It’s the internal culture of the company. Another retailer, which I won’t name, would be way more aggressive than [the company I work for] so in that culture, you have to be aggressive, so if you’re not aggressive—most Asians and Indians grow up in a culture where they feel very deferential to your elders, to people who are older than you, that’s all fine and great, but if you know what kind of company in the U.S. is a go-getter, like a techno-business attitude, then it’s not going to be a good culture fit. (#6)

This participant goes on to discuss the relationship of fit to performance, “If you’re not a culture fit, you’re not going to make it. That’s OK because you’re better off going and working in a company with a culture fit.” (#6)

Advice about how to track-switch by grooming a particular image is punctuated by the admonition to be ready. As one interviewee explained, “[Y]ou need to be ready. When you are tapped on the shoulder, you don’t want to say, ‘Hey, I don’t have this skill set.’ You need to continuously improve your skill set, so that when you are tapped on the shoulder, you are ready to go.” (#5) Participants assumed that those who want to track-switch should be prepared for the transition to management.
Training Programs

Only five of the fifteen interviewees said anything about training programs that helped prepare them for a management position. They can be categorized as training in India prior to coming to the U.S., training within a U.S. company, and training the interviewee sought outside of the work environment.

Training in India prior to coming to the U.S. One interviewee mentioned that the company in India provided an orientation program, and this interviewee stated, “Every company just has an orientation program, I believe, so before they [employees] come to the United States or travel outside India so that they [the company] just give you an introduction of how the people are, how to communicate on a general day-to-day basis because always when you transfer from one geographic location to another the way people communicate and the lifestyles are entirely different so for that particular reason there will be a one- to two-days’ orientation program.” (#1) A weakness in this program, according to the interviewee, was communication skills. In his words, “[I was] pretty confident about the way I was communicating. Then once I reached here I could reflect on ordering a hamburger at the McDonald’s. They were not able to understand me, so ha ha it was kind of funny. Over a period of time, I made friends who are Americans, and even though we communicate with each other at times, they would ask me to repeat whatever I have said. So I got confused, and I had to ask whether they are trying hard to understand my pronunciations.” (#1) When probed about what additional training would have been helpful, the interviewee said, “Normal orientation programs that include pronunciation, or touch base on pronunciation and certain stuff. That would be one of the major areas. And having conversations between two people. There would be improvisations on those conversations and addressing people like that.” (#1)
Training within a U.S. company. Another interviewee (#6) talked about the PIE model a former company used as a method for training: Performance, Image, and Exposure. This interviewee discussed management training using the PIE model, and it appears that the model had guided the interviewee’s management style.

Training the interviewee sought outside of the work environment. Three of the five interviewees said they had acquired training outside of work. Perceiving yourself as a leader, according to one of these interviewees, leads to acting like a leader and taking charge of your professional development. “I needed to grow into that role [of leadership], so I started off with my communications. Dale Carnegie was one of the first times in my career where first of all, I needed to be comfortable speaking in public. So that was my first thing. And I still remember my first two video lessons I learned how to deal with difficult people. There were two psychology professors and it was very well done in a simple language and they asked how do you deal with difficult people? People have different personalities. How do you handle them? So I had to learn that. Then Dale Carnegie principles helped me put others first.” (#5)

Another interviewee took a course based on Steven Covey’s Seven Habits of Highly Effective People and said, “. . . it’s something that sort of stuck with me and I’ve utilized throughout my career.” (#4) This interviewee went on to say, “I’ve not had formal training in management as you can probably tell, but that was a good course. I learned a lot from just professional development.” (#4)

Another interviewee said he had acquired training outside of work, especially regarding soft skills, such as “presentation skills, negotiation skills, how to convince your team members, how to convince your client, and how to impact your business analysts” and recommended online courses. “There are quite a few online courses now. There are quite a few content-level,
quite a few sites that I would recommend. There is one LinkedIn site, like Lynda.com, which is there. I can’t think of sites now just off the top of my head, but those are two big sites that I have personally gone through those web-sites and they have pretty good content with live examples, simple examples that anybody and everybody can understand and can implement.” (#7)

**Question 2: Why did you want to become a manager?**

To gain a better understanding of what motivated participants to transition from a technical position to a management position, I asked them why they wanted to become a manager. Interviewees’ responses for why they wanted to be in a managerial position can be divided into three categories: always wanted to be manager, management is a natural progression in my career path, and management offered new challenges and responsibilities. Five of the interviewees noted that they always wanted to be a manager. Seven of the interviewees came to the realization that being a manager was the natural progression in their career path. The three remaining interviewees saw a management position as offering them new challenges and responsibilities. In analyzing the responses of interviewees who always wanted to be a manager, I categorized their desire to track-switch into: following a game plan, being able to influence people, becoming a manager as part of their upbringing, and fulfilling a larger role. I begin with following a game plan because interviewees noted the importance of having a plan to realize their dream.

**Always Wanted To Be a Manager**

**Following a game plan.** Dreaming about a career in management and becoming a manager are two different things. In the drive to become a manager, three interviewees stressed the role of planning or following a game plan. “I had mentors in my life to ask and find out what I needed to do to get to that level. So I had a game plan that I followed in terms of what exactly
had to be done at my level to get to managing a portfolio and getting into the management level of things.” (#15) Or as another interviewee noted, “I used to dream about being a manager, but not just dream, I worked toward it.” (#7) That is almost verbatim what another participant said, “All I did—and it probably attracts a lot of people—all I did was kept focused on that dream, and moved towards it.” (#6) Or as one participant noted, “There’s a big difference between dreaming about things and getting things.” (#7) The dream to become a manager precedes the plan to realize that dream, and the interviewees cited three motivations for realizing the dream, the first was being able to influence people.

**Being able to influence people.** The long-term desire to be a manager by one interviewee was so that the interviewee could lead and work with people: “I’ve always had the aspiration, even while in college, to lead people. I always wanted a role where I could lead people to utilize my technical capabilities.” (#13) “Enjoying working with people” was another reason given by an interviewee who also wanted to influence people. As this interviewee noted, “So I’ve always been very interested in people and what makes us tick and how can I inspire and change myself while bringing people on to achieve their goals. . . . I’ve always been a people person, and having the ability to mold and shape people is what gets me excited every day.” (#12) This interviewee expanded on what molding and shaping people meant: “Understanding how I can best support them, help them grow. Meanwhile, I’m growing with them as well.” (#12) Another interviewee was also motivated by being able to influence people. “Usually in most companies when you go closer into business and start managing people, what happens is that your value to the company is not how much you know technically in finance or whatever, but how much you can direct people toward a particular mission. . . . So how do you motivate and rally a lot of people behind you and move them toward a particular business goal? That is
something that always attracted me.” (#6) In short, these three interviewees had a long-term desire to become a manager, a desire they labeled as “always wanting to be a manager,” and that desire was driven by a need to work effectively with people.

**Becoming a manager was part of my upbringing.** In addition to wanting to work with people and “always wanting to be a manager,” interviewees attributed being motivated by their upbringing. As this interviewee noted about being in India, “Back then becoming a manager was a big deal. Most of the people had dreams of becoming a manager and go up higher in the ladder. I had those dreams, too. I always wanted to be a manager. I always wanted to be a leader.” (#7) This dream to be a manager was most likely shaped by limited career progression:

In India there was only one spot to go up higher in the ladder. You started as junior developer, then developer, then you become a lead and eventually you’re picked up as delivering the projects as a manager. Then you grow higher to the VP and CEO levels. Since there was only one stream, I wanted to go for the higher level, and the first step in the chain was to be hired in management, so I picked up that stream with my interest. (#7)

In this interviewee’s case, cultural expectations in India provided both a model and motivation for the interviewee to follow.

**Fulfilling a larger role.** Having a larger role in a company’s operation was another motivation for becoming a manager. As one participant stated, “I did want it [to be a manager] all along because when I was in the technical side of things, I used to manage a particular project, but as a manager I got to see my managers handle a bunch of projects, handle a portfolio. That’s pretty much what I wanted to do.” (#15) Another participant was motivated by making an impact on the business through providing solutions that had business value. “Even when I was an engineer, a solution to a problem was not what interested me more. What interested me more was coming to a solution that had a business value. How do you troubleshoot to make an impact on the business? That was always my objective. That’s what excited me.” (#6) The desire to fulfill a
larger role in the company quite naturally leads to a managerial position because managers
generally have a greater scope of responsibility and authority than does a technician.

Management Is a Natural Progression in My Career Path

For other interviewees, becoming a manager was not their initial goal, but as they
considered their careers, they came to see that they had abilities that would enable them to
function well as a manager. Interviewees’ statements about why they saw management as a
natural progression in their career path can be divided into three categories: interviewees self-
identified themselves for a management role, work circumstances convinced them that they fit a
management role, and changes in their employment allowed for track-switching.

Interviewees self-identified themselves for a management role. The natural transition
from technician to manager that was facilitated by a growing awareness of the technician’s fit for
a management role, was described by the following interviewee: “Well, as I grew into the
profession, I learned that I was more interested in people, and I had an interest in talking to
people, knowing people, and perhaps I can manage people, and I can build relationships with
people. And that’s how my interest leaned more toward management outside of the technical
environment.” (#11) As another interviewee said,

In the beginning of my career, I did not even know how to plan my career. So, no, in the
beginning it wasn’t always a goal to lead people, but as I continued to work in the
corporate environment, I was quickly able to recognize that people leadership is a role I
would do well in. Maybe five years into my career in corporate America, I was able to
identify that I would like to go into a people leadership role. (#2)

Work circumstances convinced them that they fit a management role. Some interviewees
came to realize that they could track-switch successfully when they performed managerial
functions before they officially track-switched. One interviewee noted that managing projects
and a team “sort of just fell into my lap. I started out managing projects and it was then during
the course of managing my projects I guess people noticed how well I communicated with
different individuals and how people tended to go to me for resolution. That was kinda the big
trigger. You sort of establish your level of expertise and you share that with people.” (#4)

Another interviewee said there was no specific reason for seeking a management
position. This participant’s goal was management consulting, but when the interviewee’s skill set
and management capabilities matched a particular position, he discovered that:

This particular role had specific requirements that needed my skill set. The skill set
specifically on the Systems Analyst side and along with the manager’s capabilities, which
is more associated with the tasks that a Business Analyst do, so on-the-job requirements
matched what I was looking for and also the position that was available was for a
principal consultant role. That’s why I chose this one. (#1)

Another example of natural progression based on work circumstances was the back-and-
forth work that one participant did in straddling the technician-management role.

It was a natural progression into a project management role and a very gradual one, from
a tester to a developer to a senior developer, team lead, project lead, so the
responsibilities were growing. And part of the time technical activities were reducing
from 100% to 90%, 80%, 70%, and 50%. Even after I got into the project management
role, I still had some of those responsibilities. I was still writing the code, even though I
took the responsibility of leading the project plans, tracking the project plans, talking to
the clients to get more business. So when I was doing all these activities related to
project procurement, management, financial management, relationship management,
stakeholder management, I was also writing code, and gradually over a period of time,
the time I was putting into technical activities or getting involved in with the various
design, that time stopped or gradually got reduced into the time when I fully was put into
project management role, and even when I moved to lead the project management, I was
still on the same project on which I had done development, so it was a very easy thing
being able to talk to customers being technical with them. . . . So I would call it a natural
progression. (#10)

It appeared that the natural progress from technician to manager was facilitated by the
management work these interviewees did as technicians and it seemed this also provided the
motivation for them to want to have an official management position. Others saw how well they
performed those duties, and the feedback from colleagues authenticated a growing awareness
that the interviewees had the necessary abilities to track-switch, which then appeared to have nurtured a desire to pursue management opportunities.

**Change in Employment.** Another motivating factor the interviewees cited for track-switching was a change in employment. One interviewee worked in banking and found it “regimented, process oriented, and a lot slower” (#3) than the retail environment of the interviewee’s next job. “Later on I moved to the retail domain where I really started enjoying the hustle and bustle of everyday work that occurs within retail. From that point onwards I really started enjoying my work, and I must say I’m pretty happy with how things have turned out.” (#3) This interviewee acknowledged that a change in employment can reveal a satisfaction in working that can naturally lead to the responsibilities that go with managing people.

