CRANFIELD UNIVERSITY

ANNABEL HANA CHRISTIE

WHY AND HOW DO MIDDLE MANAGERS USE AUTONOMY IN STRATEGY?

SCHOOL OF MANAGEMENT
Doctor of Philosophy

PhD 2019-2020

Supervisor: PROFESSOR ANDREY PAVLOV
Associate Supervisor: PROFESSOR MARK JENKINS
AUGUST 2020

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Abstract

This thesis focuses on the research question why and how do middle managers (MMs) use autonomy in strategy. Building on the literature about MM autonomy and flexibility in strategy, I focus on the concept of autonomy in strategy for MMs, which includes when MMs act independently to change or subvert intended strategy, in contrast to MM flexibility in strategy which often supports intended strategy. In an inductive study based on interviews with MMs in large multinational companies from varying countries and industries, I develop four main findings. First, in terms of from where MM autonomy in strategy comes, it has at least three sources: inherent autonomy, situational autonomy, and gained autonomy. Second, in terms of what are the strategy implementation outcomes of MMs' use of autonomy in strategy, there are four major outcomes: the strategy being avoided, delayed, changed or delivered. Third, looking at why MMs use autonomy in strategy to change strategy, MMs have different motivations: self-interest, they are unclear on the strategy, do not believe in the strategy, or do not implement strategy in response to non-attention by TMs. Fourth, looking at how MMs use autonomy in strategy, MMs have several ways of adapting strategies that they find difficult or do not wish to implement: MMs use prioritisation, capabilities, resources, status, trust, persuasion, networks and politics. I make a theoretical contribution by formulating six propositions about strategy-specific conditions, the sources of MM autonomy in strategy, the self-interest of MMs, and the outcomes of MM autonomy in strategy. These propositions advance our understanding of various aspects of MM autonomy in strategy.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Despite the fact that strategy implementation is of primary importance, Hickson, Miller and Wilson (2003) cite Nutt (1999) who found that around half of strategies do not get implemented. Similarly, Lee and Puranam (2016) argued that all strategies, even the imperfect ones, should be implemented. It is middle managers (MMs) who have the primary role of implementing strategy that has been set primarily by top managers (TMs) (e.g., Burgelman, 1994 and 1996; Wooldridge and Floyd, 1990; Floyd and Wooldridge, 2000; Huy, 2002). But MMs are also well known for not always implementing strategy as intended by TMs (Ates et al., 2020).

That divergence from or non-implementation of the intended strategy can often be a major problem for organisations by not meeting financial and other targets set by TMs. For example, Ahearne, Lam and Kraus (2014) found that MMs' flexibility in strategic involvement benefits performance but only up to a point, and after that point the disadvantages associated with lack of strategic direction outweigh the benefits, i.e., MM flexibility in strategy has an inverse-U relationship to firm performance and extensive flexibility leads to worse performance. Ahearne, Lam and Kraus (2014) use only the term "flexibility" and not "autonomy" but, as I will argue below, the extensive flexibility that they identify might be better termed "autonomy". Prior literature has examined various reasons for such divergence by MMs. For example, Ates et al. (2020) reviewed the strategy literature to conclude that MMs often have different views of strategy than TMs and frequently engage in counterproductive efforts or sabotaging of strategy implementation, such as "counterproductive actions" (Meyer, 2006), "opportunism and linguistic influencing of strategic initiatives" (Sillince and Mueller, 2007, p. 155), "foot-dragging" and "sabotage of the strategy" (Guth and MacMillan,

1986, p. 314 and 320). On the other hand, MMs can also give a positive impetus to the intended strategy. For example, Hopkins, Mallette and Hopkins (2013) found that MMs can influence either strategic inertia or strategic renewal.

A recent review of MMs and their role in enacting or influencing strategy (Wang, Gibbons and Heavey, 2017) suggests that, so far, the efforts to study MMs' influence on strategy from the MM perspective have been limited and that, in particular, there is little clarity about what their intentions are and how and why they may influence strategy.

The reason for this limitation in the literature may be that most prior studies have focused in one of two ways. First, some studies focus on MM "flexibility" in strategy as primarily MMs finding different ways to perform strategic tasks and achieve strategic goals as given by TMs (e.g., Shimizu and Hitt, 2004; Ahearne. Lam and Kraus, 2014; Wang, Gibbons and Heavey, 2017), i.e., MMs are acting congruently with the intended strategy. Second, in other cases, the literature examines how MMs create initiatives that become emergent strategies that did not start as strategies intended by TMs. These studies usually refer to MMs using "autonomous strategic behaviour" (Bourgeois and Brodwin, 1984; Ahearne, Lam and Kraus, 2014; Mirabeau and Maguire, 2014). But these studies, especially Mirabeau and Maguire (2014) focused on strategic behaviour that was initially peripheral to the central strategy intended by TMs.

In summary, prior studies have mostly focused on either congruent influences on the central, intended strategy or on the development of emergent strategy. As the intended, central strategy has a major effect on performance (as cited earlier), it is important to understand why and how MMs might divert the strategy from what TMs intend, which empirical observation suggests they often do (Nutt, 1999). The notion of

autonomy provides a fruitful avenue for investigating this phenomenon of strategy divergence, as the ability of MMs to make these divergent changes requires that they possess a certain degree of autonomy (see definition of autonomy in 1.1 below).

Hence, my study focuses on how MMs apply autonomy to the central, intended strategy in deciding whether to delay, change or avoid rather than implement the strategy as intended by top management. My study finds that *MM autonomy in strategy* both motivates and enables MMs to strongly influence the strategy as intended by TMs. Hence, MM autonomy in strategy is a key concept to explain MM behaviour in relation to strategy. While linking MM autonomy to strategy is not a new idea, my contribution is to detail the sources of MM autonomy in strategy, why and how MMs use their autonomy in strategy, and what are the outcomes of middle managers using their autonomy in strategy.

My research focus on MM autonomy in strategy required that the unit of analysis be the individual MM. This research focus also means that MMs themselves are the best informants to provide an account of why and how they use autonomy in strategy. Thus, I collected data directly from 40 MMs in 31 large, multinational companies. I used qualitative methods to generate rich descriptions of middle management practices, interventions and actions from the perspective of the MM. To collect the qualitative data, I used personal interviews to obtain MM's reflections and accounts of how and why MMs gain and use their autonomy to influence strategy. To analyse the data I applied both King (2004 and 2012)'s template analysis and the Gioia methodology (Corley and Gioia, 2004; Gioia, Corley and Hamilton, 2012).

I have three major empirical and theoretical contributions. First, empirically, I have established four categories of variables to describe the phenomenon of MM

autonomy in strategy: sources ("where") of MM autonomy, strategy outcomes ("what") of MM autonomy, motivation ("why") for MM autonomy, and methods ("how") of MM autonomy in strategy. Second, also empirically, I have developed concepts and themes that make up these categories, thus providing much detail on these categories. These first two contributions also relate to and build on the existing literature. Third, theoretically, I have developed six propositions that specify relationships among many of the themes and categories. These propositions concern strategy-specific conditions, the sources of MM autonomy in strategy, the self-interest of MMs, and the outcomes of MM autonomy in strategy.

The rest of this chapter will expand on my personal motivation for this study. Chapter 2 will discuss the systematic literature review and the evolution of my research question. Chapter 3 will set out the methodology I have used. Chapter 4 will describe the findings of empirical research. Chapter 5 will discuss the results and draw implications for theory and practice. Chapter 6 will provide a summary, conclusion and recommendations for further research.

My motivation to earn a doctorate is that I wish to change my career from being a lawyer to becoming an academic, a business school teacher and a researcher. I have extensive law qualifications including an undergraduate degree in law, a Master's in tax law and a legal practice course which is a professional qualification taken by solicitors admitted to practice in England and Wales in the United Kingdom.

Before starting my PhD I worked in a hedge fund firm and later in two City of London top law firms. While at the hedge fund, I worked together with traders and investors who, before trading and investing, carefully researched whether a company was achieving its strategic targets. So, I became aware about the importance that

achieving strategic targets has on attracting interest from investors and traders and investment.

Later, as a solicitor I advised some of the biggest multinational companies as well as prominent charities and individuals. I also founded my own law firm. My experience as a solicitor advising managers, executives and company directors at large, often AIM and LSE listed, companies and later as a managing partner of my own law firm have greatly stimulated my interest in the challenges of management and strategy implementation.

In particular, having worked as a solicitor on six AIM listings and other corporate and banking transactions, I have often seen a large gap between the strategy that the companies planned to implement and what actually got implemented. I have also seen that changes to the strategy as set by TMs often negatively affected the company's ability to raise finance and affected the cost of raising finance as well as the company's share price.

While practising law I gained experience in teaching, lecturing and presenting. I taught law to postgraduate students and qualified lawyers. I also often conveyed complex information to sophisticated clients, usually senior business executives and company directors of large, often listed, companies. I greatly enjoyed developing and sharing knowledge, presenting, lecturing and teaching and the feedback that I have received has always been positive.

I find that the world of academia fits well with my personality and interests and what I want to do next, namely to research, develop and create knowledge and to convey knowledge via teaching and lecturing.

1.1. Middle Manager Autonomy in Strategy

What we do not fully understand is why and how MMs are able to change strategy as they implement it. To do so must require some autonomy in strategy on the part of MMs so that they can choose and execute actions that support or subvert strategy intended by TMs and assigned by TMs to MMs to implement. The Oxford English Dictionary (2012) defines autonomy as freedom from external control or influence. Such autonomy can apply to any aspect of a manager's job. Autonomy has been studied in the social sciences for a long time, e.g., Rossel (1971) examined situations that encourage autonomy. Bailyn (1985) defined "strategy autonomy as the degree of independence and discretion that employees have in their jobs to choose the problems that they want to work on" (in a study of industrial R&D labs). Spector (1986) said that autonomous management practices provide employees (not just managers) with discretion and control to determine how to perform their work. Backström (2013) related autonomy to the breadth of the freedom within which certain individuals are able to act. Agency theory in economics also discusses autonomy (e.g., Jensen, 1986).

A few studies of MMs in strategy refer to "autonomous strategic behaviour" that needs to be balanced against TM control (Bourgeois and Brodwin, 1984; Ahearne, Lam and Kraus, 2014). Mirabeau and Maguire (2014) found that some "autonomous strategic behaviour" by MMs, in particular, led to an emergent strategy that contributed to realised strategy. Some studies examine concepts analogous to autonomy in the sense of MMs acting on strategy with some degree of freedom, even though they do not use the actual word autonomy. For example, Boyett and Currie (2004) discussed the lack of executive control over what MMs do. In terms of well-known company examples of MM autonomy in strategy, Burgelman (1996) documented how, at Intel, a change in

strategy execution by MMs (diverting production from one product line to another), that was not approved by TMs, enabled a later change in strategy that was approved by TMs. Indeed, Intel's CEO Andy Grove believed that MMs' actions saved the company (Grove, 1997, pp. 96-97). The Intel case is clearly one of MMs using autonomy in strategy even though that term is not used by Burgelman or Grove.

Hence, the purpose of my thesis is to understand why and how MMs might explicitly and directly challenge and change assigned strategic tasks and goals. I term such behaviour as "MM autonomy in strategy".

1.2. Definitions of Strategy

There are many definitions of strategy. One of the two of the most widely used strategy textbooks have broad but complementary definitions: "strategy is the means by which individuals or organisations achieve their objectives" (Grant, 2013, p. 15) and "strategy is a long-term direction of an organisation" (Johnson et al., 2014, page 3).

Perhaps the earliest definition of strategy is that of Andrews (1971) who defined strategy as "the pattern of major objectives, purposes or goals and essential policies and plans for achieving those goals, stated in such a way as to define what business the company is in or is to be in and the kind of company it is or is to be." Since then a huge number of other researchers and writers have offered their own versions of strategy, such as, most famously, Porter (1980)'s positioning strategy and his later, more specific view of strategy as a unique configuration of activities (Porter, 1996). This range of views has been well summarised in Mintzberg et al. (2005) as well as in many textbooks such as Johnson et al. (2014).

The various definitions of strategy in articles that focus on strategy nearly all say that strategy is about getting to a new situation and is not concerned with routine operations. This distinction was made in one of the very first seminal articles in the new field of strategic management (Cauwenbergh and Cool, 1982, p. 247): "Strategic management therefore deals with the formulation aspects (policy) and with implementation aspects (organisation) of calculated behaviour aimed to get to a new situations. For this reason, strategic management is the most critical element of the management organisation. It explains success and survival to a large extent." This distinction between strategic and non-strategic activities is carried over into research on the role of middle managers. The most comprehensive review on the role of middle managers in relation to strategy (Wooldridge, Schmid and Floyd, 2008) investigates the MM role in strategy formation and deliberately excludes MM studies that examine MMs' more general roles (for a review of the latter see Dopson and Stewart, 1990).

1.3. The Implementation Challenge of Strategy

Most prior studies state that strategy formulation is primarily the domain of top managers and strategy implementation is primarily the domain of middle managers (e.g., Burgelman, 1994 and 1996; Westley, 1990; Wooldridge and Floyd, 1990; Floyd and Wooldridge, 1992, 1996, 1997, 2000; Dutton et al., 1997; Huy, 2002). This accepted distinction runs through 20+ years of research about middle managers in relation to strategy. Hence, it is clear that the role of MMs is central in converting intended to realised strategy. MMs also play a clear role in the primary challenge to the strategy formulation and implementation paradigm—Mintzberg and Water's (1986)

distinction between deliberate (i.e., formulated) and emergent strategies as a continuum. In both types of these strategies, MMs play a key role even if in differing ways.

A good review of the research on strategy implementation is provided in Mintzberg et al. (2002) and most recently by Hitt et al. (2017). Often, this research stream has examined the strategy process independent of strategy content, although some research has focused on the implementation of specific strategy types, such as mergers and acquisitions, and also particularly on matching organisational structure to the strategy chosen (Hitt et al., 2007). But, of course, implementation involves much more than organisation structure. The school of process studies (e.g., Langley, 1999; Langley et al. 2013; and Kouamé and Langley, 2017) emphasise the role of organisation processes (activities, routines and the like) in strategy implementation.

Similarly, according to the Strategy As Practice (SAP) school (Johnson et al. 2007; Golsorkhi et al. 2015), strategy is not so much something that an organisation "has" but something that people "do" both in terms of strategy formulation and strategy implementation., which view gives implementation precedence over formulation. The SAP view implies that a formulated strategy does not really exist until mangers conduct practices to enact the strategy.

For the purposes of my study, a key issue in strategy implementation is how the relative responsibilities of TMs and MMs affect MM autonomy in strategy. As mentioned above, recent studies are giving a bigger role in strategy formulation to MMs. Most recently, in the context of the COVID-19 crisis, Heyden, Wilden and Wise (2020) argued that TMs can benefit from enabling radical change initiatives by MMs. At the same time, recent literature is giving TMs a greater role than before in strategy implementation (e.g., Barrick et al., 2015), thus moving away from the

dominance of the power button perspective that emphasises the role of middle managers relative to top managers. Therefore, an ongoing debate that is very relevant to my thesis as it looks at the relative roles of TMs and MMs in strategy implementation, particularly at the micro-level of what activities MM's undertake that might change intended strategy as they implement it.

1.3.1. Intended and Realised Strategy

MMs are responsible to ensure that strategy as formulated by top management is implemented and so becomes realised. Intended strategy is developed mostly by an organisation's strategy makers at the top and but is likely to be adjusted by MMs in response to changes in the environment. This assumption is based on the idea that an intended strategy is not a fixed construct but is also enacted as it is implemented. That is the view of most researchers on strategy implementation, as well as that of many practitioners (as in the view of Andy Grove of Intel, cited below), and of strategy writers such as Richard Rumelt, who sees strategy as something to be "crafted" (Rumelt, 2011). I will be looking at how MMs use their autonomy in strategy to 'craft' and influence strategy implementation and strategy formulation.

But why should TMs accept from MMs enacted or emergent strategy that is different from the one which they have formulated or intended? One way to reconcile this is if we recognise that a strategy is not one construct but has multiple elements and that MMs can convince TMs that a different course is required or that a strategic objective can be satisfied in more than one way.

There are examples of MMs exercising their autonomy in strategy that had positive results. For example, Intel provides a documented case of a strategy change led

by MMs that was unintended (by the TM) but with good performance consequences (Burgelman, 1996). Intel's CEO, Andy Grove, believed that MMs, production planners, and finance people saved the company in the mid-1980s by gradually allocating more and more of Intel's production resources away from the money-losing memory business and into the more profitable microprocessors: "Simply by doing their daily work, these MMs were adjusting Intel's strategic posture." (Grove, 1997: 96-97). Yoffie and Cusumano (2015, p. 181) commented: "By the time Grove decided to exit the memory chips business formally, only one of Intel's eight silicon fabrication plants was producing memory chips, making the strategic shift far less drastic and painful than it might have been". Burgelman (1996, p. 202) concluded that: "Middle-level functional managers contributed to the definition part of the strategic business exit (SBE) process through inertia in the deployment of Intel's distinctive competence in the business strategy of dynamic random-access memory (DRAMs)" and "The dissolution of the strategic context of the DRAM business took several years. It happened gradually with the incremental de-commitment in allocation of manufacturing resources at the business level" (p. 205).

Another instance of emergent strategy is found in Mirabeau and Maguire (2014) who conducted an in-depth qualitative study of emergent strategy in a large telecommunications firm. They found that some "autonomous strategic behaviour" by MMs, in particular, led to emergent strategy that contributed to realised strategy.

In contrast, there is a recent example where Volkswagen's disastrous cheating of diesel emissions, exposed in 2015, might also be seen as an unintended strategy driven by MMs. The truth is still not known as to whether or not top managers at VW headquarters were aware of the cheating. If we assume not, then some MMs decided to

make autonomous changes in order to meet the strategic objective of producing cars that would pass U.S. emissions regulations. These MMs undertook the activity of changing the test technology. To them, it would have seemed like a technical activity that had no effect on the strategy. But, as it happened, they had adopted a strategy to cheat. To date, six middle-level managers have been indicted in the USA, and two convicted: one an engineer, James Liang, and the second a manager, Oliver Schmidt, both in VW's U.S. R&D facility. In June 2018, Rupert Stadler, the then chief executive of VW's Audi division, was arrested in Germany, and in July 2019 was charged with fraud and jailed to face trial in September 2020 (*The Associated Press*, 2020).

1.4. Middle Managers

From the above we see that some of the research on realised strategy has focused on the role of MMs in enacting strategy that is different from the intended strategy set out by TMs (in other words MMs exercise their autonomy in strategy). However, in this section, I start by taking a broader look at the literature on MMs, which has a number of different perspectives. First, what is an MM is, perhaps not surprisingly, also a matter of perspective and different papers define in different ways who is an MM. In fact, some organisations do not refer to MMs as managers. As Fulop (1991) already pointed out nearly thirty years ago, there is now an anti-managerial bias and increased pressure to reduce levels and increase self-participation by fostering self-regulatory units and promoting self-management. The need for 'managing' has, however, not disappeared. Instead, the fewer employees who are responsible for management do not have the title of 'middle manager' but some other title such as executive, director, president, etc.

Also, some papers do not even define MMs and just assume that we all know who MMs are and, instead, focus on what MMs do and on what is their role.

1.4.1. The Importance of Middle Managers

The role of middle managers remains an important area of concern for researchers, particularly in relation to probably their most important role: their involvement in the formulation and implementation of strategy and how that affects organisation performance (Wooldridge and Floyd, 1990).

A comprehensive literature review on the role of MMs in the strategy process reviewed three relevant streams of research: middle management roles, involvement, and outcomes (Wooldridge, Schmid and Floyd, 2008). Their review concluded that there is extensive opportunity for further research on the role of MMs in strategy. Their high-priority issues for future research were: (1) "the need for holistic investigation of strategic roles" (p. 1211), (2) "the need for links between antecedents, processes, and outcomes" (p. 1215), including "the development of theory that incorporates both the conditions leading to and outcomes flowing from the enactment of strategic roles" (p. 1215), and (3) the need for multilevel theory, to "investigate multilevel relationships and require careful consideration of level of analysis" (p. 1216).

1. 4.2. Definitions of Middle Manager

There are many definitions of MM, with continuing disagreement (Wooldridge, Schmid and Floyd, 2018: 1217; Castañer and Yu, 2017). My analysis of the literature suggests that, using the criterion of maximum mutual exclusion, the best categorisation of these definitions and descriptions is in terms of (1) location, (2) characteristics, (3)

motivation, (4) views, and (5) activities. There are, of course, overlaps among individual papers on which of these elements of definition are addressed, so total mutual exclusion is not possible. In Chapter 2, I will refer in detail to the papers that define MMs.

From an organisation structure viewpoint, there are many MMs sandwiched between TMs and those below MMs. Not all such MMs implement strategy and very few MMs have strategy implementation as their sole job. The majority of MMs implement strategy that has been formulated primarily by TMs. I will be looking at *why* and *how* MMs use their autonomy to implement, change, delay or avoid an intended strategy.

My interviews suggest that being an MM is sometimes situational. This is so because a manager can have different roles. These include both the role of top manager in relation to some roles and the one of middle manager in relation to other roles. Similarly, a manager can have a title or position that could be considered top management, but they can play a middle manager role if implementing a strategy set primarily at a higher level. As will be further explained in Chapter 2, for the purpose of my study I define in relation to strategy a middle manager as someone who has primary responsibility for implementation of strategy that has been formulated primarily at a higher level Inherently, a middle manager who is implementing a strategy that was set higher up has limited formal autonomy to change that strategy while implementing it. It is this MM "wriggle room" or autonomy in strategy that I am studying.

1. 4. 3. Role of Middle Managers in Strategy

A large body of literature sets out MMs' involvement in strategy, although almost none define strategy and assume that the reader knows what that is. Floyd and Wooldridge (2000) in a review of strategy research found that this literature gradually moved from a top management only view to add a role for MMs and developed their own model for the role of middle management in strategy and made suggestions for further research. For example, Schilit (1987) examined how MMs engage in both formulating and implementing strategy. Thakur (1998) argued that organisations have to be selective in democratising their strategy-making process.

Almost all empirical studies on this topic avoid actually defining strategy and simply take as given whatever the organisation calls strategy. Treating as "strategy" what managers are told is strategy or interpret as strategic is well supported by prior research (Gioia and Chittipeddi, 1991; Balogun and Johnson, 2004; Fiss and Zajac, 2006; and Luscher and Lewis, 2008), and accords with an "emic" definition of strategy (re "emic" see Morris et al., 1999). For example, Rouleau and Balogun (2011) studied this issue directly, examining MMs' use of strategic sensemaking and discursive competence. Filstad (2014) examined the politics of sensemaking and sensegiving.

1.5. Autonomy

All managers have some degree of autonomy over their activities, although this varies by industry, company, function, job title, personal characteristics such as experience and political power, and the nature of the activity itself. This autonomy can even differ over time; and all else being the same, the most likely driver of such difference is performance pressure. Mallette and Hopkins (2013) has an important finding: the

amount of autonomy given to middle managers by top management depends on competitive intensity that exists in the industry in which the firm operates, with more autonomy if less intensity. Thus, businesses under pressure usually give less autonomy to managers.

Globocnik and Salomo (2014:508) refer to Bailyn (1985)'s concept of "formal job design by the degree of autonomy in strategy" as one of three organisational factors that support the emergence of "bootlegging behaviour". The latter is defined as initiatives by employees who work without formal legitimacy to take actions to develop their ideas and obtain buy-in by organisational decision-makers. Such employees (probably mostly MMs) sometimes apply unorthodox approaches and ignore formal structures. Hence, Globocnik and Salomo (2014) can be interpreted as parallel to the concept of emergent strategy (as in the Intel example above).

Autonomy also varies by national culture. For example, Brodbeck et al. (2002) found that compassion and autonomy for managers is lower in Germany than in the UK. And there are many studies of autonomy for MMs in Japan, such as Numagami et al. (2010). But the 20-year enthusiasm for the Japanese approach to management has now ended with the stagnation of Japanese companies and the Japanese economy (Numagami et al., 2010).

1.5.1. Middle Manager Autonomy in Strategy

Some prior literature addresses MM autonomy in literature, although only a few studies use the words "autonomy" or "autonomous". Among these, both Bourgeois and Brodwin (1984) and Ahearne, Lam and Kraus (2014) talk about "autonomous strategic behaviour" that needs to be balanced against TM control. Currie and Procter (2005) saw limiting

factors for an MM "autonomous strategic role". Mirabeau and Maguire (2014) discussed "autonomous strategic behaviour" by MMs that leads to emergent strategy.
Floyd and Wooldridge (1992) proposed a framework for MM actions that are "integrative" with or "divergent" from with the "organisation's concept of strategy"..

More articles discuss the concept of MM autonomy without using that word. Among these, Boyett and Currie (2004) studied lack of executive control over what MMs do; Meyer (2006) found "counterproductive actions" by MMs in strategy; Sillince and Mueller (2007) found MM "opportunism and linguistic influencing of strategic initiatives"; and both Guth and MacMillan (1986, p. 314) and Ates et al. (2020, p. 657) discussed MM "foot-dragging and sabotaging of strategy implementation"; Kuratko and Hornsby (2004) found that MMs do not follow the status quo – they walk a fine line between resourcefulness and rule-breaking; (Canales, 2013) reported that MMs shape their strategic role to increase their power base; and Hopkins, Mallette and Hopkins (2013) found that MMs can influence either strategic inertia or strategic renewal.

An interesting aspect of all these articles is that they discuss either positive or negative effects on the intended strategy of MM exercise of autonomy in strategy. As mentioned above, Floyd and Wooldridge (1992) refer to these effects as "integrative" and "divergent". I will use "convergent" and "divergent" as these are more precise counterparts.

1.5.2. Middle Manager Flexibility in Strategy

Some studies have focused on MM flexibility rather than autonomy in strategy.[1] The most

[1] MM flexibility is not the same as organisation strategic flexibility even though the former helps to enable the latter.

recent review paper on MM flexibility in strategic roles (Wang, Gibbons and Heavy, 2017) points out that, so far, the efforts to study MMs' strategic role flexibility have been limited. Their review sets out three key manifestations of MM's strategic role flexibility which are "(1) multifaceted role behaviour, (2) multidirectional patterns of influence, and (3) temporal agility". They define MM strategic flexibility as "the extent to which managers are sensitive to various strategic cues, are willing to pursue appropriate response required by the situation and enact strategic behaviour". Similarly, Shimizu and Hitt (2004) found that MM "strategic flexibility requires use of three capabilities: maintaining attention, completing an assessment, and taking action". Ahearne. Lam and Kraus (2014) found that MMs' flexibility in strategic involvement benefits performance but only up to a point

Other key studies on MM flexibility in implementing strategy include Rouleau (2004) on four "micro-practices" MMs use in the process to change strategy, Rouleau and Balogun (2011) on how MMs use strategic sensemaking and discursive competence, and Guo, Huy and Xian (2017) on how MMs are better than TMs at bridging between the political environment and market goals.

1.5.3. Comparing Autonomy and Flexibility in Strategy

I have found no article that articulates the difference between MM autonomy in strategy and MM flexibility in strategy. In general, however, the literature views MM flexibility in strategy as primarily MMs finding different ways to perform strategic tasks and achieve strategic goals as given by TMs. In other cases, the literature examines how MMs create initiatives that become emergent strategies. What the literature covers much less is the situation when MMs might explicitly and directly challenge and change assigned strategic

tasks and goals. That situation seems to fit more when MMs use autonomy to subvert rather than support the intended strategy, even though MMs can use autonomy to do either.

Articles looking at MM autonomy in strategy also sometimes cite studies that do not talk about autonomy or flexibility but instead describe the same phenomenon in different ways. One such example is Nonaka (1988), who talked about deductive top-down and inductive bottom-up driven strategy making models. Another example is Mintzberg (1978), who referred to intended and emergent strategy and is also often cited. An early example is Wernerfelt and Karnani (1987) who talked about 'adaptation'. I have, however, found no article that sets out how all the different ways of describing MM autonomy in strategy relate to each other and or how they differ.

Another key difference between MM autonomy and flexibility in strategy is that nearly all the studies on flexibility see it as convergent with intended strategy, while the studies on autonomy see a mixed effect, some convergent and some divergent. For example, Ahearne, Lam and Kraus (2014) found that MM autonomy is beneficial but only up to a certain threshold. After this threshold problems associated with a lack of strategic control outweigh the benefits. Wernerfelt and Karnani (1987) said that extreme adaptation can lead to a lack of focus on the overall strategy. Many articles see MM autonomy as a lack of executive (TM) control over what MMs do, e.g., Boyett and Currie (2004), implied negative consequences.

Overall, the literature can be interpreted as saying that MM autonomy in strategy is a tool that MMs can (if unsupervised) use in both positive and negative ways. Hence, I have developed a more nuanced view of MM autonomy in strategy. MM autonomy in strategy has different sources, some of which may not be so easy for top management to

know about and thus control. This view has also led to the possible main difference between MM flexibility in strategy and MM autonomy in strategy. MM flexibility in strategy means that MMs have the ability to modify or bend or are willing to change (all these perhaps an expectation often granted to MMs by TMs). In contrast, MM autonomy in strategy as means MM freedom from external control and influence, independence and self-government (maybe more a right sometimes granted to MMs by TMs, and often taken by MMs sometimes even without TMs' knowledge).

My distinction between MM flexibility and autonomy in strategy can also be generally deduced from the literature, which when talking about MM flexibility in strategy, generally concludes that it is something that is positive and can be controlled by top management (Sanchez and Mahoney, 2004). In contrast, articles addressing MM autonomy often say that MMs have done something on their own without TM control or even TM knowledge, e.g., Mintzberg (1978), and Ahearne, Lam and Kraus (2014) refer to "extreme flexibility" which I interpret to mean autonomy. It is important to note that MM use of autonomy in strategy can lead to both positive and negative outcomes.

Table 1.1. provides a summary of key articles on MM autonomy and flexibility in strategy, grouped by whether they explicitly use the terms autonomy/autonomous or flexibility, or just study these topics.

Table 1.1. Summary of Key Articles on MM Autonomy and Flexibility in Strategy

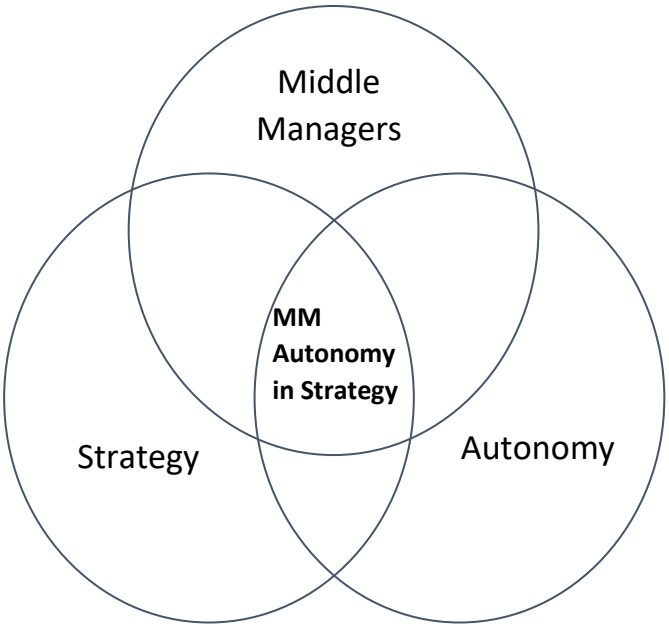
MENTIONS AUTONOMY OR AUTONOMOUS	MENTIONS FLEXIBILITY
limiting factors for MM "autonomous strategic role" (Currie and Procter, 2005) "autonomous strategic behaviour" that needs to be balanced against TM control (Bourgeois and Brodwin, 1984; Ahearne, Lam and Kraus, 2014). "autonomous strategic behaviour" by MMs, in particular, led to emergent strategy (Mirabeau and Maguire, 2014) MMs best initiate and execute strategic change when they have high autonomy (Heyden et al., 2017)	"the extent to which managers are sensitive to various strategic cues, are willing to pursue appropriate response required by the situation and enact strategic behaviour" (Wang, Gibbons and Heavey, 2017) MMs' flexibility in strategic involvement benefits performance but only up to a point (Ahearne. Lam and Kraus, 2014) "strategic flexibility requires use of three capabilities: maintaining attention, completing an assessment, and taking action" (Shimizu and Hitt, 2004)
CONCERNS AUTONOMY OR AUTONOMOUS	CONCERNS FLEXIBILITY
framework for MM actions that are "integrative" or "divergent" with the "organisation's concept of strategy" (Floyd and Wooldridge, 1992) lack of executive control over what MMs do (Boyett and Currie, 2004) "counterproductive actions" (Meyer, 2006) "opportunism and linguistic influencing of strategic initiatives" (Sillince and Mueller, 2007) "foot-dragging and sabotaging of strategy implementation" (Guth and MacMillan, 1986, p. 314; Ates et al., 2020, p. 657) MMs can influence either strategic inertia or strategic renewal (Hopkins, Mallette and Hopkins, 2013) MMs do not follow the status quo – they walk a fine line between resourcefulness and rule-breaking (Kuratko and Hornsby , 2004) MMs shape their strategic role to increase their power base (Canales, 2013)	"four micro-practices MMs use to interpret and sell strategic change: translating the orientation, over coding the strategy, disciplining the client, and justifying the change" (Rouleau, 2005, p. 1413) MMs use strategic sensemaking and discursive competence (Rouleau and Balogun, 2011) MMs better than TMs at bridging between the political environment and market goals (Guo, Huy and Xian, 2017)

In conclusion, I focussed my study on MM autonomy in strategy rather than MM flexibility in strategy because I wanted to focus more on situations where MMs have the freedom to take actions beyond the control of TMs, to support or divert intended strategy, while MM flexibility in strategy is more about taking actions with the support of TMs. Furthermore, the topic of MM autonomy in strategy has been less studied than the topic of MM flexibility in strategy. As stated earlier, I define MM autonomy in strategy as "MMs have and use autonomy in strategy when they have the freedom to take actions beyond the control of TMs to support or divert intended strategy".

1.6. Research Question

MM autonomy in strategy seems to be very important for strategy implementation but is an understudied phenomenon. The purpose of my thesis is to extend the concept of MM autonomy to the context of strategy. Figure 1.1. depicts the domain of my study. I state here my initial definition of MM autonomy in strategy as "MMs have and use autonomy in strategy when they have the freedom to take actions beyond the control of TMs to support or divert intended strategy". This definition will be refined in the course of this thesis. This definition also leads to my research question. We know that MMs use autonomy in strategy, but we do not know much about it. First, MMs do not always, or even often, exercise autonomy in strategy. Why do they do so sometimes? Second, for MMs to act with freedom from what TMs intend is not easy within the constraints of MM roles in large organisations that have formal processes. How do MMs actually get and use autonomy in strategy? Hence, my overall research question is *"why and how do MMs use autonomy in strategy?"*

Figure 1.1. Core Subject of My Research



1.7. Research Design

In terms of research design, my thesis combined the choice of a qualitative method of data collection, personal interviews with 40 individual MMs as informants, and systematic coding of interview transcripts to generate first-order concepts, second-order themes and outcome data structures. My research design is a qualitative method because my intention is to add to theory rather than to test it, and to provide a rich description of MM autonomy in strategy. I chose the individual MM as my unit of analysis in order to understand their individual accounts of their autonomy in strategy. I have interviewed 40 MMs from 31 different companies, 12 of which are based outside Western Europe or the USA. The 31 companies ranged in size from a minimum of $100 million in revenues to multi-billion multinationals (the majority). I have combined template

analysis (King, 2004 and 2012) and the Gioia methodology (Corley and Gioia, 2004; Gioia, Corley and Hamilton, 2012) to analyse my quantitative data.

By interviewing many MMs from a large number of companies, my method differs from nearly all previous studies. These have either interviewed informants within one or a small number of organisations or conducted surveys across a number of organisations. To my knowledge no study has been conducted by interviewing MMs across so many different organisations about their flexibility or autonomy in strategy. Among previous key studies, Sillince and Mueller (2007) conducted a longitudinal case study on one organisation; Ahearne, Lam and Kraus (2014) conducted interviews and surveys in one Fortune 500 company; Mirabeau and Maguire (2014) in one telecoms company (probably Canadian); and Linder and Bothello (2015) collected survey data from CFOs of 208 Danish companies.

1.8. Contribution

This study contributes to theory and literature in a number of ways. First, my study finds that there are three different sources of MM autonomy in strategy--inherent, situational and gained—or from *where* autonomy in strategy comes. Second, my study finds, in terms of *what* autonomy in strategy produces, that MMs use it to produce four possible implementation outcomes in regard to intended strategy: avoid, delay, change or deliver the strategy. Third, my study explains in a fine-grained way *why* MMs might use autonomy in strategy to seek to avoid or change the implementation of the intended strategy. Fourth, my study explains, again in detail, *how* MMs go about avoiding, delaying, changing, or delivering intended strategy. These explanations derive from four data structures made up of second-order themes and supporting first-order concepts. In

addition, this study provides rich detail in the form of quotes from the MM informants. I derive six propositions which also allow me to set out a number of areas for further research. These propositions concern strategy-specific conditions, the sources of MM autonomy in strategy, the self-interest of MMs, and the outcomes of MM autonomy in strategy.

My study examines MM autonomy in strategy using personal interviews with a large sample, 40, of informants from many different large multinational companies, 31 in total, from a wide variety of countries on 4 continents. Previous studies have either interviewed informants within one organisation or conducted surveys across organisations. Hence, my inductive study is important for developing reasonably generalisable propositions. My study examines multiple reasons *why* (motivations) MMs seek to avoid, change or deliver strategy; and multiple ways *how* (methods) in which they do that. Previous studies have examined fewer motivations and methods.

2. SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter reports on my systematic literature review (SLR) based on my initial research question: *how does middle manager autonomy in strategy affect organisation performance?* As will be explained at the end of this chapter this SLR helped me decide to revise the question for my thesis research and data collection by dropping the performance part of the question. Thus, the final question became: *why and how do middle managers use autonomy in strategy?* Hence, the SLR has both enabled and improved my thesis research. Lastly, as the SLR was a formal process completed at one point in time (23 July 2017) this chapter will discuss in relation to the SLR process only the final 130 papers that qualified in the SLR process. However, as I continued to find and review papers after the SLR submission date, I will include in this chapter's broader discussion of the literature other papers that I have found since the SLR, right up to mid-2020.

I reviewed the strategy literature only as it relates to MMs. As regards to the literature on autonomy, I reviewed articles on autonomy of middle managers in relation to strategy formulation and implementation and organisation performance. I have conducted this literature review to research the current knowledge in this area and to find areas to build on in my own research.

2. 1. Introduction

Using my initial research question of *how does middle manager autonomy in strategy affect organisation performance*? I conducted a systematic literature review (SLR) in June and July 2017. The purpose was to systematically review the literature on middle managers, autonomy, strategy, and performance as these relate to middle managers. A further purpose was to identify research opportunities in relation to this topic. In addition to papers found via the SLR search, I also refer in this chapter to a small number of papers

which were not found via the SLR but which I have decided to include despite this as they substantially inform my research.

2.2. The Systematic Literature Review Process

My Systematic Literature Review is mainly based on Tranfield, Denyer and Smart (2003). The strength of this approach is that it makes the literature review transparent and reproducible, theoretically sound and methodologically rigorous.

Before starting the systematic review, I carried out a number of exploratory searches and test searches. Then, I created a panel of experts as a required step of conducting an SLR. I also developed the literature search plan.

The first step of the literature search process was to identify search terms/keywords used in papers which could potentially help to answer the research question. These search terms/key words (and their synonyms) which I identified were: middle manager, line manager, autonomy, empowerment, decision making, influence, strategy and performance.

The second step of the literature search process was to combine these search terms and key words into search strings to form combinations of the search terms. I then tested the search strings to see whether using them to search would bring up articles that help to answer my research question.

The third step in the literature review process was to use the search strings to search for articles with all the terms and key words forming part of the search string. Search using four search terms combined into one search string brought no result. Search using only two of the four search term brought many results, many of which were not

helpful in answering my research question. Therefore, I ended up using search strings that had three search terms forming one search string.

The fourth step in the literature review process was to examine the results of the searches. This was important in order to reduce the number of articles to one that was manageable and to select the best and most relevant articles. When selecting articles it was important to determine which were of the right calibre and relevant and thus could help to answer my research question.

The fifth step was the extraction of relevant information from articles that were identified as being of the right calibre and relevant in helping me to answer my research question. The information which was extracted included, in addition to the author(s) names, year of publication, the title of the article and the journal in which it was published, and also definitions of the researched terms (middle manager, autonomy, strategy), methodology, theoretical lens, practical and theoretical contributions, whether the article was qualitative or quantitative and the country in which the author(s)'s institution was located.

The sixth stage was synthesis, and I analysed how the existing knowledge fits together to find gaps in knowledge that need to be filled. Once I identified the gaps I formulated my final thesis research question.

2.3. Literature Search

Literature Search Terms/Keywords

The search terms/key words are the words and their synonyms that are used to describe the people (middle managers) and the contexts/researched area (strategy), (autonomy) and (performance). The search terms/key words are also the words that I have used to

articulate my research question. I have then extensively tested the search terms/key words by carrying out test searches to determine whether indeed the search terms are the terms used in academic articles in the research area/stream that I am researching.

As a next step, I translated the search terms/key words and their synonyms from 'human language' (strategy, strategic, middle manager, middle-level manager, line manager, autonomy, decision making empowerment, influence and performance) into 'computer language'; in other words into search strings/search terms best understood by database search engines.

The keywords which were chosen to be used to search databases were:

- Strateg*
- Middle Manager Middle Level Manager Line Manager
- Autonomy Decision Making Empowerment Influence
- Performance

The key/search words/terms and their synonyms were then combined into search strings:

1) "Middle manage*" OR "Line manage*" OR "middle level manage*"
2) Autonom* OR "decision making" OR empower* OR influence
3) Strateg*
4) Performance n/3 (firm OR organi*)

Finally, the above key/search word search strings were combined together as set out below in order for the search databases to identify articles which cover and examine middle managers and autonomy, and strategy and performance. I have not combined all four key/search terms because when I tested the search string combining all four key/search terms no results were presented by the search engines.

