



INTERNATIONELLA HANDELSHÖGSKOLAN
HÖGSKOLAN I JÖNKÖPING

Ledaren i mitten

Mellanchefens uppfattade roll ur ett relationsperspektiv

Filosofie kandidatuppsats inom Företagsekonomi

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Handledare: Tomas Müllern

Jönköping Januari 2006



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Leading from the Middle

The Middle Manager's Perceived Role from a Relationship Approach

Bachelor's thesis within Business Administration

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Datum:	2006-01-20
Ämnesord	Förväntningar, Identitet, Kommunikation, Mellanchefer, Möjligheter & Restriktioner, Organisationsstruktur

Sammanfattning

Den traditionella synen på mellanchefer är att de spelar en roll att ta emot och ge vidare information uppåt och neråt i organisationen. Med den här positionen i hierarkin sägs mellanchefen känna sig klämd i mitten på grund av motstridiga förväntningar från över och underordnade. Olika forskare har kommit med olika teorier om mellanchefen behövs i den moderna organisationen eller inte. När organisationsstrukturer börjar förändras på grund av nedskärningar och/eller decentralisering förändras mellanchefens roll. Teoretiker argumenterar om förändringarnas olika effekt på mellanchefen. Men hur uppfattar egentligen mellanchefen sin roll i den nya organisationen?

Den här uppsatsen syftar till att nå en större förståelse för hur mellanchefen uppfattar sin roll i organisationen och hur denna roll påverkas av relationerna med de övre chefsnivåerna.

För att besvara syftet med den här uppsatsen har en kvalitativ metod använts. Ett urval på 50 mellanchefer från fyra olika organisationer har tagits från en intern databas tillhörande ett forskningsprogram i samarbete mellan Jönköping Internationella Handelshögskola och Umeå Universitet. Den valda tekniken är att analysera sekundärdata från forskning om mellanchefer.

Hur mellanchefen uppfattar sin roll skiljer sig mellan den individuella mellanchefen och dennes erfarenhet. Detta visar att mellanchefens identitet är en nyckelfaktor till mellanchefens upplevda roll.

Bachelor's Thesis within Business Administration

Title:	Leading from the Middle: The Middle Manager's Perceived Role from a Relationship Approach
Author:	Maria Lyckhult
Tutor:	Tomas Müllern
Date:	2006-01-20
Subject terms:	Communication, Expectations, Identity, Middle Management, Organizational Structure, Possibilities & Restrictions

Abstract

The traditional view of middle managers is that they play a role to receive and deliver information upwards and downwards in the organization. With this position in the hierarchy the middle manager is said to feel stuck in the middle due to conflicting expectations from upper and lower levels in the organization. Researchers have provided theories whether the middle manager is needed or not in the modern organization. When organizational structure begins to change due to downsizing and decentralization the roles of the middle managers begin to change. With the organizational change theorists then argue about the different effects on the middle manager. But how does the middle manager actually perceive his or her role in the new organization?

This thesis aims at reaching a greater understanding of the middle manager's perceived role within the organization and how the role is affected by the relationships with the upper management levels.

To answer the purpose of this thesis a qualitative method is used. A sample of 50 middle managers from four different organizations is taken from an in-house database belonging to a research program in collaboration between Jönköping International Business School and Umeå University. The technique chosen is therefore to analyse secondary data originally collected in recent research within the field of middle management.

How the middle manager's role is perceived differs between the individual middle manager and his or her experience, which indicates that the middle manager's identity is the most influencing factor on the perceived role.

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1 Introduction

This chapter is discussing the background of the problem of this thesis in relation to current research within the subject. Further the purpose is presented followed by the research questions used in order to answer the purpose of this thesis.

Traditionally middle managers play an important role in an organization delivering a desired message from the upper management down to the lower levels. Along with years of organizational change within almost any company, researchers have provided different meanings on what a middle manager is in a modern organization, if the middle manager is needed at all, and how the organizational changes affect the role of the middle manager. Peters (1992) for instance declares that middle managers obstruct the growth of the company and are therefore not needed. While Dopson, Risk and Stewart (1992) conclude in their study, that in times of rapid changes the middle managers have a more important role in the organization than earlier. Watson (2001) points out that to make an organization grow and survive the managers are needed as steering, coordinating, shaping and directing.

Research is covering this topic but more research is needed to find out how the middle managers perceive their role and how the role is affected by the relationships with the upper management levels. In order to understand this, it is of interest to study the influencing factors of the middle manager's perceived role. Some of these themes are assumed to be the *organizational structure* i.e. the middle manager's position or hierarchical distance to the upper management levels, *possibilities & restrictions* set by the upper management levels, *expectations* from the upper management levels, *communication* between the managerial levels, and how *identity* affects the middle manager's perceived role. In the following sections a short discussion of why these themes are assumed to be important in order to understand the middle manager's perceived role will follow.

After organizational changes that many times have resulted in fewer hierarchical levels and more decentralized structures the middle manager's role sometimes has changed. Floyd and Wooldridge (1994) stress that the fewer hierarchical levels there are within the organization the fewer managers, but the strategic roles of the middle managers are likely to become more important. Where the middle manager is positioned in the hierarchy and if the organization is decentralized are factors assumed to affect the middle manager's perceived role. Further, the hierarchical and geographical distance between the middle manager and the upper management levels affects the relationships between the managerial levels (Keys & Bell 1982). Therefore the *organizational structure* is an important issue to be discussed in order to understand the middle manager's perceived role.

Possibilities and restrictions in the managers' environment are factors that determine the outcome of their work. This can be to what extent the manager can make decisions and also as Watson (2001) explains the middle manager's chance to gain new knowledge to either "boost" self-confidence or increase the possibility to perform the role. Stewart (1982) emphasizes on different restrictions that have an influence on the manager's choices. These restrictions are if resources are not provided, if the environment is not suitable to perform the tasks, and the attitudes of subordinates and superior managers.

As organizational structure begins to change, the roles of the middle managers begin to change, which has implied both threats and advantages (Watson & Harris, 1999). The changed role of the middle manager comes along with new *expectations* from different levels within the organization. Being positioned between these levels Thomas & Dunkerly (1999) discuss that the middle managers feel stuck in the middle with the role as both team players

and executioners. Here the relationship with the upper management levels is essential in order to make the middle managers understand their expected role. Further, the managers that are left after downsizing are affected by 'the survivor syndrome', and need to be motivated to find their new roles within the organization (Brockner, et al., 1994). Thomas & Dunkerly (1999) conclude that the restructuring reduces the feeling of being stuck in the middle and it facilitates the decision making process as well as the right to manage. The drawbacks are that the middle managers' workload and responsibilities are increasing.

Theories within the corporate identity and organizational change stress the importance of *communication* to implement the change successfully (Williams, 2001). The move from strong hierarchical organizational structures to a more decentralized structure implies, as Dopson et al. (1992) emphasize, that the middle manager comes closer both to the subordinates and the upper managers and decision making is spread between the different levels. They also find in their study that middle managers are seen by the upper management as key persons to implement changes and therefore they are able to influence the performance of the organization. In other words the way communication is managed determines the middle manager's perceived role.

A middle manager is manager between levels of organizational hierarchies with the role to plan, coordinate and control to help the organization perform (Watson & Harris, 1999). A distinction has to be made between the middle manager's actual role and the individual manager's *identity*. A middle manager's role can be the same no matter who performs the role. Thus the individual middle manager's identity determines how the middle manager perceives the expectations from the upper management levels and it also determines how the middle manager approaches new situations such as organizational change. Therefore the same managerial role can be performed in different ways depending on the middle manager's identity. Newell and Dopson (1996) describe how these changes affect the middle managers' attitudes towards their career and the organization which implies the need of more information. Therefore the relationships with the upper management levels are also important to help to create the middle manager's identity.

The perceived role of a middle manager is still very diffuse and a research is needed to understand how factors such as organizational structure, possibilities and restrictions, expectations, communication, and identity affect the perceived role of the middle manager. These themes will therefore be discussed in this thesis with a focus on how the relationships between the middle manager and the upper management levels affect these themes which in turn affect the middle manager's perceived role. This research will therefore be done by the use of already existing theories within the research on middle management and by an analysis of empirical data gathered from a total of 50 middle managers from four Swedish companies.

1.1 Purpose

This thesis aims at reaching a greater understanding of the middle manager's perceived role within the organization and how the role is affected by the relationships with the upper management levels.

1.2 Research Questions

To answer the purpose of this research to reach a greater understanding of how the middle manager perceives his or her role, the following research questions will be investigated.

- How does *organizational structure* affect the middle manager's perceived role and how does the hierarchical and geographical distance between the managerial levels affect the relationships between the middle manager and the upper management levels?
- What *possibilities & restrictions* enable or limit the middle manager to meet the expectations from the upper management levels and to perform the expected role?
- How do the perceived *expectations* from the upper management levels affect the middle manager's perceived role?
- To what extent does *communication* between the middle management and the upper management levels affect the middle manager's perceived role, task and performance?
- How does the middle managers' *identity* affect their managerial work and how do relationships between the managerial levels affect the middle managers' present role and future career?

In order to understand how the factors stated above influence the middle manager's perceived role, a distinction between the middle manager's formal and informal role description will also be made.

2 Methodology

This chapter will give the reader a presentation of the chosen method as well as how the method helps to answer the research questions used in this thesis. The limitations of the method are discussed along with the trustworthiness and the quality of the empirical data used.

2.1 Chosen Method

The aim of this thesis is to understand how middle managers perceive their role in the organization and how their role is affected by the relationships with the upper managerial levels. To answer this purpose a qualitative method will be used in order to through the interpretation of gathered data, reach an understanding of how this group perceives their situation (Lundahl & Skärvad, 1999).

2.1.1 Technique

There are different ways to gather data and it can be in the form of case studies, surveys, observations and already existing documents et cetera. The technique chosen should be the one that best answers the purpose of the thesis in relation to the time frame and the resource disposal (Patel & Davidsson, 2003). The technique chosen in this thesis is secondary data originally collected in recent research within the field of middle management. Secondary data are data that have been gathered by someone else but can be used by others doing a secondary analysis (Lundahl & Skärvad, 1999).

The empirical data analysed in this thesis are taken from an in-house database belonging to researchers within the field of middle management at Jönköping International Business School (JIBS) and Umeå University, Sweden. The empirical data of this database consist of qualitative and quantitative data. The qualitative data chosen to be used are in the form of interviews with a total of 50 respondents gathered at four different occasions of which two belong to two master theses written by students at JIBS and the other two belong to a research program on middle management done in collaboration with JIBS and Umeå University.

2.1.2 Data Sample

The first master thesis was done in January 2004, with six interviews made by two master students at JIBS, with respondents from a large Swedish manufacturing company located in Jönköping. The second master thesis was also done in January 2004, with nine interviews made by two other master students at JIBS, with respondents from another large Swedish manufacturing company also located in Jönköping. Thirdly, ten interviews were made in October 2004 by an Associate Professor within Business Administration at JIBS and two PhD Students at JIBS, with respondents from a large Swedish media company. Finally, 25 interviews were made in August 2005 by an Associate Professor within Business Administration at JIBS and a PhD Student at Umeå University.

Qualitative studies are built upon questions and the author should consider the respondents' confidentiality and either present the case openly or anonymously (Patel & Davidsson, 2003). The advantages of an open case study are that the case is seen as more interesting and real. However the advantages of anonymity are that it gives the researcher the possibility to analyse data that could be sensitive to the respondent (Lundahl & Skärvad, 1999). Due to requests from some of the middle managers interviewed in the case studies de-

scribed below, their names or the name of the organization they belong to will not be mentioned in this thesis. Instead the respondents are coded to let the author know the source of the quotes presented in the thesis. However to make the text more simple to read, these codes will not be written down in the thesis. In the following sections the original purposes of the research programs and of the master theses and will be described including a description of the four organizations that are parts of these studies.

Organization I

The first organization is a Swedish company in the media sector spread over a large geographical distance and with a complex hierarchy which is somewhat centralized. The partly state owned organization has a long history with a strong organizational culture. The organization is part of the large research program mentioned above on middle management. At the time of the interviews the organization is going through downsizing and organizational change. In order to understand the identity of the middle managers a semi structured interview is made with 25 middle managers with a focus on the organizational change and the middle manager's attitude towards the change (Müllern & Wählin, 2005).

