



JÖNKÖPING INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS SCHOOL
Jönköping University

Middle Managers' Planning and Perceived Stress

Master's thesis within Business Administration

Authors: Petra Holm

Sara Johansson

Tutor: Ethel Brundin

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Author: Petra Holm
Sara Johansson
Tutor: Ethel Brundin
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Abstract

- Problem:** A hardening business climate all over the world has resulted in company downsizing, which in turn has increased the workload and created a more stressful workday for middle managers. This has developed a new pressure upon middle managers to manage their work days efficiently, and in order to do this they have to make good use of their restricted time. One way to handle this is to utilize more efficient planning and time allocation, which also might have an impact on middle managers' perceived stress.
- Purpose:** The purpose of this thesis is to describe and analyze everyday planning and its potential impact upon the perceived stress among middle managers in medium sized organizations.
- Method:** We use a qualitative method in this study and, in order to receive the information needed, ten middle managers from five different companies have been interviewed. The middle managers work at medium sized manufacturing companies located in the Jönköping region. The empirical material is analyzed together with the frame of reference which constitutes the basis for the conclusions.
- Result:** From the study it can be concluded that middle managers feel that it would be almost impossible to manage their work days without planning. All middle managers claim that they are in control of the work days, but it seem like it is often occurring that upcoming projects, assignments, or different unexpected occurrences instead control their days. The middle managers experience stress originating from both social and emotional stressors, and since the feelings of experienced time stress are often occurring, a conclusion may be that the middle managers perceived stress can be related to their planning.

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1 Introduction

In the introduction of this thesis we aim to introduce the issue of increased company downsizing due to a hardening business climate all over the world. Company downsizing often brings with an increased workload and more stressful work days for middle managers, and therefore we, in the background and the problem discussion, consider the possible outcomes of these new conditions. We also further narrow down this discussion by formulating our purpose statement.

1.1 Background

People today live with the conception that everything is constantly developing; the question is not how, but at what rate. This has contributed to an awareness with competitive companies and an appreciation of the importance of adapting to changes around the world (Tyrstrup, 2002). Additionally, new technological findings combined with different ways of thinking have created extra pressure on organizations (Kotler, Armstrong, Saunders & Wong, 2002). Adjusting to new conditions, however, is a lengthy procedure that requires good leadership, because leading an organization in change is one of the most difficult leadership obligations known (Yukl, 2002).

A consequence of the hardening business environment is a need of organizational downsizing, outsourcing, and efficiency savings (Worall & Cooper, 1995), which not only affects the organization as a whole in a negative way, but also influences the managers individually (Koslowsky, 1998). This will bring about an intensification of work, which is especially true in the case of middle managers, since it attributes wider roles of responsibilities, flatter structures, fewer middle managers overall, peer pressure to perform, and the need to keep pace with constant changes (Thomas & Dunckerley, 1999).

The changes affecting organizations and middle managers also bring with them a new and important need of planning since time has become an increasingly important variable in successful business performance. The different ways organizations manage time, for instance in production, sales, distribution, product development and introduction are directly connected to the organization's competitive advantage (Stalk & Hout, 1990). Even though managers of today most often are aware of the importance of time and the value of using time well, they often acknowledge a lack of time for future planning and, as a result, experience their work days as hectic and filled with quickly occurring problems in need of instant solutions (Tyrstrup, 2002).

Fact is though, managers, who constantly devote time to plan their workdays, sometimes experience the planning process as extremely unpredictable. Managers often have an appreciation of the coming days and weeks, but must constantly be prepared to face changes of already made plans (Tyrstrup, 2002). Since managers often find it important to continually measure their work to the overall business plan, they frequently get caught up in decisions regarding symptoms instead of core issues. In other words, instead of focusing on bringing the company forward, they focus on not let-

ting the company move backwards (Fairholm, 2001). This is also true in the managers' everyday planning, since empirical findings have shown that managers' work days often consist of the everyday problems of an organization, and the managers' attempts to find ways of solving them (Tyrstrup, 2002).

Managers, and particularly middle managers, who experience their work days as hectic and mainly focused on problem solving instead of forward looking plans, often refer to their jobs as stressful. Furthermore, difficulties in performing an assigned job, or time conflicts between different tasks, often lead to stressful responses (Koslowsky, 1998). Stress responses are often divided into two large groups, which are physically caused stress and psychologically caused stress. Physically caused stress appears due to a direct disturbance of the body from external factors whereas psychologically caused stress is a result of a person's emotional reactions to factors in one's environment (Albrecht, 1980). Increased work load is said to be negatively related to job satisfaction and positively related to, for instance, anxiety, depression, decreased life satisfaction, or sleeping disorders, which are all symptoms that might be avoided with better planning and less stressful work days (Wichert, 2002). Since stress-related illnesses seem to be a result of downsizing and efficiency savings, these illnesses can be said to be a symptom of how we as a society choose to run the economy, as well as structure, manage, and organize businesses (Worall & Cooper, 1995).

1.2 Problem Discussion

Since organizational downsizing, outsourcing, and efficiency savings today seem inevitable, it is important to learn more about the present business environment in order to make it easier for middle managers to cope with their new responsibilities and time limitations. Furthermore, according to Worall and Cooper (1995), the increasing organizational downsizing and work intensification has developed a new pressure upon middle managers to make well use of their restricted time in order to manage their areas of the organization efficiently. This contributes to the importance of efficient planning and time allocation, which in turn might have an impact on the middle managers perceived stress. The possible connection between middle managers' planning and their perceived stress is however yet to be determined, and therefore we have decided to further investigate this matter. In order to do so we need to investigate middle managers' everyday planning and their possible experienced feelings of stress, which inspired us to formulate the following purpose.

1.3 Purpose

The purpose of this thesis is to describe and analyze everyday planning and its potential impact upon the perceived stress among middle managers in medium sized organizations.

1.4 Definitions

In order to facilitate the readers understanding of the research and to avoid misunderstandings we wish to define two core concepts often referred to in this thesis. These

two concepts are the definition of middle managers and the definition of medium sized companies.

1.4.1 Middle Managers

The traditional definition of middle managers is, as stated by Franzén (2004), managers that both have managers above and below themselves in the organizational hierarchy. However, according to Davis and Fisher (2002) the concept of the middle manager is, today, unclear, which leaves that there is no generally accepted definition. Since we research middle managers in medium sized organizations we were not able to find enough middle managers who have managers below themselves in the hierarchy, and therefore we instead chose to adapt a definition of middle managers made by Witzel (1999). Witzel (1999) defines middle managers as managers below the top management that are responsible for executing instructions passed down the hierarchy, where the employees below the middle manager are not expressed as including other managers.

1.4.2 Medium Sized Companies

According to Olsson and Skärvad (2000) and Curran and Blackburn (2001) a company's size can be measured either by the company's turnover or number of employees. Since we among other things investigated middle managers planning and their interaction with coworkers, we find it of more interest to define the companies after number of employees rather than turnover. Therefore we followed the European Union's (2005) definition which states that medium sized companies have from 50 to 249 employees.

1.5 Disposition

Chapter 2 Frame of Reference: This chapter presents different theories mainly regarding managerial time limitations and planning, as well as occupational stress. The theories about occupational stress are used in order to cover the possible outcome of time limitations and poor planning.

Chapter 3 Method: The method chapter describes our scientific approach as well as our research approach. Furthermore, there is also a description of our research sample and how we present and analyze our collected empirical material in order to most efficiently fulfill the purpose of the thesis.

Chapter 4 Empirical Findings: This chapter reproduces the empirical findings coming from the interviews with ten middle managers in the Jönköping region. The empirical material contains information about the middle managers' everyday work life and how they look upon their planning and stress.

Chapter 5 Analysis: In the analysis chapter we present our interpretation of the gathered empirical findings with respect to the frame of reference. The analysis is divided into three main areas referred to as middle managers, planning, and stress.

Chapter 6 Conclusions and Final Discussion: The last chapter of the thesis provides the reader with a conclusion of the findings as well as a final discussion. The final discussion contains our final thoughts about the study, the limitations of the study, and recommendations for future studies.

2 Frame of Reference

In the frame of reference we present theories that we use, later on, together with our collected empirical material, in order to analyze and answer our stated purpose. We focus, in the beginning of the chapter, on different managerial roles and tasks, and secondly also managers' planning and time limitations. Since we in the introduction mentioned the possibilities of stress reactions as an outcome of an increased work load we also bring up occupational stress as well as its possible triggers and outcomes.

2.1 Middle Managers

According to Williams (2001) a middle manager's task today is to carry out change in management rather than to establish strategic visions and objectives. Livian and Burgoyne (1997) further argue that even if middle managers do not make big decisions they make many small ones that have significant value for the company. Furthermore, Livian and Burgoyne (1997) also state that recent studies have been performed showing that middle managers today have more enriching roles than ever before. Despite this, Dopson (1992) describes middle managers as characterized by very hard work, immense pressure, less security, and less promotion opportunities. Franzén (2004) however claims that the role of middle managers can be formed and experienced differently, and that it is up to the middle managers to decide if they want to become worn out and tense or to remain strong and calm.

Holden and Roberts (2004) claim that middle managers' work situation started to change during the 1980s. Likewise Livian and Burgoyne (1997) add that this change is a result of an increasingly developed information technology, increased competition, cost reduction efforts, and changed attitudes regarding authority in companies. These changes have conveyed a slimming process at all managerial levels and, according to Holden and Roberts (2004), resulted in middle managers' increased workload due to more complex and demanding jobs than before. Middle managers' new responsibilities include more control over budgets and human resource management activities, as well as a greater autonomy in their everyday operations. Furthermore, middle managers have gained more authority over people in their teams and departments, since they both have the power to employ personnel, promote them, and to decide salary enhancements and other rewards. Moreover, middle managers today are required to develop new skills and knowledge as well as accept new goals, standards, and values. All these changes can result, according to Holden and Roberts (2004), in long-term consequences for both the middle managers private lives and their careers. One reason for this is that it has become harder for middle managers to perform efficiently and that empowerment and larger workloads have created conflicts, tension, and contradictions in the middle managers' work. This development, in turn, has led to that some middle managers experiencing feelings of being overburdened and stressed as a result of their hectic work life.

2.1.1 Managerial Roles

Through the years, scientists have developed many different frameworks for recognizing and evaluating managers' behaviors and personalities. One particular method has been to evaluate the different roles managers either are forced into or choose to play in different situations. For instance, Mintzberg (1971) has produced a highly recognized and often reproduced study in this field, but the main focus regarding managerial roles in this study will be put on a study produced by Stewart in 1988. The reason for why we chose to address managers' different roles through Stewart's (1988) categorization is because she emphasizes issues in managers work life that are closely connected to the managers' everyday planning and the different organizational stressors they are exposed to. We therefore believe that we by analyzing the investigated middle managers based on these roles will add to our understanding of middle managers' everyday planning and its possible impact on their perceived stress.

Stewart (1988) aimed at classifying managers' jobs and tasks based upon how managers spend their time, and from that derived five managerial roles. These roles are of interest in this study since they imply that different managerial jobs may convey different levels of personal pressure due to differences in demand, personal interaction, and time pressure. The five managerial role groups that Stewart identified are *the Emissaries*, *the Writers*, *the Discussers*, *the Trouble-Shooters*, and *the Committee-men*.

The Emissaries

Managers falling under Stewart's (1988) description of *the emissaries* often spend a lot of time outside the company by visiting customers and clients, attending conferences, and interacting with people and not being with their co-workers. These types of managers often have longer work days, but, on the other hand, will profit from less fragmented work days and by not being so overwhelmed by sub-ordinates while being at their offices. Furthermore, this type of managers has much more personal time due to a lot of traveling and other time spent outside the office.

The Writers

The group of managers falling into Stewart's (1988) managerial role-category referred to as *the writers* mostly spend half of their work days reading, writing, and dictating, while the other half is dedicated to interactions with other people. Managers in this group however spend the least time attending group meetings and do most of their work inside their offices. It is also determined that the writers, on average, have the shortest work days compared to the other managerial groups.

The Discussers

Stewart (1988) refers to another group of managers as *the discussers* who, not surprisingly, spend the most amount of time in contact with other people by attending meetings and talking to colleagues for instance. However, managers in this group are more distinguished by the people they interact with than by the amount of time spend doing so. This is the case since the discussers interact with colleagues on the same level of the organization rather than with the subordinates, which clearly differentiates this group from the others.

The Trouble-shooters

The trouble-shooters have, according to Stewart's (1988) categorization, the most fragmented work days. These managers have hectic work days due to a massive amount of scheduled meetings and also have, in addition to that, a large number of upcoming, unscheduled contacts. Despite trying to plan their days, these managers still have to cope with crises and problems in need of fast solutions.

The Committee-men

Stewart (1988) also claims that the last group of managers undertakes the roles of *the committee-men*, and states that managers with roles fitting this category daily have a large amount of internal contacts. They spend a lot of their work hours in group meetings and discussions and have contacts horizontally and vertically in the organization, but do not have much interaction with people outside of the company.

2.1.2 The Complexity of Managerial Jobs

In addition to the research about different managerial roles, Stewart (1982) also researched the difficulties facing managers in their everyday work life. By doing so Stewart (1982) found a way of expressing the complexity of managerial jobs by creating a frame work upon which to look and investigate managers' different obligations. Based upon this research she states that managerial jobs consist of three categories referred to as *demands, constraints, and choices*.

Demands

Demands do not, according to Stewart (1982), refer to managers' job descriptions or what superiors think is important, but rather what managers really must do in order to fulfill their jobs. What actually needs to be done is determined by factors such as how personally involved the managers need to be in the work performed, and if there are any difficulties in the relationships with co-workers. However, external expectations and possible reactions upon unfulfilled expectations, as well as unavoidable bureaucratic procedures and mandatory meetings, may have an impact on the demands facing the manager.

Constraints

Stewart (1982) considers constraints to be the internal and external factors that limit the possibilities of managers to adequately perform their jobs. One of the main constraints is judged to be to what extent the manager's job is defined, and how the attitudes of subordinates reflect upon their willingness to perform their job. Other common constraints are limitations regarding resources and facilities, trade unions, the location of the companies, and policies and procedures.

Choices

According to Stewart (1982), choices in their work lives are managers' possibilities to differentiate themselves from others by performing assignments along their own will. It is up to the managers' choice which jobs that will be done and in which ways. The

main reason for deterring to what extent managers are facing choices in work is to what level the job is defined, since the broader the definition is the more choices the managers have.