So, the combined search strings which I used were:

- (“Middle Manage*” OR “Line Manage” OR “Middle Level Manage*”) AND (Autonom* OR Decentrali* OR Decision Making OR Empower* OR Influence)
- (“Middle Manage*” OR “Line Manage” OR “Middle Level Manage*”) AND Strateg*
- (“Middle Manage*” OR “Line Manage*” OR “Middle Level Manage*”) AND (Performance n/3 (Firm OR Organi*)

The above search strings were extensively tested and brought up research papers relevant to my research topic. When designing my search strings, my objective was to get to the right point where I was not making the search too narrow to miss things and or too broad to end up with a lot of articles of which only a small part were potentially relevant. Therefore, I decided to search a bit broader so that I could look at the relevance of the results and choose some but not others.

At this point, I would like to acknowledge the limitation of my search as there may be articles which are relevant but were not identified by the searches as carried out. I also had to make a judgment call as to which articles that were identified by the search best answer my research question. It is possible that some of the articles which I have decided not to include would be included by another researcher making a different judgment call about what is relevant and what is not relevant.

I searched the EBSCO and ABI databases. EBSCO was also used to check the availability of full-text sources. In EBSCO and ABI I searched only for peer-reviewed articles as those are seen as higher quality and more reliable. ABI and EBSCO are the two main business and management journal aggregators and between them they offer access to full text and abstracts of international business and management journals from all the top publishers. In many cases the coverage goes back to when the journal began.

ABI provides full-text access to approximately 3,900 leading international business journals contained within the ABI Inform Global, Trade and Industry, and Dateline databases. It covers a wide range of business and management subjects. It includes market, industry, and country reports. Its coverage is from 1971 to now. Additionally, ABI indexes Emerald journals.

EBSCO (Business Source Complete) provides full-text access to more than 3,700 scholarly business publications, including over 1,900 peer-reviewed journals. It covers all disciplines of business and management.

I extended the search by also including some of the research relevant articles which were referred to in the articles that the searches brought up or which I became aware of by attending conferences and workshops.

Duplicates were counted as results for each of the searches, but not counted subsequently when counting articles to be reviewed.

Then I needed to reduce the number of articles to a number that was manageable and to include articles that were most useful in answering my research question. I have done so by including only peer-reviewed articles in the English language and since 1965. Thus, I excluded results such as book chapters, reports, dissertations, conference papers and working papers as these are not peer-reviewed.

Applying a relevance criterion, I then excluded articles which were not directly relevant to my research question. In such excluded articles the search terms or key words were often covered very briefly and or just mentioned rather than being the focus of the article. Despite excluding non-English articles in the searches, some non-English articles were still produced by the search because they had the introduction of

metadata or only key words in English, while the actual body of the articles was in a language other than English. I excluded such articles.

Articles were also excluded if their focus was not middle or line managers in combination with at least one of the following: strategy, performance, or autonomy. In addition, some articles were excluded when the focus of the article was on "managing" or "management" without reference to middle managers. Further articles about performance other than of a business unit or organisation in the context of strategy were also excluded, e.g., such as about individual or team performance.

Then, applying a quality criterion, I excluded articles in journals that were not highly ranked. I kept only articles in peer-reviewed journals which achieved 3, 4 and 4*in the Academic Journal Guide (AJG) 2015 score of the journal rankings produced by The Chartered Association of Business Schools.[2] The AJG is based upon peer review, editorial and expert judgements following the evaluation of many hundreds of publications, and is informed by statistical information relating to citations. It is a guide to the range, subject matter and relative quality of journals in which business and management academics publish their research.

Finally, another reduction in the number of articles was the result of multiple counting, as articles which came up in multiple search results were all counted as a result initially but, of course, they appeared only once in the final SLR extraction table.

2.4. Panel of Experts

As a next step, I created a panel of experts which included:

[2] (https://charteredabs.org/academic-journal-guide-2015)

Mark Jenkins is Professor of Business Strategy and the lead for Leadership and Management at Cranfield. Professor Jenkins is my co-supervisor.

Andrey Pavlov is Associate Professor of Organisational Performance at Cranfield and specialises in the intersection of performance management and strategic change. Dr. Pavlov is my co-supervisor.

Clare Kelliher is Professor of Work and Organisation at Cranfield and specialises in people and change management.

2.5. Statistical Summaries

In this section, I provide various statistical summaries of the papers.

2.5.1. Total Number of Articles

To present all the articles which I have reviewed and the information extracted from each of the articles in a systematic way I have decided to use a table format. In the Extraction Table (Appendix B) the articles which were reviewed are set out in alphabetical order by author(s) surname. Information included for each article includes the title of the article, year of publication, journal in which published, the theoretical lens used, methodology, definitions used (if any) of middle managers, strategy, autonomy, performance; and the theoretical and practical contribution which the article makes. In addition, Table 2.1 summarises the search results by topic and source.

Figure 2.1. provides a flowchart of the SLR process to show how I reduced the initial 702 publications found in the searches to a final 130 articles to review. The total number of publications which were found via searches was 702 (and from those 185 were duplicates, resulting in 517 unique articles). From the 517 articles 130 have met

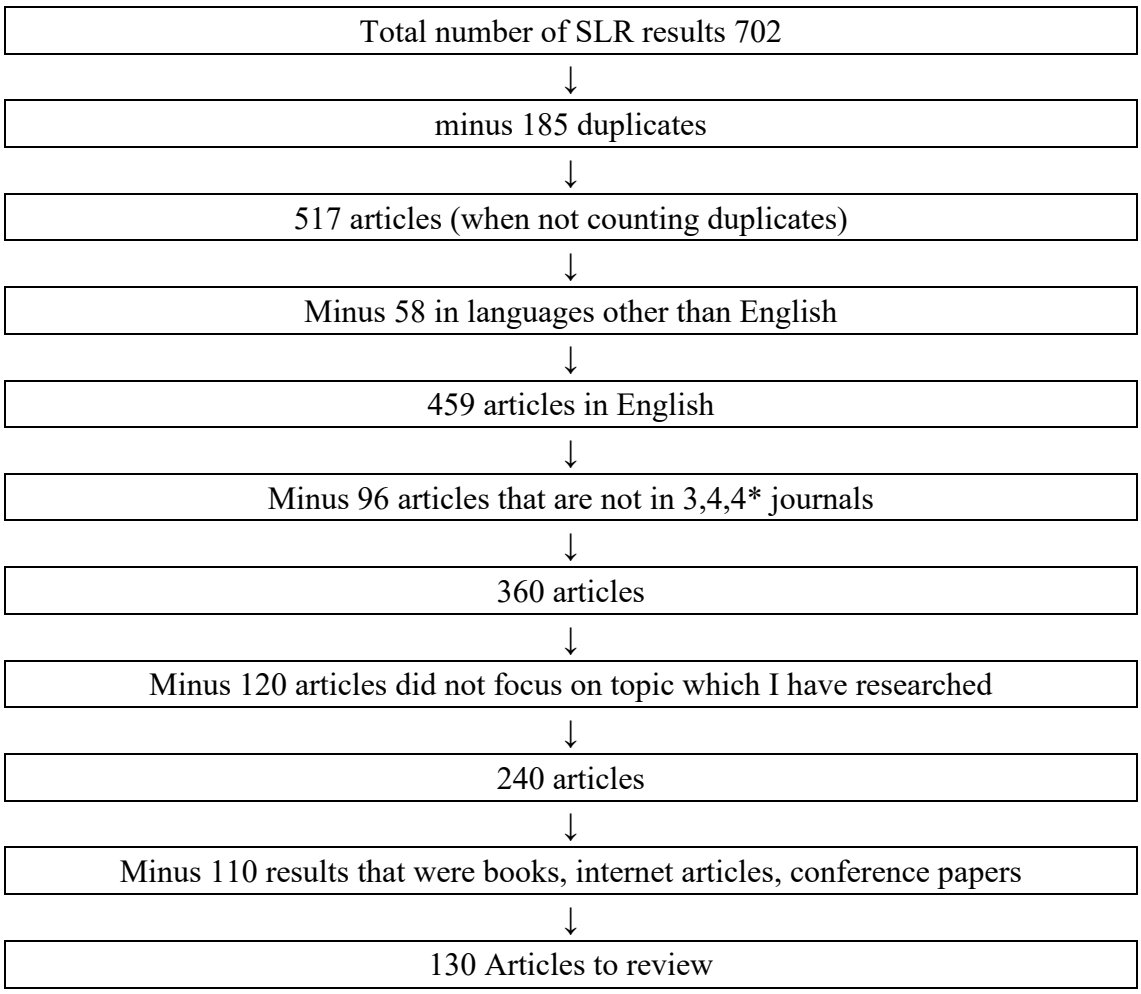
Table 2.1. ABI and EBSCO Databases Search Results

ABI	
MM and Autonomy	103
MM and Strategy	319
MM and Performance	81
EBSCO	
MM and Autonomy	49
MM and Strategy	112
MM and Performance	38

all the selection criteria and are all set out in more detail in the Extraction Table in Appendix B. From the 517 articles 58 were in languages other than English and for example had only introduction and key words in English. That has left me with 459 articles. Despite the fact that I searched for 3,4, or 4* peer-reviewed articles, 96 articles were published in journals that were not 3,4, or 4*. Thus I excluded. 120 articles were not focusing on the topic which I have researched. 114 of the results were books, internet articles, conference papers etc. so these were also not reviewed. Thus, the SLR has resulted in 130 articles to review. Appendix A lists the 130 papers by author, date and journal.

In this chapter, in addition to the 130 articles found via the SLR I also refer to a small number of other articles not found via the SLR, but included because they are seminal or because they otherwise influenced my thesis in an important way.

Figure 2.1. Flowchart of Systematic Literature Review Process

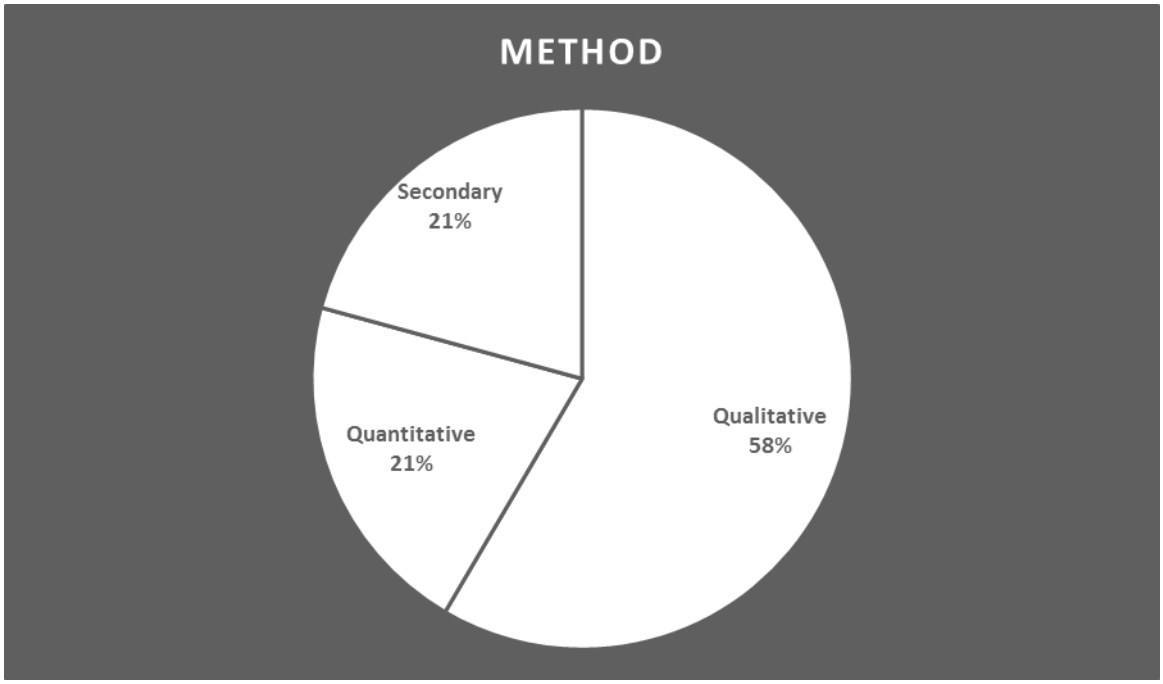


In addition, I have continued to update with my research with new articles in this research domain published since the SLR search period.

2.5.2. Research Method of Articles

As shown in Figure 2.2., there were many more qualitative than quantitative papers.

Figure 2.2. Type of Paper by Method



Qualitative = 76

Quantitative = 27

Secondary data or conceptual or review = 27

TOTAL = 130

2.5.3. Count of Journals Reviewed

Among the 130 papers reviewed there was a widespread of journals as shown in Table 2.2.

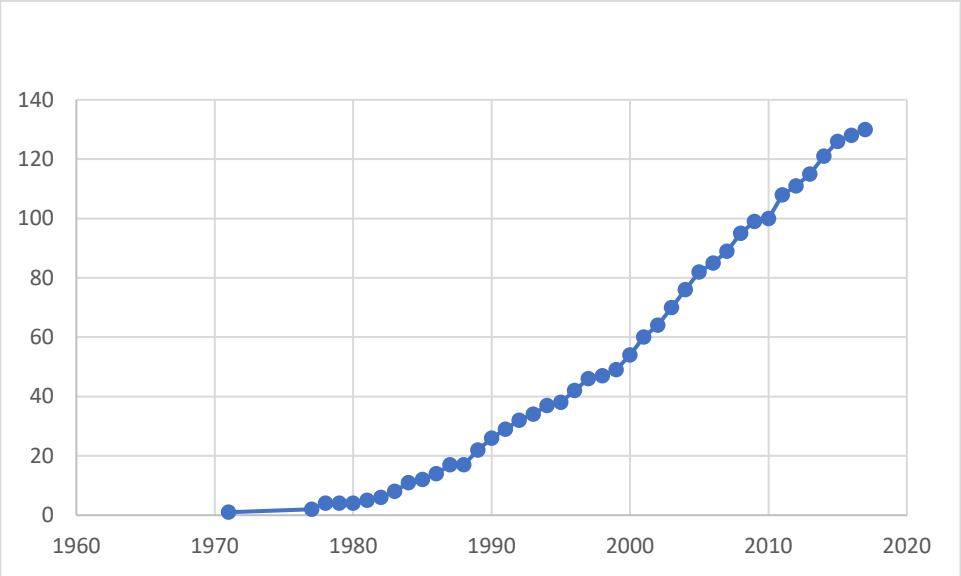
Table 2.2. Count of Journals Reviewed

JOURNAL	NUMBER
Strategic Management Journal	26
Journal of Management Studies	14
Long Range Planning	14
Academy of Management Journal	8
Academy of Management Review	6
Administrative Science Quarterly	6
Journal of Management	6
British Journal of Management	5
Human Resource Management	4
International Journal of Human Resource Management	4
Organisation Studies	4
Management Science	3
Organisation Science	3
Academy of Management Executive	2
Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice	2
Human Relations	2
Strategic Organisation	2
Academy of Management Perspective	1
Accounting, Organisations and Society	1
British Academy of Management	1
Business Strategy and the Environment	1
Columbia Journal of World Business	1
European Accountancy Journal	1
European Journal of Work and Organisation Psychology	1
IEEE Transactions Engineering Management	1
International Journal of Operations and Production Management	1
Journal of Business Ethics	1
Journal of Business Venturing	1
Journal of International Business Studies	1
Journal of Management Information Systems	1
Leadership Quarterly	1
MIS Quarterly	1
MIT Sloan Management Review	1
RAND Journal of Economics	1
Small Business Economics	1
Technological Forecasting and Social Change	1
TOTAL	130

2.5.4. Year of Articles

There was a very wide range in the publication dates with no particular year being dominant. Figure 2.3 shows how the number of articles increased steadily over the entire period from 1971 to 2017.

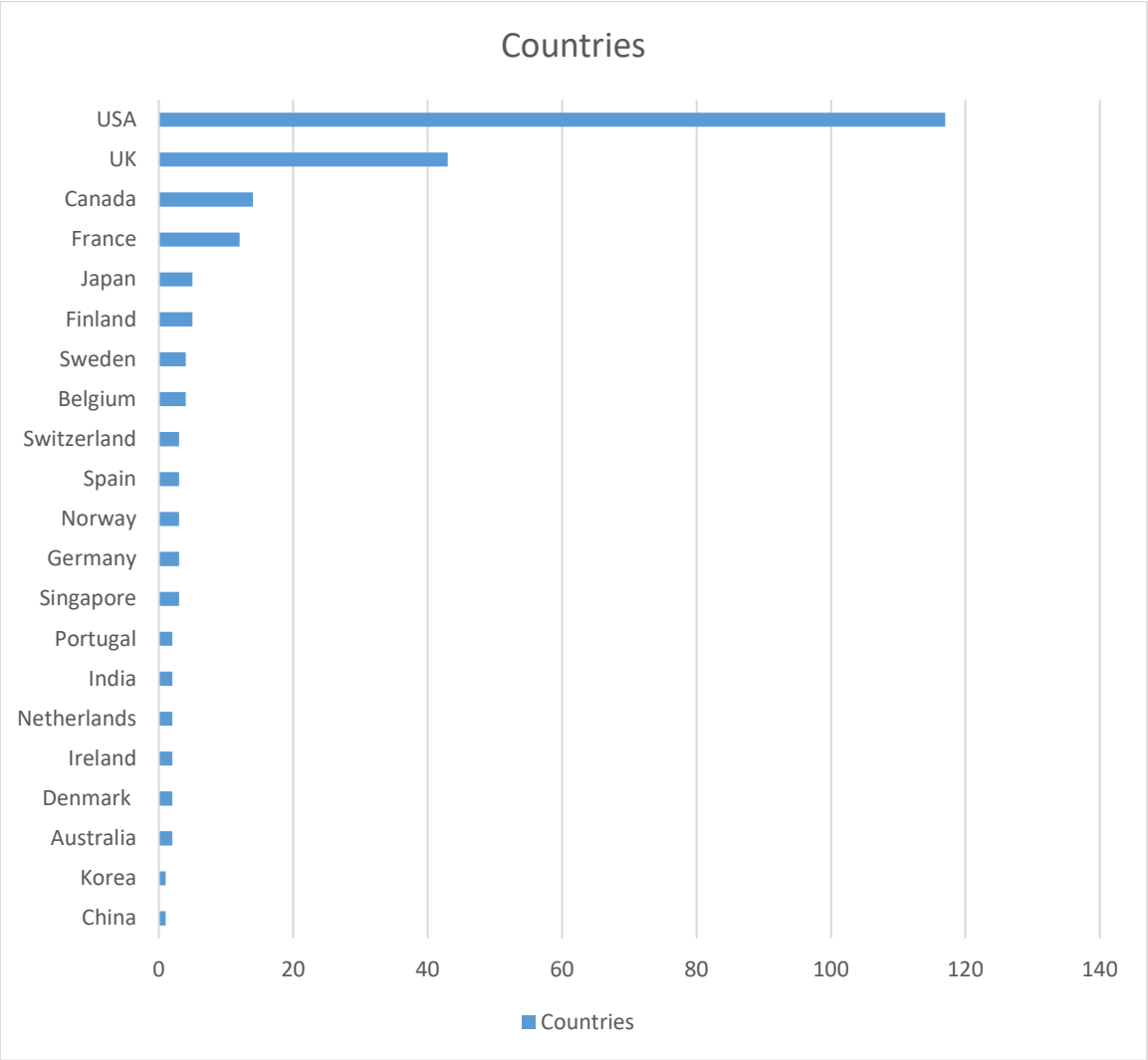
Figure 2.3. Cumulation of Articles Over Time



2.5.5. Country of Authors

For each author and co-author, I identified the country of the institution of affiliation (as the nationality of the author is not available). As Figure 2.4 shows the USA dominated, followed by the UK.

Figure 2.4. Countries of Authors by Institutional Affiliation



Total of 230 exceeds number of papers (130) because of multiple authorships.

2. 6. Synthesis of My Findings

Appendix A lists the 130 articles by author, year and journal. From each of the articles which I reviewed I extracted information as set out in Appendix B. In addition, I looked for information about what was the middle managers' strategic role, what is it that the

middle managers have done in their strategic role, what was the scope of their autonomy in their strategic role, and how the middle managers' strategic role affected organisation performance. I looked at definitions of middle managers, strategy, autonomy and organisation performance and saw how the authors defined (or not) their key concepts and dealt with definitions (or the lack thereof) and what the implications of this are. I identified areas which would benefit from further research. I also looked at how this area of research has changed over time. For example, more recently the research focus has shifted from looking solely at top management in the context of strategy formulation to also looking at the role of middle managers in strategy formulation (Ketoviki and Castañer, 2004).

From this synthesis I sought to systematically describe the state of knowledge on the topic of middle manager autonomy in relation to strategy and performance. I organised the evidence on this topic under the following main categories:

Middle managers

- definitions and descriptions of middle managers
- role of middle managers in strategy

Autonomy

- middle manager autonomy in general
- middle manager autonomy and strategy
- effects of middle manager autonomy on organisation performance

2. 6.1. Middle Managers

As mentioned, all 130 articles cover middle managers to some extent. Interestingly, this literature on middle managers is quite separate from that focusing on top managers or

"upper echelons" (e.g., Chatterjee and Hambrick, 2011). Almost no papers about top managers were found in the SLR, although Hambrick and Mason (1984) was one exception.

2.6.1.1. Definitions and Descriptions of Middle Managers

Many papers, especially earlier ones focused on definitions of middle managers. My analysis of the papers suggests that to make the definitions as different as possible from each other, the best categorisation of these definitions and descriptions is in terms of (1) location, (2) characteristics, (3) motivation, (4) views, and (5) activities. There are, of course, overlaps among individual papers on which of these elements of definition are addressed.

Location. Some papers define middle managers in terms of their location in the organisation. Shi, Markoczy and Dess (2009) used network theory to research how middle managers work within networks. Boxer and Wensley (1986) gave a typical definition of middle managers as "the manager in the middle" of the organisation. Currie and Procter (2005) looked at middle managers from the perspective of where in the organisation they are – in the middle, so being positioned as key strategic actors. But location is not a good identifying factor in organisations where the organisational structure is flat. Wooldridge, Schmid and Floyd (2008, p. 1192) defined middle managers not so much in terms of hierarchical position, but as those that have a role as mediators between strategy as set by top managers and day-to-day activities. There are also papers such as Regner (2003) which do not refer to middle managers at all, just by the position where they are in the company—"on the periphery".

Characteristics. Middle managers can be defined in terms of their characteristics. Beatty and Lee (1992) defined middle managers in terms of qualification and what they do, saying that middle managers are "qualified people to supervise and have responsibility for more complex and costly systems of capital equipment." They also said that "such managers are likely to shift from a strategy of direct control to one which encourages responsible autonomy", finding that participative management style is more effective. Fulop (1991) examined whether middle managers can also be entrepreneurial.

Motivation. Guth and Macmillan (1986) examined how self-interest affects middle managers' motivation to implement the strategy. Agency theory (e.g., Fama 1980, and Hart 1989) takes the perspective of analysing how to align middle managers' interests with the interests of the organisation. Westley (1990) examined how, if TMs exclude MMs from strategy discussions, MMs will become disaffected and cause problems for the strategy. Vila and Canales (2008) found that if MMs engaged during the planning stage of strategy they would be much more engaged in the executing stage. Canales (2013) showed that MMs shape their (strategic) role to increase their power base.

Views. Some define middle managers in terms of their views. King and Zeithaml (2001) and King, Fowler and Zeithaml (2001) reported on middle managers' views regarding the linkages between competencies and business performance. Wright (2009) discussed how middle managers view their roles.

Activities. Middle managers are often defined by the activities that they perform – often in relation to strategy implementation. Wright (2009) discussed how middle managers view their roles. Westley (1990) examined the role of middle management in strategic processes. Balogun and Johnson (2004) saw middle managers as agents of change. Boyett and Currie (2004) looked at middle managers in the context of an Irish

start-up in a Jamaican telecoms firm and defined them in terms of what they do – "moulding international strategy". Floyd and Wooldridge (1992) had MMs shaping and implementing strategy by "doing and thinking". They also specified four activity types (p. 154): "(1) implementing deliberate strategy (downward, integrative), (2) facilitating adaptability (downward, divergent), (3) synthesising information (upward, integrative) and (4) championing alternatives (upward, divergent)". More broadly, Huy (2002) saw middle managers in terms of their views managers as change agents engaged in innovation. Middle management includes managers who give and receive direction. Therefore, their impact is both downwards and upwards directed (Stoker, 2006).

Many studies look at the role of middle managers in strategic or other forms of planning. Noda and Bower (1996) studied the role of middle managers in the resource allocation process. Currie (1999) investigated how MMs worked as brokers of change in the strategy process.

Middle managers are often involved in selling issues within the company. Dutton and Ashford (1993) defined middle managers as "selling issues to top management" and that middle managers determine "how issues come to be issues (for management to focus on) in the first place". Rouleau (2005) identified "four micro-practices" (p. 1413) managers use to "interpret and sell" (p. 1414) strategic change: "translating the new orientation, over coding the strategy, disciplining the client, [and] justifying the change" (p. 1424). Ling, Floyd and Baldridge (2005) developed an "acculturated view of issue selling" (p. 637)—"managers from different cultures will differ" (p. 637) in their "perception" (p. 641) of the context and how they choose to "sell issues" (p. 644). Raes at al. (2011) examined the interaction between MMs and TMs and how these affect the quality of strategic decisions and strategy implementation.

Middle managers can act entrepreneurially. So, for example, Teece, Pisano and Shuen (1997) looked at how middle managers use and change strategic 'dynamic' capabilities. Kuratko and Hornsby (2004) saw middle managers as corporate entrepreneurs or visionaries who do not follow the status quo – they walk a fine line between resourcefulness and rule-breaking. Kuratko et al. (2005) looked at the link between middle managers' entrepreneurial behaviour and corporate entrepreneurship. But Marginson (2002) found that "managerial control systems" (p. 1019) can suppress midlevel "strategic initiative" (p. 1019): "beliefs systems" (p. 1021) created a general "climate" (p. 1024) for corporate "entrepreneurship" (p. 1027) rather than pushing for particular projects. Administrative systems resulted in entrepreneurial and support roles being apart from each other. However, middle managers can contribute to corporate entrepreneurship and the renewal of organisational capability (Floyd and Wooldridge, 1999).

Middle managers play a key role in managing knowledge. For example, Burgess and Currie (2013) studied the "knowledge brokering role of the hybrid middle-level manager" (p. S133) "in the case of healthcare" (p. S132) that "actively develops, shapes and implements organizational strategy" (p. S132-S133).

Middle managers are part of key organisational networks. Some studies in network theory directly address the role of middle managers (e.g., Shi et al., 2009). Kodama (2005) described how MMsn build and lead "informal" (p. 28) strategic "networks" (p. 27) for open innovation.

Middle managers can be leaders of the organisation. Beatty and Lee (1992) found "transformational leadership" (p. 960) by MMs to be "more effective in overcoming barriers" (p. 987) to organisational change than "transactional leadership" (p. 987).

2. 6.1.2. Difficulty of Definition of Middle Managers

The definition of what is a middle manager continues to be difficult. Wooldridge, Schmid and Floyd (2008, p. 1217) cited Hitt et al. (2007)'s need for studies to "articulate a clear and consistent definition of the focal units". Wooldridge, Schmid and Floyd (2008) then highlighted the challenge of how to "differentiate top, middle, and operating-level management theoretically so that observations of behaviour across these levels are comparable between studies?" (p. 1217) Wooldridge, Schmid and Floyd (2008) asked how researchers can "differentiate middle management in a way that is theoretically and empirically consistent across studies" (p. 1217). They also concluded that the "inconsistent definition of the focal unit has blurred issues of comparability across studies" (p. 1217).

2. 6.1.3. Proposed Definition of Middle Managers

To solve this definition problem, I propose that, in today's increasingly fluid and complex organisations, it may be more useful to take a relative view of location. Hence, a middle manager position is relative to the level of the organisation (e.g., for an entire company a middle manager can be a division or business unit head; for a business unit a middle manager can be a functional head or a product line head.) This means that the same executive can play both top manager and middle manager roles. Hence, my suggested solution to the definition issue is to focus on the role rather than the absolute position: *a middle manager is someone who carries out executive acts (in relation to strategy) where the strategy has been formulated primarily at a higher level.* This definition is close to that of Pappas and Wooldridge (2007). My definition is also the view implied by Gjerde and Alvesson (2020) who talked of university deans, normally considered to be TMs, as MMs in the "sandwiched middle" when they act as an *umbrella carrier* to protect

subordinates. The deans protect their subordinates from unnecessary and/or damaging initiatives and information from top management above, in order to allow for good professional work to take place below.

2. 6.2. Role of Middle Managers in Organisation Strategy

The SLR produced a number of papers on strategy, strategy process and strategic change that were not specific to middle managers or referred to them only in passing. These included classics such as Cauwenbergh and Cool (1982) who said that strategy is not concerned with ongoing or routine operations which are by nature not strategic (p. 247): "*Strategic management, therefore,* deals as well with the formulation aspects (policy/planning) as with the implementation aspects (organisation). *For this reason, strategic management is the most critical element of the management in organisations. It explains success and survival to a large extent.*" Other classic papers include Brown and Eisenhardt (1997) on the process of continuous strategy change, Whittington (2003) on strategy as practice, and Fiss and Zajac (2006) on the use of language in strategic change.

A large body of literature sets out middle managers' involvement in strategy, although almost none define strategy and assume that the reader knows what that is (e.g., Burgelman, 1983 and 1996; Westley, 1990; Wooldridge and Floyd, 1990; Floyd and Wooldridge, 1992, 1996, 1997; Dutton et al., 1997; Huy 2002). These studies also mostly state that strategy formulation is primarily the domain of top managers and strategy execution is primarily the domain of middle managers. This accepted distinction runs through 20+ years of research about middle managers in relation to strategy.

Floyd and Wooldridge (2000) in a review of strategy research found that this literature gradually moved from a top management only view to add a role for middle

managers and developed their model for the role of middle management in strategy and made suggestions for further research. For example, Schilit (1987) studied how MMs influence "formulating and implementing strategic decisions" (p. 271). Thakur (1998) argued that organisations have to be selective in democratising their strategy-making process. There remain, however, many open questions about this 'democratising of strategy' and thus this area presents a good opportunity for further research. Regnér (2003) did not explicitly address the role of the middle manager but studied how strategy creation at the periphery of the company was different from that at the centre, is more inductive than deductive. However, as it is primarily middle managers who work at the periphery, his study demonstrates a different type of strategy making for middle managers from top managers.

Mantere (2008) found that middle managers are increasingly expected to contribute strategically. Mantere (2005) examined middle managers as "strategic champions" and the tension in their recursive and adaptive practices. Mantere (2008) examined how "role expectations" (p. 294) can both "enable and constrain" (p. 294) MM strategic behaviour. Wooldridge, Schmid and Floyd (2008) extensively reviewed prior research on the role of MMs in the strategy process and found many different focuses as well as theoretical lenses (p. 1196-1202). Darkow (2015) studied how middle managers contribute to strategy development in terms of ideas, data, time, resources and analytical work. Floyd and Wooldridge (1992) built a "typology of four middle management strategic roles" (p. 153) --"championing.. synthesising…facilitating…implementing" (p. 154. Floyd and Wooldridge (1994) recognised middle management has a strategic role. Floyd and Lane (2000) saw MMs as more likely to have to deal with conflict between "strategic roles" (p. 159) than those in other positions.

2.6.3. Role of Middle Managers in Operational/Functional and Non-Strategic Activities

The various definitions of strategy nearly all imply that strategy is not concerned with ongoing or routine operations, which are, by nature not strategic. As cited earlier, this distinction was made in one of the very first seminal articles in the new field of strategic management (Cauwenbergh and Cool, 1982). Although some might argue that the advent of the internet, social networks, the sharing economy and digitisation have blurred the distinction between strategy and operations, these new technologies merely change how middle managers perform their roles. The distinction between strategic and non-strategic activities continues. For example, some emails are about strategic issues and others about operational ones. This distinction between strategic and non-strategic activities is carried over into research on the role of MMs. The most comprehensive review on the role of middle managers in relation to strategy (Wooldridge, Schmid and Floyd, 2008) investigates the middle manager role in strategy formulation and deliberately excludes middle manager studies that examine middle manager's more general roles (for a review of the latter see Dopson and Stewart, 1990).

Van Cauwenbergh and Cool's (1982) definition of strategy management (or management of strategy), like most others, stresses that strategy is about things that are at a particular point in time important to the organisation. What is important, and hence strategic, is different for different organisations and for the same organisation over time. Therefore, different activities are labelled as being strategic in different organisations and at different times. What matters for my research is not the specific nature of what is

considered strategic, but whether or not middle managers are involved in whatever is labelled as strategic or strategy.

The SLR found a few articles that can be categorised as being about middle managers in non-strategic or at least, functional/operational activities. Grover et al. (1993) reported on how information systems managers had a considerable role in resources allocation and specific knowledge in relation to information technology and thus good access to top management. Mangaliso (1995) studied the strategic usefulness of management information as perceived by middle managers. Fauré and Rouleau (2011) studied the competence of accountants and middle managers in budget making.

2.6. 4. Middle Manager Autonomy in General

The SLR found many articles about middle manager autonomy in general rather than in strategy in particular, or at least without featuring the words “strategy” or “strategic”. Backström (2013) defined autonomy as the breadth of the freedom within which certain individuals are able to act but most articles have not defined what autonomy is. At the individual level, Dutton et al. (1997) found that managers are not fully autonomous agents but rather conscious of aligning themselves with the social context. At the team level, there is an entire research field on self-managed teams, looking at how autonomy of such teams can increase both job efficiency and satisfaction (Celso and Pais, 2009). However, this topic is a long way from my research question.

At the macro level, there are organisation theory studies on how to structure hierarchies and decentralised decision-making to arrive at the right extent of autonomy (Mihm et al., 2007). Many studies look at how organisation design and structure can optimise autonomy. For example, Crilly and Sloan (2014) studied how organisational

architecture affects corporate attention to stakeholders, including acts by middle managers.

2.6.5. Middle Manager Autonomy in Change

Some articles in the SLR focused on middle manager autonomy in relation to change in general, rather than strategy in particular. Huy (2002) found that middle managers "balance" emotions during "radical change" (p. 31), "helping groups to adapt to committing passionately to individual change projects and, simultaneously, attending to change recipients' needs for continuity". Balogun (2003) argued that instead of blaming middle managers, they should be given more autonomy to harness their potential as change intermediaries.

Balogun and Johnson (2004) found that middle managers rely on informal "negotiations" (p. 524) with "peers" (p. 524) to "interpret" (p. 523) and implement change because of senior executives being too distant. Beck and Plowman (2009) studied the role of middle managers in a NASA[3] incident in animating and guiding organisational interpretation in the process of change and rare events. Luscher and Lewis (2008) found middle managers to be critical change agents who are lynchpins of organisational change, acting as intermediaries. But Ogbonna and Wilkinson (2003) found that middle managers are at best ambiguous about culture change.

2.6.6. Middle Manager Autonomy in Strategy Role

None of the articles found in the SLR used the term "autonomy in strategy" but nearly all used the terms "autonomy" or "flexibility", sometimes interchangeably in the same

[3] National Aeronautics and Space Administration, USA.

article. As I plan to use the empirical part of my study to investigate the existence of autonomy in strategy, I will not refer further to that term "autonomy in strategy" in this chapter on my literature review. Instead, I will refer primarily to "autonomy" or occasionally to "flexibility" if an article used that term explicitly.

Supporting my earlier distinction between convergent and divergent middle managers actions, the articles found in the SLR that are more directly about MM autonomy or flexibility in strategy do tend to address whether such autonomy can be convergent with the intended strategy or can be divergent, although the articles did not neatly use the term "flexibility" for convergence or "autonomy" for divergence. However, these concepts are strongly there, regardless of the terms. For example, Balogun (2006) showed how middle managers steered "a course between intended strategies and unanticipated outcomes" (p. 29). Hopkins, Mallette and Hopkins (2013) found that middle managers can influence either strategic inertia or strategic renewal. Sillince and Mueller (2007) found that a "middle management team implementing a strategic initiative" (p. 155) "reframed" (p. 158) "responsibilities" (p. 158) and "expectations" (p. 163) based on the team's "changing goals" (p. 172). This divergence was enabled by unclear top management intent that favoured midlevel opportunism. Much of the economics literature on agency theory focuses on possible divergent ("opportunistic") behaviour of all types, not just strategic, by managers at all levels (Shimizu, 2012).

2.6.6.1. Convergent Use of Autonomy in Strategy

Floyd and Wooldridge (1992) distinguished between "integrative" (i.e., convergent) and "divergent" MM activities in relation to intended strategy. Many studies examined the convergent use of autonomy in strategy by MMs. Gupta (1987) studied the role of MMs

heading strategic business units and their autonomy in the context of multi-business firms. Fulop (1991) looked at how MMs use their autonomy to mobilise strategic resources by using political skills to change and redirect organisational energies. Floyd and Wooldridge (1996 and 1999) conceptualised strategy development as a multi-layered process with MMs as central players who build and integrate "knowledge domains, social networks, and resources". Boyett and Currie (2004) found that in an international venture middle managers were the only ones in a position to judge whether strategic issues were considered properly to reconcile "strategic intent" (p. 51) and local ("host country", p. 51) context. Chadwick, Super and Kwon (2015) studied how middle managers in Korean firms consciously contributed to the development of strategic resources. Currie and Procter (2005), in an interpretative study of three UK hospitals, found "expectations from key stakeholders" (p. 1346) to be primary "antecedents to middle management's strategic contribution" (p. 1346). Inconsistent "cues from stakeholders" (p. 1352) caused MMs to be reluctant to perform their needed role, resulting in "role conflict and role ambiguity" (p. 1351), which implies reducing MMs' autonomy.

2.6.6.2. Divergent Use of Autonomy in Strategy

Middle managers can engage in behaviour that results in a divergence from the strategy intended by top managers (Floyd and Wooldridge, 1992; Pappas and Wooldridge, 2007). Such divergence is the result of MMs championing and facilitating initiatives that can affect adaptive strategy implementation, planning, and formation of strategies, by championing alternative strategies and by emergent behaviour in the strategy process (Mintzberg and Waters, 1985) andin the implementation of strategy (Burgelman, 1983; Floyd and Wooldridge, 1992). Currie and Procter (2005) found that MMs' strategic

contribution can be exercised both upward and downward and can be either divergent or integrative. Guth and Macmillan (1986) explained "interventions" (p. 213) of MMs against TM decisions as motivated by conflicts of interest. Laine and Vaara (2006) found that MMs resisted TM attempts to control strategy by starting a separate strategy discussion to increase their own role.

Middle managers' divergent behaviour is strategically important because it "challenges the 'dominant logic' and facilitates the entering of new markets and creation of new capabilities" (Pappas and Wooldridge, 2007, p. 324) as well as appealing to and attracting new customers. Mirabeau and Maguire (2014, p. 1224) provide in their case study a fine-grain example of how middle managers exercise autonomy in strategy. They found that "emergent strategy originates as autonomous strategic behaviour--projects that, despite dissonance with the prevailing concept of strategy, are nonetheless launched as a result of local problem-solving. Autonomous projects become enduring patterns of action (i.e., the emergent portion of realised strategy), through mobilising wider support…". This conversion of project "activity" into a "strategy" seems conceptually clear when it involves a new project. What is less clear is when and how do middle managers sufficiently adapt or change the activities that support an intended strategy (especially those formalised in a document) to the extent that the new, adapted strategy counts as an unauthorised, emergent strategy?

The Intel example highlights this puzzle. The MMs at Intel were highly unlikely to think that they were changing the strategy when they were diverting production resources away from the memory business and into microprocessors. However, at some stage, this unplanned move by MMs to microprocessors became a partially realised strategy that was completed when TMs made a conscious strategic choice. In the Intel

case, the emergent strategy started by MMs worked well. In VW's case, as discussed above, the emergent strategy, started by MMs using their autonomy, led to disaster.

In conclusion, it can be very hard for top managers to recognise *a priori* which autonomous MM actions may change the strategy (for good or bad). But perhaps there are patterns of MM behaviour, requests or speech that can be early warning signals. Identifying such signals could be a major contribution of my research.

2.6.7. Effects of Middle Manager Autonomy in Strategy on Organisation Performance

There is a large stream of research on the performance of middle managers as individuals. For example, Dysvik and Kuvaas (2011) studied how intrinsic motivations moderated the relationship between what MMs saw as their job autonomy and their job performance. But my interest is in performance at the organisational level—product line, department, business unit, division, company, or other organisational entities. Of course, the individual performance of middle managers is important, but it is their contribution to the performance of the larger units of which they are part, especially in the context of strategy, that is more problematic and therefore more interesting to study. Linder and Bothello (2015) concluded that middle managers' autonomous strategic actions are motivated by wanting to improve performance. Overall, there is only limited research on the link between middle managers and organisation performance.

2.6.7.1. Positive Effects

Wooldridge and Floyd (1989) concluded that consensus among middle managers about strategy had a more positive relationship with performance when dealing with

incremental strategic rather than major change. Wooldridge and Floyd (1990) found that MM engagement in strategy formulation, but not MM consensus, was "associated with improved organisational performance" (p. 231). Floyd and Wooldridge (1997) investigated "the relationship between middle management upward influence on strategy and performance at the organizational level of analysis" (p. 471). Their findings suggest that positive effects of middle manager strategic influence on organisational performance depend on two contingencies: "(1) whether the overall pattern of influence is conducive to skills in the network centrality of managers; and (2) whether the pattern of downward influence is consistent with an appropriate balance between the organisation's need for control and flexibility" (p. 465).

Andersen (2004) found that decentralised decision making and planning was associated with higher performance in dynamic environments, in a process that embraced a dual approach of planned and emergent strategy. Mair (2005) reported on how middle managers enact strategy and affect performance and concluded that middle managers' proactive enactment of planned strategies was linked to profitability. King and Zeithaml (2001) and King, Fowler and Zeithaml (2001) reported on middle managers' views regarding the linkages between competencies and business performance.