“I moved from a programmer to a senior programmer,” another interviewee said in describing the route to management, “but after that, there was a limit on how much you can grow. At that time, the only opportunity to grow your career, to progress more into the upper levels, was to go into the management route. That was one of the main reasons I looked at it. There were very few Indian managers at the company at that time. So I got this opportunity [at another company] and I didn’t want to let go because that was setting an example to my fellow Indians to show them that this is an available path for people to choose to succeed and you don’t have to stick to being a technical leader or being the second technical guy.” (#14) In addition to seeing management as the natural progression in the interviewee’s career, this interviewee also saw the opportunity to be a role model for other Indian technicians, and this interviewee said being an example to fellow countrymen was a strong motivation for assuming a management position. The interviewee was a pathbreaker by becoming a leader for the Indian community.
Management Offered New Challenges and Responsibilities

Another motivation for becoming a manager cited by several participants was the opportunity to address new challenges and assume new responsibilities. As one participant said,

I’ve been very, very passionate about business and business management, about the leadership goals, making things different for companies, our customers. So I have a financial management MBA from an institute in India, so from day one I wanted to be in financial management, financial roles. The company has given me a lot of challenges, and I’ve loved doing it. This is the only sport I play. I’m very passionate about making things different for our customers, for our shareholders, building great businesses. That’s what got me to the management roles. (#5)

In responding to this interviewee, I noted that it sounded like one of the reasons the participant wanted to get into a management position was to initiate change. So in that role the participant could make things different and have an impact on people. “Yes,” the participant responded and noted:

And not just internal associates . . . but also our customers. Our mission is such a noble mission, and I’m absolutely proud of the company. I am here to save people money so they can live better. And that mission is also transforming with all the e-commerce and everything coming the way retailing is being done and run. It’s changing, so now we are going to save people time and money, so they can live better. It’s all the more better for retailers. (#5)

One interviewee stated the reason for making the change to management as follows:

So I used to be a really hardcore technical, and that used to be my passion. Then you reach a point “Hey, man, this doesn’t challenge you anymore. I’ve been there done that.” So you reach a point where you need something bigger than that. That’s primarily when my journey for leadership began. One of my mentors, she was one of the inspirations for me to think about management at that time, said, “I know you are an individual contributor. You develop and make things happen.” But she also said, “It’s a bigger challenge and the satisfaction when you get things done through others.” . . . That satisfaction is completely immense. I need something more challenging and this mentor’s question about how can you help others to do this was my first part for me to go to management. (#8)

Another participant described blending new challenges and responsibilities that led to a natural career progression after earning an MBA:
Since I started solely in software and on the technology side, my focus was to continue to remain in the technology industry but also gain some more knowledge on the business side of it. That’s why I wanted to do an MBA because it would give me some exposure into the business side . . . . And then after I graduated, I worked in a start-up, which was in the technology space, but I did a lot of the end-to-end marketing for them. And because it was a start-up, a lot of the job responsibility also came with facing customers and trying to get everything in line for the customers, and I’ve been doing this now for over four and one-half years. I enjoy facing the customers most, after marketing, so I decided that when I moved to the management side of it, this is where I wanted to be.

Although motivations for track-switching varied, the satisfaction with a management position was common for the participants. Nobody regretted or backtracked from switching to a management position from a technical position, and interviewees clearly identified management as people business and enjoyed serving a larger goal of helping customers.

**Question 3: How did you take advantage of or create opportunities to become a manager?**

Interviewees answered the question about opportunities by addressing how they either created opportunities or took advantage of available opportunities. In terms of creating opportunities, interviewees said that their professional reputation was the primary basis for successful track-switching, whether within the organization for which they were employed or whether with another organization. Another opportunity several interviewees talked about at length was how the chance to have a mentor had become instrumental in their track-switching.

**Professional Reputation**

Professional reputation was consistently the top factor the interviewees described as having created opportunities within their company to track-switch. One interviewee affirmed the role of technical expertise as a mark of professional reputation: “I really got the position because of my technical capabilities I think. And this is not my first management position. I’ve been in this management role for almost the last eight years now. The first position, my step into management, was due to my technical capabilities.” (#14) Yet another interviewee talked about
the value of reputation as it relates to delivering the goods: “I have to say reputation plays a huge part. There is no way that I can deny that. The more you can deliver the things you have promised, the more you are able to tackle all the unexpected issues that land on you—all those crises that you have faced and how you have tackled them—these are the things that people tend to notice. Once they feel you are able to lead a team, they will definitely promote you to that level.” (#3) Interviewees endorsed the premise that technical capabilities coupled with integrity in getting the job done—on time and well—was the entryway to track-switching.

**Opportunities within the Organization**

Interviewees mentioned that once a technician’s professional reputation is established, opportunities within the organization for which the technician is employed can come quite naturally. Producing effective results naturally leads to performing management duties without the benefit of the management title. For example, participants discussed their move into a management role, as exemplified by this interviewee: “It was just the work that grew larger, and my supervisor and I thought that we needed to build a team to be able to do all the work that the business needs, and I was a natural fit to be able to lead the team because I was in the role, and she thought I would be able to lead the team as well.” (#2) This participant also noted, “Nine years ago, I started out in the role of just managing projects and the volume of work grew over a period of time, and we knew that this was not something just one person could do and that’s when we decided we would build a team, so I moved forward and got a team approved and we were able to hire four people to report to me, so that was the first team that I ever led.” (#2)

Three other interviewees provided examples of organic development of a management position: “When I joined, this was a start-up, so I wasn’t really in a management position. Even though the designation had ‘manager’ [in the title], I really wasn’t managing any people at that
point. It was just a very sole army kind of team, and I was the one working on the marketing side. With a lot more time and exposure to the field and the industry, I had a few people reporting to me, and then it just transitioned into a very smooth management job.” (#9) This interviewee generalized, noting, “A lot of the times that I’ve seen—this is my third job since I graduated—what happens is that you just assume the role and the designation doesn’t come up until you actually do the role and you’re really ingrained in the system. That’s exactly what happened to me as well. I assumed the role, carried on the responsibilities, and then when the positions opened for a few more people on the team, they were all reporting to me at that point in time.” (#9)

Another participant noted,

It just happened naturally. I had a team. I was working here in the U.S. as a team lead, more like an onsite coordinator, coordinating my tasks with the team that was back in India. And then I had to return to India to lead that whole team because the team lead in that position had resigned, and then they said they would wind up the team unless there was a person who knows all the stuff, who is able to lead the team. So then my manager who I was reporting to had too many projects to manage, so she told me, we need you to manage the whole affair. It was a small team. We had six or seven people back in India at that time. So she said, “Why don’t you start managing all the work. If you need me for something, you can call me, but your own project perspective, creating project plans, tracking the billing to the client—get involved in all those activities in addition to your usual day-to-day work.” So my technical part became straight from 100% to like 70, 80%, and for maybe 20-30% of the time I was doing those activities. I kept doing it for one full year. Then it was decided by the client to wind up that offshore team operation. They called me back here in the U.S. and said, “Well, we can’t afford a team back in India. Why don’t you come here? We really need you, and keep doing whatever you’re doing and why don’t you step into a project manager’s role. We have a lot bigger team. You can lead them. You can manage their work. You know the technology, so it will just be a smooth thing.” So that’s when I did. I travelled back to the U.S. towards the end of 2005, and I took over that part-time project manager, part-time team-lead role and then gradually, as more and more work came on the project management side, I was able to hand over my technical work to the other folks and take over project management full-time. (#10)

The evolution of a technician’s responsibility from technician to manager makes a great deal of sense from a company viewpoint. Once a technician shows promising management skills,
and applies those skills to particular tasks while continuing to function in a technical role, the technician has the opportunity to demonstrate the capability of taking on more and more management responsibilities for larger and larger projects. This scenario was repeated in another interviewee’s track-switching experience:

And then I joined the business team. They were looking for somebody who had the technical background to help lead the team in building new reports and finding things from the data. So I was a perfect fit. I did not get a management position directly. I was asked to be a technical leader on the team. I joined the team, and I was helping my fellow associates how to run studies and pull the data from different systems and how to navigate the different complex systems we have. After doing that for six to eight months, my director said, “Would you be interested in this position?” We had a manager who left the position and it became open, and they were looking to hire, and he approached me and they wanted to know if I wanted to be considered for this one. Even before he asked me, in my regular meetings, I said I would like to try this out even though I didn't have that experience. Given the opportunity, I gave examples of helping other technicians to try and help them grow in the technical sense. I kind of showed some of my leadership abilities to them and said that if an opportunity comes, I would like to be considered. And when it came, they approached me and said, “We want you to take this opportunity,” and I jumped on it. (#14)

As seen above, track-switching is both a function of managers recognizing a technician’s work and a technician being prepared to accept management responsibilities that grow out of that work. As one interviewee noted,

The biggest opportunity I got was to move to the U.S. the last time. How did that happen? So there were leaders who were observing me almost three years, since my Asia stint. There were a couple SVPs and VPs in the company who were observing all the work I was doing. So before I finished completing the project I was leaving, they said, “Would you like to move to the U.S.? We have a position. It would be great for you. It would be great for your career development.” I never thought about it. I never wanted to move out of India. I never had an American dream before, but when it was offered, it just opened my horizons and I said, “Hey, there is a world outside. While I was in Hong Kong for a short time I learned so much. Why don’t I take this opportunity to be in the U.S. (#5)

Many of those who track-switched within their company reported opportunities to demonstrate their leadership potential over time, thus allowing the company to establish evidence that the technician was capable of assuming more management duties. In several cases,
the process of track-switching was organic in that it grew naturally from working as a technician with increased management responsibilities to gradually assuming complete management functions without continuing to function as a technician. Thus, it would appear that, while the process of track-switching varies from opportunity to opportunity, possessing the ability to work with and for people is the common denominator.

**Opportunities with Another Organization**

Interviewees who sought employment outside their current organization stated that they did so because they wanted to expand their range of capabilities and grow as professionals. The two interviewees who track-switched by joining a new employer did so through networking, making a contact in the company they wanted to work for.

In the two cases where interviewees left an organization to take a management position with another organization. They used LinkedIn as a means for identifying a potential management job. In one case, a recruiter identified the interviewee through a LinkedIn profile. “Now, my current position, to answer your question specifically about that transition, actually came up to me through a recruiter who found my profile either on LinkedIn or someplace else, and they approached me and said, ‘Hey, there’s a position here that you may be interested in and you may be well-suited for it. Would you like to explore?’ I continued the conversation with them, and that’s how I ended up in my current role.” (#11) This interviewee stressed that the change from being a technician in one company to a manager in another company was not assured. “My current position was not a certain move. I had been on this track for a number of years, and it has happened gradually. For me it wasn’t a sudden change, as in a changing of the track, I’ve always had dual duties, triple duties to perform. And then slowly and steadily I leaned toward one side of the track, and I made the shift to the management track.” (#11)
The other interviewee also used LinkedIn, but this interviewee already had a connection in the company to which the interviewee applied. “So I saw this job posting on LinkedIn and then I applied through them and got referred for the interview. Actually, I knew one of my friends who was already working on the same company. So I came to know about the opening there and I applied for this particular role, so the HR called me up and reviewed my resume and then going from HR as a normal interview goes.” (#1) When asked if the move to a new company was because there was not a management opening in the interviewee’s current company, the interviewee replied, “I just thought of growing my horizons with a newer service provider or another company, so that’s why I made the choice to move from my previous employer to a new employer.” (#1) This interviewee expanded on that answer by saying, “After making a decision it took almost six to seven months to land on a specific opportunity that I was specifically looking for. And my previous company did have options available there but for me personally being with the same company I just wanted to experience a newer version of another company, how stuff works and utilize my skill set that I have learned from this company and apply it to another company to expand myself.” (#1) It was obvious that the opportunity to track-switch to another organization in some cases was facilitated by personal connections, so interviewees highlighted the value of networking.

**Mentoring**

Networking through mentors was a consistent theme throughout the interviews. In fact, when addressing opportunities, interviewees discussed mentoring repeatedly. Although the interview questions I asked did not include mentoring, seven of the fifteen interviewees believed mentoring was an important topic to bring up during their interviews. They initiated the conversation about mentoring and seemed to feel it was a critical factor influencing their track-
switching. Specifically, they talked about selecting a mentor, locating a mentor, interacting with a mentor, benefiting from a mentor, and being a mentor. A prelude to discussing these categories, interviewees emphasized a particular mindset for the mentor-mentee relationship they called reciprocation.

**Reciprocating in mentoring.** Participants established a mindset for mentoring by affirming that the mentor-mentee relationship was reciprocal. As one participant put it, “For me, the ones that I’m mentoring or people I mentor with, hopefully it’s always a two-way street where you learn and grow together with what you bring to the table. Mentoring shouldn’t be a take, take, take situation. It needs to be based on what you want to grow on.” (#12) Another participant affirmed the need for reciprocation: “I have a personal belief that you need to give before you ask for what you want.” (#2) In short, foundational to a mentor-mentee relationship was the mutual benefit the mentor and mentee received.

**Selecting a mentor.** After articulating the mutual benefit of mentoring, the interviewees went on to provide three guiding principles for selecting a mentor: (1) the mentee should have clear career aspirations, (2) the mentee should respect the mentor, and (3) the mentee should be inspired by the mentor. It should be noted that the interviewees seemed to suggest that the responsibility for selecting a mentor was the mentee’s. But, as one interviewee noted, “There were mentors that I sought out, and there were mentors that took me under their wings.” (#2) In effect, the mentee can seek out a mentor or a mentor can seek out a mentee.

The process of seeking a mentor begins with clarity about the interviewee’s career aspirations. As one interviewee noted, “So first things first is, and I mentioned this earlier—the introspective look—is understanding what are the things you want to grow and develop on. If you have an idea of what you want to grow and develop on, seek out people who have that same
skill set you admire or look up to, that you know you can learn from.” (#12) Clarity about an interviewee’s career aspirations was an aid in finding mentors who could provide specific guidance about how to achieve those aspirations.

The mentee should respect the mentor. As an interviewee said, “I reached out to my mentors and people who were interested in my professional growth, people whom I respected well. They may not be in my direct chain of command, but they were around me when I was growing up in the professional world. They saw me doing things. I saw them doing things. I respected their input. I respected their professionalism. I respected them in specific instances, and I asked them how they handle those things differently.” (#11) While it seems intuitively obvious that respect would be the cement that holds a mentoring relationship together, interviewees made this explicit.