The theoretical areas covered in this interview are the following: Organizational issues such as responsibilities, decision making, communication and uncertainty. Furthermore issues concerning internal relationships and expectations, stress, competence and development, and external relationships (Müllern & Wählin, 2005).

Organization II

This organization is also a large Swedish fast growing company in the media sector that at the time of the interviews was going through a major organizational change in order to increase the efficiency of the complex organization as well as to save resources. The organizational structure is very complex and the managerial levels are spread over a large geographical distance. Before the change the many geographically spread local area units had one CEO and the mother company in Stockholm had another.

The semi structured interviews are made with ten respondents as a preliminary study to a large research program on middle management. The fundamental question of the research program is what new roles the middle managers face in new and innovative forms of organizing. The interviews are covering six major areas within the theories of middle management. These areas are the following: strategic and operational development, relationships upwards and downwards, external relations, expectations, stress and uncertainty, competence and development.

Organization III

This manufacturing organization is located in Jönköping, Sweden. This organization was chosen by the interviewers since the organizational characteristics corresponded to the authors' definition on middle management and it has gone through organizational change (Bjärkefur & Sjöholm, 2004).

The original purpose of the master thesis was to explore the role of the middle manager and to what extent the middle managers are involved in the strategic decision making process in a flat organization. The nine interviews are covering the areas concerning the middle manager's role in the organization, communication and relationship with the upper management levels, organizational structure, possibilities & restrictions and expectations (Bjärkefur & Sjöholm, 2004).

Organization IV

This manufacturing organization is located in Jönköping, Sweden. The company has recently faced organizational change when expanding internationally. The organization was chosen by the interviewers due to the traditional organizational structure that the interviewers believed that this company has (Eklund & Hauswirth, 2004).

The original purpose of the master thesis was to investigate how the middle managers experience their leadership style. Therefore the six interviews made have a focus on the middle manager and the leadership style. However the questions are covering the areas concerning the middle manager's role and identity, organizational structure, expectations and relationships with the upper management levels (Eklund & Hauswirth, 2004).

2.2 Limitations of Method

There are four organizations with a different number of respondents from each organization. All the respondents have irrespective of organization received different questions but a large number of similar questions can be found. That is why the author uses the method of sifting out the questions that are similar to each other and that are relevant to the research questions of this thesis. As a result of this there are a different number of answers per theme. Because of the fact that the 50 different respondents receive different questions no matter who is the interviewer, the complexity is increased and a selection is made among the respondents who got similar questions.

The drawbacks of this method are that the author is not able to form specific questions based on the research questions in this thesis and when not meeting the respondents there is no possibility to follow up the answers and ask new clarifying questions. For example in the cases when the answers are unclear to the author there is no possibility to ask further questions. However this does not affect the possibility to answer the purpose of the thesis. Due to the access of the large number of data, unclear answers can be ignored. One advantage with the use of already gathered data is the possibility to analyse a large amount of data, gathered over a large geographical distance, which would not have been possible to do with short time frames and scarce resources provided in a bachelor's thesis.

2.2.1 Trustworthiness of the Data

To consider the reliability of the data sample is important for the trustworthiness of the thesis. When using secondary data one should be critical to the source from which the data are gathered (Lundahl & Skärvad, 1999). Therefore when the secondary data of this thesis are interpreted it is considered that the answers of the respondents can have been influenced by what the respondent thinks the interviewer wants to hear or by misunderstandings of the respondents of the stated questions. This the author can not know and the fact that the author never has met the respondents makes an evaluation of the reliability of their answers difficult. However due to the large number of respondents and that there are more than one interviewer, the author of this thesis can interpret the answers and generalize the answers that to a large extent are similar. Moreover it is considered that mistakes can have been made by the interviewers when typing the interviews and also misunderstandings can have been done by the author of this thesis. The latter is important to criticize since the answers of the interviews are interpreted by the author in relation to the author's knowledge

and what the author wants to hear. This is kept in mind and the quotes are translated from Swedish into English as accurately as possible.

The quality of the interviews varies but has been evaluated by the author as high due to the experience that the interviewers have within the research field of middle management. Thus the interviewers' experience does vary from Master Students to Doctoral Students and to an Associate Professor from JIBS and Umeå University. The interviewers' choices of questions and the formulations of the questions do generally cover the same theoretical field which strengthens the quality and the opportunity for the author to write a thesis like this with the large number of respondents from four different organizations. The interview questions cover to a large extent the same theoretical field. However the questions are formulated differently depending on the respondent, the organization and the interviewer. The interviews from one of the manufacturing organizations are somewhat different to the other three when it comes to how the questions are formulated and therefore also the answers differ. This is due to that the purpose of that thesis is to look at the middle manager from a leadership perspective. Therefore it can be questioned if those interviews should be used in this thesis. However the answers in the interviews are good and a selection of these answers is covering the areas concerning the different themes discussed in this thesis and therefore helps to answer the purpose.

The knowledge of the interviewer affects how the interview questions are formulated. A difference that can be seen when evaluating the quality of the data is that the interviews made by the researchers belonging to the research program are covering a large theoretical field within the research of middle management. The discussions are longer and more follow up questions within the theoretical field are asked. From the author's point of view this contributes to high quality data that can be used in this thesis. The choice of the organizations are also interesting as the two media organizations are facing challenges that according to theory is affecting the middle manager's role. However, differences between the interviews made in the research program and the ones made by master students are that in a research program the timeframe and resources provided are greater which makes it possible to make interviews of this size. To the author of this thesis this is of great value since data of this size and quality could not be obtained with the timeframe and resources provided in a bachelor's thesis.

2.2.2 How the Data are Used

To be able to find a pattern of the answers in the large number of interviews the answers are read through and marked thematically with a specific colour for each theme. A summary of the respondents' answers could then be written still following the themes of this thesis and each answer be coded for the author to know the origin of the quote. The empirical chapter and the analysis of this thesis could be written and a pattern could now be seen how the individual middle manager answered the different questions but also the differences and the similarities between organizational levels and between the different organizations. Here it should be mentioned that the focus of this thesis is on the individual middle manager and how he or she perceives his or her role and not on the organization itself. Although their answers are affected by the organizational structures and the hierarchical levels that differ between the organizations. That is why major similarities and differences between the organizations are considered and analysed. When the empirical data were written many of the respondents gave about the same answers especially the middle managers within the same organization. Therefore and also due to the large amount of respondents, the descriptions of their answers is generalized and typical answers are quoted.

2.3 Method of Analysis

By looking at the theory within the research field of middle management five research questions are formulated in order to be able to answer the purpose of this thesis. The research questions that are based on the five themes discussed in this thesis are assumed by the author to be crucial issues in order to understand the perceived role of the middle manager. The relationship between these themes and the perceived role of the middle manager are complex and differ between issues such as the middle manager's position in the hierarchy, the type of organization and the identity of the middle manager. By looking at a large number of middle managers a pattern of the perceived role is assumed to be seen. The disposal of the timeframe and the resources of this thesis made it impossible to gather primary data and therefore secondary data are used. An analysis is made discussing the empirical data and the theoretical aspects within the field of middle management.

3 Frame of Reference

This chapter will provide the reader a theoretical overview discussing what a middle manager is, how organizational structures affect the middle manager's position and decision making, as well as how possibilities & restrictions, expectations, communication, and identity affect the middle manager's perceived role.

The structure of this thesis is built upon the five research questions that are based on the five themes described in the introduction. These themes are presumably correlated to one another and are affected by the relationship between the middle and the upper management levels. Therefore, these themes are believed to be essential factors affecting the middle manager's perceived role. These themes will in this chapter be discussed theoretically in order to be able to answer the purpose of this thesis which aims at understanding the middle manager's perceived role and how it is affected by the relationships with the upper management levels.

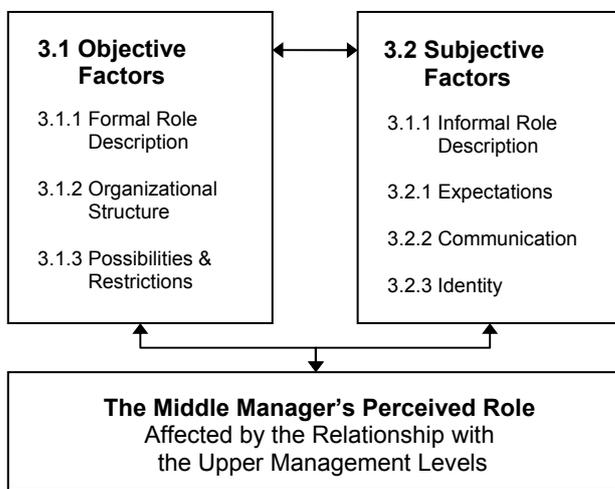


Figure 3-1 The Middle Manager's Perceived Role

How these factors influence the middle manager's role is complex and they will therefore be divided into *objective* and *subjective factors* that are illustrated in Figure 3-1. The objective factors (Chapter 3.1) are formal factors set by the organization and they are therefore factors that to a large extent are the same for all or many middle managers in the same position within the organization. However, these objective factors are not enough to understand the middle manager's perceived role therefore also the subjective factors will be discussed. The subjective factors (Chapter 3.2) are psychological factors that vary between the individual middle managers and describe how they actually feel and perceive their working conditions. As mentioned above the relationships between the middle manager and the upper management levels are believed to be affecting the factors that in turn affect the perceived role and are therefore considered as an important issue. As the model (Figure 3-1) is built upon the research question it should be noticed that two additional factors, the formal and informal role descriptions, are added in the model in order to make the distinction between the objective and subjective factors more clear.

Objective Factors

The first objective factor, *the formal role description*, indicates what is expected by the middle manager depending on his or her position in the organization and involves duties written on paper. The second objective factor, *the organizational structure*, concerns issues affecting

the middle manager's perceived role such as where in the hierarchy the middle manager is positioned and how the decentralization affects the middle manager's right to make decisions. The third objective factor, *the possibilities and restrictions*, is the factor that enables or limits the middle manager to meet the expectations of the upper management levels.

Subjective Factors

The first subjective factor, *the informal role description*, involves duties and expectations belonging to the role that are not written on paper. Closely related to the informal role is the second subjective factor, *the expectations*, which are the tasks and the expectations from the upper management levels that the middle manager feels he or she must do in order to perform his or her job as expected. The third subjective factor, *the communication* between the middle manager and the upper management levels, helps the middle manager to understand and perform his or her role. The last subjective factor is the middle manager's *identity* that is created by the individual middle manager's personality but also affected by his or her relationship with the upper management levels.

As mentioned above it is essential to understand how all these themes to some extent are related to each other and how they are affected by the relationship between the middle and upper management levels in order to understand the perceived role.

3.1 Objective Factors

3.1.1 Formal & Informal Role Description

To understand the middle manager's perceived role a discussion will follow describing the members of the organization and their duties followed by a discussion of the middle manager's formal and informal role. In later chapters the formal and informal role will be separated into the objective and subjective factors. This section ends with the author's definition of middle management in this thesis.

The Members of the Organization

Mintzberg (1983) discusses that the term middle management involves all managers in the organization but not the strategic apex and not the operating core. The term middle management is included in what Mintzberg calls the middle-line managers, the analysts, and the support staff. The strategic apex is defined by him as the ones in charge to ensure that the organization fulfils its mission and also serves the needs of those who control or have power in the organization. The strategic apex is a group of people with the overall responsibility for the organization such as the chief executive officer (CEO) and other top-level managers (Mintzberg, 1983). In this thesis the term upper management levels will be used to describe all managerial levels above the individual middle manager that affects the middle manager's perceived role. In other words this group will include the CEO, the executive group, other top-level managers and also the middle managers that are managers above the individual middle manager in question. Furthermore the operating core is defined by Mintzberg (1983) as the members of the organization that perform the basic work related to the production of the organization's products or services. In this thesis this group will be described as the co-workers or the subordinates of the middle manager.

Role Description

A role is a set of expected behaviours associated with a particular position in an organization. Firstly a role consists of the formal requirements which are job related and explicit and secondly the role also consists of the informal requirements which are social and implicit. Along with this role people have expectations on how a person with a particular role should act (Moorhead & Ricky, 2001). In this thesis this will be described as the middle manager's formal and informal role and expectations.