Middle managers' upward influence behaviour in the context of strategy can lead to higher performance. There are numerous reasons for this. Top managers who are normally responsible for strategy formulation do not know all information (Gupta, 1987; Mintzberg and Waters, 1985). Thus, middle managers who exercise their autonomy and engage in upward influence behaviour in the context of strategy expose senior managers to different perspectives and provide insightful input, context, region, business-specific or alternative solutions into strategy formulation. Guo, Huy and Xiao (2017) found that

middle managers in China's state-owned enterprises were better than both top managers and front-line employees at managing the political environment to achieve market goals because they were better at bridging the interface between competing market and political imperatives.

There are a number of reasons why middle manager autonomy in strategy can improve organisation performance. First, top managers' planned strategies cannot envision all eventualities. Therefore, middle managers having the autonomy to facilitate strategic adaptability enables them to harness emerging market trends not foreseen in the strategic planning processes, e.g., Mintzberg and Waters (1985). Second, middle managers who have autonomy to engage in exploratory or emerging strategies develop more commitment to the final strategy (Ashforth and Mael, 1989), and this commitment, in turn, results in a stronger commitment to the course of actions (Mitchell, 1973). Top management support and other organisational variations including age, size, history, company culture, industry, and nationality can affect middle managers' strategic actions and also affect middle manager's confidence to perform better (Brodbeck, Frese and Javidian, 2002; Iida and Morris, 2008; and Wooldridge, Schmid and Floyd, 2008).

2.6.7.2. Negative Effects

Middle manager autonomy in strategy can also have negative consequences. Research suggests that a wide scope of middle manager autonomy allowing extreme adaptation may result in unfocused strategy (Wernerfelt and Karnani, 1987). A high degree of middle manager autonomy in the form of flexibility to change means that the identity of companies cannot be maintained and continuity can be destroyed, which can lead to overreactions (Volberda, 1996). Shimizu (2012) reminded us that globalisation and

technological developments heighten competitive intensity which means organisations need to adapt to new environments, revitalise and develop new businesses, and find new growth opportunities (p. 194). It is in this context that the idea to provide middle managers with more autonomy in strategy to encourage corporate entrepreneurship has started to attract attention. Shimizu focused on the risk of middle manager's autonomy in the context of corporate entrepreneurship. Shimizu was concerned that giving middle managers autonomy means that there are 'information asymmetries' and as new ideas are essentially unproven, middle managers' autonomous behaviour can exacerbate agency problems such as opportunistic behaviour. Also, the newness of the ideas makes it very difficult to evaluate them.

2.6.7.3. Contingent Effects

Ahearne, Lam and Kraus (2014) is a rare study that found a non-linear, inverse U-shape relationship between middle manager's strategic flexibility and firm performance. Looking at middle managers through the lenses of social network and paradox theories, this study concluded that the relationship between the middle manager role in strategy and firm performance is influenced by and contingent on both well-aligned structure and middle managers' social capital via their informal networks. Ahearne, Lam and Kraus (2014) concluded that middle managers' flexibility in strategic involvement benefits performance but only up to a point, and after that point, the disadvantages associated with lack of strategic direction outweigh the benefits.

2.7. Learning from the SLR

The SLR has yielded several key learnings:

1. There are only a few quality papers in which middle managers and their autonomy in strategy are treated as either central or important. There are, of course, hundreds of papers, some of which were found in the SLR, where middle managers and their autonomy or flexibility in strategy are mentioned. But these other papers focus on other issues such as the strategy process rather than on middle managers themselves. The fact that there are only a few quality papers is encouraging as it means there are sufficient papers as a base for my research but not so many as to limit the possibility of making a real contribution.
2. Only 18 articles directly address MM autonomy in strategy and another 13 indirectly or only partially (see Table 2.3).
3. There are many definitions of middle managers, and some papers do not even define what they are but study them anyway. This provides an opportunity for my original definition, as given earlier: *a middle manager is someone who carries out executive acts (in relation to strategy) where the strategy has been formulated primarily at a higher level.*
4. The role of middle managers in strategy varies greatly: from participating in the initial formulation to taking a primary role in implementation to creating emergent or divergent strategies. This suggests an opportunity to study further *why* and *how* middle managers can and should take these different roles.
5. Very few papers define strategy and essentially take as given whatever the organisation calls strategy. Following that tradition allows me to take an *emic* view to study the autonomy of middle managers in whatever they themselves and their top managers call "strategy".

Table 2.3. Articles that Address Middle Manager Autonomy in Strategy

DIRECT	INDIRECT OR PARTIAL
1 Ahearne, Lam and Kraus (2014)	4 Balogun (2003)
17 Brodbeck, Frese and Javidan(2002)	15 Boxer and Wensley (1986)
20 Burgelman (1983)	18 Brown and Eisenhardt (1997)
27 Colling and Ferner (1992)	19 Burgelman (1994)
28 Crilly and Sloan (2014)	23 Burgess and Currie (2013)
38 Dysvik and Kuvaas (2011)	29 Currie (1999)
41 Fenton and O'Creevy (2001)	31 Darkow (2015)
47 Fulop (1991)	35 Dutton and Ashford (1993)
52 Gupta (1987)	57 Hornsby, Kuratko and Zaha (2002)
53 Guth and Macmillan (1986)	66 Krause (2004)
69 Laine and Vaara (2007)	68 Kuratko et al. (2005)
72 Linder and Bothello (2015)	102 Rossel (1971)
86 Mirabeau and Maguire (2014)	130 Wright (2000)
91 Numagami, Karube and Kato (2010)	
105 Rouleau and Balogun (2011)	
106 Schilit (1987)	
108 Shi, Markoczy and Dess (2009)	
106 Shimizu (2012)	

Note: Numbers refer to the number in Table 2.1 that lists all 130 articles found in the SLR.

In relation to autonomy, middle managers have some scope for changing strategy as they implement it. Such changes can be convergent with or divergent from the intentions of top managers.

6. In relation to performance, the literature finds a mixture of positive, negative and contingent effects of middle manager autonomy in strategy on organisation performance. Also, while performance can be an outcome of autonomy, it can also be a determinant. The latter is a rather intriguing finding.

2.8. Key Gaps in the Literature

The literature on MMs has several gaps in relation to my topic of MM autonomy in strategy, particularly the *why* and *how* of MMs use of autonomy to adapt the intended strategy. While prior studies have found that MMs do adapt strategy as they implement it, none have provided detailed motivations and mechanisms or, in other words, *why* and *how* MMs do it.

In regards to *why* middle managers adapt strategy, various studies such as Ahearne, Lam and Kraus (2014) found that middle managers' adaptive strategy implementation behaviour was due to their lack of "buy-in" of the original strategy. Various studies found that the lack of buy-in relates to insufficient involvement in the strategy formulation stage. But no studies have detailed other motivations or why the lack of buy-in occurs at the strategy implementation stage.

In regards to *how* middle managers can adapt intended strategy, prior studies reported only a few mechanisms or processes. Ahearne, Lam and Kraus (2014) found that middle managers' adaptive strategy implementation worked through upward and downward influence via their social networks. Mirabeau and Maguire (2014) studied only how MMs promoted emergent strategy through "practices of strategy articulation" as "repetitively activated, routinised ways of producing, distributing, and consuming texts containing representations of what the firm has been, is, and will be doing". There is scope to look for more ways how MMs can adapt the intended strategy.

In conclusion, only a very few studies show why and how middle managers use autonomy in strategy. The few that do so provide only an incomplete list of the whys and hows. So, there seems to be scope to further study how and *why* MMs gain and use

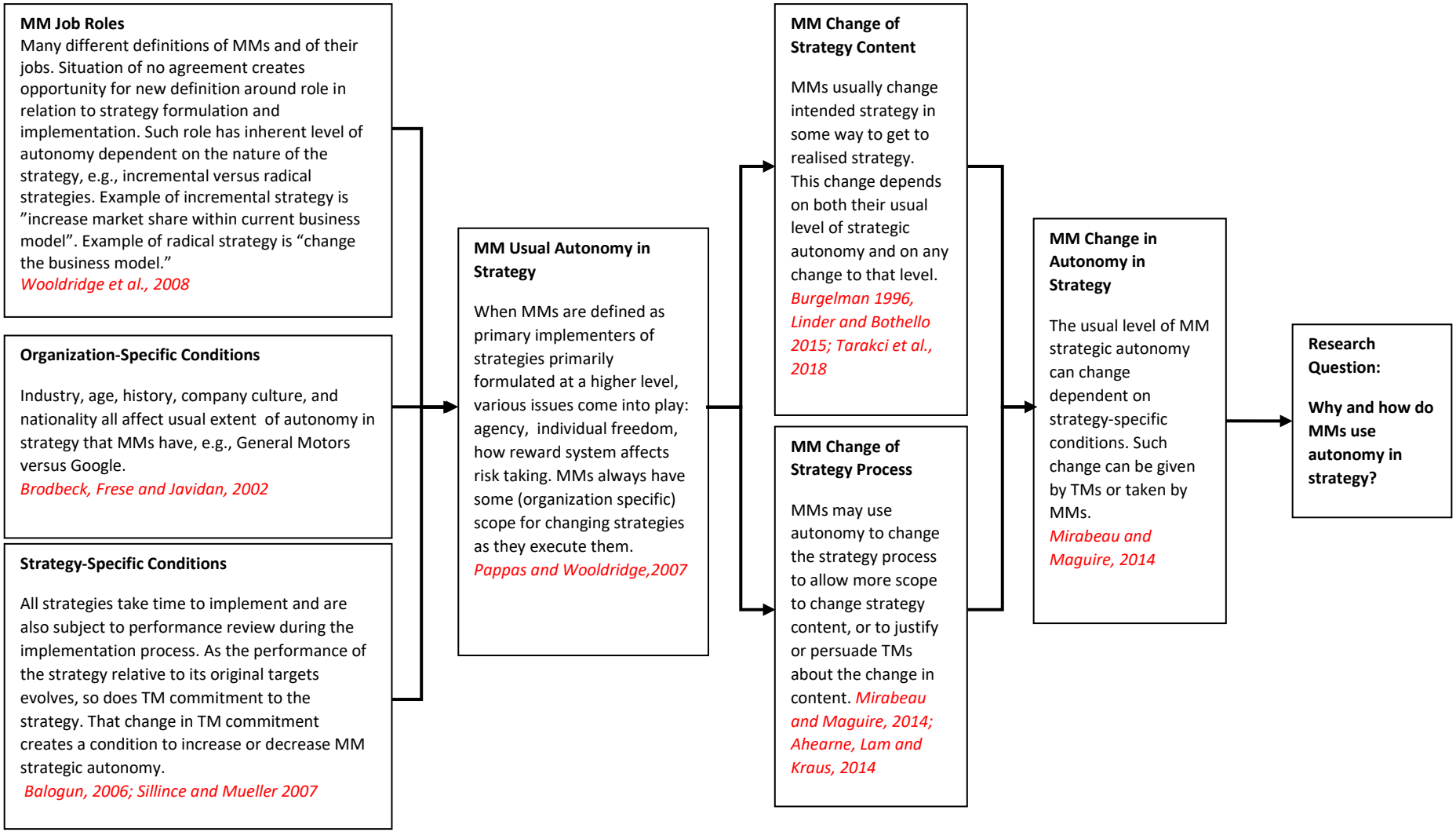
autonomy in strategy. In addition, more fine-grained knowledge about MM autonomy in strategy would enrich our understanding of this area.

2.9. Revised Research Question

I have summarized the key findings from the SLR into a flowchart of constructs and key supporting literature (Figure 2.5.) I decided to not include the performance aspect of my research question for a number of reasons. First, the previous studies that included performance effects of MM autonomy in strategy were few and inconclusive. Second, whenever I presented my research design at conferences and workshops, I received consistent advice that there are too many variables beyond the control of the middle manager that affect organisation performance. The original research question including performance was too wide with too many research gaps and thus needed to be narrowed down. Instead, my research question became: *why and how do middle managers use autonomy in strategy?*

The revised research question also allows me to address the research gaps identified in section 2. 8 above. The next chapter will discuss my research methodology for the research question.

Figure 2.5. Constructs Getting to the Research Question



3. METHODOLOGY

In this chapter I describe the 12 key stages of my research methodology and set out my decision making, including:

1. choice of interpretivism as my philosophical position,
2. selection of MMs as the units of analysis,
3. choice of qualitative method,
4. selection of usually only a single informant per organisation (except when an organisation was very large, in which case more than one informant from an organisation could participate),
5. development of the interview guide,
6. choice of analytical method,
7. choice of types of organisations from which to recruit informants,
8. selection method for research participants,
9. recruitment of informants,
10. data collection,
11. coding of interview transcripts,
12. development of data structures.

I conclude with sections on the trustworthiness and ethics of my study.

3.1. Choice of Interpretivism as My Philosophical Position

All research studies have to select an epistemology. As explained in Symon and Cassell (2012) the major choices are positivism, neo-positivism, neo-empiricism (interpretivism), critical theory and (affirmative) post-modernism. Although Symon and Cassell (2012) equate neo-empiricism and interpretivism, Duberley, Johnson and

Cassell (2012) distinguish between these two. They see interpretivism as "understanding the actual meanings and interpretations actors subjectively ascribe to phenomena in order to describe and explain their behaviour through investigating how they experience, sustain, articulate and share with others these socially constructed everyday realities". As I seek to study how MMs perceive their motivations and actions in strategy, I will adopt an epistemology of interpretivism. That epistemology fits with my emic view of accepting whatever the MM informants might say about their perceptions of their roles in strategy.

None of the articles reviewed in Chapter 2 about MMs explicitly discussed epistemology and most took an interpretivist one by default, accepting what informants told them. Among key previous studies, Sillince and Mueller (2007), Ahearne, Lam and Kraus (2014) and Mirabeau and Maguire (2014) relied primarily on interviews; and Linder and Bothello (2015) collected survey data from CFOs.

By adopting an epistemology of interpretivism, I need to be concerned with five assessment criteria (Symon and Cassell, 2012): credibility, dependability, confirmability, ecological validity, and transferability/logical inference.

In a later section of this chapter, after detailing my method, I will discuss how this method meets these assessment criteria. Symon and Cassell (2012) also discuss the continuing development of different assessment criteria for qualitative research. However, they also say that what is important is that the researcher should be explicit about the basis on which their work should be judged (p. 221). Hence, I will explicitly assess my research on the five interpretivist criteria above.

3.2. Selection of MMs as the Units of Observation

My research question on why and how MMs use autonomy in strategy requires that the unit of analysis by the individual MM. The research question also means that MMs themselves are the best informants to provide an account of why and how they gain and use autonomy in strategy. While it could also have been helpful to get the views of each MM's TM, I found that potential MM respondents were much more willing to speak openly when I told them that I would not interview TMs in their organisation. Thus, I was faced with the trade-off of MMs openly answering questions and not having TMs' perspective or MMs being less open and having TMs' perspective. As my study is MM centred, I have chosen to rely on the answers of MMs only.

3.3. Choice of Qualitative Method

I have decided to use qualitative methods in order to generate rich descriptions of middle management practices, processes, interventions and actions. Because my focus is on middle manager autonomy (in relation to strategy), I need to understand it from the perspective of individual middle managers. To do so requires collecting rich data from middle managers and then analysing that data in a systematic way in order to develop a deeper understanding of middle manager autonomy in strategy.

The field of qualitative management research has now developed some systematic approaches to collecting and analysing data: the case-based method of Kathleen Eisenhardt (Eisenhardt, 1989; Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007; and Eisenhardt, Graebner and Sonenshein, 2016); the grounded theory method of Dennis Gioia, now commonly referred to as the "Gioia methodology" (Corley and Gioia, 2004; Gioia and Chittipeldi, 1991; Gioia, Corley and Hamilton, 2012); and the process methods of Ann

Langley (Langley, 1999; Langley et al., 2013; Gehman et al., 2017). These methods usually collect data from multiple informants within one or just a few organisations.

My choice of a qualitative method is consistent with what I found in the systematic literature review, which found 76 qualitative versus 27 quantitative studies among the 103 empirical articles.

To collect the qualitative data, I chose personal interviews as the best way to obtain MM's perceptions of why and they use autonomy in strategy. This approach was also the most common in the studies, found in the SLR, that collected primary data: 46 studies used interviews, 27 surveys and questionnaires, 8 observations, 2 conversations, and 22 documents/accounts/emails/archival data.

3.4. Choice of Informants

The next methodology choice was whether to collect data from multiple individual MMs in a single organisation or from single MMs in multiple organisations. In contrast to the approach of the previous studies cited above in section 3.3., I decided to collect data in most cases from a single informant in an organisation. In a few cases I had more than one informant from the same organisation, but each informant was treated as an independent observation about the individual and not as combined observations about the organisation. The reason for this choice was the consideration that collecting data from multiple organisations should provide a wider range of processes and practices, that might be experienced by MMs (the unit of analysis), than data from one or just a few organisations. I have, however, narrowed the types of organisations to ensure that informants face similar contexts and pressures. For example, an MM in a start-up is likely to have a very different sort of autonomy in strategy than one in a large, mature

company. Therefore, I have collected data from only large, multinational, for-profit, operating companies (further discussed below). One of the main reasons for this choice is that such companies are large enough to have defined roles for middle managers and to have strategy and formal strategy processes. (In a few cases, I recruited more than one informant from the same organisation, but each informant reported on only their own experience, and I did not combine these multiple informant interviews to report on the organisation as an entity.)

The semi-structured format of one-hour interviews was chosen because it allowed for both consistency across interviews and scope for interesting digression.

With a large enough number of participants, such as 30 or 40, the findings should yield some variance and also allow theoretical saturation (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). After saturation is reached, additional interviews will be redundant according to the 'principle of redundancy' as articulated by Yin (1989). I have interviewed 40 middle managers (plus 4 that took part in my pre-thesis pilot study).

The practical advantages of single informant interviews include the following: easy to get permission, not dependent on one or a few gatekeepers, can get moderate number of participants, and can get a wide variety of cases. The disadvantages are the following: dependent on informant memory and being subject to bias such as motivated by self-justification, e.g., Eisenhardt and Graebner (2007, p. 28): "impression management and retrospective sensemaking are deemed the prime culprits."

My study focuses on the strategic activities of MMs as perceived by themselves in relation to their activities, namely the exercising of their autonomy in strategy. There are many studies on the perceptions of MMs. For example, McCann, Morris and Hassard (2004) interviewed individual mangers in 30 large organisations in Japan, USA

and UK to understand how middle managers perceived organisation ideology in the three countries. There are many studies based on interviews of middle managers, including studies by Brown and Eisenhardt (1997), Beck and Plowman (2009) and Ahearne, Lam and Kraus (2014). Single informant methods are criticised for lack of validation ("common methods problem"). But that problem applies only if the single informant is proving information about a larger entity, such as their business unit. This is not true for my study where the focus of my research is the middle manager's own autonomy in strategy.

Beyond middle managers, there are many other studies published in top journals using single informants where the focus is on the individual rather than the organisation. For example, Kunda, Barley and Evans (2002) interviewed 52 skilled technical contractors about why they entered the contingent force. Elsbach (2003) studied how individual employees' perception of their work identities was affected by a change to non-territorial office environments. Elsbach and Kramer (2003) interviewed 36 Hollywood executives and producers about social judgement processes that experts use to assess the creative potential of unknown others. Kreiner, Hollensbe and Sheep (2006) examined the balance between personal and social identities of Episcopal priests, using phone interviews of 60 informants.

Similarly, in my study, the single informants should be seen as representing not so much their companies but instead as representing their individual experiences. I have interviewed 40 individual middle managers on why and how they exercise autonomy in strategy. The variance in organisation and individual conditions will provide a wider range of findings about this phenomenon. In other words, interviews with, say, 40 male, British managers in large UK banks are likely to yield a narrower range than my diverse

but bounded number of research participants of 40 middle managers of different genders and national origin all working in large operating companies of varying parent company nationality in different industries.

Interviews are viewed as a way for leaders to tell stories that encourage the implementation of strategic choices (e.g., Vaara and Reff Pedersen, 2013). Paroutis and Heracleous (2013) used interviews with 15 strategy directors in 11 (UK) FTSE companies to understand how they used discourse to influence the context of strategy. For my study, the interviews of the MM informants provide insights into the way in which they construct the reality of their experience in strategy. These transcribed interviews should shed light on how MMs get autonomy in strategy and how they use autonomy in strategy. In other words, these transcribed interviews capture what middle managers believe in, such as "the strategy is unrealistic in relation to available resources". Such beliefs can be real drivers of their actual behaviour.

3.5. Choice of Analytical Method

My methodological approach initially follows template analysis as developed by King (2004 and 2012) and King and Brooks (2017). Hence, I initially used systematic coding of data following King (2004 and 2012), a similar approach to the approach used in the study by Guo, Huy, and Xian (2017) cited in Chapter 2. King's template analysis usually stops at the final template after adding some qualitative interpretation (e.g., Kraft et al., 2018). I wanted to go beyond this approach to add the data structures of the Gioia methodology. So, to further analyse the data, I used the Gioia methodology (Corley and Gioia, 2004).

The Gioia methodology takes a pure grounded theory approach in starting the

coding with no priors. All codes emerge from studying the data. But then the codes are used in an interpretative process to create data structures with "1st Order Concepts", "2nd Order Themes", and "Aggregate Dimensions". Hence, combining King's template analysis and the Gioia methodology gave me a more tailored method to analyse my interview transcripts. Following King, I could use prior literature to inform the initial code list and to take a systematic approach to develop the final code list which allowed me to take a more focused approach from the beginning. Following Gioia, I could add theoretical interpretation of the data and to develop data structures.

To be more specific, King's template analysis allowed me to start with codes derived from literature which I could have not done using the grounded theory approach of the Gioia methodology. Using King's template analysis, I developed codes that were closely linked to the initial codes derived from literature. The initial code list has been updated in the process of coding of the interview transcripts to ensure that the codes accurately captured all the interview transcript text. Then once all interview transcripts were coded using the final version of the code list (this meant that all interviews which were coded using versions of the code other than the final code list had to be recoded using the final version of the code list), I applied the Gioia methodology. This enabled me to develop researcher centric themes which in turn allowed me to use abstraction and to present my findings in a more theoretical way. I then used the themes to develop data structures which provide a theoretical and visual presentation of my findings.

First, using King's template analysis, the initial codes were informed by the literature review. In accordance with the method, once I have started coding the pilot interview transcripts and later the interview transcripts, I adjusted the code list to be able to accurately code the interview transcripts to ensure that I had codes that allowed me to

code all the interview transcript text. The initial code list was expanded to capture as many details about MM autonomy as possible and new codes relating to autonomy were added. The initial code list was also expanded to capture how context affected MM autonomy in strategy, and codes relating to the external and internal environment were introduced. Some minor changes were made to some codes so that wording of each of code accurately captured the transcribed text that was coded by a particular code.

Once I had derived the final version of code, all interview transcripts were coded using the final version of the code. After fully coding all the interview data I have analysed the coded data further using the Gioia methodology to develop data structures and aggregate dimensions which provide a more structured and theoretical way of looking at the findings. My use of multiple methods is consistent with the recent call by the editors of *Academy of Management Journal* for qualitative researchers to develop approaches that fit their work rather than follow one method rigidly (Bansal, Smith and Vaara, 2018). Figure 3.1 below in section 3.13 will show the steps in my data analysis.

3.6. Interview Guide

Following the epistemology of interpretivism, I developed an interview guide to cover the research question and the seven constructs (in Figure 2.5 in Chapter 2) leading to it. I would seek to follow this guide as closely as possible, while allowing for some digression. Then I developed an initial interview guide for the pilot study and a revised version after the pilot study. The final guide had 19 questions, as listed in Table 3.1. As the interviews are semi-structured not all items were covered or in the same depth or some were not covered at all. After each question in Table 3.1, I state in brackets the construct from Figure 2.5 that this question addresses. Questions 1 and 2 establish the

nature of the company and the nature of the MM's role. Question 3 asks for examples of strategies in which the MM is involved, to get the MM thinking about strategy and to help me understand what sorts of strategies in which the MM is engaged. Questions 3 to 7 ask about MM's usual level of autonomy in strategy and in relation to the organisation culture of hierarchy. Questions 8 to 10 identify and describe the strategy or strategies to which all further questions relate. Questions 11 and 12 are about the years of experience of the MM and their superior in order to understand how that might affect autonomy. Questions 13 and 14 are about the MM's role in this strategy. Questions 15 to 18 are about changes in the strategy and Question 19 about the performance of the strategy against targets and how MM autonomy might have affected that.

Table 3.1. Questions in the Interview Guide

1. What is the size of your overall company in terms of annual revenues and number of employees? What the size of the main unit in which you work? e.g., UK retail division of UK high street bank. [ORGANISATION-SPECIFIC CONDITION]
2. What is your level in the company? What are your main responsibilities? To what position(s) do you report? What position(s) and how many people report to you? [MM JOB ROLES]
3. Please give examples of strategies in which you are involved, including the range from the highest level to the lowest level (highest level would be corporate or business unit strategy, lowest level would be strategy for a unit or activity for which you are directly responsible). [STRATEGY-SPECIFIC CONDITIONS]

4. What is your role in strategy formulation and implementation? [MM JOB ROLES]
5. How much autonomy do you have in relation to strategy? [MM USUAL AUTONOMY IN STRATEGY]
6. How satisfied are you with the autonomy that you have in relation to strategy? [MM USUAL AUTONOMY IN STRATEGY]
7. What is the culture of the company in terms of hierarchy? Is that different in your organisational unit? [ORGANISATION-SPECIFIC CONDITIONS]
8. Now please give me a recent case or example of strategy (preferably at a high level) in which you had a role in changing that strategy, either as it was formulated or as it was implemented. [STRATEGY-SPECIFIC CONDITIONS]
9. Please describe that strategy, when it occurred, the reason for the company pursuing that strategy, and the hoped-for business performance outcome. [STRATEGY-SPECIFIC CONDITIONS]
10. How ambitious were the targets of this strategy in relation to where the business was before the initiation of the strategy? [STRATEGY-SPECIFIC CONDITIONS]
11. At the time of this strategy, how many years had you been with this company, in this unit, and in that role? Was your title the same as the one you have now? If not, what was the title? [MM JOB ROLES]
12. At the time of this strategy, how many years had your boss been with this company, in this unit, and in his role? [MM JOB ROLES]
13. What was your extent of involvement in the development of the strategy? [MM USUAL AUTONOMY IN STRATEGY]

14. What was your extent of involvement in the implementation of the strategy? [MM USUAL AUTONOMY IN STRATEGY]
15. Were any aspects of this strategy changed during the implementation period? What? Why? [MM CHANGE OF STRATEGY CONTENT OR PROCESS]
16. Who decided on these changes? [MM CHANGE OF STRATEGY CONTENT OR PROCESS]
17. Did you as a middle manager make any changes to the strategy that were not formally approved in advance? Why? How? [MM CHANGE OF STRATEGY CONTENT OR PROCESS]
18. How did the strategy changes affect the performance against strategic objectives?
19. Could that performance against strategic objectives have been better if you had been given more autonomy in strategy? Why? How? [MM CHANGE IN AUTONOMY IN STRATEGY]

3.7. Types of Organisations

To achieve variance in organisational conditions, especially in terms of hierarchy, which is likely to be the biggest driver of autonomy in strategy, I sought a mix of companies. At the same time, to reduce the variation in types of organisations to a reasonable range for comparability, I decided to recruit informants only from large, primarily Western, for-profit, operating companies (not professional services). These selection criteria should allow for both variation and comparability.

Size. The size of the company affects the levels of management and formality of roles and hence autonomy. "Large" means companies large enough to have strategic

business units (SBUs) with SBU heads (e.g., general manager or managing director) and one or two levels of management below (e.g., marketing director or marketing manager). Both SBU heads and marketing directors or managers are considered as middle managers for the purpose of my study. I expect only companies with thousands of employees to have SBUs. As most potential informants may not know the total employment of the parent company, but nearly always know revenues, I used an annual revenue requirement at least $100 million. At this size, companies will also be large enough to have many formal management processes that define the scope of middle manager autonomy in strategy. Hence, the nature of middle manager autonomy in strategy will be bounded by formal processes. *How middle managers navigate these boundaries is the essence of my study.*

Nationality. Following work on "cultural clusters" (such as Ronen and Shenkar, 2013), "Western" means USA, Canada, European Union (and other Western Europe such as Norway), Australia and New Zealand. This Western designation will apply to an organisation's primary heritage (e.g., Jaguar Land Rover is Western even though owned by an Indian parent), or to companies that were originally Western-owned but have since changed to local ownership such as after nationalisation. Even within Western companies, we know that there are differences in average levels of middle manager autonomy. For example, Brodbeck, Frese and Javidan (2002) found that compassion and autonomy for managers is lower in Germany than in the UK.

For-profit. Non-profit organisations usually have many more multiple, conflicting strategic objectives than do for-profit companies, thereby complicating the purpose of strategy and middle managers' adherence to intended strategy (Perry and Rainey, 1988).

Operating versus professional service. My preliminary exploratory talks with potential informants found that most staff in professional service firms, such as consultancies, and accounting and law firms, did not work with strategies analogous to those of middle managers in operating companies. Most of the strategies they worked on were those of their clients and not of their own organisations. I experienced that myself when I was a lawyer in two large law firms. At these firms only very senior partners were concerned with the strategies of the firm itself. Nearly all other partners, let alone associate lawyers (the equivalent of MMs), focused entirely on client matters.

3.8. Selection Method for Research Participants

As I needed a relatively small number of research participants, I decided to recruit a focused, "purposive" or purposeful selection of research participants, which is a non-probability selection. Saunders (2012) states that purposive sampling can be used to find "typical" cases that illustrate the issue in the research, provided the appropriate selection criteria are used: "Typical case purposive examples are usually chosen to provide an illustrative profile that is considered representative, albeit not statistically" (p. 42). Palinkas et al. (2015, p. 534) says: "Purposeful sampling is a technique widely used in qualitative research for the identification and selection of information-rich cases for the most effective use of resources". This involves identifying and selecting individuals or groups of individuals who are especially knowledgeable or experienced with the phenomenon of interest (Cresswell and Plano Clark, 2011). Bernard (2000) and Spradley (1979) note the importance of availability and willingness to participate and the ability to communicate experiences and opinions in an articulate, expressive, and reflective manner. In contrast, probabilistic or random sampling is used to ensure

the generalisability of findings by minimising the potential for bias in selection and control for the potential influence of known and unknown confounders.

In conclusion, a purposive selection of interview participants that selects only middle managers who have had experience of exercising autonomy in delivering strategy should deliver on the illustrative profile needed.

3.9. Recruitment of Informants

I used many methods to recruit participants. I attended alumni events at Cranfield School of Management, where I talked to Cranfield alumni about my research and encouraged them to participate. If they were interested and they met the selection criteria set out above I gave them my business card and asked them to contact me to let me know when they would be free for one hour to be interviewed either in person or via Skype. I also recruited informants from executives in degree and non-degree programmes at Cranfield School of Management. In addition to that, I recruited other postgraduate students at Cranfield School of Management by talking to them in the cafeteria and or in breaks between their classes about my research. If they met my research criteria I gave them my email address and encouraged them to contact me to let me know when they would be free for one hour to be interviewed. I further recruited participants from my extensive network, especially alumni of the London School of Economics, where I earned both undergraduate and master's degrees, most of which alumni are now in middle management positions. These LSE alumni either themselves became informants or directed me to others in their companies. I also recruited participants at business book launches and various professional events for business executives where I attended talks aimed at senior business executives and then talked

with them in breaks about my research. Some MMs who said they would email me did not do so or did so only after I had finished my interviewing. Other MMs who initially said that they wanted to be interviewed changed their mind because they did not get their employers' permission to participate in the research. Finally, some MMs who wanted to be interviewed did not meet the research participant criteria and thus were not interviewed.

I qualified informants with five screening questions to ensure that they met the research criteria:

1. Your total (parent) company has at least $100 million in annual revenues and sells products or services (but not professional services), for profit.
2. Your job title has the word "manager" or "director" or equivalent.
3. You have people reporting to you and you report to somebody else.
4. You can talk about your experience of delivering strategy where you had some autonomy in changing the nature of the strategy or in how you delivered it.
5. You need to have the function of a middle manager (as no one has the title 'middle manager')

If potential informants asked what I meant by strategy I gave them examples. What was important for my study was that they themselves used the word "strategy" in describing their role. As I argued in Chapter 1, the word strategy is used when talking about something important. Cauwenbergh and Cool's (1982) definition of strategy management (or management of strategy), like most others, stresses that strategy is about things that are important to the organisation. But what is important, and hence strategic, is different for different organisations and for the same organisation over time. Hence, different activities are labelled as being strategic in different organisations and at different

times. What matters for my research is not the specific nature of what is considered strategic, but whether or not middle managers are involved in whatever is labelled as strategic or strategy. Treating as "strategy" what managers are told is strategy or interpret as strategic is well supported by the research on sensegiving and sensemaking (Gioia and Chittipeddi, 1991; Balogun and Johnson, 2004; Fiss and Zajac, 2006; and Luscher and Lewis, 2008), and accords with an "emic" definition of strategy (Morris et al., 1999). In any case, when I report my findings in Chapter 4, I will give many examples of what the informants considered to be strategies that they were tasked to implement.

For the purpose of my study middle managers needed to be involved in delivering the strategy. The key screening question found out if the informant could talk about one or more cases of delivering strategy where they had some autonomy in changing the nature of the strategy or in how they delivered it. If asked, I provided examples of strategy: a strategy to increase market share, a strategy to improve profitability, a strategy to launch a new product, and a strategy to design and implement a new operation process.

I told all potential informants that my study was about "how middle managers exercise autonomy in delivering strategy" and that they needed to talk about their experience as a middle manager. Hence, all participants have self-identified as middle managers.

Participant Profiles. I interviewed 40 middle managers for the study. Appendix C provides the characteristics of the informants. Of the 40 study informants, 12 were women, and 16 were British with many other national origins represented. Of the 31 parent companies, 12 were based outside Western Europe or the USA. One company from the Middle East was originally U.S. owned, and one company from Africa was

originally U.K. owned. Lastly, some informants came from the same companies: 6 from one oil and gas company in the Middle East, 4 from one U.S.-based investment management company, and 2 from one U.S.-based pharmaceutical company. The 31 parent companies ranged in size from the minimum of $100 million in revenues to multi-billion multinationals (the majority).

3.10. Data Collection

The data collection format was a one-hour semi-structured interview with each informant, mostly face-to-face but some via Skype, fully tape-recorded. Informants were offered anonymity as to their own and their company's identities. Most, but not all, opted for anonymity. All informants signed a research consent form. All interview recordings were transcribed by a professional UK based transcription service. In the results chapter of this thesis, individual informants will be anonymised and described using the information in Appendix C. This information uses a sufficient level of disguise. For example, companies based in the USA were identified as such because there are very many such companies, while companies in the Middle East and Africa were identified at this regional level rather than the specific country because there are far fewer large, multinational companies in each sector in those regions. The informants trusted me because they had the reassurances of full anonymity, which included the understanding that I would not discuss or verify the information they provided with others in their company.

3.11. Coding of the Interview Transcripts

King (2004) points out that the term 'template analysis' does not describe a single

delineated method; it refers to a varied but related group of techniques for thematically organizing an analyzing textual data. This section describes the steps that I have taken to develop the coding template and how I got from codes to concepts.

Initial template. King (2004) recommends the development of an initial template that will be revised a number of times based on the actual data. Similarly, I have designed the initial template to help inform the design of the interview guide, and at the same time, the interview guide has informed the initial template (Table 3.2). As per King both the initial and final templates have higher and lower codes (King, 2004) as shown in the following initial template (e.g., 1 is a higher code, and 1.1 is a lower code).

These initial codes (Table 3.2) were developed before any data was collected and were used as input for the interview guide. The interview guide was based on the above initial template and evolved after the pilot interviews.

The initial code template (Table 3.2.) was derived from literature, as summarized in Figure 2.5 Constructs Getting to the Research Question, which highlights eleven key articles. The initial codes template had only 2 major headings and 10 subheadings. I used this initial coding template to develop the interview guide and to start coding by hand each pilot interview transcript, noting the relevant code in the right margins of each page.

I developed the evolved code template (Table 3.3.) while coding the 4 pilot interview transcripts. Then once I started coding the 40 interview transcripts included in my study, to be able to accurately code all text in all the interview transcripts, I had to revise the coding template a number of times. Eventually the final version of the coding list template included 8 major headings and 54 subheadings (see Table 3.4.).

Table 3.2. Initial Template

1. MM OVERALL ROLE

    1.1. business unit in company
    1.2. level in company or business unit
    1.3. reports to who
    1.4. who and how many report to the MM
    1.5. demographics of MM

2. MM ROLE IN STRATEGY

    2.1. usual role in strategy
    2.3. levels of strategy in which involved
    2.4. usual contribution to performance against strategic objectives
    2.5. general autonomy in strategy
    2.6. satisfaction with level of autonomy

3. COMPANY CONDITIONS

    3.1. culture of hierarchy
    3.2. factors affecting culture

4. STRATEGY CASE OR EXAMPLE

    4.1. description of case or example
    4.2. initial role of MM in that case or example
    4.3. how MM role changed
    4.4. how MM autonomy in relation to strategy changed
    4.5. why MM autonomy changed
    4.6. process of change in MM autonomy
    4.7. performance consequence of change

The interview guide was based on the above initial template but evolved after the pilot interviews.

Development of template. The coding list was updated and expanded to capture additional information in terms of both breadth and depth. To provide for context and background, I added new section 2 about demographics of the MMs and their bosses and new section 1 about demographics of the company and the environment in which the company operates were added. The section about strategy was re-worded and

expanded to provide for more fine-grained coding to learn more about the strategy or strategies that the middle manager was implementing.

The coding list was also expanded to allow me to more effectively code for information relating to the core topic of interest--middle managers' autonomy in strategy implementation. This was also because the middle managers in both the pilot and the early interviews pointed out that the personal characteristics of middle managers as well as their superiors, especially in terms of relative experience, did matter in regard to middle manager autonomy in strategy implementation.

Middle managers that I have pilot interviewed also pointed out to me that the company and the context/environment in which the company operates have to be taken into account by middle managers implementing strategy. So, for example, a middle manager in a company in a highly regulated environment, such as banking, has to take into account all applicable regulations when implementing strategy. Similarly, a middle manager in a highly hierarchical or political company has to take into account the hierarchies and politics when implementing a strategy.

As regards to "strategy" the wording of this code was expanded to find out more about the nature of the strategy as well as about the background to the strategy formulation and the importance of the strategy for the organisation. In addition, a code was added to capture the financial or other support for the strategy and resources available to middle managers in implementing the strategy. Moreover, a code was added about the reasons for the company pursuing the strategy and the importance of the strategy to the company.

Finally, but not less importantly, I expanded the original three codes on autonomy (original 4.4., 4.5., and 4.6.) to a much larger section (new 5). This was

because these initial codes did not sufficiently cover all areas of middle manager's autonomy in strategy.

The initial version of the evolved template is shown in Table 3.3.

Table 3.3. Evolved Template 1

1. Company demographics
1.1. Company name
1.2. Company size
1.3. Company structure
1.4. Company hierarchy
1.5. Company ownership
1.6. Geographical operations/location of company

2. MM's demographics
2.1. MM's name
2.2. MM's total years of experience
2.3. MM's type of experience
2.4. MM in current company (years)
2.5. MM's job title
2.6. MM with current job title (years)
2.7. MM's progression within current company
2.8. MM's supervisor in current company (years)
2.9. MM's supervisor in current role (years)

3. MM's job
3.1. MM's day to day responsibilities
3.2. Number of employees reporting to MM

4. Strategy/Strategies
4.1. what is the strategy
4.2. who set up the strategy/strategies formulation
4.3. people who set up the strategy still in the company
4.4. strategy time frame
4.5. importance of the strategy
4.6. financial support for the strategy
4.7. other support for the strategy
4.8. other resources available for the strategy (e.g. slack resources)
4.9. performance targets of the strategy
4.10. why the strategy is succeeding/failing
4.11. the reason why the company is pursuing the strategy

5. MM's autonomy in the strategy
5.1. MM's role in formulating the strategy
5.2. MM's role in implementing the strategy
5.3. MM's role in autonomy in delivering the strategy

5.3.1. to deliver the strategy
5.3.2. not to deliver the strategy
5.3.3. change in the delivery of the strategy
5.4. reasons for MM having autonomy/could deviate from the strategy
5.4.1. autonomy given/part of the role
5.4.2. organisational politics
5.4.3. network
5.4.4. experience
5.4.5. past performance
5.4.6. trust
5.4.7. personal interest
5.5. decrease in MM's autonomy
5.6. MM reason for change to strategy/exercising autonomy/deviating

6. MM's view of strategy
6.1. MM understands strategy
6.2. MM happy with strategy
6.3. MM's definition of strategy

7. Impact of MM autonomy on strategy
7.1. positive
7.2. negative

The template evolved yet again once I started coding the first interviews. when there was no suitable code to in the initial code list, I added new code(s) to the code list to ensure that all interview transcripts were accurately coded. I also sharpened the wording of some of the existing codes so that the wording of each code accurately describes the interview transcript text that I have coded using each code. The reason for this adding new codes and sharpening the wording of existing codes was to ensure that all interview transcript text could be accurately coded.

The most important change was that I added code 8 which captures quotes by middle managers about the environment both inside the company (internal) and outside of the company (external). I also added a code for decrease of MM autonomy. I also rephrased some of the codes to sharpen their meaning. The final version of the evolved template is shown in Table 3.4. Overall, the final template differs from the initial template because I added codes about company demographics, MM's demographics,

MM's job, and especially many codes about the MM's autonomy in strategy, the MM's view of the strategy, the impact of the strategy, and the external and internal environment. All the additions and changes, including minor changes to the wording, were made to fully and accurately code all the text in all the all interview transcripts.

