JÖNKÖPING UNIVERSITY
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To Cope with Role Conflict and Work Stress

A middle managerial perspective

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Abstract

Middle managers occupy an ambiguous position in modern organizations and the intermediacy of their position makes them vulnerable to experience role conflict. Role conflict leads to numerous negative outcomes for individuals, including work stress. On an organizational level, work stress among middle managers can lead to decreased financial performance. The World Health Organization has declared stress as "the health epidemic of the 21st century" and together with new Swedish regulations, the subject is more relevant than ever. To respond to the negative stress development, organizations are obliged to react and show responsibility in action. The purpose of this quantitative study was to examine what stress coping strategies middle managers in the insurance and banking sectors in Sweden employ. By linking the strategies to their perceived stress level, an understanding of what strategies middle managers use to handle role conflict and work stress can be derived. A theoretical framework based on management and stress literature was conducted, in order to formulate three hypotheses predicting the relationship between the variables role conflict, work stress, and coping strategies. The data was conducted using survey research and analyzed using a standard multiple regression. The findings suggest that role conflict is present among middle managers and correlates with higher levels of work stress. Further, middle managers employing more problem focused stress coping strategies were found to occupy lower levels of work stress. The results are discussed on an individual and organizational level both from a theoretical and managerial standpoint.

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1.   Introduction

In the first part of the study, the background to the study is introduced. A specific research problem is defined to help focus the attention to the area of importance. Furthermore, the purpose and aimed contribution are also presented. Finally, to understand the chosen area of research, the delimitations are defined.

1.1. Background

Middle managers are traditionally described as being located between the strategic top and the operating core of an organization (Mintzberg, 1998; Dutton & Ashford, 1993). However, in this study the distinguishing feature of what is defined as a middle manager is not so much related to their specific location in the organization but rather, based on the definition by Wooldridge, Schmid and Floyd, (2008), it is the middle managers uniqueness when it comes to access to senior management as well as their knowledge of day to day operations and closeness to employees that defines them. Thus, the term middle management is referred to and understood relatively broadly in this study.

The growing body of literature discussing a so called middle management perspective have helped put focus on middle managers importance in organizational decisions and how they hold a central position in explaining organizational outcomes (Wooldridge et al.,2008). They are seen as critical mediators between the levels within an organization and are crucial when it comes to mediate between an organization's strategy and day-to-day operations (Nonaka, 1994). The relevance of middle managers in the organizational hierarchy have been emphasized in various studies; in research on strategy-making processes (Dutton & Ashford, 1993; Wooldridge & Floyd, 1990; Floyd & Lane, 2000), on organizational entrepreneurship (Burgelman, 1983), organizational learning and innovation (Kanter, 1982; Nonaka, 1994), and change implementation (Balogun & Johnson, 2004; Huy, 2002), indicating the importance of middle managers in organizational settings.

However, the function of middle management is less clear. Research have stated what they should do, empirical studies have found what they actually do and a third group of researchers have looked at how middle managers are affected by their work role (Harding, Lee, Ford, 2014). The focus of this study is not on what middle managers do and the skills they possess but rather on how their ambiguous position affect them, positioning us somewhere in the third group of researchers. The equivocal position of middle managers makes them more vulnerable and exposed to uncertainty (Sims, 2003). Their role has been argued to be under much change in the last decades (e.g. Harding et al., 2014). Forces such as internalization, globalization, and technological advances (Parker, 2005) have greatly altered the business landscape affecting the structure of organizations at all levels, including the middle management level.

As a result of the changing business environment, organizations have focused on expanding the use of their human capital leading to more demanding performance expectations on individuals, including multi-skilled role requirements (Dewe, O´Driscoll & Cooper, 2010). Research by Dopson & Stewart (1990) found the complex and altering set of pressures on organizations having particularly affected middle management. Increase in exercised direct and indirect control have lead to an increased work insecurity among middle managers (Ogbonna and Wilkinson, 2003). Due to increased employee empowerment, middle managers are also expected to take on a role as facilitators (Floyd & Wooldridge, 1997). Further, managers tend to have to do more work with fewer employees (Antonioni, 1996). The combination of responsibilities have lead to new, somewhat contradicting, demands on managers. When middle managers are uncertain of having enough resources to meet the demands, a sense of helplessness often appears as physical and physiological reactions (Antonioni, 1996; Lazarus, 1999). These types of reactions are referred to as stress (Selye, 1975; Lazarus, 1999).

Seminal work by Beehr and Newman (1978) pointed out that as most people spend a substantial amount of their life at work. Thus, it seems very likely that work issues will be a significant contributor to how they feel. Since the 1970s, stress within organizations, in this study referred to as work stress, has become an important element in management literature (i.e. Ganster & Rosen, 2013). Stress has also received a more prominent position in workplace policies. According to Meško et al. (2013) low levels of work performance, motivation and exhaustion of the single individual

also affects an organization's financial performance in the form of productivity loss and absenteeism (e.g., Xie & Schaubroeck, 2001).

According to data from Statistics of Sweden (Ivarsson, 2014), work related stress has been increasing in Sweden in recent years, and data reports that one of four employees have reported various health issues related to their workplace. Stress and other psychological strains are mentioned as the most common reasons. According to the Swedish Work Environment Authority, social and organizational factors were the second largest cause of occupational illnesses reported in Sweden in 2014. These factors accounts for a third of all reported occupational illnesses, an increase of 70 per cent since 2010 (The Swedish Work Environment Authority, 2015). Following this development, Sweden has adopted a new provision (AFS 2015:4) about organizational and social work environment as a part of the Swedish Work Environment Act (SFS 1977:1160). The provision came into effect in March 2016, promoting the position that the mental and social environment is just as important as the physical in today's working life (The Swedish Work Environment Authority, 2015). The organizational work environment include management and allocation of work tasks as well as demands, resources and responsibilities (AFS 2015:4). The social work environment encompasses requirements such as social interaction and support from managers and peers (AFS 2015:4).

Stress has a destructive effect on both mental and physical health of employees as well as affecting organizations' financial performance. Thus, it becomes relevant to examine underlying factors (i.e. stressors) and consider potential methods to reduce strain and minimize the costs for organizations. The identification of work stressors was first made by Kahn et al. (1964), identifying role conflict and role ambiguity as the main causal factors of individual stress in an organization. Rizzo, House and Lirtzman (1970) defines role conflict as conflicting organizational expectations and demands that affects a person's role performance. Since Kahn et al.'s (1964) identification, the types of stressors have continued to expand (Dewe, et al., 2010), and more recent examples include work overload, career development issues, relationships at work, organizational structure and cultural issues (Beehr and Newman, 1978). In recent years work-life conflicts and organizational change are often debated (e.g. Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Voydanoff, 2002; Huy, 2002; Balogun, 2003). Despite, or as a result of more recent research on stressors (e.g. Ganster & Rosen, 2013), role conflict continues to be present in the work stress literature.

Due to middle managers' somewhat floating and unclear roles in organizations, they often meet contradicting and changing expectations and demands from people around them like peers, subordinates and superiors (Han, Wang, Dong 2014). This often results in middle managers being involved in role conflict. When middle managers have to employ a lot of time and energy to alter competing expectations or demands they are faced with the notion of whether there is a lack of resources to handle these demands, and consequently, stress may occur (Selye, 1975).

According to the Swedish Work Environment Authority (2015) it is the employer who is responsible for creating a good work environment by the use of work environment management. Kahn et al. (1964) suggest that role conflict can be minimized using stress management strategies. Despite the development of organizational stress management, the increasing trend of work stress suggests that organizations have failed to provide the sufficient policies to change the demanding work environment (Dewe et al., 2010). Stress management focusing on giving employees the resources to develop individual coping abilities to handle work stress caused by role conflict is therefore an area that needs to be further explored.

According to Lazarus and Folkman (1984, p. 141) coping can be defined as 'constantly changing cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage specific external and/or internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of the person.' It is an umbrella term for numerous ways of handling various difficulties in a person's environment, and can be both internal events as well as explicit actions.

The most established and recognized coping strategies within the field, according to Lazarus and Folkman (1984), are the two strategies of either taking action and confronting a difficult event (i.e. problem focused) or trying to direct the focus from the actual problem and not dealing with it (i.e. emotion focused). The former involves taking an active role of dealing with the stressful event as soon as it appears compared to the latter which attempts to manage the stressful feelings that are associated with a certain event and not changing the situation (Folkman, Lazarus, Gruen, DeLongis, 1986)

1.2 Problem Discussion

With the presented background it becomes clear that role conflict, due to increased levels of work stress, has a negative impact on the health and well-being of employees. Role conflict is a part of an organization's social and organizational work environment, which are the second largest cause of occupational illnesses reported in Sweden (The Swedish Work Environment Authority, 2016). Previous research have examined the relationship between work-related stress and role conflict (Kahn et al., 1964; Han et al., 2014), specifically acknowledging middle management as vulnerable to experiencing role conflict (Srivastava, Hagtvet & Sen, 1994; McConville, 2006). With role conflict as one of the main stressors for middle managers it becomes relevant to study work stress and role conflict in a middle managerial context. As part of new regulations on the organizational and social work environment (AFS 2015:4), employers in Sweden are obliged to establish prerequisites for a good, healthy work environment. However, despite work stress being a significant health issue in Sweden during the last decades, the recent development indicates that organizations are struggling with effective stress management. In fact, according to Statistics of Sweden, one out of every four Swedish employees describe experience of health issues related to work stress (Ivarsson, 2014). Stress management developed from the research by Lazarus and Folkman (1984) builds on the notion that stress, rather than being a direct response to a stressor, depends on an individual's resources and capacity to cope. As a result, to examine coping strategies in order for organizations to provide employees with sufficient resources to cope with work stress becomes of great importance (Dewe, O´Driscoll & Cooper, 2010).

Many researchers have tried to explain the negative consequences experienced by individuals in specific work situations and the underlying causes (e.g. Rizzo et al., 1970; Floyd & Lane, 2000). Especially focusing on demonstrating the relationship between specific stressors and perceived strain (Beehr and Newman, 1978). The areas of personality traits and their connection to coping mechanisms as well as individual differences have been thoroughly explored (e.g. Perrewé et al., 2004; Hobfoll, 2002; Ralston et al., 2010) in the process of finding individual determinants of the emotional and behavioural responses from an individual when exposed to stressors. Recent organizational research have turned to examining how individual resources can reduce stress and increase well-being (Hobfoll, 2002). Various stress models have provided a theoretical framework (e.g., Lazarus, 1966; Lazarus & Folkman,1984; Carver, Scheier, Weintraub, 1985) however, the effectiveness of individuals' specific coping strategies of handling work stress appears to be a less explored area.

1.3 The research purpose and formulation of research questions

This thesis aims to complement previous literature and study the stressor-strain relationship between role conflict and work stress among middle managers within the insurance and banking sectors in Sweden. Further, by examining what stress coping strategies middle managers employ and link the strategies to their perceived stress levels, we aim to gain an understanding of what strategies middle managers use to handle role conflict. From examining the coping strategies used by middle managers to handle work stress we hope to contribute to the research field of middle management, as well as coping, by gaining a deeper understanding of what coping strategies leads to lower levels of perceived stress. From this reasoning the following research questions were developed:

RQ 1: To what extent is role conflict and stress related on a middle-managerial level

RQ 2: What coping strategies can be considered as more efficient to handle perceived work stress among middle managers?

1.4 Delimitations of the study

In role theory, different types of role conflict are present, the two considered as most typical for middle-level managers are inter role conflict and intra role conflict (Han et al, 2014). Inter role conflict is related to the expectations of different roles a person plays and how they are not the same in all situations of life. (Han et al. 2014). Intra role conflict refers to when the different expectations associated with a specific role conflicts with each other (Han et al. 2014). The

focus of this study lies on intra role conflict, specifically the demands and expectations a middle manager experience from subordinates, superiors and peers. The other type of role conflict, inter role conflict will be controlled for but not examined in detail. Ganster and Rosen (2013) emphasis that in the work stress literature, when referring to environmental stressors, the focus is generally on so called psychosocial stressors. These type of stressors are situations and work aspects that affects a person through a psychological stress process, compared to a directly physical process. This study follows previous research by exploring psychosocial stressors. Further, we also focus on transactional stress, which is caused by an interaction between an individual and their environment, following in the tradition of Folkman and Lazarus'(1984) work on stress and coping. Other views of stress (e.g as independent (external) or dependent (response) is not examined. Furthermore, only the two most established coping strategies (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), problem focused and emotion focused, was included in this study. Finally, the study was conducted within the insurance and banking sectors in Sweden during a four-month period.

1.5 Contribution

This thesis aim to contribute to existing literature on the relationship between role conflict and work stress in a middle managerial context, and to build on extant literature on stress coping strategies by examining such strategies used by middle managers in Sweden.

Furthermore, the aimed practical contribution of this thesis is to give organizations a better understanding of the relationship between the stressor role conflict and the coping strategies used to handle work stress in a middle managerial context. A deeper understanding of the coping strategies used by middle managers to handle work stress related to their organizational role will enable organizations to work more proactively to prevent stress among middle managers.. The results will hopefully give organizations an implication on how to improve the organizational and social work environment for middle managers to make the necessary changes following new regulations (AFS 2015:4). Additionally, the results will hopefully enable organizations to create an environment where the middle managerial role is less vulnerable by giving middle managers the necessary strategies to allocate resources to respond to the demands of their work role in a sufficient manner. The potential consequences of role conflict and work stress can lead to decreased organizational performance, as well as various health issues affecting a large portion of the Swedish population. Thus, this thesis aim to make a societal contribution by elaborating on what coping strategies are most efficient for middle managers to reduce stress and to provide suggestions on how organizations can improve the work environment for these managers.

TABLE 1 Summary of key words from literature review

Role conflict	Conflicting organizational expectations and demands that affects a person's role performance (Rizzo et al., 1970)
Coping	Constantly changing cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage specific external and/or internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of the person' (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984, p. 141)
Stress	Whena person cannot fulfill the variety of responsibilities they are given, a sense of helplessness often appears as physical and physiological reactions(Seyle, 1975).
Work stress	A process in which psychological experiences and demands in the workplace yields short-term strains, as well as long term changes in employees' mental and physical health (Ganster and Rosen, 2013).
Middle manager	Managers with access to senior management as well as knowledge of day to day operations and closeness to employees (Wooldridge, Schmid and Floyd, 2008).
Emotion focused coping strategies	Emotion focused coping include attempts to manage the stressful feelings, such as anger or sadness, that are associated with a certain event and to eliminate emotional anxiety (Folkman et al, 1986; Folkman and Lazarus, 1988).
Problem focused coping strategies	Dealing with the problem that is causing the distress by modifying or eliminating it (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984).
Transactional stress	Stress caused by an interaction between an individual and their environment (Folkman and Lazarus, 1984)
Stress management	Stress management strategies is defined by Lazarus (1991) as resources used by an individual to change work conditions so that they are perceived as less stressful.