2.2 Time and Planning

Worall and Cooper (1995) claims that due to managers' changing work environment, time has become a limiting factor in their everyday work life, which results in the fact that time restrictions and planning have become a more and more interesting subject to investigate. We will therefore now present the theoretical background to the issue of managerial time restrictions and planning.

2.2.1 Time as a Resource

Many researchers look upon time as a resource, but according to Friman (2001) time is not like any other resource. The main difference is that time cannot be stored like a product because it is constantly consumed in the management process, and since time is consumed at the same time it appears it is important to be able to optimize the available time frame. Friman (2001) also states that it is incorrect to say that managers actually manage time, since what they really deal with are the activities they can achieve within that specific time frame.

Stalk and Hout (1990), on the other hand, looks at time as one of the most powerful sources for organizations' competitive advantage and therefore emphasize the necessity of managers having knowledge about how to manage time well. Moreover, Fairholm (2001) claims that time can also be seen as a critical resource, but the planning of critical resources must be done wisely. According to Tyrstrup (2002) dealing with everyday problems is a task that frequently occupies managers' time, which has led to managers that are constantly complaining because the time available for questions of the future is insufficient. Furthermore, Tyrstrup (2002; 2005) states that the lack of time available for important tasks to be accomplished can be seen as a complicated chronological puzzle. Therefore, managers have to be aware of the importance of time and use it efficiently and for the right purposes. This may however, according to Tyrstrup (2005), be really hard to succeed with since managers not only work under a lot of time pressures, but also have to fight the fact that the majority of their time is scheduled.

2.2.2 Time Horizons

It is also a fact that humans know more about the upcoming days and weeks than they know about the following months or years, and the longer time horizon that is investigated the more uncertain it is as to what the future will bring, according to Tyrstrup (2002). Despite this the future is not more uncertain than the present, and time uncertainties are more or less consistent over time. However, unpredictable changes in life are often seen as pressuring and therefore often develop feelings of uncertainty.

Tyrstrup (2002) claims that managers often see their work days as chaotic since a normal day consists of handling tasks, actions, and events, all which occur at the same time. A huge dilemma is, therefore, for managers to divide their available time between these different tasks, and it is impossible to devote time for all of them at the same time, but none of them can be ignored for too long. Therefore, managers must often prioritize to deal with urgently occurring tasks, but according to Forsblad, Sjöstrand, and Stymne (1979), it is also important to devote time to make plans for the future.

2.2.3 Scheduled Time and Calendars

Lane and Kaufman (1994) state that the fact that time is scheduled is something that is very well known, but time is often scheduled differently in different cultures. For instance, in the USA, a business person is often considered to have a schedule that is driven by the clock, whereas other cultures may emphasize informal and unscheduled social time as essential components of business relationships. In one organization, time can be found to be well planned and scheduled, whereas in another organization time may basically flow in response to daily life. Based on research made by Trägårdh (1997) it is known that Swedish managers see planning as important and that they have relatively hectic schedules. Swedish managers also feel that they always are expected to have time to take part in different meeting constellations arising from both urgent and non-urgent situations. Both Trägårdh (1997) and Högberg (2002) further claim that managers are very controlled by their own calendars, and even though most managers do not appreciate this, they expect it as a necessary part of their work as managers. Furthermore, Trägårdh (1997) also states that without calendars and planning, managers would not be able to manage everything that has to be taken care of in the company

2.2.4 Managers' Planning

According to de Klerk (1990) a company's structure is the fixed working pattern for how activities are managed in the company. Selin (1998) and de Klerk (1990) further state that the better and clearer organizational structure a company has, the easier it is to plan activities and delegate tasks. Additionally, Forsblad et al. (1979) and de Klerk (1990) claim that in order to use work time most efficiently, managers have to be aware of the tasks' structure and the time that can be spent on each of the tasks. Moreover, it is important to have discipline, according to de Klerk (1990) also, to be able to set limits, prioritize, and never to diverge from rules.

De Klerk (1990) further argues that fixed time should be scheduled for constantly recurring tasks, and if managers run out of scheduled time for a certain task they should stop and continue next time there is time allocated for the same task. If managers continue to work on the task outside the scheduled time it will trespass and affect the next job on the agenda, and De Klerk (1990) claims that if time allocation decisions are not respected it is no use even to try to schedule time. Strict time and task distribution will only work if the amount of allocated time for each task actually is followed, and the benefits of following the planned schedule is that the managers

know what must be done and also that it will be done. Nevertheless, it is not only the time spent on permanent tasks that should be planned, but also time allocated for unforeseen and not yet decided tasks. According to Davidson (1978) there will be fewer interruptions the better the managers have scheduled their time. Furthermore, de Klerk (1990) also states that the more the managers and their subordinates respect the scheduled time the better it will work.

De Klerk (1990) claims that what actually has to be done in a company is always more than the managers have time to do, as well as that work will become easier and counteract stress if managers know the needed priority order of the tasks that needs to be dealt with. De Klerk (1990) also states that when the workload is heavy it can sometimes be better for managers to start with the task that creates the most satisfaction, and with the tasks the managers knows will be managed in time. After performing the first task the managers however can go on with more demanding and less satisfying tasks, and the result will be more contented and efficient manager.

Furthermore, according to Tyrstrup (2005), a plan expresses the expectations the manager had at the time the plan was made, such as for instance expectations of future possibilities to act and influence in different contexts. The plan also tells more about the time when it was created then it says about the future which it was meant to reflect and forecast. Therefore, it is important for managers to be able to handle unexpected and unforeseen issues since this is an immense part of a manager's job. Excellent planning has taken place if things look the same before, during, and after the planned event.

2.2.5 Urgent and Unexpected Situations

Tyrstrup (2002) claims that since both the everyday work and the management of long-term questions can seem unpredictable, it is hard to put into practice pre-planned approaches. Managers may have an appreciation of the coming day, week, or month, but they always have to be aware that things may change. It is also important that managers always are prepared to act with short notice on unexpected occurrences and that they are able to improvise in order to take care of urgent and unexpected problems. According to Tyrstrup (2005) many occurrences appear to be unexpected just because the managers, through planning, create expectations that do not happen. The managers, however, might meet their expectations, even though, perhaps, in a different way than they initially thought, and therefore create the thought that everything is unforeseen.

Tyrstrup (2005) further states that it is a fact that managers often have to improvise and take care of urgent problems which sometimes also lead to others that get the feeling that the managers are insufficient or have performed poor planning, even though it might be explained as a lack of time or resources. This is, however, still a failure in management since the managers failed in foreseeing the issue. Strategies and planning are some of the most important tools in management, but since normal working days often are non-structured due to contradictions and stress, strategies and plans do not always contribute to good management. The reason behind this is that strategies and plans are based upon what managers know beforehand, and thus the

hard work of implementing the strategies or plans has not yet gotten started. However, this does not mean that all planning is meaningless but is rather a question of accepting the dilemma of the need of goals, planning, and visions to be able to mobilize the expectations that help to make the business work.

As mentioned above, the world consists of a lot of insecurities and constant changes, and managers have to be able to handle activities that are going on within the company gradually and sometimes even after they have taken place. Tyrstrup (2005) argues that this is one of the reasons why managers always are very busy and always have some new tasks to take care of. All occurring issues of interruptions through constantly ringing cell phones and urgent needs of checking e-mail can create a very pressuring environment for the manager, which, as a result, often is perceived as extremely stressful. Furthermore, since managers are very busy and work under time limits, according to Simon (1987), mistakes are often made. In order to reduce such mistakes managers need to be able to have reliable knowledge about the surrounding environment, the company, and how to handle activities within the company. Ways to learn how to avoid mistakes made due to a lack of time can be gained from training and experience, but most managers still rely on their intuition and analytic techniques. Tyrstrup (2005) adds that not only do managers work under enormous time pressures, but they also have problems planning their own work time since most of their work days are already scheduled.

2.3 Stress

Managers planning and tight schedules might have an impact upon their perceived stress, and therefore occupational stress and the impact of stress on managers will be considered in this part of the thesis. This subject is of the greatest importance since Worall and Cooper (1995) argue that the increasing trend of company downsizings, which implies a change of work situation for a large number of middle managers, may have an impact on the overall health of the middle managers, and in the long run also the organizations' development.

2.3.1 Stress Definition

Stress is the body's reaction to outside pressure, according to Girdano, Dunsek, and Everly (2005). This is expressed as a combination of biochemical interactions in the human body as a biological attempt to adjust to pressure. The term "pressure", on the other hand, refers, by Albrecht (1980), to a situation with a possibly problematic outcome, which, by demanding immediate or future adjustment creates a stress response. Pressure is, therefore, a result of our environment, whereas stress is a result of how a person reacts to the pressure.

Furthermore, Newell (2002) states that stress is always present in human life to a small extent. Our natural stress is low and important to keep us going, but the stress easily increases depending upon different environmental factors that may be affecting the person. Stress created by outside pressure varies from person to person and is different in every situation. Even though some stress is natural and sometimes positive,

it is important to know that the higher stress that are developed, the higher the wear to which the body is exposed to.

2.3.2 Positive Stress and Negative Stress

Iwarson (2002) argues that humans are exposed to both positive and negative stress. Positive stress, referred to and introduced by Seyle (1976) as eustress, is an action enhancing stress that creates the extra energy and focus sometimes needed and, for instance, is often experienced by athletics when trying to create an extra competitive edge. A positive stress reaction typically does not last long, but, according to Iwarson (2002), is experienced as enhancing productivity. On the other hand and less constructive, is negative stress, which is also introduced by Seyle (1976) and referred to as distress. When a person develops distress, it often brings with it poor concentration abilities, performance anxiety, and inability to cope adequately with upcoming situations. Iwarson (2002) claims that situations when distress most often appear is when environmental strains are becoming to demanding, come too often, or last too long. Furthermore, according to Seyle (1976) humans experience their optimal stress level somewhere in the middle between eustress and distress.

2.3.3 Physically and Psychologically Evoked Stress

Albrecht (1980) states that stress responses can be divided into two large groups, which are referred to as physically caused stress and psychologically evoked stress. Physically caused stress appears due to a direct disturbance on the body from external factors such as a bacteria, extreme heat, extreme cold, wounds, cuts, fractures, drugs, or physical training.

However, the focal point in this thesis is stress responses that are psychologically evoked, and thereby a result of a person's emotional reaction to factors in one's environment. This kind of stress response is nowadays often seen as unnecessary and only complicating our lives, but historically it filled an important function as a survival tool. Albrecht (1980) has divided psychologically evoked stress into four different groups. These groups are *time stress*, *expectation stress*, *situation stress*, and *confrontation stress*.

Time Stress

In today's society there is a large focus on time, and most situations are based on schedules and deadlines. This often creates anxiety and a constant feeling that there is something in need of being done before a certain time. Another common feeling is also that time is running out, and that something terrible will happen when that has happened.

Expectation Stress

Expectation stress is most often seen as anxiety, such as a feeling of worry, when facing something unknown or frightening. This mostly results in a feeling of general worry, but can sometimes also result in anxiety attacks experienced as a feeling of an approaching disaster.

Situation Stress

Situation stress often occurs in situations when a person is feeling uncomfortable or scared. It might be a result of a danger of physical injury, but is most often based upon fear of other people's opinions, and the risk of a possible loss of status.

Confrontation Stress

Another often occurring type of stress is confrontation stress which might appear in connection to unpleasant interactions with other people. This is often the case when a person is going to meet someone, or several people, that the person dislikes or does not have any preset rules about how to interact with. In other words, confrontation stress might occur when traditional rules for personal interaction no longer apply.

2.3.4 Occupational Stress

Newell (2002) claims that there are not many work places or jobs that are inherently stressful, but may be perceived so due to how the workers experience the environment and react upon its different stressors. It is, therefore in order to investigate occupational stress, important to take into account not only environmental factors but also organizational demands, and how the worker experiences and reacts upon these demands. Karasek (1979) developed a Job Strain Model (see figure 2.1.1) which takes into account the collective consequences of the job demands, and how much personal control and decision making power the worker possess while dealing with these demands. These aspects of the job situation would, according to Karasek (1979), represent the amount of job pressure the worker is exposed to in the everyday work life.

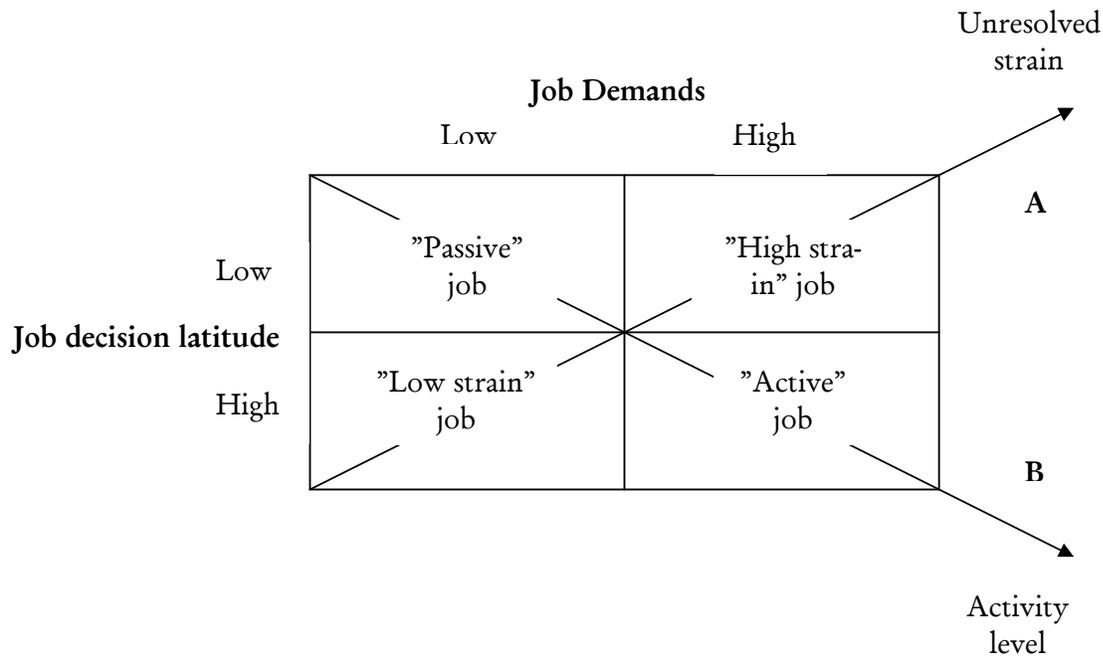


Figure 2.1 Job Strain Model (Karasek, 1979. p. 288)

According to Karasek (1979), job decision latitude is defined as a workers’ potential control over the tasks and responsibilities performed, such as their “decision authority”, and that job demands is a measurement for the psychological stressors involved in performing these tasks and responsibilities. Furthermore, job demands are also referring to stressors that are related to unexpected tasks and stressors originating from personal conflicts.