Floyd and Wooldridge (1994) describe the traditional view of the middle managers as people doing things that translate strategic decisions made by the upper management into actions at the operational level. This view of the middle manager involves tasks as defining tactics and developing budgets for achieving a strategy, as monitoring performance of the individual and as taking action when behaviour does not fulfil the expectations. In their study they stress that the view of the middle manager is misunderstood and that middle managers in a modern organization should be seen as managers with a strategic role needed in order to achieve organizational success.

The middle management has a clear range of roles within the organization from first-line supervisors to department managers and their role is to work like a filter between the upper management and the employee (Denham, Ackers, & Travers, 1997). However, the work that the middle managers do and the way they carry out their assigned role seem to vary from one manager to another (Watson, 2001). Stewart (1991) emphasizes that the role of the manager is dependent upon the hierarchical levels, the function of the manager but is also affected by the characteristics of the people that the manager works with, the received amount of direction and power that they have, the time frame to perform the task, and the cultural context of the environment in which they work (in Watson, 2001). Watson (2001) himself suggests to explain the middle manager's role in three different steps. He explains *management as a function* which is the overall steering or directing of an organization, *management as activities* which are the activities carried out in order to be able to steer or direct the organization, and *management as a team of people* which is the group of people responsible for steering and directing the organization by carrying out activities that makes this possible.

The Author's Definition of Middle Management

Most research on middle management is normally based on a narrow definition of what a middle manager is. In this thesis a broader definition will be used defining the middle manager as all managers between the top management and the operating core. Furthermore the focus will be put upon the middle manager as a function (Watson, 2001), as being a receiver of information and as carrying out information in the organization. In other words the middle manager's overall role is a key person to be the top managements' extended arm to steer and direct the part of the organization in which he or she is positioned. How the middle manager perceives his or her role differs between the individual middle manager. Therefore the five themes of this thesis will be described in the following sections in order to understand the influencing factors on the middle manager's perceived role. Starting with the organizational structure a description of the middle manager's position in the hierarchy will be made and the decision making affected by the level of decentralization will be described. Furthermore the possibilities and restrictions to perform the expected role will be discussed and the middle manager's perceived expectations, followed by a description of the communication between managerial levels. Finally issues concerning the middle manager's identity will be discussed. All these factors must be considered in order to be able to understand the middle manager's perceived role.

3.1.2 Organizational Structure

How does organizational structure affect the middle manager's perceived role and how does the hierarchical and geographical distance between the managerial levels affect the relationships between the middle manager and the upper management levels?

An organizational hierarchy is usually built by first-line supervisors that have been put in charge of a number of operators and together form a basic organizational unit. Further a manager is then appointed to be in charge of a number of these units that form a higher level unit and so on, until all the units of the organization come below a single manager, usually the CEO, and the organization is formed. Within this hierarchy the middle manager has direct supervision above and below him or her. The middle manager passes information upwards and downwards, makes decisions that requires authorization, allocates resources provided by the higher levels of the organization, and formulates strategies for his or her unit. However the role of the middle manager and his or her duties vary as they descend in the chain of authority (Mintzberg, 1983). The role of the middle manager further differs depending on where he or she is positioned in the hierarchy. A traditional view is that first-line supervisors are personally and technically competent within the area they supervise and that they have a face to face contact with the operating core. The managers at levels above these, traditionally seen as the middle managers, do not have the same contact with the operating core due to geographical distances or time barriers. Therefore these managers spend a lot of time with the upper management levels and thus create a stronger upward orientation than the first line supervisor (Keys and Bell, 1982). In this thesis the first-line supervisors are also seen as middle managers. However, the example provided by Keys and Bell (1982) above, shows how the relationships between the managerial levels differ depending on the middle manager's position. Moreover they emphasize that the "effectiveness as a supervisor of those below depends primarily on the ability to develop upward influence of one's superior".

Centralization, Decentralization & Decision Making

During the 1980's decentralization became a prestige word within both the public and the private sector. Our society was characterised by a fast growing technological development with a focus on knowledge, creativity and communication. Organizations were facing a need of restructuring and decentralization to replace the traditional structures. The decentralization of the organization was supposed to involve the employees in decision making and in that way create a better workplace (Drakenberg, 1997). Further, the main theoretical ideas on the factors that cause changes within the organization which in turn, determines the role of the middle manager are the impact of information technology and downsizing (Pinsonneault, & Kraemer, 1997). Floyd & Wooldridge (1994) also discuss this by saying that information and communication technologies make the upper management less dependent on the middle manager. They also emphasize how the increased use of empowerment and the use of cross-functional teams allow managers at operational levels to define their own roles. The organization is then no longer in need of many hierarchical levels. Other studies have shown that IT increases the importance of the middle manager as achieving a role to process data and make more complex decisions and deeper analyses than before (Pinsonneault, & Kraemer, 1997).

Looking closer at the differences between centralized versus decentralized decision making Mintzberg (1983) describes the two as follows. When the power of decision making in the organization is within one single unit the structure is centralized. When the power is divided among many people in the organization the structure is decentralized. In a centralized structure all decisions are made by one person and are implemented by direct supervi-

sion. When all the decisions of an organization can not be made in one unit there is a need to decentralize. The main organizational advantages of decentralization is that the organization can quickly respond to local conditions and it is also a motivating factor that makes managers take initiatives and enables them to make their own decisions (Mintzberg, 1983). Looking at the effects of decentralization, a theory suggests that the organization must stimulate entrepreneurial thinking of individuals and business units that allow people to be responsible for their own decisions. Decentralized decision making gives a need for clear mutual agreements in which a manager knows who is responsible for what (Van Riel 2003; in Balmer & Greyser, 2003).

When it comes to strategic decision making Westley (1990) finds that middle managers who are excluded from strategic decision making are dissatisfied. Middle managers want to be included in strategic conversations in order to have access to powerful coalitions as well as to get access to organizational sense-making. She further stresses that in order to develop the middle management group that is responsive, opposed to paralyzed, there is a need of creating meaning in the organization and include the middle managers as actors in the process. This theory is strengthened by Wooldridge & Floyd (1994) that describe how the role of the middle manager is strongly related to the organization's performance. They find that the middle manager's involvement in strategic decisions is associated with higher financial performance. Low involvement of the middle manager on the other hand contributes to problems with the implementation. In other words, strategies formulated together with the middle managers are supposed to be superior to those that are decided only by the top management.

3.1.3 Possibilities & Restrictions

What possibilities & restrictions enable or limit the middle manager to meet the expectation of the upper management levels and to perform the expected role?

The work and performance of the middle manager differ between individuals and between organizations. Possibilities and restrictions in a company enable or limit the middle manager to perform the expected tasks. Stewart (1982) explains how restrictions, internal or external to the organization, limit what the middle manager is able to do. These restrictions involve resources provided to perform the task as well as laws, technological limitations, physical location, organizational policies and procedures, and also the attitudes of colleagues on different levels that influence the implementation process. Schartau (1997) concludes in her study that possibilities and restrictions affecting the middle manager's work is the relationship to upper management levels, the financial support and also the possibility to develop leadership skills (in Drakenberg, 1997). She also mentions people related restrictions on the performance in for example old colleagues that have been working during many years together, culture or a demanding boss. When it comes to what is needed by the individual middle manager to function as a manager, Watson (2001) discusses the manager's need of formal management training as a booster of confidence rather than a source of knowledge.

Changes within the organization bring uncertainty to the middle manager on how to perform the new role. Opposed to this, Dopson et al. (1992) stress that due to the changes to the flatter organizations middle managers feel less frustrated about their work since they have a more clear area of responsibilities which also implies that they have more control over the resources that they need in order to be efficient managers. In the same study it is seen that managers today perceive that they have new freedom to take risks, be innovative, take on new challenges and gain new managerial expertise.

3.2 Subjective Factors

3.2.1 Expectations

How do the perceived expectations from the upper management levels affect the middle manager's perceived role?

Flatter structures in the organization have contributed to a decreased number of middle managers. Research has shown that the middle manager's role has become wider and more important than before (Dopson et al., 1992). Theorists claim that expectations on the middle manager from the upper management levels and lower levels within the organization make them feel stuck in the middle and as Thomas & Dunkerly (1999) say that middle managers are 'caught in the middle' with the role as both team players and executioners. Hill (1993) concludes that a manager must learn how to handle expectations and conflicts from subordinates and at the same time meet the demands of the upper managers. She describes management as a "world of overwhelming confusion, overload, ambiguity, and conflict" (Hill, 1993, p. 54). Managers feel that they are 'caught in the middle' from both sides of the hierarchy since there is a greater pressure from lower levels due to the increased spans of control and resource constraints while there is a pressure from the upper management levels for greater performance (Thomas & Dunkerly, 1999). Schartau (1997) finds in her study of middle managers in health care services, that middle managers feel a pressure from the upper management levels that they are not active enough to implement changes (in Drakenberg, 1997). Others see themselves as tools exactly following the directives of the upper management levels even though they do not agree with them (Schartau, 1997; in Drakenberg, 1997). In order to meet the expected role of the middle manager there is a need for a well functioning upper management as well as the subordinates' willingness to co-operate. Gable (2002) emphasizes that the conflicting expectations come from individuals whose support and approval are needed in order to successfully perform the middle manager's expected task. Watson & Harris (1999) describe the dilemma as being between managers and workers with the expectations to be loyal to both groups, having a role to implement policies and decisions that have been decided by the upper management, being responsible for efficiency in the organization and being responding to external interests. The research of Watson & Harris (1999), shows that the managers are aware of the concept and usually do not see themselves as being stuck in the middle. Some managers argue that being in the middle is reduced by the flat organization and potential feelings of being stuck in the middle can be handled by the individuals themselves if they have the ability to handle people.

Strategies, that according to Keys and Bell (1982) are helpful for the middle manager to meet the conflicting expectations in the organization, are to develop good relationships with the upper management levels, show loyalty to the superiors and make sure to know their authority. It has been seen that middle managers tend to have more loyalty upwards within the organization than downwards. To listen to the superior manager's demands is seen as a key to the future career. However this loyalty differs between the individuals and is depending on the situation. If the manager does not get enough support from the upper management levels or if his or her suggestions for improvements are ignored it is natural for some to be frustrated while other managers do not seem to care (Edlund, Ahltop, Andersson, & Klepesto, 1990).

3.2.2 Communication

To what extent does communication between the middle management and the upper management levels affect the middle manager's perceived role, task and performance?

Communication is needed as a tool to help building the corporate identity and the identity of the individual. Corporate communication helps to create the reputation of an organization and is therefore important in order to maintain a competitive advantage (Van Riel, 2003; in Balmer & Greyser, 2003). Here the communication between the middle manager and the upper management levels is essential in order to enable the middle manager to communicate to lower levels. To understand the importance of the upper management's need to communicate with the middle managers a discussion will follow on what impact corporate communication has in the organization. Van Riel (2003) defines corporate communication as the "...orchestration of all the instruments in the field of organization identity (communication, symbols and the behaviour of the organization's members) in such an attractive and realistic manner as to create or maintain a positive reputation for groups with which the organization has dependent relationships" (in Balmer & Greyser, 2003, p. 163). To make the individual understand and interpret the organizational identity communication is needed from the upper management levels.

Van Riel (2003) explains how theory divides corporate communication into three areas of communication: management communication, marketing communication and organizational communication. Management communication is the communication of managers on different levels between both internal and external target groups (in Balmer & Greyser, 2003). Research on internal communication focuses on how important the role of the manager is to create a good communication climate (Smidts et al., 2001). This study also shows that managers should play an important role when communicating between the different levels of the organizational hierarchy. One problem then exists as all managers are not aware of their role to play in the communication process (Van Riel, 2003; in Balmer & Greyser, 2003).

Communication & Change

As Dopson et al. (1992) find in their study the upper managers see the middle managers as having a key role when implementing changes in the organization and therefore influence the performance of the organization. In a later research it is discussed that as most organizations today face the challenge of reorganization or downsizing, communication is needed in order to help the 'survivors' among the middle managers to understand their new role (Newell & Dopson 1996). Harrington & Williams (2004) provide managerial implications on the importance of the relationship between the upper and middle managements in order to succeed in any change program of the organization. They say that the upper management must provide training courses for the middle managers to enable them to perform the expected role in the new organization. The middle managers' opinions and knowledge must be valued as well as informing them that their co-operation is needed in order to succeed in the implementation. Furthermore expectations on the middle managers' contributions and their position must be communicated. Finally they stress, that the upper management must lead by being a good example, being visible and supportive. Earlier studies show that this is not so easy. Doherty & Horsted (1995) find in their research that lack of information and communication about the middle managers' new role in a changing organization is the greatest complaint as the organization communicates mostly about organizational issues rather than issues concerning the middle manager. This view is strengthened in a research by Newell and Dopson (1996) in which it is found that managers feel unmotivated after rationalization programmes that result in longer hours of work. These middle managers also experience lack of control over their future career due to lack of information about their

new role in the organization. Further it is seen that the new role demands new skills which are not supported by training and development. Therefore to succeed in changes and to create job satisfaction and motivation, there must be a balance between the organizational and individual concerns about careers.