2.   Theoretical Framework

This section presents an overview of research in the area of middle management, role conflict, work stress. The theoretical background begins with a presentation of the relevant subjects and is then followed by how the theoretical concepts relates to middle managers' coping strategies of handling stressful situations at work. Influential frameworks are introduced and discussed together with theories and processes, which can be significant for middle managers in their working role. Finally, hypotheses are formulated from the theoretical framework presented.

2.1 What is a middle manager

Middle managers are traditionally seen as hierarchically below senior top management and above first-level supervision (Wooldridge et al., 2008), responsible for a business unit at the middle level in the organizational hierarchy (Uyterhoeven, 1972). Hence, these managers are supervisors at the same time as they are being supervised (Dutton & Ashford, 1993), a unique position due their access to top management combined with good knowledge of operations (Floyd & Wooldridge, 1997). This combination enables middle managers to mediate between an organization's strategy and day-today tasks (Nonaka, 1994), giving them an important role as interfaces between otherwise disconnected organizational domains (Floyd & Wooldridge, 1997; Nonaka, 1994). Bartlett & Goshal (1993) developed an organizational model describing middle managers as horizontal integrators of strategy and capabilities. The role of middle management focuses on communicating information between different levels, i.e. the top and operating levels of the organization (Floyd & Lane, 2000), by implementing top management strategies and decisions and exercise control over subordinates (Harding et al., 2014). Thus, middle managers can be described as managers who coordinate, mediate, negotiate, and interpret connections between the organization's strategic and operational levels (Floyd & Wooldridge, 1997).

2.2 The function of a middle manager

The definition of middle managers that this thesis leans upon are managers with access to senior management as well as knowledge of day to day operations and closeness to employees (Wooldridge, Schmid and Floyd, 2008), indicate that they hold a complex role in the organizational hierarchy. According to McConville (2006), the role of middle managers can be said to be more difficult to distinguish compared to other management positions. Traditionally, it has been a relatively simple task to identify top management as those who define missions and are responsible for strategy formulation. Similarly, first-line managers can be defined as those who control the daily detail operations on the 'shop floor'. Contrary, the role of middle managers are harder to distinguish as the boundaries between hierarchical levels are often blurred. The development toward flatter hierarchical structures further contributes to the ambiguity of their role (McConville, 2006).

A study conducted by Dopson & Stewart (1990) emphazise how previous research on middle management tend to present a rather gloomy picture, portraying middle managers as caught in the middle of the organizational hierarchy with a progress toward a decline in the importance of their role. Balogun's (2003) research on middle managers roles during change implementations outlines a similar view, arguing for how middle managers in previous research often have been portrayed as hindering and being resistant to change, hence having a negative impact on organizational development. In their research Dopson & Stewart (1990), however, highlights a number of studies arguing for the reshaping of the middle management role rather than for its decline (e.g. Kanter, 1982; Nonaka, 1988). Other studies follows in this ambiguous notion of the function of middle management. Harding et al. (2014) argues that middle managers can be seen as vital and loyal mediators between top management and junior employees on one hand, but can contrary be seen as a problem hindering development.

Despite the contradicting views, most management and business research of today support the notion of the importance of middle management in organizations. Kanter (1982) was one of the earlier advocates for the need to recognize middle management's increased importance, stating that the productivity of of an organization will increasingly depend on the degree to which it give room for its middle managers to be innovative and combine ideas and action. Research have emphasized their importance in organizational strategy (Wooldridge et al., 2008; Floyd and Wooldridge, 1997) and organizational change (Balogun, 2003; Balogun & Johnson, 2004; Rouleau & Balogun, 2011). Huy (2002) argues for how middle managers are closer to their employees and thus, likely to be more aware of their employees' emotional needs as well as having the time to interact with their subordinates. Floyd and Wooldridge (1997) suggest that middle management involvement in both the definition and execution of strategic decisions is significant and that it should be extended beyond the top management team and that the importance of inclusiveness should be a feature of the strategic decision process. Research by Balogun, (2003) shows how middle managers fulfill positions as complex "change intermediaries" during strategic implementations. This suggests that middle managers play multiple roles and to impose changes in their department is only one of several roles the middle manager has to fulfill.

2.3 The concept of role conflict

Within social theories, an individual's behavior is explained by using the concept of `role´(Mantere, 2008). A role is the set of behaviors that others expect of individuals in a certain context (Scott & Bruce, 1994). Roles, as seen above, are a part of an organization's everyday strategic discourse and practice (Mantere, 2008). When individuals encounter situations in which they feel the need to take on a role that collides with their personal values, has to take on several incompatible roles, or has to handle conflicting demands from one or more role senders a phenomena referred to as role conflict appears (Kahn et al., 1964). As mentioned in the first chapter, Rizzo et al., (1970) defines role conflict as conflicting organizational expectations and demands that affects a person's role performance.

As seen above, the definition of role conflict is relatively broad. Kahn et al. (1964) therefore identified several types of role conflict, in particular intrasender-, intersender-, and inter role conflict. Kahn et al. (1964) defines intersender conflict as conflicting expectations from two or more individuals on a single role, and as the focus of this thesis is on incompatible expectations on middle managers both from senior management and junior staff this is the type of role conflict relevant in this study. In role theory intersender conflict is sometimes also referred to as intra role conflict (e.g.

Han et al., 2014), so also in this study as described in the delimitations section. Individuals who hold various roles will experience diverse expectations from people with whom they interact (Floyd & Lane, 2000). If these expectations become more extreme and the individual struggle to find cohesion between them it creates role conflict (Floyd & Lane, 2000), specifically intra role conflict.

2.4 Role conflict among middle managers

The presented literature suggest that in today's work environment, managers confront multiple, often opposing role expectations (Marginson & Bui, 2009). Seminal work by Cahn et al. (1964) concluded that the largest pressure on a person holding a specific role comes from others who have the power to exert leverage on him or her. A study conducted by Srivastava, Hagtvet and Sen (1994) found that middle managers are more vulnerable to role stress and role anxiety than are other managers. Sims (2003) investigated the vulnerability of middle managers, taking a narrative approach to understand their lives. The author argues that middle managers are put into a uniquely vulnerable position. Feeling the need to create sense-giving stories for both senior managers as well as junior employees at the same time. The two sets of stories are likely to clash or even be opposing, leading to conflict.

According to McConville (2006) middle managers in particular, due to their intermediate position, often experience a distinct and unique type of role tension. The authors points towards that middle managers role as mediators between strategic planners exaggerates the intermediacy of their role causing strain for these individuals. The phenomena of role conflict is most often present in boundary spanning roles (Friedman & Podolny, 1992; Han et al., 2014) and due to the blurred boundaries at the intermediate level in the organizational hierarchy (McConville & Holden, 1990), often experienced by middle management (Han et al., 2014). The multiple and often conflicting demands from senior management, employees and peers results in middle managers simultaneously playing multiple roles in an organization, creating role conflict and personal strain (Han et al., 2014; Fried & Tiegs, 1995). Balogun's (2003) work on middle managers as change intermediaries conclude that middle managers fulfill important roles during organizational changes however, due to the fact that the understanding of their role and contribution is often overlooked, middle managers are often facing workload issues and role conflict.

Research by Floyd and Lane (2000) examined strategic role conflict during organizational renewal and how it is a certain consequence of change. Middle managers with their position at the intermediate level of the organizational hierarchy will be the center for most strategic information (Dutton & Ashford, 1993; Floyd & Wooldridge, 1992; Nonaka, 1988). Hence, management at this level experiences the broadest range of strategic roles. To enable interaction with lower levels, middle managers must have technical knowledge and deep understanding of the organization's capabilities. Interaction with top level requires understanding of organizational goals and competitive strategy as well as the external environment (Floyd and Lane, 2000). Thus, middle management experience greater complexity of information and interaction flows than does other management levels. Independent of to what extent a middle manager engage in all roles and behaviors, the wide range of expectations put on them increases the risk of role conflict (Floyd and Lane, 2000). In a previous study Floyd and Wooldridge (1997) emphasized four strategic roles of middle managers, each role unique and valuable. They are (i) implementers, integrating senior management's strategies with employee activities. As (ii) synthesizers, middle managers communicate information upwards to senior management. Middle managers also have a (iii) championing role, influencing the decisions of top management and reshape existing strategies. Their fourth role is as (iiii) facilitators, engaging in idea creation encouraging individuals on both higher and lower hierarchical levels.

2.5 Changes in middle managers work role

The changing business landscape of today have had an impact on all organizational levels, pressuring organizations to change in order to survive (Dopson & Stewart,1990; Parker, 2005). The more turbulent, fast changing, business environment has affected the role of middle management to a high extent (Dopson & Stewart, 1990; Harding et al., 2014). Staff reduction and greater decentralization have lead to the work role of middle managers becoming more general, with greater responsibilities and a broad variety of tasks (Dopson & Stewart, 1990, Dewe et al., 2010). An

increase in employee empowerment has lead to expectations on middle managers taking on the role of facilitators (Floyd and Wooldridge, 1997) increased demands on organizational cost-efficiency is expressed in middle managers having to do more work with fewer employees including multi-skilled role requirements (Antonioni, 1996; Dewe et al., 2010). Many positive outcomes can be derived from these changes such as more autonomy and greater responsibility for middle managers. However, the changes can also be seen as increasing the strain and pressure on middle managers and adding to the complexity and strenuousness of middle managers work role.

2.6 Role conflict and work stress

As a result of the ambiguity inherent to the middle managerial role, role conflict seems to be a present phenomena within their organizational context. Role conflict can cause strain on both individuals and organizations (Rizzo et al., 1970). Multiple studies have, during the last decades, shown how role conflict leads to numerous malfunctional outcomes, including decreased job satisfaction and psychological distress (Rizzo et al., 1970; Floyd and Lane, 2000; Han et al., 2014). Further, role theory states that when an individual is exposed to inconsistent expectations, an experience of higher levels of stress, dissatisfaction and decreased performance may occur (Rizzo et al., 1970). Marginson and Bui (2009) found that increased levels of role conflict leads to a decrease in performance. Role conflict has been found to be positively related to boundary spanning but have a negative correlation to commitment, involvement and participation in decision making (Fisher & Gitelson, 1983). Moreover, Rizzo et al. (1970) states that role conflict can have a negative impact on organizational effectiveness.

Antonioni (1996) argues that when managers experience a lack of means to meet the expectations from their work environment a feeling of powerlessness is often experienced resulting in both physical and psychological responses, called stress (Selye, 1975). Early work by Kahn et al. (1964) identified role ambiguity and role conflict as the two main factors of individual stress in organizations. Similarly, Fried & Tiegs (1995) emphazised role conflict and role stress as two of the most frequently used sources for work stress.

From the development of this theoretical framework, there is reason to believe that there is a significant relation between the experience of role conflict and perceived stress. To clarify and test this assumption on a middle managerial level we formulate the following hypothesis:

H1: More role conflict among middle managers is related to higher levels of perceived work stress.

2.7 The concept of transactional stress

There are many ways of defining the term stress and endless formulations can be found in the existing research within the area. Stress can be something observed in the external environment as well as something that is experienced individually. Situations in a person's environment that cause stress processes are referred to as stressors, while a person's actual responses are called strain or stress (Griffin & Clarke, 2011). Sandin (1999) states that depending on the different ways stress manifests itself, it is seen as independent (feature of the external environment), dependent (and individual's response) or a transaction (between the individual and the environment). Various stress models exist within the field, Lazarus's (1966) transactional model of stress and coping is viewed as the most influential (Ganster & Rosen, 2013). The model shows how stress is caused by an imbalance between the demands placed on us and our resources (the ability to cope and mediate stress). Lazarus and Folkman (1984) builds on the research by Lazarus, defining stress as a specific relation between an individual and the environment, leaving the individual feeling threatened or overwhelmed. The definitions is similar to later conceptualization viewing stress as a result of environmental factors causing a process of cognitive and physiological responses that has an impact on an individual's well-being (e.g. Ganster & Rosen, 2013). The transactional model of stress and coping is a dynamic model since it looks at how an individual interpret a stressful event rather than the actual environment itself. This thesis lean on the transactional model by Lazarus (1966) and Lazarus and Folkman (1984) in that middle managers are affected by stressors in the work environment (i.e. role conflict) but that their reaction to, and the consequences of, the stressor are dependent on their individual resources to cope.

2.8 Introduction to the concept of work stress

Stress in an organizational setting is referred to as work stress in this study. Work stress is defined by Ganster and Rosen (2013) as a process in which psychological experiences and demands in the workplace yields short-term strains, as well as long term changes in employees' mental and physical health. The growing awareness of work stress in today's business environment suggest it being a new phenomena, however research on stress and the relation to work had long before the 1990s been an area of interest of researchers. In 1962, the person- environment (P-E) model was developed by Khan and French, which has been the most widely used in stress research for decades. The model argues for how adjustment to the job is the key to handle stress effectively. If the match between individual abilities and the job requirements were successful, both the individual and the organization would benefit from the corporation. However, in the 1970s and 1980s, scientific attention turned to focus on smaller groups and individual adaptation to perceived work stress

2.9 Implications of work stress on organizations

Multiple studies have argued for how role conflict correlates with various negative outcomes, such as decreased job satisfaction and psychological distress (Rizzo et al., 1970; Floyd and Lane, 2000; Marginson & Bui, 2009; Han et al., 2014). In research from Lee and Ashforth (1996) and Nixon et al.'s (2011), a clear relationship is shown between workplace stressors (e.g. role conflict, role stress) and primary indicators (e.g. emotional exhaustion). Findings of negative effects of work stress on both emotional and physical levels can be seen as clear incentives for organizations to work with prevention of work stress among employees. To not acknowledge the problem can lead to constraints in functioning at work, employees being absent from work and cost spent on helth care to treat different symptoms of work stress (e.g., Ganster, 2005; Greenberg, 2010; Halpern, 2005). Futher, Meško et al. (2013) find how stress leads to low levels of work performance, motivation and exhaustion of the single individual, which affect an organization's financial performance. According to Xie & Schaubroeck (2001) the effect on an organization's outcome can be shown in the form of productivity loss and absenteeism. Additionally, the authors found incentives for organizations to lower stress levels among employees, as it leads to decreased costs, increased utilization of time and a higher level of innovation.

