It was noted in Chapter 2 that some chief executives sought to establish clear guidelines covering their relationship with the leader soon after appointment (indeed, occasionally, during the appointment process itself), although at this stage in the relationship, such guidelines typically covered role definitions rather than behavioural issues, plus particular concerns of the chief executive, such as the relationship with the opposition party or parties. Others chose not to raise such issues explicitly, preferring to see how the relationship developed, and to rely on a mutual informal understanding of these guidelines (although occasional explicit negotiation was seen to be required).

Over time, all chief executives will find themselves analysing this most crucial of relationships and seeking to develop a way of working (backed by a set of mutual understandings) which enables them to do a good job as the key strategic manager of the authority. In particular, although the functional (‘who does what’) elements of the relationship can be established fairly quickly (and in some circumstances there will be a strong case for doing so) the behavioural framework of the relationship will inevitably take longer to establish, and may never be the subject of an explicit discussion. It will develop gradually as the two individuals experience a range of situations which generate responses (implicit or explicit) from one or both, which contribute to a growing understanding of the behavioural dynamics of the relationship.

In the development of the relationship (from the chief executive’s perspective) there is a sequence of issues which will need to
be addressed (although in some circumstances they can be dealt with relatively easily). The sequence is as follows:

- What needs to be resolved urgently?
- Gaining an understanding of the political context within which the leader operates (including the extent to which the designated leader is in fact the ‘real leader’)
- Developing an ability to ‘read the leader’.

Once a satisfactory modus operandi has been achieved, it is helpful to explore the relevance of the marriage metaphor, which was used in one way or another by several of the chief executives interviewed. The leader/chief executive relationship is like a marriage … or is it?

**What needs to be resolved urgently?**

Even for chief executives who are inclined to allow a relationship to develop organically, there may be issues they feel it is imperative to identify and resolve at an early stage. One example is provided by the chief executive who sought an assurance from his leader that the majority group would withdraw from micromanagement (see Chapter 2), an assurance which was not in the event put into practice.

Several chief executives identified their relationship with opposition groups as an issue that required early resolution.

*Soon after I arrived, I realised that there was a long tradition of the chief executive ‘telling the opposition nothing’ …. I’ve always thought that this was unacceptable, and I made it clear that I wanted to brief opposition leaders when I felt it to be appropriate to do so … there was some resistance from the Labour group, but not from the leader, who accepted the principle.*

Other chief executives confirmed that briefing opposition groups was a point of principle for them. Some had experienced resistance, some did not.

*I insisted on briefing the opposition leader, in the face of reluctance on the part of the coalition leaders … we had disagreements about what the*