Being inspirational is also a quality interviewees desired in mentors. “I look for people who inspire me. I look up to them and try to learn things from them. The way they do business. The way they think about doing business or the way they run large teams. The way they lead multi-functional, cross-functional teams in organizations or just in markets.” (#5) Clearly, respect comes from observing leaders in action, as the above interviewee noted, and the necessity of observing leaders to determine who would be a good mentor is another part of choosing a mentor.

Once an interviewee had determined what type of mentor could be helpful in reaching career goals and had observed leaders to determine who were respected, the next step in the process was to ask to be mentored. “And then build that relationship. Make that outreach to introduce yourself. Perhaps attend meetings where they’re at or if they’re speakers at different events try to go there to understand a bit more about who they are and try to build that
relationship yourself. But it has to be based on a mutual relationship, too. The mentor has to see how they can best support you as well.” (#12) Access to leaders, according to one interviewee, is not that difficult. “Fortunately, I’ve got that kind of exposure and experience where I see these leaders. And everybody else [in the company] gets to see some leaders, so you need to observe them, and if you like them, go to them, reach out to them, ask for help. If I start counting, there will be many mentors, and I’ve learned different things from different people.” (#5) Again, the lesson here is that mentees should take the initiative in choosing a mentor. This does not preclude a mentor choosing a mentee, but the advice interviewees stressed was how a mentee can choose a mentor.

Interviewees suggested that mentors can be located either within the company or both within and outside the company. When locating mentors inside the company, they said one’s own manager/leader can also be a mentor. As one interviewee noted, “The other thing is, in mentoring, hopefully someone’s leader is supportive. They can make connections for you based on things you want to grow or they have come up with opportunities for you to work on. They might have folks in their network to help connect them to as well. That’s actually how I’ve been introduced to a few of my mentors where a leader has opened a door for me, and then I fostered that relationship myself then.” (#12)

One unique approach to soliciting mentors within the company was outlined by an interviewee, who, along with other colleagues, developed a program of mutual support that led to their hosting leaders who spoke to the group and offered mentoring advice.

A few years before I got into a management position, there were a lot of my friends, who were Indians actually, who pretty much started two or three years before the time I started, and after a certain amount of time, pretty much everybody was stagnant in their role. So we were thinking how do we grow our career in [the company]. So we started a mentoring circle. So, for instance, I was working in the HR system, implementing HR systems, so I had knowledge of all the HR systems, and we had friends who worked in
different parts of [the company], so they had expertise on those systems. What we did was we took turns to help each other understand different systems available in [the company]. So one day, I would tell about HR systems to all my friends. The next day someone would come to the meeting and talk about—we had this meeting every Saturday, we just booked two hours in the library—so one meeting somebody from merchandizing would talk about the merchandising system and it was different each week. It helped us learned the different business areas within [the company]. So it was still like trying to be more technical, and what we found was that to be better at technology you need to understand the business. You can't just understand business in one area, you can understand it all across. That was the first part, and then we were introduced to one of the leaders in [the company] who was an Indian too, and he said, “If you want to be in the technology field, or any field, you don't just need to understand the business but you also have to have the starter skills, too. (#14)

While mentors can be from within the company, having mentors in the company did not preclude also having mentors outside the company. One interviewee talked about this blended model,

It was a combination of both [mentors inside and outside the company]. In fact, one of the mentors I’m still in touch with, he doesn’t work within the [current company] space. He is in [another company], and I’m still in touch with him. We just got introduced through a social gathering and we were in touch. He’s on the technical side. I have mentors in [other companies] as well who have helped in my day-to-day career progression. (#15)

Most interviewees noted that having multiple mentors was the norm in successful track-switching.

Once a mentor has signed on, the next part of the process was utilizing the mentor’s expertise. As already noted, the mentor-mentee relationship was based on mutual trust and respect, so what interviewees noted was that they used mentors as trusted sounding boards. For example, one interviewee consulted mentors about a variety of issues.

I leveraged my mentors as sounding boards. That is the first thing. . . . If there’s a problem that I’m facing, if there’s a concern, if there’s a perception, if there’s feedback that I need to work through, I’ve always leveraged them as sounding boards and getting their advice. They have also helped me connect with other people. For example, if I say I want to work on communication, they know somebody that is a really good example of good communication, so they would help me connect to that person and say, “Ask them how they work through this journey.” They act as the connectors as well, so there’s a
couple of different ways in which they’ve helped me. (#2)

Another interviewee stated that keeping the mentor informed about the mentee’s career was important. “Believe me, I know that to network is to do my work. So I make sure whenever I’m meeting my mentors, I share my work. I share about what kind of results I got.” (#5) From this and other mentees’ perspective, a primary purpose of the mentor-mentee relationship was obtaining professional advice, and such advice was facilitated by the mentee keeping the mentor informed about the status of his or her work.

Interviewees discussed a number of benefits from having a mentor. Most commonly mentioned was that mentors provided advice, encouragement, and support. In addition, another benefit was that the mentor-mentee relationship can endure over time and thus become a long-lasting source of support. One mentor provided advice for a participant who was uncertain about which direction to take in terms of career choices. As the participant stated, “I consulted one of my senior colleagues and the solution that he gave was it was up to me to repay my contribution now; it’s up to me to choose which one I want to do.” (#1) So the participant chose to following a path to management. Another participant noted how encouragement worked in the mentor-mentee relationship.

I’ll never forget it was a few years ago, my boss at the time, I would go with him and say, “This is what is going on. This is what I think we should do.” He would just ask me baseline questions and he would say, “Yea. Go do it. This is your show.” So he wasn’t a micro manager. He trusted that I was doing my job. I would go to him with the important stuff. That trust relationship that you build with them kind of feeds your confidence, so that when they come back and say, “Hey, I know you can do this,” it kind of complements each other. (#3)

This participant also found a subordinate, older than the interviewee, who doubled as a mentor and provided information to support the participant.

Then I also had the support of someone on my team who understood that I was a first-time manager. She was the Senior Analyst on my team, but she was older than me and
had ten years’ more experience than I did. After I left, she took over as manager of the team. She understood that I was new to management, and it was kind of a learning for me. And she was able to offset a lot of the landmines I would have stepped into. . . . So she advised me on the HIPAA policies, for example. She advised me when someone was kind of bad mouthing someone else on the team, and there was tension between individuals. The amount of accommodations we made for one individual was overextending ourselves, and that was not sitting well with the VP. So information like that that I didn’t want to find out the hard way was good to know and was good to have the support that way. (#3)

Another benefit of mentor-mentee relationships is that they can endure over time, as one interviewee noted of his mentor relationships. “Fifteen years down the line, I’m still in touch with him [my first mentor]. I wish him well on his birthday. He wishes me well on my birthday. And we’ve always stayed close, and any big decisions, I still call him on my career and say, ‘Hey, this is coming along. What do you think?’ . . . And all these 10, 15 years I’ve been working, I have built relationships, and I keep those relationships intact.” (#5) The continual contact with mentors when mentees have moved on in their careers is a strong testimony to the benefits of a successful mentor-mentee relationship.

Obviously, mentors taught many lessons either implicitly or explicitly, and one essential lesson was humility, which mentees saw as a necessary component of people skills. One interviewee, for example, saw the relationship between humility and teamwork. The interviewee described a manager as “a humble man, very intelligent, like with five degrees in finance,” and recounts a situation in which the interviewee knocked on the manager’s office door and found that the manager was with the CEO of the company, so the manager said he would call the interviewee right back.

He could have called me on the phone. He could have told the secretary to get me, but instead of that he walks to my cubicle, taps me on the shoulder, and says, “Hey you wanted to talk. Let’s go and talk.” That’s humility. I remember he was introducing us to the CEO of the company, and the CEO said, “I’m sorry that you have to work for [name of colleague].” He [my manager] said, “He doesn’t work for me. He works with me. We work with each other. We don’t work for people. We don’t work for our managers. We
work for shareholders. We work for our customers. But we don’t work for one individual. We work with them. So there are people who are senior to me. I work with them. There are people who are junior to me. I work with them, too. (#5)

Tellingly, the lessons about humility were associated with teamwork and treating people with respect, an important facet of the mentor-mentee relationship, and an important aspect of effective management.

Another interviewee, who helped develop the Saturday professional development program at the library that was mentioned earlier, shared that speakers who came to the Saturday events taught the attendees about professional behavior. One manager pointed out that the members of the Saturday group needed to work on how to showcase their talent and abilities. “So that person came to a few sessions and we said give us some examples, so he said ‘This is what you need to do. This is how you talk in a meeting. You make sure that you’re paying attention. Don’t wait for somebody to ask a question. When you have it, just ask a question. Don’t wait for your turn.’ We had so many sessions like that over multiple Saturdays, and we had other guest speakers and not just Indians anymore.” (#14)

Mentors also reinforced the priority of excellent work. “So the suggestion and the mentorship I got was you do your work diligently and prove to your leadership that you’re able not only to deliver but also manage a team of resources. Let the work speak for itself in terms of managing resources, managing timelines, managing expectations with the business partners. I actually did that.” (#15) Interviewees also consulted with their mentors to correct problems at work. As one interviewee noted, “That’s how it helped me identify the pitfalls on my professional experience, and once I recognized oh, this was incorrect, then I asked them how do I correct this in my future professional engagement? They either recommended training; they recommended readings; they recommended workshops. Work around and come back with
experience so we can discuss this further, so on and so forth. I took it to heart, and I kept working at it. That helped me to become a better leader, and a better manager over the years.”

(#11)

Clearly, a variety of mentors for each mentee can be useful because each mentor has particular strengths, and can teach particular lessons. As this interviewee attested: “Again, somebody is a great leader in finance. Somebody is a great CEO for market. Somebody is a great cultural mentor. Somebody is a great people leader. So there are different skill sets people have. . . . Somebody was great in building new businesses. Somebody was great at transforming those businesses into something different and changing the whole course of action. Somebody was really good at closing down some bad businesses. . . . And what did I do? I tried to observe and learn how are they doing it. Thinking about how they are building new businesses or winding down a business or doing some correction, restructuring the organization. How do they do it?”

(#5)

Mentees clearly benefited from mentoring to enable effective track-switching, and the benefits mentors provided included teaching essential skills that support effective management practices. Implicit in several interviewees’ remarks was the need for continuing mentorship because for the long-term, managers need advisors to help them sort out issues that can be effectively solved by the insights that respected mentors can provide.

Because one of the motivations for being a manager was to help others be effective in their team efforts, it is not surprising that interviewees found themselves mentoring others. One interviewee had gone through the company process of developing a personal development plan for a five-year period that was shared with the interviewee’s manager. This interviewee was then in the position of mentoring a junior employee. “She just graduated out of college. . . . Now I
understand where she foresees herself in three- or four-years’ time period, so I can share information which I think will be useful for her to expand her knowledge areas and stuff like that.” (#1)

Another interviewee found that by becoming a mentor the interviewee was demonstrating leadership skills useful in becoming a manager.

Because it was the people leadership skills, and just connecting with people, I first picked up mentees. So mentees and the mentor relationship is really special to me because I felt like I was at where I was at in my career because of mentors who have helped me to grow. And when I had mentees that I was able to both learn from and hopefully contribute for their career, that helped me get a sense of leadership skills without actually being a “manager.” From there, I think management picked up on the fact that I was being proactive in having mentoring relationship, putting together mentoring circles. That helped me get into that leadership role. (#12)

Although the five questions I asked interviewees about track-switching did not explicitly envision mentoring as a major topic, it turned out to be an important aspect of track-switching for Indian technicians who had made the transition to management. Mentoring, according to the interviewees, was instrumental in providing them with advice, insight, and direction for their careers. The interviewees also affirmed that mentoring was not only about receiving from a mentor but also was about giving to the mentor.

**Question 4. How did the climate at your work influence your decision to become a manager?**

To gain an understanding of how participants’ work climate was a factor in their track-switching, I asked participants how their work climate influenced their decision to become a manager. I was then able to sort their responses into two categories: barriers in the work climate and supportive mechanisms in the work climate. In this section, I organized what participants said about addressing the barriers into four categories and conclude by discussing the supportive mechanisms in their work climate.
Barriers in work climate. Four work climate barriers were cited by interviewees in moving from a technical position to a managerial position: learning how to deal with people, communicating in English, being transparent in human relations, and avoiding favoritism and jealousy in office politics.

Learning how to deal with people. The first barrier participants experienced was the change from a direct approach to dealing with people to one of using a nurturing approach. Here’s how one interviewee described it:

I’m very direct. I speak my mind. Sometimes that can be perceived as—you know I have a technical background, so if you think about it we don’t know how to fluff things up very well. We are about facts and data and systems and such. That can be viewed as not caring, striking the balance of the perception of being a nurturer but also a facts-driven person. So that’s the balance that you have to drive, that I had to drive, which became a hindrance for myself just because of my mindset and my background. So that was one. The second thing that I thought was a hindrance was that people had this image of me as being really data savvy and tech savvy. A lot of people did not think I could be as good a leader as well. So I had to break that barrier to show that I could be as good a leader, too. And for things that help, I think there were a lot of mentors and sponsors and coaches along the way that would help. (#2)

Because of this interviewee’s technical background, the interviewee’s approach was straightforward—“We are about facts and data and systems and such”—and the interviewee’s colleagues saw the interviewee’s technical background as a barrier to being a manager, where soft skills are needed. This interviewee’s recollection of others’ perceptions of technicians affirmed what interviewees said about the need for developing soft skills, especially communication strategies that promoted group identity and productivity.

