Do Middle Managers Contribute to Their Organisation's Strategy?

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Abstract

This paper presents an empirical study on the contribution made by middle managers to the development of strategy in an organisation. The data was collected using semi-structured interviews with middle-managers and top-managers in companies large enough to have the middle management layer in the organisational hierarchy. The data was analysed using a qualitative approach. Previous studies in this field were found to be wide and varied. An early study by Mintzberg (1978) found that strategy mainly forms from emergent influences at middle and lower levels of the organisation, as well as from deliberate influences emanating at the top. In the same year Miles and Snow (1978) subsequently declared that not all organisations have the same level of strategic management activity. This research found that the most common role for middle managers is to implement deliberate corporate strategy. The synthesis of information appeared to be the only area where middle managers exerted a restricted upward influence. These findings would appear to conflict somewhat with those of a seminal study by Floyd and Wooldridge (1992) who developed a typology of middle managers roles in strategy. They suggest that middle managers have the potential to exert both upward influence on top managers and downward influence on operational level managers. Porter (1996) argued that managers who operate beneath the top strategic level lack the perspective and the confidence to maintain a strategy. He claims the middle level managers' main role is tactical, not strategic. This would appear to concur with this present study. Other themes that emerged in this research regarding middle managers contribution to an organisation are also evident in the literature. These include middle manager's soft skills, their political astuteness and the ability to use power well. All research participants in this study agreed that the possession of excellent 'soft skills' by middle managers was a hugely important aspect of their role. They felt that these soft skills were essential for the smooth execution of strategic change and implementation. These findings concur with Hardy (1996) who argues that to overcome the shortcomings regarding an organisational strategy, middle managers must be capable of acting politically and using their power. Hardy (1996) declares that power is needed to orchestrate and direct actions that are crucial to the realisation of strategic goals within organisations. Similar declarations were made by participants of this study. One additional interesting interpretation of this study was that it appears desirable that middle managers are 'effective followers' as described by Kelley (1992) mainly because of their position in the organisational hierarchy. The author claims that effective followers and effective leaders are often the same people playing different roles at different parts of the day. It seems that the main contribution by middle managers to strategy development, primarily implementing deliberate strategy, should not be seen as a lesser task than choosing the strategy in the first case. It appears from this study that middle managers can, and do, make a significant contribution to the strategic development of an organisation. However, contrary to declarations in the literature, the findings would appear to conclude that middle managers have little influence on the choice of strategy adopted by their organisation. It may be that not every middle manager should aspire to be top managers because their own role as middle manager is unique in itself and therefore has a very important place within the structure of an organisation. A wise middle manager, acting with integrity and possessing the necessary soft skills can pave the way for a smooth transition of strategic change and implementation which may be crucial to the outcomes of their organisation.

1. Introduction

The role of the middle manager in organisations has been the topic of much research over the past number of decades. Many articles have been published claiming the potential for middle managers to contribute significantly to strategic development. This research has attempted to test the validity of this theory. It is based on a qualitative study involving semi-structured interviews with four managers in different organisations. It explores the possible contribution of middle managers to strategic development within an organisation.

2. Literature Review

Before this piece of research was commenced previous work and research pieces on strategy and the role of middle management was examined. Strategy is defined by Mintzberg and McHugh (1985) as a '*pattern in a stream of decisions or actions*' and also by Johnson *et al* (2008, p3) as the '*direction and scope of an organisation over the long term, which achieves advantage in a changing environment through its configuration of resources and competences with the aim of fulfilling stakeholder expectations*'.

Well over thirty years ago seminal work done by Miles and Snow (1978) claimed that there was indeed a marked difference in strategic management activity within different firms in a single industry. They devised a typology identifying four strategic orientations that exist within a specific industry. Each of these types has its own strategy for responding to the environment, and each has a particular configuration of technology, structure, and process that is consistent with its strategy. They classified firms as belonging to the Defender, Prospector, Analyser, or Reactor type. They expected more middle management activity and opportunities to exist in, what they call, Prospector-type organisations. In a subsequent piece of research, Floyd and Wooldridge (1992) developed a typology of middle managers roles in strategy which built on the Miles and Snow (1978) typology of strategic management activity in firms. Two of the types identified, Championing Alternatives and Synthesising Information, suggest that influence can extend upwards in an organisation while the other two types, Facilitating Adaptability and Implementing Deliberate Strategy, suggest that influence is extended downwards in an organisation. The authors view strategy as a process in which middle management activity combined with top management intent creates strategies that are realised.