Karasek’s (1979) model therefore implies that job stress and dissatisfaction is the highest in jobs with high demands and a low grade of personal control and decision power, and consequently, the lowest in jobs with low demands and high job decision latitude. These assumptions are further explained with the prediction that, following diagonal A in the model, strain increases simultaneously with an increase in job demand and a decrease of job decision latitude. Secondly, following diagonal B, an increase in both job decision latitude and job demand does imply, according to Karasek (1979), an increased activity level giving possible development to new behavior patterns by the worker.

Newell (2002) has further developed Karasek’s Job Strain Model (1979) by stating that peoples’ perception of their job demands and their ability to face these demands is determined by the available resources for facilitating the job, as well as the social support the workers are provided with. With resources, Newell (2002) refers to both organizational and personal resources.

2.3.5 Occupational Stressors

Albrecht (1980) divides occupational stressors into social stressors and emotional stressors. Social stressors include all the workers social interactions, such as cooperation with colleagues, interactions with superiors, and meetings with clients and customers. However, there might also be other, more specific, disturbances, such as spectators during work or the necessity of continually reporting to supervisors. On the other hand, one of the main emotional stressors is the worker's perception and sensitivity to deadlines and time pressure. Furthermore, emotional stressors might also be how unsafe and dangerous the worker perceives the work place to be; if the worker might experience any personal economical risk associated with the job, or if there is pressuring personal responsibility for risky assignments at work. There may also be a feeling of expected failure or that someone else is expecting the worker to fail which often brings with severe stress responses since workers often feel that it might result in a loss of status or self respect.

Workers can also experience pressure which creates what Eriksson, Thorzén, Olivestam, and Thorsén (2004) refers to as moral stress. Moral stress might appear due to economical and technical reasons, which may imply that organizational goals are rigid and difficult to affect. The worker might be able to have some kind of impact upon the procedures to reach the goal but not likely upon the goal itself, which often is experienced as very pressing and thus creates a stress response.

Furthermore, according to Eriksson et al. (2004) being a part of an organization with strong regulations by rules often is also experienced as pressuring and therefore stressful. In such cases the organization often lacks flexibility and adjustment possibilities, as well as roles incoherent with the needs of the organization. In such situations the workers might find themselves in a dilemma, with no way open to satisfy both the regulations and the organizational goals.

2.3.6 Middle Managers' Stressors

In today's business world middle managers are especially exposed to stressors and the possible development of stress responses. The reason behind this, as stated by Worall and Cooper (1995), is that many firms are victims of downsizing, which often brings with it higher demands and pressure upon the middle management. According to a study made by Worall and Cooper (1995) the most frequently occurring occupational stressors were competitive pressure, the volume of work, and the existence of performance targets. These stressors can all be referred to as emotional stressors and are possibly sources of stress depending upon how the middle managers experience them. However, Albrecht (1980) argues that middle managers also react upon social stressors. Social stressors, according to Worrall & Cooper (1995), may be the pressure of relationships with colleagues, even though this is not occurring to the same extent

According to Livian and Burgoyne (1997), there are several reasons why middle managers experience an increased stress at work. This, among others, depends on an increased personal work load, such as demands from top management for higher productivity and better overall results. Some managers also experiences alienation from

top management creating stress by indicating less support from higher levels of the organization. Furthermore, other stressors might be government interventions and regulations ruling the managers' work procedures, and also the creation of different conflicts with colleagues and superiors deriving from multiple and higher demands. Lastly, there might be pressure upon middle managers to increase their skills and knowledge, sometimes even with new certifications as a demand.

Also Albrecht (1980) claims that the middle management position might be the most stressful position in a company and that one reason for this is that middle managers must satisfy people on all levels in the organization. Not only is it necessary to fulfill the organizational goals and follow the demands of the top management, but it is also middle managers' responsibility to listen to and respect the lower levels of the organizational hierarchy. This often creates a feeling of hopelessness and increases the pressure upon middle managers who frequently develops stress responses. Middle managers are often eager to succeed and fulfill the demands that are put upon them and therefore feel responsible if anything negative happens to their area of the organization.

2.3.7 Response to Chronic Stress

Eriksson et al. (2004) states that after a long period of chronic stress such as after a period of hard work on a pressuring position, both physical and psychological symptoms start to appear. It often starts with difficulties letting go of problems and relaxing, and there are commonly sleeping difficulties as a result. The person also gets easily annoyed and becomes angry, and due to tension in the body, physical aches might appear. According to Wichert (2002), a stress response may also take the form of experienced anxiety, depression, decreased life satisfaction, and sleeping disorders. Iwarson (2002) refers to this stage as the body's dejection phase, which implies slower heart rate, unstable blood pressure, sore and tense muscles, and a weakened immune system. Due to prolonged stress a person might also feel increased emotional sensitivity, have difficulties focusing, and experience a deterioration of the immediate memory (Eriksson et al., 2004).

2.4 Summary

With this summary we aim at mediating a picture of where we are positioned prior to our empirical research and analysis, and as visible in our frame of references, we have chosen to put emphasis upon middle managers' time and planning. It has also been made clear that we are emphasizing occupational stress as a possible outcome of time limitations and poor planning, which we will further investigate in our empirical study.

We state that it is very important for managers to manage their time well, since time is needed in every task and every project the managers perform. Therefore managers, even though most of their time is scheduled and their work days are hectic, must be aware of the importance of time and use it both efficiently and for the right purpose. We have also emphasized that it can be hard for managers to actually find time for all

tasks that have to be taken care of, and that if managers know the needed priority of the tasks that need to be dealt with, their work will become both easier and will counteract stress. Furthermore, managers would not be able to manage everything that needs to be taken care of in the company without their calendar or planning, which also shows that it is very important for managers to plan and use their time well.

We also emphasize that not all work places or jobs are inherently stressful, but that they often are perceived as such depending upon how the workers experience the environment and its different stressors. Therefore we are taking into account not only environmental factors, but also organizational demands and how the workers experience and react upon these demands. Furthermore, we are also bringing up Karasek's Job Strain Model, which is explained by Karasek's statement that occupational stress is a collective consequence of the job demands, and how much personal control and decision making power the workers possess while dealing with these demands. However, it has also been stated that the workers ability to face these demands is determined by the available resources for facilitating the job, and the social support the workers are provided with.

2.4.1 Research Questions

The performed literature study generated four research questions aimed at facilitating the performance of the study, and the fulfillment of the stated purpose. The research questions are divided into two main groups covering middle managers planning as well as their experienced feelings of stress, and the questions are formulated as follows:

Planning

What type of everyday planning do middle managers engage in, and to what extent?

To what extent do middle managers feel that they can control their work days through planning?

Stress

How do middle managers experience stress that originates from their work life?

How is middle manager's experienced feelings of stress interrelated to their everyday planning?

3 Method

In this chapter we justify our choice of a qualitative research approach, and also describe how we perform the study in terms of collection and analysis of the empirical material. We also emphasize the different methods used in order to ensure the reliability and validity of the research, as well as how we acted in order to efficiently fulfill the purpose of the thesis.

3.1 Theoretical Approach

The first thing we needed to clarify while presenting the method used in this thesis is our standpoint regarding the scientific approach of the study. While clarifying this we considered the two most dominating standpoints of scientific approach, which according to Carlsson (1990) are positivism and hermeneutics. These two scientific alignments are opposite poles of each other and most scientist's stand points can be found somewhere in between these two extremes. According to Alvesson and Sköldbberg (1994) the main difference between positivism and hermeneutics is that positivism is based upon the believe that all data and knowledge is measurable and can be referred to as concrete objects, whereas the hermeneutic approach claims that there is no absolute knowledge and that all empirical findings must be interpreted and understood. Therefore, in order to demonstrate the scientific standpoint taken in this thesis we found it important to further discuss positivism and hermeneutics and state which approach this study is based upon.

Alvesson and Sköldbberg (1994) argue that positivism represents the thought that data is something existing, and that it is the scientist's task to collect and systematize the data. The truth is, based upon these believes, what we see, and there is nothing hidden under the surface that we need to interpret and understand. The positivistic ideal research methods are those used in natural science, which, according to Carlsson (1990), also are the only methods that create true scientific results due to the strict research methods. Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill (2003) claim that studies, performed with a positivistic research philosophy, aim at investigating observable data which will be the basis for law-like generalizations. There is also an emphasis on highly structured research methods and quantifiable observations such as statistical observations interpreted without any value added.

The positivistic stand point, however, did not coincide with our intentions in this study since the presumptive outcome of planning on middle managers' perceived stress not only is based upon the subjects own understanding of their feelings, but also on our interpretation of their expressed feelings. Therefore this study could not be said to be based upon observable and quantifiable data and thus took on more of the hermeneutic scientific approach.

According to Carlsson (1990), the hermeneutic approach emphasizes the importance of the language as a means of gaining knowledge, and significant are also the concepts of understanding and interpretability. The hermeneutic thought concerning knowledge is that in order for knowledge to increase, it is important that people understand each other and have the same intentions. Everything we learn is based upon what

prerequisites we have, and is thus an outcome of our interpretation of our surrounding. Hartman (1998) claims that the hermeneutic scientist's intentions are to describe people's understanding of the world and the sense that they tie to different phenomena, rather than to describe the world. The scientist also wants to see association between humans and their appreciation and understanding of the world.

We believed that having hermeneutic as the main philosophical thought behind this study would guide us in creating the necessary knowledge and finding the most suitable method for fulfilling the purpose of this study. Since the hermeneutic approach, as stated by Hartman (1998) emphasis the scientists' wish to describe peoples' understanding of the world we were aware of that our background and knowledge maybe would influence the result. We therefore did our outmost to remain neutral while performing this study in order for the results to be as little affected by us as possible.

3.2 Research Approach

Before the collection of empirical data in a study it is important to consider which research approach, choosing between quantitative method and qualitative method, is the most suitable for the study (Patton, 1990; Olsson & Sörensen, 2001). Most essential, according to Patton (1990), is that the research method must match the purpose of the study, the questions being asked, and the resources available.

According to Saunders et al. (2003) all empirical material that involves numerical information or includes information that can be quantified and helpful to answer the research questions or meet the objective can be referred to as quantitative. Hartman (1998) states that a quantitative approach is appropriate when conducting research that contains numerical relations between two or more measurable characteristics. If the characteristics cannot be measured it is impossible to conduct a quantitative research. However, according to Bell (1995) and Saunders et al. (2003), in order for the quantitative material to be useful it has to be analyzed and interpreted; this can be achieved through different quantitative techniques like, for instance, simple tables or diagrams that show the frequency of occurrence through establishing statistical relationships between variables. A major advantage with the quantitative approach is that with a limited set of questions the opinions of numerous people can be measured. Patton (1990) adds that a quantitative approach also smoothen the process of comparison and the statistical aggregation of information.

As an outcome of our theoretical approach and the purpose of the thesis we, however, did not consider the quantitative research method to be suitable in this study. Since we gathered information about middle managers' everyday planning and perceived stress in their work life, we had to create an understanding about their personal thoughts and feelings. We believed that by using a quantitative method we would not have obtained the in-dept information needed and we therefore made use of a qualitative research method in this study.

According to Gummesson (2000) the qualitative research method can be seen as one of the most powerful tools for research in management and business subjects, which, according to Patton (1990), generates a very detailed and extensive description of a

small number of people and cases. Furthermore, Patton (1990) states that the advantage of this method is that it increases the understanding of the case and the situation studied. The reasons behind the better understanding of the situation studied in a qualitative method are that issues can be studied in depth and in detail and fieldwork can be done without being hindered by predetermined categories of analysis, which contribute to the openness and depth of the qualitative study. According to Strauss and Corbin (1998) the empirical material in a qualitative study is based upon the meanings that are expressed through written or spoken words or by observed behaviors. Furthermore, Saunders et al. (2003) claim that qualitative information cannot be collected in a standardized way. The reason for this, according to Strauss and Corbin (1998), is that its richness and fullness regarding feelings, thought processes, and emotions, never then could be captured.

After providing a description of the qualitative research method it is important to add that, according to Patton (1990), another reason for using a qualitative research approach is the flexibility created by the method. This was of greatest importance in our study since as our understanding of the subject deepened or the situations changed this method allowed us to develop and adapt new questions, which according to Patton (1990) is possible in a qualitative study and also helps the researcher to not get locked into inflexible designs that eliminate the interviewee's responsiveness. We gained a deeper understanding about the middle managers' everyday planning and perceived stress by performing a qualitative study, since interviewing the middle managers increased our knowledge about their personal feelings in a way that quantitative research could not do.

3.2.1 Interviews

According to Merriam (1994), interviewing is the most common way to gather information in a qualitative study, and the interview material is used to create an understanding of the problem being researched. Patton (1990) supports this by stating that the purpose of interviewing is to investigate other people's thoughts regarding the subject being researched and that interviewing is the most successful tool in a qualitative study.

According to Saunders et al. (2003) there are several different methods to choose between when performing an interview. Interviews can be performed on a one-to-one basis, meaning that only the interviewer and a single interviewee are present and are taking place face-to-face or over the phone. Another way of conducting interviews is through a focus group, where a small number of participants are gathered to discuss different issues documented by the researcher.

We decided to perform interviews on a one-to-one basis during a personal meeting, since we believed that this would create the most relaxed environment and thus provide us with the most detailed and open minded empirical findings. We, however, also needed to determine how to structure the interviews in terms of formalization and structure.

3.2.2 Structure of the Interviews

An interview can be highly formalized and structured which implies that standardized questions are used for each respondent (Merriam, 1994; Hartman, 1998; Saunders et al., 2003), but the interview can also be based upon informal and unstructured conversations. Furthermore, there is, according to Saunders et al. (2003), another form of interviews positioned in between structured and unstructured interviews having an intermediate position.

According to Saunders et al. (2003) the questions used during an interview can be based upon a predetermined and standardized set of questions, giving that the interview is referred to as a *structured interview*. Using this type of interview the interviewer read each question for the respondent on a standardized schedule, usually with pre-coded answers.