Another interviewee mentioned the same barrier of too direct communication:

The biggest style change for me was I used to be very direct . . . and I could tell them [employees] exactly what to do, and they wouldn’t mind because that was the [Indian] culture. In the U.S., you have to be in the position to give the other person some freedom so that you say you need this done, but I’m not going to tell you how it is to be done. People always want to discuss and go back and forth. Again, it goes back to the culture of the company. India and the U.S. are the two biggest democracies, so when you grow up
in a very free society, pretty much you grew up being told you can be whatever you want to be. So nobody gets backed into a box, so it’s very difficult sometimes to manage directly. Your management style has to totally change. Because it was very tough for me the first six months, but then after a few missteps you learn. (#6)

As already discussed, differences in Indian culture vis-a-vis American culture was often highlighted when an Indian technician track-switched in the U.S. Cultural differences between the two leading democratic nations can constitute a formidable barrier to successful track-switching.

**Communicating in English.** Another barrier was communicating in English.

Communication, in general, can be a barrier, as one participant stated, even when English is a common business language for India and the U.S. But communicating effectively in English is a complex task that has many nuances. As that participant observed:

> It is not an easy transition for people coming from a different country and . . . to be a leader and managing different types of associates here in the United States because English is not your first language. Also, although we are from in India, English is not the first language but English is the common language. That’s why you see that we speak better in English than people from other countries. . . . But we speak British English . . . . There are certain words that Americans use that are not the same as we use in speaking British English. So sometimes my kids will make fun of my accent and laugh at me because they were born and brought up here and they say, “What are you talking about?” So the big barrier is communication. And when you are a leader your communication becomes very key. (#8)

The common practice of U.S. businesses expecting managers to speak publicly can be a hindrance. As one interviewee noted, public speaking is not typical of the business culture in India. “So the people like me we never even spoke in front of anyone in India, even at work. So all of a sudden that is a big thing for us. Moreover, in our culture we are taught to be humble, don’t speak in front of others, so often times we are very timid. So communication is a hindrance.” (#8) As previously noted in the section on abilities, interviewees listed soft skills, particularly communication skills, as critical to track-switching, and again here, interviewees
confirmed that using English effectively was a persistent challenge, a barrier to making the switch to management and a continuing burden when working as a manager.

**Being transparent in human relations.** Another work climate barrier was the difference between maintaining a certain level of privacy about your personal life, as in many Asian cultures, and being able to share your beliefs and values with your colleagues. As is often the case in the U.S., this distinction can be characterized as transparency. As one interviewee explained it,

One of the things with Indians or Asians I would say in general is that we hesitate in talking about ourselves. So when we’re a technologist what’s most important is what you know in [a program language], so I knew that. . . . But when you’re talking about leaders, you’re talking about your whole self. What are your values? What are your beliefs? How do you live your life and how do you inspire others to live your life? So that is one of the barriers that I have to break. I still struggle with it, to be totally honest. But allowing people to get to know my whole self, what do I believe in, how do I lead, and such. So that was one of the things that was a little bit of a barrier for me in terms of showing people that I could lead. (#2)

This respondent’s view was that in U.S. culture, transparency in leaders is expected and opening up and sharing about yourself was considered a barrier for this respondent in the work climate.

**Favoritism in office politics.** Two interviewees talked about negatives in office politics that served as barriers to track-switching. One interviewee bemoaned the problem of the inner circle and of favoritism in office politics:

There is a huge component of favoritism, and it goes back to the relationships and trusts and all of that. For some reason, this person trusts that person. He worked with him in a prior company, and he knows him from another division or another company, and he or she hires him on and puts him in a managerial or director role. . . . There’s a lot of favoritism. It’s usually not a very formal process. It’s sort of like being the cool kids in high school. You’re either in or out. A lot of times it feels that way. I’ve had people tell me that. You’re either part of the inner circle or you’re not. That happened a lot in one of my jobs. . . . There is a lot of favoritism. (#4)

**Jealousy in office politics.** Another interviewee stated that barriers to a management position included unsavory office politics, such as jealousy. “There were quite a few hindrances
in reaching the management position. It takes people at least a decade to reach that position eventually. My jumps to the new positions were pretty frequent and there are people around who also have similar kind of aspirations, and like I said some people behave differently. Some people are jealous. Some people just accept it. Some people try to pull you down.” (#7)

In most cases, interviewees stayed in the same company to track-switch, but as one interviewee pointed out, the shift to another company did not eliminate barriers, or, as the interviewee says, “hindrances”:

Perhaps you could say one of the hindrances was me shifting jobs, as that was definitely a hindrance, because once you move from one company to another you literally have to start from ground zero. You have to prove yourself again. Whatever you have done in your previous work experience, that really doesn’t qualify too much, as least in today’s dynamic world. What I’ve seen is that people are no longer truly looking for what you’ve achieved in the past. They’re looking for key factors like adaptability and learnability. If you are able to prove that you are able to hit the ground running as fast as possible, those are the kind of things they look for. But I would still say that because of the fact that I’ve moved jobs, people do take some time to realize how adaptable you are. (#3)

The reality of barriers in the work climate was not changed when a technical person track-switches to another company. Interviewees recognized the persistence of barriers but also noted that it was the individual’s responsibility for addressing barriers.

Taking responsibility for addressing barriers. The barriers interviewees mentioned were not impossible to overcome, and interviewees stressed the need to take responsibility for addressing those barriers. In their view, taking responsibility began with recognizing the pervasiveness of workplace barriers. As one interviewee noted, the work climate will always present challenges, and the individual is responsible for negotiating those challenges. This interviewee said:

Any work environment in any company is never 100% aligned to your way of working and the way you want it to be. Based on that, you should be able to work yourself in a less than 100% work environment. You should be able to move things along even if the work environment is not 100% conducive to the way you want it to be. It’s similar to
thinking the glass is half full versus half empty, and look at everything in a positive way and you’ll make the work environment very conducive to your way of working. (#13)

In other words, there are barriers in any work climate, and part of what it means to have effective management skills is being able to negotiate that environment and make it work for you.

Another interviewee echoed the need for taking responsibility for the work climate:

I think there are two ways of looking at work and environment. One is the work environment could be quite compatible with your style and approach and also you have the ability to change or adjust the sub-work environment within your own area, so you can influence change in addition to adapting. It’s always a combination both of adapting and of influencing the change the right way. (#13)

Adapting to and influencing the work climate are critical components of managing the work climate, and interviewees provided specific strategies for interacting successfully with the work climate. For example, an interviewee who did not have management support to track-switch found people to help overcome that barrier: “What helped me get past that . . . was finding the right leader or right mentors that could help me get past that roadblock. The drive of being able to move to that next step has to come from within and then finding the right support and sponsorship is on you.” (#12) Another interviewee echoed the belief that the employee has primary responsibility for adjusting to the work environment, in this case, to prove the interviewee had the ability to become a manager. The perception was that a technical person, especially an excellent technician, was not seen as a candidate for management. This interviewee expressed frustration in trying to break into management. “Every time I tried to talk to somebody about a [management] position, they would say, ‘Ah, you’re too technical, and probably you don’t have leadership experience,’ and those kind of things. That becomes a big challenge because people like me who have been hands on, being very technical, they tend to be seen as that is the only stuff they have.” (#14)
This interviewee took the initiative to overcome the perception that technology was the interviewee’s only skill set by talking to management about the desire to become a manager. The interviewee was then advised to provide evidence that the interviewee had management skills and to do so, the interviewee used a situation where he had been brought in to show people how to use technical application to meet work goals. Here is his story:

I was trying to help them understand the new technology, how to build and create new reports and stuff like that. So in the process, there were so many things I had to do to make sure I could influence them to make sure they were working and delivering on time. Getting things done the right way. I documented those things and said, “This is what I have been doing. It’s not just technical. Look at these associates who were not even able to log into the system. Now they are able to pull information from the system.” I provided documentation to say these are the steps you follow. I showed them the processes I built. (#14)

In effect, by providing evidence, the interviewee obviously demonstrated competence in already performing a management role.

Foundational to negotiating work climate is to understand that all work climates present challenges that have to be negotiated. For technicians to be successful in track-switching, the technician must take the initiate to negotiate work climate obstacles. However, the overwhelming attitude of the interviewees was that they liked being in their work environments, even if some barriers had to be overcome to become a manager.

Supportive Mechanisms in Work Climate

Typically, the interviewees agreed that the companies they worked for provided support mechanisms for making the transition from a technical position to a management position. I have categorized those mechanisms as developing talent, shadowing, and working with leaders. All three of these mechanisms are interrelated because their common purpose was to support talented technicians who have potential to track-switch.

**Developing talent.** The first mechanism is developing talent. As one interviewee noted,
the company understood the value of challenging employees by developing them as professionals. “Yes, we need to invest in developing this talent, and let’s take them overseas. Let’s give them a different experience, so maybe in five years’ time, ten years’ time, they could be a great leader for the company. So [the company] invests a lot of time and energy in developing me. Nine years before [working for this company], I could not stick on with one company for more than two years. In nine years, I can’t believe myself. Every two years they have challenged me. They have given me new opportunities to do something different, to challenge myself. Absolutely, I still feel like I just joined yesterday.” (#5)

As another interviewee stated, the company provided many opportunities for professional growth.

I think it was very supportive from my organization side because when I joined this organization 17 years back, I did not know where I would be 10 years, 15 years down the line. I joined this organization, and it turned out to be not a job but a career. . . . If anyone wants to grow, take more opportunity, take more responsibilities, usually there is no pushback for taking extra responsibilities, so that is how I actually got started. When I started back in India, it was an extra responsibility I had taken on top of the work which was my usual schedule. (#10)

These interviewees were acknowledging that their company enabled them to develop a career, not merely a job, and in developing that career, interviewees were given opportunities to learn and grow as professionals so that their careers were interesting and exciting.

**Shadowing.** Another mechanism for helping technicians get a feel for management was shadowing. For one interviewee, shadowing was very helpful in getting a taste of how management works and getting hands-on management experience. “First I was shadowing both the business analysts and the manager who was working on the same project, so I got involved along with them on their daily tasks and understand what all the things they have to cover on a daily, weekly, monthly basis and projects charters and all those steps. So I got this experience of
things to be covered and was trained according to them and then over a period of one or two
months I got a project which I was responsible to handle all by myself.” (#1)

**Working with leaders.** Another interviewee said the opportunity to work with “really
awesome leaders” was very helpful in preparing for a management position because this
interviewee was able to expand on the interviewee’s existing professional skill set:

> My work environment was very productive, very helpful in building my leadership skills
set. I did not get promoted as quickly or as fast as many people did or many companies
promoted their folks. But I was surrounded by some really awesome leaders, and I had an
opportunity to work with them closely and was given some opportunities that allowed me
to work on a different spectrum of skill sets, different spectrum of areas of interest, not
just technical, as in IT technical, but also business projects that I was put on to work, I
would say, globally. . . . it gave me an opportunity to learn many things, come in contact
with many different leaders within the organization. I learned a lot from them either
through mistakes, my own mistakes. I learned from them by observing them or learn
from them by just being with them. (#11)

Interviewees recognized what seems intuitively obvious: A person’s work climate can
either promote track-switching or hinder it. But work climate is not an either/or. As the
interviewees noted, no work climate is a perfect match for any employee because all work
climates present barriers of various types. Because barriers are part and parcel of work climate,
the technician needs to take responsibility for overcoming barriers to track-switch. In fact,
overcoming barriers is a prerequisite to track-switching because once a technician makes that
switch to management, the barriers the technician addressed will not magically disappear. The
technician who has track-switched will continue to work around, over, and through barriers to
become a successful manager.

**Question 5: What were the elements in your life outside of work that influenced your
decision to become a manager?**

To better understand how their environment outside of work guided their track-switching,
I asked interviewees what elements in their lives outside of work influenced their decision to
track-switch. Interviewees pointed to the influence of their families within the context of the expectations of Indian culture. Before moving forward, it is important to remember that the interviewees generally came from a segment of Indian society that valued education and instilled high expectations for performance, not only in education but also in careers. The families in which the interviewees grew up had a profound influence in shaping the interviewees’ expectations and achievements, and they spoke very highly of their family upbringing.

Interviewees pointed to specific expectations of family life that influenced their decision to become a manager. I divided their responses into four categories. Their families modeled professionalism, provided encouragement, provided counsel, and inculcated the value of community service. Before providing data about the environmental factors, I will share interviewees’ perspectives about the influence families had on them.

**The Influence of Family Background**

The influence of family is central in setting very high expectations at the beginning of a child’s formative years, and the interviewees acknowledged this. “[M]any of my colleagues and friends . . . we all come from a similar background where the expectations are very high. . . . So that expectation was set at the very initial stage of my life, always do better. . . . A little bit about myself. I come from a family of doctors, but . . . . I had the freedom of choosing my own career, but inculcated in that was you have to do well in life. That expectation was set . . . .” (#15)

Another interviewee agreed that high expectations were normative. “As Indians, like you’re driven to be A+ students every day for no matter what, and if you get a B it’s not good. . . . We control our grades, if you will, by how hard we study. We control what school we go into based on what our grades are. So we’ve controlled that our entire life. . . . you’re so focused on controlling your own destiny, if you will, because it is our culture. It is innate in us.” (#12)
High expectations for high achievement were foundational during interviewees’ formative years, as those two interviewees acknowledged. Interviewees were expected to excel and expected to take responsibility for their performance. These expectations were supported by family and friends, who modeled professionalism.