Table 3.4. Evolved Template 2

1. Company demographics
1.1. Company name/industry
1.2. Company size
1.3. Company structure
1.4. Company hierarchy
1.5. Company ownership
1.6. Geographical operations/location of company

2. MM's demographics
2.1. MM's name
2.2. MM's total years of work experience
2.3. MM's type of experience
2.4. MM in current company (years)
2.5. MM's job title
2.6. MM with current job title (years)
2.7. MM's progression within current company
2.8. MM's supervisor in current company (years)
2.9. MM's supervisor in current role (years)

3. MM's job
3.1. MM's day to day responsibilities
3.2. Number of employees reporting to MM

4. Strategy/Strategies
4.1. what is the strategy
4.2. who set up the strategy/strategies formulation
4.3. people who set up the strategy still in the company
4.4. strategy time frame
4.5. importance of the strategy
4.6. financial support for the strategy
4.7. other support for the strategy
4.8. other resources available for the strategy (e.g. slack resources)
4.9. performance targets of the strategy
4.10. why the strategy is succeeding/failing
4.11. the reason why the company is pursuing the strategy

5. MM's autonomy in the strategy
5.1. MM's involvement in formulating the strategy
5.2. MM's autonomy in implementing the strategy
5.3. MM's use of autonomy in delivering the strategy
    5.3.1. to deliver the strategy
    5.3.2. not to deliver the strategy
    5.3.3. change in the delivery of the strategy
5.4. reasons for MM having autonomy/could deviate from the strategy
    5.4.1. autonomy inherent/given/part of the role
    5.4.2. organisational politics
    5.4.3. network
    5.4.4. experience/knowledge/skills
    5.4.5. past performance/performance
    5.4.6. trust
    5.4.7. personal interest/self-interest
    5.4.8. emergency
    5.4.9. new situation
    5.4.10. hard work

5.5. MM's decrease in autonomy
    5.5.1. MM gives up autonomy
    5.5.2. MM's definition of autonomy

5.6. MM reason for change to strategy/exercising autonomy/deviating

6. MM's view of strategy
6.1. MM understands strategy
6.2. MM does not understand strategy
6.3. MM's definition of strategy

7. Impact of MM autonomy on strategy
7.1. positive
7.2. negative

8. Environment
8.1. External
8.2. Internal

Appendix D provides an example of a fully coded transcript.

3.12. Interpretation – Development of Data Structures

After coding all the text, I then followed the Gioia methodology and undertook an extensive process of examining the coded text and the final template of codes (listed in Chapter 3) to identify the most salient first order, informant-centric, "concepts" (e.g.,

"MM sees strategy as not doable"). I selected and grouped these concepts into related sets. I then assigned second-order researcher-centric terms or "themes" (e.g., "no belief in strategy") to the groups of first-order concepts. Lastly, I grouped the first-order concepts and second-order themes into four data structures, each with its aggregate dimension: (1) Sources of Autonomy in Strategy, (2) Strategy Implementation Outcomes, (3) Why MMs Used Autonomy in strategy, and (4) How MMs Used Autonomy in Strategy. Chapter 4 on the findings will provide much more detail on these procedures.

3.13. Summary of Empirical Data Collection and Analysis Process

The informant interviews produced 40 transcripts each averaging about 8,000 words. Hence, there was text of over 300,000 words to code, first using the initial and, then later, the final list of codes. Figure 3.1 provides a diagram overview of the empirical data collection and analysis process, which are the only four of the above twelve stages that involved iteration (stage 5 interview guide, stage 10 data collection, stage 11 data analysis, and stage 12 interpretation). The diagram shows that I undertook an iterative process with each category of activity going through a number of stages that informed other activities. For example, the interview guide went through three versions, the pre-thesis (pilot) and thesis interviews were conducted in two stages, the code has been developed while coding of the transcripts of the interviews, the pilot interviews informed the initial development of first-order concepts and second-order themes, and the resultant two data structures informed a search for further quotes, which led to adjusted to the code and data structures with modified concepts and themes.

Figure 3.1. Overview of Empirical Data Collection and Analysis Process

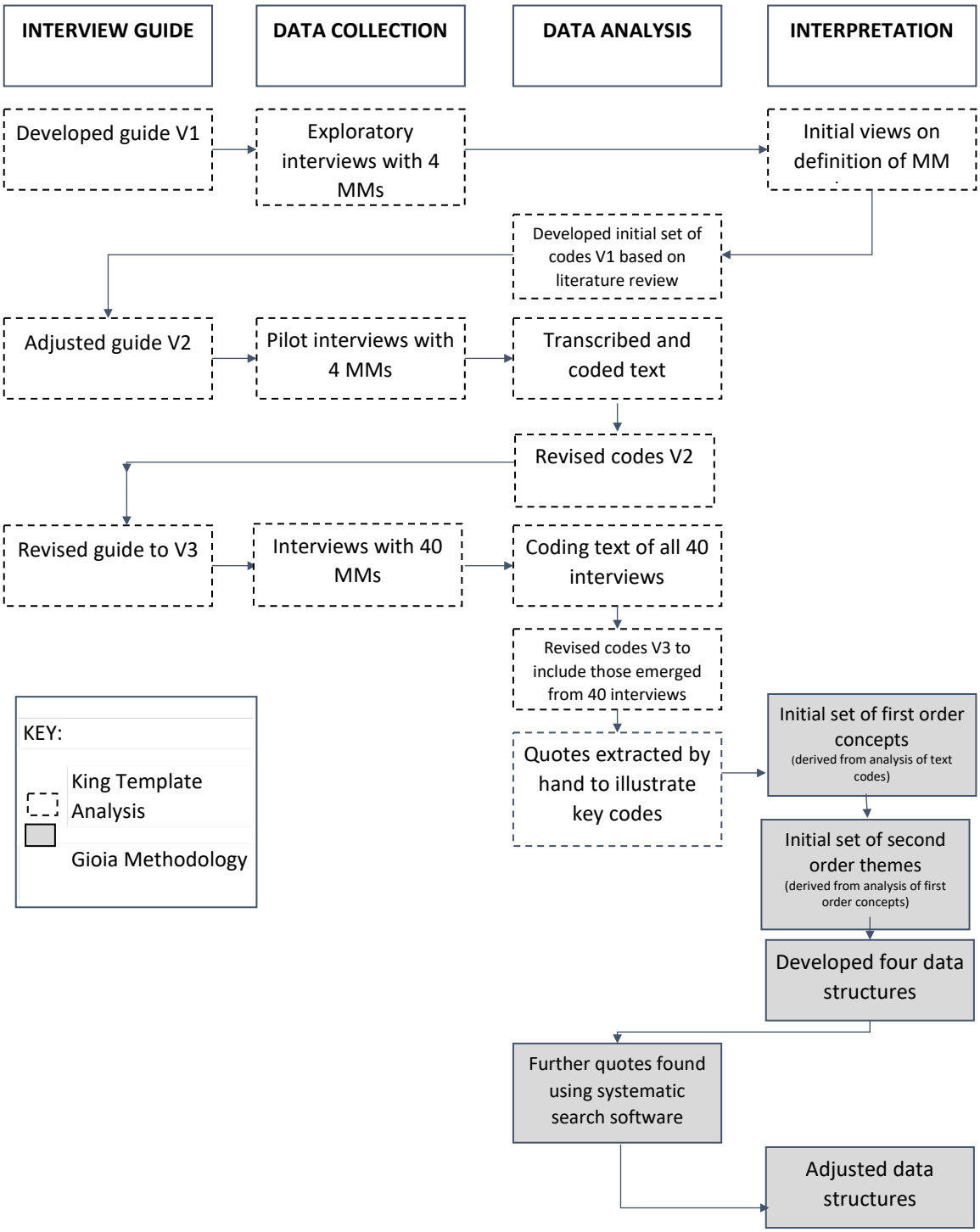


Figure 3.1 highlights the combination of King (2004 and 2012)'s template analysis method and the Gioia methodology (Corley and Gioia, 2004; Gioia and Chittipeldi, 1991; Gioia, Corley and Hamilton, 2012) that I used as a combination analytical method: some steps follow King's template analysis method, while some follow the Gioia methodologys.

3.14. Trustworthiness of My Method

To conclude this chapter, I review the issues that affect the trustworthiness of my method: choice of informants, selection of participants, reliability of participant comments, alignment of constructs with data, validity of the coding, and how my method meets the assessment criteria of an interpretivist epistemology.

Choice of informants. As discussed earlier, single informant methods are criticised for lack of validation ("common methods problem"). But that problem applies only if the single informant is proving information about a larger entity, such as their business unit. In this study, the informants are reporting on their own motivations and actions in relation to their autonomy in strategy. Even where I had more than one informant from the same organisation, their responses were not combined to provide information about the organisation. Furthermore, my interpretivist epistemology gives primacy to the emic views of informants.

Selection of participants. Interviews were recruited on a convenience but purposive basis. They had to be self-identified as "middle managers" with relevant job titles, and they had to pass four screening questions, especially "experience of delivering strategy where you had some autonomy in changing the nature of the strategy or in how you delivered it". Lack of systematic bias from the recruiting procedure is

suggested by the diversity of the participant mix—of the 40 MMs 12 were women and 16 were British with many other national origins, and of the 31 parent companies, 12 were based outside Western Europe or the USA. I regard this diversity to be a positive factor as it leads to a rich range of data, which in turn enriches my findings. Of course, the selection was biased toward those who had used autonomy in strategy, but my study did not try to estimate the incidence of autonomy, so that bias does not matter. Furthermore, of the many potential participants approached (about 1.5 times the final 40) none disqualified themselves on the grounds of lack of experience of autonomy in strategy. Non-participation was usually due to lack of time and very occasionally for reasons of confidentiality.

Reliability of participant comments. Although I am accepting whatever the informant said, I still need to consider the reliability of their comments. Depending on self-reports poses the potential criticism of errors of memory, but that does not apply much here as informants spoke of recent experiences and did not have to provide factual data. Also, the potential criticism of self-justification, impression management or retrospective sensemaking does not seem to apply, as many informants were quite open about their own satisficing and self-interested behaviour.

Alignment of constructs with data. My analysis depended on assigning all text in the transcripts to one or more codes. These codes came initially from terms in the literature review and were then revised and added to by me as I went through the coding process. The key initial code words were, of course, “autonomy”, “strategy” and “implementation”. These constructs are well established in the literature, even though of varying definitions, as discussed in Chapter 2. The question is whether the informants’ responses corresponded to these key constructs, especially “strategy” and “autonomy”.

By my taking an 'emic' rather than 'etic' approach, I have avoided the issue. Indeed, an emic approach is more correct for the purposes of my study. I want to identify whatever it is that informants think is "strategy" or "autonomy". In the case of "strategy", informants used that word consistently and without hesitation to describe many different types and instances of strategy. In the case of "autonomy", some informants used terms synonymous to autonomy as well as that term itself. The many other constructs identified in this study (the first-order concepts and second-order themes) were all taken from words used by the informants in the case of the first-order concepts and both direct words and my own aggregating interpretations in the case of the second-order themes. In the case of the final strategy outcomes—avoid, delay, change or deliver strategy—all four key words were used extensively by the informants in their common-sense meaning. By taking an 'emic' approach, the informants are the final arbiters of what the constructs mean.

Validity of the coding. Often, to achieve trustworthiness, coding is done either by someone independent of the primary researcher or by two researchers who then compare and reconcile their codes. That is particularly the case when the research takes a neo-positivist philosophy with a realist ontology and realist epistemology, as opposed to philosophies that involve researcher reflexivity (King and Brooks, 2017, p. 17). I took an interpretivist approach. Thus, double coding was less important. Also, by following King (2004)'s template analysis approach, I used a hierarchical system of coding (see my earlier lists of templates) that reduces researcher discretion in the assignment of codes, i. e., all the codes exist in an ordered and related structure. Also, the template approach makes more transparent the choices I made in assigning codes. Thus, after coding all the transcripts, I reviewed all of the coding and adjusted, if

necessary, to ensure that the coding covered all the text in a logical, hierarchical structure. There were almost no comments about the subjective feelings of informants, which would allow for more alternative interpretations in the coding process and, hence, benefit from the use of independent coders. Thus, a further boost for the validity of the coding is that the informant comments, although based on subjective memory, mostly concerned facts: about a strategy, resources, etc., or about their recent actions in relation to implementing a strategy.

Assessment criteria of an interpretivist epistemology. In this section, I evaluate how my method meets the interpretivist quality criteria as set out by Symon and Cassell (2012), particularly "is evidence provided that this is an authentic representation of what happened?" (Table 12.3, p. 212).

For the interpretivist assessment criterion of *credibility*, Symon and Cassell (2012) ask if the findings are free from researcher bias and the effects of bias minimised or accounted for. First, I did not have any priors other than my interest in MM autonomy in strategy. I encouraged informants to talk about their experiences but was neutral and non-judgmental on what they said. Indeed, many MMs told of how they deliberately subverted intended strategy while others told of how they did their best to implement strategy. Also, I used one of Guba and Lincoln (1989)'s means to achieve validity—peer debriefing, which was done regularly with my two thesis supervisors.

For the interpretivist assessment criteria of *dependability* and *conformability*, Symon and Cassell (2012) ask if alternative explanations have been considered and negative cases analysed. The combination of the systematic template of codes and the extensive informant quotes cited in this thesis make the findings easily confirmable. I have complete transcripts of all 40 interviews, typed by a professional transcription

service from the tape-recorded interviews. Hence, there was no selective recall or editing on my part. Second, Table 4.1 How First Order Concepts Related to Codes provides a guide that auditors can use to check the concepts against the interviews. Third, I have kept copies of the fully coded transcripts. Overall, the dependability and confirmability of my study are based on (a) using a highly structured data analysis procedure, (b) keeping multiple copies of the template, and (c) performing multiple rounds of coding.

Furthermore, although this is a small sample qualitative study that does not aim for statistical generalisability, the sample of 40 informants is sufficiently diverse, within the constraint of all MMs being in large multinational companies, that I can be confident the results reliably reflect the experience of MMs in similar organisations. In terms of alternative explanations, I did search for other explanations until I came to the fairly obvious four data structures, especially the two on why MMs and how MMs might change strategy. For the criterion of *dependability*, the researcher needs to capture and make available for evaluation the emergent research process. Figure 3.1. above provides an overview of the empirical data collection and analysis process and records the shifts in my research process. I have also set out earlier in this chapter, the evolution of my coding template.

For the interpretivist assessment criteria of *ecological validity* and *transferability/logical inference,* Symon and Cassell (2012) ask if the findings speak to real-life events and contexts, and whether the extent of findings' applicability elsewhere have been considered. First, the findings are very much based on real-life events as they are based entirely on the directly reported experiences of working managers. The informants provided thick descriptions of their experiences, telling long stories rather

than giving short answers—these can be seen in the cited quotes and the transcripts. Second, the applicability elsewhere seems quite certain as the data are drawn from 40 MMs of diverse genders and nationalities from 31 different and diverse large multinational companies. Thus, the findings are applicable to other large multinational companies, which is a very important and prevalent set of all business organisations.

Lastly, Symon and Cassell (2012) ask whether the findings have been related to established theory. Chapter 5 will do so and demonstrate how the findings fit with and extend existing theory.

3.15. Ethics of My Research

First, before beginning my research, I obtained ethical approval from the Ethics Committee at Cranfield University. Second, I evaluate here the ethics of my research following the most relevant criteria in Holt (2012).

Deliberative conversation. While I applied a semi-structured interview guide, I allowed the informants time and space to give their views, which indeed was the purpose of the interviews. Indeed, some of the most interesting findings came from informant digressions.

Constancy of language and behaviours. By following my interview guide, I was constant through the different interviews. At the same time, I was not rigid about the sequence of questions as informants often jumped from topic to topic. But I would keep returning to missing key topics, particularly those about the informant's exercise of autonomy in strategy.

Sensitivity in handling participant data. I have disguised all information that could identify informants or their companies. But I have reported enough information to

allow for an understanding of the industry sector and company nationality. For countries such as the USA or UK, which have many companies in many sectors, I have identified the exact company nationality, but for smaller countries with fewer companies, I have used regional groupings such as Middle East or West Africa. A few informants were willing to be identified but, to maintain consistency, I have not included any identifiers.

Lastly, separate from the above list of Holt (2012), I promised to provide to each informant not only a summary of the findings that are understandable by them as managers but also personal feedback about their own experience of autonomy in strategy. I have now provided this feedback to all informants. Hence, informants obtained information of value to them in return for the time spent on the interview.

4. FINDINGS

4.1. Overview

This section reports on the findings and on further issues emerging from the data and coding process. I provide many quotes from the MM informants to support the findings. Appendix E provides further detailed quotes and support, especially in relation the first order concepts making up the second order themes.

What is most interesting is that, as reported in Chapter 3, four complementary data structures supporting four aggregate dimensions emerged from the coding. Although not necessarily found in this order, the four aggregate dimensions explained, first, from *where* MMs obtained their autonomy in strategy; second, *what* the MMs did with their autonomy in strategy; third, *why* MMs used autonomy in strategy; and fourth, *how* MMs used their autonomy in strategy. *Hence, these four aggregate dimensions can be argued to provide a fairly comprehensive view of the major aspects of MM autonomy in strategy.* I cannot, however, be as confident about the comprehensiveness of the details (the supporting first-order concepts and second-order themes) as these are more dependent on the idiosyncrasies of my particular set of data. On the other hand, the comprehensiveness of the details is supported by the thorough process of developing and revising templates to identify over 50 individual codes used to code all the interview transcript text.

Hence, there are four main findings of this study. First, there are at least three sources of *where* autonomy in strategy comes from—inherent, situational and gained. Second, in terms of *what* autonomy in strategy produces, MMs use it to produce four possible implementation outcomes in regards to intended strategy: avoid, delay, change or deliver the strategy. Third, MMs have many reasons *why* to use autonomy in strategy

to avoid, delay or change strategy rather than deliver it as intended by top managers. Fourth, MMs have several ways of adapting strategies that they find difficult or do not wish to implement, i.e., *how* to use autonomy in strategy to avoid, delay, change or deliver strategy.

Before explaining each data structure and its first order concepts and second order themes, it is useful to review the key story of one MM informant and how she related to the where, what, why and how of autonomy in strategy.

4.1.1 An MM Happy to Use Autonomy

MM39 illustrates the use of all four major aspects of autonomy in strategy—where, what, why and how. She works in South America as vice president of operations for a local subsidiary of a Chinese multinational oil and gas company, which makes her an MM within the overall structure of this large company despite a title of VP. In addition to having a financial background and an MBA, she also has legal qualifications from a top US university. Her parents are from South America and having been educated in the US from an early age she speaks both Spanish and English fluently. In addition to being bilingual MM35 is also multicultural and said that she has 'flexibility with cultures'. She uses her knowledge of both South and North American cultures, of the different 'systems', as well her knowledge of Spanish and English and the ability to present herself as both South and North American depending on whom she is interacting with to gain an incredible amount of autonomy. She then uses the autonomy to input into and to shape the strategies in which she is involved.

MM35 uses her autonomy to lobby the local government to change the laws and regulations in the country where the multinational subsidiary is located to get the

strategy of the multinational implemented. MM35 said that the autonomy that she has makes her feel that she is ‘managing the company’. MM35 points out that the level of autonomy that she has reflects the ‘trust’ she has but that it also means ‘such a responsibility’ and ‘lots of work’.

Being in a regulated industry, a big part of MM35’s job is dealing with the local government. Being the only senior MM in the subsidiary who speaks Spanish gives her incredible autonomy when negotiating and signing documents with the local government. She pointed out that: ‘they [the Chinese executives] have to sign documents in Spanish and they don't know one word in Spanish’ so they have to ‘trust’ her as they do not understand the documents and the ‘details’ in them, which gives her lots of autonomy. MM35 said that ‘they do not need to print out documents for me, I have negotiated it, I know what is in it’.

MM35 has been in the local subsidiary longer than the top management team and said, ‘I have lived with this company every single story’ and ‘been a part of it’. So, she has ‘the black box’ of the company and the knowledge of the company’s history is the next source of autonomy. Because MM35 knows the history of the company and the times are ‘risky’ she has become the new incoming CEO’s ‘eyes and ears’, which again led to her having more autonomy.

MM35 said that she is also an excellent problem solver in situations where there was ‘fear because at that moment they have reached a point where they had no solution’ which she was able to solve and so gain more autonomy. In addition to that, she is an excellent communicator and able to convey complex ideas in simple words and, so by being able to make other people to understand, she further gains autonomy. In addition

to building relationships in people in the company ‘she gained support’, she has also built relationships with other people in the industry and even in government: ‘I even have my advocates in the government’, which allowed her to propose legislation and ‘…...some of those laws have been written by me’. This, of course, leads to even more autonomy as the top management do not speak Spanish, do not know any people in the government and, thus, cannot as effectively lobby the government to change the laws. MM35 pointed out ‘if you go to my Facebook half of the government is there’.

Her skill set, knowledge of the legal system and ability to understand legal contracts give MM35 another source of autonomy. Being a lawyer, when negotiating with government lawyers the wording of legislation MM35 can persuade them by saying, ‘I mean we know how to write, we’re lawyers, so let's write this in a way that is beneficial for both parties’. This unique skill set, including legal drafting skills, ability to persuade and communicate yet again leads to more autonomy for MM35.

When asked how she would define autonomy MM35 said it is ‘freedom’ that comes with ‘responsibility’. She also said that because the freedom comes with ‘responsibility you have no freedom’.

In summary, in terms of **sources** of autonomy, MM35 had many: *inherent* in her job responsibilities running operations in a subsidiary of a multinational, *situational* in her monopoly on knowledge of the local language and culture and *gained* especially in terms of how she built up her contacts with government regulators. In terms of strategy **outcomes**, MM35 used her autonomy mostly to deliver the strategy intended by the corporate parent and her bosses although she also changed the strategy as she saw fit. In terms of reasons **why** MM35 might change intended strategy, she had limited

motivations to do so as she had so much autonomy. In terms of **how** MM35 was able to affect strategy, she mainly used her status as a trusted local.

4.1.2 Overview of Results of Coding

All the findings emerged specifically via the coding process, which I will discuss in more detail below. Coding produced four sets of first-order concepts which are illustrated in tables in more detail and discussed in the text. The first set of 8 first-order concepts related to the three sources of autonomy. The second set of 8 first-order concepts relate to four strategy implementation outcomes. The third set of 11 first-order concepts related to *'why'* middle managers wanted to change implementation of strategy, which included the desire avoid implementation at all or to change the strategy. The fourth set of 13 first-order concepts related to *'how'* the middle managers were able to change the implementation of the strategy.

This chapter will discuss each concept, theme and data structure in detail, supported by extensive quotes from interviews. Before concluding this chapter, I will also set out further issues that emerged.

4.2. First Order Concepts and Second-Order Themes

The Gioia Methodology (Corley and Gioia, 2004) uses first-order analysis to identify informant centric terms and codes, followed by second-order analysis using researcher centric concepts and terms to create data structures of first-order concepts, second-order themes, and aggregate dimensions. Following this method, I undertook an extensive process of examining the coded text and the final template of codes (listed in Chapter 3)

to identify 31 most salient first order, informant-centric, concepts. After examining these, I decided to group the 40 first-order concepts into four sets. The first set of 8 first-order concepts related to different sources of MM autonomy in strategy that made up their total autonomy. A second set of 8 first-order concepts related to the strategy implementation outcomes from MM use of autonomy in strategy: to avoid, delay, change or deliver the strategy. A third set of 11 first-order concepts all related to MM's desire to change implementation of the strategy, i.e., to avoid delivery at all, to delay delivery, or to change the strategy in some way. A fourth set of 13 first-order concepts all related to how the MMs were able to change implementation of the strategy. Very rarely did informants speak of creating entirely new strategies, i.e., creating emergent strategies. In addition, most MMs had not just one but multiple strategies that they were tasked to implement. Lastly, the 40 first-order concepts were all based on one or more of the final codes, but not always the same (see Table 4.1).

Table 4.1. How First Order Concepts Related to Codes

1st Order Concepts	Related Codes
Data Structure A – Sources of Autonomy in strategy	
a1 explicit autonomy in job description	5.4.1
a2 implicit autonomy granted in job	5.4.1., 5.4.4. 5.4.5.,5.4.6
a3 weak top manager engagement	5.4.2., 5.4.8., 5.4.9
a4 emergency	5.4.8
a5 other situation change	5.4.9., 8.1., 8.2
a6 gained autonomy via contacts	5.4.2., 5.4.3
a7 gained autonomy via positioning	5.4.3., 5.4.4
a8 gained autonomy via resources	5.4.9., 5.4.10
Data Structure B – Strategy Implementation Outcomes	
b1 MM hides from top managers	4.7., 4.8., 5.2., 5.4.2., 5.4.3, 5.4.4., 5.4.6, 5.4.7.
b2 MM persuades top managers	5.6., 5.4., 5.4.2., 5.4.3.
b3 MM forced by conditions	4.9., 4.11., 5.4.7, 5.3.1., 5.3.2., 5.3.4., 4.9.,
b4 MM prioritises	5.4.7., 6.2., 5.6., 5.3.1., 5.3.2.,4.9.,
b5 MM given autonomy	5.4.1.
b6 MM takes autonomy	5.4.2., 5.4.3, 5.4.4., 5.4.5., 5.4.6., 5.4.7., 5.3.3.,
b7 MM does as required	5.3.1., 5.4.1.,5.2.,
b8 MM takes initiative	4.7., 4.8., 5.4.1., 5.4.2., 5.4.3., 5.4.4., 5.4.5.,5.4.6., 5.4.7.,
Data Structure C – Why Use Autonomy in strategy	
c1 poor communication by TMs	4.1, 4.2
c2 MM ignorance	5.1, 6.1
c3 cannot see benefit or value	6.2
c4 sees strategy as not doable	4.6, 4.7, 4.8
c5 uses own opinion	5.4.1, 5.6
c6 strategy not monitored	5.4.1
c7 strategy has low salience	4.5
c8 strategy maker has left	4.3
c9 has overload	4.6, 4.7, 4.8
c10 insufficient resources	4.6, 4.7, 4.8
c11 avoid poor performance evaluation	5.4.7

Data Structure D - How Use Autonomy in strategy	
d1 power of position	5.4.1
d2 uses own judgement to act	5.2, 5.3
d3 ability to adjust strategy	5.3.3
d4 uses exploration to create better strategy	5.3.3
d5 adapts to fit team	5.3.3
d6 superior trusts the MM	5.4.6
d7 long experience	2.2, 2.3, 2.6
d8 good past performance	5.4.5
d9 works with superiors	5.4.3
d10 works with teams	5.4.3
d11 seeks powerful allies	5.4.2, 5.4.3
d12 creates alliances	5.4.2, 5.4.3
d13 uses network	5.4.2, 5.4.3

I developed concepts by analyzing the coded text to derive a concept. To analyze the coded text and develop concepts, I first collected in one document all transcript text segments relating to a particular code. This allowed me to see the transcript text coded by a particular code from all interview transcripts next to each other in one document, which facilitated the ease of reference, which in turn allowed me to easily analyze what each of the MMs said in relation to a particular code. In some instances, where codes were similar, a concept was derived by looking at text coded by two or more similar/related codes. The Gioia methodology was applied to the coded text to develop the concepts and themes. I did this by first collecting all interview transcripts coded with the same or similar code in one document. I then reviewed the commonly coded sets of interview text and labelled the most prominent sets as first-order concepts, using informant-centric language. This allowed me to add theoretical interpretation and continue to develop second-order themes that were researcher-centric, and finally aggregate data structures.

4.3. Overall Data Structures

4.3.1. Summary of Results

My process of analysis was to go from first-order concepts to second-order themes to outcome data structures. The first set of 8 first-order concepts related to different *sources* of MM autonomy in strategy and is presented in Data Structure A below (Figure 4.1). The second set of concepts supported the strategy implementation outcomes and is presented in Data Structure B below (Figure 4.2).The third and fourth sets of concepts supported either *why* MMs wanted to change delivery of the strategy or *how* they changed or achieved the delivery. These results are presented in Data Structures C and D in Figures 4.3 and 4.4. All four outcomes in the four data structures can also be seen as equivalent to Corley and Gioia (2004)'s "aggregate dimensions". Data Structure A has three second-order themes based on six first-order concepts. Data Structure B has four second-order themes based on eight first-order concepts. Data Structure C has four second-order themes based on 11 first-order concepts. Data Structure D has five second-order themes based on 14 first-order concepts. These last two data structures are easily the most logical choice, as they concern the why and the how of MM autonomy in strategy. The components of each data structure, i.e., the first-order concepts and second-order themes shed light on the why and how of MM's exercising their autonomy in strategy. I will justify below the choice of each concept and theme, using quotes from the interviews as well as drawing support from prior literature.

4.3. 2. Narrative of Overall Results

As the results are quite detailed, covering four data structures with 16 second-order themes and 40 first-order concepts, it is useful in this section to provide a narrative of

the overall results. In essence, MMs respond to different intended strategies that they are tasked to implement.

First, MMs decided whether they should implement ("deliver") the entire strategy as delegated to them or whether they should avoid, delay or change all or part of the strategy. Each of the four outcomes has a further two components. In each of the outcomes avoiding, delaying or changing the strategy, an MM may either conceal this avoidance from TMs or persuade TMs to accept this avoidance, delay or change.

Second, an MM is motivated to choose an outcome other than implementation of the strategy as set out by the TMs for any one or more of four major reasons: unclear on strategy, no belief in strategy, they may be responding to non-attention from TMs, or they are responding to their own self-interest. Each of these four reasons are made up of a further two or three components each. In the first reason--being unclear on the strategy--there may have been poor communication by TMs or for whatever other reasons the MM is ignorant about the strategy. In the second reason--having no belief in the strategy--the MM cannot see the benefit or value the strategy, the MM sees strategy as not doable, or the MM just uses their own opinion about the efficacy of the strategy. In the third reason--MM response to non-attention--that may come from the strategy not being monitored by TMs, the strategy having low salience for the MM, the strategy maker having left the organisation. In the fourth reason--MM self-interest-- the MM may have work overload, the MM may have insufficient resources, or the MM wishes to avoid poor performance evaluation from trying to deliver a strategy that is not easily implementable.

Third, having taken a view on whether or not to avoid, delay, change or deliver strategy, an MM thinks about whether they have sufficient autonomy to do what they

want. An MM has three sources of autonomy in strategy: inherent autonomy, situational autonomy and gained autonomy. Inherent autonomy may be both explicit from the job description and implicit from TM acceptance of MM behaviour, and the like. Situational autonomy may come from weeks TM engagement, and emergency, or other situation change. Gained autonomy can come from contacts, positioning, or resources. An MM may particularly try to gain autonomy in order to change a strategy with which they do not fully agree or do not wish to fully implement. Also, they can be circular effects. An MM with a significant existing level of autonomy in strategy may be more likely to find reasons to change implementation of the intended strategy.

Fourth, having decided to change attention and having obtained the necessary degree of autonomy, and MM may have different methods for avoiding, delaying or changing the outcome of intended strategy. It is the MM's autonomy in strategy that allows them to rely on trust, knowledge, good past performance, status, experience and to use prioritization, capabilities, status and trust, persuasion and politics. An MM may use prioritisation, which in turn can depend on the power of the MM's position or the MM can simply use their own judgement. An MM can use their capabilities, which may come from their ability to adjust a strategy, using exploration to create better strategy, and from adapting the strategy to fit the MM's team. The MM may use their status and trust that comes either because the superior trusts the MM, because the MM has long experience, or because the MM has good past performance. MM may use persuasion, even working with their superiors working with their teams. Lastly, an MM may use politics, such as by seeking powerful allies, creating alliances, or using their network.

4.3.3. Narrative of Findings on "Why" and "How" MMs Use Autonomy in Strategy

The literature examining the place of MMs in strategy has progressed from seeing MMs as recipients of change to identifying the central role of MMs in changing or adapting strategy and generating emergent strategy. However, despite this development, the literature has paid less attention to MMs' motivations to engage with strategy and the mechanisms through which they do it. My study provides the evidence to help advance our knowledge in this direction. As the why and how of MM autonomy in strategy are the key findings of my study, I provide in this section a summary narrative about these.

My study finds multiple possible sources of lack of MM buy-in: e.g., being unclear about what the strategy is and lacking belief in the value or plausibility of the strategy. My study finds that, in addition to 'unclear TM's intent,' it is also situations where TMs display little interest in the strategy that leads to 'divergence' by MMs. My study also identifies the different forms of 'adaptive behaviour' and 'divergence', which I identify as including MMs changing, delaying and avoiding strategy (or a combination of such divergent behaviours). Further extending these findings, my research has provided a more granular analysis and identified a broad set of reasons for MMs' motivation to change, delay or avoid strategy, set out as 11 first-order concepts comprising four second-order themes. Such motivations range from a basic lack of clarity regarding the strategy to MMs acting to protect their self-interest in the process of strategic change.

Compared with prior studies, my study identifies a much larger set of mechanisms through which MMs can influence strategy. This larger set comprises the 13 first-order concepts making up five second-order themes, showing that the

mechanisms MMs use to influence strategy range from simple prioritization tactics to using status, knowledge, experience and trust and forging complex political alliances.

4.4. Data Structure on "Where" - Sources of Autonomy in Strategy

This and the next three sections on data structures will draw on extensive quotes from the interviews. Supplementary quotes are provided in Appendix E.

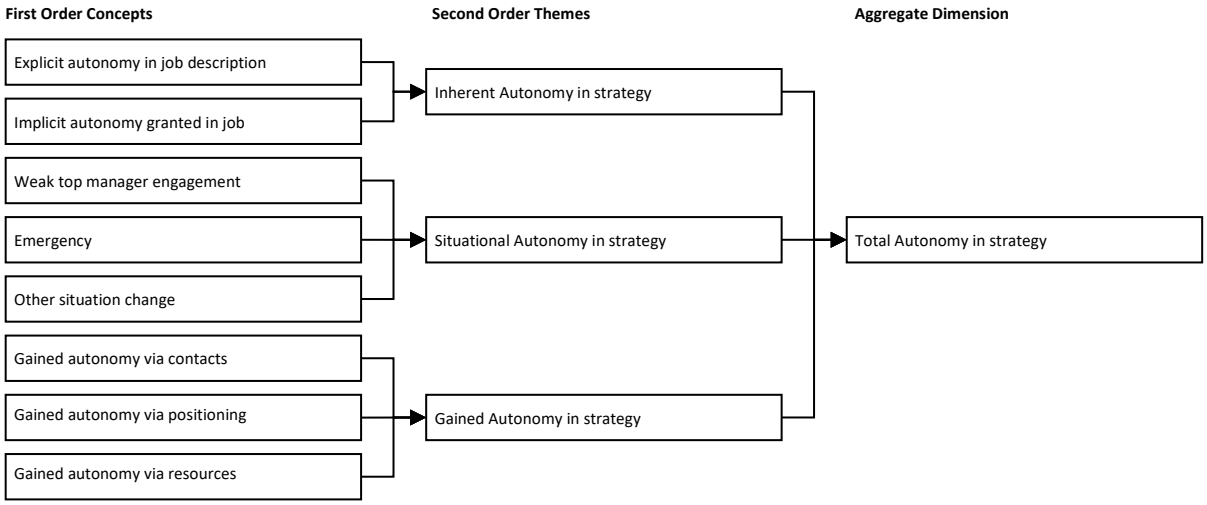
From the data, my key finding is that MM autonomy in strategy has at least three sources: *inherent autonomy, situational, and gained autonomy.* From my systematic literature review, it is apparent that, so far, no attention has been paid to how MMs gain and expand their autonomy in strategy. I have identified three sources of MM autonomy in strategy. MMs can get and expand their autonomy in strategy because it is *inherent* in the job, because of the *situation* or because they have *gained* it. These three sources are second-order researcher-centric themes that emerged from eight first-order informant-centric concepts, as set out in Data Structure A in Figure 4.1.

The MMs easily discussed how they got autonomy. Most but not all of the MMs got autonomy from all three sources and all used several of the eight sub-sources as described in the first order concepts: *inherent autonomy* from (a1) explicit autonomy on the job description, and (a2) implicit autonomy granted on job; *situational autonomy* from (a3) weak top manager engagement, (a4) emergency, and (a5) other situation change; and *gained autonomy* (a6) via contacts, (a7) via positioning and (a8) via resources.

These specific first-order concepts are all interesting in their detail, which is apparent from the variability of the responses. The three second order themes seem to be complementary and comprehensive in explaining all the possible sources of

autonomy for MMs.

Figure 4.1. Data Structure A – Sources of Autonomy in Strategy



4.4.1. Inherent Autonomy in Strategy

Some MMs talked about their *inherent* autonomy in strategy This inherent autonomy in strategy can be explicit or implicit.

Explicit autonomy. An example of explicit autonomy could be autonomy in strategy that middle managers are given to do a job, which is part of their job description or articulated to them. MM01 provided a clear statement of explicitly given autonomy:

"Yes, for me personally autonomy has always been given." (MM01)

The case of MM30, VP for support services in the EMEA region of a large IT security multinational, illustrates how MMs have explicit autonomy. He said that autonomy is very difficult to just take.

> "It has to be something that somebody has said 'I want you to own this.' Somebody above you has said, 'I want you to own this.' It's much harder to try and do it without the authority and autonomy and much easier in this company when you have it."

MM30 thought that autonomy was partly based on meritocracy--if a manager was viewed positively, they would be given more responsibility. If their results had been very good, they would be given more responsibility. He thought that his peer group had all been given something extra by the COO and they had not asked for it or that they did not specifically raise their hands.

Being given autonomy as part of their role was seen as positive by MM25.

> "So, I have been given a lots of autonomy definitely and that is one of the good things in my role, and for my boss to be honest that he has never been on my back to tell me what to do." (MM25)

MM25's quote implies trust from her boss. MM31 was able to gain not only autonomy in strategy, but also trust and support by formulating and presenting his plans to the senior management.

> "If you can formulate that and you can present that to your senior management you are given the trust and the autonomy. They will say: 'Okay, you know what, deliver it, we agree, we support you, we're behind you.' (MM31)

Other MMs described explicit autonomy to be part of how the company was set up. MM08, CFO of the UK subsidiary of a very large Chinese state-owned oil and gas multinational, attributed his high level of autonomy as very much explicit rather than implicit. When the UK branch was first set up, there were very clear job descriptions with assigned responsibilities for each officer of the UK board. Hence, MM08 attained his autonomy from the board, as senior management of the company. But the assigned responsibilities from the head office in China were very wide, so the UK officers had to work out what kind of activities they could do in the company and what they could not

do. As CFO of the UK company he could work in detail on activities, but he also needed to bring this to the company for the monthly UK management meeting level to discuss if there was some new strategy, or some big decision they needed to make.

Implicit autonomy

Implicit autonomy in strategy is that which middle managers are given but which may not be particular to them.

The case of MM06 illustrated implicit autonomy but also articulated the link between given and gained autonomy in strategy by setting out that he had been given a lot of trust because he was in a senior position and that he had gained more trust and autonomy in strategy over time because of his output.

> "I think coming into a senior position you do assume a position of trust. But it is that age old question, is trust built or is it given? And the answer is that it is both, you start off with the base level of trust but over time you output will ensure that you're automatically given more trust to increase your autonomy if you are decision making." (MM06)

> 'I guess to some extent it depends on your performance and your past results, that you can leverage that.' (MM06)

Often this implicit autonomy in strategy is also 'inherited' by MMs from their predecessor and given to them because their predecessor had left. For example, MMs' autonomy often increased when their managers left the organisation.

> "The manager has left, you're the only one in charge. They can't really have any other options than to ask you to run the show." (MM33)

> "You see, as I said, I had to step up to my manager's role and I had to do so many things." (MM37)

MM15, merchandise manager of a large multinational department store, gained a lot of implicit autonomy when her boss left. She had started at this company as

Executive Assistant to the Chief Merchant, was then promoted to Women's Wear Buyer for the private label. And then after two years as the Women's Wear Buyer she was made head of the private label when her boss, the Chief Merchant left the company. Soon, MM15 was reporting directly to Managing Director of the entire group not just of the store. the store but the Group. So huge responsibility, very important person, and While MM15 had weekly updates with the MD, he was hugely busy, and did not even know where MM15's office was. Hence, MM15 had a lot of autonomy.

In summary, the second-order theme A1 "Inherent Autonomy" shows that MMs have both explicit autonomy that comes from the job description and implicit autonomy that is granted in the job.

4.4.2. Situational Autonomy in Strategy

MMs also had *situational* autonomy. An opportunity for MMs to define their job and redefine the scope of their autonomy often arose in specific situations, under certain conditions such as in the context of change. There were three first-order concepts supporting this second-order theme: weak top manager engagement, emergency, and other situation change.

The case of MM25, head of research at a mid-size multinational information provider, illustrates how MMs have situational autonomy. While she had been with the company for twelve years, her current boss had been there for only two years. When her previous boss had left the company two years ago, MM25 took on quite a lot of his responsibilities but without taking his role. What happened then was that her current boss

was responsible for the editorial team so his knowledge on the research side was limited. This new boss realised that MM25 was doing a good job and that he could rely on her because he had seen from her previous boss that he was also heavily relying on MM25. Another important factor was that MM25 and her new boss had built a certain level of respect where they both understood that they would silently agree not to step on each other's toes. Also, from the beginning the two had a very different attitude towards certain things where they decided not to confront each other necessarily but be more adult about it.

MM25' experience pulls together these three sources of autonomy. First, when her previous boss left, her situational autonomy increased. Then, by doing a good job with her new boss she increased her gained autonomy which eventually became inherent autonomy.

4.4.3. Gained Autonomy in Strategy

The third source of MM autonomy in strategy is gained autonomy. MMs can gain autonomy *via contacts (through people), via positioning (through manoeuvres)* and *via resources*.

MM25 illustrates how an MM can work hard to gain autonomy. She works for a large company in financial news and data. Their customers are the banking industry, law firms, consultancy firms, accountancy firms, PR agencies, and so on.

MM25 described herself as 'not a tall woman' and that she makes herself more visible by talking to everyone and that is how she gains lots of her autonomy. Indeed,

talking to her was very easy and our interview only finished when two tall men knocked on the door telling us that we were overstaying and that they had booked the room.

As regards to strategy implementation MM25 said that she implements what she thinks fits best with the overall strategy. So, she decides what she does not implement and what she implements and what is the 'best fit' and then goes on to implement it. MM25 noted:

> "I have been given a lot of autonomy definitely and that is one of the good things in my role and from my boss to be honest that he has never been on my back to tell me what to do. Obviously, as long as I am delivering."