Both Merriam (1994) and Bell (1995) state that the purpose with interviews that are in between the structured and the unstructured interviews is to get certain information from all the respondents. The *intermediate interview* is controlled by some types of questions, but no exact wording or order is decided in advance. This makes it possible for the interviewer to adjust the interview to the information the respondent is giving. This also provides for the most commonly occurring interview structure.

Semi-structured interviews imply, according to Saunders et al. (2003), that the interviewer has prepared different themes and questions that will be covered during the interview. It is however important to know that these themes and questions may vary from interview to interview, and that it is also possible to add questions during the interview. Patton (1990) and Saunders et al. (2003) state that the information given by the respondent will be recorded by note-taking or by the interviewer tape-recording the conversation.

Unstructured and in-dept interviews are informal and used in order to investigate in depth and general areas (Bell, 1995; Saunders et al., 2003). Saunders et al. (2003) claim that no predetermined questions are used, but the interviewer needs to have a formulated idea about the aspects that need to be explored. This interview method can also be called non-directive since the interviewee can talk freely about behaviors, beliefs, and events in relation to the topic area.

However, Merriam (1994) states that a combination of different styles, both *structured* and *unstructured*, can be used within the same interview. We have, therefore, with regard to our purpose and method, performed a mixture between *structured* and *unstructured interviews*, which according to Merriam (1994) and Bell (1995) is called an *intermediate interview*. We felt confident in using a mixture of these interview structures since Merriam (1994) states that most researchers use a combination of styles within the same interview. This was also of value since there was always a possibility, even though a lot of questions would be asked in the same way to all interviewees, that new information would occur and new questions had to be added.

3.2.3 Interview Subjects

In order to ensure open and detailed answers to our interview questions we guaranteed all respondents full anonymity, giving that we not provide the readers with either company names or names of the middle managers. Instead we choose to refer to the middle managers by the letters A to J, as well as giving separate company descriptions. The company descriptions are given in order to provide some details about our sample and give the readers an appreciation of the type of companies involved in the study.

Our research sample consists of ten middle managers gathered from five manufacturing companies in the Jönköping region. We choused manufacturing companies since we after studying the literature found ourselves interested in middle managers in manufacturing companies. The companies in the study qualified for our definition of medium sized companies, and selected with no preferences other than to possess the correct criteria for the number of employees and company activities. In the same way the middle managers were selected with no preferences other than to fit our definition of a middle manager, since we by not choosing the middle managers after their personal characteristics increased the trustworthiness of the study.

The initial reason for why we decided to study medium sized companies were that the Jönköping region and Jönköping University have a focus on small and medium sized companies, which increased our interest in this type of companies. However, while researching companies in the Jönköping region we soon realized that most small companies we contacted did not have enough employees to have the type of middle managers we aimed at researching. We therefore decided that we in this study would only focus upon middle managers in medium sized companies.

Following is a short description of the companies participating in the study:

- The first company has 58 employees and is a manufacturer of aluminum products.
- The second company produces and markets industrial weighing systems, and it has 85 employees.
- The third company has around 100 employees and it produces load carriers for cars.
- The fourth company is a manufacturing company that works within the mechanical surface treatment industry. At the moment it has 55 employees.
- The fifth and last company is a manufacturer of diamond tools. It has around 100 employees working in the company.

3.2.4 How to Conduct the Interviews

According to Bell (1995) interviewees should get the possibility to decide where and when they want to get interviewed, and that it is of great importance that the interviewer and the respondent not get disturbed during the course of the interview. We,

therefore, scheduled the interviews after the respondent's preferences, giving that we met all ten respondents at their offices at their chosen time. We did not, however, try to influence the respondents in keeping us undisturbed during the interview since the level of daily interference was a part of the research, but instead we observed and documented the level of activity during the interviews. We found that only two middle managers got disturbed during the interview, which we consider to be a combination of the middle managers courtesy to turn off their phones and that no-one found it necessary to contact them during the hour we had scheduled.

Furthermore, since Bell (1995) and Saunders et al. (2003) state that tape-recording an interview helps to control biases and to produce reliable empirical material for analysis we used tape recorders during the interviews. Tape-recording, however, according to Andersson (2001), may in some cases make the interviewee uncomfortable and can result in inhibited answers, different from what they would have been with regular note taking. We therefore gave all respondents the possibility to reject the tape-recorder, and if so we would instead use regular note taking. This procedure is supported by Bell (1995) who states that interviews with note-taking can be as good and trustworthy as interviews with tape-recording, and thus not a weakness of the study. However, no-one of the interviewees rejected the tape-recorder so this never became an issue.

Additionally, we performed the interviews in Swedish with a Swedish interview guide since we wanted to make the middle managers feel as comfortable as possible. We believed that letting the interviewees listen to and answer questions in their native language would make them feel more relaxed and thus generate more open and honest answers. Since we realized that this procedure created a possibility of misinterpretations while translating the empirical findings from Swedish to English we sent back the typed interviews to the respondents for verification, which is a procedure supported by Bell (1995). This not only confirmed the validity of the empirical material, but also provided the respondents with an extra safety against wrong quotations and interpretational mistakes, as well as increased the trustworthiness of the study.

3.2.5 The Quality of the Study

Bell (1995) states that the chosen research method is often criticized in terms of reliability and validity, and in order to determine the levels of these two concepts in this study we further discussed and analyzed our chosen research method. This is important since it determines how valuable the study and its results will be for the readers.

Reliability is, according to Holloway (1997), a measurement of to what extent the research method would give the same result if repeated, independent of how, when, and where the research is being conducted. Therefore, as stated by Gummesson (2000), a study with high reliability will successfully be replicated by other researchers. It has, however, been said that it is impossible to achieve total reliability, and that it is especially difficult in qualitative research because in such studies the researcher is the main research instrument (Holloway, 1997).

The term “validity”, on the other hand, is according to Bell (1995) basically a measure upon how well the method used is suitable and adopted to the purpose of the study. It is important to determine whether the chosen question actually will measure what the researchers want it to measure. Holloway (1997) further describes the concept of validity by stating that it is a scientific concept of truth, and that every research must prove that it has truth value.

We aimed to increase the reliability of this study through carefully performed preparations and procedures. We believed that by researching middle managers at companies selected without any preferences other than for them to be medium sized manufacturing companies in the Jönköping region provided replicable and valuable research. Furthermore, there was only one researcher present at each interview and after having studied different techniques for how to avoid influencing the interviewee we increased the reliability of the study by conducting well performed and unbiased interviews.

Furthermore, in order to increase the validity of this study we carefully prepared the interview questions and also discussed the validity of these questions with others who have knowledge in the area. The questions were prepared in order to help us get the information needed to answer our stated purpose, and we also studied literature covering the best ways of compiling valid interview questions, which contributes to increasing the validity of the study.

The frame of reference mainly presents research made on top managers and not middle managers. This is a result of limited previous research made on middle managers, but we argue that as long as we only present information that also can be applicable on middle managers this does not decrease the trustworthiness of the study. Furthermore, according to Drucker (1995) today’s middle managers, due to their responsibilities and knowledge, may be regarded as facing the same tasks and challenges as top managers, which also support our choice of theory.

3.2.6 Presentation and Analysis of Empirical Findings

When presenting the empirical findings we combined the different middle managers statements into different areas of information. In other words, we divided the empirical material into the same three main areas as in the frame of reference, which are middle managers, time and planning, and stress. Under these heading the text is divided after the interview guide and written as coherent text. We realized that by writing the empirical findings in a coherent text common for all ten managers we maybe decrease the readers’ appreciation of each specific middle manager, but since we aimed at analyzing the middle managers as a group we still saw this as the most efficient procedure. Furthermore, grouping the middle managers’ statements together makes the readers clearer recognize similarities and differences between the different middle managers, whereas by reading one statement at a time the readers might not as easily recognize recurring experiences and feelings.

When presenting the analysis we followed the same disposition as in the frame of reference. This means that we first focused upon middle managers roles regarding posi-

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tion and work tasks, followed by middle managers planning and time usage. Thereafter we focus upon the middle managers acknowledged stress as well as their not yet acknowledged stress. The latter was analyzed thorough use of the Job Strain Model presented by Karasek (1979), as well as analysis of different statement made by the middle managers throughout the interviews. The analysis was further followed up by a conclusion aimed at tying the different parts together and answering our stated purpose and research questions.

4 Empirical Findings

This chapter provides the reader with the empirical findings gathered through interviews with the middle managers in the study. The material is presented under the three main headings which are middle managers, time and planning, and stress, and we present the empirical material collectively for all middle managers in order to provide the readers with easier understood empirical findings.

4.1 Middle Managers

When asked to describe a typical work day almost all middle managers referred to their days as very diversified, and that they never really knew beforehand everything that will happen during a day. Middle manager J however stated that even though no work day is the other like, there are always different tasks that are constantly recurring, such as duties specific for the position. Apart from all position specific tasks during a day both middle managers B and F stated that they start up their day by checking and responding to e-mail and sometimes also answering phone calls. Middle manager B also tries to take a stroll in the office every day to check in on the other workers, but admitted during the interview that it sometimes is difficult to have time to do that since there might be a lot of phone calls to deal with. In addition, middle manager C laughed and said that most people think that middle managers do the same thing all day sitting at their offices, but that that is not true since middle managers do different things all the time. After stated almost the same thing, middle manager D admitted that the diversification of the job tasks is fun, but at the same time difficult. It is important to know quite a lot about many different things and the job perhaps would have been easier if it had been possible to focus on only a couple of things.

Furthermore, both middle managers F and G often have to deal with urgent phone calls regarding problems that need to be taken care of. In middle manager F's case it is mostly sick notifications giving that people may have to be taken in from the outside, whereas it in the case of middle manager G mostly is production problems that need to be solved, giving that right man has to be sent to the right place.

Middle manager I added a new aspect of managerial work to the discussion by stating that an important element of the work days is to notify the surroundings about the tasks and progress of the organization. This did not get supported by any other middle manager since they mostly seemed to deal with intra-organizational reports, but all middle managers seemed, to different extents, to have meetings scheduled. Middle manager H has two to three meetings during a day and seems to have most meetings scheduled beforehand, but despite this middle manager H said that it is not often the work day turns out as expected. Lastly, middle manager D supported this by stating that it is easy to know what needs to be done during the day while getting to work in the morning, but then the day does not always turn out as expected.

4.1.1 Work Load

“Companies are getting more and more downsized, which increases the burden on middle managers. They get much more to do and must learn to prioritize, and take the rest when they have time and if they have time.” (Middle manager J)

Six out of ten middle managers find their work load to be manageable, whereas the rest find it too heavy and experience it as very hard to fulfill their duties. Middle manager A was among those who looked positively upon the work load and stated that the job tasks felt quite easy to handle, and that it is a positive when there is more to do, since there is nothing worse than sitting thinking about what to do to deserve the salary. Similarly, middle managers D, E and H feel that their job is on a reasonable level and that they have quite much liberty to decide themselves what to do during the days. As middle manager H put it,

“I have created my everyday work life as I like it to be. I have decided which staff to hire, and by working a lot with coaching and delegating I can make them act in the way I wish, which gives me the day I want.” (Middle manager H)

Furthermore, middle manager E showed relief over being able to self decide the level of ambition since there is a life outside the office as well which is important to be able to participate in. Also middle manager J claimed that the work days are not too demanding, but admitted at the same time that this is a result of the company recently hiring someone to relieve some pressure by taking care of some of the tasks. For the same reasons middle manager C eagerly awaited the planned future hiring of another person that would relieve some of the present work load. Middle manager C also stated that the work load was very high for the moment and had been constantly increasing lately giving that there at least never is any need to think of what to do during a day. Both middle managers F and G agreed upon that they have too much to do and do not feel like they have time to perform their job well enough. Additionally, they both expressed a wish for getting a co-worker to step in and relieve some pressure from them. Lastly, middle manager B said that the work load might be so high because there is so much dialogue during the days that the paperwork tend to be left untouched until the afternoon, which most often results in over time.

“One can not get paperwork done during the daytime, and it is first in the afternoon things start to calm down.” (Middle manager B)

4.1.2 Work Hours

The stated work hours for the middle managers are within a range of 40 to 60 hours per week. Many middle managers however claimed that the amount of hours worked goes very much in periods, and for instance middle manager F said that there have been years when the overtime has been more than 300 hours a year. Middle managers A and G both claimed that they not worked that much overtime, but on the other hand they often bring work with them home after work. Middle manager A, however, stated that there never is more than two hours worth of work brought home, and that most of the remaining work, on the other hand, is mental. This is also the case for middle managers I and J, and middle manager I stated that:

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“...it is a challenge to be home when one is home, and to be at work when one is at work. These two are important to separate, but it is not always possible, and it is first afterwards that one realizes that one has not been at home at all.” (Middle manager I)

Similarly middle manager J sometimes wakes up at night remembering different things that should have been done during the previous day, and the middle manager admitted that even though there is hardly ever any hand fast work brought home, there are so much thoughts in the head.

Middle manager C on the other hand does not often work overtime or bring work home in the week days, but may instead do some work during the weekend. Middle managers E and H however have made it a point to never bring any work with them home, and prefer to instead work longer hours at the work place. For instance middle manager H is one of the few at the work place who has resisted getting a lap top since the work should be done at the office and not home. There has only been a few times when middle manager H mentally has brought work home, and then it has only been the “good parts”, such as the areas of the work that really interest the middle manager. When middle manager G mentally brings home thoughts of the job, it mainly originates from problems with customers and conflicts with superiors or workers. The only person who actually does not seem to suffer from many work hours and the pressure of bringing work with home in order to get it done is middle manager D. Surprisingly middle manager D has unregulated work hours and sometimes feel that it would be possible to be at work less than 40 hours a week, but does not since it would send out the wrong signals to the other workers.

Regarding business trips there only seems to be four middle managers that actually travel an appreciable amount. Middle managers A, B, and G however stated that the travel they do connected to work does not intrude on their private life, and middle manager I is the only one who has to stay overnight while traveling.

4.1.3 Special Demands

When having to consider whether there are high demands facing the middle managers in their positions half of the middle managers answered that they had experienced demands traceable to their positions. For instance, middle manager A said that having responsibilities towards personnel always creates higher demands, and middle manager B referred to the difficulties of getting directions from above in the organization and having to convince the workers to implement the directions. Middle manager B also stated,

“If there are any problems I am the one who has to handle them.” (Middle manager B)

Middle manager D on the other hand raised another issue regarding the position as middle manager, which is that the middle manager always must be the responsible and serious person in the company. The middle manager experiences this as very disturbing since this often aggravates other people even though this is a way the middle manager must behave due to the position. The middle managers who did not recog-

nize any specifically high demands in their positions as middle managers said that there were demands, but not distinctly connected to their positions. Middle manager C for instance claimed to not being able to affect the work much, but rather compile it, and middle manager G believed that the highest demands were not coming from the organization but from the middle managers themselves.