Above research show how work stress stem from various organizational demands, experienced by an individual. Literature acknowledges the need to study stress within organizations for various reasons. Potential risks of not working actively with work stress prevention may lead to mismanaged organizational stress which can lead to even higher individual strain and have effects on the asset of human resources in an organization (Srivastava and Sen, 1995). The benefits from handling work stress is therefore not solely on an individual level but is highly affecting an organization as a whole.

2.10 Stress management

A growing understanding of the potentially devastating effects of work stress has lead to that research examining the relationship between work stress and well-being has increased substantially over the past 20 years (e.g. Ganster & Rosen, 2013). In the last decades, employers have shifted in the way stress is perceived, from being something that was seen as a weakness in individual employees to a problem employers have a responsibility and obligation to acknowledge(Väänänen, Anttila, Turtiainen & Varje, 2012). This change came from the discovery of how long-term economical effects of staff turnover, sick absence and early retirements affected organizations negatively. In the late 20th century, work stress became recognized as an important societal issue. In 1999, the European Commission stated that work-related stress were common in all fifteen member states (Väänänen et al., 2012), and the World Health Organization denotes stress as the ''health epidemic of the 21st century'' (Smith 2012). In fact, according to Statistics of Sweden, one out of four Swedish employees describe experience of health issues related to work stress (Ivarsson, 2014). New governmental policies on work environment, such as the new Swedish provision on mental and social work environment (AFS 2015:4), further highlights this view. The relevance and impact of work related stress has created increased interest of finding reliable measurement instruments to be able to measure stress in different societal contexts

as well as leading organizations to increase the usage of stress management. Lazarus (1991) defines stress management as the resources a person uses to adjust to work conditions so as to make them appear less stressful.

On an organizational level, stress management is crucial to find potential causes of stress as well as to handle constant change, in order to make conditions as good as possible for the employees (Michie, 2002). In practice, individuals and organizations use different approaches to manage a stressful environment. According to Michie (2002), changes of a structural character to adapt schedules or the environment are potential ways. Psychological changes are another way to go, offering social support and re-thinking the control level given to employees. The author further explains that in order to handle stress experienced in different working situations, our own coping strategies are crucial for success. Problem solving, assertiveness and time management is given as examples on how to handle a stressful environment. The social support at work is also a critical factor to be able to handle stress.

Stress management developed from the research by Lazarus (1966) and Lazarus and Folkman (1984) builds on the notion that stress, rather than being a direct response to a stressor, depends on an individual's resources and capacity to cope. Further, Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) transactional model states that stress may not evolve if an individual perceive the stressor as something positive or even challenging rather than as something threatening. As a result, an individual who possess sufficient coping strategies may not develop stress from an event caused by a stressor. The model suggests that an individual can learn how to handle stress and develop coping strategies as a response to stressors. Michie (2002) argues that by actively pursuing training, individuals can become aware of signs of stress, learn how to interrupt negative patterns and making an active plan to reduce work stress. However, the source of why someone is stressed can seldom be eliminated by individual coping strategies. The Swedish Work Environment Authority (2016) states that by using work environment management an employer can, together with employees, prevent or find solutions to conditions that causes work stress, so as to create a sustainable balance between demand and resources. Taking a similar approach and building on the notion that role conflict can be minimized but not eliminated (Kahn et al., 1964) the area of individual coping strategies to handle work stress will now be examined.

2.11 Individual Coping strategies

Coping research has expanded across a range of disciplines in the last decades. The notion that an event in the environment, a stimulus, will provoke stress reactions and the need to cope, is a natural and appealing way of thinking about psychological stress (Lazarus, 1999). The impact of a stressful situation is somewhat determined by an individual's perception of their stressfulness (Lazarus 1966; 1999). Depending on the characteristics and personal experience of an individual, the way of coping with stress becomes different between people (Michie, 2002). When exposed to a stressful situation, individuals evaluate the meaning of the event and depending on their well-being and personal balance, makes their own appraisal.

According to Lazarus and Folkman (1984, p. 141) coping can be defined as 'constantly changing cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage specific external and/or internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of the person'. The two most recognized categories of coping are emotion focused coping and the problem focused coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Researchers have made attempts to further classify coping responses such as dysfunctional coping (Carver, Scheier, Weintraub, 1989) and meaning-focused coping (Folkman, 2010) however, later researchers tend to pay more attention to emotion and problem focused coping (Boyd, Lewin, Sager, 2009; Srivastava and Sager, 1999). The two strategies consists of either dealing with the problem that is causing the distress by modifying or eliminating it (problem focused) or trying to direct the focus from the actual problem and regulating emotions (emotion focused) (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984; Lazarus 1980). The former involves taking an active role, such as understanding the stressor, finding alternatives based on the prevailing costs and benefits for oneself and the organization (Tang, Tollison, Whiteside, 1987; 1989 cited in Srivastava & Tang, 2015). Thus, problem-focused coping refers to cognitive attempts to regulate stress (Green et al., 2010). Emotion focused coping include attempts to manage the stressful feelings, such as anger or sadness, that are associated with a certain event (Folkman and Lazarus, 1988) and to eliminate emotional anxiety (Folkman et al, 1986). Further examples of problem focused coping include; to prevent the effect of a stressor, coming up with action strategies, trying to avoid becoming distracted by other events and seeking advice or assistance from someone (Carver et al, 1989). Examples of emotion focused coping strategies

include seeking moral support or sympathy, managing stress by positive reinterpretation, trying to act as if the stressor does not exist and accept the stressor and situation (Carver et al, 1989).

Problem focused coping strategies, also called active focused strategies, have by Billings & Moos (1981) and Pearlin & Schooler (1978) been found to be effective in adjusting to negative influences in stressful situations. According to Menaghan (1982), the usage of problem focused strategies such as negotiation or discussing and positive comparison, leads to decreased stress and to a reduction of future problems related to one's role. The specific coping strategy has also shown to reduce depression when used in stressful situations (Mitchell, Cronkite, & Moos, 1983). According to Boyd et. al. (2009), the experience of decreased role conflict is positively related to problem focused coping. Contrary to the positive health and stress outcomes of using problem focused coping strategies, the emotional focused approach to treat difficult events has shown to lead to increased psychological distress (Billings & Moos, 1981). As stress emerge continuously, and emotion focused strategies are seen as passive or reactive, they tend to lead to negative outcomes for an individual even though that individual may feel relief in the short perspective (Goolsby, 1992). Moreover, Pienaar (2008) found emotion focused strategies to be related with higher levels of psychological stress and Billings and Moos (1981) found avoidance coping, as a part of emotion focused coping, to be positively correlated with psychological distress. Lastly, Boyd et al. (2009) found emotion focused coping to be a more prevalent response among individuals' experiencing work related role conflict.

Following the theoretical framework presented, it becomes clear than an individual's coping strategies are important to understand their reactions to work stress and with this background we formulate the following hypotheses:

H2: Problem focused stress coping strategies are positively correlated with lower levels of work stress among middle managers.

H3: Emotion-focused stress coping strategies are negatively correlated with lower levels of work stress among middle managers.

2.12. Factors influencing work stress

The focus of this study lies on the organizational stressor role conflict however, stress results from a combination of various individual characteristics as well as organizational stressors (Ganster & Rosen, 2013).

2.12.1. Age

Previous research have shown that older employees often report lower strain compared to younger or middle-aged colleagues (e.g., Ng & Feldman, 2010; Hertel & Rauschenbach, 2011). Ng and Feldman's (2010) meta-analysis of more than 150 000 workers showed that older workers in general report lower strain compared to younger workers. The authors also found a negative correlation between role conflict and chronological stress. In addition, a study conducted by Rauschenbach & Hertel (2011) found that older workers reported lower stress levels compared to middle-aged peers.

2.12.2. Work experience

Ng and Feldman (2010) suggest an alternative way of interpreting employee differences in age into research. The ability of handling stress is described as developing with greater life experience, using personal development and growth when going through internal stress processes. Hertel et al. (2014) argues for older workers being more adapted to handle work stress due to them possessing higher job experience, work customs, and knowledge in how the job is conducted, giving them resources to handle stressful situations in a more successful manner. Additional research further supports the notion of how more experience have a positive correlation with higher levels of emotional capacities, as well as self-management skills (Charles, 2010).

2.12.3. Gender

Studies have shown how gender affect experienced work stress (e.g. Lundberg, Frankenhaeuser, 1999; Lundberg, 2005). Women's high participation in the work force combined with persisting traditional gender roles in home and family responsibilities can be one explanation for observed gender differences in work stress. Being a spouse, a mother, and an employee, can lead to negative health effects due to this inter role conflict (Arber, Gilbert & Dale, 1985).

2.12.4. Family situation

In this thesis the focus lies on intra role conflict, that is conflict within the work role. However, inter role conflict is also a significant source of strain (Kahn et al., 1964). A type of inter role conflict is work–family conflict, when demands of work and family roles are conflicting in some respect so that participation in one role is more difficult because of participation in the other role (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Research has established that work stress and family stress can be said to interact substantially (e.g. Lazarus, 1999) and numerous studies have focused on the role conflict between work and family life (e.g. Kahn et al., 1964; Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Voydanoff, 2002).

One aspect of work-family conflict includes the age range of the children. The age of a family's children can influence the level to which parents experience conflict, as several studies have found that parents of young children experience more role conflict compared to parents with older children (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Greenhaus & Kopelman, 1985; Pleck, Staines, Lang, 1980). Furthermore, two studies found a relationship between the size of families and conflict, large families being associated with higher levels of work-family conflict compared with small families (Cartwright, 1978; Keith & Schafer, 1980). A study by Herman and Gyllstrom (1977) found that married employees experienced more work-family conflict compared to unmarried employees. Further, Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) found that the extent to which a person feels supported by his or her significant other affects perceived work-family conflict.

Table 2 presents a summary of the three derived hypotheses:

TABLE 2 Summary of hypothesis

H1	More role conflict is related to higher levels of perceived stress.
H2	Problem focused stress coping strategies are positively correlated with lower levels of work stress among middle managers.
H3	Emotion-focused stress coping strategies are negatively correlated with lower levels of work stress among middle managers.

3.   Method

This chapter will give an explanation of the chosen methodology and method of this study. Firstly, the research philosophy will be presented followed by a discussion of research design and method. The research approach and strategy will then be examined followed by an elaboration on how the data was collected and the used instruments. Further, validity and reliability will be discussed including the control variables used in the study. In the last section, a research analysis will be conducted including arguments for inclusion of data and finally some criticism is presented.

3.1 Research philosophy

As a researcher it is important to consider the main philosophical positions as it creates a foundation to get a satisfactory result and can increase the quality as well as the creativity of the research (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe, Jackson, 2012). By understanding philosophical issues, a researcher gain understanding of his or her reflexive role, find an overview of how the design of the study should be shaped and why, and are enabled to identify and potentially even find new designs not used earlier by researchers (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012).

Within the social sciences, the interest of study is of behaviors rather than objects (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012). The central ontological positions within the social sciences are internal realism, relativism and nominalism, forming the basis of what standpoint the thesis is built on. The aim of this thesis is to investigate if there is a relation between coping strategies used by middle managers and their perceived stress levels. When talking about concepts such as stress and coping strategies it becomes clear that the definitions of the concepts vary between different researchers and contexts and how to measure them can be hard to agree on. Nevertheless such differences and disagreements do not alter the reality of the concepts. Middle managers' perception of stress at work is an existing problem due to role conflict and we aim to evaluate coping strategies. Hence, the ontological stance of this study is that of internal realism. The definitions of the concepts and the opinions of suitable measurements used may differ but they are real and facts can be found independent of the researcher although it may not be possible to access them directly (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012). There may not be a single explanation about how to successfully cope with role conflict, the concept is far more complex and we understand that our result may only be an estimation of the true reasons behind useful coping strategies and perceived stress levels.

Within the social sciences the study of the nature of knowledge, the question of how we know what we know, has been discussed thoroughly, focusing primarily on the contrasting views of positivism and social constructionism (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012). Even though no researcher can be said to follow all aspects of each view, awareness of these two fundamentally different worldviews is important early on in the research process to minimize pitfalls (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012). A positivistic view implies the idea that the social world is something existing externally, and the notion that it is possible to measure a property using objective methods (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012). The epistemological position of this study is mainly positivistic as the researchers are independent from what is being observed due to the use of survey research. The aim of the study is to find causal explanations i.e. a relationship between used coping strategies and perceived levels of work stress, and statistical measures are used to obtain results. However, as previously mentioned no researcher consistently supports one position, which is the case also in this study. The notion that the impact of a stressful event, to a certain amount, results from a person's own perceptions (Lazarus 1966) is reflected in how the Perceived Stress Scale (Cohen et al., 1983), the scale used to measure participants perceived stress levels, is developed. Hence, the self-reflective survey used in this study to obtain data will be influenced by participants' view of the world. Since social constructionism argues that as person's different interpretations, resulting from their world view, will affect their actions as well as social interaction with other people (Saunders, Lewis, Thornhill, 2009), our research can be said to include elements of both positivism and social constructionism. However, given the ontological position of this study the epistemological stance of the researchers is mainly positivistic.

3.2 Research design and method

A positivistic position is usually related to quantitative methods (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012) with is also the technique used to gather information about the experiences of middle managers in this study. By implementing quantitative methods of gathering information, Easterby-Smith et al. (2012) argue that the results can cover a range of situations which is needed in the case of the complex reactions and feelings from each individual in this study. If the participants agree to take part of the study, using quantitative methods is considered to be effective and efficient. Furthermore, according to Blanche, Durrheim and Painter (2006) the results of a quantitative study can be argued to have considerable relevance, with the potential of covering large samples.

To measure a large number of factors, a cross-sectional design is often used in quantitative studies (Bryman & Bell, 2015). The method enables possible relationships to show between different factors. As opposite to longitudinal studies, the cross- sectional design makes the comparison at a single point in time (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012). Due to a time limit of four months, the choice of a cross-sectional design was made.

When developing a research design, it is important to consider what conclusion the researchers aim for. Depending on the goals of a study, research can be distinguished in different ways (Blanche et al., 2006). Further, defining the research design will impact the direction of the research process. Since this is a quantitative study aiming to find a correlation between coping strategies and work stress, three research approaches can be considered; exploratory, descriptive and explanatory. Due to exploratory research primarily being used to discover relatively unknown research areas and descriptive studies aim to describe different phenomena, this study takes an explanatory research approach (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012). Explanatory studies strive towards causal explanations of phenomena and try to eliminate plausible rival hypotheses (Blanche et al., 2006). Applying this, the correlation between coping strategies used to handle stress at work and level of stress of middle managers will hypothetically show the best way of coping with stress at work.