2.1 Middle Manager/Organisational Strategy

Two of the leading protagonists in the area of strategic thinking, Michael Porter and Henry Mintzberg, appear to have opposing views on the importance of middle-managers in terms of the overall organisational strategy. Porter (1996) argues that the 'top table' must *choose* an appropriate strategy and be disciplined in sticking to this *choice*, perhaps with a time frame of a decade or more. He claims that the middle-level manager's main role is tactical, not strategic, and as such much of the resources at middle-management level should be spent on improving the operational effectiveness of the organisation. Porter (1996) argues that improving operational effectiveness in individual activities is a necessary part of management, but it is *not* strategy. Strategy is long-term, overall, and visionary, and is about how the top-level managers *combine* the activities (strategic 'fit'). He argues that from the choice perspective, the role of middle managers in the formulation of strategy is limited to providing input. The primary role of middle management from his perspective is therefore implementation of strategy. This point of view was in direct contrast to earlier work by Mintzberg (1978) who outlined the importance of middle management by claiming that separating strategy formulation from strategy implementation imposes a false division of work between top managers (i.e. thinking) and other organisational members (i.e. doing).

Mintzberg (1978) conducted two investigative studies on the strategy of two organisations, namely the strategy of Volkswagenwerk between 1920 and 1974 and the strategy of the United States Government in Vietnam between 1950 and 1973. He claimed the aggressive, proactive strategy-maker at the 'top table' can under some conditions do more harm than the hesitant, reactive one. Mintzberg made the case for 'social learning' whereby realised strategy forms from emergent influences at middle and lower levels of the organisation, as well as from deliberate influences emanating at the top. Interestingly, it could be argued that the world today is such a different place, politically, socially, and technologically than that of Mintzberg in 1978 but maybe his case for 'social learning' still holds. On the other side of the coin, 'choosing' a particular strategy and sticking firmly with it, has proved to be very successful for companies like Ryanair and Aldi.

2.2 Strategic Learning

Mintzberg and Waters (1985) introduce the notion of '*strategic learning*', where managers learn from the experiences of their own organisations. This leaves the door open for emergent strategies to be identified. Implicit in their argument is that middle managers can have an upward influence on strategy formation. Top level managers, who are away from the day-to-day varied activities of the organisation, can surrender control to middle level managers who have the information, current and detailed enough, to shape realistic strategies. Of course, it is very important for the culture of the organisation to support such upward influence; otherwise suggestions will fall on deaf ears.

Because of their position in the organisational structure, middle managers possess (legitimate) power. Politics is 'power in action' and middle managers need to be able to use their power effectively to assist the organisation reaching their goals. Hope (2010) conducted an eight month qualitative case study on a Nordic insurance company, with 4,500 employees, which demonstrated the tight coupling between *power*, *politics*, *sensemaking* and *sensegiving*. The study examined an organisational change to the structure of a company division, which has approximately 350 employees. The findings of the study were that middle managers disagreed with senior managements change initiatives and the study described some of the tactics they used to delegitimize their opponents. The middle managers applied divergent actions to achieve an alternative decision than the one intended by senior management, as they had a completely different perception to the right way of organising the business. In this specific case, the divergent tactics by the middle managers led to a successful strategy being developed.

2.3 Emergent Strategy

Boyett and Currie (2004) conducted a case study on the acquisition by Digicel of a mobile phone licence in Jamaica in 2000. As a result of the study, the authors were able to establish that the middle managers in the organisation did not accomplish the four clear strategic objectives set by the firm's executive management. Instead, they collectively orchestrated an emergent strategy which included championing a hierarchical structure instead of the flat and flexible organisation structure that was the norm for most businesses in Europe. In this case, the company's foreign adventure has been very successful. It must be said, however, that maybe the company got lucky.