MM25 noted that she tailors a strategy in such a way to make the most out of it and accepts the fact that some points are not feasible. When deciding what is feasible MM25 takes into account resources and also said that it was:

> "definitely paramount that my …. team feels understood and supported."

MM25 also uses her autonomy to 'focus on the quality', 'to keep everyone on board' and because she does not always get the support that she needs to 'compensate' and not 'lose out'. MM25 explained how she expands her autonomy:

> "I have built an in-house knowledge about the products and about the people which allows me to basically not to have to follow any rules with regard to who do I have to approach for certain issues. I don't have to for any hierarchy I can directly approach anyone I like if I want to."

MM25 pointed out that having lots of autonomy helps her to implement strategy. She said that she got her autonomy because she has been in the company for a long time or as she put it, 'I am part of the furniture'. She also gets to know people and has built a network:

> "It is good to know me as well I think because I know a lot of people so I can interconnect people."

MM25 said that in order to get autonomy 'I had to really build my persona' as initially she really struggled because she was younger, also pointing out that 'I am not very big as such' and thus it was initially very difficult for her to 'impose authority.' She has built her persona by 'establishing a direct conversation' so that she could 'straightaway understand whether the person understood what I was explaining'. On the point of establishing conversations MM25 said she uses her autonomy :

> "to network with whoever I want within the business. I am not going to ask any authorisation from anyone to talk to someone."

She also pointed out that her autonomy is also very much with regard to day to day work and she would not waste her boss's time on such matters:

> "I know what needs to be delivered and the autonomy will just give me enough level of flexibility to just reach that goal. That is it, that is what I see."

MM25 is also aware about the responsibilities that go with autonomy:

> "I will not decide to take the afternoon off because I just want to have the afternoon off, because I know that may not give the right signal to my guys so it is always that aspect that I am always very aware of. I probably tend to work too much."

MM25 articulated that autonomy comes at a price of 'hard work' and 'responsibilities' and that autonomy is given to her when she 'delivers'.

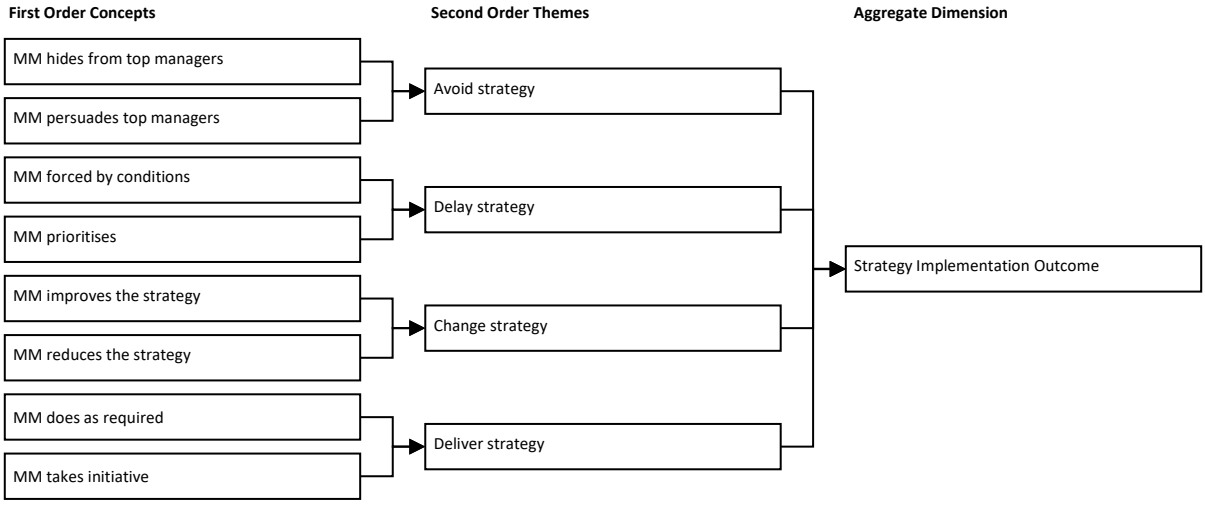
In summary, MM25 shows how an MM can use positioning (in her case, especially building her "persona") as well as contacts and resources to gain autonomy. She then makes good use of her overall autonomy to implement what she thinks fits best with the overall strategy. So, her autonomy is very much focused on getting the right

outcomes for the company. MM25 did not mention or imply self-interest, unlike some other MMs on whom I will report later.

4.5. Data Structure on "What" - Strategy Implementation Outcomes

The second outcome data structure (B) (Figure 4.2) on "what" MMs did with an intended strategy, or strategy implementation outcomes is based on four second-order themes about outcomes.

Figure 4.2. Data Structure B - Strategy Implementation Outcomes



In terms of language, my findings suggest that "strategy implementation" (the term I used) was interpreted by MMs as being divided into primarily four aspects: "avoid the strategy", "delay the strategy", "change the strategy" and "deliver the strategy" (which were the terms most of the MMs used). This distinction also provides the interesting insight that strategy implementation by MMs is the end product of four activities or components: avoidance, delay, change and delivery.

4.5.1. Avoid Strategy

Two first-order concepts support the second-order theme, *avoid strategy*: *MM hides from TMs and MM persuades top TMs.*

In many cases MMs simply hid their lack of action on a strategy from TMs. This hiding was a clear case of divergence from TM intentions and required sufficient autonomy from close scrutiny by TMs, as illustrated by several quotes:

> "…the strategy, if it is not monitored, I can change it. You know how? I don't do it, that's it. (MM05)

> "Oh, keep it to [the] side, nobody will ask about it" (MM02)

> "Honestly, they can cover it up and that's the reality of it. It is easy to smile up and to say, 'yes it's been done' and to make things look as though they have been done." (MM01)

> "If your heart is not in it then you won't be able to implement it as well. I think you would have to check a tick box. So, you have to show that you're doing it…. but this would be just for show." (MM20)

> "So, the strategy comes from the top… you have autonomy in implementing it to the point where you don't need to implement everything." (MM25)

In other cases, MMs directly persuade TMs that the strategy need not be implemented. Hence, this was an explicit, rather than hidden, divergence from original TM intentions, as illustrated by these quotes:

> "Sometimes … they [strategies] do not seem feasible to us. … so, we go back [to top management] and say that this is … not good for the company … and we have a bit of discussion and yeah …. basically the case is closed." (MM29)

> "…but I mean I would only ever want to convince someone of something that I was going to be able to deliver." (MM15)

In summary, MMs were able to avoid implementing a strategy by either hiding from TMs their non-action or persuading TMs that the strategy was not needed after all.

4.5.2. Delay Strategy

Two first-order concepts support the second-order theme *delay strategy*: forced by conditions, and MM prioritises

In some cases, delay of the strategy was forced on the MM by conditions beyond their control. Hence, although divergent from TM intentions, this was not a deliberate choice by an MM.

> "It would have been great if we had started it two years ago because we'd be there already now." (MM30)

> "When you realise that you do not have the right people to implement, the right knowledge, the right experience to execute the strategy always ... take[s] longer … than expected or … you have …. an outcome that was not anticipated." (MM 21)

> "If there … were worldwide economic issues…. we have to suspend this *strategic* project." (MM04)

> "We are currently trying to juggle … we have got a glut of projects … and we have to kind of wait until we got more time to allocate." (MM12)

In most other cases, the MM simply prioritised to delay a strategy:

> "We prioritise, deprioritise …. strategy." (MM35)

> "We've definitely put things on hold, delayed things but we've never stopped a proposal going through." (MM35)

> "Yes, they fall to the bottom of the queue because I had autonomy to do the things that I felt were the most synergistic with what they were interested in." (MM09)

In summary, MMs were able to delay implementing a strategy by either being forced to do so by conditions or by making a deliberate choice to prioritise.

4.5.3. Change Strategy

The third and most common strategy implementation outcome was that MMs changed the strategy. Two first-order concepts support this theme: *MM improves the strategy* and *MM reduces the strategy.*

Sometimes MMs improved the strategy in ways mostly convergent with TM intentions.

> "You might not have considered it at the planning stage but as long as it complements what you are trying to do you can go ahead." (MM11)

> "I use autonomy to shape the strategy in the best way possible, to have not a constraint in framework." (MM24)

> "…the financial targets weren't flexible but the strategy in order to achieve those targets could adapt or flex where necessary." (MM09)

Sometimes MMs reduced, did less of, or changed the strategy in ways mostly divergent with TM intentions.

> "The company strategy is to sell the full stack [set of products] …my strategy was that I am not going to the sell the full stack because this is not going to benefit us in the long run." (MM10)

> "We agree with 92% to 100% but there are about 10% that we don't. Sometimes they don't seem feasible to us." (MM29)

In summary, MMs were able to change a strategy by either improving or reducing it, the former being more convergent with the intended strategy, and the latter being more divergent.

4.5.4. Deliver Strategy

The last strategy implementation outcome was that MMs delivered the strategy more or less as intended. Two first-order concepts support this theme: *MM does as required* and *MM takes initiative.*

When MMs delivered the strategy, they were sometimes able to do so by simply doing what was required of them.

> "what's required, and rolling that out and creating a vision for your own team that's in line with everything that you're expected of, or expected to deliver for want of a better term." (MM01)

> "You just deliver what you promise, is number one. And just make, get things done." (MM02)

> Even so, MMs might try to adjust the strategy at the beginning.

> "So, we are delivering by that, and sometimes we are not free to decide this is good or this is right in the strategy. Maybe, in the beginning, we can give our feedback, give our opinion to adjust. It is already maybe taking it as a feedback [to] keep in mind about the strategy in the beginning, but I think once the strategy started…it's not that easy just to change. "(MM05)

> In many cases, MMs had to use their initiative to deliver the intended strategy.

> "Every strategy has a change at its core. So … we work through... managing the change… to implement … the strategy." MM24

> "so, for me I'll do whatever is appropriate in order to support people in my team or me individually to deliver. And that for me works better when I'm in an autonomous environment." (MM01)

> "I think it's good because we're not told how to do it, just that we need to do it and we can come up with the in between bits." (MM35)

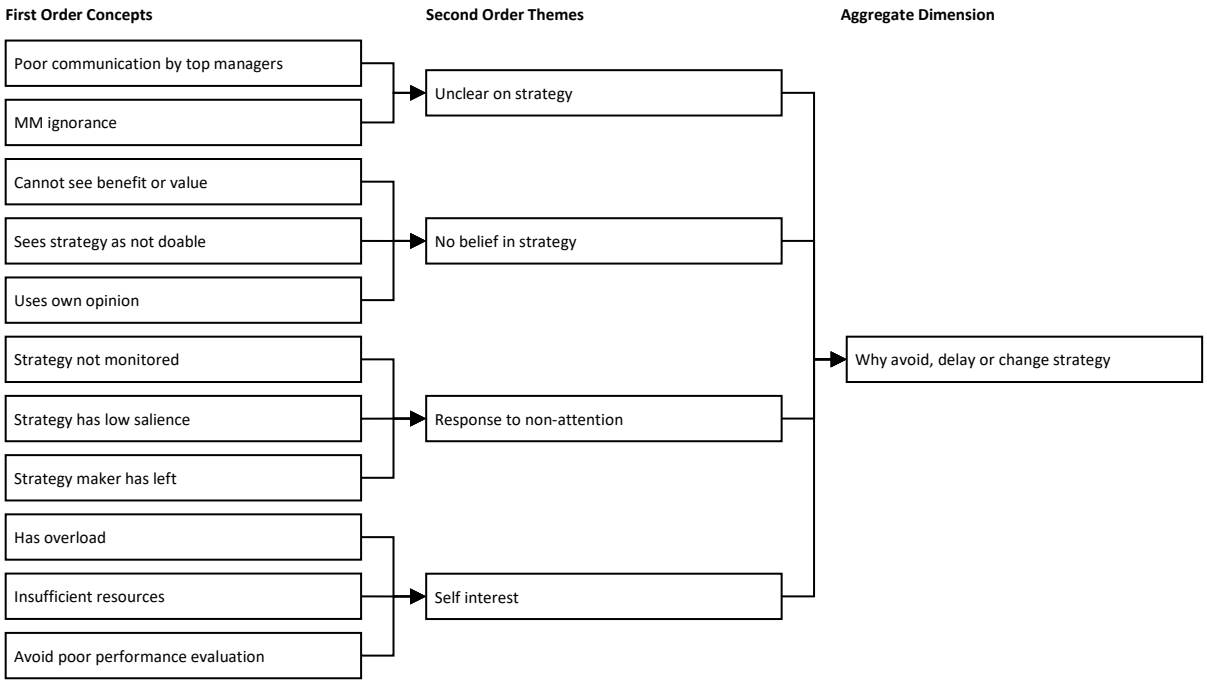
In summary, “Deliver Strategy” is the strategy implementation outcome that is the most convergent with TM intentions. Even so, MMs can take initiative and not just do as required.

Having established the above four strategy implementation outcomes, my discussion of the next two data structures will refer to why and how MMs avoid, delay, change or deliver strategy.

4.6. Data Structure on “Why” MMs Use Autonomy in strategy

The third outcome data structure (C in Figure 4.3), on why MMs wanted to avoid, delay, change or deliver the strategy, is based on four second-order themes, all of which are directly about the MMs’ perceptions: unclear on strategy, no belief in strategy, response to non-attention, and self-interest. These various conditions and perceptions led various MMs to seek to exercise autonomy to avoid, delay, change or deliver the strategy.

Figure 4.3. Data Structure C – Why Middle Managers Avoid, Delay or Change Strategy



MM37 provides a good case of why MMs want to change intended strategy. She is a VP at a large investment bank providing investment management services to large institutional investors and sovereign funds globally. MM37 reports to a managing director who then in turn reports to the CEO. MM37 has lots of autonomy because soon after she joined the company her manager resigned, which 'exposed her to new responsibilities' that she had not expected. MM37 is responsible for delivering strategy, which delivery is measured by targets, but she did not find strategies to be efficiently

articulated by such targets. MM37 felt that communication in relation to strategy could be better articulated via values, clear and short statements and she wanted strategy to be more visible. MM37 has found strategy at her company 'not to be clear'.

MM37 noted that strategy was at 'the top'. MM37 recalled that she had been invited to comment on the draft strategy but said that she had not commented because it was a 'massive document' and that she 'didn't have the time to look at it so I never provided any comments.' MM37, thus, did not know exactly what the strategy was and, as a result, did not know what strategy she was exactly supposed to be implementing.

Also, although MM37 had the autonomy to do what she wanted, she admitted that 'I do not know how everything fits together at the top'. For her 'strategy is not clearly defined', and, so, she uses her autonomy to define what the strategy means for her and how to implement it. MM37 also pointed out that the bureaucracy created more burden and more work. Therefore, one way she used her autonomy was to define the strategic outcomes and redefine what to do. Lastly, MM37 pointed out the negatives of autonomy:

> "It is too much work, yes. You need to be at the front line all the time, so that can be a little bit tiring."

MM03 provides another example of an MM who, because of uncertainty about the strategy, was selective about what aspects of it he implemented. MM03 was new to his role and was responsible for compliance and risk management at one of the largest retail banks in the Middle East. MM03 reported to the Head of Compliance. Strategy could have been communicated to MM03 better, so he was not entirely clear about all aspects of strategy and how best to implement it. MM03 felt that he should have been more informed about strategy and included in the process of strategy formulation. He

also pointed out that it was important that the strategy proposed by his TM take into account all regulations and should focus more on risk management. Not knowing exactly what the strategy was gave MM03 lots of autonomy to do what he wanted and to manage compliance and risk as he saw fit.

His TM focused on setting many performance indicators for MM03, perhaps as a proxy for achieving strategic goals. MM03 did not feel included and engaged and, in any event, he was not entirely sure what he should be doing in relation to strategy. Thus, MM03 focused on meeting the many performance indicators that were set by TM. MM03 also noticed that not all the performance indicators were monitored, thus focused on only those that were monitored. Thus, poor communication by TMs and poor monitoring of strategy implementation have given MM03 lots of autonomy to change, delay and to avoid strategy.

4.6.1. Unclear on Strategy

Wooldridge, Schmid and Floyd (2008) define middle managers as those that have a role as mediators between strategy as set by top managers and day-to-day activities. This mediation role has to start with being clear on the strategy in the first place. The second order theme, *unclear on the strategy,* was supported by two first order concepts: poor communication by top managers and MM ignorance.

As the main focus of this thesis is about why and how MMs change intended strategy, the logically first concept to emerge was one that showed that in some cases MMs did not know in the first place what was the intended strategy and hence were motivated to use autonomy in strategy to avoid implementing this unclear strategy.

Thus, many MMs received poor communication from top managers. That may be because MMs were not so involved in the strategy formulation process or because the strategy was not explained to them or indeed because the MM did not have the time to engage with the strategy.

Many quotes illustrate how TMs can fail to clearly communicate the strategy. These ones by MM01 and MM23 show lack of clarity from the start:

> "It is in my experience when that communication hasn't been really clear at the very, very beginning and there isn't a passion around the final goal that's often led to challenges." (MM01)

So, MM01 links 'not really clear' communication about strategy to 'challenges' while M23 questions why a TM has not given a clear view on the strategy.

> "So, we might question ourselves why, I'm not quite sure why this individual we are working with, C level…, let's say as an example, hasn't given a clear point of view on the strategy." (MM23)

Even when top managers had communicated the strategy, some MMs were ignorant about the strategy or did not understand it. Often the MM did not know what the strategy is, perhaps because they were not privy to all strategic decisions.

MM06 articulated the importance of knowing the expected outcome of strategy to deploy the strategy.

> "…you can't deploy a strategy and not know your expected outcome. So, you'd need to know why you are doing it, how you're doing it and when you're doing it." (MM06)

MM09 pointed out that when she was tasked to deliver a strategy that did not play into her 'strength' she did not engage with it completely.

> "So, the UK is quite strong in [medical condition X]. It's not my strength so it's one of those ones where, whilst I went and met with people, it wasn't something that I knew so much about. So, they let it fall lower down the queue, but I still had to do it, I must admit. So, I had to do that, but I didn't - it wasn't something that I engaged with completely." (MM09)

MM37 set out that she did not understand the strategy because she was busy and not able to find the time necessary to understand the strategy. As a result, she would use her autonomy to ignore the strategy.

> "For me, it's not very clear where we want to go. But, maybe it's my fault. You see, I know sometimes they organise town halls and they organise things to sit everybody together but I'm so busy that I don't go. So, it can be my fault as well, you see." (MM37)

> "What is our strategic statement? I don't know how many pages because it was a massive document and we had like a high-level explanation of what the different sections were, and I didn't have the time to look at it." (MM37)

In summary, the second-order theme C1 "Unclear on strategy" arises from the first-order concepts of "poor communication by TMs" and "MM ignorance".

4.6.2. No belief in strategy

Even if MMs were clear on the strategy, they might not believe in it because they could not see the benefit or value in the strategy, saw the strategy as not doable, or used their own judgement to decide that they did not want, for whatever reason, implement it. Thus, three first-order concepts combined to support this second-order theme of no belief by the MM in the strategy: cannot see benefit or value, sees strategy as not doable, and uses own opinion

In all three cases, MMs would seek to use autonomy in strategy to avoid, delay or change the strategy.

Some MMs could not see the benefit or value of a strategy or did not see the strategy as 'exciting'. In consequence, they would seek to avoid implementing the strategy or not put in much effort into delivery. It is also clear as illustrated by MM13's comments that the benefit or value of strategy can be seen by MMs as lower if the process of strategy formulation takes too long (e.g., because of regulatory requirements) such that the company's agility or the MM's autonomy was thus lower.

> "I remember sometimes when I was at [XYZ bank] that all releases had to be approved by external parties and regulators, so having the ability to give autonomy to a team for a release every day was pointless. It's of no benefit because they will all be queued up until that regulator saw the report and then said yes. So, what's the point of having agility?" (MM13)

As illustrated by an MM29 quote, when formulating and articulating a strategy, it is important that all departments are clear how the strategy adds value to them

> "Sometimes the culture in a different department has resistance to such programmes where they think it doesn't add value, it just wastes more time." (MM29)

As regards to strategy articulation, it is important, as pointed out by MM37, that the strategic statement is clearly articulated and also exciting, so that MMs are happy about the strategy and inspired to implement it.

> "Am I happy with the strategy? As I said, for me I don't think there is a clear statement of this organisation. As I said, they talk about activities, so they talk about 'We want to be close to our clients, we want to grow in business…'. But am I happy? I'm not sure it's exciting." (MM37)

TMs when tasking MMs with strategy implementation have to ensure that MMs 'can do' the strategy implementation, so that they 'do not sit on things that they can't do' as well articulated by MM37.

> "So, people who make the wrong decisions, they waste time because they are sitting on things that they can't do. They might be doing the wrong thing as well because they are going off and then they don't understand what the core aims are." (MM37)

In order to ensure that MMs use their autonomy as intended, it is important that they have a framework which sets out the 'bits that they decide and what bits they don't decide' as highlighted by MM37.

> "So, you need to give them a framework, so that they understand what bits they decide and what bits they don't decide." (MM37)

Sometimes MMs saw the strategy as not doable. As articulated well by MM5 it is important that a TM ensures from the beginning that an MM believes that strategy is doable. This is so because if an MM sees a strategy as not doable, they will not do it and or will convince the TM that the strategy is not doable and or convince the TM to change it to something else.

> "I can say to management "I will do it" but in actual I will not do. I remember some strategy has been set and it is not implemented because it is not doable. And for me as a leader I can convince management it is not doable. then they try to change and do something else. Yes, I am [a] leader." (MM05)

Sometimes, MMs used their own opinion to decide that they did not believe in the strategy. So, for example, MM09 used her own opinion to decide that 'collaborations were not working' and had enough autonomy to implement a new framework.

> **"**So, I had a large amount of autonomy, I developed the framework because I decided that these collaborations weren't working and I told my employer company that that's what I was going to do because they didn't have a method at that point. So, I implemented that framework and was autonomous and they were open to that." (MM09)

TMs when setting strategy in new environments have to be also aware 'how things are done' locally and what is the local 'logic', what is the local regulatory context and what are the boundary 'lines'.

Other MMs used their judgement to determine how to best implement strategy.

> "I would say that I use autonomy to shape the strategy in the best way possible, to have not a constraint in framework, but to be able to put as much thought into

> it, as much independent validation into a strategy to make it optimal. To make sure that we are not missing anything." (MM24)

In summary, the second-order theme C2 "No belief in strategy" arises from the first-order concepts of "cannot see benefit or value", "sees strategy as not doable" and "uses own judgement".

4.6.3. Response to Non-Attention

Many MMs wanted to avoid delivering strategy if they perceived that the strategy was not monitored, the strategy had low salience, or if the original strategy maker had left the organisation or was no longer responsible for the strategy implementation.

MMs see the monitoring of strategy and ensuring that 'the business is on track' as TMs job as evident from a quote of MM16.

> "The senior people give them budget, but they don't sort of get too involved in the why or the exact [how]…as long as they hit the targets and they do the job, the senior guys are there to make sure that it's recorded and the business is on track." (MM16)

Many MMs reacted to whether the strategy was sufficiently monitored by top managers. While lack of monitoring may seem incompetent, the reality was that most MMs were tasked to implement multiple strategies, which had varying levels of associated monitoring. This is best illustrated by a quote from MM05:

> "Because there are many things, it is followed up very well, so I said before if it is something, if it is monitored it will be done. But once there is no monitoring, it is not monitored, so it will disappear." (MM05)

Separate from the level of monitoring, some strategies were not deemed by MMs to be very important to the company, i.e., they had low salience. In such cases, MMs would seek to avoid making much effort to implement. This not wanting to implement and 'not wanting to do it' was well articulated by MM01 who said that MMs

are not going to implement the strategy if they ‘do not agree with it’, ‘do not want it’, ‘they can’t see the value’, see it as ‘irritating’ and or they have got ‘a lot of work on’.

> “But it's almost a good example of that there is a strategy, we will implement, key account management. And certain countries, very senior leaders, not wanting to do it, is because they can't see the value. It's irritating because it's more work and they’ve got a lot of work on. Or they don’t agree with it.” (MM01)

A quote from MM39 below shows it is important that the strategy and its different aspects are clearly articulated and defined by TMs.

> “For me the strategy, I'm not sure if it’s clearly defined and clearly driven and clearly… So, how would I do things differently? So, clearly define what is the strategy?”

Another cause of non-attention by MMs was if the original formulator of a strategy had left or moved on or is no longer responsible for the strategy or if there is a belief that the strategy will fail. The strategy was, thus, orphaned and ignored, and doomed from the beginning. This is well illustrated by quotes by MM05:

> “…will not implement strategy in a situation where the someone who has brought it up….then leaves the company or if management does not believe in it.” (MM05)

> “At that time half of the team, I am not talking about myself, this is other management, that time it is upper management, the upper management said he was not believing in this programme. He said ‘Oh this will fail, it is [X’s] initiative, it is someone [else who] bring[s it] and he [is] going to leave the company’. ” (MM05)

In summary, the second-order theme C3 “Response to non-attention” arises from the first-order concepts of “strategy not monitored”, “strategy has low salience” and “strategy maker has left”.

4.6.4. Self-interest

Some MMs followed their own perceived self-interest to avoid delivering strategy, if the MM faced work overload, had insufficient resources to deliver the strategy or, in some cases, to avoid poor performance evaluation if they tried to deliver a strategy that was difficult to implement.

As apparent from the quotes below MMs will not implement strategy if it is not in their self-interest and they do not want to do it.

> If they say no, realistically that's their call…. Not wanting to do it, is because they can't see the value.' (MM01)

In a quote below MM05 articulated that he will avoid implementing strategy if it is not in his self -interest to do so because implementing it adds workload. Thus, for the TM it is important to ensure an optimum MM workload rather than overload.

> "To not implement a strategy? We can decide, we can if I speak frankly, maybe we just feel, 'Oh keep it to [the] side, nobody will ask about it' and we feel it's okay, we couldn't – we shouldn't implement the strategy. If maybe, because sometimes we feel some strategies add load, you know workload, the human nature is avoiding workload." (MM05)

While MMs might wish to implement a strategy, quite often they simply had too much work and overload to implement all strategies that were assigned to them.MM01 articulated that it is important that TM provides the right level of support to MMs so that they can 'cope'.

> "I think if in a big organisation like mine there will be lots of strategic imperatives and I think the realistic part of it is if you're a country manager of for instance, one of the big five in Europe, everyone is trying to support that strategic drive and as a country manager you've got ten people coming at you, you're going to prioritise the top two or three. And every other strategic imperative is going to have to go somewhere else, go away, I can't cope, and in a big organisation that is the reality." (MM01)

As well articulated in MM01's quote above MMs will prioritise the implementation of the strategies that they were tasked with in order to be able to cope.

A critical role of MMs is to use their autonomy to mobilise strategic resources . Often, these MMs had insufficient resources to implement particular strategies. Whether or not there are 'sufficient resources' to implement a strategy, therefore, affects MMs' decision to implement or not to implement strategy.

> "It's not just about their willingness but the surrounding company willingness, the resources that we have available, the systems infrastructure that you have available at that time. But, probably they're right, probably back then like two years ago we couldn't have achieved it even though it was needed. It would have been great if we had started it two years ago because we'd be there already now." (MM30)

Some strategies were seen by MMs as so difficult to implement that they were likely to result in poor performance evaluation of the MM.

> "Interestingly, if that middle manager is – still wants to show that they are a high performer but does not want to do whatever it is that they are being expected to do, honestly they can cover it up, and that's the reality of it. It is easy to smile up and to say, 'yes it's been done' and to make things look as though they have been done, and it happens, it really does happen." (MM01)

In one case, an MM regretted taking on a strategy that led to poor performance evaluation.

> "…so I just committed and committed without realising that it was going to be really difficult to do. So, yes, my current employer was unhappy because of the amount of work it cost them to get the transactions done…Autonomy went a bit too far; I'm not sure I'd do the same thing again but I think… I didn't lose my job, and it was one of these weird sort of double-edged swords…." (MM30)

In summary, the second-order theme C4 "Self-interest" arises from the first-order concepts of "has overload", "insufficient resources" and "avoid poor performance evaluation".

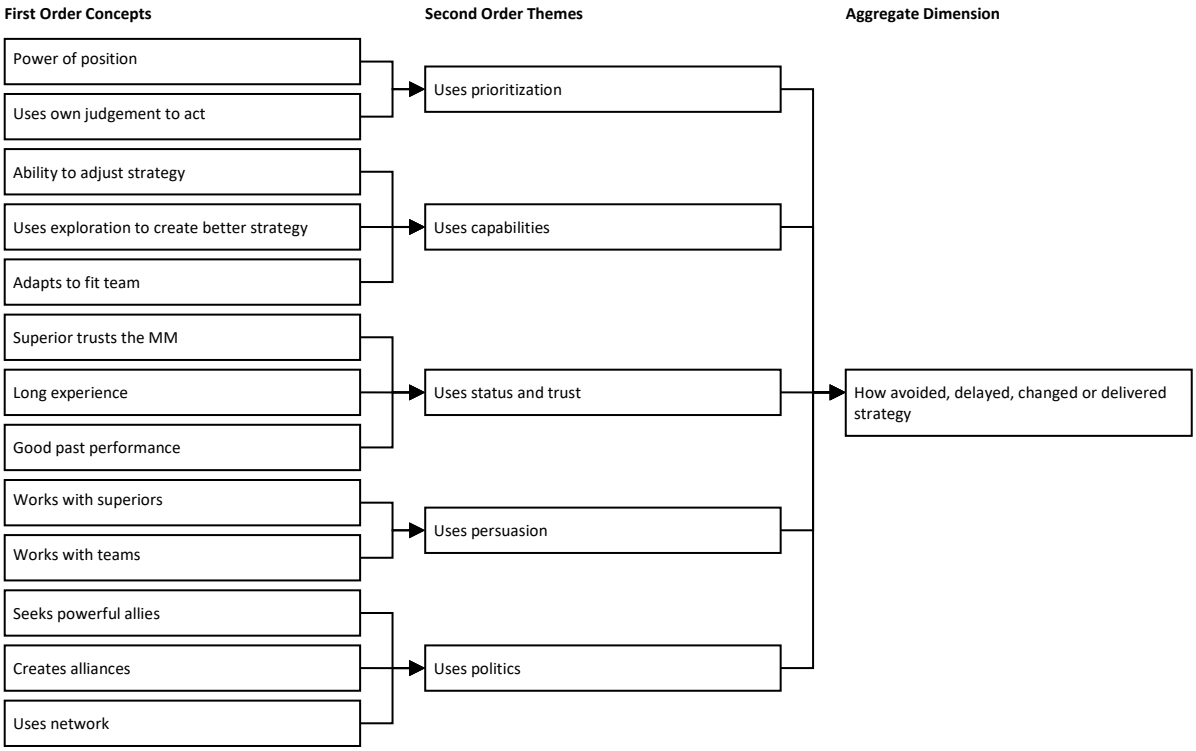
To conclude on Data Structure C, there are many reasons why MMs use autonomy in strategy to avoid, delay, change or deliver an intended strategy.

4.7. Data Structure D on "How" MMs Use Autonomy in strategy

The fourth outcome data structure (D) (Figure 4.4), on how MMs avoided, delayed, changed or delivered the strategy, is based on five second-order themes, all of which are directly about *what the MMs did*, in contrast to *what MMs perceived* (as in Data Structure C): uses prioritization, uses capabilities, uses status and trust, uses persuasion, and uses politics. Various MMs would take one or more of these actions in order to gain and exercise autonomy to avoid, delay, change or deliver the strategy.

MM01 illustrates how someone who had long experience and who was very comfortable with the extent of autonomy he had, was able to change strategy in various ways. MM01 was Director of the Accounts Centre of Excellence for a very large multinational pharmaceutical company. His main job was to pull together plans for implementation of key account management centre of excellence, specifically in a geographical region which was Europe and also in China. It was up to him to develop strategy that engages country managers and their managers and their management teams in doing things a certain way to follow the global strategic plan. MM01 was a highly

Figure 4.4. Data Structure D – How Middle Managers Avoid, Delay, Change or Deliver Strategy



experienced manager--he had been two years in that role, 14 years with the company and 29 years in the industry.

MM01 was not much concerned with getting autonomy as he had plenty of it, mainly due to his long experience and relationship with his TM. The latter's style was quite consultative and because MM01 was trusted, the boss would confer with him and his colleagues.

MM01 also firmly believed that the middle manager is the most powerful individual who can either prevent or make something from happening. He explained how an MM can avoid implementing a strategy by fooling senior managers:

> "It's easy to smile up and say, 'Yes it's been done' and to make things look as though they've been done, and it happens, it really does happen. And I think it's a responsibility of senior managers to watch out for it because all sorts of

relationships are there in large organisations, those subcultures and those relationships where Person A who is a senior manager has known Person B the middle manager for many, many years and therefore trusts them at their word. And whilst they are trustworthy, they still might just tweak that strategic message slightly so that it loses the impact."

MM01 also explained how MMs could thwart intended strategy by blocking communication to the front-line staff:

"But it has to get through that middle group in order for that effective message to get to the people who are going to do the doing and the customer facing people. So, if those people in the middle, the middle managers are as enthusiastic, positive and can see the vision and have the tools etcetera, etcetera it's going to happen. If there's anything that prevents that, it's not going to happen and that happens all the time in our organisation and causes all kinds of frustrations."

MM01 also provided interesting reasons why MMs should exercise autonomy to not always follow the set strategy.

"Yes, I think without autonomy how do you know that the system that's currently in place is the best? So, if you allow a bit of autonomy within that system someone might find one improvement and add to it and that for me is worth [it]."

On the other hand, he did not want MMs to go too far with autonomy:

"So, everything about autonomy for me is if there is a line that you cannot go over autonomy is about going to that line, but never going over it. So, if you allow autonomy for people to go over the line then that's recklessness, that to me is not autonomy, that's stupidity almost."

In summary, the case of MM01 shows both motivation and method to change intended strategy.

MM30 talked about how he is able to gain a great deal of autonomy and how he uses it, again showing the interaction of sources and use. He works as a VP for a large global technology security company and is responsible for the company's European strategy. Their main clients are Fortune 500 companies. MM30 was enthusiastically saying 'I think every company listed in the Fortune 500 list is one of our customers.'

MM30 said that the service they provide to companies is very important to them as any data and or security breaches can be very high-profile and thus very damaging. MM35 sees autonomy as 'freedom to decide.'

MM30 is responsible for strategy implementation and explained his involvement:

> "You know, we do a twice-yearly strategy off-site with the CEO and we have a direct tap into the strategy coming from the executive staff."

MM30 understood the CEO's strategy well:

> "I think definitely if you didn't have good strategic information flow all the way down, you'd create a problem with execution but I think he's doing a good job there."

As regards to strategy implementation the company's motto 'choose speed' gives MM30 lots of autonomy because he can justify changing strategy or making a change to implementation by justifying that it was time efficient to do so. MM30 elaborated:

> "Yes, so if you're faced with a decision, choose speed. That's the sort of higher level value or guidance; it's do it fast rather than sit and think and think and think and design, build a big strategy and, you know, make sure 100% of everyone's on board and then years later…"

MM30 explained further that he does not always wait for his TM's approval for changes and makes decisions quickly:

> "Yes, quickly and don't wait for the whole thing to be baked as a fully-baked cake. You know, bake each piece and go kind of thing."

When making changes MM30 gains autonomy not by asking for it, but he just does things that need to be done and does not necessarily get permission. Instead he informs TM about what he does because:

'I need to inform them. So, they're not consulted necessarily but they're informed.'

MM30 explained why autonomy is important in order to get things done:

> "If you wait for everyone's opinion, and if you try to address everyone's concern then you don't move very quickly at all. I will make the decision and move forward."

MM30, at the same time as gaining autonomy by not asking for permission, also acknowledged that it is difficult to get autonomy and pointed out that often

> "You have to be given the autonomy and I've noticed that's very difficult to just take. It has to be something that somebody has said, 'I want you to own this.' Somebody above you has said 'I want you to own this.' It's much harder to try and to it without the authority and autonomy and much easier in this company when you have it."

MM30 gets autonomy from his TM because of 'trust' and his 'abilities', 'confidence' because he 'had done things before', 'results', 'hard work' and because he can be relied on. He also pointed out that he gets autonomy because TM realises that he has only got 'two hands' and because TM realises 'his own limitations' and his own 'bandwidth'. MM30 gave an example of when he uses his autonomy and does not ask permission for doing things:

> "So, there's an area I saw that needs further exploration, I know there's a bit of a gap, it's now quite my area, but it's important to my area …… and start working on it. That's autonomy. I'm not going to go talk to her boss and say, 'Talk to my boss,' then talk to his boss and then they agree that, 'Yeah, we can talk about this,' and then go on… Just go do it, you know, that's my idea. Just get on with it, see what happens. I can make the decision; I can make the call; I can put the money into it; I can move the resources; I can do whatever it takes and no one else will challenge that. That's exercising autonomy. It's not always asking for permission for everything."

For MM30 autonomy also meant being able to decide which decisions he is making and which not:

> "I can even agree not to be involved a decision. That's autonomy. So, I could say 'Listen, I don't need to be involved in making that decision. If you want to assign a resource to that particular problem, this level can do it. I don't need to be involved. If you want to do this level of budget spend just do it. I don't need to be involved.' Autonomy can also be stepping away and saying I don't need to have autonomy on that.

In summary, MM30 showed flexibility in both how he got autonomy and how he used it to affect strategy.

MM10 is a good example of how an MM uses autonomy in strategy in different ways. He works for a global marketing/digital advertising firm looking after global accounts of large multinationals. A key source of his autonomy is that he has been with the company longer than the TM to whom he reports. He uses his autonomy to change strategy, to have flexibility to tailor products to his customers' needs, whereas his TM's strategy is to sell standard products. He also changes the pricing strategy per product set by his TM in a situation when that would mean higher overall revenue and to fit the resources available.

> "So if you take one of the customers at the moment, the objective of the business obviously is to get all four of our products into their business but that business quite clearly said to us, 'We're not interested in your media product right now'."

So, MM10 changed the strategy by not focusing on the media part. Obviously, the company strategy is to have the full stack and the media part is one of those being sold. MM10 has not implemented the strategy as set out by TMs, saying:

> "I'm not going to sell the full stack because it won't benefit us in the long run."

He has autonomy to make changes:

> "As long as I meet my targets. If I'm not meeting my targets, then I have to explain my rationale as to why I'm not hitting my targets and why I haven't followed the company strategy."

MM10 has been given lots of autonomy because it is the culture of the company: 'here's the strategy you go and build it as if it was your own'. He points out that there is, however, tight revenue control.

> 'Whilst you have the flexibility to implement your strategy …you still have obligation to talk the business through where your business numbers are versus targets on a weekly basis.' 'Again, I have autonomy as long as I hit my targets.'

MM10 can gain autonomy to change strategy and to keep an 'unprofitable customer' by being able to persuade and explain why in fact it is beneficial for the company.

> "If that customer has significant market impact, i.e., if they tell the market that they are working with us and that brings more customers in then we can keep them…I'm doing it because if we have these customers on our books and on our website and in our testimonials then we'll get this revenue over here. So, again that strategy is for me to adapt and implement. As long as I share the rationale."

MM10 also believes that he is given the autonomy that he has to test strategy and improve it in order to learn and to find out what works best and be able to do things that are 'generally not under his area'. MM10 influences his boss:

> "It's funny I just went for breakfast with my boss this morning where I gave him some feedback on things that we could be doing better as a team and he was very receptive to that and he said, 'Let's go and implement it, you have the ability to go and do that, go and put it into play'."

MM10 has gained autonomy by 'delivering', noticing that:

> "You have to deliver, if you're delivering then you've got a platform to be able to ask for more. If you are not delivering and you are asking for more autonomy, then actually you should be asking for more help because there's a problem that you might not be seeing the full picture of."

MM10 has also gained autonomy by persuading and by being able to 'articulate why and how that's going to happen' and by being solution focused:

> "Yes, and basically you know, what you find when you're in a leadership position is that most people will come to you with a problem. 'This is broken, what are you going to do about it?' That person is not doing their job."

So, he presents himself as 'solution focused' rather than pointing out that here's a problem, and by solving the problems he gains autonomy. MM10 explained how he solved a problem relating to how information to customers was presented.

> "I wanted to change the way we were presenting information to customers and to get more autonomy over how we do that. So, what I did there was to invite the CEO into a meeting with me when he was in London, for him to come to a customer meeting, for him to spend – I knew the way the customer conversation was going to go so I wanted him to see that so that he would come to the conclusion that he actually said to me after the meeting: 'Actually this way is not hitting the customers need, do you think we could have done it any differently?' and again I was ready with a solution of how we should do it. And then after the CEO had seen the problem first hand, he said, 'Okay well let's change the way we talk, let's use your plan which was…' So, I guess having them see your pain points is important for them, to see if from the other side of the view to then get the autonomy to be able to change it."

MM10 in order to expand his autonomy had to change his communication style to fit his new boss:

> "I guess the key thing was the way I present information to him. So, I've had to learn his language to know how he wanted to hear things and had to change my thinking about how to shape the information for him and then we could have a common conversation."

To keep and gain autonomy MM10 was also good at getting 'trust' and articulating his interests.

> "There have been instances where I've said, in our 1-to-1s, you know 'When you do this the impact on me is this and I don't like it'. So, highlighting instances whether intentionally or unintentionally his actions have an impact on me and actually that impact means that it has a detrimental impact on the teams and the work that you do. So, giving him feedback on that was really important, to know how we should talk to each other and how we should engage. And almost inviting him to do the same back to me, to get the level of trust."

In summary, MM10 uses many methods to use autonomy to affect strategy.

Overall, in terms of Data Structure D, MMs use many methods in autonomy in strategy to avoid, change, delay or deliver intended strategy.

4.8. Further Issues Emerging from the Data and the Coding Process

A number of issues did not produce notable or frequent enough comments to yield findings to contribute to any of the four data structures or to generate further data structures.

MM perceptions of organisation performance. Although I asked all MMs whether their autonomy in strategy improved organisation performance, none said explicitly that it did, although a few said that they changed the strategy in order to improve performance.