4.1.4 Satisfying Members of the Organization

All but two middle managers have experienced difficulties in satisfying both upper level management and subordinates at the same time. Middle manager A claimed that most difficult is to make the subordinates share the feeling of importance and urgency when having to be done with an order to a specific date or having to implement a new method. Middle manager B supported this and added that when for instance implementing a new method for doing something management can provide the right tools and tell the workers how to perform, but most importantly it is the middle managers job to make the workers understand why they are using this new method. Middle managers E, F, G, and H all agreed that it is very difficult to make everybody in an organization satisfied. This was further clarified by middle manager E who stated that,

“...decisions always affect people in different ways and it is impossible to satisfy everybody. Some will be less pleased and some will be more pleased.” (Middle manager E)

Furthermore, both middle managers G and H referred to the need of saving money in the organization, and how it often affects subordinates in a negative way since where the costs need to be reduced there is no room for cost reductions. Middle manager I added that one difficulty with many responsibilities is that, for instance, top management demands the middle manager’s presence while at the same time subordinates are trying to get a hold of the middle manager somewhere else. It seems to be often occurring that personnel come to the middle manager’s office when the middle manager is elsewhere.

Consequences from these sometimes experienced difficulties, to satisfy all levels of the organization, is according to middle manager B that there will be discussions and delays in the production giving that the work will not get done in time, and the middle manager is the person who has to take the blame. Middle manager D often gets into discussions with the CEO who does not understand, and middle manager E mostly experiences dissatisfaction from all different levels of the organization. Likewise, middle manager G has to handle dissatisfaction and complaints in the organization, but said that it feels much better when it is a problem in which the middle manager can support and stand for the way the problem has been handled. The consequence can also be frustration among the workers according to middle manager H, which may turn into skepticism towards the middle manager. Middle manager H further said that this sometimes also makes the workers doubt their middle manager’s control, since they see things from their perspectives, which is not always the whole picture. Lastly, the consequences for middle manager I may be to feel insufficient, and the middle manager has to start thinking of what is possible to expect from a per-

son in this particular position. Middle manager I also said that it is easy to put too high demand upon oneself, and also that it is easy to take on too much at a time.

4.1.5 Organizational Rules and Regulations

Seven out of ten middle managers claimed that their work is very affected by company rules and regulations, but middle manager D is the only one who is affected negatively because of too few rules and regulations. Middle manager D explained that since the company the middle manager works at is an old family owned company with high profitability the individual freedom always has been high in the organization. This is evident since even though there are rules most people still have the feeling that in the end all rules are negotiable anyway, which makes the work harder for middle manager D who has been working hard to establish clearer rules. Middle managers A, H, and J claimed to be affected by for instance having to write recurring reports and adapt to international regulations, but does not see it as a problem. On the other hand, middle manager F expressed a feeling that there are too many reports to write which sometimes is too much hard work. Middle manager F does not think that reports are more important than anything else is, but said that if feels like everybody else think so. Also middle manager A admitted that the work days are very structured by rules and regulations, both coming from society and from the organization, but at the same time stated that...

“...I decide myself in my organization how I wish to structure this company. This is something I do together with my co-workers and with which the company has nothing to do.” (Middle manager I)

Middle manager E concluded that middle managers can become inhibited by rules since they most often are more based on principles than on common sense.

Among the middle managers who claimed not to be affected by rules and regulations is middle manager B who said that it is mostly freedom under responsibility in the organization. This provides both positive and negative effects since a lot of people become used to taking responsibility, whereas some other people easily get away with not taking any responsibility at all. These people may, for instance, refer to so called invisible rules, which makes it hard for the middle manager to deal with the issues in an adequate way. Finally, both middle manager C and G claimed to not get affected much at all by rules and regulations.

4.2 Time and Planning

All ten middle managers stated that it is most common to use calendars when scheduling meetings and deadlines, and that all other planning is kept mentally. Despite this some middle managers admitted that they sometimes use post-it notes or make lists with tasks that have to be done. Furthermore, all middle managers agreed that unscheduled meetings occur every day, and according to middle manager A this can result in that other tasks may suffer since less time will be available for them.

For middle manager E it is important to schedule as little as possible in the calendar and instead have available time in order to take care of the often upcoming occurrences. Middle manager H supported this and stated,

“Half of all activities are booked in the calendar, and when it comes to the other half of my time twenty-five percent is mentally planned and the rest spent on activities and problems that occur unexpectedly.” (Middle Manager H)

Similarly middle manager F only plans half of the day and lets the rest of the day stay free in case of unexpected, urgent, and non-predictable occurrences. According to middle manager I it is also important to have time to spend with the staff, which is one of the reasons why the middle manager only schedules half of the working day and set aside the rest of the time for people in the company.

The most common time frame for the middle managers' meetings was that they were booked two to four weeks ahead. However, even if five of the middle managers did not have anything else but meetings scheduled in their calendars all ten agreed that it would be almost impossible to manage everything without the calendar and the mental planning. Middle managers D and I claimed that they need to have some kind of structure in the day, and even if it does not mean that this structure is written down it can make it easier for the middle managers to keep their deadlines. Middle manager H stated that without planning the job would be very frustrating, since it would be hard to keep control over different things and thus cause irritation and stress.

4.2.1 Realization of Plans

When the middle managers were asked how often they used to be able to complete what they had planned, not one of the ten middle managers claimed to be able to realize their plans. Reasons for this are according to middle managers A and G that they often are too ambitious and think that they can complete more than what actually is possible. Middle managers C, E, G and H, on the other hand, stated that it sometimes is hard to be able to fulfill plans since there are always new or unexpected tasks to take care of. Middle managers H and I added that some tasks may take longer to complete than first expected, which below is clarified by middle manager H.

“What was important during the planning might not be as important today, and things may have to be re-prioritized.” (Middle manager H)

Deadlines must, according to middle manager D, be finished on time and therefore, in order to fulfill the assignment, it is important to have some free time reserved in the calendar. Middle manager B stated that it can be tough to not be able to finish everything on time since it always affects others. Upon agreeing with their time limitation's impact upon other people middle managers F and I also stated that it is a situation when it is easy to feel frustrated. It is, according to middle manager G, very common to postpone a task until the next day giving that it sometimes is necessary to work over a day or a weekend in order to catch up. Having to catch up on work in the weekend is experienced as very stressful by middle manager C.

When discussing prioritizing, middle manager B claimed that tasks having to deal with customers always must be taken care of first, and thus administration will have to wait. Furthermore, middle manager J stated that it is important to get started on time with a task since this will increase the probability of being able to keep the deadline. Moreover the middle manager claimed that it is important to always start with the most urgent task. Middle manager I on the other hand has a different prioritizing when it comes to tasks and stated that,

"I use to do the task that I think is most fun first." (Middle manager I)

4.2.2 Interruptions

When the middle managers were asked to describe what they felt when getting interrupted in their job by something or someone, they all answered that they saw it as something very natural and also as a part of their job. All of them claimed that if they feel that the reason behind the interruption is important, and especially if it involves personnel, they always stop what they are doing in order to deal with the "interruption".

Even if middle manager A handles upcoming issues the middle manager still prefers to finish the present task before dealing with a new one. The result of this is that the middle manager is often getting delayed and thus behind in the planning. Middle manager B feels the same way and if it is not possible to finish begun tasks before handling new ones, the middle manager often feels stressed. Furthermore, middle manager F experiences interruptions of tasks as disturbing the concentration that the middle manager possess while working and also middle manager G stated that,

"...it can be hard to get a flow in the workday while always getting interrupted."
(Middle manager G)

Similarly, even though both middle managers F and J consider interruptions and helping others to be a part of their job they occasionally feel that getting interrupted disturbs their concentration while working on a task.

"I get interrupted at least ten times every day, and most common is that people want to ask me something." (Middle manager D)

Middle manager D further claimed that the job would be easier if the middle manager would not get interrupted, but at the same time realized that there often is a good reason why people are interrupting. Getting interrupted does not have any impact, on the other hand, upon middle manager C's work, and the middle manager's door is always open since it does not disturb middle manager C when people walk in with questions. If the middle manager wants or needs to be alone, the door is closed, and people know that they have to get back later.

4.2.3 Deadlines

In a middle manager's job there are always important deadlines that have to be held. However, whereas four of the middle managers do not have any problems with this the other six find it really hard to actually hold these deadlines. The middle managers

position in the company decides and controls what kind of deadlines the middle manager has, and the deadlines can be everything from sending away a report to delivering a product to a customer in time.

“...there is no chance that I will miss a deadline. It is very important to always be on time and to deliver information at the right time. That is how it works...the quality of the information might not always be the same, but it is always delivered in time.”
(Middle manager I)

Furthermore, middle manager I is also one of the middle managers who stated that it is never hard to hold deadlines, and that most deadlines are predictable. If the middle manager has a structured work day it is not difficult to get done on time.

“Deadlines can be hard to hold, but you always hold them. That is something you have to do, that is just how it works.” (Middle manager G)

Additionally, both middle managers E and H also claimed that it sometimes is hard to keep deadlines after being away on a business trip. According to middle manager G breaking a deadline could result in the company losing business, which is why it is so important to always keep deadlines. Similarly, middle manager F stated that the result of not being able to keep a deadline might be that the customer does not pay for the product or the company has to pay a fine. However, both middle managers F and D feel that if they have missed a deadline but still tried their best, there is no reason to get upset. Middle manager H, on the other hand, feels that it would be very frustrating to miss a deadline or to not be on time. Furthermore, middle manager J stated that the situation can be very stressful and unpleasant when there are many deadlines at the same time, but when the deadlines are fulfilled there is only a good feeling left. This statement is supported by middle manager A who added that,

“To finish on time sometimes causes stress, but at the same time it is a challenge...”
(Middle manager A)

4.3 Stress

When we asked the middle managers about in which situations they felt stressed everybody had different answers even if they all reminded of each other in some sense. Middle managers A, B, I, and J generally feel stressed when having to prepare something for others and the time is not enough. This may be everyday tasks, financial closure, or preparations for speeches at meetings. Furthermore, middle manager I feels stressed when many unexpected things happens at one time and results in priority difficulties. Furthermore, both middle managers G and J commented upon how cell phones are stressful since the middle managers can be reached at every time during the day, which also is the case with e-mail but to a lesser extent.

Another source of stress seems to be to deal with personnel, and middle manager E particularly stated that unpleasant situations, such as firing staff, are very stressful since situations regarding people is more stressful than situations regarding tasks and figures. Similarly, middle manager H stated that it is stressful when there is problem

and conflicts among people on several places at the same time, and there is no time to spend on either of them.

Furthermore, middle manager C sometimes feels stressed when being responsible for important papers that need to be signed and sent in and people taking too long to sign them, and middle manager F feels stressed when many things happen at one time. This may, for instance, be the case when middle manager F is doing something on the computer at the same time as the phone calls and three people are standing in the door with questions.

Middle manager G concluded that:

“The whole society is so wound up and everything is under so much pressure. Prices are forced down and the personnel is decreased. A couple of years ago we were ten more here in the administrative department, and today I have to do much more administrative tasks even though I do not have time.” (Middle manager G)

Also the perceived consequences from when the middle managers feel stressed differ from person to person. Middle managers B, H, and I stated that when getting stressed they lose engagement in their work situation. For instance middle manager H said that there is not enough time to engage in the personnel, and by getting stressed the engagement decreases even further, which contributes to the personnel not feeling supported and gives the middle manager a strange feeling of being dizzy and having a stomach ache. Likewise, middle manager I said that it is easy to prioritize incorrectly while being stressed and it might result in the middle manager not really seeing people who are having a hard time at work.

Furthermore, both middle managers A and E claimed to be very easily annoyed while being stressed. Middle manager A gets shorter in the manners, and this also affects the middle manager’s judgment and thus the whole work situation. In the same way middle manager E stated that:

“If I am stressed I get annoyed, which affects my job since stress is absolutely the worst ingredient in a job. It takes away my focus.” (Middle manager E)

Middle manager C’s most occurring sign of being stressed is to wake up in the early morning, about half past three, and not be able to get back to sleep. The only way of being able to relax again is then to get up and write down the thoughts and what to do the upcoming day. Also middle manager G sleeps worse while being stressed, but the middle manager also neglects the importance of food by eating less. Lastly middle manager J said that stress takes away effectiveness, and that it may affect the middle manager into, for instance, not finding important papers.

4.3.1 Private Life and Health

While discussing the middle managers’ jobs possible impact upon their private life half of the ten have experienced a negative impact on their personal life which presumably is originating from their work situation, whereas the other five do not experience any problems at all. Both middle managers B and G stated that it could have been nice to be able to spend some more time with their families, and middle man-

ager G also added that when being busy at work it is easy to be less active, and sometimes also a little bit low, when getting home in the evenings. Middle managers E and F experiences that they often bring thoughts of work with them home which negatively affects their personal life, and that it sometimes is very hard to let go of such feelings. Middle manager E further stated that,

“Some days one is so wound up that one has to lie down for ten minutes just to calm down.” (Middle manager E)

On the other hand, middle manager I mostly experiences that the impact at home from work is a result of all the time spent at the office and that the impressions from work are brought home. Similarly middle manager C claimed that the work contributes to a better personal life since it is good to have a lot to do, and that it does not raise any problems since the middle manager still has a private life in the evenings. Even if middle manager C works on weekends it does not affect the personal life negatively since the middle manager follows strict hours.

Only two out of ten middle managers believed that their work life has any impact upon their personal health. Middle manager C sometimes feel stressed when having a lot to do at work, and even though middle manager E also sometimes feel stressed from work the middle manager recognizes the importance to fight it. The symptoms middle manager E has experienced are feeling generally ill, worried, upset stomach, and headache, which the middle manager refers to as stress symptoms. Middle manager E further stated that:

“If one has a lot to do at work one must be able to relax at home, but if one has a tough private life it does not provide any rest either which gives a really high stress.” (Middle manager E)

Among the middle managers who actually did not experience any impact upon their health from their job situation worth mentioning was that middle manager A sometimes sit down and writes down thoughts and notes on what to do when starting to feel stressed, and even though middle manager G claimed that there is no impact upon the personal health, the middle manager is always tired. Furthermore, middle manager J is well aware of that even though the job has no impact on the health today it might have it in the future. Middle manager J is worried and does therefore try to not work as much, and constantly tries to remember that personal life is personal and work life is work.