Another example of middle managers contribution to a successful emergent strategy was identified by Burgelman (1994) in a longitudinal field research. He identified how an Intel Corporation exit strategy evolved with strong influence from middle managers. The senior managers were reluctant to 'let go' of the product that 'made Intel' (Semi-conductor Memory) because they had an emotional attachment to it but middle managers were able to shift scarce resources into the microprocessor business without a preceding reconsideration of the official corporate strategy. Today, Intel is one of the largest microprocessor manufacturers in the world.

2.4 Soft Skills

An empirical study by Guth and McMillan (1986) showed that middle managers must be able to articulate their demands for the allocation of (scarce) resources. The skill of articulation is also brought to the fore in a study by Floyd and Wooldridge (1992) who claim that effective middle management activity is dependent on ability to articulate ideas, persuasion, and an ability to evaluate and interpret information that may influence senior management. A later study by Floyd and Wooldridge (1997) showed that middle managers appear to connect an organisations strategic levels and operational levels through mediation, negotiation, and interpretation.

Huy (2002) outlined the importance of middle managers role in managing emotions when an organisation is going through radical change. A wide range of emotions, including fear, anger, enthusiasm, and disappointment were felt by employees affected by the radical change. Huy (2002) argues that middle managers are structurally closer to their employees and so are more likely to be aware of their subordinates emotional needs than top management who are caught up with strategic issues.

## 2.5 Negative influence by Middle Managers

Some research has highlighted the potential for misuse of power by middle managers. For example, an empirical study by Guth and MacMillan (1986) provides evidence that middle managers who believe their self-interest is being compromised can not only redirect a strategy, delay or reduce the quality of its implementation, but can also even totally sabotage the strategy.

In attempting to shape how, and what, strategy will actually be implemented, middle managers can intervene in two ways, either by taking a position on an alternative strategy or resisting a strategy decision.

Kuratko *et al* (2001) demonstrated statistically significant relationships between middle manager entrepreneurial actions and a number of company performance indicators, including profits, growth in revenue, and growth in assets. The authors claimed that the entrepreneurial actions should be monitored and measured on an ongoing basis. The potential danger is that middle managers can often walk a fine line between clever resourcefulness and outright rule breaking as they seek to overcome internal obstacles to reaching their professional goals (Kuratko and Goldsby, 2004).