**Modeled professionalism.** In addition, family members modeled professionalism. As one interviewee noted, family and friends provided examples of professional behavior.

> . . . it’s with the people you hang out with and you see people in your family who have been successful, who have done well in their fields, and you notice the way they work and behave every day in their lives. Those are the kind of things that you try to incorporate into your daily schedule, not just at work, but even the moment you get out of bed and how you tackle the day. That kind of determines how well your day progresses both at the office as well as outside. I must say that I have been influenced by exceptional people in my family as well as friends. (#3)

This interviewee labeled family and friends as exceptional, and that label makes sense, especially when the professional achievements of family and friends are taken into account. As one interviewee noted, his mother and father not only stressed the importance of education but also they were educated professionals.

> “. . . so growing up back in India . . . my dad has a master’s in accounting and finance and my mom was specifically a mathematician. They had given prior importance to education more than anything . . . .” (#1)

As another interviewee noted, “I saw my dad manage people a lot growing up. People reported to him. He was a sales manager, a sales director, and he runs his own business right now. It must have subconsciously played into my confidence or something like that.” (#4)

Modeling professionalism can be both caught and taught. When the interviewee talked about seeing the interviewee’s father manage people, the reference was to observing the interviewee’s father in action, so the interviewee was catching on to how professionals operate by seeing the father act in a professional role. The value of having a model of professionalism for
interviewees is that these examples of successful professionals helped provide the incentive for interviewees first to become professional technicians and then to track-switch.

**Provided encouragement.** In addition to modeling professionalism, families and friends provided encouragement for interviewees to become professionals. One interviewee said it this way: “It’s always the five people who you mutually hang around with that contribute to your thought process and the things that you do . . . . Usually, my friends and colleagues and family were supportive enough and all of them were looking forward to bringing up a career and aspiring and trying to help society, so education played a very high, important role.” (#1) The stress on education was related to the social group the interviewee was part of: friends, colleagues, and family, and this social group supported and encouraged the interviewee’s career aspirations.

One interviewee showed how education and encouragement fit together and recounted how the interviewee’s parents encouraged the interviewee to be engaged in a number of extra-curricular activities, even though the interviewee was not particularly interested in the activities. The benefit of these activities was learning discipline that transferred to the interviewee’s professional life.

I guess my parents sent me to a lot of these classes at one point in which I wasn’t interested in, but the fact that you just keep going to all these classes, you just have to manage your time, and like I said, prioritization becomes a very important aspect of your life because while you’re going to all these classes, there’s also pressure to do well in school, so definitely those have ingrained some sort of discipline, if you will, in my life. (#9) The lesson of discipline, although not apparent at the time, helped the interviewee later on as a manager.

Another interviewee spoke of the encouragement and support the interviewee’s family provided: “My family was supportive. Good job. You’re doing something right. When I told
them this was offered to me [his current job], they encouraged me to take it. . . . They sort of
knew what it entailed and knew what it meant. Definitely encouraging of that.” (#4) The
couragement to track-switch was based on personal knowledge of what it meant to be a
manager. One interviewee summed up the relationship between family support and track-
switching as follows:

My parents have always been very supportive of me, encouraged me to continue to grow in
my career. And when I thought about what my career meant, for me to grow and feel
good about what I was doing to give back because that has been a big theme within our
family is we’re put on this earth to give and serve others. Leadership was where I could
fulfill that from a professional standpoint. So within our family that was always a theme
that helped motivate me and encourage me. (#12)

While this interviewee cited parents as very supportive, others cited their family
members, such as spouses and children, as also providing encouragement. As one interviewee
noted, family members have been supportive throughout the interviewee’s career, including
track-switching.

I have a very supportive family, which I have to have to work many long hours. So when
you transition, change is difficult and you’re working harder at a lot of things,
understanding the culture and you start managing people, and when you’re facing that,
it’s a huge change. An understanding family who gives you that extra time,
understanding that this transition point is very important. It’s just like the mentor
relationships I was talking about. A good relationship at home and people you can tap
into is very important. (#6)

Another interviewee lauded his wife as a great source of positive influence during his
career. Interestingly, this interviewee noted that he had a problem living away from his parents, a
problem his wife solved by her support.

I was away from my parents. They were living far away from me. The only person living
with me was my wife. For the past 15 years, she has been one dearest friend who would
listen to my stupid questions and stupid thoughts. When you’re low, all different things
come out, and when you are happy, everything is going positive, you need someone to
share with. So she was always there to share in my difficult times and good times. And
my parents were a little far away. They didn’t know what I was doing, what I was
earning. They just knew that I was well off and there were no questions with respect to
my work. So they didn’t know what kind of problems I was going through, so I could not go to them if I was in trouble or I needed guidance. That’s when my wife and I had some friends who were in the same industry and they helped me a lot. They motivated me, but I agree the major motivation factor was my wife. (#7)

**Provided counsel.** In addition to encouragement, family provided counsel that helped shape the interviewees thinking and life choices, including career choices. One interviewee directly attributed track-switching to the interviewee’s father’s advice. “So if I think about what got me here, the management position or the level in the organization and everything, and again, my dad has been a big influence on my life. He always said, ‘Have a big heart. So let people get benefit out of your credit. Share your credit; share your knowledge; don’t try to withhold information, but be authentic, be yourself.’ All those lessons of life, sharing and caring about people, not being afraid of anything, being myself, sharing my ideas.” (#5)

Another interviewee noted that father’s advice helped the interviewee to seek opportunities in various geographical areas, even if the opportunities took the interviewee farther from home.

He owns his own small chain of stores but he always encouraged me to not just limit myself to his business, and it’s a small business, and he used to say the grass doesn’t grow well under a banyan tree. That’s what my dad used to tell me so he challenged me to move on. I remember when I got admission into my MBA program. There was one university, which was a pretty good university locally, where my parents used to live. And there was one down south in India, and he said, “If I were you, I would go down South. I would experience a different life, meet different people, understand the culture, and also get out of your comfort zone.” That advice is still sticking on. . . . today, I’m sitting 8,000 thousand miles away and all thanks to [my company], and I absolutely love it. (#5)

**Inculcated the value of community service.** As previously noted, interviewees were taught a strong sense of community service by their parents, and that counsel to serve others was extremely important in one interviewee’s professional life because of the lessons learned that were transferable to the interviewee’s managerial position.
I can tell you for me it [engagement outside work] was more help than hindrance. I’m a very active member in the community. So we built our Hindu temple here in [the city] so I was one of the primaries on that, as part of the organization. . . . So in the last ten years, I’ve learned about communication, working with people, learning to be patient, persevere. Being part of [a] non-profit organization helped me immensely . . . . That helps me with my leadership, but I’ll tell you when you’re a leader of a non-profit organization and working with people, it’s easy to get things done at work because of your direct relationship and all that. But outside in the non-profit everyone is a volunteer, and everyone’s thinks they are doing it and holding them accountable. You can’t be authoritative; it’s all by request. Even the small things they do, you have to thank them for it. You’ve got to get things done. So you learn to be patient. It taught me perseverance and also holding people accountable. It also makes you not think about yourself. You become more selfless. That helped me be a leader. How do you put people before you? You’ve got to work at it. Most of the time we are selfish. We want to think about our kids, our family, and all that. So how do you put the community first? The only way to do that is to link to some higher purpose or some higher goal. . . . I would say for me my involvement outside work helped me mentally immensely to improve my leadership skills. (#8)

Another interviewee expressed a common understanding of the value of community service among interviewees, noting that the priorities of the interviewee’s life were family, community service, and work. “One, in priority sequence is family. Family comes first in terms of the principles and values you have. Your wife and kids have to be at the highest level. . . . Two is community. In and around your community you work with people, whether it’s an Asian community or an Indian community or broader entire [name of local] community. . . . Then the third area is obviously work.” (#13)

Another interviewee reinforced that perception. Essentially, as this interviewee stated it, you are who you were raised to be. “. . . focusing on our careers was a driving factor for who my sister and I are today which is hopefully that we are professional contributors who are giving back to the professional environment. That’s how our parents have raised us. My upbringing is solely based on how they raised us, and I think I bring pieces of that to work every day of how I care for folks that are on my team or where I work with.” (#12)

For these interviewees, family was instrumental in providing them with the drive,
insights, and behaviors necessary to track-switch. They were raised in professional homes; they had insights into the nature of professional work; they acquired appropriate education to become professionals, and they saw not only their professional work, but also their community service and home life as opportunities to demonstrate leadership skills because “That’s how their parents raised them.” In at least two cases, interviewees lauded their spouses for the support they provided so that the interviewees could track-switch successfully. As one interviewee noted, “If you’re not happy outside work, you’re not going to be very effective at work.” (#6) The interviewees in this study expressed great satisfaction in their work, and that is not surprising given the professional modeling, encouraging, counselling, and inculcating the value of community service the interviewees received in their homes in India.

**Chapter Summary**

Chapter four presented the responses to the study’s interview questions, organized under the five sections that outline the study’s five interview questions. First, I stated the interview question and then gave a summary of the participants’ response. Next, I pulled pertinent quotes from the participants’ interviews to highlight emerging themes.
Chapter Five:

Findings, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

This chapter analyzes the implications for the data presented in chapter four. I will begin by reviewing the research design. Next, I will discuss the findings for each research question. I will then compare the findings to the relevant literature and present the conclusions. Lastly, I will discuss the limitations of my study, suggestions for improved practice, and recommendations for future research.

Research Design

The purpose of this study was to explore how Indian managers assessed the influences leading to their transition from technician to manager when working for a company in the U.S. To fulfill the research purposes, I used a narrative design and interviewed 15 Indian technicians who made the transition to management in the U.S. and had been in their management role for at least a year. I asked each of the participants the same five, open-ended research questions. The interviews were audio recorded and then transcribed. Participants reviewed their transcriptions and entrusted me to correct obvious grammatical errors. Chapter three described the participants’ response to each question. In the next section, I present the findings from this study.

Presentation of the Findings

This section answers the study’s research question and sub-questions. The major research question was: What influenced the successful track-switching of an Indian technician who had transitioned into a management position in a U.S. company in the U.S.? To effectively address this central question, several sub-questions had to be answered by the participants. These questions were:
a. From your perspective, what unique abilities helped you to make the transition into management?

b. Why did you want to become a manager?

c. How did you take advantage of or create opportunities to become a manager?

d. How did the climate at your work influence your decision to become a manager?

e. What were the elements in your life outside of work that influenced your decision to become a manager?

To answer the sub-questions, the next section provides a synthesis of the participants’ responses to the interview questions. The number in parentheses marks identifies a particular interviewee.

Sub Question A

Sub Question A: From your perspective, what unique abilities helped you to make the transition into management?

Interviewees cited various abilities that they believed were necessary for successful track-switching. In analyzing their responses, I determined that interviewees cited abilities that could be organized into a model of self-assessment that included four components: technical skills and job performance, soft skills, image, and training. I also chose to include training programs interviewees mentioned as preparation for becoming a manager.

**Technical skills.** In discussing self-assessment of technical skills and job performance, interviewees agreed that excellent work performance as a technician was essential for track-switching. As one interviewee noted, “You get your foot in the door for any job based on performance. Performance means everything.” (#6) The interviewees seemed to agree that being competent as a technician was the cornerstone of building an image that shows management potential.
In discussing self-assessment of soft skills or people skills, the interviewees established a strong relationship between communication ability and soft skills. In their view, effective communication was the foundation for effective soft skills. The interviewees noted the need for soft skills and discussed interaction within and outside work teams. The need for Indian technicians to assess their soft skills became an imperative because, as one interviewee said, “There’s very little emphasis on soft skills,” in Indian culture, “and a lot of emphasis on how good you are in your technical skills.” (#9) But to communicate effectively was not just a matter of using proper grammar and being an articulate speaker. Interviewees also spoke about communication skills as the ability to influence others. As one interviewee noted, “You have to amend and blend with people that you are working with. Make changes to yourself. The way you interact to make other people comfortable, and also be willing to work either for or with you. That part becomes an important aspect while you are working with people.” (#9) The reason interviewees emphasized the need for communication skills as foundational to soft skills is that technicians deal with machines to satisfy work requirements; managers have to deal with people to complete projects, and unlike machines, as one interviewee noted, “People are not predictable. People are not black and white.” (#5)

When communicating within a team, the soft skills interviewees identified were motivating, being cultural sensitivity, building teams, and listening. Participants emphasized the purpose of communication was not merely the transfer of information, but, as one interviewee stated, “One of the other things that I also think is important as a leader is to not just think about work. Your job is to inspire, to motivate, not just for work but to make yourself and them better people in general.” (#2) To communicate so as to motivate, managers from an Indian culture must not have “culture myopia,” as one interviewee noted, but they should recognize that
effective communication takes place in a culture that in the U.S. “... is open. It’s dialogue. We expect to disagree. Point, counterpoint. It is not to be taken as a representation of your entire identity if you disagree on a point.” (#5)

Effective communication was also integral to team-building, and team-building means the manager is developing a team spirit where team members want to work for the good of others, where the manager has personal knowledge of team members so that he or she can motivate them to work for the success of the team, and where the manager gives credit to the team when projects are successful and takes the blame when things go amiss. As one interviewee said, “So number one is putting people first, giving credit to the associates. If things don’t go well, you take the responsibility. Accept this is your career change, so that’s number two.” (#8)

This interviewee went on to note, “Effective communication also entails effective listening” or as one interviewee explained, “Personally I feel that for any person to be successful at being a manager, they need to have their soft skills. They need to make sure that they are able to communicate with their associates. Mostly listen to their ideas.” (#14) And technical expertise can be a hindrance to effective communication. The interviewee went on to say,

And one of the fallacy of being a technical person, even for me, I easily tend to give directions because I know the technology so well, and being in that it is not about telling them what to do but helping them grow into the position, so we have to really listen, and just provide guidance, and ask open-ended questions... You should be able to give guidance to the associates, have an open mind, listen to them and you should sharpen your soft skills. That’s the most important thing for being a manager. (#14)

Effective communication also requires communication of high ethical standards. One interviewee stated it this way: “One important thing is as a leader, we need to know who we are and communicate to our associates. ... We all have different moral values and principles, but not everything is visible to the other people. You behave in a way, and people make an opinion of you, but you’ve got to say, ‘Hey, this is me.’ What you stand up for... You tell that and then
you live and lead by example.” (#8) Ethical communication also may require challenging accepted norms, such as being casual about cost overruns.