3.2.3 Identity

How does the middle managers' identity affect their managerial work and how do relationships between the managerial levels affect the middle managers' present role and future career?

Watson (2001) believes that our identity is not given when we were born and it does not become fixed when we grow up, it is rather an emergent process. Being a manager is not only about what the manager knows or what the manager does, but it is connected with the 'sort of person' the manager is. What the work means to the managers is a key influence on how they perform. The middle managers must "*relate their approach to managerial work to their personal concept of self*" (Watson, 2001, p. 160). Watson explains how the middle manager usually is seen as a person helping to shape the organization, but this can only be understood when relating the way they carry out the managerial work to the ways in which they shape themselves as individuals.

Managers need to understand their role in the organization. Literature discusses that due to the changes in the traditional hierarchies, the layers of the organization are decreasing at the same time as the number of managers is decreasing. But even though the number of middle managers is less than earlier, their strategic role becomes more important at the same time as responsibilities and tasks become greater (Dopson et al., 1992; Floyd & Wooldridge, 1994). Dopson et al. (1992) further explain how the middle manager's role and function is affected by the changing organization in a way that they now work in a more turbulent environment. They say that the role of the middle manager has become more general with greater responsibilities and more tasks to perform. Other changes that affect the identity of the middle manager are the increasing span of control, the responsibility for a larger number of people, to be held more accountable for their work as well as that greater emphasis is put on performance. The development of IT also contributes to more information that in turn gives greater expectations on decision making. Changes have implications on the middle manager since they are required to change the managerial attitude and gain new skills. They are expected to be more flexible, manage staff from different backgrounds, be more aware of what is happening in the department and outside and have greater marketing and strategic knowledge. The middle manager's new role brings both positive and negative effects on the individual manager. Thomas & Dunkerly (1999) discuss these effects as positive and negative consequences on the middle manager's career, health and well-being. The positive effects caused by the restructuring of the organizations are that it reduces the feeling of being 'stuck in the middle' which increases the feelings of job enrichment and job fulfilment. Managers feel they have greater strategic input, as well as increased possibilities of making decisions and the right to manage. The negative effects are that the middle managers' workload and responsibilities increase as their role gets wider. This in turn makes them work longer and it becomes difficult to balance work and family life.

4 Empirical Data

This chapter presents the empirical data summarizing the respondents' view on their role influenced by the relationships with the upper management levels and by the objective and the subjective factors.

This chapter presents the empirical data of each of the objective and subjective themes of this thesis. The effects of how the relationships with the upper management levels affect the middle manager's perceived role are complex and they are therefore discussed in each section of this chapter concerning the five themes that this thesis is built upon.

4.1 Objective Factors

4.1.1 Formal Role Description

The formal role seems to be clear to the middle manager as it involves administrative work such as budgeting, setting salaries and directing the department. The majority of the respondents think that they know their formal role even though the directives are not always clear for some and all the respondents have not a description written down on what their role involves. The middle managers say that they understand their role through their position in the hierarchy as well as their responsibility. However, at the two manufacturing companies some of the middle managers say that although they know their role there were not many clear directives provided when they were employed. In one of these organizations all the managers say that there is nothing written on paper what their role is. However this is something that the company is working with at the time of the interviews. One manager says *"no, there are no clear directives. I have adapted directives myself and my previous boss was a role model"*. When directives are not clear the relationship with the upper managerial levels becomes essential *"I have always had a very good relationship with my boss and from personal communication with him I know what is expected by me"*.

Related to the managers' formal role is to what extent the middle manager is empowered to make decisions. This differs between the organizations depending on the decentralization and the manager's position in the hierarchy. In one of the manufacturing organizations all the middle managers have the same boss. This implies as one of them said that *"In our organization the middle managers are very independent. We have a lot of responsibility although not financially. This is the only way to make it work when all the middle managers have the same boss. We have to make own decisions"*.

4.1.2 Organizational Structure

The most reoccurring statement made by the middle managers belonging to the two large media organizations is that the organizations are very controlled by the top. However, this opinion differs within the organization as some middle managers say that their organization is centralized, while others say it is strongly decentralized. The majority agrees on that it is decentralized at each local unit, but when it comes to the financial resources it is very controlled by the top. Some managers explain that the decentralization also differs between the levels *"The great geographical distance makes the decision making moved down in the organizations. The fact that all the managers are not positioned in Stockholm makes the organizations more democratic and more decentralized"*.

Most of the middle managers that talk about decision making say that they feel free to make decisions concerning their department or local area unit. *"I make decisions within the frames of our budget. When it comes to great decisions, choices of technology and strategic decisions I need support from the upper management levels"*. Also duties concerning the middle manager's formal role are within the frames of the decision making. When further looking at decision making the middle manager feels that even though he or she needs support from the top before making important decisions they feel that they can influence easily. This influence is important for the middle managers' motivation as expressed *"after our company merged with another large German company we have been involved a lot and part of the decision making. This is important and stimulating"*.

A pattern whether being involved in strategical issues or not seems to be similar among the middle managers. Either they are involved in the strategical decision making or at least part of a discussion. *"I do not make strategical decisions but I am part of the discussion and I feel that they listen to my opinions"*. Further this manager explains that *"I do not need to be more involved in this because it would take too much time from what I am actually here to do"*. This shows that some managers seem to be satisfied with the decision making that they have. This is strengthened by the middle managers that are asked whether they wish to have more influence or not. A common view is as this manager says *"I do not wish to have more influence on decision making. By my experience it is good the way it is"*.

However, managers that have been working for some time in the organization feel that they can contribute more. One of these managers expresses *"I can feel a disappointment that I am not more involved in discussions about the strategic issues. But in the hierarchy my position is quite far away from that role even though I possess a lot of knowledge and have many years of experience working in the company"*.

The possibility to influence seems to differ due to the size of the organization but also depending on the specialist knowledge of the upper managerial levels. One middle manager in one organization questions if his CEO always has the right knowledge to make decisions as he thinks that there is knowledge further down in this organization. While other managers in another organization emphasize that their CEO has a lot of knowledge and experience of the service that the organization provides. If he would not have had that, they believe that they would have had much greater influence.

Opposed to the two large media companies discussed above, the two manufacturing companies differ. The managers of these organizations perceive their organizations as very decentralized and the answers between these managers do not differ very much. Important to mention is that the organizational structure of one of these differs quite a lot since the organization is very flat with only one manager between the CEO and the 41 middle managers. This implies as it is said *"there are so many middle managers below the boss in our organization that the middle managers have to make their own decisions"*. Here the decisions are made as far down in the organization as possible. The upper manager of this organization spends his time where he sees it is needed most and the managers say *"decentralization makes decision making very independent. As long as you make the right decisions nobody will yell at you and if you make a mistake you will hear it"*. However, what these managers have in common with most of the respondents of this study is the support from the upper managerial level needed before making important decisions. The middle managers also have to make their decisions within the budget frames.

4.1.3 Possibilities & Restrictions

From the middle managers of this study a pattern can be traced that there are issues concerning possibilities and restrictions to perform their job. The two most general issues discussed by the middle managers are the lack of resources and whether middle management training is provided or not.

Middle Management Training

When looking at the effects of further education, 30 out of 50 middle managers are emphasizing the importance of that the organization provides middle management training in order to develop their role as managers and to meet the expectations of the upper management levels. There are a large number of respondents that have attended some kind of management training. *“The middle management training was very rewarding. It gave a lot of knowledge about me. I also got some confidence in doing things that I normally would not dare to do”*. Furthermore managers explain how this course also helped them to create important networks within the organization. As mentioned in section one of this chapter, discussing the middle manager’s perceived role, middle managers that have attended a management course feel that they are seen by the organization. It has also given them a lot of self-confidence and they have a better understanding of their role as middle managers. Most managers express that the organization is willing to provide further education if the middle manager feels it is needed. Although they stress that whether they can attend a course or not is a question of time. Not only management training is needed but also as one manager says *“for the moment I think that the middle managers of our organization have a crying need for education concerning labour legislation and similar things”*.

Managers from one of the manufacturing organizations of this study feel that their role as managers has changed and that the organization today values new characteristics of their leaders. To meet these expectations the organization has provided a leadership course. The outcome of this is reflected by one manager who says *“Today there is much focus put upon the soft aspects of being a leader. I have changed how I value other people and their knowledge. Earlier I was very goal oriented and the goal should be achieved no matter what. If people were working over time did not matter. Today I use other tools to control how people feel and like their work. That they work with the right things that they have the capacity to perform results”*.

Lack of Resources

13 out of 50 middle managers from the different organizations of this study are asked to what extent they feel that resources affect their performance. 10 respondents state that there is a lack of resources. The financial resources are the major issue but as a result of this also the human resources. As one manager expresses *“we are too few people at my department. This is a problem since I have to find competent personnel and I have the expectations to find them internally within the organization. This is difficult. I need a solution of this in order to be able to perform my job”*. The financial resources also affect the ability to live up to the visions *“we do not live up to the vision of this organization even though we work hard to do it. There is a lot that obstruct this not least the resource constraints”*. The lack of resources is also said to be a stress factor for some of the middle managers.

The effects on the middle managers’ time frame to perform the tasks are evident especially in the two media companies in which deadlines have to be kept as well as a large number of tasks should be handled. *“There is a lack of resources... But resources are not always the solution. We have deadlines to keep and a pressure that we must do it”*. One issue discussed by some managers is to what extent they perceive that the upper management levels fulfil their needs. *“The lack of*

resources gives a problem. I have to argue upwards and it is hard to get what I need. But there are also personnel problems since people do not work like machines. It is hard to get resources from upwards”.

One manager expresses his frustration of his situation as not being able to focus on what he thinks is his job *“The lack of resources is one thing but the expectations to solve the problems of the department and to focus on administrative tasks is another. These things do not increase sales which I wish to focus on. It would be good to have a colleague who has time to focus on these things so that I can focus on sales which is my real job”.*

Organizational Factors

Further, it can be seen that whether the directives are clear or not they affect the middle manager’s uncertainty, which in turn affects his or her possibility to perform the expected role. As discussed in section one in this chapter a majority of managers feels that there are no clear directives on their role. One of the organizations is working on these role directives at the time of the interviews. Many managers feel that although the directives are not very clear, they know what is expected and are able to fulfil it. There is also the freedom to make decisions perceived by some middle managers that affect their performance. At the question if the middle manager feels he or she has enough authority to perform the role many managers feel that they have. Although one respondent says *“...no, I feel that I need support of my decisions all the time”.* These are typical issues that differ depending on the manager’s position within the hierarchy.

One of the organizations has a long history with a strong organizational culture. Middle managers that were employed externally into this organization feel that it took time before they were able to influence. They had to learn how colleagues were thinking and how they could question things. As most people are employed internally in this organization and have been working in the organization for many years, the externally employed feel that they were not seen in the beginning.

4.2 Subjective Factors

4.2.1 Informal Role Description

“A middle manager is the upper management’s extended arm in the organization to deliver a message upwards and downwards in the organization”. The middle managers agree on that the informal role of middle management is to be responsible for the employees, motivate them and make them work towards the shared goal. They have a responsibility to develop the organization and make sure that their department is well functioning. One manager emphasizes *“Today it is not always the best technician that becomes the boss. Other values are important and it is expected by you to develop your employees. A manager must take time, always be there as a leader and put the soft aspects in focus”.* The soft aspects of leadership, the managers say, is also to handle the employees’ personal problems both at work and their personal life. This brings new expectations on the middle managers and to be able to handle this and to understand this new role, the middle management training is important. The most important role that the middle managers seem to have in common is to help the employees, inspire them and help them come up with ideas. It is about planning, thinking strategically and making decisions.