2.6 Leadership and Followership

There is much material on the role of leadership in the field of management studies. Kelley (1988) claims that organisational outcomes are significantly influenced by how well their leaders lead, but partly also on how well their followers follow. The author discusses the qualities found in effective followers, and they have a striking resemblance to those qualities that make a good leader. What distinguishes followers from leaders is not intelligence or character, but the role they play. Effective followers and effective leaders are often the same people playing different parts at different hours of the day. This is particularly significant in middle managers roles and skills as their unique position in the organisational hierarchy means that they are indeed both followers and leaders, where the literature suggests that they have both upward and downward influence. Followers are categorised by Kelley (1992) into one of the five types shown in Figure 1.
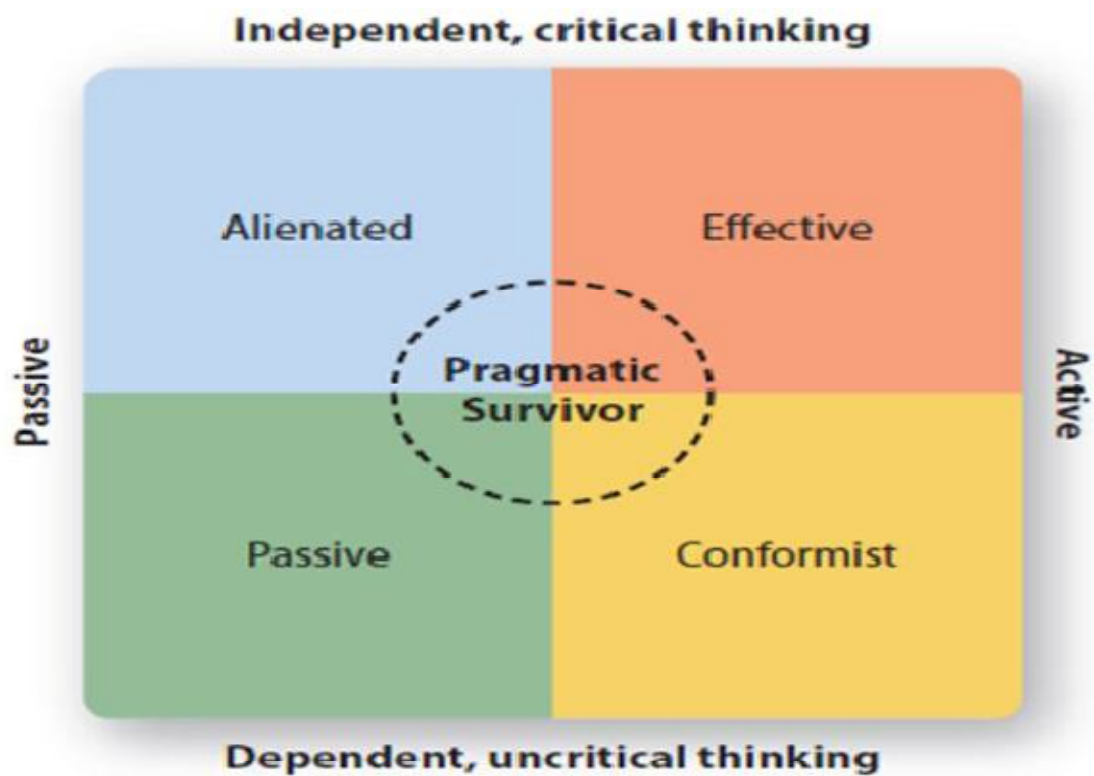
SOURCE: From *The Power of Followership* by Robert E. Kelley, p. 97, copyright © 1992 by Consultants to Executives and Organizations, Ltd. Used by permission of Doubleday, a division of Random House, Inc.

Figure 1: Styles of Followership (Kelley, 1992)

Table 1 summarises some of the literature describing the roles a middle manager has the potential to play and the skills required to play those roles in a modern organization

Middle Managers Roles and Skills in Strategic Development	Form of Involvement	Literature
Championing Alternatives	Upward	Floyd and Wooldridge (1992)
Synthesising Information	Upward	Floyd and Wooldridge (1992)
Facilitating Adaptability	Downward	Floyd and Wooldridge (1992)
Implementing Deliberate Strategy	Downward	Floyd and Wooldridge (1992)
Political Skills (Ethical Behaviour)	Upward/Downward Upward/Downward Upward/Downward	Guth and McMillan (1986) Hardy (1996) Hope (2010)
Soft Skills (Mediation, Negotiation, Interpretation) (Emotional Intelligence, Articulation) (Sensemaking, Sensegiving)	Upward/Downward Upward/Downward Upward/Downward	Huy (2002) Boyett and Currie (2004) Rouleau and Balogun (2011)
Influencing Organisational Outcomes (Entrepreneurship) (Followership)	Upward/Downward Upward/Downward Upward/Downward	Wooldridge and Floyd (1990) Burgelman (1994) Kuratko (2001)

Table 1: Middle Managers Roles and Skills

3. Methodology

This research was conducted utilising a qualitative approach. This approach was chosen because it was felt it would best meet the exploratory element of the study. Also, it was felt that the establishment of personal contacts by the chosen method of semi-structured interviews might have a more successful outcome. Initially, e-mails were sent to companies in order to establish contact and explain the purpose of the request. Their permission was requested to conduct the study within their organisation. Of those that responded, follow up phone calls were made and then four suitable companies were chosen for site visits to initiate the research. Semi-structured interviews were subsequently conducted with each participant organisation. The four interviewees were as follows: *two senior managers*, one a Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and the second senior manager is a Managing Director (MD); *two middle managers*, one a sales manager (SM) with an Irish-based subsidiary of a Multi-National Corporation and the second middle manager is a general manager (GM) of an Irish-base manufacturing plant, part of a Multi-National Corporation.