Interviewees also discussed communication outside the team to various constituents with particular emphasis on a non-technical audience. My analysis of interviewees’ responses to communicating outside the team yielded four categories: Communication and project management expectations, communication and dispute resolution, communication and client expectations, and communication and good job performance.

Regarding communication and project management expectations, interviewees stressed the importance of timely communication. As one interviewee said, Indian technicians “know how to communicate, but they don’t communicate in a timely manner” (#10). By this the interviewee meant that Indian technicians need to learn to communicate potential delays in a project well before a crisis point, so project management means managing risks--potential risks and unexpected risks--to ensure projects are delivered on time, even if the schedule has to be adjusted.

Communication also pertains to dispute resolution, which entails negotiating. As one interview observed, “When you work with people, you’ve got to work with people and be able to negotiate.” (#5) Effective managerial communication requires working with people to affect resolutions to human conflicts.

Another dimension of communication outside the group related to client expectations, which translated to client satisfaction which was connected to increased productivity. “One of the most important things is managing the client expectations,” noted one interviewee. “That’s the number one thing.” (#3) And managing client expectations means producing excellent work on time, so clients want high productivity, and they want the manager “to come back with
positive and constructive feedback of the direction that particular project is taking.” (#3) They want effective communication.

Allied with client expectations was the role of communication and job performance. The manager must be able to say “no” to constituents within the company who foster scope creep, so soft skills or people skills do not require affirmation of everyone’s ideas. When those within the company, for example, want the manager’s team to take on work that does not fit the team’s objectives, the manager must say “no,” which is a positive communication skill. By saying “no” to others, the manager is saying “yes” to the team. As an interviewee said, “One unique skill, one thing I look for in my management is the ability to establish boundaries, to very nicely and clearly establish boundaries. Because if you don’t, your team cannot rely on you to protect their interest, their work-life balance, their growth and career.” (#5)

Lastly, interviewees noted the importance of improving their image and self-assessing their abilities to be a manager by (1) being proactive, (2) changing mindset, (3) asking for work, (4) informally managing people, and (5) acclimating to corporate culture. The image technicians groom for track-switching is the image that will demonstrate they are management ready.

In their view, the first part of grooming that image is was being proactive. One interviewee said this about being proactive, “You just cannot be sitting at your desk and put your head down and say, ‘I’m going to do a good job. People will notice or they won’t.’ So performance, exposure, all that.” (#6) This interviewee explained the necessity of not simply believing that a technician’s work will speak for itself. The quality of work is vital, but technicians must create an environment where they are exposing the value of the work.

Additionally, technicians recognized the need to change their mindset about how they think about their work, including taking initiative. For one interviewee, this meant making “the
In effect, this interviewee was saying that a technician focuses on doing excellent technical work. The manager focuses on how to help team members do their best work so that they desire to be active participants of the team.

The technicians also pointed out the need to ask for work, an outcome of being proactive. Asking for more work is a signal that a technician is engaged in the project beyond the individual level and is demonstrating an interest in promoting team effort. Managers look for technicians who enthusiastically volunteer to do more because such volunteering demonstrates the ability to think and act like a manager.

Another way interviewees suggested technicians groom their image is by informally managing people. The logic of demonstrating people skills by informally managing people was stated by one interviewee who said, “You get the job done by working with people, influencing them without being their direct manager. . . . You can influence people who are not reporting to you, so, hence, you should be able to influence people who are reporting to you.” (#6) Another way to informally manage people to groom image is by mentoring others. One interviewee attributed mentoring as a way that helped the interviewee to become a manager: “I think management picked up on the fact that I was being proactive in having mentoring relationships, putting together mentoring circles. That helped me get into that leadership role.” (#12)

Interviewees also noted that each company had its own corporate culture. Therefore, participants were cognizant of the importance of cultivating an image that acclimates to corporate culture. Because there was no written rules for a particular corporate culture, the technician must learn to assimilate to the culture. One interviewee said it this way: “You start learning the intricate rules of the company, what works, what doesn’t work. Nobody puts it on a piece of paper and tells you this is what it takes for you to be a people manager. These are the
people you need to network with. These are some of the unwritten rules of behavior you are expected to exhibit.” (#6) So creating an image for track-switching entails understanding what kind of behavior or mindset managers in a company culture are looking for. The interviewees advised technicians aspiring to a management position to carefully consider whether they would fit in a particular culture because if there is not a fit, it will be difficult to make a successful transition into management. As one interviewee noted, “It’s going to be very difficult for you to get those positions where you manage others because they’re looking for people who can instill the culture in others. If you’re not a culture fit, you’re not going to make it. That’s OK because you’re better off going and working in a company with a culture fit.” (#6)

Although Sub Question A did not ask for data about training programs, interviewees offered such information spontaneously, and because that information was in the context of unique abilities required for track-switching, I included a discussion about training programs under Sub Question A. Five of the fifteen interviewees mentioned training programs. One interviewee discussed training in India prior to coming to the U.S., and stated that the training was a two-day orientation program that did not address communication skills. In fact, prior to coming to the U.S., this interviewee felt “. . . pretty confident about the way I was communicating. Then, once I reached here I could reflect on ordering a hamburger at the McDonald’s. They were not able to understand me, so ha ha it was kinda funny. Over a period of time, I made friends who are Americans, and even though we communicate with each other at times, they would ask me to repeat whatever I had said. So I got confused, and I had to ask whether they are trying hard to understand my pronunciation.” (#1) Another interviewee spoke about training the interviewee had within a U.S. company using the PIE model: Performance, Image, and Exposure. Three other interviewees sought training outside of the work environment.
and found Dale Carnegie courses and online courses. One of the three interviewees mentioned professional development training, but did not specify what that entailed. As pointed out by the participants, formal training offered by these companies that employed these track-switchers was limited.

**Sub Question B**

**Sub Question B: Why did you want to become a manager?**

I grouped interviewees’ responses to Sub Question B into three categories: always wanted to be manager, management is a natural progression in my career path, and management offered new challenges and responsibilities. Five interviewees said they always wanted to be a manager; seven said being a manager was the natural progression in their career path; three said being a manager provided them with new challenges and responsibilities. I categorized the motivations of those who always wanted to be a manager into: following a game plan, being able to influence people, becoming a manager as part of Indian culture, and fulfilling a larger role.

The first group of interviewees, those who always wanted to be a manager, said having a game plan for track-switching meant not just dreaming about being a manager. As one interviewee put it, “I used to dream about being a manager, but not just dream, I worked toward it.” (#7) Being able to influence people was another reason given for those who always wanted to be a manager. “I’ve always been a people person, and having the ability to mold and shape people is what gets me excited every day” (#12) is the way one interviewee talked about influencing people, and other interviewees indicated agreement. Another motivation was shaped by Indian culture, where being a manager was “a big deal,” according to one interviewee. This interviewee went on to say that in India, most technicians “had dreams of becoming a manager and go up higher in the ladder. I had those dreams, too. I always wanted to be a manager. I
always wanted to be a leader.” (#7) Other interviewees who always aspired to be a manager saw the manager as being in a position to fulfill a larger role in the company because managers have more authority to make decisions and have a greater scope of responsibility.

A second group of interviewees saw management as a natural progression in their career path. I divided the responses of this group of interviewees into three categories: Interviewees who self-identified themselves for a management role, interviewees whose work circumstances convinced them that they fit a management role, and interviewees who made a change in employment in order to track-switch. Those who self-identified themselves as potential managers did so because they saw a growing interest in working with people. Those whose work circumstances convinced them that they fit a management role had tangible evidence that their work was expanding to include management responsibilities. One interviewee stated that managing projects and a team “sort of just fell into my lap.” (#4) Another interviewee said, over time “It was a natural progression into a project management role and a very gradual one, from a tester to a developer to a senior developer, team lead, project lead, so the responsibilities were growing.” (#10) And as the responsibilities grew, so did the management duties, until the interviewee was no longer working half time as technician and half time as manager but full time as manager. Of the two interviewees who were motivated to track-switch because of a change in employment, one changed from banking to retail before track-switching and found retail more exciting than banking, so the interviewee moved up to management. The other had reached a ceiling in career mobility at the company where the interviewee worked, so the interviewee sought another environment to expand the interviewee’s skill set and move into management.

The third group of interviewees stated that their motivation for track-switching was because management offered new challenges and responsibilities. As one interviewee said, “The
company has given me a lot of challenges, and I’ve loved doing it. This is the only sport I play. I’m very passionate about making things different for our customers, for our shareholders, building great businesses. That’s what got me to the management roles.” (#5) Another interviewee was proud to work for a company with a noble mission of saving people money so that they could live better lives. This interviewee was motivated to help people. Yet another interviewee found that being a hardcore technical person failed to challenge anymore. “So you reach a point where you need something bigger than that,” the interviewee stated. “That’s primarily when my journey for leadership began.” (#8) This interviewee went on to note what a mentor advised, “It’s a bigger challenge and the satisfaction when you get things done through others” and the interviewee found that to be true, and for the interviewee, “the satisfaction is completely immense” (#8).

**Sub Question C**

**Sub Question C: How did you take advantage of or create opportunities to become a manager?**

I created two categories for interviewees’ responses to Sub Question C: opportunities within the organization for which they were employed and opportunities with another organization. In addition, interviewees talked about the role of mentoring in their track-switching, so I included mentoring in this question. Interviewees prefaced their insights about opportunities by reinforcing the necessity of a good professional reputation. As one interviewee noted, “I have to say reputation plays a huge part. There is no way that I can deny that. The more you can deliver the things you have promised, the more you are able to tackle all the unexpected issues that land on you—all those crises that you have faced and how you have tackled them—
these are the things that people tend to notice. Once they feel you are able to lead a team, they will definitely promote you to that level.” (#3)

With the prerequisite of an excellent professional reputation established, interviewees talked about opportunities within the organization that employed them, and their unified perspective was that track-switching was a natural, organic development. Typical of interviewees’ comments was, “It was just the work that grew larger, and my supervisor and I thought that we needed to build a team to be able to do all the work that the business needs, and I was a natural fit to be able to lead the team because I was in the role, and she thought I would be able to lead the team as well.” (#2) Another interviewee noted that although the interviewee had the title of manager, the interviewee didn’t manage people, but “With a lot more time and exposure to the field and the industry, I had a few people reporting to me, and then it just transitioned into a very smooth management job.” (#9) One interviewee succinctly noted that track-switching “just happened naturally.” (#10)

In two cases, interviewees left one organization to track-switch in another organization. Those opportunities came about through networking, including, in one case, a recruiter contacting an interviewee through a LinkedIn profile and, in the other case, a contact within the company to which the interviewee moved. In both cases, the interviewees wanted to explore new options, and in one case, the path to a management position did not seem feasible within the current company.