4.2.2 Expectations

The Middle Manager's Dilemma I am Stuck in the Middle

Middle managers are explained as managers being stuck in the middle between the demands of the upper and lower levels within the organization. 21 out of 50 respondents answer the question whether they perceive themselves as stuck in the middle or not. Of these 21 answers 13 feel that they are stuck in the middle. The *"middle manager's dilemma"* is to find a balance between receiving instructions from the upper management levels and then to delegate them to the lower levels which is not always popular among the latter. Generally the managers explain that the major reasons for feeling squeezed as a middle manager is because they want to defend their group at the same time as they want to be loyal to the upper management levels. One manager says that *"you have to be loyal to the organizations and be its representative. Sometimes you have to go against your own will. This can create conflicts between you and your co-workers"*.

Further when the middle manager's role and responsibilities are changing it brings new demands and expectations that make the manager feel squeezed. Also when the directives are not clear enough the managers become uncertain and feel squeezed. One middle manager positioned in the higher levels of the hierarchy with a position having two managerial roles says *"I do feel stuck in the middle. Especially with my position as both a local area manager and a deputy managing director I feel that I need more clear directives on my role"*. Other managers explain that they feel squeezed between the levels but that they can handle it well because their boss is very supportive or that the organization enables them to feel free and independent.

For most of the managers feeling stuck in the middle it can be seen that they belong to the two organizations of this study that are facing changes due to a need for greater efficiency or saving resources. One manager who feels squeezed due to lack of resources says that *"when it comes to salaries I feel stuck in the middle because there is a lack of resources and I cannot for example fulfil the subordinates' requests for higher salaries even though I feel that they deserve it"*. Another great issue related to the lack of resources and the downsizing of the organization, is managers that have to sack personnel and perceive themselves as squeezed when the organization is not supportive.

Expectations but 'I am not Stuck in the Middle'

Of the 21 respondents eight do not see themselves as stuck in the middle. An interesting difference is that the majority of the managers, that do not feel stuck in the middle, come from the small decentralized organizations of this study. Further reasons for not feeling stuck in the middle is the manager's personality and attitude, as one manager expresses himself *"no, I do not feel stuck in the middle. I am not that kind of person. I believe that I can influence and it is because of my personality I do not feel squeezed"*. A combination of personality, good relationship with the boss and experience of the individual manager seems to be crucial issues as one manager says *"no, I do not feel stuck in the middle. It is because of my boss and also my personality. This is something you learn. You have to argue for your opinions. There are some bosses in the organization that I know that if I worked with them, I would feel stuck in the middle"*.

Others perceive the organization and its members as supporting or the working environment as very good. They say that they do not feel stuck in the middle and e.g. *"I think that depends on what type of organization you work in and with what kind of people"*. It is also a matter of loyalty from the members of the organization. One manager explains that because his co-workers are team leaders they are also loyal to the organization. Hard working employees that strive to reach the common goal contribute to the manager's perceived expectations set by a satisfied upper management level. *"The expectations of the upper managerial levels are not*

too tough as long as everything is functioning well and the results are good then the upper managerial levels are satisfied. This implies that my co-workers and I can work in peace and quiet. However there are days when this is changing and I suddenly feel stuck in the middle”.

Expectations and the New Role

Irrespective of whether the manager feels stuck in the middle or not most of the respondents perceive that there are expectations that they must meet. The issues concerning the perceived expectations are to some extent similar but they also differ between the members depending on organization and the manager's role. The traditional expectations are those concerning financial issues as well as reaching a certain goal in production. However, a recurrent issue is that as the world is changing so is the organization and so is the role of the middle manager. As one manager says *“today there are greater expectations on me as a middle manager since my role has changed. As a middle manager I am expected to take care of people and make sure that people are feeling good. This increases the expectations on me”.*

In line with this, some middle managers complain that the expectations set by the upper management levels are too unrealistic to fulfil. It can be seen that these unrealistic expectations are usually caused by resource constraints. This then generates stress both on the middle manager and his or her subordinates. As stress is affecting the well-being of people, it is affecting the performance. One manager expresses it thus *“with the timeframe and all the new demands, created due to lack of resources, and the fact that we live in a changing world, there is a new dilemma with new expectations that we have not yet adopted. This leads to that my workers and I do not feel very good for the moment”.* The same manager perceives that the organization does not understand the working conditions as he says *“when the upper managerial level thinks it is hard to find competent personnel maybe the questions should be asked if the required expectations are unrealistic. Are there people that can live up to these expectations? This should be discussed in the organization and in Sweden. It would be good for everyone”.* Further one manager thinks that his responsibility is too great and that he does not get much support from the upper management levels. At the same time as this implies decision making he feels that this is also stimulating.

It is also seen that even though the demands are increasing the support of being a boss is also increasing. Another manager with a quite positive approach to the expectations says that *“the expectations of the upper management levels are OK. I think that I know what is expected by me and I think that I have the ability to deliver what is expected, otherwise I hope they will let me know about it”.* Opposed to this other managers complain about uncertainty and say that the expectations of the upper management levels can be clearer and more directives are needed. Further one manager feels that *“the expectations that you feel are expectations that you have on yourself. As long as you perform well you get more freedom and they do not come and tell you their expectations”.*

Expectations and Loyalty Upwards

Managers feel that the most important with their role is to have loyalty to the upper management levels. A reoccurring answer is that *“even though I do not agree with the upper management levels I must have an explanation that I am behind it. Maybe I do not think it is the best solution for our department but it is for the company”.* This loyalty increases the expectations on the middle manager and it is important for keeping good relationships with the upper management levels. Further the same respondent says *“I am working for this organization, they are my employers but I also work for this group to help them to perform as expected and I help them feel good about work. But I can not go against the organization and put the employees in the first place because then none of us would have a job left. This balance is very important”.*

As discussed in the beginning of this section the greatest complaint among the middle managers is to find a balance between upwards and downwards expectations. Loyalty upwards then increases these expectations. To enable the middle manager and his or her department to do the job, they need resources and also communication with the upper management levels becomes important. Middle managers have the responsibility to defend the workers and their environment when it concerns time, equipment and personnel and defend these good arguments upwards. At the same time they must meet the directives from the upper management levels to run the business efficiently and rationally with a low budget and as fast as possible. This is a conflict of interest and one respondent expresses the importance of letting the upper management know about this otherwise it will be too hard to make it.

4.2.3 Communication

Most middle managers express that they are satisfied with the communication with the upper management levels. How often these middle managers have a dialogue with the upper management level differs between the organization and the hierarchical levels but is also depending on what managerial level the middle manager communicates with. Middle managers from all the organizations have discussions and meetings regularly with the CEO. However, this is to a less extent in the media organization where the hierarchical levels are many. Here it depends on the managerial position. One manager says *“I report to the CEO every Monday and we discuss what is going to be done during the week. I need this in order to have information when I meet the local area managers”*.

Most managers communicate mostly with their closest boss and they feel that they can influence but some almost never communicate with the CEO or the top management. *“I can say what I think to all my managers and we always have a lot of meetings...”* But I do not have any contact with the top management. There is a great distance between the top and the middle management but I think that is good”. However this view changes between the individual middle managers and managers of the lower levels seem to have the least contact with the upper management levels. At one of the local area units in one of the two media organizations one manager does not even know who the upper managers are. Although, he thinks, that the relationship with the upper managers of his own department is very good. The same manager expresses some uncertainty wondering what is going on in the upper managerial levels and how their decisions will affect the organization in the long run. He says that he can not know since he does not communicate with them.

The middle managers of the organization with large geographical distances have due to the complexity of the organizational structure less influence on the top management. Here the relationship and the communication with the closest manager become essential in order to make their voice heard. *“Before my boss communicates with the upper management levels in Stockholm, she makes sure to hear what we have to say first... Therefore I feel that I participate in the decisions... However, it is very frustrating when decisions are made in Stockholm at the head office that even my boss does not know anything about”*.

Importance of Communication

The majority of the middle managers of this study explain that they have a very good relationship with their closest boss. This relationship seems to be very important to the middle manager since the upper managerial levels are very busy managers. At the question what will happen if the closest boss is removed one manager answers *“if one level above me will dis-*

appear it will not be good for me because the manager above my boss is very busy. My boss is very helpful and helps me make important decisions. It is so much easier to reach him than the top management”.

The managers that do not have this relationship express that they sometimes feel lonely. An example of this is one of the managers from one of the manufacturing organizations as she says *“Due to my responsibilities I do not have much contact with the upper management levels. It is the other departments that I am working with that I communicate to. I am responsible for what I am doing and it does not go upwards in the hierarchy. This is positive because when I want to do something I do not have to ask for permission. I miss not having someone to bandy ideas with”.* The middle managers of this organization share similar opinions and they emphasize that this is due to the structure of their organization with one manager responsible for 41 middle managers. As discussed in the previous section this circumstance gives these middle managers a lot of freedom to make their own decisions which they are satisfied with. They agree that the relationship with both the CEO and their boss is good and that there are meetings once a week with either the CEO or the boss. However, even though the middle managers are satisfied with working very independently, some of these managers miss not getting more attention from the upper management levels. *“My department gets very little attention in relation to our importance for the company. I get drowned in my boss’ funnel and I really have to squeeze out my questions”.* Another middle manager in the same situation but with a different view expresses *“My boss has visited my department five times during the past four years. He just ran through, but it really does not matter”.* The middle managers of the other manufacturing organization think that they have very good relationship with the upper management levels. These managers perceive they have a lot of freedom to perform their role and they can easily influence the upper management levels. An example of a good relationship is as this manager says *“...we have created so much trust that he gives me a lot of freedom to make decisions and run the business. When things are working very well he focuses on something else that needs more attention. Then I have to beg him to come and help if I need”.*

Some managers play an important role when it comes to influencing the upper management levels as one manager says *“I have managed to convince the executive group that some decisions are not good for our company. In other words I can influence upwards”.* What also is a common role when it comes to the communication is to communicate upwards and then inform the co-workers downwards. As discussed earlier in this chapter this is the situation when the middle manager feels stuck in the middle. However one manager with strong opinions expresses that in order to not to run into a position that hurts his authority he has to be critical to what his bosses say and make sure to discuss things a lot with them. He can not agree with everything that comes from the upper management levels.

Communication & Change

All the four organizations that are part of this study have at the time of the interviews gone through organizational changes due to either growth or downsizing. These changes have brought new tasks to the middle managers and the disappearing levels have increased their workload and responsibilities. Some of the middle managers express their importance when influencing these changes and their role to implement the changes. One manager discussing the change expresses it as *“For me it is important to be keen on and observe what is happening upwards and downwards in the organization. It is important to understand the directives and make sure to deliver them to the subordinates so that everyone understands the message”.*

To understand this new role, communication with the upper management is important. As can be seen in the interviews, the middle managers are provided middle management training. In two of the organizations the managers explain how they are involved in the change by being invited to seminars to discuss and share their views. One manager says *“focus has*

been put on organizational values, vision and mission. Here the top management has been suggesting ideas that they have pushed further down in the organization, then everyone has been part of seminars and discussions about the suggestions and then presented the resulted ideas back to the upper management levels”.

4.2.4 Identity

The personality of the individual middle manager determines how he or she performs the managerial work. From the interviews many different characteristics of the individual can be seen and they provide different examples of how you can perform the same managerial role in different ways.

Managerial Work & View of Themselves

How the middle manager perceives the relationship with the upper management level contributes to how this individual manager performs his or her job. Managers get instructions from the upper management levels to implement decisions, and the communication between the two levels differs from organization to organization. It is seen in the empirical data that this affects the level of independence that the middle manager has. One manager explains how he thinks that he and his colleagues perceive the situation *“I think that among many people here there is a very high personal commitment. Many see their department as their own little business and when you do so, you put so much more effort in the task than you are expected to do. Maybe you want to expand and show that it is going well. When you perform well you achieve the goal. Most people here I believe is working a lot because they want to achieve the goal”*. These managers are from one of the manufacturing organizations of this study that due to the organizational structure have a lot of responsibility and work very independently. These managers face the same working conditions but to perform their managerial work they need to grow with an identity that enables them to make decisions, have a goal to achieve and the skills and experiences needed to achieve this goal. One manager from one of the large media companies expresses disappointment of not being more involved in strategical decision making. Being involved, he says, *“...has to do with personality. You have to be outgoing. I am more like a thinker rather than coming up with many ideas. Maybe this is not typical of the business I am working with”*.