To test our hypothesis, and find patterns in our research, we chose to use survey research. Since our research is cross-sectional, we found it more appropriate to use survey methodologies compared to quasi-experimental methods (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012). Further, according to Lazarus (1999) the phenomena of coping can be noticed by both observation and self-examination. By using survey research the participants are asked to examine their use of coping strategies, an example of a self-reflective survey, which is in line with Lazarus' theory. The detached viewpoint of our thesis leads us to use a inferential survey, as compared to factual and experimental (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012), to see what relationships we can establish between coping strategies and stress among middle managers.

3.3. Research approach

The study takes on a deductive approach, aiming to find results through hypothesis testing based on previous theory and literature (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012). The expected pattern that exists in the beginning of a deductive study is later on tested to see if conclusions can possibly be derived (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012). Contrary to using an inductive approach, the study therefore begins with a theory about what patterns could be found among middle managers and their relation to stress and ways of coping efficiently. The usage of the deductive approach is also shown in the structure of having a more general reasoning from the beginning that becomes more specific towards the end of the research process.

3.4. Sample

3.4.1. Sample characteristics

The sample of the study consisted of middle managers within the Swedish bank and insurance sector. The initial sample size amounted to 97 respondents out of 195, however, due to insufficient answers, only 74 were used in the analysis. The range of the ages of the middle managers in our sample is 26 to 63, with a majority of the participants being between 39 to 56 years as seen by the standard deviation, with a mean age of 48 years. From the obtained

descriptive statistics for the categorical values we can see that our sample is represented of somewhat more men (44 men compared to 30 women) and of these 32 people state that they experience role conflict. Further, almost the entire sample of 74 participants are married or live in cohabitation, 68 compared to 6 who describe themselves as single/living by themselves. 38 participants have at least one child between the ages of 0-19 years. The experience varies from 0-2 years of experience (23 participants) to 9 years or more (18 participants).

3.4.2. Sample technique

In this study, a number of different sampling techniques were used in gathering a sample representing the targeted middle managers in Swedish bank and insurance businesses. Due to the time frame of the study and specific criteria of the target group, selective, convenience and snowball sampling were used. Selective sampling is a type of nonprobability sampling and according to Palys (2008), this technique sees sampling as a process of strategic choices where the researchers makes decisions based on their objectives. For this study, the initial target sample was middle managers working at the five insurance corporations. In a first stage, we primarily targeted HR executives via mail and telephone contact, at the head offices of these companies. Due to company restrictions on corporation in student thesis, a number of responses from HR executives to participate resulted in rejection. The sample therefore came to consist of middle sized companies who were contacted in a similar manner. After the initial sample process, we realized that the participation rate we could expect from the insurance companies contacted was not sufficient for our study hence, we decided to include Swedish banks as well as they can be considered as a similar industry.

The sample was, additional to selective sampling, also gathered through personal connections and through contact via numbers and email-addresses found on LinkedIn or company websites. This resulting in the use of convenience sampling (Marshall, 1996; Easterby-Smith et al., 2012). The third sampling technique used was snowball sampling, as the initial contact with a HR executive at the company often resulted in 5 possible participants to the study. The HR department could either chose to send out the email containing an introduction to the study with a link to the questionnaire or provide us with contact details to potential participants. This line of connections is described by Vogt (1999) as the definition for snowball sampling.

The various sampling techniques lead us to contact 39 companies. Of the many companies that agreed to participate, the estimated number of middle managers per company were five, resulting in the potential of 195 participating middle managers. Of all requests sent out, a total number of 97 middle managers responded however only 74 finalized the survey and contributed to the study, indicating a drop out rate of 23,7%. The total response rate as compared to the potential sample of 195 middle managers was equal to 62 %.

3.4.3. Target population

To narrow the potential field of research we first made the distinction between organizations with few hierarchical steps (e.g. universities) compared to those with multiple levels (Bolman & Deal, 2008). As the focus of this study is on middle managers we aimed to find organizations with a broad spectrum of managers. Further, the choice of focusing on the insurance and banking sector was partly made due to their already notable and much debated personnel policies. In recent years, the industry have gotten much attention due to turbulent changes and a reduced work force. Employees within the banking sector has experienced increased strain due to expanded workload and constant requirements of skill development (Jungstedt, 2015). The insurance sector is experiencing similar issues, becoming more dependent on competitive pricing, exposed to increased competition and tighter regulations and supervision (Erlandsson, Blomgren, Olsson, 2013; Sandström, 2015). Ulrika Boëthius, the chairman at the Financial Sector Union of Sweden, conclude that the industry, is faced with a constant restructuring process contributing to the stress among employees.

3.5. Research strategy and data collection

3.5.1. Primary data

We used a self-completion questionnaire in the form of a web-based survey to collect the survey data. Internet surveys creates advantages compared to other survey modes due to the possibility to measure new or complex concepts such as preferences and subjective probabilities during a shorter time period. Further, collecting survey data over the internet is very cost-effective compared to other techniques. Due to the time limitations of this thesis and the need to be very economical it seemed as the most suitable option (Schonan, 2009).

As with all self-completion questionnaires due to the lack of personal contact, response rates can be very low, and further, the researcher cannot be certain of if it is the person targeted who actually answers the questionnaire (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012). Hence, declining response rates are a common drawback with most surveys so also for Internet surveys, something that became present also in our study (Schonan, 2009). We tried to reduce this problem by building trust (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012), targeting HR managers to show what the organization as a whole could gain from our research. Further, by getting the management on board the decision to participate in our research would come from higher instance giving middle managers more incentive to respond to the questionnaire.

Furthermore, internet surveys can lead to coverage and nonresponse errors (Schonan, 2009). By focusing on a closed population such as insurance companies and banks we aimed to create a good sampling frame to avoid coverage problems. We knew beforehand that all our potential participants would have Internet access and email addresses. By leaving out participants who did not answer the full survey and building in dynamic error checking of all answers to ensure that people responded throughout the entire survey (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012) we aimed to minimize nonresponse errors.

All participants in our research were contacted by email or phone and they could access the questionnaire by an online link provided to them through email. Due to convenience and the existing time limit (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012) and the requirement to keep costs at a minimum the tool qualtrics was used to produce the web survey. The questionnaire consisted of 6 control questions, 14 Likert-type questions related to perceived stress level, and 36 Likert-type questions about what coping strategies the participant normally use. Two instruments were used in the study, Cohen et al.'s (1983) Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) and Carver et al.'s (1989) COPE inventory.

To ensure participants that the study was conducted in line with ethical principles an informed consent preceded the online survey. Easterby-Smith et al. (2015) lists 10 principles important for research ethics, divided into the key areas of protecting the interests of the research participants, and preserve the integrity of the community of researchers. By accepting the informed consent an agreement of ensuring participants anonymity and privacy as well as no harm would come to them, the confidentiality of the study, participants rights and the purpose of the study was made (e.g. Saunders et al., 2009). This is in line with the principles mentioned by Easterby-Smith et al. (2010).

3.5.2. Secondary data

To gain further knowledge on our specific research topic, we decided to conduct a traditional literature review. In the beginning of the research process, the formation of our research hypotheses were created from the existing theories within the field. Documents as letters, agendas, newspapers articles or other relevant documentation of the topic can be used to support the findings from the primary data collection. The main collection of data for this study has been conducted through university databases like Scoopus, JSTOR, Web of Science and SAGE. For the review to be "systematic, explicit, comprehensive and reproducible" (Fink, 2005), which should be the aim throughout, we used keywords as middle manager, role conflict, work stress, coping, stress and coping strateg* to find relevant literature. In discovering seminal work (e.g. Lazarus, 1966; Lazarus and Folkman, 1984; Kahn, et al., 1964), the technique of snowballing was used for finding additional information (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981).

3.6. Instruments

3.6.1. The Cope Inventory

Coping strategies were assessed with selected scales from the Cope inventory (Carver et al. 1989). Cope is a multidimensional coping inventory developed to assess the different ways in which people respond to stress (Carver et al., 1989). The inventory consists of 14 conceptually different coping strategies measured by 13 scales. Each Cope scale consists of four items, and participants are asked to answer what they usually do when experience considerable stress at work. The scale was translated into Swedish by Muhonen & Torkelson (2001).

Five scales are considered to measure different dimensions of problem-focused coping; active coping, planning, suppression of competing activities, restraint coping and seeking instrumental social support. Another five scales measures different aspects of emotion-focused coping; seeking emotional social support, positive interpretation and growth, acceptance, turning to religion and denial. The final three scales are regarded as less useful/less adaptive coping strategies; focus on and venting emotions, behavioral disengagement, mental disengagement and alcohol-drug disengagement.

In this study the Swedish version of the Cope inventory (Muhonen & Torkelson, 2001) is used and we chose to include those Cope scales that was best suited for our conceptualization of emotion-focused and problem-focused coping and for our sample. Hence, as seen in Figure 1 we included all five problem-focused scales and four of the emotion-focused scales leaving out four scales. The Cope inventory ask participants to indicate what they usually do on a four-point scale, to make the scale more similar to the scale if the PSS instrument the scale in our questionnaire is a five-point scale.
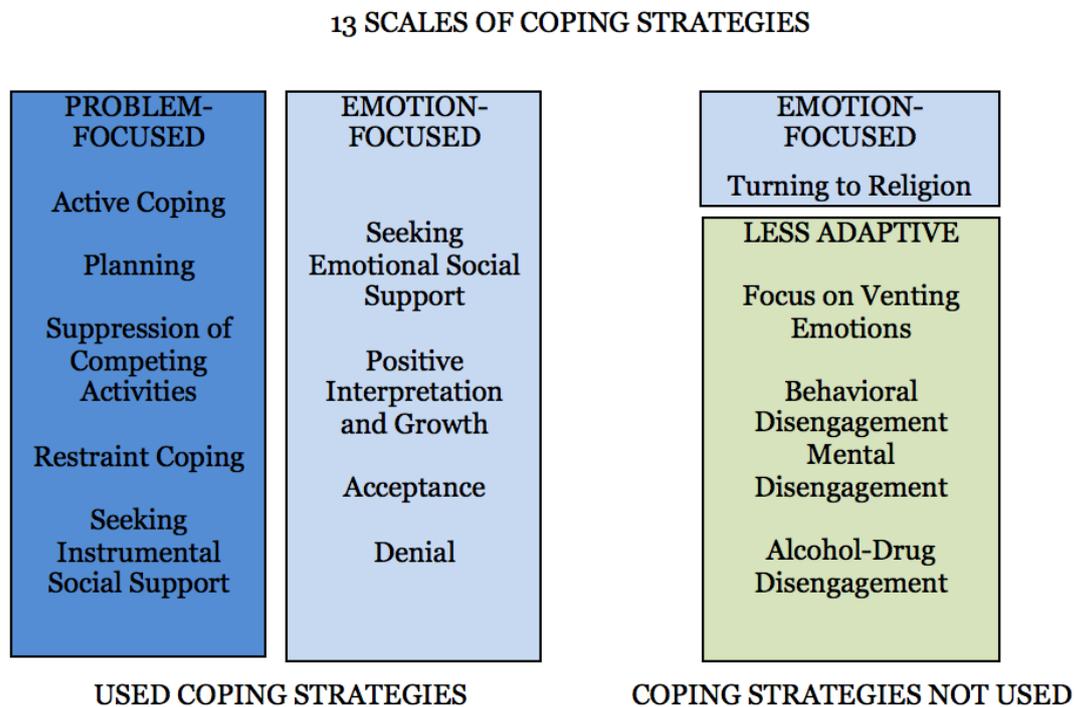

Figure 1. Scales of Coping Strategies

3.6.2. PSS

Perceived stress levels were measured by the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) developed by Cohen, Kamarck and Mermelstein (1983). The scale measures the degree to which situations in one's life are appraised as stressful. The instruments build on Lazarus research on stress and coping and the assumption that the impact of stressful events is, to some extent, determined by a person's perceptions of his or her stressfulness. The scale items were designed to target how overloaded, uncontrollable, and unpredictable respondents find their lives.

The PSS can be used in multiple settings e.g. give information about how the processes through which stressful procedures influence pathology, to look at how various moderators of the objective stressor/pathology relationship functions (Cohen et al, 1983; Cohen & Williamson, 1988). Further, the PSS can be used as an outcome variable, to measure a person's experienced levels of stress as a function of objective stressful events, coping resources, personality factors, and so on (Cohen et al., 1983), which is how it is used in this study. The scale is used to measure middle managers' experienced levels of stress as a function of coping strategies used. The scale questions are general in nature and therefore comparatively free of content specific to any sub-population group (Cohen et al., 1983). The PSS differ from other life-event scales since it asks about a shorter period, one month, due to the assumption that the predictive validity of the instrument would fall if the scale would cover a longer time period (Cohen et al., 1983). Since perceived levels of stress should be influenced by daily struggles, major events, and how the availability of coping resources change, which are all relatively volatile over a longer period (Cohen et al., 1983). The scale can be used across many areas, ranging from research in psychology (Ramírez & Hernández, 2007), as well as the medical field (Leung, Lam, & Chan, 2010).

In this study the complete 14-item PSS is used (Cohen et al., 1983), translated to Swedish by Eskin and Parr (1996). Since the PSS is formulated to fit into various context (Cohen et al, 1983; Cohen & Williamson, 1988), the scale was adapted to fit the purpose of this specific study. The participants were asked to apply the questions on a work specific situation to ensure that the focus was on work stress.

3.7. Data validity and reliability

In survey research, the emphasis is on external rather than internal validity (Vogt, 2011). This suits our research well since we do not intend to find a causal link between variables, which is considered internal validity, but rather to see what can be considered as more effective coping strategies in general from a small sample of middle managers in the insurance and finance sector. Hence, we are generalizing a finding from a sample to a population, which is considered to be external validity (Vogt, 2011). To demonstrate that our result is not just a product of our specific sample, we chose to limit our study to only include companies within the bank and insurance sector in Sweden since the likeliness of bias may increase due to differences in industry and nation (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012). Further, another potential bias in the sample is the tendency to get participants who are more open-minded and keen to help compared to the population as a whole (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012). To reduce this, an initial dialogue with managers was conducted so that potential participants would see our research in the light of their organization rather than on solely an individual level. This to motivate participants to fill out the questionnaire to a higher extent. However, we are aware of this being a limitation of our study since we cannot fully eliminate this bias.