Unexpectedly, I found that in answering Sub Question C, interviewees talked at length about the role of mentoring in track-switching. Essentially, mentoring is a form of networking, and 7 of the 15 interviewees lauded the value of mentoring in track-switching. I categorized interviewees’ comments about mentoring into five sub-topics: selecting a mentor, locating a
mentor, interacting with a mentor, benefiting from a mentor, and being a mentor. Interviewees also prefaced their comments about mentoring by discussing reciprocating in mentoring. In other words, the mindset a mentee should have is that the mentor-mentee relationship should be mutually beneficial. One interviewee described mutuality: “For me, the ones that I’m mentoring or people I mentor with, hopefully it’s always a two-way street where you learn and grow together with what you bring to the table. Mentoring shouldn’t be a take, take, take situation. It needs to be based on what you want to grow on.” (#12)

Participants advised that when selecting a mentor, the mentee should have clear career aspirations, should respect the mentor, and should be inspired by the mentor. In terms of clear career aspirations, one interviewee advised, “If you have an idea of what you want to grow and develop on, seek out people who have that same skill set you admire or look up to, that you know you can learn from.” (#12) In addition, the mentee should respect the mentor, and the mentee should be inspired by the mentor. One interviewee remarked about inspiration, “I look for people who inspire me. I look up to them and try to learn things from them. The way they do business. The way they think about doing business or the way they run large teams. The way they lead multi-functional, cross-functional teams in organizations or just in markets.” (#5)

In answering the question about where a mentee can find a mentor, the consensus was that the mentee should be responsible for reaching out to potential mentors and can do so by actively seeking mentors. “Perhaps attend meetings where they’re at or if they’re speakers at different events try to go there to understand a bit more about who they are and try to build that relationship yourself. But it has to be based on a mutual relationship, too. The mentor has to see how they can best support you as well.” (#12) According to interviewees, access to leaders was not a particular problem, beginning with a potential mentee’s own supervisor. In one case, an
Interviewee started a mentoring circle that ultimately attracted mentors. The interviewee took the initiative to hold Saturday morning meetings at a library to discuss among fellow technicians aspects of the company so that they could get a global view of the company’s work. This mentoring circle led to managers being asked to speak and giving advice about track-switching. Interviewees acknowledged, however, that mentors need not be limited to the technician’s current employer. Mentors can be recruited from other companies, and, in fact, mentees might desire several mentors with different areas of expertise, and mentees would keep in contact with mentors when either leaves a company to work elsewhere. Having mentors from both inside and outside the company I called blended mentorship.

Once a mentee has found a mentor, the next issue the interviewees commented on was how to interact with mentors. In general, mentees used their mentors as sounding boards, to help provide advice about a variety of work-related issues. Participants also recognize that mentors can provide networking opportunities, as one interviewee said, “They have also helped me connect with other people. For example, if I say I want to work on communication, they know somebody that is a really good example of good communication, so they would help me connect to that person and say, ‘Ask them how they work through this journey.’” (#2)

Because mentees were able to interact so positively with their mentors, the interviewees mentioned several ways in which they benefited from the interactions. Most of them were particularly emphatic that mentors provided encouragement that boosted confidence. As one interviewee noted, “He [the mentor] trusted that I was doing my job. I would go to him with the important stuff. That trust relationship that you build with them kind of feeds your confidence, so that when they come back and say, ‘Hey, I know you can do this,’ it kind of complements each other.” (#3) But mentees also learned how to think about being a manager. In one case, a mentor
helped the participant learn about office politics. The mentor was savvy about office politics, and she covered the mentee’s back. The mentee learned that such support is very helpful in being a manager, and that part of the managerial role is to deflect disruptive office politics from the team. Another mentee learned an allied lesson, the value of managerial humility. This mentee’s manager stated publicly to the CEO that the manager’s subordinates worked with him, not for him. They worked together as a team. For this participant, humility became a critical component of managerial team-building. The value of mentorship not only in promoting track-switching but also in enriching managerial decision-making was affirmed by interviewees when they talked about the long-term relationships they had established with mentors that enabled the interviewees to continue seeking advice about work-related issues.

Often times, one outcome of participants being a mentee was, in turn, to become a mentor, and interviewees talked about their roles as mentors. Again, a value of mentoring was that it promoted professional development, as one interviewee pointed out in explaining an opportunity to mentor a junior employee in learning how to develop a five-year plan for her career. Mentoring others also functioned as a gateway to track-switching for some interviewees. One interviewee, because of interest in people, developed mentoring circles before becoming a manager, and “From there, I think management picked up on the fact that I was being proactive in having mentoring relationship, putting together mentoring circles. That helped me get into that leadership role.” (#12) As these interviewees found, mentoring is both about giving and receiving, so mentoring is a reciprocal process of mutual benefit to both mentee and mentor.

Sub Question D

Sub Question D: How did the climate at your work influence your decision to become a manager?
Interviewees’ responses to the question about work climate could be grouped into two categories. The first was barriers in the work climate and the second was supportive mechanisms in the work climate. Interviewees cited four barriers in the work climate: learning how to deal with people, communicating in English, being transparent in human relations, and avoiding favoritism and jealousy in office politics.

The first barrier was changing from a technician’s role to a manager’s role when it came to interacting with people. Technicians tend to use a direct approach when dealing with people; managers often use a more nurturing approach. One interview contrasted the two approaches: “I’m very direct. I speak my mind. Sometimes that can be perceived as—you know I have a technical background, so if you think about it we don’t know how to fluff things up very well. We are about facts and data and systems and such. That can be viewed as not caring, striking the balance of the perception of being a nurturer but also a facts-driven person. So that’s the balance that you have to drive, that I had to drive, which became a hindrance for myself just because of my mindset and my background.” (#2)

The second barrier was communicating in English, due to the fact that, as one interviewee pointed out, English is the common language in India but not the first language, as it is in the U.S. An additional issue is that the English taught in India is generally British English, so diction became a problem. Speaking in public can also be a barrier. As one interviewee noted: “So the people like me, we never even spoke in front of anyone in India, even at work. So all of a sudden that is a big thing for us. Moreover, in our culture we are taught to be humble, don’t speak in front of others, so often times we are very timid. So communication is a hindrance.” (#8)

The third barrier was transparency in human relations. One interviewee pointed out that as Indians or Asians in general, “. . . we hesitate in talking about ourselves,” (#2) but in the U.S.
leaders are expected to be open and transparent. “But when you’re talking about leaders,” this interviewee continued, “you’re talking about your whole self. What are your values? What are your beliefs? How do you live your life and how do you inspire others to live your life? So that is one of the barriers that I had to break.” (#2)

The fourth barrier was avoiding favoritism and jealousy in office politics. A problem of track-switching is the cult of favoritism, where a person is hired because he or she has a relationship with another person in the company. As one interviewee described the inner circle, “It’s usually not a very formal process. It’s sort of like being the cool kids in high school. You’re either in or out. A lot of times it feels that way. I’ve had people tell me that. You’re either part of the inner circle or you’re not.” (#4) Interviewees also noted that being promoted to a managerial position can cause some people to be jealous of your achievement, especially if your promotions happened faster than was normally expected. Another consequence of unsavory office politics is that “Some people try to pull you down.” (#7)

Interviewees noted that the responsibility for addressing barriers rested on the technician who sought to track-switch because barriers will always exist and the technician who can negotiate barriers is demonstrating skills managers possess. One interviewee noted, “Any work environment in any company is never 100% aligned to your way of working and the way you want it to be. Based on that, you should be able to work yourself in a less than 100% work environment. You should be able to move things along even if the work environment is not 100% conducive to the way you want it to be.” (#13)

Interviewees also commented about supportive mechanisms in the work climate that focused on developing talent, shadowing, and working with leaders. One interviewee noted that the company for which the interviewee was employed provided ample opportunity to develop
one’s talent. One action stood out: giving challenging assignments regularly. Another interviewee noted that shadowing a manager primed the pump for managerial responsibilities. Another interviewee said the opportunity to work with leaders at work prepared the interviewee for track-switching by being able to learn more about the organization and how the managers operated. As this interview noted, working with leaders “gave me an opportunity to learn many things, come in contact with many different leaders within the organization.” (#11)

Sub Question E

Sub Question E: What were the elements in your life outside of work that influenced your decision to become a manager?

It is important to recognize that the interviewees in my study came from a particular strata of Indian society where family is a vital aspect of the cultural ethos. Family, for these interviewees, was the seedbed where professional aspirations were planted and nurtured. As one interviewee noted, “Many of my colleagues and friends . . . we all come from a similar background where the expectations are very high. . . . So that expectation was set at the very initial stage of my life, always do better.” (#15) Another interviewee confirmed the ingrained cultural mandate for high performance: “As Indians, like you’re driven to be A+ students every day for no matter what, and if you get a B it’s not good.” (#12)

The expectation of high achievement was supported in the family and among friends. For example, family members modeled professionalism. As one interviewee noted, “. . . it’s with the people you hang out with and you see people in your family who have been successful, who have done well in their fields, and you notice the way they work and behave every day in their lives. . . . I must say that I have been influenced by exceptional people in my family as well as friends.” (#3) Family members not only emphasized the value of education but
also were credentialed themselves. One interviewee’s father had a master’s in accounting and finance and the mother was a mathematician. Another interviewee saw professionalism modeled by the interviewee’s father: “I saw my dad manage people a lot growing up. People reported to him. He was a sales manager, a sales director, and he runs his own business right now. It must have subconsciously played into my confidence or something like that.” (#4)

Family, including colleagues and friends, also provided encouragement regarding the interviewees becoming professionals. One interviewee noted, “It’s always the five people who you mutually hang around with that contribute to your thought process and the things that you do . . . . Usually, my friends and colleagues and family were supportive enough and all of them were looking forward to bringing up a career and aspiring and trying to help society, so education played a very high, important role.” (#1) As another interviewee remarked:

My parents have always been very supportive of me, encouraged me to continue to grow in my career. And when I thought about what my career meant, for me to grow and feel good about what I was doing, to give back because that has been a big theme within our family . . . we’re put on this earth to give and serve others. Leadership was where I could fulfill that from a professional standpoint. So within our family that was always a theme that helped motivate me and encourage me. (#12)

Support comes not only from an interviewee’s family of origin but also from spouses. As one interviewee said, “I have a very supportive family, which I have to have to work many long hours. So when you transition, change is difficult and you’re working harder at a lot of things, understanding the culture and you start managing people, and when you’re facing that, it’s a huge change. An understanding family who gives you that extra time, understanding that this transition point is very important. . . . A good relationship at home and people you can tap into is very important.” (#6) Another interviewee extolled his wife: “For the past 15 years, she has been one dearest friend who would listen to my stupid questions and stupid thoughts. . . . So she was
always there to share in my difficult times and good times. . . . the major motivation factor was my wife.” (#7)

Family also provided counsel. For example, one interviewee said fatherly advice helped shape the interviewee’s life and understanding of management: “. . . my dad has been a big influence on my life. He always said, ‘Have a big heart. So let people get benefit out of your credit. Share your credit; share your knowledge; don’t try to withhold information, but be authentic, be yourself.’” (#5)

Family also inculcated the value of community service. As previously noted, one interviewee said the family was taught that “we’re put on this earth to give and serve others,” and that theme resonated throughout the interviews. One interviewee noted that community service benefited the interviewee’s management career:

Being part of a non-profit organization helped me immensely . . . . with my leadership, but I’ll tell you when you’re a leader of a non-profit organization and working with people, it’s easy to get things done at work because of your direct relationship and all that. But outside in the non-profit everyone is a volunteer, and everyone’s thinks they are doing it and holding them accountable. You can’t be authoritative; it’s all by request. Even the small things they do, you have to thank them for it. You’ve got to get things done. So you learn to be patient. It taught me perseverance and also holding people accountable. It also makes you not think about yourself. You become more selfless. That helped me be a leader. (#8)

Another interviewee attributed sibling professional contributions to parental upbringing: “. . . we [my sister and I] are professional contributors who are giving back to the professional environment. That’s how our parents have raised us. My upbringing is solely based on how they raised us, and I think I bring pieces of that to work every day of how I care for folks that are on my team or where I work with.” (#12)
Conclusions

This section discusses the findings of this study in relationship to other relevant research. As mentioned in chapter two, I looked at two bodies of literature for this study. One related to track-switching and the five factors I explored in this study, which I adapted from the Cummings and Schwab (1973) model. The other body of literature examined the career advancement of highly-skilled Indians in the U.S. As I pointed out, the two bodies of literature did not fit together or overlap. In this section, I compare what my participants said about the five factors (abilities, motivation, opportunity, work climate, and environment) that influenced their track-switching with what I found in the literature on track-switching. I also discuss how my findings relate to the very limited body of literature about the career advancement of Indian professionals in the U.S.

As a reminder from chapter two, the literature I reviewed said virtually nothing about track-switching for non-native speakers, such as Indians. The literature on track-switching had as its audience native-speaking professionals who have been born and raised in U.S. culture. There was no mention of other cultures or the unique needs for track-switching of those who come from other cultures to work in a U.S. company and track-switch. The body of literature that examined the career advancement of highly-skilled Indians in the U.S. did not pertain to my interviewees because that body of literature deflected the problem of the glass ceiling for Indians by noting that the answer to limited career advancement was entrepreneurship, a topic that was never raised by my interviewees. In fact, 14 of my 15 interviewees were solidly settled in a corporate environment that could be characterized as following a typical corporate business model. The one interviewee who worked for a startup was in the position of being on the ground
floor of a business that flourished, as the interviewee’s role in the company quickly turned into
managing people. Taking this into account, I arrived at the following conclusions:

1. To track-switch, Indian technicians need to have abilities that are also
   recognized in the literature on track-switching.