The middle manager’s identity and the understanding of who he or she is also affect the performance of the whole group as this middle manager says *“I have begun to understand that the effects of what I am doing contribute to how co-workers act and how it makes the whole group progress”*. Another middle manager concludes what good leadership is to him and he says that *“Leadership does not have to do with gender it is a matter of the individual’s maturity. It is gained by experience in life...Leadership is about experience, knowledge and engagement to run the business with responsibility”*. Many of the respondents convey how experience is a key to how they perform their role and how they perceive different situations at work differently. In other words by experience they become better managers. One manager expresses what experience has meant to him *“before turning 30 years old I wanted to change the world by myself. But at the time I realised that the best way to change the world is by finding the best people to do it...This understanding came after a few years as a leader. The best way to reach success is to find the right people to do the job that is better than doing the job you yourself. It comes by experience”*.

It can be seen that many of the respondents of this study have developed themselves as individuals by the leadership education provided by the organization and the responsibility that the upper management levels have given them. *“Being a young, female middle manager given the responsibility that I have has stimulated me and made me find new personal characteristics and I am thinking now this is fun. Also the leadership training and the responsibility to create my own department has also been stimulating”*. This manager is a good example of how you grow with your re-

sponsibility. Further one middle manager comments on how they need authority to perform the responsibility that they have *“If you have responsibility you need much authority otherwise you will be very uncertain of what to do and not to do. It is usually this uncertainty that makes you stressed. But if you know what is expected by you it is much easier. Now we will get both responsibility and authority and it will be up to us if we succeed or not, then we can not blame anyone else”*.

Reorganization & Downsizing

When the middle manager’s environment is changing as in organizational changes and downsizing the middle manager takes on a new role. This situation will then be perceived differently by the middle manager depending on his or her identity. Different circumstances are solved in different ways. Some middle managers in this study perceive that their role has changed due to the organizational changes or downsizings. They express how that has increased their workload. This is expressed especially among the middle managers from the two media companies. Major effects due to either organizational changes or downsizing are uncertainty and/or stress. The effects of organizational change on the two manufacturing organizations are mostly positive. However there are complaints of having too much to do to be able to spend time on other things than just being a boss. A conflict of interest is expressed by one of these managers as *“Now I am 100 % a boss which feels boring since I miss working with the technology as I did before. That is what is exciting and what develops me”*.

The anxiety that the middle managers are facing in downsizing organizations and in other organizational changes are perceived differently among the middle managers. One middle manager from the media company facing downsizing expresses how she has seen stress affect the organization *“We have to be rational and it can not cost us too much. Now I feel that this has reached its limit. Employees are getting burnt out and some groups do not feel good at all. I think this is a serious problem”*. Another manager from the other media company facing organizational changes says *“When it comes to stress I have not felt it has affected my health. But of course the stress and the pressures increase the demand to do more things in a shorter time with better results. One gets new computers and new telephones to be able to produce more. Because of this there is less time for reflection”*.

However the middle managers of the media companies also explain that in their business workers have high needs to achieve and therefore stress is typical of the job. *“I always feel stress related to my job. I am extremely stressed because there are so many things to do and I want my tasks to turn out well...It is not my boss who is telling me that I have to work late. It is in order to be able to reach the goals successfully”*. The empirical data show that stress is also caused both by having high expectations on oneself and from the upper management levels as well as the inexperience of the new position. *“In the beginning when I was employed I felt much stressed. I had very high expectations on myself that I should perform as much as I did before I became a manager. This was at the same time as I should handle all the administrative work and make sure everyone was feeling good. Working too much I realized that I was not a good boss. Especially being a middle manager I want to achieve so much all the time instead of locking the door and focus on how I want to improve our service for instance”*.

5 Analysis

In this chapter an analysis will follow discussing the empirical findings in relation to the theories presented in the theoretical framework. The structure is based on the five themes that will help to understand the middle managers' perceived role and how the role is affected by the relationship with the upper management levels.

The chapter is following the structure of the thesis that is dividing the five themes into the objective and subjective factors. It should be noticed that the formal and informal role descriptions of this chapter are not part of the research questions but are included in the analysis to present to the reader the differences between the formal and informal roles of the middle manager. This will help understanding the differences between the objective and subjective factors and also what the new role of the middle manager involves.

5.1 Objective Factors

5.1.1 Formal Role Description

The middle manager's formal role concerns formal requirements that are job related and explicit (Moorhead & Ricky, 2001). Empirical data show that the middle manager's formal role is clear however, the respondents stress that directives are not always clear and usually not written down. According to Stewart (1991) the amount of direction that the middle manager has, affects his or her role. She further explains that the role differs depending on the hierarchical levels, the function of the manager but is also affected by the characteristics of the people that the manager works with, and the power they have to perform the task (Stewart 1991; in Watson, 2001). When the middle manager does not have clear directives one can think that it creates uncertainty. However, it is seen that the middle managers know their role by looking at the boss as a role model which shows that the characteristics of the people that the middle manager works with is a key in order to understand what the role implies. Another example of this shows the importance of good relationships with the boss to be able to communicate and know what is expected by the middle manager.

As discussed above and also emphasized by Mintzberg (1982) the middle manager's role is dependent on the hierarchical levels and the power that the middle manager has. This is supported by the empirical data which show that the middle manager's role is affected by his or her position in the hierarchical levels and also by the decentralization that gives the freedom to make decisions and work independently. These issues will be analysed in the following section concerning the organizational structure.

5.1.2 Organizational Structure

How does organizational structure affect the middle manager's perceived role and how does the hierarchical and geographical distance between the managerial levels affect the relationships between the middle manager and the upper management levels?

During the 1980's the change to decentralized organizations became important in the organizations in order to involve the employees in decision making to create a better work place (Drakenberg, 1997). Research proves that decentralization stimulates entrepreneurial thinking and allows people to make own decisions, it is seen in the empirical data that the middle managers have the authority to make decisions concerning their department. The middle manager's authority to make decisions differs between the organizations and hierar-

chical levels. However what the middle managers have in common is that they many times need support from their closest boss before making important decisions. The decisions must also be made within the budget frames which some managers think limits their ability to perform and meet the expectations.

There are differences between the four organizations concerning the managers' possibility to make decisions. By separating the two manufacturing organizations from the two media organizations it can be seen that the manufacturing organizations are more decentralized, and the media organizations that have more complex structures are centralized at the top but decentralized in the different local area units. This implies that the middle managers of the manufacturing organizations perceive that they work under a lot of freedom and have to make own decisions. With very few hierarchical levels like in one of the manufacturing organizations, the decision making is pushed as far down in the organization as possible. An advantage with this is as Mintzberg (1983) emphasizes that the organization quickly can respond to local conditions as it enables managers to make their own decisions. However, in the two media organizations it looks a bit different. The organizations are larger and spread over a great geographical distance which makes the organizations centralized at the top but decentralized at the local area units. This implies that the middle managers can make decisions concerning their unit, but financial decisions are made by the top management.

According to Westley (1990) the middle managers need to feel that they are part in the strategical decision making. Being part of the organization creates meaning and by involving the middle managers they become responsive. Looking at the overall results from the respondents' answers it can be seen that the middle managers feel that they can influence the strategical decision making. From these findings it can be interpreted that the middle managers generally are satisfied with their situation. This is important since the middle managers' contribution to the strategic decision making is according to Floyd and Wooldridge (1994) seen as strongly related to the organizational performance and superior to those that are decided only by the top management.

However the answers differ between the individual middle managers. Some of the respondents are asked if they want to be more involved in strategic decision making and it is seen that some middle managers feel that they are satisfied and more involvement will take too much time from their actual job. Further it can be seen that managers at lower managerial levels wish to be more involved due to their knowledge and experience. However as Keys and Bell (1982) express managers at lower levels do not have the same relationship with the upper management levels as the managers at higher managerial levels have. I believe that this distance between the hierarchical levels affects the relationships which in turn obstruct the middle managers on the lower levels to be part of the strategical decision making. Disappointment of the situation is expressed by one manager and he is aware of that this is due to the fact that his position is too far down in the hierarchy. As literature discusses the latter group discussed above should be more included in the strategical decision making and especially if these managers have a lot of knowledge that can contribute to the performance of the organization.

Previous research discusses that the increased use of IT makes the middle manager become less important in the organization (Floyd & Wooldridge, 1994) while others show that IT has increased the use of the middle manager to make more complex decisions than before (Pinsonneault & Kraemer, 1997). However the empirical data do not give any results showing that any of these two contradictory theories are true. Despite this, it is seen that the

middle managers have an important role when it comes to decision making within the organization.

5.1.3 Possibilities & Restrictions

What possibilities & restrictions enable or limit the middle manager to meet the expectations from the upper management levels and to perform the expected role?

Within the organization there are possibilities and restrictions that determine how the middle manager is able to perform his or her role. A pattern from the empirical study can be seen that the greatest restriction is the resource constraints in some organizations while the organization at the same time provides middle management training to enable them to perform their role.

Middle Management training

To enable the middle manager to perform the role and function as a leader Schartau (1997) concludes that the middle manager needs to be provided the possibility to develop his or her leadership skills (in Drakenberg, 1997). It is seen from the empirical data that all organizations more or less have provided middle management training. The middle managers perceive this training as important in order to develop their role as a middle manager and meet the expectations. The middle manager training is perceived as rewarding, increasing knowledge of themselves, giving self-confidence to do things that they normally not dare to. This is in line with Watson's (2001) study where he emphasizes that the middle managers need some kind of management training more as a booster of self-confidence rather than a source of knowledge. Further it is seen that the middle management training helps to create important networks within the organization and finally it makes them feel that they are seen by the organization as a middle manager.

What the changing role of the middle manager involves, is expressed especially in one of the two manufacturing organizations. The new organizational values of this organization also expect new characteristics of the leaders like to focus on the employees' well-being in the first place. As one manager expresses that earlier he was very goal oriented and if the employees were working overtime did not matter but now other tools are used to reach the goal and the individual worker is important. These managers were provided leadership training that they think helped them to perform the new expected role. As Dopson et al. (1992) discuss, the middle manager's role becomes wider when the organization is changing and the middle manager feels a need of other education to for instance be able to perform the administrative tasks. Most middle managers feel that the organization would provide education if they wish however there is a matter of lack of time. By looking at these results I believe that whether the organization is downsizing or expanding middle management training is of great importance and a key to develop good middle managers that are able to perform their role as expected but also more efficiently can help the organization to develop.

Lack of Resources

According to Stewart (1982) the middle manager faces restrictions such as resource constraints, laws, technological limitations, physical location and organizational policies and procedures. From the empirical data it is seen that many middle managers are limited to perform their expected role due to resource constraints. In the two media organizations the financial resources are the most reoccurring complaint. Lack of human resources is also a restriction. Some middle managers are not able to employ more people when needed, for

instance when they wish to have a colleague to share the managerial tasks with or when there are too few co-workers at the department. This is due to restrictions such as organizational policies of internal employment and lack of financial resources.

The major effects of resource constraints are that middle managers can not focus on the actual job. As they are expected to perform both the formal role such as the administrative work and at the same time perform the informal role such as solving problems at the department, middle managers feel that they are limited to perform their actual job. When middle managers are asked whether the upper management levels fulfil their needs or not, there are again complaints about lack of resources. People can not work like machines and getting resources from the upper management levels is hard. This is a problem since work can not be done efficiently. Further it is seen that resource constraints limit the middle manager and his or her staff to live up to the vision even though they are working hard. From this example it can be seen that the restrictions also lead to stress. The time frame is also an issue that limits the middle manager to perform the work especially in the two media organizations. However it should be considered as one manager says that keeping deadlines is part of their job.

Organizational Factors

Whether the directives are clear or not affects the middle managers' uncertainty, which then limits the middle manager to perform the expected role. However, even though most middle managers from the empirical data think that the directives are unclear they know what is expected by them. As discussed, middle managers know their role by looking at the previous boss as a role model or the good relationship with the boss is crucial.