When using survey research the major concern is whether the instruments and questionnaire items used are accurate and stable (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012). To ensure reliability we used well-established instruments that have been pre-tested and are well-known within the research fields of coping and stress. Folkman (1992) argues for internal consistency as the most suitable measure of reliability when doing research on coping strategies (cited in Muhonen & Torkelson, 2001). Further, the author suggests using Cronbach's alpha of at least .07 as guidance for sufficient coping measures. Folkman's recommendations are in line with general recommendations of most adequate method for calculating internal consistency and of what can be considered as an acceptable level of reliability (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012; Saunders et al., 2009). Hence, internal consistency is measured by using the Cronbach's alpha also in this study.

3.8. Internal consistency

The used instrument for measuring coping strategies, the Cope inventory, is considered one of the best established instruments of coping strategies and an extensively used scale (e.g. Muhonen & Torkelson, 2001; Hertel et al., 2015). Several studies have found the instrument to be both a reliable and valid coping measurement (e.g. Carver et al., 1989). The Cronbach's alpha of the inventory is in line with Folkman's (1992) recommendations showing good internal consistency with alpha values ranging from 0.62 to 0.92, with the exception of the mental disengagement scale. The reliability of the Swedish version of the Cope inventory in terms of internal consistency was found to be high (Muhonen & Torkelson, 2001) and in line with the results of Carver et al. (1989). The alpha coefficients within each scale found in Muhonen & Torkelson (2001) study can be judged adequate ranging from 0.6 to 0.95 as the number of items for each scale are few (i.e. n=4).

Moreover, the scale for measuring perceived stress, the PSS, has also been proven to possess good reliability and validity, showing good internal consistency indicated by Cronbach's alpha values of 0.84, 0.85 and 0.86 in the three study samples (Cohen et al., 1983). The Swedish version of PSS has also demonstrated good internal consistency with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.82 (Eskin & Parr, 1996). Eklund, Bäckström and Tuvesson (2014) found that the established concurrent validity and criterion validity of the PSS together gave a representation of good construct validity. Further, the authors found that the Swedish version of the PSS showed satisfactory psychometric properties and recommended for it to be used with people with and without known stress-related disorders.

The scales showed good internal consistency also for this study with alpha values of .881 for the PSS and .704 for the problem focused coping strategies. However, the alpha was somewhat lower for the emotion focused coping scale with an alpha value of .640.

3.9. Variables and measures

3.9.1. Dependent and Independent variables

The independent variables in our study is coping strategies and role conflict. Since this thesis focuses on two types of coping strategies, i.e. emotion-focused coping and problem-focused coping strategies, the independent variable coping strategies is divided into these two sub-categories. The dependent variable used is perceived stress (see Figure 2 for a relationship between the variables). The independent variable coping strategies was measured on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from "never" to "very often". Role conflict was measured as a dichotomous variable where the participants had to indicate whether they experienced role conflict with "yes" or "no". An explanation was also given before the question to give participants our definition of role conflict. The dependent variable was measured on a five-point scale ranging from "I usually do not do this at all" to "I usually do this a lot". We used the translated Cope Inventory (Carver et al., 1989; Muhonen & Torkelson, 2001) to measure our independent variables and selected 9 scales that are relevant for how middle managers cope with role conflict. To measure the independent variable we used the full, translated, version of the PSS (Cohen et al., 1983; Eskin and Parr, 1996), a 14-item scale. The participant answered on a 5-point Likert scale, from "never" to "very often".
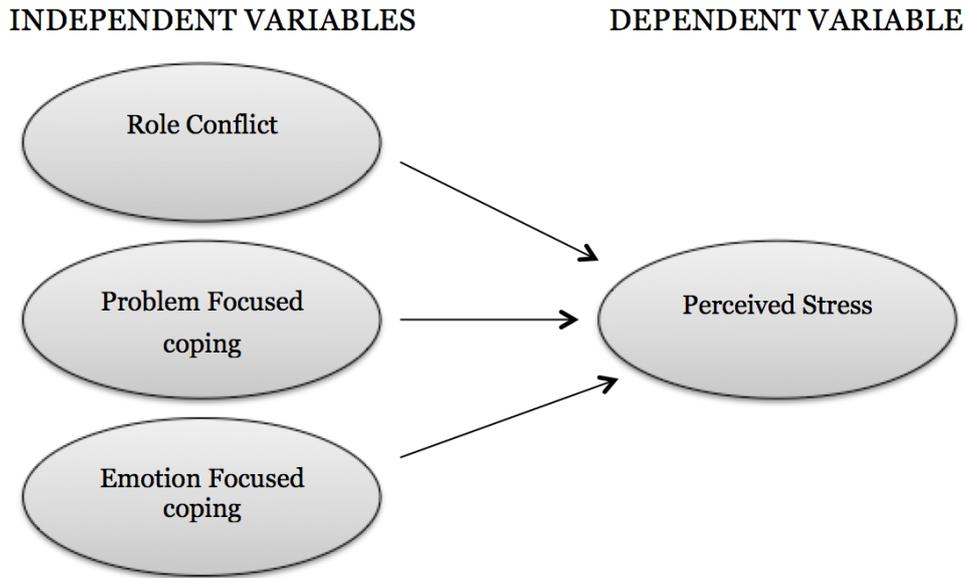
INDEPENDENT VARIABLES   DEPENDENT VARIABLE

Figure 2. Independent and Dependent Variables

3.9.2. Control variables

Apart from intra role conflict research has shown how individual characteristics (Boyd et al., 2009) as well as inter-role conflict affects stress levels (Kahn et al, 1964; Han et al, 2014) we therefore control for the most prominent factors that can potentially affect middle managers stress levels when conducting the regression analysis. Due to the extensive literature on work-family conflict (e.g. Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Herman & Gyllstrom, 1977; Cartwright, 1978) we control for "number of children", "age of children", and "marital status", by letting the participants indicate if the have children, how many children they have, the age range of the children and if they are married/cohabitation or single. Previous research have shown that older employees often report lower strain compared to younger or middle-aged colleagues (e.g., Ng & Feldman, 2010; Rauschenbach & Hertel, 2011), we therefore control for "age" by asking our participants to indicate their age in the beginning of the survey questionnaire. Furthermore, studies have shown how gender affect experienced work stress (e.g. Lundberg, & Frankenhaeuser, 1999; Lundberg, 1996). Thus, gender is also controlled for. Finally, as more experienced workers seems to possess potential resources to handle work stress in a more efficient manner (e.g. Ng & Fieldman, 2010; Hertel et al., 2015), middle managers experiences are therefore also controlled for.

3.10. Data analysis

The collected data were analyzed using multiple regression analysis. We used IBM SPSS Statistics Version 21 to perform the statistical analysis. To be able to run a multiple regression stress scale item were reverse coded, in order for a high value to indicate the same type of response on every item. The ordinal control variables (e.g. experience, age of children) were dummy coded as was the dichotomous values; gender (1=female, 0=male), marital status (1=married/cohabitation, 0= single/one person household) and role conflict (1=yes, 0=no). After entering all the data, we checked for incomplete cases, reducing our sample from 97 participants to 74. With 74 complete responses, we run a descriptive and correlation analysis to outline the characteristics of our data (shown in Chapter 4 and Appendix A). To find if the strength and direction between two variables can help support an hypothesis, a correlation can be created in SPSS using a number of different available statistics. In this study, the Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient has been used to study the relationship between the variables. Due to the use of continuous (infinite) and dichotomous (only two) variables we considered Pearson correlation coefficient to be sufficient to determine the relationship between our dependent and each independent variable. To evaluate and compare the different models we looked at the adjusted r square rather than the r square due to the fact that we are doing a multiple linear regression rather than a simple linear regression. Further, as the sample of this study is

relatively small the r square may give an rather optimistic overestimation of the true value while the adjusted r square can be said to "correct" this value to give a more accurate estimation of the true population value (Pallant, 2005).

TABLE 3 Summary of key measurements

Measurement	Value range	Definition
Pearson correlation coefficient	-1 to +1	Pearson correlation is used when exploring the strength of the relationship between two continuous variables, giving an indication of both the direction and the strength of the relationship (Pallant, 2005).
Variance inflation factor (VIF)		The Variance inflation factor (VIF) is a variable measuring multicollinearity in a multiple regression procedure, calculated by using the formula 1/1–R2. VIF values above 10 indicates multicollinearity Pallant, 2005).
R square		The r square tells how much of the variance in the dependent variable is explained by the model (Pallant, 2005).
Adjusted r square		The adjusted R-squared compares the explanatory power of regression models that contain different numbers of predictors (Chatterjee & Hadi, 2015)
Beta		Beta is the probability of making a type II error ((McGraw-Hill).
Confidence interval	95% confidence level	Whith a 5% sig. level, reserchers can be at least 95% confident that Ho is false before rejecting the hypothesis (McGraw-Hill)

4.   Results

In this section the results from the standard multiple regression is first presented, to test the three hypotheses conducted, after which a more thorough analysis of the underlying relationship between the dependent- and independent variables is presented. Summary tables are presented while more detailed statistics from the multiple linear regressions can be found in Appendix A. The obtained descriptive statistics, i.e. the mean, standard deviation and number of responses for each answer for the continuous variables can be found in Table 9 (see Appendix A). The frequency distribution of the control variables can be found in the sample section under Method.

4.1. Correlation matrix

To start the analysis of the relationship between the dependent and independent variables the Pearson correlation coefficient was examined (see Table 4). The dependent variable, Perceived Stress, and Problem Focused coping have a correlation of -.235 which indicates a moderate negative relationship. The correlation between stress and emotion focused coping have from the test resulted in a value of - .011 which is a relatively low correlation and can therefore not be considered to correlate with perceived stress level to a high extent. The correlation of stress and role conflict have a positive relationship of .623.

Before the multiple regression was conducted the correlation between our control variables and the dependent variable was also examined using the Pearson correlation coefficient, to give an indication of the relationship between the variables and their significance to our model. The correlation between stress level and age of middle managers found to be negatively related with a value of - .191. However, none of the other control variables could be said to have a significant correlation as the correlation between stress and experience is inconsistent in this sample as the correlation is positive for participants with an experience of three to five years (.193), becomes negative at the next level of experience of six to eight years (- .161) and then becomes positive again for participants with an experience of 9 years or more (.029).

Following this, the correlation analysis indicates that the data was suitably correlated for a multiple regression analysis to be reliably undertaken. However less so for the independent variable Emotion Focused coping.

TABLE 4. Correlation matrix

		Perceived Stress	Problem Focused	Emotion Focused	Experienced role conflict
	Perceived Stress	1	-.235	-.011	.623
Pearson Correlation	Problem Fouces	-.235	1	.336	-.079
	Emotion Focused	-.011	.336	1	.021
	Experienced role conflict	.623	-.079	.021	1

a. Dependent variable: perceived stress

b. All requested variables entered.

4.2. Assessing the assumptions

To further explore the relationship between our dependent and independent variables, we run a standard multiple regression analysis. By looking at the Pearson correlation (see Table 4), at least some correlation was found among the three independent variables and the dependent variable Perceived Stress.

Before conducting the multiple regression analysis, analyses were performed to ensure no violation of the assumptions of normality, linearity, multicollinearity and homoscedasticity (see Appendix A for a detailed analysis). No major deviation from normality was detected (see Figure 3 and 4 in Appendix A) for the dependent variable. The correlation between the independent variables were examined and due to correlation values below $r= .9$, we exclude the likeliness of multicollinearity (Pallant, 2005). To further check for multicollinearity we run a collinearity statistics, and with the variance inflation factor (VIF) for all independent variables below 2.3 (Pallant, 2005) we assume very low multicollinearity in our model. With all assumptions fulfilled we proceed with the regression analysis.

4.3. Hypotheses testing

Given that the Pearson correlation coefficient for most of our control variables indicated no significant relation with Perceived Stress we compared a variety of different models (e.g. including and excluding independent variables) to ensure that the independent variables in the model analyzed accounted for the highest variability in the dependent variable.

Using the enter method (see Table 5), we first examined how much of the variance in Perceived Stress that was explained by solely the independent variables Emotion Focused coping strategies, Problem Focused coping strategies and role conflict ($r2= .425$; adj $r2= .400$). For each of the two independent variables of coping strategies together with all other control variables ($r2=.484$ and adj $r2=.392$ respectively $r2=.536$ and adj $r2= .454$). For Role Conflict and all the control variables the $r2$ was .495 and adjusted $r2$ .415. Finally, we examined a basic model containing only the control variables. The total variability explained by the model was 48,4 % with an adjusted r square of .402. By comparing the adjusted r squares, the conclusion was made that the full model explains more or just as much as all the alternative models. The independent variables in our model explains 55,6 % of the variance in perceived Stress Level with an adjusted $r2$ of .468.

TABLE 5. Model Summary

Model	R Square	Adjusted R Square
1	.425	.400
2	.484	.392
3	.536	.454
4	.495	.415
5	.484	.402
6	.556	.468

1 Dependent variable: percieved stress. Independent variable: role conflict. emotion focused. problem focused

2 Dependent variable: percieved stress. Independent variables: emotion focused+control variables

3 Dependent variable: percieved stress. Independent variables: problem focused+ control variables

4 Dependent variable: percieved stress. Independent variables: role conflict+control variables

5 Dependent variable: percieved stress. Independent variables: control variables

6 Dependent variable: percieved stress. Independent variables: role conflict. problem focused.
emotion focused+control variables

To assess the statistical significance of our model we look at the F test (see Table 6), if the model has no explanatory power none of the independent variables can be said to predict the dependent variable. By looking at the significance level of our model (p<.05) we can argue that our model is indeed significant and that Role Conflict, Problem Focused and Emotion Focused coping predicts Perceived Stress.

TABLE 6. ANOVA

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
	Regression	10.024	12	0.835	6.079	.000
6	Residual	8.382	61	0.137		
	Total	18.405	73			

6 Dependent variable: percieved stress. Independent variables: role conflict.

problem focused. emotion focused+control variables

As shown in Table 7, there are four significant predictors of Stress Level; the independent variables `Problem Focused´ and 'Role Conflict' and the two control variables `age´ and `9 years or more of experience´. Role conflict, show the strongest unique contribution to the equation (B= .668, p= .000), this indicates a positive relation between perceived stress level and the experience of role conflict, hence we accept H1. Problem Focused is the second largest predictor (- .581) with a significance level of p= .004, supporting H2.

This was followed by contribution of Experience 6 years or more (B= .390) and Age (B=- .010) with a significance level of p= .005 respectively p= .043. The other variables, including Emotion Focused (p=343), did not make a statistically significant unique contribution to the equation. Hence, even though Emotion Focused coping strategies

appeared to have a slight, positive, correlation with perceived Stress Level, there was not enough significant evidence to support H3.