Nationality effects on MMs. I found no notable differences in the comments between MMs from the 19 Western European and American parent companies and those from the 12 non-Western European and American parent companies, nor between the 23 Western European and American individual MMs and 17 non-Western European and American individual MMs. At the same time, my sample did not include nationalities, such as Japanese, that are known to exhibit significant differences from Western company behaviour.

Company effects on MMs. The 31 parent companies operate in a very wide range of industries and geographies as well as varying in size. Some informants came from the same companies: 6 from one oil and gas company in the Middle East, 4 from one U.S.-

based investment management company, and 2 from one U.S.-based pharmaceutical company. I did not find that informants from the same companies made similar comments compared with informants from different companies. Of course, this commonality of the parent company was a relatively small variation in the sample.

Gender effects on MMs. I found no notable differences between the comments of the 28 male and the 12 female informants.

Conclusion. Taken as a whole, these further issues emerging from the data are collectively quite interesting, suggesting that MMs in large, for-profit, Western heritage, operating companies face similar processes in relation to autonomy in implementing strategy.

4.9. Conclusion

This chapter has, first, reported on the finding that MM autonomy in strategy has different sources-- given, situational and gained. Second, I have reported on three data structures that have first-order concepts and second-order themes. The findings are very encouraging. From the extensive text and codes, I have been able to develop four data structures that together explain very well the phenomenon that I have been investigating—MM autonomy in strategy. First, MMs have three primary sources of autonomy in strategy--inherent, situational and gained. In the case of inherent autonomy, MMs are passive recipients. In the case of gained autonomy, MMs are active players. In the case of situational autonomy, MMs are a combination of passive and active. Second, there are four different strategy implementation outcomes: MMs can avoid, delay, change or deliver the intended strategy. Third, there are many different

reasons *why* MMs avoid, delay or change strategy. Fourth, there are many different ways *how* middle managers avoid, delay, change or deliver strategy.

All findings are supported by extensive quotes from the interview transcripts. The next chapter, Discussion and Contributions, will discuss the findings in more detail, develop propositions, and relate the findings and propositions to the literature, and set out the contributions.

The most interesting findings in my study are as follows. First, MMs have three major sources of autonomy, which are both complements and substitutes for each other. Most interesting is that MMs often seek to increase their level of autonomy. Second, MMs may use that autonomy to not just deliver intended strategy but may change, delay or avoid the strategy. There seem to be two key types of drivers as to whether MMs use autonomy to change, delay or avoid the strategy. One type of driver has to do with whether the MM understands or agrees with the strategy, which in turn often depends on how TMs involve MMs in strategy formulation or communicate or monitor the strategy. The other type of driver has to do with MM self-interest, especially in terms of either their workload or their performance evaluations. Lastly, compared with prior studies, MMs have a surprisingly large number of ways in which they change, delay or avoid the strategy. In Chapter 5 I will provide much more discussion of these interesting findings and how they contribute to theory and practice.

5. DISCUSSION AND CONTRIBUTIONS

5.1. Overview

In this chapter, I discuss the findings in the previous chapter to relate these findings to the literature reviewed in Chapter 2, discuss my contributions to theory and literature, to develop propositions, and set out my contributions to practice. Table 5.1 summarises my findings in terms of the aggregate dimensions and second-order themes. First, I find three sources of autonomy in strategy for MMs: inherent, situational and gained. Second, there are four primary strategy implementation outcomes of MM use of autonomy in strategy: MMs may avoid, delay or change as well as deliver intended strategy. Third, MMs have many motivations to use autonomy in strategy to avoid, delay, change or deliver intended strategy. Fourth, MMs have many methods within autonomy in strategy to avoid, delay, change or deliver intended strategy.

Table 5.1. Summary of Findings

SOURCES OF MM AUTONOMY IN STRATEGY "WHERE"	STRATEGY OUTCOMES OF MM AUTONOMY IN STRATEGY "WHAT"	WHY MMs USE AUTONOMY IN STRATEGY "WHY"	WHY MMs USE AUTONOMY IN STRATEGY "HOW"
Inherent Situational Gained	avoid strategy delay strategy change strategy deliver strategy	MM unclear on strategy MM has no belief in strategy MM's response to TM non-attention MM's self-interest	MM uses prioritisation MM uses capabilities MM uses status and trust MM uses persuasion MM uses politics

MM = middle manager, TM = top manager
TOP ROW = AGGREGATE DIMENSIONS, Cells = Second Order Themes

5.2. Relating the Four Key Findings to Prior Research

In this section I will relate to prior research the four key findings of (1) sources of autonomy in strategy ("where"), (2) strategy implementation outcomes ("what"), (3) "why" MMs use autonomy in strategy, and (4) "how" MMs use autonomy in strategy, as well as their supporting themes.

5.2.1. Sources of Middle Manager Autonomy in Strategy

The first key finding of my study is that MM autonomy in strategy has at least three sources: inherent, situational, and gained. Prior studies did not describe such sources of MM autonomy, only how they used them. Some studies do indeed imply the need for MMs to have some autonomy in strategy. Balogun and Johnson (2004) saw middle managers as agents of change, implying that MMs need autonomy to create change. More broadly, Huy (2002) saw middle managers in terms of their views as change agents engaged in innovation, again implying the need for autonomy. Some studies, such as Bourgeois and Brodwin (1984), Ahearne, Lam and Kraus (2014) and Mirabeau and Maguire (2014) talked generally about "autonomous strategic behaviour" rather than how such behaviour arises. My key contribution here is to find that MM autonomy in strategy is an active condition that changes over time and that MMs can be proactive in gaining more of it.

5.2.2. Outcomes of Middle Manager Autonomy in Strategy

The second key finding of my study is that MMs use autonomy in strategy to produce one or more outcomes: avoid, delay, change or deliver the strategy. Extensive research on the role of MMs in strategy has found that MMs sometimes use autonomy to change the

intended strategy as they implement it (see summary in Table 1.1). Also, some studies go beyond how MMs adapt intended strategy to how they initiate actions that become emergent strategies (e.g., Mirabeau and Maguire, 2014) or how MMs can initiate strategic change (Heyden et al., 2017). However, previous literature has focused on change and to a much lesser extent on delay ("foot-dragging" (Guth and MacMillan, 1986, p. 314) and "sabotaging strategy implementation" (Ates et al., 2020, p. 657). None have focused on avoidance as such. A major contribution of my study is to identify that MMs perceive themselves as having four clear choices—to avoid, delay, change or deliver an intended strategy.

5.2.3. Why Middle Managers Use Autonomy in Strategy

My study has found many reasons why MMs seek to use autonomy in strategy.

5.2.3.1. Unclear on strategy

Previous studies show the importance of MMs understanding what the strategy is about. My findings show that poor understanding arises from two separate reasons: not just poor communication by TMs but also ignorance on the part of MMs.

In relation to communication by TMs, recent literature has emphasized the role of MMs in the strategy formulation process as drivers of understanding and motivation. Thus, Ketoviki and Castañer (2004) found how "participation and communication" (p. 337) in strategic planning worked together in achieving "goal convergence" (p. 337) among MMs. Vila and Canales (2008) found that MMs' "active participation" (p. 285) in strategic planning increased their "appreciation of priorities and goals" (p. 276) and

"co-ordinated action" (p. 276) during implementation. Westley (1990) found that MMs' exclusion from the strategy conversation led to demotivation, alienation and conflict.

My study shows how a lack of or insufficient participation in strategy formulation can lead to MMs being unclear on the strategy. First, many quotes illustrate how TMs can fail to clearly communicate the strategy, and to create lack of clarity from the start. Second, even with clear initial communication by TMs, it is hard to get a clear message on strategy to pass down a large organisation. Third, TMs may even deliberately obfuscate a strategy to avoid revealing bad news, such as planned job losses, which causes confusion and leads to wasted resources and demotivated MMs.

Even when TMs had communicated the strategy, some MMs were ignorant about the strategy or simply did not understand it. Often the MM does not know what the strategy is, perhaps because they were not privy to all strategic decisions. This partial ignorance of strategy is in line with a large body of literature which states that strategy formulation is primarily the domain of top management, e.g., Burgelman (1983 and 1996), Westley (1990); Wooldridge and Floyd (1990), Floyd and Wooldridge (1992, 1996, and 1997), Dutton at. al., (1997), and Huy (2002). My study shows that MM ignorance can be because of many reasons: the MM being just too busy and not able to find the time necessary to understand the strategy, MM does not have knowledge to understand the strategy (does not know what it the strategy means for them/their team), or the MM is not interested in the strategy.

The various quotes supporting the two first-order concepts that make up this second-order theme all show explicitly or implicitly that lack of clarity on the strategy motivates MMs to either avoid implementation or try to change the strategy. Wooldridge, Schmid and Floyd (2008) have identified as a high future research priority

the investigation of 'conditions' leading to middle managers enactment of strategic roles. One of my findings is that the interviews shed light on what conditions lead to *why* MMs use their autonomy in strategy.

5.2.3.2. No belief in strategy

Prior literature, as set out in the previous section, discusses how MMs may lack commitment to a strategy. Also, Fiss and Zajac (2006) extended strategic change to include not only a shift in structures and processes but also as a cognitive reorientation (conveying new priorities to 'buy-in'). My findings show it is not just commitment but MMs having different beliefs from TMs about the effectiveness of a strategy. My study shows that these different beliefs can arise from three causes: MMs cannot see the benefit or value in the strategy, see the strategy as not doable, or use their own judgement to decide that the strategy is wrong.

Some prior literature stresses the role of divergent behaviour by MMs--engaging in behaviour that results in a divergence of strategy from that intended by top managers (Floyd and Wooldridge, 1992; Pappas and Wooldridge, 2007). Some of this divergent behaviour by MMs can be beneficial to the organisation. For example, Pappas and Wooldridge (2007: 324) found that such MM behaviour is strategically important because it "challenges the 'dominant logic' and facilitates the entering of new markets and creation of new capabilities" as well as appealing to and attracting new customers. This divergent behaviour can be partly explained by how Floyd and Lane (2000) saw MMs as more likely to have to deal with conflict between "strategic roles" (p. 159) than those in other positions.

My study shows that such divergence from the intended strategy as set out by TMs arises for what seem to MMs to be very good reasons based on their evaluations of the strategy. The causes can be both rational and emotional. The rational arises as MMs often have more knowledge than TMs. For example, Burgess and Currie (2013) studied the "knowledge brokering role of the hybrid middle-level manager" (p. S133) "in the case of healthcare" (p. S132).

In my study many MMs talked about the knowledge they had. The emotional arises because lack of belief in a strategy is likely to trigger negative emotions about the strategy. For example, Huy (2011) studied how strategic change affects MMs' emotions and concluded that no belief in a strategy should create negative emotions about a strategy. In my study, a few MMs showed strong negative feelings, even emotions:

"…but am I happy? I'm not sure it's exciting." (MM37)

My study shows that MMs care that the strategy should be implementable. If not, they will only pretend to implement it. This lack of belief in a strategy then encourages entrepreneurial behaviour that can involve rule breaking (Kuratko and Hornsby, 2004). Balogun (2006) showed how MMs managed a path between intended strategy and unpredicted situations. Hopkins et al. (2013) found that middle managers can influence either strategic inertia or strategic renewal. The interview quotes showed how lack of belief in the strategy was demotivating and led MMs to avoid or change the strategy.

5.2.3.3. Response to non-attention

Only limited prior literature addresses MM response to non-attention by TMs to a strategy. But my study finds this theme to be an important one for why MMs are

motivated to avoid or change a strategy.

The literature suggests that TM non-attention to a strategy can arise from a number of causes. First, there may be an incorrect setting up of managerial systems. Marginson (2002) found that poorly set up managerial control systems can suppress middle management strategic initiative. Second, TMs can be too distant. Balogun and Johnson (2004) found that middle managers rely on informal "negotiations" (p. 524) with "peers" (p. 524) to "interpret" (p. 523) and implement change because of senior executives being too distant. Raes et al. (2011) found that the quality of strategic decisions and strategy implementation depends on continual interactions between MMs and TMs.

My study found three motivations for TM non-attention to a strategy: the strategy was not monitored, the strategy had low salience, and the original strategy maker had left the organisation or was no longer responsible for the strategy implementation. The interview quotes showed how non-attention by TMs to the strategy led MMs to seek to avoid or change the strategy. Shimizu (2012) has described 'divergence' by middle management that was enabled by unclear top management intent. I have found a number of situations which are interpreted by middle managers as 'unclear top management intents' which led to divergence of MM strategic actions.

5.2.3. 4. Self-interest

Prior literature addresses how the self-interest of all managers, including MMs, affects their behaviour in relation to organisation objectives. This literature starts at a fundamental level with agency theory: Fama (1980) and Hart (1989) identified agency as the cause of misalignment of managers' and organisation interests. Much of the

economics literature on agency theory as, for example, articulated by Shimizu (2012) found that agency led to possible divergent ("opportunistic") behaviour of all types, not just strategic, by managers at all levels. In relation to strategy implementation, Guth and Macmillan (1986) used expectancy theory to show how self-interest affects middle manager motivation to implement strategy. They found three sources of low or negative commitment to implementing a strategy: perceived inability to execute strategy, low perceived probability that strategy will work, and perception that outcomes will not satisfy individual goals. Sillince and Mueller (2007) found that a "middle management team implementing a strategic initiative" (p. 155) "reframed" (p. 158) "responsibilities" (p. 158) and "expectations" (p. 163) based on the team's "changing goals" (p. 172). This divergence was enabled by unclear top management intent that favoured midlevel opportunism.

But this prior literature does not identify the mechanisms by which MM self-interest come into play in the implementation of strategy. My study finds that MMs followed their own perceived self-interest to avoid delivering strategy, if (1) the MM faced work overload, (2) the MM had insufficient resources to deliver the strategy, or (3) in some cases to avoid poor performance evaluation if the MM had to deliver a strategy that was difficult to implement.

My findings reinforce those of Guth and Macmillan (1986) but go beyond them into three detailed motivations. The many quotes on self-interest of MMs show how these motivations spurred MMs to avoid or change the strategy. Shimizu (2012) looking at MMs via an agency theory lens, concluded that middle managers do engage in opportunistic behaviour of all types. I have added to Shimizu's research as I have found a number of specific areas where this opportunistic behaviour is displayed by MM.

5.2.4. How Middle Managers Use Autonomy in Strategy

Having discussed the four themes that drive *why* MMs seek to avoid or change strategy, I now discuss the five themes that drive *how* MMs avoid, delay, change or deliver strategy.

5.2.4.1. MM Uses prioritisation

On the first *how* theme, C1 uses prioritisation, and its two supporting concepts (power of position and uses own judgment) there is significant related prior literature.

In terms of the power of the MM position, Luscher and Lewis (2008) found middle managers to be critical change agents who were lynchpins of organisational change, acting as intermediaries. A powerful example is provided by Beck and Plowman (2009) who studied the role of MMs in a NASA[4] incident in animating and guiding organisational interpretation in the process of change and rare events. Canales (2013) showed that MMs shape their (strategic) role, which increases their power base. Mantere (2008) examined how "role expectations" (p. 294) can both "enable and constrain" (p. 294) MM strategic behaviour.

In terms of using their judgment, prior literature has long stressed the key role of strategic judgment by MMs. Wooldridge and Floyd (1989) cited Bower (1970)'s definition of MMs as the only ones in organisations who are in the position to judge whether strategic issues are being considered in context (see also Noda and Bower, 1996). Vila and Canales (2008) found that MMs had varying "appreciation of priorities and goals" (p. 276) and "co-ordinated action" (p. 276) during implementation. Boyett

[4] National Aeronautics and Space Administration, USA.

and Currie (2004) found that, in an international venture, MMs were the only ones in a position to judge whether strategic issues were considered properly in order to reconcile strategic intent and local context. Regnér (2003) did not explicitly address the role of MMs but studied how strategy creation at the periphery of the company was different from that at the centre, being more inductive than deductive (i.e., making more use of judgement).

In terms of using prioritisation, Fiss and Zajac (2006) showed that TMs use sensemaking to convey new priorities to MMs, thus demonstrating that prioritisation in strategy implementation is an inherent role of MMs. Guo, Huy and Xiao, (2017) found a key role for prioritisation by MMs using the power and autonomy inherent in their position in the organisation. They found that MMs in China's state-owned enterprises were better than both top managers and front-line employees at managing the political environment to achieve market goals because they were better at bridging the interface between competing market and political imperatives.

The contribution of my study is to show that MMs avoid, delay, change or deliver strategy by using the power of their position and by making judgments that result in changed priorities. Thus, often, it was not that MMs changed the content of strategy intended by TM but that they gave different priorities as to what aspects to implement and when.

My study shows that many MMs have sufficient autonomy in relation to strategies that they could simply prioritise what and when they delivered, without having to gain extra autonomy. In particular, most MMs used the inherent power of their position to prioritise, or they used their judgment to prioritise.

5.2.4.2. MM uses capabilities

While MMs might be able to prioritise what strategies they implement or change, a different issue is whether they have the capability to implement or change a strategy. Most literature has focused on organisation capability, such as for strategic renewal (Floyd and Wooldridge, 1999) or change in strategic capabilities ("dynamic capabilities" of Teece, Pisano and Shuen, 1997). Also, most literature has focused on the roles of MMs, such as championing, synthesising, facilitating, implementing (Floyd and Wooldridge, 1992) but not so much on the capabilities that MMs use to deliver or change strategy. The contribution of my study is to detail how MMs use three capabilities to avoid, delay, change or deliver strategy. These three capabilities are ability to adjust a strategy, uses exploration to create better strategy, and adaptation of a strategy to fit the team and or environment and to maximise the use of resources. All these adaptive capabilities are in the context of coping with the external environment and making best use of available resources.

The first capability--having the ability to adjust the strategy--is supported in some prior studies. Wooldridge and Floyd (1989) suggest that positive effects of MM strategic influence on organisational performance depend partly on balance between an organisation's need for control and flexibility (i.e., MM ability to adjust strategy). But too much autonomy for MMs to adjust strategy may result in unfocused strategy (Wernerfelt and Karnani, 1987), or that the identity of companies cannot be maintained, and continuity can be destroyed (Volberda, 1996). Indeed, looking at how much would be optimum autonomy for MMs to have is another opportunity for further research.

The second capability--uses exploration to adjust the strategy formulated by TMs to create better strategy--is supported by some previous studies. Ashforth and Mael

(1989) found that MMs who have autonomy to engage in exploratory or emerging strategies develop more commitment to the final strategy. Mirabeau and Maguire (2014, p. 1224) provide in their case study a fine-grain example of how MMs used exploration to create unintended strategies. They found that emergent strategy originates as "autonomous strategic behaviour"--projects that, "despite dissonance with the prevailing concept of strategy, are nonetheless launched as a result of local problem-solving".

The third capability--adapts to fit the team—has less support from prior literature. Sillince and Mueller (2007) found that a middle management team implementing a strategic initiative reframed responsibilities and expectations based on the team's changing goals.

Many quotes from the interviews show the importance of MM's exercising capabilities to avoid, delay, change or deliver strategy.

5.2.4.3. MM uses status and trust

Some prior literature addresses the role of MM status and trust (from their bosses/TM) in relation to strategic autonomy. My study found that MMs often used their status or trust to gain significant strategic autonomy. This status or position of trust arose from three conditions (supporting first order themes): the TM trusts the MM, long experience of the MM, and good past performance of the MM. Working with TMs is key for MMs in delivering strategy. Wooldridge, Schmid and Floyd (2008) defined middle managers as those that have a role as mediators between strategy as set by TMs and day-to-day activities. Raes et al. (2011) discussed interactions between MMs and TMs and how these linked to quality of strategic decisions and strategy implementation. Trust of the

MM by a TM is one aspect of this relationship. Mantere (2008) identified the role of trust as one of eight TM actions that give strategic agency to MMs. The contribution of my study is to confirm the importance of trust in allowing MMs to use strategic autonomy.

The second supporting concept of "long experience" is not directly covered in the literature in relation to MMs. The contribution of my study is to identify the importance of MM long experience in allowing MMs to use autonomy to avoid, delay, change or deliver strategy. This long experience is especially relevant if the MM has unique knowledge and or skills or more experience than the superior in the context/strategy.

The third supporting concept of "good past performance" is not found in previous literature, but only the causal reverse. Prior studies mostly look at the causal link from MM autonomy to organisation performance (e.g., Ahearne, Lam and Kraus, 2014). However, my interviews also show the reverse link at the individual MM level—better past performance of the MM increases status and trust, which in turn increase MM autonomy in the present. Tarakci et al. (2018) found a related effect--performance feedback to MMs can encourage divergent strategic behaviour through the exercise of autonomy. Hence, the contribution of my study is to identify the importance of MM past performance in allowing MMs to use strategic autonomy.

In summary, my research shows the prevalence of MMs using their status and trust to avoid, delay, change or deliver strategy. Many MMs gained their TMs' trust because they had 'insights', were 'credible' had experience and 'knowledge' and because they 'know' what they are talking about. Another route to MMs having status and gaining a TM's trust is if they have long experience; especially relevant is if they

have unique knowledge and or skills or more experience than the superior in the relevant context/strategy. Good past performance is also a powerful way of getting status and trust that can be sued to exercise strategic autonomy.

5.2.4.4. MM uses persuasion

The next level of why MMs were able to change strategy came from how they used persuasion by working with TMs and working with their teams. Some prior literature addresses this theme, focusing especially on "issue selling" by MMs. Dutton and Ashford (1993) defined middle managers as "selling issues to top management" and that middle managers determine "how issues come to be issues (for management to focus on) in the first place". Rouleau (2005) identified four micro practices managers use to interpret and sell strategic change: translating the orientation, over coding the strategy, disciplining the client, and justifying the change. Ling, Floyd and Baldridge (2005) developed an acculturated view of issue selling--managers socialised in different cultures will vary in their perception of the context and how they choose to sell issues.

The first concept supporting the theme of "uses persuasion" is "works with superiors." As cited in the previous section, various studies such as Wooldridge, Schmid and Floyd (2008) and Raes et al. (2011) stress the importance of MMs working with TMs. Even the exercise of autonomy that result in divergent strategy has to be eventually authorised by TMs (Floyd and Wooldridge, 1992; Pappas and Wooldridge, 2007; and Mirabeau and Maguire, 2014).

The second concept supporting the theme of "uses persuasion" is "works with team." In terms of working with their teams, Sillince and Mueller (2007) showed how strategy implementation is very much a team effort. They found that a middle

management team implementing a strategic initiative reframed responsibilities and expectations based on the team's changing goals. Less directly relevant, there is also an entire research field on self-managed teams, looking at how autonomy of such teams can increase both job efficiency and satisfaction Celso and Pais, (2009).

The contribution of my study is to confirm the importance of both concepts ("works with superiors" and "works with team") in generating MM strategic autonomy. In addition, my study shows that these two concepts operate through the theme of "uses persuasion", i.e., MMs persuading superiors or teams to avoid, delay, change or deliver strategy.

5.2.4.5. MM uses politics

Some MMs used politics to gain autonomy needed to avoid change or deliver a strategy. The MMs sought powerful allies, created alliances, and used networks.

In terms of the second order theme of "uses politics", numerous studies address that for MMs. Dutton et al. (2001) found that MMs' upward selling of strategic issues was politically and contextually embedded. Fulop (1991) looked at how MMs use their autonomy to mobilize strategic resources, by using political skills to change and redirect organisational energies. Kuratko et al. (2005) found that MMs championed new ideas through a political process and innovation until success was achieved. Pappas and Wooldridge (2007) suggested specific relationships between alternative forms of network centrality for middle managers and particular elements of the strategic renewal process. Guo, Huy and Xiao. (2017) found that MMs in China's state-owned enterprises were better than both top managers and front-line employees at managing the external political environment.

In terms of the first-order concept "seek powerful allies", Laine and Vaara (2006) found that middle management resisted corporate-level attempts to control strategy by initiating a separate strategy discourse to increase midlevel influence and autonomy, i.e., they sought allies for the separate discourse.

In terms of the first-order concept "creates alliances", there are no direct prior studies relating to MMs and strategy.

In terms of "uses network" many studies have looked at network effects for MMs. Some studies in network theory directly address role of middle managers (e.g., Shi et al., 2009). Kodama (2005) described middle management's role in building and leading informal strategic networks in and across firm for open innovation. Floyd and Wooldridge (1999) saw MMs as key factors in the strategic renewal process who build and integrate knowledge domains, social networks, and resources. Ahearne, Kraus and Lam (2014) looked at how MMs' network size and change of networks over time affected their ability to enact strategy. Pappas and Wooldridge (2007) suggested specific relationships between alternative forms of network centrality for MMs and particular elements of the strategic renewal process. In my study, some MMs used networks to avoid, delay, change or deliver strategy.

5.3. Confirmation of Role of Top Managers

Prior literature has found that TMs have a key role in affecting how MMs engage with and implement strategy. My study provides more detail on this TM role. I find evidence to confirm previous studies that TMs affect MM engagement in strategy work in several key ways: involving MMs in strategy formulation, setting and managing the context in which strategic decisions are made and strategy implemented, and continuing to pay

attention to the strategy as it is being implemented. My study has found that each of these TM behaviours can affect the likelihood of MMs' exercising autonomy to influences strategy by changing, delaying or avoiding it.

Earlier works have shown that, in order for MMs to perform a strategic role, they need to be actively socialised into strategic conversations by TMs (Currie and Procter, 2005). Vila and Canales (2008), for example, found that MMs' active participation in strategic planning increased MMs appreciation of priorities, goals and coordination of strategy implementation. Westley (1990) found that MMs' exclusion from the strategy conversation led to demotivation, alienation and conflict. Ketokivi and Castañer (2004) described the way participation and communication in strategic planning complemented each other in achieving goal congruence among MMs. This importance of TMs involving MMs in strategy formulation was confirmed by my data, showing that when MMs were not clear about the strategy or did not believe in it, they tended to change, delay or avoid it.

Many researchers, from Bower (1970) onwards (see also Noda and Bower, 1996), have emphasised TMs' role in setting the context in which MMs could engage in strategy work and influence the strategy. Dutton et al. (1997) showed how MMs' interpretation of the overall supportiveness of the organizational context influenced their decisions to sell strategic issues. More recently, Maguire and Hardy (2013) discussed the manipulation of strategic context by MMs, as accomplished by enacting various practices of strategy articulation that link the discursive work at different levels of the organization. Similarly, Tippmann, Scott and Mangematin (2013) stressed the role of organizational context in affecting the choices of MMs. More specifically, Linder and Bothello (2015) found that TMs' support of MMs influenced the occurrence of

autonomous strategic actions by MMs. The importance of the strategy context as set by TMs was supported in my study, which showed that MMs were likely to deviate from the original strategy if they did not have sufficient organizational support from TMs.

Finally, Sillince and Mueller (2007) found that MMs involved in implementing a strategic initiative actively reframed responsibilities and expectations as their team's goals were changing. This reframing was made possible by unclear TMs' intent, which in turn encouraged MMs' opportunism. Similarly, Raes et al. (2011) found that the quality of strategic decisions and strategy implementation depended on continual interactions between MMs and TMs. The importance of TMs' constant attention to the strategy as it is being implemented is supported by my findings, which suggest that MMs are likely to change, delay, or avoid implementation of strategy when the strategy is not actively monitored or when TMs do not frequently interact with MMs.

My findings confirm that the above behaviour of TMs affects what MMs do in strategy. My study adds to this prior knowledge and has found that if MMs do not understand strategy, if TMs do not engage with strategy implementation and if the strategy implementation is not monitored, MMs are likely to use autonomy in strategy to change, delay or to avoid it.

5.4. Theoretical Contribution: Developing Propositions from This Study

To theorise from my findings, following Cornelissen (2017), I have chosen propositions, rather than a process model, or a typology. Propositions seem ideally suited to my study as it allows me to put some of the many themes that I have developed into cause-effect relationships. Developing propositions also allows me to focus sharply on the areas where my data and data structures can combine with prior

literature to generate new relationships not previously identified. I develop six propositions about strategy-specific conditions, the sources of MM autonomy in strategy, the self-interest of MMs, and the outcomes of MM autonomy in strategy. As mentioned above, each of these propositions are new to the world and not derivable solely from prior literature.

5.4.1. Proposition 1 on Strategy-Specific Conditions

Nearly all prior research on the role of MMs in strategy implementation has focused on the strategy process. This is problematic as the implementability of a strategy depends very heavily on strategy-specific conditions. Only a few prior studies on MMs refer to this critical factor. For example, Guth and Macmillan's (1986) identify two sources of low or negative commitment of MMs to implementing a strategy that were strategy-specific: perceived inability to execute the strategy and low perceived probability that the strategy will work. Wooldridge et al. (2008) identified as a high research priority the investigation of 'conditions' leading to MMs enactment of strategic roles. Hence, there is recognition that strategy-specific conditions have not been researched in relation to MM implementation of strategy and that there is a gap.

These strategy-specific conditions include, for example, the external and internal environment in which strategy is implemented, the availability of resources, the ambitiousness of the targets, and the time scale for the implementation of the strategy. What is relevant here are the strategy-specific conditions that might encourage MMs to use autonomy in order to avoid, delay, or change a strategy rather than implement the strategy as envisioned by TMs. Hence, I define "strategy-specific conditions" relevant to MM autonomy in strategy as the difficulty for MMs of implementing a strategy

arising from the ambitiousness of the strategy in terms of targets and timing relative to the context and the resources available to MMs.

My study has addressed this issue directly. My interviews did not focus on the strategies, but the difficulty of the strategies was very salient in MM comments such as that strategy was "not doable", the strategy had "low salience" with TMs, the MM had "insufficient resources", and the MM wanted to "avoid poor performance evaluation". An additional strategy-specific condition faced by MMs was that they were often tasked to implement multiple strategies at the same time. Such conditions reduced the time and resources available to them for any single strategy.

The quotes show that MMs often use autonomy in strategy to manage the path between intended strategy and unpredicted situations (also found by Balogun, 2006) which depended on the difficulty of a strategy relative to resources, time, and MM skills and MMs self-interest. These strategy-specific conditions were an important driver of MM motivation to avoid, delay or change the implementation of the strategy rather than to implement the strategy as envisioned by TMs.

Hence, I can theorize that strategy-specific conditions lead to MMs' use of autonomy to change, delay or avoid strategy by developing the following proposition:

> *Proposition 1: Middle managers' likelihood to use autonomy in strategy to change, delay or avoid strategy depends on strategy-specific conditions—especially if the strategy is perceived to be difficult to implement and the targets are difficult to achieve relative to the external context and the resources available to middle managers.*

To summarise, most prior studies on MM's autonomy in strategy focus on the process rather than the strategy itself. This is problematic as that leaves a gap in

theorizing the role of MMs in strategy work. Through the proposition above, the contribution of the thesis is to fill the gap and to highlight and bring to the foreground the importance of the strategy itself and of strategy-specific conditions.

5.4.2. Proposition 2 on Sources of Autonomy in Strategy

Prior literature has tended to view the extent of MM autonomy as static, derived mostly from job design. This is shown in Globocnik and Salomo (2014, p. 508) who referred to Bailyn (1985)'s concept of "formal job design by the degree of autonomy in strategy" as one of three organisational factors that support the emergence of "bootlegging behaviour". The latter is defined as initiatives by employees who work without formal legitimacy to take actions to develop their ideas and obtain buy-in by organisational decision-makers. One prior study suggests that the extent of MM autonomy varies by industry. Mallette and Hopkins (2013) showed that the degree of autonomy given to MMs by TMs depends on the competitive intensity that exists in the industry in which the firm operates, with MMs in less competitive industries enjoying greater autonomy. Thus, businesses under pressure usually give less autonomy to managers. But this view is also static, at least in the medium term, as the level of MM autonomy depends on an industry condition. Fenton-O'Creevy (2001) talks about 'support for involvement'. Heyden et al. (2017), in the context of change, talk about TMs giving 'support' to MMs.

Because of this static view and focus on job-defined or industry-related autonomy, prior literature has ignored the dynamic perspective of autonomy as well as the different sources of MM autonomy in strategy. This is problematic because it is the ability of MMs to increase their levels of autonomy in strategy that allows them more scope to avoid, delay or change intended strategy rather than to implement it as intended by TMs.

What my study has found is that the level of MM autonomy varies in the immediate short term, because not only do MMs have static inherent autonomy (given to them and which comes with the job as set out in the job description) but they can also have dynamic situational autonomy (arising from change or emergency) and gained autonomy (which they got because of networks, organizational politics, skill, knowledge, experience and trust). Hence, autonomy in strategy is not only 'given' to MMs but also 'situational' and 'gained' by them. Thus, my contribution is to fill an important knowledge gap by articulating the sources of MM autonomy in strategy. I further contribute by adding to the current 'static' dimension of job-defined inherent MM autonomy in strategy a 'dynamic' dimension of MM autonomy in strategy. It is dynamic because new situations and gained autonomy both involve change in the level of autonomy that MMs have in strategy.

> *Proposition 2: Middle managers can, via situational and gained autonomy, dynamically vary their level of autonomy in strategy beyond static, inherent job-defined autonomy,*

5.4.3. Propositions 3a, 3b and 3c on MMs' Self-Interest

MMs often exercise autonomy in order to deliver strategy as close to TMs' intentions as possible. But much of the research on MMs has focused on situations where the latter choose to deviate from the strategy as envisaged by TMs. For example, Kuratko and Hornsby (2004) saw MMs as corporate entrepreneurs and visionaries who do not follow the status quo; rather, they walk the fine line between resourcefulness and rule-breaking. Mirabeau and Maguire (2014) have described how MMs can develop emergent strategy instead of implementing strategy set out by TMs. Ates et al. (2020) have found that

when MMs possess considerable autonomy, they can set and pursue their visions that are not aligned with the strategy set out by TMs. This emphasis on MMs using autonomy in strategy to diverge from the strategy as intended by TMs was likewise reflected in my study, which was particularly evident in the discussion and context of the MMs self-interest.

Managerial self-interest has long been an object of attention in organization studies. Agency theory (Fama, 1980; Hart, 1989) examined the misalignment between the managers and the owners of the organization and found that it encouraged opportunistic behaviour on the part of the managers (e.g., Shimizu, 2012). The focus on opportunism has had a major effect on the development of organization theory (e.g., Williamson, 1993), including strategy management. Guth and Macmillan (1986), for example, investigated MMs' motivation to engage in strategy implementation and found that perceiving the strategy as failing to satisfy MMs individual goals was one of the key reasons discouraging MMs from participating in strategy work. Likewise, Sillince and Mueller (2007) found evidence of MMs opportunism during strategy implementation.

However, although prior literature acknowledged self-interested behaviour on the part of MMs, it rarely identified its causes. My study found that when MMs faced work overload, had insufficient resources to deliver the strategy, or were in danger of receiving poor performance evaluations, they tended to avoid the implementation of a strategy in order to protect their self-interest. My findings reinforce those of Guth and Macmillan (1986) and Shimizu (2012) but provide more detail about the causes and mechanisms of self-interested behaviour. My contribution with this proposition is to detail three specific ways in which MM self-interest is likely to lead MMs to use

autonomy to change, delay and avoid strategy rather than implement it as envisioned by TMs.

On *work overload* there is limited prior literature. While not focusing on work overload directly Morgeson, Delaney-Klinger and Hemingway (2005) looked at how MMs use cognitive ability and job-related skills to deal with overload. Noda and Bower (1996) researched how MMs allocate resources in strategy but did not look at the impact of work overload on how MMs exercise autonomy in strategy. Hornsby, Kuratko, and Zahra (2002) talked about time availability in the context of MMs' corporate entrepreneurship. My study makes a contribution by identifying and predicting that work overload will affect whether MMs use autonomy to change, delay or avoid implementation of strategy.

Proposition 3a: Perceiving work overload as a threat to middle managers' self-interest is positively related to the likelihood of middle managers exercising autonomy to change, delay or avoid the implementation of the strategy.

On *resources* there is literature that focuses on how MMs use resources in strategy. For example, Fulop (1991) looked at how MMs obtain and build resources in order to implement strategy. Chadwick, Super and Kwon (2015) studied how MMs in Korean firms consciously contributed to the development of strategic resources. Mantere (2008) and Mirabeau and Maguire (2014) both looked at how MMs allocate resources in strategy. However, this focus on resource allocation and resource creation leaves an important gap as sometimes there are no resources to be allocated or created by MMs. My study suggests that we should also view lack of resources as a constraint that encourages MMs to use their autonomy in strategy to change, delay or avoid implementing strategy. My study makes a contribution by identifying this gap and

predicting that lack of resources will motivate MMs to use autonomy in strategy to change, delay or avoid implementation of strategy.

Proposition 3b: Perceiving lack of resources as a threat to middle managers' self-interest is positively related to the likelihood of middle managers exercising autonomy to change, delay or avoid the implementation of the strategy.

On the topic of *risk of poor performance evaluations,* the literature on performance focuses on aligning MMs' goals with strategic targets and on measuring performance of MMs themselves. For example, Decoene and Bruggeman (2006), who studied MM motivation in a balanced scorecard setting, researched the alignment of performance measures with strategy. Dysvick and Kuvaas (2011) looked at how to design performance targets for MMs implementing strategy. Marginson (2002) looked at performance indicators that align and measure MMs performance in strategy. But the literature is incomplete as it does not pay attention to the situation where implementing a strategy is not in an MM's best interest because the strategy implementation impacts on MMs' self-interest. Thus, the contribution of my study is to reverse the usual focus on how to motivate MMs with performance measures that are aligned to the strategy targets. Instead, my study highlights the danger of MMs being demotivated by personal performance targets aligned to strategy targets in a situation where MMs fear poor performance evaluation from attempting to implement a strategy that is too difficult.

Proposition 3c: Perceiving the risk of poor performance evaluations as a threat to their self-interest is positively related to the likelihood of middle managers exercising autonomy to change, delay or avoid the implementation of the strategy.

5.4.4. Proposition 4 on Outcomes of MMs using Autonomy in Strategy

Current research stops short of identifying systematic strategy outcomes of MM behaviour as most of the studies so far have usually focused on one outcome only. My findings address this shortcoming, showing that MMs can use their autonomy not only to implement strategy as envisioned by TMs but also to change, delay and avoid it. Many studies have focused on how actions by MMs enable the implementation of intended strategy, i.e., delivery *of* the strategy. These studies have assumed that delivery is the objective of MMs and focus on how MMs go about implementing a strategy as in line with TMs' expectations. For example, Boyett and Currie (2004) found how MMs adapt strategy to local context. More recently, Guo, Huy and Xian (2017) show how MMs deliver strategy by bridging between the political environment and market goals. Many other studies have focused on how MMs deliberately *change* intended strategy. For example, Hopkins, Mallette and Hopkins(2013) found that MMs can influence either strategic inertia or strategic renewal, and Ates et al. (2020, p. 657) references "counterproductive actions". Other studies have focused on MMs delaying strategy. For example, Sillince and Mueller (2007) refer to MMs "foot-dragging". Guth and MacMillan (1986) have noted that MMs "sabotage the strategy" and Fenton-O'Creevy (2001) refers to the MM as a potential "saboteur".

My findings present a more complex and nuanced view of MMs' autonomy than the current literature suggests. My study found that, by exercising autonomy in strategy, MMs may choose different outcomes to pursue: deliver, change, delay or avoid implementing strategy (or combination thereof). My contribution to theory is to predict that an MM will make a systematic choice on their preferred outcome for TMs' intended strategy.

Proposition 4: When presented with a strategy to implement, middle managers will respond in one of four ways: deliver the strategy as requested, change the strategy, delay implementing the strategy, or avoid engaging with the strategy on any level.

5.5. Contributions to Evidence and Theory

My thesis makes two contributions, empirical and theoretical. First, from the empirical findings I develop four aggregate dimensions that explain, first, from *where* MMs obtained their autonomy in strategy; second, *what* the MMs did with their autonomy in strategy; third, *why* MMs used autonomy in strategy; and fourth, *how* MMs used their autonomy in strategy. *Hence, these four aggregate dimensions can be argued to provide a fairly comprehensive view of the major aspects of MM autonomy in strategy.* Second, I develop six propositions that use the evidence of my study to build on gaps in the prior literature and, so, articulating theoretical insights about the use of autonomy by MMs implementing strategy. Developing propositions is one way to create theory as set out by Cornelissen (2017). The six propositions concern strategy-specific conditions, the sources of MM autonomy in strategy, the self-interest of MMs, and the outcomes of MM autonomy in strategy.

5.6. Contributions to Practice

The effective delivery by MMs of intended strategy is of critical importance to companies. This study helps TMs better understand what drives MMs seek to avoid, delay, change, or deliver the intended strategy. First, TMs can improve MMs' motivation to deliver intended strategy by ensuring that MMs understand what the strategy is about and what the benefits are that the implementation of the strategy will bring. TMs also need to be aware that MMs are quick to respond when TMs are not paying attention to the strategy--such as poor monitoring or not giving high salience--or if the original strategy maker is no longer there. TMs also need to look out for MM self-interest being triggered by work overload, insufficient resources or the threat of poor evaluation of the MM. My study also adds to MM knowledge about their autonomy in strategy. MMs benefit from knowing that they have many mechanisms by which to effectively deliver intended strategy, and how they can increase, decrease and use the autonomy in strategy implementation.

Probably the key, surprising empirical finding is that most MMs are tasked to implement more strategies than they can manage with the available time and resources. In consequence, MMs are often motivated to use and increase their autonomy to avoid or change the delivery of strategy. Furthermore, MMs are generally very capable of using or gaining the autonomy needed to avoid or change the delivery of strategy. The effects of this excess burden of strategies are exacerbated if TMs insufficiently communicate what the strategy is about, cannot convince MMs to buy in, or not monitor or poorly monitor implementation of the strategy.

Hence, the major implication for practice is that what TMs do in strategy implementation is just as important as what they do in strategy formulation. TMs cannot

just pass strategy implementation to MMs. Nor should TMs overburden MMs with too many strategies to implement. TMs know both these prescriptions but find it hard to live by them. The contribution of this study is to expose in detail the mechanisms by which MMs are, first, motivated to avoid, delay, change or deliver intended strategy, and, second, how they do so.