In the study by Dopson et al. (1992) it is concluded that the change to flatter organizations makes the middle managers less frustrated about work due to the more clear area of responsibilities and the control of the resources they need to be able to perform their job. When comparing the four organizations' part there are similarities between the two media organizations and the two manufacturing organizations. The two media organizations have very complex structures but have responsibilities over their departments. The manufacturing organizations are working under a lot of responsibilities. Dopson et al. (1992) also emphasize that other positive aspects for the middle manager are the freedom to take risks and being innovative. This is seen particularly in one of the two manufacturing organizations where the flat structure enables the middle managers to make their own decisions. In both the manufacturing organizations the middle managers and their co-workers can be innovative however what these also have in common with the two media organizations is that they do not have any financial responsibilities

Schartau (1997) stresses that colleagues that have been working for many years together and the organizational culture are issues that restrict the middle manager to perform his or her role (in Drakenberg, 1997). In the empirical data it is also seen that a strong organizational culture affects how the middle managers employed externally can have a hard time to find their role within the organization and to be able to influence. For these middle managers it takes time to learn the culture and why decisions for instance are discussed as they are. It is seen that the middle management training helps to overcome this obstacle as it makes the middle manager understand the colleagues and the organization better.

5.2 Subjective Factors

5.2.1 Informal Role Description

The informal role differs from the formal role since it consists of informal requirements which are social and implicit (Moorhead & Ricky, 2001). The informal role is sometimes diffuse and it is seen that it differs between the middle managers. In line with the traditional view of the middle manager (Mintzberg, 1982; Floyd & Wooldridge, 1994) the respondents see themselves as a person who receives information from the upper management levels and delivers the message downwards within the organization. It is seen that part of this role is also strategical thinking, planning and decision making.

Dopson et al. (1992) discuss that the middle manager's role has changed and become wider and more important than before. The respondents emphasize that this new role is increasing the expectations on them and they express that this new role involves being a leader with focus on the soft aspects. In other words the informal role is to help the employees and to inspire them to come up with new ideas, it is to handle their personal problems and make sure that they are feeling good in order to enable them to perform their job. The middle manager's informal role is interpreted as a key in order to function as a manager to steer and direct the part of the organization in which he or she is positioned. This issue will be analysed further in the following section concerning the expectations.

5.2.2 Expectations

How do the perceived expectations from the upper management levels affect the middle manager's perceived role?

The empirical data show that whether the middle manager feels stuck in the middle or not depends on his or her identity and the relationship with the closest boss. However, irrespective of if the middle managers see themselves as stuck in the middle or not the majority of all the respondents feel that there are high expectations that must be met. Further loyalty to the upper management levels is seen to be a prioritized issue and a balance needs to be found between loyalty and defending the group.

The Middle Manager's Dilemma 'I am Stuck in the Middle'

The empirical data show, as also expressed by Watson and Harris (1999), that the middle manager's dilemma is to find a balance between the expectations of the upper and lower levels within the organization. Theorists agree with this saying that middle managers are stuck in the middle with the role as both team players and executioners (Thomas & Dunkerly, 1999). It is visible that the middle managers that do feel stuck in the middle want to defend their group at the same time as they are expected to be loyal to the upper management levels.

A major reason for feeling stuck in the middle is that the middle manager's role is changing and that the directives are not clear enough. Gable (2002) finds that the conflicting expectations come from the individuals whose support is needed in order to successfully perform the expected tasks. In other words when the middle manager perceives that he or she is supported by these individuals it is seen that the feeling of being squeezed is reduced. Apart from this, the feelings are also reduced by an organization that enables the middle manager to feel free and independent. This indicates the importance of good relationships to the upper management levels. However, the majority of the middle managers that feel stuck in the middle belong to the two media organizations that faced major organizational

changes. As a result of these changes the managers feel that the lack of resources to meet the expectations from lower levels makes them feel stuck in the middle. Further, when having to sack personnel the managers feel stuck if their boss is not supportive enough.

Expectations but 'I am not Stuck in the Middle'

Schartau (1997) stresses that how the middle managers perceive the expectations differ between the individual managers (in Drakenberg, 2003). In the empirical data it is evident that not all middle managers feel stuck in the middle despite of the conflicting expectations. This shows that identity is one reason but that organizational structure also plays a role. Watson and Harris (1999) find that the feeling of being stuck in the middle is reduced by flat organizations, which is also seen in the empirical data as many middle managers from the two manufacturing organizations do not feel stuck.

Further, Watson and Harris (1999) stress that feeling stuck in the middle is not always the case even though there are high expectations that they must meet. As discussed in their study the feelings of being stuck in the middle vary as the middle managers themselves learn how to handle people. This is in line with the results from the interviews that show that feeling stuck is a matter of the individual middle manager's identity gained from his or her experience but also depending on whether the relationship with the upper management levels is good or not. The middle managers emphasize that a key for not feeling stuck in the middle, is the organizational environment and the loyalty of the co-workers as is also discussed by Gable (2002). Further, it is noticed that good performance by the manager's department equals satisfied upper management levels, which implies that the pressure on the middle manager is not too heavy.

Expectations and the New Role

The middle manager's dilemma of finding a balance between the expectations and the understanding of his or her role is complex and can be expressed as a "...*world of overwhelming confusion, overload, ambiguity, and conflict*" (Hill, 1993, p. 54). The majority of the respondents do feel that there are expectations from the upper management. Some feel ambiguity due to unclear directives, some feel overload caused by unrealistic expectations while others feel conflict while not being able to meet the expectations from the lower levels as there are resource constraints from the upper managerial levels.

The extent to how the middle managers perceive these expectations differ between the respondents and between the organizations. One reoccurring issue among the respondents is that as the world is changing the organization must follow and the role of the middle manager then changes. Further Thomas and Dunkerly (1999) explain how the pressure on the middle manager's performance has increased at the same time as there are resource constraints that must be considered. From the empirical data it is seen that the expectations that are too unrealistic to fulfil are often caused by resource constraints. As a consequence these unrealistic expectations then lead to stress which in turn affects the well-being of the employees which then affects the performance. The middle manager's new role, that is more important and wider than before (Dopson et al., 1992), does not only involve the formal role but also an informal role to take care of the employees and make sure that they feel good. This is an issue of great relevance when understanding the middle manager's perceived role. When making sure that the employees are not too stressed it brings stress upon the middle manager who puts a greater responsibility upon himself or herself.

A more positive aspect of expectations is as some middle managers express that even though the responsibility is sometimes too great it is also stimulating. However it is seen that

in order to find this balance it is important that the expectations are clear and that it is also communicated to the middle manager whether he or she performs as expected or not.

Expectations and Loyalty Upwards

Discussed both in theory (Edlund et al., 1992; Keys & Bell, 1982; Watson & Harris, 1999) and by the middle managers, loyalty to the upper management levels is the most important issue to be prioritised even though it can create conflicts with the lower levels. The middle manager is expected to choose what is best for the organization and not for the department. Otherwise, as also the theory discusses, it can affect the middle manager's future career. However loyalty upwards increases the expectations on the middle manager as he or she is expected to run the business as efficiently as possible with as low budget as possible and at the same time provide resources to enable the co-workers to perform their job. As Keys and Bell (1982) suggest the middle managers can reduce the conflicting expectations by developing good relationships with the upper management levels, I believe that communication is a crucial issue to reduce these conflicts of interest.

5.2.3 Communication

To what extent does communication between the middle management and the upper management levels affect the middle manager's perceived role, tasks and performance?

From the interviews it can be seen that the middle managers that have good relationships with the managers at the upper management levels are also able to influence these. This is also discussed in the section concerning the organizational structure. Since communication is crucial in order to let the middle manager know what decisions that he or she can make as well as how the relationship with the upper management levels plays a role when the middle managers make decisions, the impact of communication when making decisions will now be discussed.

The middle managers are seen as tools to receive and deliver messages from the upper management levels as well as formulating strategies for his or her unit (Mintzberg, 1983). This role is an important key when creating the corporate identity since it helps to create the reputation of the organization. However, it is seen that not all managers are aware of their role to play in this process (Van Riel, 2003; in Balmer & Greyser, 2003). Therefore communication and good relationships between the middle manager and the upper management levels are important to create a good communication climate (Smidts et al., 2001). It can be seen from the empirical data that good communication and good relationships are closely related. How often the middle manager has a dialogue with the upper management levels differs between the organizations and the hierarchical levels. The most reoccurring statement is that the communication with the closest boss is the most important. When it comes to the lower managerial levels and their communication with the upper management it seems to be important that the middle managers get information on what is going on in the upper managerial levels to reduce uncertainty on what decisions are made and how they will affect the future of the organization. Middle managers from the organizations with great geographical distance do not have the same possibility to influence the top management as middle managers from the flat organizations. Therefore it is seen that in organizations with many hierarchical levels the middle manager's relationship with the closest boss becomes crucial in order to make his or her voice heard in the organization.

The Importance of Communication

Good relationship with the closest boss is seen to be important in order to be able to fast get advice when making decisions. Managers at higher managerial levels are perceived to be very busy. The managers, that do not have this relationship, miss having someone to bandy ideas with and they have come to realize that being a middle manager is in this case lonely. The less contact the middle manager has with the upper managerial levels the greater is the responsibility to make decisions. This is seen as positive since it gives the middle managers a lot of freedom and they also feel that that they can influence. These results are also seen to be affected by the organizational structures. Flat organizations with few hierarchical levels imply closer relationships with the top management, at the same time work is very independent compared to many hierarchical levels where there is a greater need to get support from the closest boss.

Communication & Change

Research shows that communication in times of organizational change is not perceived as satisfying among middle managers (Doherty & Horsted, 1995; Newell & Dopson, 1996). The lack of information concerning the middle manager's new role is in Doherty & Horsted's (1995) research the greatest complaint. Due to lack of information the middle managers are seen to be unmotivated and uncertain about their future career and it is seen that the new expected role is not supported by managerial training (Newell & Dopson, 1996). Opposed to these results the empirical data show that the middle managers facing organizational change have been well informed and managers are satisfied that they are able to be part of discussing the change. Also as discussed earlier the provided middle management training enables them to understand their new role and is perceived as rewarding. These findings are in line with Harrington and Williams' (2004) suggestions to provide managerial training in order to succeed in changes.

From further discussions with the middle managers it is seen that they are aware of their importance when influencing changes in the organization. Some middle managers express how their role involves receiving information from the upper management levels and then communicating it downwards but also to observe what is happening at the different levels and make sure directives are understood correctly.

5.2.4 Identity

How does the middle managers' identity affect their managerial work and how do relationships between the managerial levels affect the middle managers' present role and future career?

Managerial Work & View of Themselves

The way the middle manager meets the expectations of the upper management levels and the way he or she perceives the role in the organization differ between the individuals and is therefore affected by his or her identity. According to Watson (2001) a person is not born with a certain identity and it does not become fixed when the person grows up. This means that the identity is changing throughout life and as Watson further explains the middle managers must relate their managerial work to their personal view of themselves. The empirical findings show that how the same managerial work is performed vary between the respondents and they are also many times aware of that their personality influences their performance and their choices. It is seen that managers from flat organizations are given much responsibility and independent work. These managers face the same working conditions and in order to perform the expected managerial work they need an identity that en-

ables them to make decisions and give high personal commitment. They have to be devoted to work and when performing well they achieve the goal. Here it can be seen as Watson (2001) says that what work means to the middle managers influences how they perform. In contrast to the managerial work discussed above identity is also seen to limit the middle managers' choices as for instance the lack of involvement in strategic decisions. As one manager explains that as a "thinker" he does not have the right personality to be part of the strategic decision making. This view of himself limits his possibility and wish to help shaping the organization.

The empirical data show that the middle managers' experience is a key to how they perform their managerial role and perceive different situations. Experience makes them become better leaders which is seen by the middle managers as a major issue concerning their role. It is expressed that the individual middle manager's performance also contributes to the progress of the whole department. Middle managers express that they grow with the responsibility that they are given by the upper management levels. However to be able to have this responsibility, the managers say that they need to know their authority otherwise they will be very uncertain of what to do and not to do.

Reorganization & Downsizing

How the middle manager perceives his or her role is affected by the organizational restructuring. When hierarchical levels are disappearing the middle manager's role has become wider and more important than before (Dopson et al., 1992; Floyd & Wooldridge, 1994). As the empirical data show the middle managers express that when the organization changes and the values change so does the role of the middle manager. Today there is much more focus on how the individual is seen and how each individual can contribute to the success of the organization. It is seen in the sections of the empirical data concerning the middle manager's informal role, the expectations, and the possibilities & restrictions that the majority of the respondents emphasize how their role as a middle manager has changed to have much more focus on the individual employee and his or her well-being. The middle managers take this as an important role although it increases the expectations on them. But to be able to perform this role they explain the need of leadership education which also has been provided by the organizations.