The results for each hypothesis, and whether they were confirmed or not, is presented in Table 8.

TABLE 7. Coefficients for model

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients			95.0% Confidence Interval for B		Correlations		
	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.	Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Zero-order	Partial	Part
(Constant)	3.86	.701		5.507	.000	2.458	5.262			
Problem Focused	-.518	.174	-299	-2.977	.004	-0.867	-.17	-.235	-0.356	-.254
Emotion Focused	.160	.168	.094	.955	.343	-0.175	.496	-.011	.121	.081
Experienced role conflict	.668	.094	.664	7.109	.000	.480	.856	.623	.673	.607
Nr of children	.019	.051	.045	.37	.713	-.083	.121	.085	.047	.032
Experience_9y or more	.390	.134	.336	2.918	.005	.123	.658	.029	.35	.249
Experience_6-8y	.085	.135	.071	.635	.528	-.184	.355	-.161	.081	.054
Experience_3-5y	.138	.127	.117	1.089	.281	-.116	.392	.193	.138	.093
Gender	.128	.098	.126	1.313	.194	-.067	.324	-.079	.166	.112
Age	-.010	.005	-.214	-2.07	.043	-.021	.000	-.173	-.256	-.177
Marital status	-.049	.179	.-.027	-0.276	.784	-.407	.308	-.098	-.035	-.024
Children_6-12	-.042	.122	-.208	-1.985	.052	-.486	.002	.056	-.246	-.169
Children_0-5	.173	.14	.132	1.235	.221	-.107	.454	.228	.156	.105

TABLE 8. Summary of hypotheses -Results

	Unstandardized Beta Coefficients	Sig.	Support
H1 More role conflict is related to higher levels of percieved stress.	.668	.000	Confirmed
H2 Problem focused coping strategies are positively correlated with lower levels of work stress among middle managers.	-.518	.004	Confirmed
H3 Emotion-focused coping strategies are negatively correlated with lower levels of work stress among middle managers.	.160	.343	Not confirmed

4.4. Interpretations of results

The empirical results shows how perceived stress level among the participants have a mean of 2.4, with a standard deviation of 0,5 hence a majority of participants have a stress level between 1.9 and 2.9 indicating a relatively low stress level among the middle managers in our sample. Looking at the mean scores for the usage of problem focused coping strategies versus emotion focused coping strategies we can see a tendency toward the usage of problem focused strategies with a mean score of 3.57 compared to 2.86 for emotion focused strategies. Further, the standard deviation indicates that a majority of the participants use a similar amount of problem versus emotion focused coping strategies with a range of only 0.29 from the mean score. Altogether, this implies that the sample is relatively homogeneous in terms of used coping strategies.

4.4.1. Interpretations of RQ 1 on Role Conflict

In order to answer the first research question, to what extent is role conflict and work stress related on a middle-managerial level, this thesis set out to study the relation between the experience of role conflict and perceived stress levels among middle managers using a multiple regression analysis. H1 suggested that more role conflict is related to higher levels of perceived work stress. The findings from this study show support of H1 with a significant strong positive correlation between experienced Role conflict and Perceived Stress (.668, $p<0.05$). These findings are consistent with previous literature on how role conflict is a predictor of increased strain and work stress (e.g., Rizzo et al., 1970; Marginson & Bui, 2009; Fisher & Gitelson, 1983; Fried & Tiegs, 1995).

Furthermore, role conflict being the strongest contributor to the equation, and the support for H1 indicates that role conflict can be considered a main stressor (Kahn et al, 1964) also in today's work environment on a middle managerial level. Following this, we argue for the importance of understanding that role conflict can largely affect middle managers' work stress levels. Accordingly, this gives incentives to study what coping strategies that can be considered to be the most useful when trying to reduce work stress.

4.4.2.Interpretations of RQ 2 on Coping Strategies

In order to answer the second research question, "What coping strategies can be considered as more efficient to handle perceived work stress among middle managers", this study looked into what coping strategies middle managers themselves stated that they use when faced with a stressful situation at work. Thereafter we analyzed the coping strategies in relation to their perceived stress levels based on two hypotheses (H2 and H3). H2 suggested that problem focused stress coping strategies are positively correlated with lower levels of work stress among middle managers experiencing role conflict. H3 suggested that emotion focused stress coping strategies are negatively correlated with lower levels of work stress among middle managers experiencing role conflict. The findings from this study confirm H2, with a significant ($p<0.05$), negative relationship between Problem Focused coping strategies and Perceived Stress. These findings are in line with extant research (Pearlin & Schooler, 1978; Billings & Moos, 1981; Menaghan, 1982) suggesting that problem focused coping strategies are effective to adjust to or alter negative situations where an individual experience stress. Further, our study show that this finding is true also among middle managers as the perceived stress level in the sample decrease by 0,518 units for a one score increase in the usage of Problem Focused coping strategies. With stress values measured ranging between 0 to 5 this indicates that a higher use of problem focused coping strategies can greatly reduce middle managers stress levels at work.

However, the findings does not clearly support the literature (Goolsby, 1992; Pienaar, 2008, Billings & Moos, 1981) in the claim that higher usage of emotion focused coping strategies are related with higher levels of stress. In the regression analysis the indication from the Pearson correlation showing no significant correlation between Emotion Focused coping and Stress Levels was verified ($p>0.05$). Hence, Emotion Focused coping as a predictor of Perceived Stress is not significant in this study and thus we can neither confirm nor disregard H3. However, the underlying relationship, with a positive relation between the two variables Emotion Focused coping and Perceived Stress (B= .160), appears to be as predicted in the literature (Goolsby, 1992; Pienaar, 2008, Billings & Moos, 1981) supporting the idea that higher usage of emotion focused coping leads to higher levels of work stress.

Due to the lack of significant evidence to support H3 in our initial empirical findings, we ran a new multiple regression only including the cases where the middle managers stated that they experienced role conflict (N=32), to see if there was an increase in the usage of Emotion Focused coping strategies and a higher perceived stress level. The stress level was, as predicted, slightly higher with a mean score of 2,76 however, the used coping strategies for this limited sample was almost identical to that of the full sample. Furthermore, with a negative adjusted r2 (-.255) and the new model not being significant (p> .05), we conclude that there is no statistical significance of this second regression. Therefore, H3 is not supported in this case either.

4.5. Control variables

Looking at the control variables in the regression analysis we can conclude that a majority was not significantly correlated with work stress. The statement that older middle managers should be able to cope with stress in more efficient manner (Ng & Feldman, 2010; Hertel & Rauschenbach, 2011) is supported, with a decrease in stress level by .010 units for every year. However the low value (-.010) indicate that age cannot be said to be a large predictor of stress levels in our empirical findings. Contrary to the theory presented (Ng and Feldman, 2010; Hertel et al., 2014, Charles, 2010), experience seem to have a positive relation with perceived stress level, as the results shows that an additional level of experience will increase the stress level by .390. However, due to the other experience variables not being significant predictors of stress level, the result is somewhat contradictory.

Contrary to what is suggested in theory (e.g. Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Cartwright, 1978; Herman & Gyllstrom, 1977) our empirical findings showed no significant results for the remaining control variables. The number of children and the age span of the children are not significant predictors of stress level (see Appendix A). However having children age 6-12 show a negative relationship with stress level while having younger children, age 0-5, appeared to have a slight, yet positive correlation, indicating that older children, contrary to what extant research suggest, leads to higher levels of stress. Nevertheless there was not enough significant evidence to support this. A possible explanation for this result is that almost half of our sample report not having children at all or does not have children in the relevant age span (i.e. children younger than 19 years). Furthermore, neither gender nor marital status proved to be of significant level (see table 7). Due to the fact that only 6 out of 74 participants regarded themselves as singles/living by themselves this uneven distribution could explain why marital status did not predict stress to a higher extent. Our sample included a majority of men, 59,5%. Extant research suggest that men to a higher extent than women use problem focused coping strategies (Folkman & Lazarus, 1980) which could be an explanation of why problem focused coping strategies was used to a higher extent in our sample. However, the use of problem focused coping strategies over emotion focused coping strategies was present for all participants except for one, independent of the participants gender.

Overall, the results of this study show how role conflict is still present in today's work environment on a middle managerial level as 43% indicate experience of role conflict. The study further supports previous literature on the negative relationship between role conflict and work stress among middle managers. Moreover, the result indicates that an individual's own coping strategies can alter the experience of a stressful situation. However, as the results do not provide a clear answer given the purpose of this study, on what coping strategies leads to lower levels of perceived work stress, we provide possible explanations which will be discussed in length in the following section.

5.   Discussion

In this chapter, the theoretical as well as practical contribution of each research question is discussed. Further, potential explanations to the results are given highlighting the limitations when conducting the study. Lastly, the social and ethical aspects are considered and the conclusion and suggestions for future research are presented.

5.2. Discussion of RQ 1

The first research question in this study refers to what extent role conflict and work stress relates on a middle-managerial level. Middle managers continue to play an important role in modern organizations (Wooldridge & Floyd, 1990; Floyd & Lane, 2000; Nonaka, 1994; Balogun & Johnson, 2004; Huy, 2002). However, the function of a middle manager is less clear (e.g. Harding et al. 2014; Sims, 2003) and they have seen their role change in recent decades (e.g. Harding et al., 2014). As a consequence, middle managers are vulnerable to work stress and in particular, stress originating from conflicting demands related to their work role (e.g. Sims, 2003; Marginson & Bui, 2009; McConville, 2006). According to previous research (e.g. Han et al., 2006; Kahn et al., 1964; Fried & Tiegs, 1995), role conflict is a factor influencing work. The results of our study on middle managers in the insurance and banking sectors show a strong correlation between role conflict and higher levels of work stress on a middle managerial level, thus supporting the extant literature on this subject.

Role conflict has been present in the work stress literature ever since Kahn et al.'s (1964) seminal work on the phenomena. Nevertheless, the result of this study implies that role conflict is a stressor present also in today's work life. The study combined with previous literature (e.g. McConville & Holden, 1990) suggests that it has become an important component of middle managers' jobs to manage role conflict in the workplace effectively. According to research by (Folkman & Lazarus 1984) it is important to understand the underlying factors (i.e. stressor) to consider possible methods to reduce stress and minimize the costs for organizations. Following the development of new regulations on organizational responsibility in working actively to prevent work stress in Sweden, organizations are given incentives to work towards lowering stress factors within Swedish organizations. This is of importance, looking at the fast paced development of work stress in Sweden according to the Swedish Work Environment Authority (2016).

Role conflict stems from incompatible expectations on middle managers from subordinates, superiors and peers (Han et al., 2014; Kahn et al, 1964). By explaining organizational goals, making sure all workers in the organization knows how to interpret them and formulating clear rules to follow, organizations can decrease role conflict and reduce incompatible role expectations for middle managers. Moreover, research argues (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984; Michie, 2002) that individuals can learn and become aware of signs of stress and develop skills to cope with stressors. An individual who possess sufficient coping strategies may not develop stress from an event caused by a stressor (Lazarus, 1966; Lazarus and Folkman, 1984), as stress is only experienced when a person is unsure of having enough resources to meet the demands from the person's environment (Seyle, 1991; Lazarus, 1999). Hence, organizations giving individuals the right prerequisites and capacity to develop the right coping strategies can reduce their experience of work stress and as a result, minimize the negative consequences of role conflict. Following the empirical findings of this study of how role conflict is present among middle managers and the strong correlation between the stressor and work stress, the study encourage the discussion of possible solutions and means to lower perceived work stress and argue that it is important to stop the current negative trend of work stress. Following this, we now turn the focus toward our second research question.

5.1. Discussion of RQ 2

The second research question in this study explores what stress coping strategies can be considered as more efficient to handle perceived work stress among middle managers. The study empirically supports the negative relation between problem focused coping strategies and work stress. This is in line with existing literature on the subject of stress coping strategies in general. Thus, this study contributes to existing literature on stress management in that it confirms the negative relationship between problem focused coping strategies and work stress on a middle managerial level. Further, the findings of the study supports the idea that an individual can learn how to handle stress by choosing the right individual coping strategies as a response to a stressor (e.g. Michie, 2002; Lazarus & Folkman,1984). The focus of this thesis lies on two types of coping strategies that can be used in response to a stressor; emotion and problem focused coping strategies. The study indicates that emotion focused coping strategies are less effective. However, the emotion focused coping variable showed not to be significant in the multiple regression analysis even though a positive correlation between the variable and perceived stress level could be deducted. Thus, while the results tell us that problem focused coping strategies are effective the results do not provide a clear guidance as for if emotion focused coping strategies are less effective. Hence, the second research question on what coping strategies can be considered as more efficient can only partly be answered.

The empirical findings of this study suggest that if middle managers practice problem focused coping strategies then, they may be able to cope with their daily work stress more successfully. This is important on an individual level as the right usage of coping strategies can increase well-being and reduce strain (e.g. Menaghan, 1982; Billings & Moos, 1981; Pienaar, 2008). But the gains are also significant on an organizational level. As the theoretical framework suggest, middle managers' lack of efficient stress coping strategies leads to decreased performance, less job satisfaction, burnout, and decreased organizational engagement (Xie, & Schaubroeck, 2001). Contrary, efficient stress coping strategies may increase their organizational engagement (Srivastava & Tang, 2015), lower disengagement, and higher performance incentives (Folkman et al., 1986; Goolsby 1992; Boyd, Lewin and Sager 2009).

This study takes the approach of stress as dependent on an individual's resources and capacity to cope. Thus, an individual who possess sufficient coping strategies may not develop stress from an event caused by a stressor (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984). Further, as role conflict seldom, if ever, can be eliminated (Kahn et al., 1964) we argue for organizations benefit from focusing on implementing an organizational environment, were middle managers are helped and encouraged to develop efficient coping strategies to reduce work stress, rather than providing standardized programs. Previous studies have shown that individuals use both types of coping strategies simultaneously, independent of the type of stressor (e.g. Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), however to what extent differ. The results of this study support this, indicating that all middle managers use both strategies. According to Folkman & Lazarus (1980) individuals tend to use problem focused coping when there is a feeling that something productive can be achieved, while emotion focused coping tends to be more common when individuals perceive the stressor as a situation they have to ride out. Hence, creating a work environment where middle managers feel in control and where their experiences are taken seriously would provide a platform for the growth of problem focused coping strategies. By enabling middle managers to use problem focused coping strategies, which are related to lower levels of work stress organizations can minimize the impact of role conflict.