4.3.2 Control

When the middle managers got the question whether they felt in control over their own days and tasks all middle managers stated that they felt in control in one way or another. Middle manager A stated that even if mostly different projects run the work day, the middle manager still felt in control of the day. This statement was supported by middle manager F saying that what actually determines the work day is what is going on in the company. According to middle managers F and D this, however, does not affect the influence the middle manager has over the tasks, which provides a feel-

ing of control. Furthermore, middle manager A stated that without having everything under control the middle manager is likely to feel much stressed.

Middle manager B added that even if the manager can control most of the day, there are some parts that are hard to control. Some examples are, for instance, when the CEO adds a new task, someone calls or wants to meet the middle manager, or there are different deadlines for reports that have to be finished on time. Also middle manager E experiences deadlines for different reports as nonnegotiable since middle managers have to keep deadlines no matter what. According to middle manager H, deadlines may also make some days very hectic, for instance if the middle manager is behind schedule when it comes to keeping these deadlines. This might contribute to the feeling of not being in control of work days and tasks, according to middle manager H.

“Yes, I’m in control of my day, but I always have a load of work that I know I have to take care of, but never have time to start with. The reason is that there are always people that want to talk with me, and e-mail that I have to read and respond to. I try to plan my day, but it never works.” (Middle manager J)

According to middle manager G it is impossible to control the time at work when someone calls or an unexpected problem occurs. Middle manager C supports this and stated that even if it feels as if most of the day can be controlled, unexpected situations often occur. The outcome of this may be a change in the priority of tasks. According to middle manager C tasks that were planned to be taken care of at a particular day might no longer be seen as important, and have to wait to be completed until the next day.

Furthermore, all ten middle managers agreed upon that unexpected situations occur every day, but it was only one of ten middle managers that claimed that these situations are surprising. Middle manager E stated that there are always some urgent tasks occurring during a day, and when this happens it is important to deal with it right away. According to both middle managers A and J the biggest challenge and problem is when employees are sick, and the result of sick leave may be that jobs have to be rescheduled. It is also commonly occurring that tasks have to be rescheduled over and over again since more urgent tasks have to be handled. However, middle manager B stated that even though unexpected situations or problems often are tough to handle they may at the same time be very stimulating to deal with.

According to middle manager C and G it is very rare that the unexpected situations surprise the middle managers, since the middle managers most likely have dealt with the problems before. Neither middle manager E gets surprised when unexpected situations occur, and the manager stated:

“...one learns to adapt and know how to handle most situations, even if they are unexpected.” (Middle manager E)

Furthermore, middle manager F stated that,

“...there is always new task to deal with, but it is nothing that surprises me since one get used to it.” (Middle manager F)

Similarly, both middle managers H and I stated that there are never any surprising, unexpected occurrences. Furthermore, even if that would be the case, middle managers have to be able to manage unexpected occurrences and middle manager H added that it would be far too frustrating to get upset every time something unexpected happens. The middle manager further stated that it was worse in the beginning of the employment, but the experience and knowledge coming with the years has taught the middle manager how to handle unexpected situations. Middle manager D, on the other hand, is often surprised by unexpected occurrences. One example of this given by the middle manager is when there are different wishes simultaneously from many directions of the organization. Furthermore, according to middle manager D, it is important to be aware of that unexpected problems may occur and also that a middle manager sometimes has to re-prioritize, since it, otherwise, can be tough due to that a large part of a middle manager's job is to serve and help others.

4.3.3 Support

When the middle managers were confronted with the question whether they feel supported from their superiors, subordinates, and co-workers only middle manager G claimed to not feel supported in the work from any level of the organization. Middle manager G stated,

“There is not as much support as I could have wished. If I tell my co-workers something they do not agree upon, they might go to my boss instead who may decide something that suits them better. It does not happen often, but it has happened, which is very frustrating for me.” (Middle manager G)

Otherwise all middle managers feel supported and the only exception is middle manager E who feels supported from co-workers and subordinates but not from top management. The middle manager must deal with heavy complaints after having to present something that is not appreciated, such as for instance poor results. Most often top management does not seem to blame the poor result on the middle manager completely but would have liked to be warned first. Other than these examples most middle managers do feel supported from all levels of the organization, and for instance middle manager B feels like if the relationship with the CEO is on a friendly basis. They work a lot together and try to make things as uncomplicated as possible. Furthermore, middle manager C's subordinates sometimes provide help when the middle manager has an extra stressful time. Also middle manager D claimed to be supported by subordinates due to good relationships and often kept dialogues during which the middle manager listens to what the workers have to say. The middle manager however still feels free to manage in the desired way since...

“...I might not always do as they wish in the end, but at least I listen.” (Middle manager D)

Also middle manager A and I have good relationships with and feel supported by the others in the organization. Middle manager I further stated that there is always a feeling of response and of having someone listening.

5 Analysis

In this chapter we present the analysis of the empirical findings with regards to the frame of reference. The chapter is divided in three main areas, referred to as middle managers, planning, and stress. Furthermore, the middle managers' planning is in the end of the chapter analyzed in order to investigate whether there is any connection to their perceived stress.

5.1 Middle Managers

When analyzing the empirical material regarding the middle managers' everyday work life and what type of tasks and interactions the middle managers perform during their days, the key word seem to be diversification. All middle managers refer to their work days as extremely diversified, even though there also are some constantly recurring tasks. These statements coincide with recent studies of middle managers work situations, performed by Holden and Roberts (2004), that state that middle managers jobs have not only become increasingly demanding, but also more complex. The gathered empirical material further clarifies this by showing that it has become increasingly important to always know a lot about many things, which also is supported by Holden and Roberts (2004) who state that there is a new pressure on middle managers to constantly develop new skills and knowledge as well as accepting new goals to work towards.

5.1.1 Middle Managers' Roles

As a basis for our research regarding middle managers' planning and possible responses to occupational stress it is of interest to analyze what different types of roles the middle managers undertake at their work places. We suggest that the middle managers interviewed constitute a mixture of three managerial role types which are *the trouble-shooter*, *the committee-men*, and *the writers*, which have earlier been identified by Stewart (1988). The tendency of the middle managers to fall into the role of the *trouble-shooters* comes from their extremely diversified and fragmented work days, and that they often have to attend a lot of meetings. Furthermore, the middle managers have also said that there often are unexpected occurrences during the work days, as well as different crises to handle. The reasons why the interviewed middle managers also fall into the category of the *committee-men* are because of their dominating amount of internal contacts and that they interact with people both horizontally and vertically in the organization. For instance, one middle manager always tries to devote time to walk around at the office and talk to all subordinates in person in order to establish good contacts with the workers, as well as at the same time having to deal with intra organizational reports for the CEO for instance. The last identified role type among the middle managers is *the writers*, and we consider this to be the case since the middle managers every day spend a lot of their time at their offices taking care of urgent and less urgent phone calls, as well as checking and responding to e-mail. The writers are, however, stated by Stewart (1988) to have the shortest work days, which we have not found any indication of in the empirical material, but only

see as further establishing the thought that no middle manager ever undertakes only one managerial role character. Instead the middle managers always seem to behave differently in different situations, which due to their diversified work days give them several different behavior and personal characteristics.

5.1.2 The Complexity of the Middle Managers' Jobs

Furthermore, we analyze the complexity of middle managers' jobs, as an additional attempt to create a basis for how to look upon the middle managers' work situation, by looking upon demands, constraints, and choices, as stated by Stewart (1982) as an efficient tool for analyzing job complexity. The demands facing the middle managers seem to be the large diversification of tasks and the need of equally diversified knowledge and skills demanded. Furthermore, another great demand seems to be the middle managers' difficulties in satisfying people at all levels of the organization, as well as the need of being able to efficiently prioritizing due to downsizing and lack of time to fulfill duties. Likewise, the constraints facing the middle managers also seem to be to a large extent originating from company downsizing, since downsizing, according to Holden and Roberts (2004), reduces the middle managers' ability to perform their jobs in preferred ways due to fewer personnel and more restricted financial resources. Furthermore, other constraints may be traceable to the middle managers position in the middle of the organization, since there might be difficulties for the middle managers to implement decisions made by the CEO, as well as to make the CEO consider suggestions made by the subordinates. Finally, the middle managers seem to have quite extended choices in their jobs, but at the same time the empirical findings show that the work days and the managerial duties are mostly decided by the organization and different occurrences in projects. This implies that even though there are choices the middle managers also have to follow the shifting trends of the organizations. This may all be concluded in the way that the complexity of managers' job is high, which is supported by Holden and Roberts (2004), and lastly that this complexity creates an extra incentive for us to further analyze the middle managers' planning procedures while trying to manage this complexity.

5.2 Time and Planning

The empirical material show that most middle managers see their work days as very hectic, which is supported by Trägårdh (1997) and Högberg (2002). Furthermore, all the middle managers in the study claim that it would be impossible to manage everything in the company without calendars and planning, which further is agreed upon by Trägårdh (1997).

We have also identified that several middle managers think it is essential to have some planned structure of the day since they otherwise feel that it would be almost impossible to be able to manage their work. These feelings are supported by Selin (1988) and de Klerk (1990) who claim that with clear structures it is easier to plan activities. However, we have found that many middle managers try to plan their work days, but never succeed since there always are some new tasks or problems that have to be taken care of, which is an issue also raised by Tyrstrup (2005) and Forsblad et al.

(1979). Even though some very important meetings within the company can be scheduled a year a head, the most common time frame for the middle managers meetings is that they are booked two to four weeks in advance. The middle managers attempt to book meetings, and even though they are not always carried out as planned, we consider the middle managers to agree with Forsblad et al. (1979) in seeing that making plans is essential even if the middle managers were not always able to realize their plans.

Furthermore, from the empirical material we get the feeling that the middle managers do not consider making plans for time and task distribution to be important, and especially not for recurring tasks, which is in contrast to de Klerk's (1990) statement about the importance of schedules. One reason for this is that the middle managers often deal with tasks based on routine and therefore do not feel that they have to spend a large amount of time planning the performance of the task. This is also the reason behind why many middle managers feel that there is no reason to write down or schedule time for other activities than meetings and deadlines, even though the middle managers still plan other activities mentally. Furthermore, four middle managers agree with de Klerk (1990) when they state that it is important to not plan the whole day so that there instead will be time left to spend on unexpected, urgent, and non-predictable activities and problems. For instance, unscheduled meetings can be seen as one of all unexpected situations that can occur, and which take place every day. One middle manager feels that prioritizing and taking care of unexpected and urgent situation at times can affect other tasks, since it might imply less time over to be spent on the not urgent tasks, which is an issue also raised by Tyrstrup (2002).

5.2.1 Control and Realization of Plans

While analyzing the empirical material we got the feeling that even if the middle managers feel in control of the day through the use of their planning, this control does not seem to be as high as they think it is. The reason to why we think this is that most middle managers admit that they hardly ever realize their plans and that projects and interactions with co-workers mainly determines their schedules, which is a problem also recognized by Tyrstrup (2005), Trägårdh (1997), and Högberg (2002). All ten middle managers however claim the opposite by saying that even though different projects, deadlines, unexpected situations, phone calls, and meetings often can control some parts of their days, they still feel in control of their own work days and tasks. The reason for this, according to the middle managers, is that it is up to them to plan and decide the priority of the tasks. The middle managers also claim that they only use their calendars when scheduling meetings and deadlines, and consequently they are not controlled by their calendars. Furthermore, our findings show that only four of the ten middle managers say that their work load is very heavy. Despite this all middle managers state that they never have time to realize their plans, which are in line with de Klerk's (1990) statement that it is always more to do in a company than the managers have time to do. The middle managers agree with this and state that reasons for not being able to manage everything can be that the middle managers from the beginning thought they could complete more than they actually could do since new or unexpected tasks always occur. The middle managers always have to

deal with tasks, actions and events that often occur at the same time, which also is stated by Tyrstrup (2002) as for some middle managers create a feeling of not being in control.

5.2.2 Interruptions

Furthermore, the empirical material also implies that all ten middle managers feel that unexpected situations occur all the time, which is an occurrence that Tyrstrup (2002; 2005) agrees with is often taking place. All the middle managers further agree with Tyrstrup (2002, 2005) by saying that dealing with unexpected occurrences is a very natural part of their job which they know will continue happening every day. One middle manager adds that it is important to take care of urgent tasks immediately even if they are unexpected, which is supported by Tyrstrup (2002). Moreover, almost all middle managers argue that even if situations seem to be unexpected they are not surprising since the middle managers most often have dealt with them before. Furthermore, several middle managers state that the longer time they work at the company the more experience and knowledge they gain that can be used to deal with unexpected and urgent situations. Simon (1987) supports this by claiming that with experience, training, and more knowledge managers can avoid making mistakes they otherwise would make.

5.2.3 Prioritizing of Tasks

When analyzing the empirical findings we also found that all middle managers claim to regard occurring and unexpected tasks as important, but still it does not seem like all middle managers always find these upcoming tasks in need of being dealt with immediately. The reason why this might be the case is that we have found that some middle managers like to finish present task before dealing with new ones, which, according to one middle manager, sometimes might result in that the middle manager gets delayed and behind in the planning, which is an issue also emphasized by de Klerk (1990).

When analyzing the middle managers prioritizing of tasks, we found that the priority list can look very different for different middle managers. One middle manager claims that tasks that deal with customers always have to be taken care of first, whereas another middle manager states that the most urgent tasks have to be managed first, which shows that there is a large variation among the middle managers opinions about prioritizing, and also Selin (1988), de Klerk (1990), and Tyrstrup (2005) all emphasize the importance of performing tasks in order of priority. Another middle manager states that the most fun task always will get done first, which is a behavior that is supported by de Klerk (1990) who claims that it sometimes can be better to start with the task that creates most satisfaction for the manager.

Moreover, we have also found that what one middle manager once thought was important when planning has changed, given that tasks might have to be reprioritized. Tyrstrup (2005) supports these findings by stating that a plan says more about the time when it was created than the future it is meant to reflect and forecast, which

gives us the understanding that it can be hard to put in practice pre-planned approaches since it is hard to know what is important in the future.