3.1 Validity and Reliability

Every effort was made to reduce bias in the study. Awareness of the constantly changing dynamic within an organisation was key, and the topics and issues in the questions put to participants were explored and probed from a variety of angles. The researcher was aware that responses reflected the reality of the given organisational circumstances and time that they were collected. Clarification was sought from participants regarding their responses and the researcher ensuring that themes explored were understood by the interviewee. Responses were documented and notes maintained meticulously which were read, re-read and examined by the researcher both during and subsequent to the data collection process in order to maintain vigour. Retrospectively, it was felt the preparation prior to conducting the interview was a key input to the process. The researcher ensured familiarity with the literature and all the available up-to-date data on middle management within an organisation. Familiarity with each chosen research site was also essential and credibility surrounding the entire project was promoted by supplying as much information as possible to each individual participant. The four semi-structured interviews were conducted between March 2012 and August 2012 in the work offices of each interviewee. Of the four participants, two held top management positions in their organisations and two held middle management positions in their organisations. Responses were recorded manually by note-taking. Arrangements had been made prior to the visit with regard to suitable date, time and location.

Confidentially and anonymity was assured and maintained throughout the process. All data is recorded as accurately and succinctly as possible and reflects a true account of the information obtained in the process.

3.2 Data Analysis

Following the interviews, transcriptions from the hand-written notes were entered into an electronic version. Initially it was envisaged that the data would be analysed using a deductive approach where it was hoped to follow a specific theory and framework regarding middle management and strategy from the literature. However, as the process evolved, it became clear that a more inductive approach to the data analysis might yield a truer picture of the research findings. This inductive analysis involved further exploration of certain themes and issues that were emerging from the conversations. Although time consuming, it was felt that this development of an informal inductive approach complimented the initial deductive approach and led to more in-depth analysis of the middle management experiences.

4. Study Findings

The findings are presented from various key management criteria that emerged during the course of the interviews.

4.1 Corporate Strategy – Perceived Value

The two senior managers interviewed (CEO and the MD), both based in Ireland, viewed corporate strategy as having an extremely important value to their organisation. They stated that without strategy, you have little direction to plan your business. The CEO preferred to use the word 'plan' rather than the word 'strategy'. The middle managers interviewed (SM and GM), both working for multinational subsidiaries, stated that they had some autonomy over the local strategy but they were conscious that they must 'fit' in with the overall group strategy.

4.2 Strategic Approach

One of the senior managers interviewed was the CEO of an organisation who adopted the low-cost strategic approach while the other senior manager was on the Board of Directors who adopted a differentiation strategic approach. They aligned resources of their organisations to ensure that these strategies were carried out. Both middle managers' interviewed belonged to organisations who adopted a differentiation approach. Both organisations merged and acquired other businesses to create a multinational empire of businesses.

4.3 Strategic Effectiveness

The MD said that the success of their strategy is measured by an increase in revenue and maintenance of margins. They look at the organisation's 'bottom line' and have a Key Performance Index (KPI) chart for each department so that any non-conformances or irregularities are highlighted, investigated, and corrective action taken where necessary. The CEO of the low-cost strategic organisation said that the financial accounts are the expression of the effectiveness of their strategy. If there are problems in the individual 'links in the chain' of their organisation, it will be reflected in their financial statements. The middle managers, SM and GM, worked with multinational organisations and both said that the financial accounts and an increase in market share reflected the effectiveness of the group strategy.

4.4 Strategy Development

The CEO and the MD agreed that middle managers in their respective organisations have a responsibility to roll out changes and improvements to their 'teams on the ground'. They see strategic activity as being at a senior level and only actions that will impact on middle managers departments are communicated and implemented. They see this 'implementation' role as being very important as they need to 'buy in all of their teams to any change'. The middle managers interviewed felt that they had some, small, autonomy to make local decisions but they must 'fit' with the overall group strategy, controlled by group headquarters. One middle manager, GM, said that he had some upward influence by way of writing his monthly report. This is approximately twenty pages of reports on production, defects, activities, and is sent to his superiors. The second middle manager, SM, also had some upward influence by writing his monthly sales reports and sales forecast to his site General Manager.