Research has provided evidence that the changes have both negative and positive effects on the middle manager's identity as it affects the middle manager's career, health and well-being (Thomas & Dunkerly, 1999). In line with the previous research of organizational change, it can be seen that the negative effects of change is that the middle manager's workload has increased which in turn leads to uncertainty and stress. This is seen especially in the two media organizations however complaints about lack of time are seen in all four organizations. Despite these statements of change, the empirical data do not give any results showing the effects on the middle managers' ability to find a balance between work and family as it is concluded by Thomas and Dunkerly (1999).

One of the media organizations was at the time of the interviews facing downsizing and the empirical data show that this causes anxiety about the middle manager's future career and role in the organization. However, it is clear that this is perceived differently depending on the individual middle manager. In other words their identity, life situation and position in the hierarchy affect how these managers perceive their situation. The answers do also differ depending on to what extent the middle managers perceive that the downsizing is affecting their department. The most serious effect on downsizing is seen to be stress. Managers at different levels within the organization emphasize how people are getting burnt out

which also implies greater pressure on the middle manager who is responsible for the employees.

Further the results show that some individuals handle stress better and think that stress is part of their job. It is found in the empirical data that middle managers that have a high need to achieve feel stressed due to high expectations on themselves and the aim always to reach the goal successfully. As they at the same time have to handle the administrative work and make sure that the employees are feeling good, managers conclude that stress is affecting how they perform as a leader.

Apart from negative aspects of organizational change such as stress, positive aspects of change can be seen. The majority of the middle managers are despite of high expectations and organizational changes comfortable in their role as middle managers. This seems to be a result of good relationships with the closest boss and the managerial training provided by the organization. Discussed by Dopson et al. (1992) and also discussed earlier in this chapter concerning possibilities & restrictions the middle managers that are provided managerial training gained new managerial skills and greater understanding of their role as a middle manager. I believe that managerial training and good upper managerial relationships are essential keys in order to give the middle manager a chance to grow in his or her identity that enables him or her to perform the wider role concerning administrative tasks, the care for people's well-being and the strategic issues concerning his or her department. When developing the middle manager's present role that enables him or her to function as a good middle manager, there is a greater chance for the middle manager to reach a desired future career.

6 Conclusion & Discussion

This chapter begins with a concluding discussion that is summarizing the results from the research questions followed by the conclusion drawn from the analysis.

This thesis aims at reaching a greater understanding of the middle manager's perceived role within the organization and how the role is affected by the relationships with the upper management levels. In order to answer the purpose of this thesis five research questions, based upon five themes assumed to be affecting the middle manager's perceived role, were formulated. A distinction of the five themes was then made and they were divided into the objective factors and into the subjective factors.

6.1 Concluding Discussion

Objective Factors

When the directives on the middle manager's role are not clear the middle manager knows his or her role by looking at the closest boss as a role model. Furthermore the middle manager's relationship and communication with the closest boss is essential in order to understand his or her role.

How does organizational structure affect the middle manager's perceived role and how does the hierarchical and geographical distance between the managerial levels affect the relationships between the middle manager and the upper management levels?

The middle managers perceive that they have authority to make decisions concerning their department. In order to make important decisions the middle managers need support from their closest boss however this decision making differs between the hierarchical levels and organizational structures. In flat decentralized organizations managers perceive that they work under a lot of freedom and have to make their own decisions. Relationships with upper management levels are good and the middle manager perceives that he or she easily can influence upwards. In partly centralized and partly decentralized organizations with a great geographical distance the middle manager is empowered to make decisions at his or her department but is influenced by many decisions from the top. In this type of organization the numbers of hierarchical levels affect the relationships with the upper management levels, which in turn obstruct the middle managers at lower hierarchical levels to be part of strategic decision making.

What possibilities & restrictions enable or limit the middle manager to meet the expectations from the upper management levels and to perform the expected role?

The most important possibility that enables the middle manager to perform the expected role is to attend some kind of middle management training. Firstly, middle management training is perceived as increasing the knowledge of the middle manager, giving stronger self-confidence, helping to create important networks within the organization and making the middle manager feel seen by the organization as a middle manager. Secondly, the middle management training is also essential in organizational changes in order to enable the middle manager to understand the new expected role and the new values, and also to enable the middle manager to help the organization develop more efficiently. Thirdly, the middle management training also helps the middle manager to overcome obstacles concerning strong organizational cultures. The greatest restriction that limits the middle manager to meet the expectations is resource constraints such as lack of financial resources and

lack of human resources. Also organizational policies and strong organizational culture are perceived as limitations to perform the role. Further, organizational structure enables or limits the middle manager to make decisions depending on the hierarchical levels and on the decentralization.

Subjective Factors

Middle managers perceive their informal role as a key person to receive and deliver information from the upper management levels. However, their role also implies strategical thinking, planning and decision making. The new role of the middle manager is focusing on the soft aspects of leadership which is to inspire employees, make sure that they are feeling good and handle their personal problems well.

How do the perceived expectations from the upper management levels affect the middle manager's perceived role?

Whether the middle manager feels stuck in the middle or not depends on the middle manager's identity, the relationships with the closest boss and the organizational structure. Feeling stuck in the middle is caused by unclear directives but also caused by the expectations to defend the group and at the same time to be loyal to the upper management levels. Unrealistic expectations on the middle manager cause a feeling of overload. These unrealistic expectations, usually caused by resource constraints, lead to stress which in turn affects the well-being of the middle manager and his or her employees. This then affects the performance. A combination of this situation and the middle manager's new role to make sure that the employees are feeling good and not stressed brings stress upon the middle manager who puts greater responsibility upon himself or herself. However, the high expectations and the responsibility given to the middle managers are also stimulating to many middle managers.

To what extent does communication between the middle management and the upper management levels affect the middle manager's perceived role, task and performance?

Good communication with the upper management levels is a key for the middle manager to understand his or her role. With whom and how often the middle manager has a dialogue with the upper management levels depend on the number of hierarchical levels and the geographical distance. Middle managers from flat organizations can more easily influence the top management which makes them feel involved. These middle managers work very independent and have greater freedom to make decisions. With many hierarchical levels and great geographical distance the relationship with the closest boss is essential for the middle manager in order to make his or her voice heard. Further, the middle managers that do not have close relationships with the closest boss feel lonely and miss having someone to bandy ideas with. In times of organizational changes communication is needed to reduce uncertainty among the middle managers. However, middle management training is essential in order to succeed in the change.

How does the middle managers' identity affect their managerial work and how do relationships between the managerial levels affect the middle managers' present role and future career?

The middle manager's identity determines how their managerial work is understood and performed which also leads to how well the goals are achieved. The identity can also limit the middle manager's choices for instance regarding the involvement in strategic decision making. However the identity can change through experience which indicates the importance of that the middle manager is given responsibilities by the upper management. When the organization changes so does the role of the middle manager. Therefore, communica-

tion with the upper management levels is crucial to reduce uncertainty and make the middle manager understand his or her important role in the process of changes. Since organizational change is seen to cause stress and uncertainty the identity also determines how the change is perceived. Good relationships with the closest boss and managerial training are essential factors that helps create the middle manager's identity and gives the middle manager a greater chance to reach a desired future career.

The middle manager's perceived role

The results discussed above show that the objective and subjective factors are all influencing the middle manager's perceived role and are hard to separate from each other. An important difference between the objective and subjective factors is that the objective factors are more or less affecting the whole organization. Organizational changes, and decisions made by the upper management levels affect a large number of middle managers since these issues lead to either possibilities or restrictions. The effects of the organizational structure and possibilities & restrictions are perceived differently depending on the middle manager's identity and his or her relationship with the upper management levels. This shows that the objective factors alone are not enough to understand the individual middle manager's perceived role. The subjective factors, that are psychological, are crucial in order to understand the perceived role. These factors differ between the managers and affect each individual middle manager depending on how he or she feels in a certain situation. The subjective factors as expectations, communication and identity are to a great extent affected by the relationships with the upper management levels but also by the objective factors as organizational structure and possibilities & restrictions. The results conclude that the identity of the middle manager is the most influencing factor on the middle manager's perceived role.

6.2 Conclusion

The results of the research questions summarized above are more or less dependent on each other which show that the objective and subjective factors are all important factors influencing the middle managers perceived role and how the role is affected by the relationships with the upper management levels. Generally, the middle managers perceive their role as important in the organization. However, how the role is perceived differs between the individual and his or her experience, which indicates that the middle manager's *identity* is the most influencing factor on the perceived role. The identity determines how the middle manager perceives and meets the *expectations* from the upper management levels, how he or she approaches the *restrictions* that limit him or her to perform the expected role and how he or she makes use of the *possibilities* provided by the organization. The extent to which the middle manager can *communicate* with and influence the upper management levels are determined by the *organizational structure*. However, since the identity influences how the managerial work is performed, the identity determines how the middle manager can handle great responsibility and can make decisions which in turn leads to the good performance of the middle manager. Good *relationships* with the upper management levels also determine how the middle manager understands his or her role, how expectations are perceived and how decisions can be made. Furthermore these good relationships also determine the middle manager's chance to reach a desired future career.

7 Evaluation of Thesis

This chapter will provide the reader with a discussion of the author's personal reflections on the strengths and the weaknesses concerning the chosen method, followed by suggestions for future research.

The chosen method to use secondary data involves advantages such the possibility to analyze a large number of interviews that would not have been possible to collect within the timeframe provided for this thesis. The large number of data increases the trustworthiness of the results at the same time as it becomes a complex task to organize the answers, interpret the answers and find a pattern on how the individual middle manager perceives his or her role. But by sorting out the answers belonging to each theme an interpretation of the respondents' answers was possible to make.

It should be criticized that since the author did not collect the empirical data the interview questions could not be formulated based on the author's research questions and the theoretical framework. This results in that not all theories support the empirical data to the extent that the author from the beginning wished. Thus the empirical data used include very deep discussions covering a large part of the theoretical field of the middle management and there are issues that have got less focus such as how the hierarchical levels affect the middle manager. This is due to how the questions are formulated. However by looking at all the answers an interpretation on how the hierarchical levels affect the middle managers could be done.

When it comes to the number of respondents from each of the four organizations these differ a lot. It can be questioned if the choice of using 25 interviews from one organization and ten from another affects the results. However, due to the many similarities between the two media organizations and the similarities between the two manufacturing organizations this is considered not to be a problem. Another reason is that the focus is put on the individual middle manager and not the organization. But it should not be forgotten that the managers' answers differ between the organizations and also their positions. Therefore these differences are gathered and touched upon in the theme organizational structure.

Another drawback of the method used is that the result of the themes is affected by how the question was formulated by the interviewer. This implies two drawbacks. Firstly, as can be seen in the results of this thesis, the possibility to education is one of the main findings to help the middle manager understand his or her role. This result can be affected by the choice of organizations and the fact that the interviewer in one of the four organizations was aware of that the middle managers from this organisation had attended a middle management training. However the results gained from the respondents belonging to this organisation is strengthened by the respondents from the other three that also were provided managerial training. Secondly, if the author of this thesis would have done the interviews, further questions covering more theoretical issues concerning the themes could have been asked.

When gaining more knowledge within the theoretical field it is seen that there is some confusion of how the term identity in relation to middle management is used. This implies that the discussion of the identity is diverse and that the author now believes that this theme involves such a wide area concerning the middle manager's role that much more research could be done on this theme. Moreover, due to the knowledge of the author when the theoretical framework was written, the results found in this thesis focus both on the identity affecting managerial work and also the identity affected by organizational changes. However there could have been a much deeper discussion on either of these two such as

on how the middle manager perceives his or her future in an organization of change. This is an interesting topic for future research.

7.1 Future Research

During the writing process of this thesis several topics within the research field of middle management are seen to be interesting topics for further research.

- The middle manager's identity is in this thesis seen to be the most influencing factor to understand the middle manager's perceived role. As the identity of the middle manager influence his or her leadership characteristics it would be interesting to look at how different identities of the middle managers have an influence on the organisation in times of organizational change.
- Related to the suggestion above are how the middle manager's perceived role is affected by the emergent use of consultants in times of organizational change and how the identity of the middle manager and the consultant is affecting the organizational change process.
- Unrealistic expectations seems to be a critical issue that leads to stress which in turn affects the well-being of the middle manager and his or her employees. As this affects the performance of the expected tasks the responsibility of the middle manager increases. It is therefore an interesting issue for further research to see how communication with upper managerial levels can reduce the negative effects caused by the unrealistic expectations.

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