5.2.4 Deadlines

The empirical material further shows that it is very important for the middle managers that deadlines are fulfilled in time, but according to six of the ten middle managers deadlines can sometimes be hard to keep. Almost all middle managers stated the importance of optimizing the available time frame, which Friman (2001) agrees with. The middle managers do not only claim that it is important to start in time with tasks in order to keep deadlines, but also that having structured work days is essential. This is also something Stalk and Hout (1990) supports by saying that managers have to be able to handle their time well in order to be effective. Furthermore, the middle managers argue that it is important to be aware of how much time that can be spent on each task, which also Forsblad et al. (1979) and de Klerk (1990) regard as important. All ten middle managers further feel that deadlines are important to keep and spend more time on deadlines than on other tasks. The middle managers do this by prioritizing tasks that have a deadline before other tasks, which implies delaying the performance of tasks without a deadline. Some of the middle managers also claim that it is, at some occasions, even necessary to work over scheduled work hours in order to finish tasks with a deadline in time.

5.3 Stress

When performing the interviews with the middle managers we realized that there might be difficulties for the middle managers both to identify managerial pressure put upon them and possible stress reactions. Therefore we divide the analysis of the middle managers stress into two different areas covering their acknowledged stress and the stress the managers themselves are unaware of and have not yet acknowledged in order to further analyze the empirical findings with support of the frame of reference.

5.3.1 Acknowledged Stress

The empirical findings show that a large concern and an acknowledged source of stress among the middle managers is the interaction with other individuals in the organization, referred to by Albrecht (1980) as social stressors. Even though it is in contrast to Worrall and Coopers (1995) statement there are several examples of social stressors being a concern of the middle managers. It has also been said that dealing with people in the organization is much more stressful than dealing with other tasks and figures, and an example of this is for instance that conflicts among people in the organization are experienced as stressful. In addition to this being a social stressor it may also be referred to as creating situational stress since the middle managers experience a feeling of stress coming from pressure in situations when they are feeling uncomfortable or scared, or experiences a risk of possible loss of status, which is supported by Albrecht (1980). It is natural to be uncomfortable in conflict situations, and it is also most often very difficult to predict what such conflicts will bring about.

Perhaps there will be an outcome of a changed future due to a changed work situation for the middle manager, which in such developments and the creation of such feelings also adds Albrecht's (1980) identified expectations stress as experienced by the middle manager. Since one stressor in such case can constitute the basis for another type of stress this may suggest that while being affected negatively in one way, there will be more stressful experiences coming from the same original stressor. Furthermore, another example brought up referring to middle managers social interactions with their personnel is that it is very stressful to fire personnel since this creates an enormous press of a personal kind on the middle managers, which draws attention to what Albrecht (1980) identified as confrontation stress. The middle managers may experience confrontation stress since firing personnel can be seen as unpleasant interactions with other people without any preset rules, which is a statement also supported by Albrecht (1980).

Furthermore, the empirical material shows that unexpected occurrences and their outcome of forced and difficult reprioritizing are experienced as stressful situations, which is found to be in congruence with what Albrecht (1980) described as emotional stressors. The middle managers often experience so called time stress (Albrecht, 1980) and claim that having to deal with too many things at one time is experienced as very stressful. This may for instance be constant cell phone calls, e-mails that needs to be answered, or papers to be signed, which all are occurring simultaneously. Additionally, it may also be when the middle manager must prepare something, such as a report to the CEO, and feel that the CEO relies upon the middle manager to get it done on time. This could be seen as time stress since the middle managers refer to the preparation of reports which needs to be done in a certain time, but additionally, since the report is demanded by the upper management this will add a social aspect on the occurrence which perhaps originates from differences in authority or personal characteristics. Lastly, it has also been stated in the empirical material that there have been increasing tasks for the middle managers to perform during the last couple of years due to organizational downsizing, which is supported by Worall and Cooper (1995) who claims downsizing to be a large reason behind the increased work load of today's middle managers.

Situations Involving Time and Planning

While more specifically discussing the middle managers' planning and possible time restrictions it seems to be the case that most middle managers find deadlines to be a large source of stress. It has been said that deadlines make the work days hectic and that having many deadlines at a time can cause stress, which is further supported by Albrecht (1980) who has identified time stress as originating from an emotional stressor such as, for instance, strict deadlines. Furthermore, another example of feelings of time stress gathered from the empirical findings is that it has been stated that having to bring work home during weekends in order to catch up is experienced as stressful, as well as having to bring or unconsciously bringing work home mentally. The reason why this may be seen as time stress is because it most likely originates from the middle managers having too much to deal with during the work days that it is not possible to get everything done during work hours. This is supported by Albrecht (1980) who stated that managers sometimes fear failure, which consequently

may be a reason for the extended habits of mentally bringing work home even when there is no specific work task to perform at home.

The middle managers' statement that unexpected occurrences are often appearing during their work days is supported by Tyrstrup's (2002) findings, and an examples of this from our empirical findings is the widely mentioned interruptions the middle managers are exposed to during their work days. This may for instance be when a middle manager is sitting at the office performing a task when someone walks in and needs immediate help with an issue. All middle managers see interruptions during work as a normal part of their job that they just have to deal with, but some still find it disturbing and admit that interruptions sometimes destroys their concentration. Furthermore, this can also be connected to the stress some middle managers claims to experience when having to start with a new task while not being done with the previous. This may also be an example of time stress, since Albrecht (1980) claims time stress to be a feeling of that time is running out, and that there always is more to do.

Furthermore, it seems that even though the breaking of plans always is experienced as stressful by the middle managers, it is when the breaking of plans starts affecting other people it becomes very frustrating and stressful, which is stated by Albrecht (1980) as being a social stressor. This may for instance be the finalizing of reports, but another example is also the middle manager who every day tries to devote time to stroll around the office in order to personally talk to and interact with the subordinates. The middle manager feel stressed when not being able to do so since this may negatively impact upon the middle manager's relation and cooperation with the subordinates.

We have however also found in the empirical material that having to finish on time may be very stressful, but that it at the same time constitutes a challenge, which may be an example of what Seyle (1976) identifies as eustress. Furthermore, another middle manager adds that also unexpected occurrences, even though they may be very hard to deal with, are stimulating. This coincides with Seyle's (1976) statement that positive stress is action enhancing and creates focus and extra energy, and since the middle managers refer to feelings such as being stimulated and challenged it seem to be an example of positive stress. Challenges may however not always be positive for the middle managers since if a task is too challenging it can be experienced as distress, which coincide with Seyle's (1976) statement, but the middle managers in this study seem to refer to challenges in positive terms.

Consequences of Stress

When analyzing the middle managers' perceived stress responses it is obvious that every person experiences stress in different ways, even though there are some general similarities. We have identified both physical and psychological types of stress responses among the middle managers, which is supported by Eriksson et al. (2004). In the empirical material there are however only a few examples of physical stress responses, such as for instance one middle manager claiming to sometimes feel generally ill, having an upset stomach, and headache as a response to stressful situations. Additionally, another middle manager claims that in certain situations, such as when

not feeling able to give the personnel their deserved support, the middle manager experiences a feeling of dizziness and stomach ache. Eriksson et al. (2004) supports this by saying that identified stress responses are among others different kinds of physical ache due to tensions in the body, which seem to be the case with these middle managers.

The empirical material has, however, shown a predominant focus on different psychological stress responses experienced by the middle managers. This is for instance stated as a general loss of engagement in the middle managers' work situation, as well as constantly having too many thoughts of work. Furthermore, several middle managers have referred to sleeping disorders such as waking up at night without being able to get back to sleep due to that the middle managers remember everything that should have been done during the previous day. Another example of the same type of stress may be another middle manager who claims to habitually wake up extremely early in the mornings when feeling stressed. All these stress responses seem to originate from chronic stress, which often implies that the middle managers have difficulties to let go of problems and to relax, and often have sleeping difficulties as a result, which is assumptions supported by Eriksson et al. (2004) statements.

Furthermore, the empirical findings also show that the middle managers get more easily annoyed when feeling stressed, which sometimes also results in a loss of focus on the task at hand. Other statements show that stress may decrease the middle managers' effectiveness in different situations, such as for instance their ability to find important papers. Additionally, stress also seems to affect the middle managers' judgment at work, and thus as a consequence the whole work situation. Since the middle managers get easily annoyed and angry as well as experience difficulties to focus when feeling stressed their stress responses coincide with those stated by Eriksson et al. (2004).

Lastly, consequences on the organization originating from the middle managers stress may be of different kinds, but one example is that stress increases the middle managers' feeling of not having enough time to spend on the personnel. The middle managers often wish that they have time to develop a personal relation to their subordinates, which for instance is important in order to realize if a subordinate is not satisfied at work, or having a generally difficult time. The empirical material also shows that the middle managers feelings of having too little time for personnel therefore decrease the managerial engagement in the personnel, as well as create a feeling among the personnel of not being supported by their managers, which may decrease the trust between the middle managers and their subordinates. This may for instance be related to Albrecht's (1980) statement that middle managers must satisfy all levels of the organization, which further is connected to the middle managers increased responsibilities towards top management to fulfill organizational goals and other demands. As a result this in some cases may decrease the middle managers' possibilities to satisfy both the CEO and the subordinates.

5.3.2 Unconscious Stress

To further analyze middle managers' perceived stress we will, in order to illustrate possible additional stress experienced by the middle managers, do so by using Karasek's (1979) Job Strain Model as a basis. The reason for why we consider the Job Strain Model to be applicable when aiming at investigating stress related to the middle managers' planning is because we consider job decision latitude to be partly dependent upon the middle manager's planning and time usage. We find this to be the case since job decision latitude address the middle managers potential control over tasks and assignments, and job demands implies all different psychological stressors involved in performing these tasks and assignments. In other words, extensive planning and well performed time usage may be related to high feelings of control at work which increases the job decision latitude, and if the middle manager is exposed to occupational stressors this will increase the job demands. Therefore job decision latitude and job demands, defined by Karasek (1979), seem to be a good help in analyzing middle managers everyday planning, and its possible impact on their stress. Furthermore, we also investigate additional sources of stress in an attempt to separate stress originating from planning and time usage from stress derived from other types of stressors.

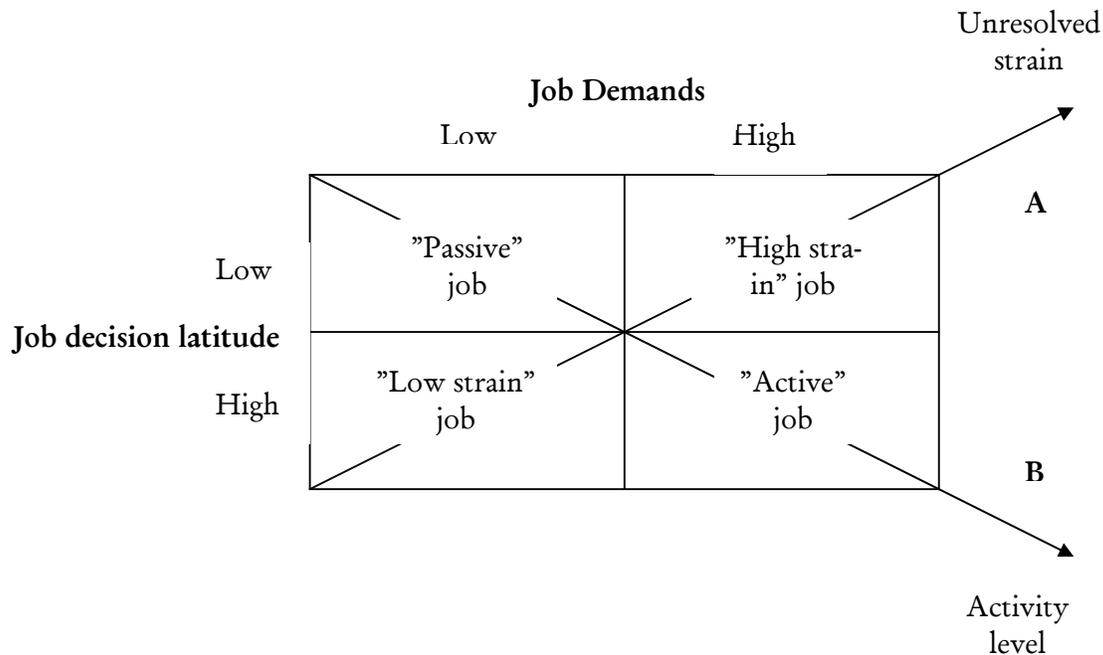


Figure 5.1 Job Strain Model (Karasek, 1979. p. 288)

Job Decision Latitude

Empirical findings show that when asking about the middle managers perceived job decision latitude with focus on control in the form of managerial planning it seemed like all middle managers felt in control in some way, even though they never realized

all their plans. One reason for this seem to be that there is so much to do and therefore the middle managers cannot perform their jobs in desired ways, which creates a feeling of not being in control. Therefore, even though the middle managers state that they are planning their days, some of them do not feel in complete control since different projects and other factors in the company may run the days. Examples of this may for instance be that the CEO creates additional demands, or that there are unexpected occurrences of other forms. Furthermore, the middle managers also claim to not feel in control over upcoming cell phone calls, e-mails, and people appearing with problems, which all may contribute to that the middle managers planning is failing and therefore gives the middle manager a feeling of lack of control. Similarly, the middle managers' deadlines contribute to decreased feelings of control since they are non-negotiable and therefore must be followed at any price. It is however important to remember that there are still several factors where the middle managers feel in total control, such as for instance in deciding whether to work over time or bring work home.

Analyzing the middle managers' feelings of control over their planning and thus their work situation creates a feeling of the middle managers having quite low control over their work days. This should however be put into perspective with all the other factors the middle managers actually are in control over, but with focus on managerial planning the control will be judged as relatively low.

Managerial Demands

When analyzing the demands put upon the middle managers it seems as though they are very high. Most middle managers, even though not all of them claim to have a very high work load and some middle managers even claim the work load to be constantly increasing. The empirical findings also show that the middle managers experience higher demands when facing more responsibilities towards personnel, and that the middle managers seem to put more than necessary demands upon themselves. Furthermore, since the organizations often must save money this creates an extra demand upon the middle managers since they have to work towards achieving those savings, and that if any problem occurs the middle managers are the ones who have to deal with it.

The middle managers also claim that the demands put upon them increase when there are many different simultaneous wishes around the organization since the middle managers are the ones who have to deal with all wishes. Another demand related to their position as middle managers is also that the middle managers need to be able to take directions from the upper management and make their subordinates implement the decisions in a good way. This certainly adds an extra demand upon the middle managers since it seems to not always be easy to make the personnel accept the top management's directions. Furthermore, all the interruptions and unexpected occurrences the middle managers must deal with further appear to increase the demands put upon them, since the middle managers states that their jobs would be much easier if they could just perform their work tasks without any interruptions.