5.3. Discussion of non-significant result

The non-significant result for emotion focused stress coping indicates no supported correlation, between the variable and perceived stress levels. By looking at stress levels among the middle managers in the sample, one can draw some potential explanations for this. As the stress level is relatively low in the sample, one can assume that already stressed middle managers may have rejected the request of participating in the study. Email conversations with middle managers choosing to abstain to participate, supports this idea since many responded that they did not have the time to fill out the questionnaire. Hence, middle managers with higher stress levels may have been underrepresented in the study. Following this reasoning, the managers that did not agree to participate could,

potentially, have been using higher levels of emotion focused coping. This highlights a problem when measuring perceived stress, as the individuals that experience the highest levels of stress may be the ones that are the hardest to target and conduct this type of studies on.

Another possible explanation to the low stress levels among the participants is the homogeneity in the usage of coping strategies. All middle managers, except for one individual, use more problem focused stress coping strategies as compared to emotion focused strategies. As Folkman & Lazarus, (1980; 1984; 1985) states an individual use both type of strategies simultaneously and depending on the characteristics of the situation and personal experience (Michie, 2002), the choice of coping strategies differ. The participants in our sample seem to both possess relatively low levels of stress and use problem focused coping to a higher extent. However, if the usage of problem focused coping strategies is the reason for the low stress levels or if they do not encounter stressors to a high extent, is hard to determine. Furthermore, the rather uniform usage of coping strategies in our sample could be a consequence of the choice to use a Likert scale in the questionnaire. Likert scales are commonly used in survey research (Pallant, 2005). Nevertheless it possesses some negative traits. The most prominent is the central tendency bias, participants tend to not select extreme values resulting in answers close to the midpoint of the scale, which could be the case also in our study.

Considering the underlying reasons from a practical standpoint of the non-significant result for emotion focused stress coping strategies, the sample size could be questioned of possibly being too small for the study. According to Hair et al. (2006), the observations, when conducting a multiple regression analysis, should always be five or above for every independent variable. However, to increase the generalizability, at least 15 to 20 respondent per independent variable is recommended by the authors. In this study, the sample size would have to be 12x5= 60 for satisfying the minimum amount recommended, the sample of n=74 satisfy the recommendations. Further, as regressions on smaller samples have in the past shown to be successful, we acknowledge that a larger sample would have been preferred in order to draw conclusions of greater significance but assume that the sample is sufficient to allow for generalizability.

The shift towards flatter organizations with blurred hierarchical lines and requirements of a more globally adapted organizational environment have lead to an expansion of middle managers responsibilities (Dopson & Stewart, 1990; Dewe et al., 2010; Harding et al., 2014). This results in that the sample in this study may include middle managers with various responsibilities compared with the middle managers studied in extant literature. Thus, the reason behind perceived stress can be hard to delimit. One can therefore argue for that the middle managers in this study can have a different role, and a different work situation, compared to middle managers studied in previous research.

Finally, the results of the study can have been influenced by the slight change of the structure of the scales used. The questions where specified based on the different type of stress (i.e. work stress) and on the type of situation (i.e. work situation) to make the questionnaire more adapted to our study. Saunder et al. (2009) emphasize how scale modifications should only be made if absolutely necessary. To greatly alter the scale could possibly affect the validity of the scale and, therefore, the results of the research. However, we consider the slight altering of the scales to not have a crucial effect on the obtained values since most of the results, after all, were significant. Further, the Cronbach's alpha values showed good internal consistency for the scales. Therefore, the change of the scales is not believed to be the main reason behind the non-significant result for H3.

Looking at the control variables in the regression analysis we can conclude that a majority was not significantly correlated with work stress or showed contrary results to the extant literature presented. A possible explanation for this is that the study was conducted on a Swedish sample as opposed to the presented research that mainly originated from the US. Sweden is a society with good access to public child care, after school care, high levels of gender equality (United Nations Development Programe, 2015) and generous policies on parental leave (International Labour Organization, 2010) which may contribute to that middle managers in Sweden is struggling less with work-life balance as compared to their American peers.

5.4. Limitations

We are aware of the existence of the many other ways this study could have been conducted. The design of our research is not ideal and hence, some further limitations are presented below. Firstly, the two independent variables of problem and emotion focused coping strategies could have been furthered analyzed with a separation between the different sub-scales of each strategy. By distinguishing between the scales, a correlation between certain behaviors and stress would be more explicit and differences in the two coping strategies could have been analyzed.

Secondly, there are a number of negative aspects to using quantitative methods one should be aware of. The data that is gathered can be insufficient in understanding the process behind a specific decision or thoughts around an issue. Further, all data gathered from a quantitative study can usually not contribute to real decisions and theories (Somekh & Lewin, 2011). Thirdly, due to potential differences in organizational culture and existing policies preventing work stress between the participating firms, a possible risk emerge when receiving answers from an unequal number of respondents related to the number of companies. As this study does not include processes of analyzing the differences in received data, the bias of an uneven number of answers within the industry has to be recognized.

6.   Conclusion

This final chapter offers a summary of the work process including the specific findings to our study. A reasoning of managerial implications is presented together with suggestions for future research. Lastly, the relation of the thesis to a broader ethical and social perspective is recognized.

The purpose of this study was to complement previous literature and study the relationship between role conflict and work stress among middle managers within the insurance and banking sectors in Sweden. Furthermore, the research aimed to examine what stress coping strategies middle managers use to gain an understanding of the relationship between perceived stress levels of middle managers and their coping strategies. Initially, a background of managerial and stress related concepts were presented, followed by the formulation of three hypotheses. In order to study the specific relationship between work stress and coping strategies, a questionnaire was sent out to targeted middle managers within the insurance and banking sectors. The aim was to find out the perceived work stress levels of the sample and the participants' coping strategies in order to test our hypotheses. Based on the collected questionnaire data, an analysis could be conducted, exploring the conformability of extant literature to our sample.

H1 focused on if more role conflict among middle managers was related to higher levels of perceived work stress. The results showed a strong statistical significance with a positive correlation between experienced Role Conflict and Perceived Stress Level (.679, $p<0.05$), supporting H1. These findings are in line with existing research on role conflict as a predictor of increased work stress. The second hypothesis, suggested that problem focused stress coping strategies are positively correlated with lower levels of work stress. The findings showed a significant, negative relationship between problem focused coping strategies and perceived stress levels which allowed a confirmation of H2. The study on the targeted sample of middle managers in the insurance and banking sector in Sweden therefore showed similar results as existing research regarding how problem focused coping can be effective to handle negative situations in which an individual experience stress. The third hypothesis, suggested that emotion focused stress coping strategies are negatively correlated with lower levels of work stress among middle managers. The non-significant value of emotion focused coping in the used model leads us to neither confirm nor disregard H3. Thus, the empirical findings of this study could not support extant literature.

The results from this study can be of interest on an individual level when considering how to handle a demanding work environment. This study suggests that using problem focused coping strategies, such as adapting effective planning, focusing on solely the problem at hand without competing activities and seeking instrumental support is an effective way of decreasing work stress and handling role conflict. On an organizational level it is important to

be aware of the importance of actively working towards preventing work stress for employees. The methods that are shown to work most effectively for individuals in a work situation have the potential of contributing when developing organizational strategies of handling work stress.

6.1 Managerial implications

Following the reasoning of the importance of understanding underlying factors causing stress (e.g. Xie & Schaubroeck, 2001), the results of this research can increase the awareness among organizations about the presence and impact of role conflict among middle managers in the insurance and banking industry. As work stress is a societal problem and can have an substantial impact on an organization's financial performance (e.g. Meško et al., 2013; Xie & Schaubroeck, 2001), there should be an incentive among organizations to acknowledge one of the main stressors among middle managers. Further, as the impact of a stressor (i.e. role conflict) to some extent is determined by an individual's perceptions of his or her stressfulness (Lazarus, 1966; Lazarus and Folkman, 1984) and the study building on the idea that role conflict can be minimized but not eliminated (Kahn et al., 1964), this study argues for the importance of understanding stress management from a transactional perspective. Thus, the study suggest implementation of stress management focusing on developing an environment where middle managers are given the resources to cope with the demands from senior managers as well as from employees. By giving employees the sufficient resources, organizations should shift focus from trying to eliminate a stressor, i.e. structural changes (Michie, 2002), to an approach where organizations are suggested to help middle managers achieve a non-stressed psychological state. We see several organizational gains from establishing an environment where middle managers are given the opportunities to use problem focused stress coping strategies. Instead of focusing resources on trying to eliminate role conflict, which theory suggest cannot be eliminated (e.g. Kahn et al, 1964), but rather on altering an individual's perception of the stressor, organization's may not experience the negative consequences of the stressor role conflict such absenteeism, decreased job performance, lower innovation. Thus, stress management focusing on developing a work environment where employees are enabled to use problem focused strategies may lead to reduced costs for organizations.

In the wake of the new Swedish provision (AFS 2015:4) about organizational and social work environment we hope that the application of the study result could potentially bring guidelines for organizational management handling stress and personnel. As, the provision aim to concretize the Swedish Work Environment Act, we argue that there is a need among organizations to receive concrete tools to implement the new regulations. The provision, in the light of the findings of this study gives organizations incentives to turn to their employees and see to their resources and capabilities rather than providing general stress management programs when implementing the new policies. By promoting a work environment where middle managers are given room to utilize cognitive efforts to reduce stress such as seeking advice and guidance from colleagues, enabling an action focused approach to problems and to give room for discussion of alternative approaches to problems (e.g. Carver et al, 1989; Folkman et al., 1986), organizations can reduce work stress among these employees. Further, as previously mentioned (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984; Michie, 2002) individuals can develop skills needed to better cope with role conflict. Thus, there is an incentive for organizations to develop middle manager's skills within areas such as how to employ the support given by colleagues and develop good relationships, how to utilize the resources given, and how to adapt to role demands.

6.2. Relation of thesis to broader ethical and social issues

In an increasingly fast paced world, with new demands on individuals and organizations, there has been a development toward increased stress levels in society. Work stress can be argued to be a societal issue as it affects all levels of society, and the World Health Organization describes stress as "the health epidemic of the 21st century'' (Smith 2012). The increase of stress in the workforce is affecting employees' health as well as organizational performance. Organizations need to take an ethical responsibility, as the human capital is organizations most important resources. To work actively with improvements towards an organizational environment is crucial to overcome the development towards increasing stress levels. From an ethical perspective,

we argue that organizations have the obligation to implement well thought out strategies to conduct stress management.

6.3. Suggestions for future research

The implementation process and effects of the new Swedish provision (AFS 2015:4), that came into effect in March 2016, could be an area of interest for further research from the perspective of middle management. The implementation of the new regulations will be part of middle managers responsibilities. At the same time as they aim to regulate the workload, suggesting that the regulations have the possibility of being counterproductive if not implemented with special concern to middle managers ambiguous role.

Further, using additional measurements to analyze the dimensions of role conflict could potentially bring more insights into the work situation of middle managers. Role conflict influences people differently, as it may not cause negative consequences for people who possess sufficient resources to cope with the stressor, but may be harmful for those who lack resources to cope with it (Lazarus,1966; Lazarus and Folkman, 1984). Hence, a person that experience role conflict, but has sufficient resources to cope with the stressor, may not experience the negative consequences related to the stressor. As a result the middle managers in this sample may have indicated a lack of role conflict in our questionnaire. Thus, for future research within the field we suggest that role conflict, similarly to the COPE inventory and PSS measurement used in this study, could be measured more in depth by using an equivalent instrument. Enabling researchers to explore the relationship between the stressor and work stress in more detail, showing overloaded, uncontrollable, and unpredictable respondents and found underlying correlations that the participants themselves did not reflect on.

7.   References

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8.   Appendix A: SPSS Output

TABLE 9. Descriptive Statistics

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Average_Stresslevel	2.4073	0.50212	74
Mean_PF	3.573	0.28933	74
Mean_EF	2.8581	0.29448	74
Experienced roleconflict	0.43	0.499	74
Nrof_children	1.07	1.186	74
Experience_9y or more	0.24	0.432	74
Experience_6-8y	0.22	0.414	74
Experience_3-5y	0.23	0.424	74
Gender	0.41	0.494	74
Age	47.05	10.317	74
Maritial status	0.92	0.275	74
Children_6to12	0.24	0.432	74
Children_13to19	0.27	0.447	74

Assessing the assumptions

Before conducting the multiple regressions, analyses were performed to ensure no violation of the assumptions of normality, linearity, multicollinearity and homoscedasticity.

As a result of the notion that some of the independent variables could be correlated (e.g. number of children and age, experience and age) an insignificant correlation of variables might be due to multicollinearity. When looking at the correlation between our independent variables we could detect somewhat of a relation between problem focused and emotion focused coping strategies, however since this correlation is below .7 we exclude the likeliness of multicollinearity (Pallant, 2005). To further check for multicollinearity we run a collinearity statistics, however with the variance inflation factor (VIF) for all independent variables below 2,3 (Pallant, 2005) we assume very low multicollinearity in our model and proceed with the analysis.