A second implication for practice is that the role in relation to strategy is more important than a manager's title or position. For example, a business unit head, such as a division managing director, is normally considered a TM and not an MM. But when implementing a corporate level strategy decided at the corporate level, this BU head is really acting as an MM. Thus, an executive acts as an MM (in relation to strategy) when given primary responsibility for implementing a strategy that was formulated primarily at a higher level. This definition also makes the conceptual contribution that the same executive can play both TM and MM roles, depending on the particular strategy. Managers should be aware of which role they are playing and act accordingly. Playing a TM role means monitoring and managing the autonomy in strategy of subordinates. Playing an MM role means seeking to maximise one's own autonomy in strategy.

5.7. Summary of Contributions

Table 5.2 summarises the domains of contribution in terms of empirical evidence, methodological approaches, knowledge of practice, and theory; and the extent of contributions in terms of what I have confirmed, what I have developed, and what I have found that is brand new.

Table 5.2 Summary of Contributions

Domains of Contribution	Extent of Contribution		
	What I have confirmed	**What I have developed**	**What I have found/done that is brand new**
Empirical Evidence	Confirmed that MMs exercise autonomy to affect strategy implementation.		
Methodological Approaches			
Knowledge of Practice		More detail on why and how MMs use autonomy to seek to avoid, delay, change or deliver intended strategy.	. TMs wishing to ensure that strategy is delivered as intended have to keep monitoring how much autonomy MMs have and how they use it.
Contribution to Theory	Confirmed earlier evidence of MMs' motivations and mechanisms for exercising autonomy (Ahearne, Lam and Kraus, 2014; Wang, Gibbons and Heavey, 2017)	Identified that there are (1) three sources of autonomy in strategy for MMs (*inherent, situational* and *gained*), (2) four strategy implementation outcomes of MM strategic autonomy, (3) four major reasons why MMs use autonomy in strategy, and (4) five major methods how MMs use autonomy in strategy..	Developed six propositions on strategy-specific conditions, the sources of MM autonomy in strategy, the self-interest of MMs, and the outcomes of MM autonomy in strategy.

6. CONCLUSION

6.1. Overall Summary of Thesis

This thesis focuses on the role of MMs in the implementation of strategy. One of the biggest issues faced by companies is the difference between intended strategy (as set out by primarily top managers in strategic plans) and realised strategy as executed primarily by MMs. Most prior studies state that strategy formulation is primarily the domain of TMs and strategy execution is primarily the domain of MMs. Hence, it is clear that the role of MMs is central in converting intended to realised strategy. MMs use both flexibility in strategy (which is more controlled by TMs) and autonomy in strategy (which is less controlled by TMs) to implement strategy. My thesis has focused on answering the research question: *why and how do MMs use autonomy in strategy?*

This study sought to develop a comprehensive understanding of MMs' use of autonomy in strategy, using an inductive theory-building approach based empirically on interviews with 40 MMs in 31 diverse, large multinational companies.

There are four main findings of this study. First, in terms of *where* MM autonomy in strategy comes from, there are three main sources: inherent autonomy, situational, and gained autonomy. Second, looking at *what* MMs use autonomy in strategy to achieve, there are four strategy implementation outcomes: avoid, delay, change or deliver the strategy. Third, looking at *why* MMs use autonomy in strategy, MMs have different motivations to change intended strategy: they are unclear on the strategy, do not believe in the strategy, do not implement strategy in response to non-attention by TMs, and self-interest. Fourth, looking at *how* MMs use autonomy in strategy, MMs have several ways of adapting strategies that they find difficult or do not

wish to implement: MMs use prioritisation, use capabilities, use status and trust, use persuasion, and use politics.

6.2. Summary of Findings

This study identified four sets of first-order concepts in relation to MM autonomy in strategy. The first set of 8 first-order concepts relate to the three sources of autonomy. The second set of 8 first-order concepts relate to four strategy implementation outcomes: avoidance, delay, change or delivery of the strategy. This last finding shows that in terms of language, "strategy implementation" (the term I used) was interpreted by MMs as being divided into primarily four different actions: "avoid the strategy", "delay the strategy", "change the strategy" and "deliver the strategy" (which were the terms most of the MMs used). This distinction also provides the interesting insight that strategy implementation by MMs is the end product of four activities or components used alone or in combination: avoidance, delay, change and delivery. The third set of 11 first-order concepts relate to *'why'* middle managers want to change the implementation of strategy. The fourth set of 13 first-order concepts relate to *'how'* the middle managers can change the implementation of the strategy.

The 40 first-order concepts then allowed me to formulate 16 second-order themes. These 40 concepts and 16 themes produced four data structures: one focusing on the aggregate dimension of from *where* are the sources of autonomy in strategy, on the *what* of strategy implementation outcomes, one on *why* MMs used autonomy in strategy to change implementation of the strategy, and one on *how* MMs used autonomy in strategy to change implementation..

6.3. Summary of Contributions

This study contributes to theory and literature in two major ways. First, I extend the concept of MM autonomy in strategy to find the detail on why and how way MMs gain and use autonomy in strategy. These findings are evidenced by four data structures that explain in a fine-grained way (1) the sources of autonomy in strategy, (2) why MMs use autonomy in strategy, (3) how MMs use autonomy in strategy, and (4) strategy implementation outcomes. Second, I develop six propositions that use the evidence of my study to build on gaps in the prior literature and, so, articulating theoretical insights about the use of autonomy by MMs implementing strategy. In addition, this study provides rich detail in the form of quotes from the MM informants.

All previous studies have either interviewed informants within one organisation or conducted surveys across organisations. Hence, although inductive, my study is important for developing reasonably generalisable propositions. My study is also unique in examining multiple reasons why MMs seek to avoid, delay, change or deliver strategy; and multiple ways in which they do that. Previous studies have examined far fewer motivations and methods.

6.3.1. Identifying the Sources and Outcomes of MM Autonomy in Strategy

In terms of from *where* MM autonomy in strategy comes, my study has found that it has at least three sources: inherent autonomy, situational autonomy, and gained autonomy, suggesting that MMs can draw on multiple sources in exercising their autonomy (Proposition 2). In terms of the outcomes of MM autonomy in strategy, my study has found that MMs actively choose among four implementation outcomes—avoid, delay, change and deliver the strategy (Proposition 4).

6.3.2. Identifying the Why and How of MM Autonomy in Strategy

While prior studies have found that MMs do adapt strategy as they implement it, none provided detailed motivations (the *why*) and mechanisms (the *how*). In regard to motivations, Ahearne, Lam and Kraus (2014) found that MMs' adaptive strategy implementation behaviour was due to their lack of "buy-in" of the original strategy. One of the main findings of my study is that it sets out detailed multiple sources of such lack of buy-in: being unclear on the strategy; not believing in the strategy because MMs did not see the value the strategy or saw as not doable; and perhaps most interestingly, not buying-in because TMs did not monitor or highlight the strategy enough or because the strategy had low salience. Tarakci et al. (2018) studied only performance feedback and the roles of social comparisons and organisational identification as motivators of MMs' divergent strategic behaviour. My study has found a much larger set of reasons why MMs are motivated to adapt strategy. I have highlighted the importance of strategy-specific conditions as a major influence on MM motivation to not deliver strategy as intended by TMs (Proposition 1).

The set of reasons is evidenced by 11 first-order concepts (poor communication by TMs, MM ignorance, cannot see benefit or value, sees strategy as not doable, uses own opinion, strategy not monitored, strategy has low salience, strategy maker has left, has overload, insufficient resources, and avoid poor performance evaluation), and four second-order themes (unclear on strategy, cannot see benefit or value, response to non-attention, and self-interest). My study says more than prior ones about the role of MM self-interest (Propositions 3a, 3b and 3c).

In terms of how MMs are able to adapt strategy, Ahearne, Lam and Kraus (2014) also found that MMs' adaptive strategy implementation worked through upward

and downward influence via their social networks. Mirabeau and Maguire (2014) studied only how MMs promoted emergent strategy through "practices of strategy articulation…repetitively activated, routinised ways of producing, distributing, and consuming texts containing representations of what the firm has been, is, and will be doing" (p. 1213).

My study finds a much larger set of mechanisms how MMs are able to adapt strategy—evidenced by thirteen first-order concepts (power of position, uses own judgement, ability to adjust strategy, uses exploration to create better strategy, adapts to fit team, superior trusts the MM, long experience, good past performance, works with superiors, works with teams, seeks powerful allies, creates alliances, and uses network), and five second-order themes (uses prioritization, uses capabilities, uses status and trust, uses persuasion, and uses politics).

6.3.3. Advancing Theory Through Developing Propositions

In Chapter 5, I have developed six propositions that can be tested in further research:

Proposition 1: Middle managers' likelihood to use autonomy in strategy depends on strategy-specific conditions—especially if the strategy is perceived to be difficult to implement and the targets are difficult to achieve relative to the resources available to middle managers.

Proposition 2: Middle managers can, via situational and gained autonomy, dynamically vary their level of autonomy in strategy beyond static inherent job-defined autonomy.

Proposition 3a: Perceiving work overload as a threat to middle managers' self-interest is positively related to the likelihood of middle managers exercising autonomy

to avoid, delay or change the implementation of the strategy.

Proposition 3b: Perceiving lack of resources as a threat to middle managers' self-interest is positively related to the likelihood of middle managers exercising autonomy to avoid, delay or change the implementation of the strategy.

Proposition 3c: Perceiving the risk of poor performance evaluations as a threat to their self-interest is positively related to the likelihood of middle managers exercising autonomy to avoid, delay or change the implementation of the strategy.

Proposition 4: When presented with a new strategy to implement, middle managers will respond in one of four ways: deliver the strategy as requested, change the strategy, delay implementing the strategy, or avoid engaging with the strategy on any level.

6.3.4. Contributions to Practice

The effective delivery by MMs of intended strategy is of critical importance to companies. My research helps top managers (TMs) to understand better what drives MMs seek to avoid, delay, change or deliver intended strategy. First, TMs can improve MMs' motivation to deliver intended strategy by ensuring that they understand what the strategy is about and what are the strategies potential benefits for the organisation. TMs also need to be aware that MMs are quick to respond to non-attention on the strategy such as poor monitoring, low salience or if the original strategy maker is no longer in place. TMs also need to look out for MM self-interest being triggered by work overload, insufficient resources or the threat of poor evaluation of the MM's performance. MMs need to be aware that they have many mechanisms by which to effectively deliver

intended strategy. They can use prioritisation, their own capabilities, their status and trustworthiness, persuasion and politics.

6.4. Limitations

My study is limited in a number of ways. First, as a qualitative study based on a large volume of text from interview transcripts, the analysis is open to alternative interpretations, although the coding was done systematically and in a highly structured way. The analysis of the coded text was carried out with the help of a tailor-made software program to collect in separate documents all text related to each individual code. Coding done by someone else may have produced findings as different coders would interpret text in different ways. Second, the sample specification of MMs from only large, for-profit, primarily Western, multinational operating companies limits the generalisability. Third, while the unit of analysis is the individual MM, the reliance on single informant interviews means that the data are better considered to be MM perceptions than absolute fact.

6.5. Opportunities for Further Research

My study offers a number of opportunities for further research. First, quantitative methods such as content analysis with statistical tests could be applied to the data collected in this study. That would allow for an alternative validation of the concepts and themes generated in this thesis. Second, each of the six propositions can be examined in new studies with larger samples, using hypothesis-testing methods. Third, a key finding of my research has been about the details of the relationship between MM and the supervising TM. Although difficult, further research could recruit dyads of

MMs and TMs to mutually report on the implementation process of the same strategies. Fourth, this study could be replicated in other domains such as non-profit organisations, start-ups, and organisations with non-Western traditions of management, such as in Japan, China or India. Fifth, my study is sympathetic to the Strategy As Practice (SAP) school of research. One extension would be to conduct a study that focuses more on how the micro-practices identified in SAP affect the *how* of MM autonomy in strategy. Sixth, my study is also sympathetic to the Process Studies school of research. Hence, an extension would be a process study of the evolution and change over time of the *why* and *how* of MM autonomy in strategy within a single organisation. Fifth, a study could look at how to balance TM control and MM autonomy, and how much autonomy TMs should give to MMs for implementing strategy.

6.6. Closing Comment

MMs continue to play an important role in strategy. This study shows that they do indeed gain and use autonomy in strategy to avoid, delay, change or actually to deliver the strategy. Their motivations in response to organisation and market pressures are key in why they seek autonomy in strategy. Their location as organisation actors is key in explaining how they can exercise their autonomy in strategy. Despite current debates as to whether MMs are obsolete, my research has found that, clearly, they are not and they have a significant degree of autonomy in strategy.

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	APPENDIX A		***Articles by Author, Year and Journal***
Article #	***Authors***	***Year***	***Journal***
1	Ahearne, M., Lam, S.K., Kraus, F.	2014	*Strategic Management Journal*
2	Amason, A.C.	1996	*Academy of Management Journal*
3	Andersen, T.J.	2004	*Journal of Management Studies*
4	Balogun, J.	2003	*British Journal of Management*
5	Balogun, J.	2006	*Long Range Planning*
6	Balogun J., Johnson, G.	2004	*Academy of Management Journal*
7	Barnett, W.P., Burgelman, R.A.	1996	*Strategic Management Journal*
8	Barney, J.B.	1991	*Journal of Management*
9	Barney, J.B.	2001	*Academy of Management Review*
10	Barton, L., C. Ambrosini, V.	2013	*International Journal of Human Resource Management*
11	Beatty, C. A., Lee, G. L.	1992	*Human Relations*
12	Beck T.E., Plowman, D.A.	2009	*Organisation Science*
13	Belasen, A. T., Frank, N.M	2004	*International Journal of Human Resources Management*
14	Bonn, I. Christodoulou, C.	1996	*Long Range Planning*
15	Boxer, P.J., Wensley, J.R.C.	1986	*Journal of Management Studies*
16	Boyett I., Currie, G.	2004	*Long Range Planning*
17	Brodbeck, F.C., Frese, M., Javidan, M.	2002	*Academy of Management Executive*
18	Brown S., Eisenhardt, K.M.	1997	*Administrative Science Quarterly*
20	Burgelman, R.A.	1983	*Administrative Science Quarterly*
21	Burgelman, R.A.	1983	*Management Science*
19	Burgelman, R.A.	1994	*Administrative Science Quarterly*
22	Burgelman, R.A.	1996	*Strategic Management Journal*
23	Burgess, N. Currie, G.	2013	*British Journal of Management*
24	Canales, J.I.	2013	*British Journal of Management*
25	Cauwenbergh, A.V., Cool, K.	1982	*Strategic Management Journal*
26	Chadwick, C., Super, J.F., Kwon, K.	2015	*Strategic Management Journal*
27	Colling, T., Ferner, A.	1992	*Journal of Management Studies*
28	Crilly, D., Sloan, P.	2014	*Organisation Science*
30	Currie , G., Procter, S.J.	2005	*Journal of Management Studies*
29	Currie, G.	1999	*British Journal of Management*
31	Darkow, I.L.	2015	*Technological Forecasting and Social Change*
32	Decoene, V., Bruggeman, W.	2000	*International Journal of Operations and Production Management*
33	Denis, J-L., Lamothe L., Langley A.	2000	*Academy of Management Journal*

34	Dopson S., Stewart, R.	1990	*British Journal of Management*
35	Dutton J.E., Ashford, S.J.	1993	*Academy of Management Review*
36	Dutton, J.E., Ashford, S.J., O'Neill, R.M., Hayes E., Wierba E.E.	1997	*Strategic Management Journal*
37	Dutton, J.E., Ashford, S.J., O'Neill, R.M., Lawrence, K.A.	2001	*Academy of Management Journal*
38	Dysvik, A., Kuvaas, B.	2011	*European Journal of Work and Organisational Psychology*
39	Eisenhardt, K.M.	1989	*Academy of Management Journal*
40	Faure, B., Rouleau, L.	2011	*Accounting Organisations and Society*
41	Fenton – O'Creevy, M.	2001	*Human Resource Management Journal*
42	Fiss, P.C., Zajac, E.J.	2006	*Academy of Management Journal*
45	Floyd, S.W., Lane, P.J.	2000	*Academy of Management Review*
44	Floyd, S.W., Wooldridge, B.	1992	*Strategic Management Journal*
46	Floyd, S.W., Wooldridge, B.	1997	*Journal of Management Studies*
43	Floyd, S.W., Wooldridge, B.	1999	*Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice*
47	Fulop, L.	1991	*Journal of Management Studies*
48	Gioia, D.A., Chittipeddi, K.	1991	*Strategic Management Journal*
49	Glaser, L., Fourne, S.P.L., Elfring, T.	2015	*Small Business Economics*
50	Grover, V., Jeong, S-R., Kettinger, W.J., Lee, C.C.	1993	*Journal of Management Information Systems*
51	Guo, Y., Huy, Q. N., Xiao, Z.	2017	*Strategic Management Journal*
52	Gupta, A.K.	1987	*Academy of Management Journal*
53	Guth, W.D., MacMillan, I. C.	1986	*Strategic Management Journal*
54	Gylfe, P., Franck, H., Lebaron, C. Mantere, S.	2016	*Strategic Management Journal*
55	Hartman, F., Naranjo-Gil, D. Perego, P.	2010	*European Accounting Review*
56	Heckmann, N.	1971	*Long Range Planning*
57	Hornsby, J.S., Kuratko, D.F., Zahra S.A.	2002	*Journal of Business Venturing*
58	Huy, Q.N.	2002	*Administrative Science Quarterly*
59	Huy, Q.N.	2011	*Strategic Management Journal*
60	Iida, T., Morris, J.	2008	*International Journal of Human Resource Management*
61	Jarzabkowski, P.	2004	*Organisation Studies*
62	Javidan, M., Dastmalchian, A	1988	*Long Range Planning*
63	Johnson, G., Melin L., Whittington, R.	2003	*Journal of Management Studies*
64	Ketokivi, M., Castaner, X.	2004	*Administrative Science Quarterly*
65	King, A.W., Zeithaml, C.P.	2001	*Strategic Management Journal*
66	King, A.W, Fowler, S.W., Zeithaml C.P.	2001	*Academy of Management Executive*
67	Krause, D. E.	2004	*Leadership Quarterly*

68	Kuratko, D.F., Goldsby, M.G.	2004	*Journal of Business Ethics*
69	Kuratko, D.F., Ireland, R.D., Covin J.G., Hornsby J.S.	2005	*Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice*
70	Laine, P.M. Vaara, E.	2007	*Human Relations*
71	Levinthal, D.A.	2011	*Strategic Management Journal*
72	Linder, S., Bothello, J.	2015	*IEEE Transactions on Engineering Management*
73	Ling Y., Floyd S.W., Wooldridge B.	2005	*Journal of International Business Studies*
74	Luscher L.S., Lewis M.W.	2008	*Academy of Management Journal*
76	Mantere, S.	2005	*Strategic Organisation*
77	Mantere, S.	2008	*Journal of Management Studies*
78	Marginson, D.E.W.	2002	*Strategic Management Journal*
79	McCann, L., Morris, J., Hassard, J.	2008	*Journal of Management*
80	Mihm, J., Loch, C.H., Wilkinson, D., Huberman, B.	2007	*Management Science*
81	Miles, R.E., Snow, C.C., Meyer, A.D., Coleman, H.J.	1978	*Academy of Management Review*
82	Miller, J. R.	1984	*Human Resource Management Journal*
85	Mintzberg ,H., Waters, J.A.	1985	*Strategic Management Journal*
83	Mintzberg, H.	1994	*Long Range Planning*
84	Mintzberg, H.	1978	*Management Science*
86	Mirabeau, L., Maguire,S.	2014	*Strategic Management Journal*
75	Mnagalisom, M.P.	1995	*Journal of Management*
87	Mollick, E.	2012	*Strategic Management Journal*
88	Morrow, J., Mowatt, S.	2015	*Business Strategy and the Environment*
89	Neubauer, F.F., Solomon, N.B.	1977	*Long Range Planning*
90	Noda, T., Bower, J.L.	1996	*Strategic Management Journal*
92	Nonaka, I.	1988	*Human Resource Management Journal*
91	Numagami, T., Karube M., Kato, T.	2010	*Academy of Management Perspective*
93	Ogbonna, E., Wilkinson, B.	2003	*Journal of Management Studies*
94	Pappas,J.M., Wooldridge, B.	2007	*Journal of Management Studies*
95	Picard, J.	2001	*Columbia Journal of World Business*
96	Pinsonneault, A., Kraemer, K.L.	1993	*MIS Quarterly*
97	Porter, M.E.	1981	*Academy of Management Review*
98	Prahalad, C.K., Krishnan,M.S.	2002	*MIT Sloan Management Review*
99	Raes, A. M. L. Heiltjes, M. G., Glunk, U., Roe, R. Al	2011	*Academy of Management Review*
100	Regner, P.	2003	*Journal of Management Studies*
101	Ren, C.R., Guo, C.	2011	*Journal of Management*
102	Rossel, R.D.	1971	*Administrative Science Quarterly*
103	Rotemberg, J.J., Saloner, G.	2000	*RAND Journal of Economics*
104	Rouleau, L.	2005	*Journal of Management Studies*
105	Rouleau, L., Balogun, J.	2011	*Journal of Management Studies*

106	Schilit, W.K.	1987	*Journal of Management Studies*
107	Seidl, D., Whittington, R.	2014	*Organisation Studies*
108	Shi W., Markoczy, L., Dess, G.G.	2009	*Journal of Management*
109	Shimizu, K**.**	2012	*Organisation Science*
110	Sillince, J., Mueller, F.	2007	*Organisation Studies*
112	Smith, J.G., Fleck, V.	1987	*Long Range Planning*
111	Soderberg , A.	2015	*International Journal of Human Resource Management*
113	Teece, D.J., Pisano, G., Shuen, A.	1997	*Strategic Management Journal*
114	Thakur, M.	1998	*Long Range Planning*
115	Tippmann E., Scott, P.S., Mangematin ,V.	2014	*Long Range Planning*
116	Tsai, W.	2000	*Strategic Management Journal*
117	Vila, J, Canales, J. I.	2008	*Long Range Planning*
118	Wernerfelt, B., Karnani, A.	1987	*Strategic Management Journal*
119	Westley, F.R.	1990	*Strategic Management Journal*
120	Whipp, R., Rosenfeld, R., Pettigrew, A.	1989	*Long Range Planning*
122	Whittington, R.	2003	*Strategic Organisation*
121	Whittington, R.	2006	*Organisation Studies*
123	Whittington, R., Yakis-Douglas, B. Ahn, K., Cailluet, L.	2017	*Long Range Planning*
124	Wilhelm, W.R.	1990	*Human Resource Management Journal*
125	Wilson, I.	1994	*Long Range Planning*
126	Wooldridge, B., Floyd, S.W**.**	1989	*Strategic Management Journal*
127	Wooldridge, B., Floyd ,S.W.	1990	*Strategic Management Journal*
128	Wooldridge B., Schmid, T., Floyd, S.W.	2008	*Journal of Management*
129	Wooldridge, B., Floyd, S.W.	1989	*Strategic Management Journal*
130	Wright, C.	2009	*British Academy of Management*

APPENDIX B. EXTRACTION TABLE FROM SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW

	Authors	***Year***	***Title***	***Journal***	***Research Focus***	***Theory Lens Perspective***	***Methodology***	***Definition: Middle Managers Autonomy Strategy***	***Practical use Theoretical use***	***QUAL***	***QUAN***	***Country***
1.	Ahearne, M., Lam, S.K., Kraus, F.	2014	Performance Impact of Middle Managers' Adaptive Strategy Implementation: The Role of Social Capital	Strategic Management Journal	Performance	Network Theory	Survey and Interviews in a Fortune 500 company	MM includes managers that give and receive directions (Stoker 2006) In the study's context, MM is district sales managers who reside at the lower end of the middle tier of the organisation (Rouleau 2005) Autonomy: none Strategy: none	MM can learn that the level of effort they expend on facilitating adaptability should depend on their span of control. Also: Their ability for adaptability and championing increases as they build informational and reputational social capital Senior Managers can enhance the performance of the former MM but not the later [p. 84] Reconcile mixed findings in prior research on adaptive strategy implementation and		v	US US Germany

									the strategic roles of MM both conceptually and empirically [p82] Further research for - the conditions under which MM engage in negative behaviours and what SM can do - measuring the balance between influencer and the influence and its effect on network size - changes in social networks of MM over time [p85]			
2	Amason A.C.	1996	Distinguishing the effects of functional and dysfunctional conflict on strategic decision making: resolving a paradox for	Academy of Management Journal	Strategy	Paradox Theory Process Theory Conflict Theory	Questionnaire Given to management in two industries	Strategic decisions – address complex and ambiguous issues that involve large amounts of organisational resources (Mason and Mitroff 1981)	Answers the question of how can top management teams use conflict to enhance the quality of their decisions without sacrificing the ability to work together		v	US

			top management teams						The pursuit of consensus affects the quality of decision. Attempts to minimise confrontation may increase consensus but lower the decision quality as options that are readily agreed on are pursued p.127			
3	Anderse n T.J.	2004	Integrating Decentralise d Strategy Making and Strategic Planning Process in Dynamic Environment s	Journal of Management Studies	Strategy	Process Theory Resource Theory	Data gathered from databases and publicly available informatio n such as annual reports Questionn aires	MM's – shape strategic options	Shows that decentralised decision making and planning are associated with higher performance in dynamics environments Embraces dual approach of planning and emergence Looks at the link between strategic planning and strategic performance		v	Denma rk

4	Balogun J.	2003	From Blaming the Middle to Harnessing its Potential: Creating Change Intermediaries	British Journal of Management	Autonomy	Process Theory	Conceptual	MM – make strategic contributions MM- strategic intermediary MMs – strategic asset	MM's perform four important roles in strategy change – keep business going, function as change intermediaries, undertake changes, helping others through changes.	v		UK
5	Balogun J.	2006	Managing Change: Steering a Course Between Intended Strategies and Unanticipated Outcomes	Long Range Planning	Strategy	Sensemaking	Case study in private utility company in the UK Interviews	MM's – recipient of change	Highlights the importance change recipients, in particular, MM's and how that affects strategy (seen in context of change) implementation.	v		UK
6	Balogun J., Johnson G.	2004	Organisational Restructuring and Middle Manager Sensemaking	Academy of Management Journal	Middle management cognition and involvement	Sensemaking; schema change	Longitudinal case study in large, privatised utility firm; managerial diaries Interviews	Not defined	The article traces the development of middle managers' mental models during an imposed shift from hierarchical to decentralised organisation. Findings indicate a contingency logic	v		UK UK

							Focus Groups		between change type and schema development. Middle managers were found to rely on informal negotiations with peers to interpret and implement change because of distant top managers.			
7	Barnett, W.P., Burgelman, R.A.	1996	Evolutionary Perspectives on Strategy	Strategic Management Journal	Strategy	Evolutionary perspective Red Queen evolution theory Dynamic perspective Structural inertia theory	Literature review	Evolution – rapidly optimising force	Evolutionary models – allow for variation in the strategies that an organisation pursue. Evolutionary models also take into account context Confirms – that it very difficult to change resource allocation once it has been set in motion.	v		US US
8	Barney, J.B	1991		Journal of Management	Strategy	Resources Theory	Conceptual	Firm resources – enable a firm to conceive and implement strategies	Looks at firm resources and they create strategic advantage	v		UK

9	Barney, J.B.	2001	Is the Resource-Based "view" a useful perspective for strategic management research? Yes	Academy of Management Review	Strategy	Resources allocation theory Dynamics theory	Literature review	Managers – manipulators of resources	Acknowledges difficulties with measuring resources such as rarity, goodwill. Stresses the importance of choosing a strategy which is consistent with the resources of the firm	v		US
10	Barton, L. C., Ambrosini, V	2013	The Moderating Effect of Organisational Change cynicism on middle manager strategy commitment	The International Journal of Human Resource Management	Strategy	Procedural Justice Social Exchange	Empirical study Data were collected via self-administered postal survey from a stratified systematic random sample of MM's from 'high tech' organisations in the UK	MM as the practitioner who shapes strategy implementation p.723 Distinctive feature of MM's is their access to both top management and operation	Explores barriers to effective implementation of strategic change		v	Australia France

11	Beatty, C. A., Lee, G. L.	1992	Leadership Among Middle Managers: An Exploration in the Context of Technological Change	Human Relations	Strategic roles of middle management	Process	Semi Structured Interviews Case study; implementation of computer-aided systems in 3 U.K. and Canadian firms	MM – responsible for implementing the new technologies	The study indicates transformational leadership by middle management to be more effective in overcoming barriers to organisational change than transactional leadership.	v		UK Canada
12	Beck T.E., Plowman, D.A.	2009	Experiencing Rare and Unusual Events Richly: The Role of Middle Managers in Animating and Guiding Organisational Interpretation	Organisation Science	Strategy	Processual Network	Semi-Structured Interviews Analysis of data on NASA incident	MMs – are linkage MMs – are on the intersection of vertical and horizontal flows of information	Examines how MMs synthesise rare and or unusual events and how this can enrich and better strategic decision making	v		US US
13	Belasen, A. T., Frank N.M.	2004	The Perception of Human resource	The International Journal of	Performance	Resources	Self-Survey given to HR	Not defined	Look at the new importance of the MM's role	v		US

			manager of the shifting importance of managerial Roles in downsizing Organisations	Human Resource Management			managers in different industries						
14	Bonn, I. Christodoulou, C.	1996	From Strategic Planning to Strategic Management	Long Range Planning	Strategy	Resources theory Process theory	Survey Longitudinal Study in manufacturing companies in Australia	Not defined	Looks at the interaction between strategic planning and strategic management	v		Australia Australia
15	Boxer, P.J., Wensley, J.R.C.	1986	The Need for Middle-Out Development of Marketing Strategy	Journal of Management Studies	Autonomy	Marketing mix approach	Literature review	MM- is the manager-in-the-middle	Sees management strategy and marketing strategy as two distinct strategies but acknowledge that they are not clearly delineated	v		UK UK
16	Boyett I., Currie G.	2004	Middle Managers Moulding	Long Range Planning	Middle management outcomes	International organisation;	Longitudinal case study of one	Middle managers – are the only men in organisations who	In an international venture, midlevel collaboration between parent firm	v		UK UK

			International Strategy			emergent strategy	international corporate venture	are in a position to judge whether strategic issues are considered in the proper context	and new venture was found to be critical to reconcile strategic intent and local context.			
17	Brodbeck, F.C. Frese, M. Javidan, M.	2002	Leadership made in Germany: Low on compassion, high on performance	Academy of Management Executive	Performance	Organisational culture	Questionnaire Data on culture and leadership collected from 457 MM's in telecommunication, food processing, finance industries in Germany.	Autonomy-individualistic, independent, unique	Looks at how autonomy should be exercised and much autonomy should managers have	v		US UK Germany
18	Brown S., Eisenhardt K.M.	1997	The Art of Continuous Change: Linking Complexity Theory and Time-paced Evolution in	Administrative Science Quarterly	Strategy Autonomy	Evolution Complexity theory Transaction cost economics Agency Theory	Interviews of 3 different types of management and observations and	Not Defined	Provides context for strategy - see strategy as part of evolution and change. THEORY: develops theory and its logic		v	US US

			Relentlessly Shifting Organisations			Organisational Theory	Secondary Sources Yin 1984 (replication logic) Multiple case method Data collection through interviews Performance measured on Likert Scale					
19	Burgelman R.A	1994	Fading Memories: A Strategic Process Theory of Strategic Business Exit in Dynamic Environments	Administrative Science Quarterly	Middle management outcomes (strategic roles of middle management)	Theory of Strategy Making Resource allocation; Organisation ecology Evolutionary Process p193	Longitudinal case study of one major high-technology firm	**MM** are functional managers maintaining and distinctly developing a firm's technologies and allocating resources. **Autonomy** not found	PRACTICAL: A firm's effective exit from its core business was found to result from the emergent strategy. Middle managers' technology choices laid the foundation for the redefinition of corporate strategy and core competencies.	v		US

								Strategy is shaped by intra-organisational ecological processes in complex organisations that help them make various adaptations **Strategy** derives from managerial activities that are differentiated to respond to the different internal and external pressures	It adds insight into how MM's add value to the strategic process. THEORY: links research in strategic management to evolutionary organisational theory.			
20	Burgelman R.A.	1983	A Process Model of Internal Corporate Venturing in the Diversified Major Firm	Administrative Science Quarterly	Strategy	Evolutionary perspective	Field Study Interviewing Employees at Different Levels Case study Intel	MM's are in the middle	Example of how MM's autonomy can save company	v		US
21	Burgelman R.A.	1983	Corporate Entrepreneur	Management Science	Autonomy	Strategic manageme	Conceptual	MM- middle-level managers	Strategy formulation and implementation	v		US

			ship and Strategic Management : Insights from a Process Study			nt – page 1349			are intrinsically intertwined and incrementally evolving process Extends the theory of strategic management by integrating literature on entrepreneurship			
22	Burgelman, R.A.	1996	A Process Model of Strategic Business Exit: Implications for an Evolutionary Perspective on Strategy	Strategic Management Journal	Strategy	evolutionary	conceptual	Strategy – is what MM's do	Conceptualises the Strategic Business Exit process	v		US
23	Burgess, N. Currie, G.	2013		British Journal of Management	Strategy	Resources Theory	Interviews Case study in the Health Care Sector	Not defined	MM – expand their role to enact strategic role	V		UK UK
24	Canales, J.I. Donate, M.J.	2013	Constructing Interlocking Rationales in Top-Driven	British Journal of Management	Strategy	Attention-based view	Data Collection (archival company	MM's – shape their (strategic) role which increases their power base	MM's – identify issues on which top management should focus on	v		UK

			Strategic Renewal				documents)					
25	Cauwenbergh, A.V., Cool, K.	1982	Strategic Management in a New Framework	Strategic Management Journal	Strategy	A structural model of the functioning of formal organisations [page 247]	Literature review	Strategy – calculated behaviour in non-programmed situation	Sets out the difference between strategic, administration and operation and casual behaviour (acknowledges that each of the concepts is fluid and that they feed into/inform each other)	v		Belgium Belgium
26	Chadwick, C., Super, J.F., Kwon, K.	2015	Resource Orchestration in Practice: CEO Emphasis on SHRM, commitment-based HR Systems, and Firm Performance	Strategic Management Journal	Performance	Resourced-based theory. Resource orchestration [p360]	Data Collection – E-mail survey with pilot study [pp366-7]	Resource utility – commitment to the development and use of an asset	Describe a double-sided view of strategic resource development Furthers the linkage between strategy and HRM Improves understanding about how managers consciously contribute to the development of strategic resources [p374] [p373-374]		v	US US Korea

27	Colling, T., Ferner, A.	1992	The Limits of Autonomy: Devolution, Line Managers and Industrial Relations in Privatised Companies	Journal of Management Studies	Autonomy	Conceptual	Conceptual	MM – defined as a line manager	Practical – MM's misunderstood the rhetoric of autonomy and took it at face value when in fact they only got 'semi-autonomy' p.216	v		UK UK
28	Crilly, D., Sloan, P.	2014	Autonomy or Control? Organisational Architecture and Corporate Attention to Stakeholders	Organisation Science	Autonomy	Stakeholders Theory	Interviews of Top management and also middle management Multilevel and multimethod approach	MM- lower down the hierarchy	Practical – answers how to configure organisation so as to answer stakeholder issues as a matter of course of business Theoretical – establishes a link between organisational architecture and attention to stakeholders		v	UK Canada
30	Currie, G., Procter, S.J.	2005	The Antecedents of Middle Managers' Strategic Contribution:	Journal of Management Studies	Strategic roles of middle management	Role orientation, role ambiguity, role conflict	Interviews Documentation Observations		Expectations of key stakeholders are identified as primary antecedents to middle management's	v		UK UK

			The Case of a Professional Bureaucracy				Interpretative case study; three U.K. hospitals		strategic contributions. Inconsistent cues from stakeholders caused managers to be reluctant to perform the needed role (role ambiguity) and created role conflict.			
29	Currie, G.	1999	The Influence of Middle Managers in the Business Planning Process	British Journal of Management	Autonomy	Processual in conjunction with typology of MM's influence	Interviews and Observations	MM's are managers in the middle responsible for operations and implementation	MM's have also upward influence which enhances MM's role as well as adding value to organisations	v		UK
31	Darkow, I.L.	2015	The Involvement of Middle Management in Strategy Development – Development and Implementation of a Foresight-	Technological Forecasting and Social Change	Autonomy	Logic Foresight	Case study interviews with 37 MMs and 70 employees in multinational company	MM's contribute to strategy development in terms of ideas, data, time, resources and analytical work.	Looks at strategy formation and development in supply chain management Sees MMs as anticipating and fostering opportunities	v		Germany

			Based Approach									
32	Decoene, V., Bruggeman, W.	2000	Strategic alignment and middle-level managers' motivation in a balanced scorecard setting	International Journal of Operations and Production Management	Strategy Performance	Organisational Theory	Case study Use of archival date and background policy documents and interviews	Not defined	Looks at alignment of performance measures with strategy		v	Belgium Belgium
33	Denis, J-L., Lamothe L., Langley A.	2000	The Dynamics of Collective Leadership and Strategic Change in Pluralistic Organisations	Academy of Management Journal	Strategy Autonomy	Process theory	Multiple data sources Interviews Observations Documents Process case studies Case study method	Strategy – seen as a collective phenomenon in which different individuals can contribute in different ways	Uses the process perspective to examine how strategic change is managed in organisations Develops process theory	v		Canada Canada Canada
34	Dopson, S., Stewart R.	1990	What is Happening to Middle Management?	British Journal of Management	Performance	Analytical Comparative	Review	MM- middle management	Looks at the development of MM's role	v		UK UK

35	Dutton J.E., Ashford S.J.	1993	Selling Issues to Top Management	Academy of Management Review	Autonomy	Upward influence (Social Problem Theory); Claiming Behaviours; Impression Management	Process theory	MM: managers who operate at the intermediate level of the corporate hierarchy (Uyterhoeven, 1972), operating two or three levels below the CEO (e.g. Wooldridge and Floyd, 1990) [p.398] Strategy definition not found- Autonomy definition not found-	Article advances theories of organisational action. Article begins to identify a set of variables that should affect the occurrence, form and success of issue selling. [p. 422-3]	v		US US
36	Dutton J.E., Ashford S.J., O'Neill R.M., Hayes E., Wierba E.E.	1997	Reading the Wind: How Middle Managers Assess the Context for Selling Issue to Top Managers	Strategic Management Journal	Strategic roles of middle management	Process Theory	Interviewed different management levels Inductive qualitative study and factor analysis; one large	MM's have hands on the 'pulse of the organisation' p.407	The article shows how managers' interpretation of the overall supportiveness of the organisational context influences their decisions to sell issues. Managers are not fully autonomous		v	US US UK

							telecommunication firm		agents but rather conscious of aligning themselves with the social context.			
37	Dutton J.E., Ashford S.J., O'Neill R.M., Lawrence K.A.	2001	Moves that Matter: Issue Selling and Organisational Change	Academy of Management Journal	Strategic roles of middle management	Upward influence; impression management	Interviewed middle managers (all at the same level) Inductive qualitative study; 82 issue-selling episodes of 42 middle managers in one, large, not-		The article refines issue-selling theory; The selling process was found to be more political and contextually embedded. Linking the initiative to organisational legitimacy, value, and relevance increased selling success. Packaging was more complex, but sellers did not use emotional appeals, and impression	v		US US UK

							for-profit hospital		management concerns seemed less relevant.			
38	Dysvik, A., Kuvaas, B.	2011	Intrinsic Motivations as a moderator on the relationship between perceived job autonomy and work performance	European Journal of Work and Organisational Psychology	Autonomy Performance	Self-determination theory	Study samples Questionnaire	Autonomy – control in respect to work tasks	Shows link between autonomy and performance and that perceived autonomy should be taken when designing jobs and performance targets		v	Norway Norway
39	Eisenhardt, K.M.	1989	Making Fast Strategic Decisions in High-Velocity Environments	Academy of Management Journal	Strategy Performance	Processual	Case studies Yin 1984 Interviews Questionnaires Secondary sources of other data	Not defined	Shows link between availability of real-time information and quick strategic decisions Admitted that link between faster decision making and performance is tenuous p.567	v		US
40	Faure, B., Rouleau, L.	2011	The Strategic Competence of Accountants and Middle Managers in	Accounting Organisations and Society	Strategy	Processual	Case study Interviews	MMs – mediators across organisational boundaries	Looks at the use of accounting data in strategic planning and as a means of performance management	v		Canada France