4.5 Skills

Soft skills are deemed to be very important attributes to possess for middle managers according to all the interviewees for this research. It was generally agreed that interpersonal skills by middle managers smoothes the way for effective change to take place. The GM described how he overcame the potential problems associated with huge changes to his manufacturing plant in the last couple of years, due to changes in the corporate strategy. He had meetings with union officials and when he sensed problems emerging, called a general meeting. At the meeting, he publicly stated his case, good points and bad points, and some of the factory workers questioned the decisions made. His soft skills were needed to convince people that change was necessary. The SM interviewed entertained senior group personnel on some of their business visits during which, the senior personnel saw first-hand the passion that the Irish workers had for the product that they were manufacturing and selling.

4.6 Political Role

It was noteworthy that both middle managers agreed that their role had a very important political aspect to it. They had to 'fight their corner' to survive in the overall group dynamics. The sales manager interviewed disagreed with the group sales strategy where sales are split up into different geographical areas. He believes that this decision is not helping the Irish subsidiary, although he agrees that it may be more prudent from a group strategy perspective. He made his business case to his superiors at senior management level and is awaiting the results of the outcome. The General Manager interviewed said that his organisational is a very political organisation, with many subsidiaries within the group competing against each other. Both the CEO and the MD placed less emphasis on the political aspect of the middle managers role. The MD said that only when middle managers are too close personally to the teams on the ground can it become challenging to enforce change or discipline when needed.

5. Discussion

(Direct quotes from interview respondents in italics)

This research reinforced the view of Porter (1996) that middle level managers' main strategic role is to implement deliberate strategy. As one respondent put it *"It is ultimately middle managers responsibility to roll out changes and improvements for the organisation"*, *"As there is constant change at the minute due to the influences of the economic climate, strategy is at a more senior level and only actions that will impact on middle managers departments are communicated and implemented"*. This implementation role is identified in the Floyd and Wooldridge (1992) typology as a 'Downward Influence', Table 1. There was less evidence presented by the interviewees of the other downward influence, facilitating adaptability, as described by the Floyd and Wooldridge (1992) model. While the two senior, Top Managers interviewed seemed to encourage strategic input from middle managers, there was limited concrete examples of middle management activity helping to develop the overall corporate strategy, contrary to the suggestions by Mintzberg and Waters (1985), one middle manager declaring *"our site specific strategy must always fit with the overall group strategy"*. The only small upward strategic influence of middle managers' was found to be in synthesising information. The middle managers interviewed declared that they have a duty to report on a regular basis, the outcomes of their roles to their senior bosses. *"I may have some influence in the form of a monthly report which is done to show a one page summary of production on our site, defects, and activities over any given month"*. The managers interviewed viewed this task as part of their job description. The similarities with Frederick Winslow Taylor (1856 – 1915) and his scientific management way of thinking are significant. The manager in Taylor's world was a mere supervisor, recording and reporting information with which top managers made decisions. Perhaps technology, and the challenging economic circumstances, has swung the pendulum back towards Taylor's description of management being 75% science and 25% common sense. Certainly the findings in this study appear to show that business strategy was definitely maintained or changed in accordance with the company balance sheet and not greatly influence by middle manager activity, *"Definitely the financials are the expression of strategic success, any weak link in our business is reflected in our financials"*. The Financial Controller in each organisation interviewed for this project appeared to have more control over strategic 'choices' than middle managers. Perhaps this is because of the tight financial constraints under which firms are operating at this economically challenging time.

There appears to be little or no evidence of horizontal influence executed by middle managers in this study, except for some competitive horizontal influence between middle managers, especially between other subsidiary managers in Multi-National Corporations (MNC).

The Multi-National Corporations who took part in this study seemed to operate in a more modular than hierarchical organisation structure and seemed to encourage a competitive ethos, rather than a team ethos, within the subsidiary members of the group. This has the potential to produce fault-lines between seemingly integrated organisational units as described by Balogun and Johnson (2004). As one middle manager in the study declared, *"We must always be fighting our corner to maintain our overall position within the group"*.