TABLE 10. Coefficients

Model		Correlations	Collinearity Statistics	
		Part	Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)			
	Mean_PF	-0,261	0,708	1,412
	Mean_EF	0,109	0,796	1,257
	Experienced roleconflict	0,62	0,844	1,185
	Nrof_children	0,061	0,451	2,217
	Experience_9y or more	0,263	0,557	1,796
	Experience_6-8y	0,085	0,629	1,589
	Experience_3-5y	0,121	0,657	1,522
	Gender	0,113	0,783	1,277
	Age	-0,198	0,689	1,451
	Maritial status	-0,016	0,763	1,31
	Children_6to12	-0,159	0,626	1,598
	Children_13to19	0,014	0,708	1,412

a. Dependent Variable: Average_Stresslevel

There are various aspects of the distribution of scores that has to be considered when studying the underlying relationship between the variables in the model. To find out about the normality, linearity and homoscedasticity for our sample, we look at the residual scatter plot. From Figure 3 we can see that the residuals are reasonably normally distributed since the curve is bell shaped. Hence we assume normal distribution for the dependent variable Stress Level.
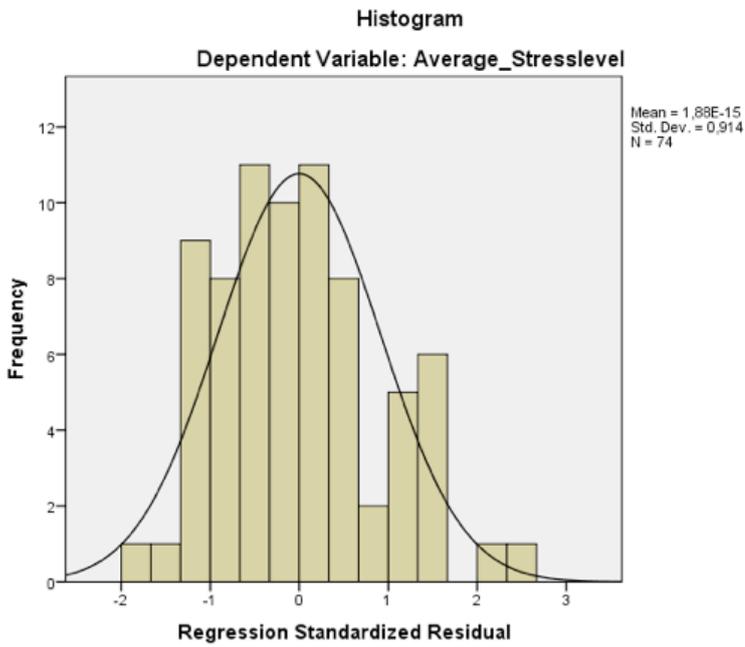
Figure 3. Histogram

The Normal Probability Plot (Figure 4) confirms the histogram in regard to the normality assumption. The points lie in a reasonably straight diagonal line which suggest no major deviation from normality.
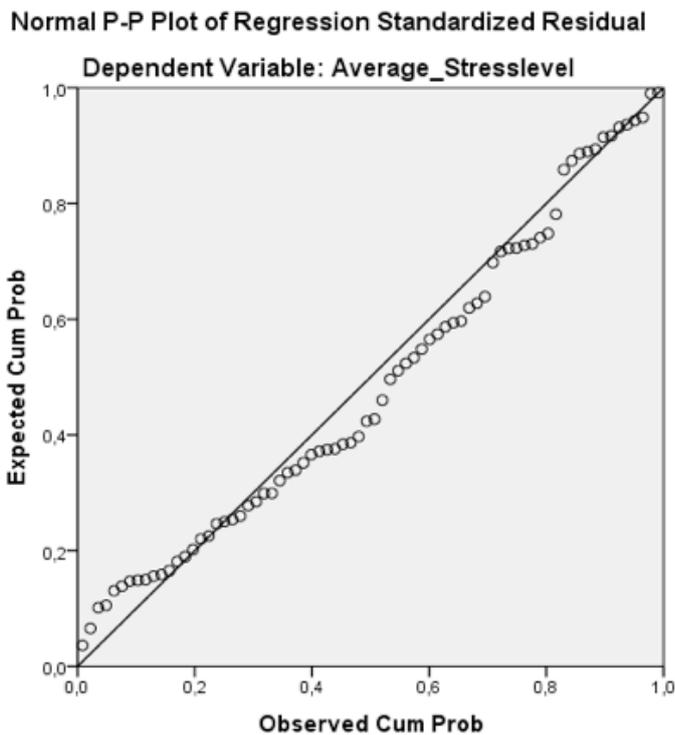
Figure 4. Probability plot

In the scatterplot of standardized residuals we cannot detect a clear or systematic pattern, here we can also check for violation of the assumption of homoscedasticity. As seen in the scatterplot our data fulfills the assumption of homoscedasticity. The presence of outliers can also be detected from the scatterplot, with no standardized residual of more than 2 or less than -2 we cannot see any extreme scores in our data set.
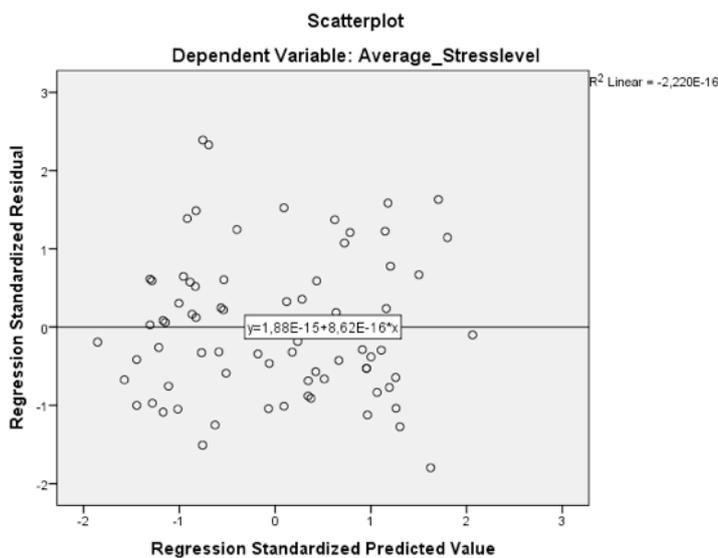

Figure 5. Scatterplot

To further examine the assumptions of linearity the graph (Figure 5) indicate a linear negative correlation between the independent variable Problem Focused coping strategies and the dependent variable Stress Level. A moderate linear negative correlation is further present between Stress Level and Emotion Focused coping strategies.
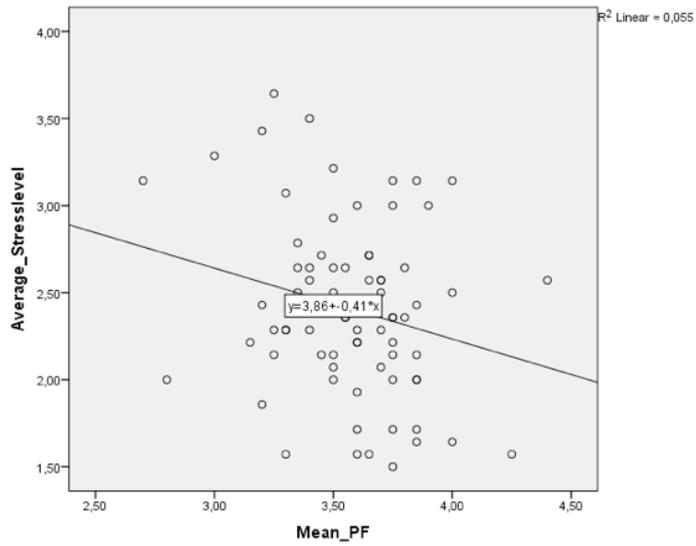

Figure 6.

9.   Appendix B: Questionnaire

Informed Consent:

Du har blivit inbjuden att delta in en studie om rollkonflikt och användandet av copingstrategier hos mellanchefer inom försäkringsbranschen. Studien utförs av Hanna Atterwall och Angelica Engqvist, studenter på Internationella Handelshögskolan i Jönköping.

Syftet med studien är att studera vilka beteenden och förhållningssätt som leder till goda resultat och välmående. Vi vill undersöka hur mellanchefer hanterar utmaningen att förhålla sig till förväntningar och krav både från överordnad chef och medarbetare och hur de hanterar den rollkonflikt som kan uppstå.
Deltagandet i studien är frivilligt och du kan när som helst välja att avbryta. Informationen du delger oss kommer att vara konfidentiell och du kommer att vara helt anonym genom hela studien.
Enkäten kommer att ta ca 10 minuter att fylla i. Frågorna i enkäten berör vilka strategier du använder för att hantera din arbetsroll samt upplevd stress nivå.

Har du några frågor eller funderingar angående denna studie, välkommen att kontakta
Angelica Engqvist, enan1216@student.ju.se
Hanna Atterwall, atha1210@student.ju.se

Deltagaruppgifter:

1. Företag:
2. Kön: M/K
3. Ålder
4. Civilstånd:
   1. Gift/Sambo   2. Singel/Ensamstående
5. Antal barn:

1.   1. 1-5 år_____   2. 6-12 år_____   3. 13-19 år_____

6. Under hur lång tid har du jobbat på din nuvarande arbetsplats?
          1. 1-2 år   2. 3-5 år   3. 6-7 år   4. 9 år eller mer

7. Rollkonflikt innebär att en person i en och samma roll möter flera olika förväntningar från medarbetare, kollegor och överordnade chefer om vad som är dennes rätta rollbeteende.

Upplever du rollkonflikt på ditt nuvarande arbete?
1. Ja   2. Nej   3. Vet ej

Del 1 Upplevd stress nivå

När du besvarar frågorna nedan, tänk tillbaka på dina känslor och tankar under den senaste månaden i relation till dina arbetsuppgifter/ din arbetssituation. Även om en del av frågorna liknar varandra finns det skillnader mellan dem och du bör behandla varje fråga separat.

Besvara frågorna så snabbt som möjligt och ange det alternativ som känns som en rimlig uppskattning.

Besvara varje fråga genom att välja ett av alternativen.

1. Hur ofta har du under den senaste månaden känt dig upprörd på grund av att något oväntat har inträffat på arbetet?
1. Aldrig   2. Nästan aldrig   3. Ibland   4. Ganska ofta   5. Väldigt ofta

2. Hur ofta har du under den senaste månaden känt att du inte kunnat kontrollera viktiga händelser eller situationer?
1. Aldrig   2. Nästan aldrig   3. Ibland   4. Ganska ofta   5. Väldigt ofta

Hur ofta har du under den senaste månaden känt dig nervös och stressad?
1. Aldrig   2. Nästan aldrig   3. Ibland   4. Ganska ofta   5. Väldigt ofta

4. Hur ofta har du under den senaste månaden framgångsrikt hanterat vardagsproblem och irritationsmoment? Med framgångsrik menar vi att du har hanterat problem och irritationsmoment på ett sätt som du upplever som lyckat.
1. Aldrig   2. Nästan aldrig   3. Ibland   4. Ganska ofta   5. Väldigt ofta

5. Hur ofta har du under den senaste månaden känt att du effektivt kunnat hantera viktiga förändringar som inträffat.?
1. Aldrig   2. Nästan aldrig   3. Ibland   4. Ganska ofta   5. Väldigt ofta

6. Hur ofta har du under den senaste månaden känt tilltro till din egen förmåga att hantera problem i din arbetssituation?
1. Aldrig   2. Nästan aldrig   3. Ibland   4. Ganska ofta   5. Väldigt ofta

7.   Hur ofta har du under den senaste månaden känt att saker gått din väg?
1. Aldrig   2. Nästan aldrig   3. Ibland   4. Ganska ofta   5. Väldigt ofta

8. Hur ofta har du under den senaste månaden tyckt att du inte kunnat klara av allt du skulle ha gjort?
1. Aldrig   2. Nästan aldrig   3. Ibland   4. Ganska ofta   5. Väldigt ofta

9. Hur ofta har du under den senaste månaden kunnat kontrollera irritationsmoment?
1. Aldrig   2. Nästan aldrig   3. Ibland   4. Ganska ofta   5. Väldigt ofta

10. Hur ofta har du under den senaste månaden känt att du har haft kontroll över din arbetssituation.?
1. Aldrig   2. Nästan aldrig   3. Ibland   4. Ganska ofta   5. Väldigt ofta

11. Hur ofta har du under den senaste månaden blivit upprörd på saker som har
hänt som du inte kunnat kontrollera?
1. Aldrig   2. Nästan aldrig   3. Ibland   4. Ganska ofta   5. Väldigt ofta

12. Hur ofta har du under den senaste månaden kommit på dig själv med att tänka
på saker som du måste göra?
1. Aldrig   2. Nästan aldrig   3. Ibland   4. Ganska ofta   5. Väldigt ofta

13. Hur ofta har du känt under den senaste månaden att du haft kontroll över hur du
använder din tid?
1. Aldrig   2. Nästan aldrig   3. Ibland   4. Ganska ofta   5. Väldigt ofta

14. Hur ofta har du under den senaste månaden tyckt att svårigheter har hopat sig
så mycket att du inte kunnat hantera dem?
1. Aldrig   2. Nästan aldrig   3. Ibland   4. Ganska ofta   5. Väldigt ofta

Del 2 Copingstrategier

I denna del av formuläret får du svara på frågor om hur du brukar göra när du ställs inför ett
problem eller upplever en stressande situation på jobbet som innebär motstridiga
förväntningar. Med copingstrategier menar vi olika sätt at ta sig an ett problem eller ta itu
med en svårighet.

Besvara varje fråga genom att klicka i ett nummer mellan 1-5.

1. Mycket sällan eller aldrig
2. Ganska sällan

3. Ibland

4. Ganska ofta

5. Mycket ofta

1. Jag försöker komma runt problemet genom direkt handling.

2. Jag pratar med någon om hur jag upplever problemet.

3. Jag försöker komma på en strategi för hur jag ska hantera problemet.

4. Jag förnekar problemet.

5. Jag pratar med någon som kan göra något konkret åt problemet.

6. Jag accepterar och lär mig leva med det.

7. Jag försöker se det i ett annat perspektiv, för att få det att verka mer

hanterbart

8. Jag anstränger mig så att annat inte ska hindra mig att ta tag i problemet.

9. Jag diskuterar min upplevelse med någon.

10. Jag accepterar det faktum att det hänt.

11. Jag lär mig något av erfarenheten.

12. Jag tvingar mig själv att inte agera för snabbt.

13. Jag rådgör med personer som har liknande erfarenheter.

14. Jag vänjer mig vid tanken att det har hänt.

15. Jag försöker få känslomässigt stöd från vänner eller kollegor.

16. Jag söker sympati och förståelse från någon annan person.

17. Jag tvingar mig själv att vänta på rätt tillfälle för att göra något åt saken.

18. Jag försöker finna något bra i det som sker.

19. Jag agerar som om det aldrig hänt.

20. Jag tar tag i problemet för att försöka lösa det.

21. Jag försöker växa som person som ett resultat av erfarenheten.

22. Jag accepterar vad som hänt och att det inte går att ändra.

23. Jag funderar över hur jag bäst ska handskas med problemet.

24. Jag väntar med att göra något åt saken tills situationen tillåter.

25. Jag lägger andra saker åt sidan för att koncentrera mig på problemet

26. Jag låtsas som om det inte har hänt.

27. Jag pratar med någon annan för att få veta mer om situationen.

28. Jag säger till mig själv "detta är inte verkligt".

29. Jag anstränger mig för att göra något åt problemet.

30. Jag tänker noga på vilka steg jag kan ta för att lösa problemet.

31. Jag försöker få råd från någon annan om vad jag ska göra.

32. Jag ser till så att jag inte förvärrar saken genom att handla för tidigt.

33. Jag gör vad som behöver göras, ett steg i taget.

34. Jag låter mig inte distraheras av andra tankar eller aktiviteter.

35. Jag fokuserar på att handskas med problemet, och om nödvändigt, lägger annat åt sidan.

36. Jag gör en handlingsplan.

Tack för din medverkan!