As mentioned in chapter two, the major abilities the literature on track-switching
discussed are: technical expertise, effective communication, ability to adopt a global perspective,
the ability to work with people and their unpredictable behavior, and the ability to motivate
others. The participants in this study confirmed that those abilities also helped them to track-
switch. When discussing communication, participants described how communication must be
used to work with people, both within a team and outside the team, and how it can be used to
motivate others. In the literature on track-switching, communication is often listed under the
need for soft skills and can include managers listening to their subordinates, but it does not
include the various way communication can be used (such as to motivate or influence others).
Perhaps because participants were non-native English speakers, they were particularly aware
of how their communication was used to help them track-switch in a U.S. company. Pandey and
Pandey (2015) discuss the critical need to prepare Indian youth for a global career by training
them in the use of soft skills. They give a comprehensive view of communication very similar to
how my participants described the importance of communication in various aspects. As Pandey
and Pandey (2015) remark:

Soft skills are learned behaviour with focused application that teaches the effective use of
English (Language of worldwide communication), team building, leadership, time
management, group discussion, interpersonal skills, career visioning and planning,
effective resume writing and deals with placement consultant and head hunters. . . . It
aims at the holistic development by fine tuning the learners’ attitudes, values belief,
motivation, desires, feeling, eagerness to learn, willingness to share and embrace new
ideas and inculcates futuristic thinking. It empowers learners with adequate ammunition
to face corporate battles and challenges. (74)
Participants in my study discussed communication skills in a way that was similar to the Pandey and Pandey (2015) description. The literature on track-switching does not address a non-native English speaking population or offer a more extensive look at how communication can be used in various ways to help track-switch.

Participants in my study also confirmed that changing a mindset from a technician to a leader of people, one who can see the bigger picture and work with people not just machines, was an important ability. In addition, the results from this study showed that participants emphasized that portraying an image of being management-ready and communicating it to their supervisors, was an ability that helped them make the transition into management. This is something that the literature on track-switching did not stress, although it is addressed at times to decision-makers (Huff, 2010; Badawy, 1995).

2. Obtaining a leadership role was the main motivation to track-switch. The literature on track-switching most often discusses “career advancement” as the primary motivation to track-switch. Although career advancement is not always defined, monetary reward and career satisfaction are the two factors most often associated with career advancement (Arnolds & Boshoff, 2002; Badawy, 1995; Badawy, 2002; Igbaria, Parasuraman, & Badawy, 1994; Lazaroiu, 2015). Badawy (1995) notes that technicians often view obtaining a management position as one of the only viable means to advance in their careers and to earn a higher salary. However, in my study, participants clearly stated that being in a leadership role and managing people was the main motivation for wanting a management positions. Because career advancement is ambiguously defined in the literature, it is difficult to determine whether my findings are consistent with that perspective.
The literature on Indian career advancement in the U.S. suggests that one outcome of the glass ceiling that highly-skilled Indian immigrants experience is that they become entrepreneurs to get ahead economically (Chand, 2012; Fernandez, 1998; Kumar, 2013; Varma & Rogers, 2004; Varma, 2009; Varma, 2010; Varma, 2011). However, only two of my participants alluded to a glass ceiling as one reason for moving to another company, but even those two track-switched after the move. None of my participants mentioned monetary reward as a motivation to track-switch.

3. Mentorship was a key factor in having the opportunity to track-switch. Opportunities for technicians to transition to a management position are generally aided by mentorship, management/leadership training programs, and/or the company’s own performance and promotion process (Little, 2016; Manikutty, 2005; Matthews, 2013; Meyer, 2017; Plakhotnik, 2017; Sillett, 2015; Watson, 2001). Seven of my fifteen participants confirmed that mentorship played a key role in creating opportunities for them to track-switch, including helping my participants navigate cultural issues. However, for the most part, cultural issues from the perspective of a non-native speaker are not addressed in the literature. Norkeh’s (2006) dissertation is an exception, focusing on the mentoring of foreign-born managers. Although his population was not targeted towards highly-skilled workers, his was the only study I found that took culture into consideration. He found that through mentoring, foreign-born managers were more likely to get promoted and to stay on the job longer than those who did not have mentoring. My participants also seemed to agree that mentoring was an important influence for them to track-switch.

4. Work climate can foster track-switching. The results from this study agree with the literature that work climate is an important factor for track-switching. However, the two major
factors that influence an employee’s view on work climate in the management literature are managerial leadership and the organization’s reward system (Chaudhary, Rangnekar, & Barua, 2012; DeConinck & Moss, 2016; Hu & Liu, 2017; Lazaroiu, 2015; McCall et al., 1988). None of my participants said anything about the company’s reward system. What they did say is that the company’s leadership offered them challenging assignments so that they could grow professionally.

5. **Company training was not a critical component of track-switching.** Except for one participant who mentioned that he had learned about the PIE (Performance, Image, Exposure) model from a previous company, none of my participants said anything about training programs within their company that helped them to make the transition into management. Only five out of fifteen participants even mentioned training programs that helped them track-switch. That does not mean that training was not an important influence in their transition, only that participants found informal ways of getting the training that they needed to prepare them for track-switching, such as online courses, books, and informal learning sessions. The types of ways and programs the participants mentioned were quite diverse so it was not possible to assess either how effective any program was in these participants’ transition into management or how effective any program would be in preparing any technician for a management position.

6. **Family ethos was a vital factor in track-switching.** Although family is an important environmental factor that influenced participants to track-switch, I could find no literature that looked at the factors outside of a technician’s work that may influence their transition into management. In this study, family ethos was vital in grooming participants to track-switch. I was surprised to find nothing in the literature about how technicians’ families influenced their track-switching.
7. The literature on track-switching is culturally myopic. A major finding of my study was that there is virtually no literature that addresses the needs of Indian technicians who wish to track-switch in the U.S. However, as my participants mentioned, they often had specific needs and found training programs outside of the company to meet them. Several of my participants mentioned that they wanted to track-switch either to become an example for other Indians or because Indians had served as an example of how to successfully track-switch. Varma (2011) does note the disconnect between U.S. and Indian culture when scientists and engineers seek management positions in U.S. companies. She says, “Due to apparent differences in leadership style, accent, communication skills, stereotypes, and appearance, managers rank Whites ahead of Indian scientists and engineers” (p. 279) in terms of being equipped to be decision-makers or taking on leadership roles in a U.S. company. Varma is a leading researcher in the field of highly-skilled Indian workers in the U.S., and her research is probably the closest that comes to discussing cultural differences in management styles, yet even she has not reported on a study on Indian track-switching in the U.S.

Limitations

In reviewing data for this study, several limitations emerged. These were:

1. The size of my sample, although sufficient for my study, could be profitably increased to yield more data about the questions I raised.

2. Because only three women participated in the study, the particular perspectives of Indian women who track-switch were underrepresented.

3. My study did not collect data to determine how long ago an Indian manager had track-switched. From interviewee’s comments, it is clear that some participants have been manager for many years and some have been managers for fewer years. It would
be valuable to compare and contrast how track-switching has or has not changed over the years, especially because Indian technicians now make up a significant part of the U.S. highly-skilled immigrant workers. Some managers discussed breaking barriers for other Indians by track-switching, and now that there seems to be a critical mass of Indian managers, further research could determine what barriers continue to exist and what new barriers exist, if any.

4. Another limitation was not differentiating generational differences among interviewees. Those interviewees who have served as managers for many years seemed to have a different perspective on management than those interviewees who represented another generation.

5. In discussing the role of family in supporting track-switching, I did not differentiate between an interviewee’s family of origin and spouses and children. Most of the interviewees talked about the formative values instilled by the family or origin, while some talked about the support from spouses.

**Recommendations for Improved Practice**

To improve the track-switching process of Indians working for a U.S. company in the U.S., I offer the following recommendations that could benefit U.S. companies:

1. There needs to be better training and orientation programs for Indian technicians who wish to track-switch in the U.S. These programs should focus on providing comprehensive soft skill training, English language training that focuses on idiomatic expressions, public speaking skills, and accent reduction, as well as a course on management communication styles in the U.S.
2. Companies should have a list of training resources that Indian technicians can access outside of the company. These resources could include online courses, conversation partners, books, and informal learning sessions.

3. Although the Indians I interviewed emphasized their need to adapt to U.S. culture, U.S. companies too should be more aware of the needs of their Indian employees, especially the important role that family plays in their career aspirations and their work values.

4. U.S. companies should recognize the strong community service value that many Indians have and tap into it to promote Indians to positions where they can mentor, train, and give back to the community. U.S. companies can also tap into the community service value by finding ways to promote the company through various community events.

5. U.S. companies should take an active role in promoting mentorship programs not only for Indian employees but all minority employees.

6. U.S. companies need to clearly outline their promotion process and give all employees a comprehensible plan for how they can get into management positions so that the promotion process is clear and fair to all employees.

7. U.S. companies would do well to have their own manager-in-training program that looks for management-ready technicians to promote to management positions.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

The research I conducted provides data for understanding key factors related to the successful track-switching of Indian technicians to management position. This research could be extended by future research, and here are my recommendations for that research.

1. Mentoring played such a significant role in track-switching, future research could look at the role of confidentiality in the mentor-mentee relationship. To what extent
can a mentor or mentee divulge work-related information without violating either company policy or precepts of confidentiality. The participants I interviewed sought out mentors they could trust, but what does that mean in terms of confidentiality?

2. It was not clear in my study whether mentors tended to be other Indian managers, so a study that would look at the nationalities of the mentor-mentee relationship could help determine whether Indian mentees gravitate toward other Indians as mentors or whether nationality is not an important part of the mentee-mentor relationship.

3. Family was a crucial factor in the formative development of Indian technicians who track-switched, and in some cases spouses were also highly valued as supporters of their manager spouse. Is the support spouses provided due, in part, to their nationality? Spouses from an Indian origin would presumably have cultivated the same ethos of their manager spouses, and thus their support would be natural. But what if an Indian technician married a non-Indian spouse. Would the non-Indian spouse naturally accept the same role of support as the Indian spouse?

4. A study of women Indian technicians who track-switched would enlarge data about their particular needs and barriers to track-switching vis-a-vis Indian men.

**Closing Statement**

The best part of doing this research and writing this dissertation has been interviewing my 15 participants. Truly, they are extraordinarily professionals with high ethical values and a strong commitment to family and community service. Although Indian technicians make up a majority of the highly-skilled immigrants in the U.S., their experience has not been sufficiently explored. It is imperative that just as Indian technicians take responsibility for learning about their host country, U.S. companies should perform due diligence in educating themselves on the
needs and barriers that face their Indian employees, especially when it comes to career advancement in their companies. I hope that this study will help to provide a roadmap for other Indian technicians who aspire to track-switch in the U.S.
References


Appendix A

MEMORANDUM

TO: Rose-Marie Speck
Jim Hammons

FROM: Ro Windwalker
IRB Coordinator

RE: New Protocol Approval

IRB Protocol #: 16-03-663
Protocol Title: On the Right Track: Exploring Influences Contributing to Successful Track-Switching of Indians Working for a U.S. Company

Review Type: □ EXEMPT □ EXPEDITED □ FULL IRB

Approved Project Period: Start Date: 04/15/2016 Expiration Date: 04/14/2017

Your protocol has been approved by the IRB. Protocols are approved for a maximum period of one year. If you wish to continue the project past the approved project period (see above), you must submit a request, using the form Continuing Review for IRB Approved Projects, prior to the expiration date. This form is available from the IRB Coordinator or on the Research Compliance website (https://vpred.uark.edu/units/rscp/index.php). As a courtesy, you will be sent a reminder two months in advance of that date. However, failure to receive a reminder does not negate your obligation to make the request in sufficient time for review and approval. Federal regulations prohibit retroactive approval of continuation. Failure to receive approval to continue the project prior to the expiration date will result in Termination of the protocol approval. The IRB Coordinator can give you guidance on submission times.

This protocol has been approved for 20 participants. If you wish to make any modifications in the approved protocol, including enrolling more than this number, you must seek approval prior to implementing those changes. All modifications should be requested in writing (email is acceptable) and must provide sufficient detail to assess the impact of the change.

If you have questions or need any assistance from the IRB, please contact me at 109 MLKG Building, 5-2208, or irb@uark.edu.
Appendix B

Exploring Influence Contributing to Successful Track-Switching of Indians Working for a U.S. Company

Consent to Participate in a Research Study

Principal Researcher: Rose-Marie Speck

Faculty Advisor: Dr. Hammons

As an Indian manager working for a U.S. company, you are in an excellent position to share your experiences that will help other Indians obtain management positions. Your participation in this study would greatly help me by providing your insights into what helped you become a manager.

Your participation in this study includes a video recorded online 60-90 minute interview, and then a review of your interview transcript. So, you will have the opportunity to see exactly what information you have provided for me to use in the study.

Your participation in the research is completely voluntary and confidential. You are free to refuse to participate in the interview and to withdraw at any time. All information collected will be kept confidential to the extent allowed by law and University policy. In the event of any publication or presentation resulting from this research, no personally identifiable information will be shared.

If you have any questions about the study, please contact Rose-Marie Speck: [rspeck006@uark.edu]. You may also contact the University of Arkansas Research Compliance office if you have questions about your rights as a participant, or to discuss any concerns about, or problems with the research. Ro Windwalker, CIP, Institutional Review Board Coordinator, Research Compliance, [irb@uark.edu].

INFORMED CONSENT

By signing below, I agree to participate in this study. I confirm that understand the purpose of the study as well as the potential benefits and risks that are involved. I understand that participation is voluntary and I consent to take part in the research.

__________________________________________________________________________

(Name)                                                                 (Date)
Appendix C
Interview Protocol

1. From your perspective, what unique abilities helped you to make the transition into management?

2. Why did you want to become a manager?

3. How did you take advantage of or create opportunities to become a manager?

4. How did the climate at your work influence your decision to become a manager?

5. What were the elements in your life outside of work that influenced your decision to become a manager?