It therefore seems to be the case that the demands put upon the middle managers are relatively high, even though still manageable, which coincide with Worall and Cooper's (1995) statement that many middle managers today experiences higher demands due to organizational downsizing.

Managerial Job Strain

After having suggested that the interviewed middle managers seem to have a relatively, but not extremely, low job decision latitude when focusing upon control over their managerial planning and time usage, as well as relatively high job demands, we will now further analyze these findings. With reference to Karasek's (1979) Job Strain Model, these findings suggest that the middle managers work in a high strain job environment. Furthermore, according to Karasek (1979), high strain jobs imply high job stress and dissatisfaction, which coincide with our earlier analysis of the middle managers acknowledged stress and stress responses. This analysis however also indicates a broader view of the middle managers perceived stress responses by further connecting these responses to the managerial planning process and insufficient time available for performing the requested tasks.

Other Sources of Managerial Stress

It is of course also important to take additional sources of stress into consideration in order to create a picture of middle managers' stress which is not only based upon their planning. During this research several other sources of stress have appeared in connection to the investigated middle managers, and one of these stressors seem to be the support from colleagues, subordinates, and superiors.

The empirical findings show that only one middle manager feels overstepped by colleagues when having to take a decision that does not suit everybody in the organization. The middle manager in question has for instance experienced that colleagues have taken issues to the CEO instead of the middle manager, and that the CEO took a different decision than would otherwise have been taken by the middle manager. There are however also other middle managers who have expressed the feeling of wishing that coworkers sometimes recognized when the middle managers were in need of help, and gave their support. Even though Newell (2002) claims lack of support from other people in the organization to be a main source of stress, which is further supported by Livian and Burgoyne (1997), we do not consider this to be as heavily emphasized by the middle managers to be a stressor of any larger extent. We base this upon that most middle managers actually claim to feel supported, and that there even is an example of subordinates that on a regularly basis provide their help when their middle manager has an extra hectic period.

In contrast to Livian and Burgoyne's (1997) statement governmental interventions and other regulations ruling the middle managers work life does not seem to be an overly large stressor in the investigated middle managers life. However, one middle manager claims to be negatively affected by organizational rules, which more specifically is said to be because of lack of rules. The middle manager in other words feels that the work situation would get improved by having more rules in the organization, which contradicts Eriksson et al. (2004) statement that strong regulations by

rules may be perceived as stressful. Other than that the empirical findings only show the experienced feeling that there sometimes are too many organizational reports to write and that the regulations sometimes are inhibiting since they are more based upon principles than upon common sense. This gives us the feeling that rules and regulations are important in the middle managers work life and sometimes affect the middle managers in a negative way and sometimes in a positive way, but that it still does not constitute a large source of stress among the interviewees.

Lastly we wish to emphasize the findings that the middle managers may feel insufficient when not being able to satisfy all levels of the organization, which is also supported by Albrecht (1980) who states that the position of the middle manager might be the most stressful position in the company since the middle manager must satisfy everybody at the same time. The empirical material provides examples of how the middle managers feel that they have to take the blame from the subordinates when trying to implement a decision taken by the CEO. Furthermore, there is also an example of a middle manager sometimes getting into heavy discussions with the CEO due to differences in opinions and ways of looking at different issues. The issue of having to satisfy different levels of the organization also seems to be a sources stress even though not to a large extent. It has been clearly stated that most of the middle managers actually feel that the subordinates understand that the middle managers have to implement the CEO's decisions, even though it may affect the subordinates in a negative way.

Since we have found a relation between middle managers everyday planning and their perceived stress we will further clarify this in the following conclusion. The conclusion will summarize our findings and emphasize crucial statements supporting our analysis, and provide a clear answer to the purpose of the thesis.

6 Conclusions and Final Discussion

In this chapter we provide the reader with the conclusions drawn from the analysis of the empirical material showing a relation between middle managers planning and their perceived stress, as well as answers to our stated research questions. Furthermore, we also reveal our thoughts regarding this study, limitations, and recommendations for future studies.

6.1 Conclusions

In order to summarize the output of the analysis we now provide the reader with our conclusions while considering the research questions stated in the frame of reference. These conclusions aim at more thoroughly demonstrating how the empirical findings answer the purpose of the thesis, which is to describe and analyze everyday planning, and its potential impact upon perceived stress among middle managers in medium sized organizations. In order to meet this purpose we have performed a qualitative study and interviewed ten middle managers from five different manufacturing companies in the Jönköping region.

The empirical findings show that the middle managers highly value the power of planning and that all middle managers perform planning, even though in different ways and to different extent. The usage of calendars seem to be a common factor among the middle managers, but still the agendas are mainly used for formal planning such as meetings and deadlines stated by the upper management or customers. The main part of the middle managers' planning can instead be referred to as mental planning, which is implying that the middle managers keep the majority of their planning in their minds. Even though there might be occurrences with the middle managers using loosely written list of things to do, the formulated plans are worked on mentally over and over again. This is a way for middle managers to deal with the everyday planning that they do not consider anyone else in need of taking part of. Furthermore, the middle managers consider planning to be an invaluable part of their work life, and that they would not be able to perform their jobs without planning.

The middle managers express contradictory feelings regarding the control they possess over their work days. Whereas it seems like all middle managers feel in control over their work days, it is also often occurring that the work days instead are controlled by upcoming projects, assignments, and different unexpected occurrences. This appear to create a feeling among the middle managers that their planning, no matter how well performed, does not really matter since there is always something occurring that changes or defer the plans. Additionally, the results of broken plans are often experienced feelings of frustration and hopelessness among the middle managers.

Feelings of frustration and hopelessness are often connected to the middle managers' constant wish to perform even when there is neither time nor possibilities to get done with planned achievements. Therefore we claim that feelings of frustration and hopelessness are closely related to feelings of experienced stress, which the main parts

of the middle managers occasionally or repeatedly have experienced. The stress referred to by the middle managers seems to be originated from both emotional and social stressors. Social stressors, creating among others, situational stress, expectation stress, and confrontation stress, seem to be as frequently occurring as emotional stressors triggering time stress. All middle managers however experiences different feelings of stress, and therefore we believe that organizations evoke different types of stress in different situations, but that all stressors are present and may trigger stress responses at any given moment. The reason to this seems to be that experienced feelings of stress is a combination of the middle managers' appreciation of different situations, and the different situations the middle managers find themselves in. This implies that even though middle managers do not have the same appreciation of situations, at least the likelihood of the same situations appearing is high, which in turn increases the chance of similar feelings of stress occurring among the middle managers in the long run.

After concluding that the main part of the middle managers experience feelings of stress, we will now refer to the extended examples of experienced time stress when saying that even though not all the middle managers stress can be traced to their planning; a large part may be. This stress may result from feelings of lack of planning, broken plans, or that the middle manager for some reason does not feel in control over the work days, even though trying to plan in beforehand. The reason to why it might be hard for the middle managers to plan in advance is that there often are other tasks occurring that change the previous plan. Therefore we claim that a large part of the middle managers experienced feelings of stress may originate from planning, and different issues connected to planning. It is however important to keep in mind that the middle managers experienced stress also derive from other sources of stress but, as found in this study, to a lesser extent.

6.2 Final Discussion

We will now more thoroughly discuss our conclusions in order to further emphasize possible reasons behind our findings, as well as our own thoughts regarding the outcome of this study. From the theory we got the understanding that middle managers often use their calendar and agendas in order to successfully plan their work days, and that it would be almost impossible to manage without these tools. Furthermore, we also learned that middle managers are exposed to several different occupational stressors that may affect them differently depending upon their perception of the environment. The literature however did not state whether one stressor or stress response was more often occurring than others, but by performing this research we have gained knowledge to add in this matter as well as realized that we do not always agree with mentioned research.

As stated in the conclusions formal planning, such as calendars and schedules, does not seem as important to middle managers as their mental planning, which therefore contradicts the theory. There are several possible reasons behind this, such as for instance that a large part of middle managers activities involve independent work with reports and projects which not include anyone else, and thus not require formal

planning. Another reason might be that middle managers quickly learn what might come up during a day and therefore not consider it necessary to plan ahead. This reason is supported by the middle managers statements that the longer they have worked at the company the less they get surprised by unexpected occurrences, but on the other hand it is contradicted by the middle managers statement that their work days are increasingly diversified. Furthermore, the dominance of mental planning over formal planning may be connected to the increasing stress perceived by the middle managers since a main part of the mental planning may originate from thoughts of work at home when the managers cannot let go of problems connected to their jobs. Perhaps it is even the case that a lot of middle managers' perceived stress could be avoided with more extensive formal planning, since that may take away the incentives to think about work after work hours.

In the conclusions we also stated that we consider middle managers to work under high strain conditions, due to their low job decision latitude and high job demands. This statement seems to be in line with resent research, but at the same time partly disagreeing with the middle managers own statements. The middle managers contradicts themselves when claiming to be in control of their work days, since they admit that they constantly gets interrupted and that their work days are controlled by projects and unexpected situations. Is the reason behind this contradiction that no-one likes to admit to not be in control, or is it because the middle managers actually feel in control even though several factors contradict it? This is a tough question but since the middle managers also admit that unexpected occurrences and not being able to realize plans contribute to feelings of stress we believe that being in control is important but hard to achieve for middle managers.

Not being in control in terms of interruptions, deadlines, and work hours, seems to be the main emotional factor that contributes to feelings of time stress. Middle managers experienced feelings of time stress is completely in line with other researchers' findings that organisational downsizing decreases the middle managers' possibilities to fulfill their job in the available time frame. Even though we established that the main experienced feeling of stress among the middle managers is time stress, it is difficult to totally eliminate the possibilities of social stressors heavily affecting the middle managers' work life. Perhaps emotional stressors creating time stress is the main stressor among middle managers due to changes in the business environment, but social stressors such as the difficulties to satisfy all levels of the organisation may be the factor that put middle managers in an extremely stressful position. Therefore it seems like middle managers' everyday planning certainly have an impact on their perceived stress, which is especially evident in their responsiveness to time stress, but that other stressors also affect middle managers. Perhaps social stressors are what distinguish middle managers' stress from other peoples stress in the organization, even though stress originating from planning still constitutes the main part of middle managers' perceived stress.

6.2.1 Limitations

A weakness of this study may be the fact that we due to limited time and resources only interviewed ten middle managers. This might be the case since a larger amount of interviewed middle managers perhaps could have provided more information needed in order to create a more complete picture of middle managers' daily planning and perceived stress.

6.2.2 Suggestions for Further Research

During this study we have come across some areas that we believe might be interesting for future research. The topics that we feel are the most significant will hereby be presented.

Our research has given us a great knowledge about middle managers' everyday planning and perceived stress in medium sized companies, but we also believe that it would be interesting to conduct a similar study on larger sized companies. We believe that it would be of interest to compare middle managers' planning and perceived stress between the different sized companies, in order to evaluate what impact an organizations' size has on middle managers stress level. .

Another suggestion for future research is to use the results from this qualitative study and perform an additional quantitative study. We believe that it would be of interest to se similarities and differences between the outcome of this study and a quantitative study with a larger sample.

Lastly, it would also be interesting to investigate if the role of middle managers, as well as their everyday planning and perceived stress, will change even further over time. The reason to why we find this to be of interest is because middle managers' work situation concerning responsibilities, work load, and everyday planning has changed over the last decades, and we believe that it will continue to change. This might be investigated by performing a study equal to this one after a certain amount of years.

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Appendix 1: The English Interview Guide

Middle Managers

1. How does one of your typical work days look? Tasks, assignments, etc.
2. Can you describe your work load? Do you find your work load reasonable? Why/why not?
3. What are your average weekly work hours? Overtime, business trips?
4. What demands do you feel are put on you due to your position as a middle manager? In which ways and why?
5. Do you feel that it can be hard to satisfy both superiors and subordinates? Examples.
6. If the answer to question 5 is yes, what might the consequences be?
7. How do the company's rules and procedures affect your work?

Time and planning

8. To what extent do you feel that you can plan your work day and your tasks?
9. How large of a part of your daily activities is booked in your agenda?
10. What is scheduled and since how long?
11. How often do you have time to fulfill what you have planned to do?
12. How often do you have to interrupt what you are doing in order to deal with some other, urgent task? How do you feel if you must interrupt what you are doing?
13. How often do you get surprised by unexpected occurrences at work, and how do you react when that that happens?
14. How often do you have important deadlines, and is it difficult to hold them?
15. How do you feel if you can not keep your deadlines?
16. How do you think you would manage without your planning?

Stress

17. What support do you get from your co-workers? Examples.
18. What support do you get from your subordinates? Examples.
19. How does your work impact on your private life and your health?
20. In what type of situations do you feel stressed? What might the consequences be?

Appendix 2: The Swedish Interview Guide

Mellanchefer

1. Hur ser en typisk arbetsdag ut för dig? Uppgifter etc.
2. Kan du beskriva din arbetsbörda? Anser du den rimlig? Varför/varför inte?
3. Vad är din genomsnittliga arbetstid per vecka? Övertid, tjänsteresor?
4. Vilka krav ställs på dig i arbetet som mellanchefer? På vilket sätt och varför?
5. Känner du att det kan vara svårt att tillfredsställa både under- och överställda? Ge exempel.
6. Om svaret är ja på fråga 5, vilka brukar konsekvenserna bli?
7. Hur påverkar företagets regler och bestämmelser ditt arbete?

Tid och planering

8. Hur mycket kan du själv styra din dag och dina arbetsuppgifter?
9. Hur stor del av dina dagliga aktiviteter är inbokade i din kalender?
10. Vad är inbokat och sedan hur länge?
11. Hur ofta hinner du fullfölja det som du planerat?
12. Hur ofta måste du avbryta det du gör för att ta hand om en annan, brådskande uppgift? Hur känns det om du måste avbryta det du gör?
13. Hur ofta blir du överraskad av händelser på jobbet och hur reagerar du då?
14. Hur ofta har du viktiga deadlines? Kan det vara svårt att hålla dem?
15. Hur känns det om du inte kan hålla dina deadlines?
16. Hur skulle du klara dig utan din planering?

Stress

17. Vilket stöd får du från medarbetare i din chefsroll? Ge exempel.
18. Vilket stöd får du från din chef? Ge exempel.
19. Hur påverkar din arbetssituation ditt privatliv/hälsa?
20. Ge exempel på då du känner dig stressad? Vilka konsekvenser kan det bli?