The study showed that middle managers did not feel that they could exert much upward influence and were constantly fighting their own corner, *"I see politics at work in the organisation constantly, I see sales strategy split into different groupings depending on the geographical locations, I also need to act politically myself when recruitment issues for my local area arise"*. This view is congruent with Hope (2010) who demonstrated the tight coupling between power and politics in organisations.

Managers also said that they had to use their power regularly to direct actions that are crucial to goals being met and organisational outcomes achieved, as described by Hardy (1996). At times this can be difficult, as described by one of the middle manager interviewees, *"A colleague had to be made redundant because they didn't possess the skills needed for their role"*. The decision to make their team member redundant required input from the whole team, including the middle manager interviewed. It was interesting that one of the other managers in the study (a Top manager) warned that "*middle management shouldn't come too close to the teams on the ground because it can become challenging to enforce change or discipline when needed*". This would seem to concur with Hope (2010) who revealed how middle managers influence the sensemaking of others by partaking in political action.

There was no evidence in this study to suggest that political savvy was used in a negative way as described by Guth and McMillan (1986) who claimed that middle managers can abuse their power even to the point of sabotaging a strategy.

Even though one of the interviewees disagreed with the corporate strategy on some issue, the middle manager didn't take a negative stance but instead came up with an alternative, instead of applying tactics to side-track the original strategy, *"I remember once formulating an alternative sales strategy myself contrary to the group strategy in order to keep the UK sales office open and it was considered"*. This demonstrates ethical corporate responsibility by the interviewee concerned but as warned by Kuratko and Goldsby (2004), there is a thin line between middle manager entrepreneurial activity and outright rule breaking.

A key finding of this research is that in order for effective political activity to take place, it is essential that middle managers possess the keen soft skills as expressed by Rouleau and Balogun (2011). One declared that in order to enable smooth change on the factory floor, *"I had to call a meeting and tell the workers the good and bad points of the events that were about to take place in terms of potential redundancy, this required honesty and firmness on my part"*. He stressed the fact that he told them the truth, good and bad, about the situation. During the meeting, he answered questions from the floor and he was convinced that this was a crucial exercise in his middle manager role. The change was implemented, not without some problems, but his soft skills certainly helped the situation. This finding is in agreement with Huy (2002) who revealed the important role of the middle manager in managing employees' emotions when the firm is going through major strategic change.

The socialisation role of a middle manager identified by Boyett and Currie (2004) was also highlighted as important by the interviewees in this study, *"I socialise with the Korean senior managers when they come to Ireland on business trips, they love the atmosphere in the Irish pubs and see how we are a passionate people and how this transmits to passion about the product we produce"*. Indeed all of the research subjects declared that social interactions within middle management were key and also contributed significantly to the smooth implementation of strategy.

6. Conclusions

The conclusions of this piece of research seem to indicate that middle managers can, and do, make a significant contribution to the strategic development in an organisation. However, contrary to declarations in the literature, the findings would appear to conclude that middle managers have little influence on the choice of strategy adopted by their organisation. The main contribution to be made appears to be in the implementation of the given strategy of the organisation.

Although this study is limited in size and the conclusions were drawn from the opinions of managers on a given day whose views and opinions might vary at another time and place, the findings would indicate that there appears to be a hugely important, but different role requiring a specific skill set for an organisations' middle manager, It is clear that this contribution should not be seen as a lesser task than choosing the strategy in the first instance, which is generally the remit of top level managers.

It is interesting to note that all four organisations who took part in this research belonged to the 'Analyser' type (Miles and Snow, 1978). This is possibly a result of the harsh economic external environment and if the research was carried out in more favourable economic times, then middle management activity in strategy development may see more activity in an upwardly influential role.

It may be that not every middle manager should aspire to be top managers because their own role as middle manager is unique in itself, and therefore has a very important place within the structure of the organisation. For an organisation to be successful and reach their goals, all managers must be capable of fulfilling their individual roles, be it on a top, middle, or operational level. A wise middle manager, acting with integrity and possessing the necessary soft skills, can pave the way for a smooth transition of strategic implementation/change, which may be crucial to the outcomes of their organisation.

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