			Budget Making						Look at how MM's and accountants work together to produce accounts that meet accounting norms and give an appraisal of strategic realisation			
41	Fenton – O'Creevy, M.	2001	Employee involvement and the middle manager: saboteur or scapegoat	Human Resource Management Journal	Autonomy	Processual	Postal questionnaire to 4,500 members of the Institute of Management	MMs – managers in the mid-levels	Looks at levels of involvement /autonomy of MM's		v	UK
42	Fiss, P.C., Zajac, E.J.	2006	The Symbolic Management of Strategic Change: Sensegiving via Framing and Decoupling	Academy of Management Journal	Management of strategic change and change management	Symbolic management that transcends national contexts [page 1189]	Publicly Available Data 100 largest publicly German companies in terms of sales and market capitalisati	Strategic change – alternation in an organisation's alignment with its external environment	Spells out the differences in language used of internal and public strategic communication Extends strategic change as to include not only a shift in structures and processes but also as a cognitive reorientation		v	US US

							on [page 1179]		(conveying new priorities to 'buy-in')			
43	Floyd, S.W., Lane, P.J.	2000	Strategizing Throughout the Organisation: Managing Role Conflict in Strategic Renewal	Academy of Management Review	Strategic roles of middle management	Evolutionary change [p.155]; role theory [p.172]; organisational learning [p. 158]	Conceptual	p. 159: Table with strategic roles of Managers, including middle management (championing, synthesising, facilitating, implementing)	Middle managers are theorised to more likely to experience conflict between strategic roles than other managerial levels. Role conflict is inevitable in complex settings but can be reduced through control mechanisms appropriate to the environment.	v		US US
44	Floyd, S.W., Wooldridge, B.	1999	Knowledge Creation and Social Networks in Corporate Entrepreneurship: The Renewal of Organisational Capability	Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice	Strategic roles of middle management	Evolutionary theory; knowledge theory; social networks	Conceptual	Strategy consensus – characterised by comprehensive analysis aimed at the entire problem.	Corporate entrepreneurship is conceptualised as a multi-layered process with middle managers as key factors who build and integrate knowledge domains, social networks, and resources. Looks at the relationship between	v		US US

									consensus and strategic process			
45	Floyd, S.W., Wooldridge, B.	1997	Middle Management's Strategic Influence and Organisational Performance	Journal of Management Studies	Middle management outcomes	Role theory; organisation ecology; boundary spanning	Regression analysis; 259 middle managers from 25 organisations	MM's – make an important contribution to strategy	Middle managers in boundary-spanning positions reported higher levels of strategic influence activity. Firm performance was associated with more uniform levels of shift downward strategic influence on the part of middle management and more varied levels of upward influence.		v	US US
46	Floyd, S.W., Wooldridge, B.	1992	Middle Management Involvement in Strategy and its Association with Strategic Type: A Research Note	Strategic Management Journal	Strategic roles of middle management	Strategy process; role theory	Factor and correlation analysis; 259 middle managers in 25 organisations	MM- middle-level managers	The study builds a typology of four middle management roles in strategy (championing, synthesising, facilitating, implementing) and links these to organisational strategy. Level and type of middle management		v	US US

									strategic involvement are found to vary with type of strategy.			
47	Fulop, L.	1991	Middle Managers: Victims or Vanguards of the Entrepreneurial Movement?	Journal of Management Studies	MM's as corporate entrepreneurs	Resource mobilisation	Conceptual	MM's defined by a number of reference points, e.g. in this paper entrepreneurship p.26 MM using political skills to change and redirect organisational energies [page 36]	Looks at how MM's use their autonomy to mobilise strategic resources	v		Australia
48	Gioia, D.A., Chittipeddi, K.	1991	Sensemaking and Sensegiving in Strategic Change Initiation	Strategic Management Journal	President's role in managing the strategic change process [p.438]	Strategic change; 'Sensemaking', 'Sensegiving' [p. 433]	Ethnographic approach Observations	MM not found-Autonomy not found Strategy not found	Findings imply that the initiation of the process of strategic change involves a set of top management activities key to the effectiveness of the process all of which can be usefully captured under the concepts of sensemaking and	v		US US

									sense giving. [p. 447]			
49	Glaser, L., Fourné, S.P.L., Elfring, T.	2015	Achieving Strategic Renewal: The Multi-Level Influences of Top and Middle Managers' Boundary-Spanning	Small Business Economics	Performance	Corporate entrepreneurship and social network research [p305]	Analyses of multi-source and multi-level data, collected from 72 top managers and 397 middle managers operating in 34 units of a multi-national organisation [p305]	MMs roles focus on communicating information between operations and top-level management, developing tactical objectives and executing strategies (Kuratko et al. 2005, Huy2001) [p306] *Autonomy, empowerment, strategy: Nothing found*	Top Manager's boundary-spanning is positively related to units' exploratory innovation, but also has a cascading effect on Middle Managers by increasing their perceived role conflict [p305] With regard to boundary-spanning, a top-down approach to Corporate entrepreneurship as a strategic renewal may be most effective [p305]		v	Germany Netherlands
50	Grover, V., Jeong, S-R., Kettinger, W.J., Lee, C.C.	1993	The Chief Information Officer: A Study of Managerial Roles	Journal of Management Information Systems	Autonomy	Management – page 123 Management Theory p 123	Questionnaire– page 116 given to study a sample of 500 from Fortune 1000 companies	MM defined as Information System manager	Information system manager has a considerable role in resources allocation and specific knowledge in relation to information technology and thus		v	US US US US

							Perceptual survey method p.124 to avoid bias objective measure such as organisational budget distribution were examined		good access to top management			
51	Guo, Y., Huy, Q. N., Xiao, Z.	2017	How middle managers manage the political environment to achieve market goals: insight from China's state-owned enterprises	Strategic Management Journal	Performance	Political Environmental	Two rounds of Interviews with MM and other employees in four state-owned companies in China	MMs- have bridging roles	Looks at how MM's manage market and political environment to achieve market-related goals.	v		Singapore China
52	Gupta A.K.	1987	SBU Strategies, Corporate-SBU Relations,	Academy of Management Journal	Looks at strategic business units pursuing differentiatio	Resources allocation	Interviews Management at different levels	MM are heads of strategic business units/different businesses in	Looks at role of MM's heading strategic business units and their autonomy in the		v	US

			and SBU Effectiveness in Strategy Implementation		n as a business strategy (in the context of multi-business firms)		were interviewed Data from general managers of 58 SBUs within 8 diversified Fortune 500 firms [page 485]	multi-business firms	context of multi-business firms			
53	Guth, W.D., MacMillan, I. C.	1986	Strategy Implementation Versus Middle Manager Self-Interest	Strategic Management Journal	Middle management outcomes	Expectancy theory: micropolitics [p. 315]	Self-reported information from MM's Correlation analysis; 90 middle managers' interventions into interdepartmental decisions	-MM not found--Strategy not found- Autonomy not found-	The article explains interventions of middle management against top-level decisions as driven by perceived conflicts of interest. The sources of middle management counter-effort as well as remedial top management tactics are identified.		v	US US

54	Gylfe, P., Franck, H., Lebaron, C. Mantere, S.	2016	Video Methods in Strategy Research: Focusing on Embodied Cognition	Strategic Management Journal	Strategy	Conceptual Research Methods	Exploring Video-based methods	Not defined	Look at strategic change and the MM's agency and development of shared understanding			
55	Hartman, F., Naranjo-Gil, D. Perego, P.	2010	The Effect of Leadership Styles and Use of Performance Measures on Managerial Work-Related Attitudes	European Accounting Journal	Performance	Process	Survey	Not defined	Looks at how performance measures affect managerial work-related performance		v	UK Spain Spain
56	Heckmann, N.	1971	Planning in German Engineering Business	Long Range Planning	Strategy	Resources	Case study of small business in Germany	Not defined	Strategy and planning is important for small firms			
57	Hornsby, J.S., Kuratko, D.F., Zahra S.A.	2002	Middle Managers' Perception of the Internal Environment for Corporate Entrepreneur	Journal of Business Venturing	Strategic roles of middle management Autonomy	Corporate entrepreneurship	Questionnaire	Agents of change in contemporary organisations [p. 256] Autonomy not defined autonomy not found-	The article identifies five organisational factors that support midlevel corporate entrepreneurship; top management support, work		v	US US US

			ship: Assessing a Measurement Scale					Strategy not found-	discretion/autonomy, rewards/reinforcement, time availability, organisational boundaries.			
58	Huy Q.N.	2002	Emotional Balancing of Organisational Continuity and Radical Change: The Contributions of Middle Managers	Administrative Science Quarterly	Strategic roles of middle management	Exchange Theory	Conversations and Interviews Longitudinal case study on radical change in one, large information technology (IT) service firm	-MM not found--Strategy not found--Autonomy not found-	Middle managers are shown to "balance" emotions during radical change, helping groups to adapt to committing passionately to individual change projects and, simultaneously, attending to change recipients' needs for continuity. [p.59] -article also contributes to the literature on the social psychology of emotion [p. 61]	v		US
59	Huy Q.N.	2011	How middle managers' group focus emotions and social identities	Strategic Management Journal	Autonomy	Social identities	Informal Conversations Interviews	MM' – support or oppose strategic change	Looks at MM's emotions and how they can be motivated by strategic change	v		Singapore

			influence strategy implementation				Case Study					
60	Jarzabkowski P.	2004	Strategy as practice: Recursiveness, adaptation and practices-in-use	Organisation Studies	Strategy	Social theory; strategic management; institutional – pages 529 and 544	Conceptual	Strategy as practice: We should examine strategy not as something a firm has, but something a firm does [p. 529] -autonomy not found- -strategy not found-	Develops management practices-in-use and strategy as practice theory Acknowledges that the reason for practice approach is the need to close the gap between theory and practice (what it is that people actually do)	v		UK
61	Javidan, M., Dastmalchian, A	1988	Why Planning in State Enterprises does not work.	Long Range Planning	Strategy	Resources theory	Interviews Study of 65 state owned corporation in Canada	Not defined	Produces set of recommendation on how to improve strategic planning in state owned companies	v		Canada Canada
62	Johnson, G., Melin L.,	2003	Micro Strategy and Strategizing: Towards an	Journal of Management Studies	Strategy	Micro perspectives	Conceptual	Strategy making – a continuous process	It acknowledges that in current 'hypercompetitive environment' it is	v		UK UK Sweden

	Whitting ton, R.		Activity – Based View			Process theory Resources bases view and institution al theory			often speed, surprise and innovation which are the source of competitive advantage.			
63	Iida, T., Morris, J.	2008	Farewell to the salaryman? The changing roles and work of middle manager in Japan.	The International Journal of Human Resource Management	Strategy	Process	Case Study/Sur vey Of MM's and human resource managers in eight medium sized firms in Japan	Not defined	Changing role of MM's	v		UK UK
64	Ketokivi, M., Castañer, X.	2004	Strategic Planning as an Integrative Device	Administrative Science Quarterly	Middle management cognition and involvement	Strategic planning; behaviour al theory	Written surveys given to manageme nt at different levels		The study provides large-scale evidence on how participation and communication in strategic planning complemented each other in achieving goal congruence among middle managers.		v	Finlan d France

65	King A.W., Zeithaml C.P.	2001	Competencies and firm performance: examining the casual ambiguity paradox	Strategic Management Journal	Performance	Resource based theory	Case study Interviews Surveys	MMs – have responsibilities that fall approximately midway between the CEO and the lowest level managers	Looks at the link between MM's perception of ambiguity and firm's profitability		v	US US
66	King, A.W, Fowler, S.W., Zeithaml C.P.	2001	Managing Organisational Competencies for Competitive Advantage: The Middle-Management Edge	Academy of Management Executive	Performance	Resources based theory	Survey and interviews: Middle managers in 17 firms identified and evaluated their firms' most valuable competences [pp100-101]	Competencies – combine knowledge and skill – they represent both the underlying knowledge base and set of skills required to perform useful actions.	Results demonstrate the linkage between competency characteristics and firm success Description of a method to access competencies and enhance the firm's competitive advantage [abstract, p95]	v		US US US
67	Krause, D. E.	2004	Influence-based leadership as a determinant of the inclination to	Leadership Quarterly	Autonomy	Lazarus theory	Sample of 399 German middle managers from	Autonomy – space, discretion and opportunity	Looks at how MM's autonomy influences innovation		v	Germany

			innovate and of innovation-related behaviours An empirical investigation				different sectors were surveyed via questionnaire						
68	Kuratko D.F., Goldsby M.G.	2004	Corporate Entrepreneurs or Rouge Middle Managers? A Framework for Ethical Corporate Entrepreneurship	Journal of Business Ethics	Middle management outcomes	Corporate entrepreneurship; ethics	Conceptual	**MM:** Agents of change in contemporary organisations [page 2] **AUTONOMY:** *nothing found* **STRATEGY:** Middle managers contribute to company strategy, a variable which is intimately connected to corporate entrepreneurship. [page 3]	Little progress in developing theory of corporate entrepreneurship. Hinders ability to shape environment for ethical activity. [page 4] To impede unethical behaviour by middle managers in corporate entrepreneurship, a framework is developed that identifies barriers to corporate entrepreneurship, resultant ethical dilemmas, and remedial HR practices.	v		US US

69	Kuratko D.F., Ireland R.D., Covin J.G., Hornsby J.S.	2005	A Model of Middle-Level Managers' Entrepreneurial Behaviour	Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice	Strategic roles of middle management	Corporate entrepreneurship; motivation	Conceptual	**MM:** middle level **AUTONOMY:** Behaviour is a bottom up process. New ideas championed through political process and innovation until success achieved. [page 703] **STRATEGY:** Entrepreneurial behaviour is linked to successful corporate entrepreneurship.[page 699]	The article conceives a model of middle management's role in corporate entrepreneurship, depicting organisational antecedents, entrepreneurial actions, and (individual and organisational) outcomes. Integrates your previous theoretical and practical research. Aims examine/reconcile MM's and TM's perspectives p 70. Integrates and extend previous theoretical and empirical research.	v		US US US US
70	Laine, P.M. Vaara, E.	2007	Struggling Over Subjectivity: A Discursive Analysis of	Human Relations	Middle management cognition and involvement	Strategic discourse; micro politics	Observations Documentation Interviews		In a broader analysis of competing intraorganizational discourses in strategy	v		Finland Finland

			Strategic Development in an Engineering Group				Interpretative case study of one European engineering and consulting company		development, middle management was found to resist corporate-level attempts to control strategy by initiating a separate strategy discourse to increase midlevel influence and autonomy.			
71	Levinthal D.A.	2011	A Behavioural Approach to Strategy – What's the Alternative?	Strategic Management Journal	Strategy	Behavioural Utility Theory	Conceptual	Strategy – is not a 'tic-tac-toe' environment in which explicit optimum of the real strategic context can be derived	Sets out the divide between economic and behavioural view of strategy	v		US
72	Linder, S., Bothello, J.	2015	Antecedents to Autonomous Strategic Action: What About Decline?	IEEE Transactions on Engineering Management	Autonomy	Self-determination theory page 227 'necessity is the mother of rigidity theory' page 228 'necessity is the	Collection of publicly available data about 500 Danish companies and questionnaires emailed to	autonomous strategic actions (exploration of new opportunities outside the scope of activities as defined in corporate strategy) MM not defined Strategy – not defined	Builds on Burgelman pioneering work on ASA at Intel. Explains what triggers autonomous strategic actions by MM's. Concludes that allocation of decision-making rights and support of top management influence the		v	UK France

						mother of invention theory'	CEO's and FSO's		occurrence of autonomous strategic actions by MM's.			
73	Ling Y., Floyd S.W., Wooldridge B.	2005	Reading the Winds in Multinational Corporations : The Impact of Culture on Issue Selling Behaviour	Journal of International Business Studies	Strategic roles of middle management	International management; cultural syndromes	Conceptual	MM's are subsidiary managers	The article develops an acculturated view of issue selling. Managers socialised in different cultures will vary in their perception of the context and how they choose to sell issues.	v		US US US
74	Luscher L.S., Lewis M.W.	2008	Organisational Change and Managerial Sensemaking : Working Through Paradox	Academy of Management Journal	Performance	Change theory	Varied data and sources	**MM:** Critical change agents. Lynchpins of organisational change, acting as intermediaries. [page 221 and 223] **AUTONOMY:** *Nothing found* **STRATEGY:** MM link strategic decision making and daily operations. {page 230]	Sparring sessions used to work through paradox. [page 235, 238] Action research used as a continuous cycle of developing and elaborating theory from practice. All participants account for perspectives. [page 2008].	v		US US

75	Mangalisio, M.P.	1995	The Strategic Usefulness of Management Information as Perceived by Middle Managers	Journal of Management	Autonomy	Information theory; contingency theory	90 middle managers interviewed	Not defined	Decentralisation associated with increased strategic usefulness of information (in terms of aggregation) as perceived by middle managers in highly uncertain settings.		v	US
77	Mantere S.	2005	Strategic Practices as Enablers and Disablers of Championing Activity	Strategic Organisation	Strategy	Strategy as practice	Interviews of 158 champions in 12 organisations	Strategy – set of numbers as well as social practice p.157 MM's do problem solving and strategizing p.176	The study identifies a tension between recursive and adaptive practices that enable and disable strategic champions.	v		Finland
76	Mantere, S.	2008	Role Expectations and Middle Manager Strategic Agency	Journal of Management Studies	Strategic roles of middle management	Role expectations, conflict, managerial agency	Inductive analysis of 262 middle management interviews from 12 European organisations	MM's drivers of organisational strategy p. 294	Looks at role expectations can both enable and constrain middle management strategic behaviour, suggesting a reciprocal role theory. It identifies eight enabling top management actions,	v		Finland

									narration, contextualisation, resource allocation, respect, trust, responsiveness, inclusion, referring.			
78	Margins on D.E.W.	2002	Management Control Systems and their Effects on Strategy Formation at Middle-Management Levels: Evidence from a UK Organisation	Strategic Management Journal	Strategic roles of middle management	Managerial control systems; emergent strategy	Longitudinal case study of strategic change in a U.K. telecommunications firm	Not defined	Details effects of managerial control system on midlevel strategic initiative: Belief systems created a general climate for corporate entrepreneurship rather than instigating specific ideas. Administrative systems led to separation of entrepreneurial and support roles. Tensions resulting from multiple key performance indicators were resolved by prioritising single measures.	v		UK

79	McCann, L., Morris, J., Hassard, J.	2008	Normalised Intensity: The new Labour process of Middle Management	Journal of Management	Autonomy	Process theory	64 interviews Case studies Qualitative interviews	MMs – are highly effective when it comes to mobilising resources	Looks at organisational structural changes and how the impact on MMs	v		UK UK UK
80	Mihm, J., Loch, C.H., Wilkinson, D., Huberman, B.	2007	Hierarchical Structure and Search in Complex Organisations	Management Science	Autonomy	Organisational Theory	Analysis using basic search model	MM as being one or two levels below CEO page 15	Looks at the process of finding and defining strategy. Looks at delegation of decision making and autonomy.		v	US US France France
81	Miles, R.E., Snow, C.C., Meyer, A.D., Coleman, H.J.	1978	Organisational Strategy, Structure and Process	Academy of Management Review	Strategy	Processual Organisational	Conceptual	Strategy – product market domain	Looks at how organisational adaptation affects strategy	v		US US US US
82	Miller, J. R.	1984	Revitalization: The most difficult of all strategies	Human Resource Management	Strategy	Processual	Conceptual	MM – are the key	Looks at revitalisation strategy and revitalisation requirements	v		US
85	Mintzberg ,H.,	1985	Of Strategies, Deliberate	Strategic Management Journal	Strategy	Organic – page 1204	Exploratory longitudin	Strategy – is an organisation plan	Looks at the difference between	v		Canada

	Waters J.A.		and Emergent				al case study of strategy formation; in a telco; data collection; researchers report; archive documents; PowerPoint slides for investors; town hall meetings; corporate emails; data analysis; chronological analysis; review of data identifying of strategy behaviour – pages	on what to do in the future	emergent and deliberate strategy			Canada

							1207 and 1208					
83	Mintzberg H.	1994	Rethinking Strategic Planning Part II: New Roles for Planners	Long Range Planning	Strategy	Processual	Conceptual	Strategy – a pattern in a stream of decisions p. 934 Strategy – a deliberate set of guidelines that determine the decision into the future.	Looks at planning strategy and strategic thinking	v		US
84	Mintzberg, H.	1978	Patterns in Strategy Formation	Management Science	Strategy	Patterns theory – page 937 Game Theory – p. 935 (set of rules of the game – the game is strategy)	Looking at collection data about important decisions; actions by the organisations; important events; trends; environment; examination of product catalogues	Strategy – deliberate plans conceived in advance of the making of a specific decision Strategy – a pattern in a stream of decisions. Strategic (decision) – significant (decision) p 934 Strategy – defined in many ways – elements of definition almost	Provides excellent summary strategy formation literature which is then developed further	v		US

							, minutes of executive meetings, interviews and so on; pattern investigation – page 936	always include – future direction, deliberate conscious set of guidelines.				
86	Mirabeau, L., Maguire, S.	2014	From Autonomous Strategic Behaviour to Emergent Strategy	Strategic Management Journal	Strategy	Evolutionary organisational theory – page 1226	Documents Reports Accounts Presentations Emails Strategy of interpretation of data formation (Yin, 2003) – page 1224	Strategy – integrated process of resources allocation	Study of emergent strategy adds to understanding the phenomenon	v		Canada Canada
87	Mollick, E.	2012	People and Process, Suits and Innovators: The Role of	Strategic Management Journal	Performance	Organisational theory and strategy – page 1002	Publicly available information	MM's are bounded by the nature of the firm	Aims to explain performance difference by looking at individual performance		v	US

			Individuals in Firm Performance				Empirical study of the game industry		Compares individual factors v organisational factors			
88	Morrow, J., Mowatt, S.	2015	Implementation of Authentic Sustainable Strategies	Business Strategy and the Environment	Strategy	Processual	Semi Structured Interviews Case Study in New Zealand	Not defined	Looks at how strategy is translated into action	v		
89	Neubauer F.F., Solomon N.B.	1977	A Managerial Approach to Environmental Assessment	Long Range Planning	Strategy	Processual	Analysis	Strategy – process of keeping the company in tune with external world	Looks at how environment affects strategy Types of environment considered: - Natural - Social/cultural - Technological - Economic	v		Switzerland Switzerland
90	Noda T., Bower J.L.	1996	Strategy Making as Iterated Processes of Resource Allocation	Strategic Management Journal	Strategy	Process perspective Ecology perspective	Retrospective, longitudinal, field study research	MM – making resources allocation decisions	Looks at resources allocation in the strategy making process	v		US UK

							methodology					
92	Nonaka, I.	1988	Self-renewal of the Japanese firm and the human resource strategy	Human Resource Management Journal	Strategy	Processual	Case Study Japan	Not defined	Looks at strategy implementation in Japanese context	v		Japan
91	Numagami T., Karube M., Kato T.	2010	Organisational Deadweight: Learning From Japan	Academy of Management Perspective	Autonomy Performance	Processual	Conceptual	MM's have the characteristics that may lead to and/or help to overcome organisational decline p.27	Unit of analysis is business unit and it looks at why strategic decisions are delayed and or not made and how this effects performance	v		Japan Japan Japan
93	Ogbonna E., Wilkinson B.	2003	The False Promise of Organisational Culture Change: A Case Study of Middle Managers in Grocery Retailing	Journal of Management Studies	Autonomy	Theory of organisational culture	Interviews semi-structured	Not defined. As regards to definitions acknowledges that there are 'considerable conceptual difficulties'	Developed understanding of organisational culture change Found that MM's are at best ambiguous about culture change	v		UK UK
94	Pappas ,J.M.,	2007	Middle Managers' Divergent	Journal of Management Studies	Strategic roles of	Social network theory	Social network analysis;	MMs – boundary spanning	The article suggests specific relationships between alternative		v	US US

	Wooldridge, B.		Strategic Activity: An Investigation of Multiple Measures of Network Centrality		middle management		89 middle managers in U.S.-based urban hospital		forms of network centrality and particular elements of the strategic renewal process.			
95	Picard, J.	2001	Organisational Structures and Integrative Devices in European Multinational Corporations	Columbia Journal of World Business	Autonomy	Resources	Interviews with executives of fifty-six manufacturing US subsidiaries	Not defined	Observed that it is important to involve MMs in subsidiaries in communication with headquarters p.34	v		Canada
96	Pinsonneault, A., Kraemer, K.L.	1993	The impact on Information Technology on Middle Managers	MIS Quarterly	Strategy	Paradox	Conceptual	Not defined	Examines the impact of information technology on MM's and strategy. Finds contradictory evidence that IT both decreases and increases number of MM.			US Canada
97	Porter, M.E.	1981	The Contributions of Industrial Organisation	Academy of Management Review	Strategy	Organisational theory	Oligopoly theory Game theory	Uses Learned, Christensen, Andrews and Guth's definition of strategy – a firm's attempt to	Acknowledges that industrial organisation can offer insights to strategic management	v		US

			to Strategic Management					compete in its environment.	'The need for strategy emerged to help the manager to transform the daily chaos of events and decisions into an orderly way of sizing up the firm's position in environment.'			
98	Prahalad, C.K., Krishnan ,M.S.	2002	The Dynamic Synchronisation of Strategy and Information Technology	MIT Sloan Management Review	Strategy	resources	Case Study interviews with more than 500 senior executives in large companies	Looks at the interplay between IT and strategy and its impact on MM's	Looks at interaction between strategy and IT	v		US US
99	Raes, A. M. L. Heiltjes, M. G. Glunk, U. Roe R. Al	2011	The interface of the top management team and middle managers: A process Protocol	Academy of Management Review	Strategy	Processual	Literature Review	MM – linking pins	Looks at interactions between MM and TM and how this link to quality of strategic decisions and strategy implementation	v		Switze rland Nether lands
100	Regnér, P.	2003	Strategy Creation in the	Journal of Management Studies	Strategy	Emerging theory	Observations Interviews	Not defined	Looks at strategy which has been	v		Swede n

			Periphery: inductive Versus Deductive Strategy Making				Yin, Longitudinal case methodology		created in a different way			
101	Ren, C.R., Guo, C.	2011	Middle Managers' Strategic Role in the Corporate Entrepreneurial Process: Attention-Based Effects	Journal of Management	Strategy	Attention - based perspective	Archival Data	MM- provide impetus for different types of entrepreneurial opportunities	Looks at the role of MM's in strategy and the effect of slack resources and the leverage of policy window – regularities and irregularities in and around organisation	v		US US
102	Rossel, R.D.	1971	Autonomy in Bureaucracies	Administrative Science Quarterly	Autonomy	Not set out	Analysis of previously gathered data p.309	AUTONOMY desire to stand apart from others and frustration at having to depend upon others over whom one has little control p.310 AUTONOMY negative orientation to bureaucratic procedure p. 313	Early article looking at autonomy Sets out situations which encourage autonomy		v	US

103	Rotemberg, J.J., Saloner G.	2000	Visionaries, Managers, and Strategic Direction	RAND Journal of Economics	Strategy	Processual	Analysis	MMs – are important in strategy formation	Good citation of Burgelman 1994 p.24 'because big strategies can grow from little ideas and in strange places, not to mention unexpected times, almost anyone in the organisation can prove to be strategist.		v	US US
104	Rouleau, L.	2005	Micro-Practices of Strategic Sensemaking and Sensegiving: How Middle Managers Interpret and Sell Change Every Day	Journal of Management Studies	Strategic roles of middle management	Role theory; micro practice	Single Case Conversations Observations Interviews Interpretative case study of strategic change in one Canadian clothing company	MM- implement strategic change	The study identified four micro practices managers use to interpret and sell strategic change; translating the orientation, overcoding the strategy, disciplining the client, justifying the change.	v		Canada

105	Rouleau, L., Balogun, J.	2011	Middle Managers, Strategic Sensemaking, and Discursive Competence	Journal of Management Studies	Autonomy	Theory development Theory on MM's Sensemaking	Interview MM Focus Groups Narratives	Not defined	Examines MM's contribution to strategy	v		UK Canada
106	Schilit, W.K.	1987	An Examination of the Influence of Middle-Level Managers in Formulating and Implementing Strategic Decisions	Journal of Management Studies	Strategy	Attribution theory; impression management theory; arguments on defensiveness; and Schilit and Locke's study of upward influence – page 274 attribution theory p.274 impression management theory p.274	60 participants in 57 organisations questionnaire	**MM:** middle level managers **Strategy:** is the outcome of social and political processes. Strategic Process (Mintzberg definition adopted) important decisions that utilise organisations resources to enhance its long-term success p.273 Strategic (Mintzberg et al. (1976) mean important in terms of the	The upward influence of middle managers is examined Attempts to develop a new stream of research in the field of strategic decision-making p.289		v	US

								actions taken, resources committed, or the precedents set. **Autonomy:** focus on influence and or bypassing 'superiors head' p.280				
107	Seidl, D., Whittington, R.	2014	Enlarging the Strategy-as-Practice Research Agenda: Towards Taller and Flatter Ontologies	Organisation Studies	Strategy	Strategy-as - practice	Literature Review (empirical material used for illustration)	Strategy – is a kind of profession like law, medicine or journalism	Looks at 'local' strategy in the context of 'larger' phenomena in the world	v		UK Switzerland
108	Shi W., Markoczy L., Dess G.G.	2009	The Role of Middle Management in the Strategy Process: Group Affiliation, Structural Holes, and Tertius Iungens	Journal of Management	Autonomy	Conceptual	Literature Review	MMs – championing alternatives, facilitating adaptability, synthetizing information and implementing strategy	Examines breakage roles of MM and how they impact on strategic goals	v		US US US

109	Shimizu, K.	2012	Risks of Corporate Entrepreneurship: Autonomy and Agency Issues	Organisation Science	Autonomy	Agency Theory Organisational Fairness Theory	Literature Review	MM's autonomous strategic behaviour – which is outside the scope of the current strategy (Burgelman 1991 p. 246) MM's synthesising strategic ideas from the top p.195	Corporate Entrepreneurship risky because new ideas is difficult to evaluate Encourages to look at the whole process of idea generation and idea selection Contributions excellently set out: (1) applying agency and organisational fairness theories in context of corporate entrepreneurship (2) acknowledging the risks associated with CE (and looking at organisational conditions that reduce these risk) (3) articulates why the idea selection is as important as the idea generation as well as idea implementation Looks also at the right level of	v		Japan

									autonomy and concludes that more autonomy does not lead to better results.			
110	Sillince, J., Mueller, F.	2007	Switching Strategic Perspective: The Reframing of Accounts of Responsibility	Organisation Studies	Middle management outcomes	Cognitive framing; linguistics	Inductive: Longitudinal case study of a middle management team	MMs – taking up and taking down expectations	A middle management team implementing a strategic initiative was found to reframe responsibilities and expectations based on the team's changing goals. Unclear top management intent favoured midlevel opportunism.	v		UK UK
111	Smith, J.G., Fleck, V.	1987	Business strategies in small high-technology companies	Long Range Planning	Strategy	Processual	Case study of high-tech companies in UK	Not defined	Looks at the strategy/plans in small companies	v		UK UK
112b	Soderberg , A.	2015	Recontextualising a Strategic Concept within a Globalising Company: A	The International Journal of Human Resource Management	Performance	Recontextualization – page 233	Case study at Carlsberg – page 232 Interviews,	MM – give sense	Looks at strategy formulation and implementation in context of multinational company	v		Denmark

			Case Study on Carlsberg's 'Winning Behaviours' Strategy				transcripts, company documents and field notes – page 237					
113	Teece, D.J., Pisano, G., Shuen A.	1997	Dynamic Capabilities and Strategic Management	Strategic Management Journal	Strategy	Game theory – page 510 Strategic theory – page 509 Resource based	Population ecology – page 529	Strategy formulation – is relating a company to its environment	Strategy research would benefit in looking more to innovation research and organisational theory, organisational behaviour	v		US US US
114	Thakur, M.	1998	Involving Middle Managers in Strategy Making	Long Range Planning	Strategy	Processual	Case study Interviews Questionnaires of managers in different levels	MM- one step below the VP and two steps above the first-line supervisor	Looks at involvement of MM's in strategy in - Attending strategic meetings - Providing strategic inputs - Articulating industry transformation	v		US

									- Analysing shifting demands Organisations have to be selective in democratizing their strategy making process as more is not necessarily merrier			
115	Tippman n E., Scott P.S., Mangem atin V.	2014	Stimulating Knowledge Search Routines and Architectural Competences : The Role of Organisation al Context and Middle Management	Long Range Planning	Strategy	Routines Organisati onal	Case study Interviews Archival Data Analysis	MM-understand routines	Looks at routines and how they evolve with context	v		France Ireland
116	Tsai W.	2000	Social Capital, Strategic Relatedness and the Formation of Intraorganiza tional Linkages	Strategic Management Journal	Strategy	Resources theory	Case Study Questionn aire	managers – source of social capital	Examines how social capital impacts on strategic relatedness		v	US

117	Vila, J, Canales, J. I.	2008	Can Strategic Planning Make Strategy ore Relevant and Build Commitment Over Time? The Case of RACC	Long Range Planning	Middle management cognition and involvement	Strategic planning	Interviews Accounts Documents Longitudinal case study; strategic planning process at regional automobile club	MM – engaged in real-time strategy making	Middle managers' active participation in strategic planning was found to increase their appreciation of priorities and goals and coordination during implementation.	v		UK Spain
118	Wernerfelt B., Karnani A.	1987	Research Notes and Communications Competitive Strategy Under Certainty	Strategic Management Journal	Strategy	Resources theory	Conceptual	Not given	Analysis of strategic options 'wait' 'focus' and 'flexibility.	v		US US
119	Westley F.R.	1990	Middle Managers and Strategy: The Micro-Dynamics of Inclusion	Strategic Management Journal	Middle management cognition and involvement	Conversation theory; interaction rituals; emotion work	Conceptual; 3 illustrative cases in one large, manufacturing firm	Not given	The article examines how middle managers' exclusion from strategy conversations in a bureaucratic organisation leads to demotivation, alienation, and	v		Canada

									conflict. Conditions that may increase and sustain feelings of inclusion and motivation are discussed.			
120	Whipp, R., Rosenfeld, R., Pettigrew, A.	1989	Managing Strategic Change in a Mature Business	Long Range Planning	Strategy	Processual	Conceptual	MM- dynamic and responsive to changes in the competitive environment	Managers are important as they aim to achieve coherence between operations and strategy	v		UK UK UK
121	Whittington, R.	2006	Completing the Practice Turn in Strategy Research	Organisation Studies	Strategy	Practice perspective – page 613 Social theory	Open inquiry and presentation of views – page 622	MM's engage in strategy work Strategy is practice rather than as a property of an organisation	See strategy as something that organisations do Develops the strategy as practice theory	v		UK
122	Whittington, R.	2003	The Work of Strategising and Organising: For a Practice Perspective	Strategic Organisation	Strategising	Practice perspective Organisation and social theory	Literature review	Not defined	Sets out matters that we need to know more about – how much it costs to make strategy, how to use consultants, which tools work, how to organise organising and what it takes to be a good strategy designer	v		UK

123	Whittington, R., Yakis-Douglas, B. Ahn, K., Cailluet, L.	2017	Strategic Planners in More Turbulent Times: The Changing Job Characteristic of Strategy Professionals, 1960 – 2003	Long Range Planning	Strategy	Contingency Theory	Examination of job advertisements data from 1960 - 2003	Not defined	Looks at how turbulence impacts on strategy/strategic planning	v		UK UK UK France
124	Wilhelm W.R.	1990	Revitalising the Human Resource Management Function in a Mature Large Organisation	Human Resource Management Journal	Strategy	Organisational capabilities	Conceptual	MM – hire people	Looks at strategy and change	v		US
125	Wilson I.	1994	Strategic Planning Isn't Dead – It Changed	Long Range Planning	Strategy	Environmental	Middle Managers and support staff in Case Study Survey	Strategy – has evolved from its purely planning focus	Looks at how environment and context influences strategy	v		US
126	Wooldridge B.,	1989	Strategic Process	Strategic Management Journal	Middle management cognition and	Strategic decision making;	Conceptual	MM's – cites Bower's definition – are	The relationship between strategic consensus and firm	v		US US

	Floyd S.W.		Effects on Consensus		involvement in Middle management outcomes	strategic consensus		the only men in organisations who are in the position to judge whether strategic issues are being considered in context	performance is elaborated by analysing strategy processes. Consensus among middle managers is seen to be more important in incremental than synoptic contexts.			Switzerland
127	Wooldridge B., Floyd S.W.	1990	The Strategy Process, Middle Management Involvement, and Organisational Performance	Strategic Management Journal	Middle management cognition and involvement Middle management outcomes	Strategic decision making; strategic consensus	Correlation analysis; 20 banking and manufacturing firms	MM – mid-level managers	Although the study did not find links between middle management consensus and performance, middle managers' involvement in strategic planning was associated with higher levels of consensus and financial performance.		v	US US
128	Wooldridge B., Schmid, T., Floyd, S.W.	2008	The Middle Management Perspective on Strategy Process: Contribution	Journal of Management	Strategy	Middle management perspective	Literature review	Middle management – is understood broadly	Analysis of papers on MMs	v		US Switzerland

			s, Synthesis, and Future Research									
129	Wooldridge, B., Floyd, S.W.	1989	Research Notes and Communications Strategic Process Effects on Consensus	Strategic Management Journal	Autonomy	Process	Method: not found Methodology: not found Approach: This approach would facilitate the detection of consensus in strategic decision-making for both synoptic and incremental processes. [p301]	MM: not found Strategy: Strategy is formulated by consensus among the CEO and the TMT. [p296] Autonomy: not found	Practical use: not found Theoretical use: not found Implementation: not found Recommendation: We recommend researchers develop the concept of priorities as a process neutral construct. [p301]	v		US US

130	Wright C.	2009	Inside Out? Organisational Membership, Ambiguity and the Ambivalent Identity of the Internal Consultant	British Academy of Management	Autonomy	Longitudinal case studies of individuals career histories – page 321	interviews – page 312	Not given	Explores how MMs define their roles and perceive their autonomy.	v		Australia

APPENDIX C. INFORMANT CHARACTERISTICS

Note: Data refer to the job and employer about which the informant reported, not necessarily those at the time of the interview.

INFORMANT	TITLE	COMPANY TYPE	SECTOR	COMPANY NATIONALITY AND MM LOCATION, NATIONAL ORIGIN and GENDER
Pilot Interviews				
P-MM1	Operational Excellence Leader	State-owned multinational	Oil and gas	Middle East, MM based in North Africa, Arab, male
P-MM2	Director of Corporate Strategy	A subsidiary that is 49 % state-owned, and 51% listed, multinational	Telecom	Majority owner is Western Europe and minority is Central European, MM based in subsidiary HQ country, Arab, male
P-MM3	VP and Head of Internal Audit	Multinational, economic and development company	Diversified, mainly real estate and financial investments	Middle East, MM based in HQ country, Arab, male
P-MM4	Divisional Manager for Projects Developmen t	Partly state- owned but publicly listed, multinational	Energy	Western Europe, MM based in HQ country, Eastern European, male
Thesis Interviews				
MM01	Director of Accounts	Multinational listed on both New York and London Stock Exchange	Pharmaceutical	USA; MM in UK, British, male
MM02	Project Manager	JV between multinational and UK company	Oil and Gas	UK and Eastern Europe; MM in London, Eastern European, male
MM03	Quality Specialist	National retail bank	Finance	Middle East; MM in Middle East, Arab, male
MM04	Engineering Supervisor	State-owned multinational	Oil and Gas	Middle East; MM in UK, Arab, male
MM05	Director of Oil and Gas operations	State owned multinational	Oil and Gas	Middle East; MM in Middle East, Arab, male

MM06	Head of Operations	Sovereign investment fund	Finance	Middle East; MM in London, British, female
MM07	Director	Multinational trading and asset management Company	Trading and Finance	Hong Kong; MM was in HK, British, male
MM08	CFO	State owned multinational	Oil and Gas	China; MM in UK, Chinese, male
MM09	Strategic Business Development	Multinational	Pharma	USA; MM in UK, British, female
MM10	VP Strategic Accounts	Multinational	Digital-based marketing support services	USA; MM in UK, British, male
MM11	Vice President Asset Management	National company	Finance/Asset Management	West Africa; MM in UK, African, female
MM12	Vice President	National company	Bespoke Factory Equipment	UK; MM in UK, British, male
MM13	Principal Quality Assurance Engineer	Multinational	Retail fashion online	UK; MM in UK, British Asian, male
MM14	Business Manager	Multinational	Insurance	USA; MM in UK, British, female
MM15	Merchandise Manager	Multinational	Department store	UK; MM in UK, British, female
MM16	R&D Manager	Multinational	Medical Devices	USA, MM in Switzerland, British, male
MM17	Risk Manager	Multinational	Financial asset managers	USA; MM in UK, African, male
MM18	Global VP IS Delivery Management	Multinational	Packaging dispensers	USA; MM in UK, Italian, male
MM19	Head of Maintenance	Multinational	Airline	UK, Austria, Switzerland, MM in UK, British, male
MM20	Manufacturing Manager	Multinational	Advanced engineered components	USA, manufacturing sites worldwide, MM in UK, Eastern European, male
MM21	Head of Sales and Strategic Planning	Multinational	Online recruiting platform of publishing and media company	Germany; MM in UK, British, male

MM22	Director of Transition	Multinational	Retail bank	UK, Worldwide, MM in UK, African, female
MM23	Head of Marketing	Multinational joint venture	Information provider	Japan and USA, MM in UK, French, male
MM24	Strategy and Operations Manager	Multinational	Information provider	US, MM in UK, British, male
MM25	Head of Research	Multinational	Information provider	UK, MM in UK, Belgian, female
MM26	Risk and Value Manager	National	Transport Network and Infrastructure	UK, MM in UK, British, Male
MM27	Regional Manager	Multinational	Banking and financial services	UK, MM in UK, British, male
MM28	Business Development Manager	Multinational	High technology manufacturing	UK, MM in UK, Arab, male
MM29	Operational Quality Manager	State-owned multinational	Oil and Gas	Middle East, MM in Middle East, Arab, male
MM30	Vice President	Multinational	IT security	US, MM in UK, American, Male
MM31	Organisational Performance Advisor	State-owned Multinational	Oil and Gas	Middle East, MM in Middle East, Pakistani, male
MM32	Business Development Lead	Multinational	Publishing	UK, MM in UK, British, male
MM33	Vice President	Multinational	Investment management	USA, MM in UK, Chinese, Female
MM34	Sr. Operational Excellence Advisor	State-owned Multinational	Oil and Gas	Middle East, MM in Middle East, American, male
MM35	Vice President	Multinational	Investment management	USA, MM in UK, British, female
MM36	Vice President	Multinational	Banking and financial services	USA, MM in UK, Indian, male
MM37	Vice President	Multinational	Investment management	USA, MM in UK, Spanish female

MM38	Sales Planning Manager	Multinational	Automotive	Germany, MM in UK, Czech, male
MM39	Vice President	Multinational	Oil and Gas	China, MM in South America, South American, female
MM40	Operational Excellence Advisor	Multinational	Oil and Gas	Middle East, MM in Middle East, Arab, male

APPENDIX D EXAMPLE OF CODED TRANSCRIPT

[redacted] HM1

Interviewer:	Good afternoon [redacted]. Could you please tell me your surname and the company that you work for?	1.1. & 2.1
Respondent:	My name is [redacted] and I work for [redacted].	1.1. & 2.1.
Interviewer:	And could you please tell me what is your title?	2.5.
Respondent:	Currently I am Director of the Accounts Centre of Excellence.	2.5
Interviewer:	Okay, and how long have you been working for Pfizer?	2.4
Respondent:	So I've been working for [redacted] for 14 years now.	2.4
Interviewer:	And how long have you been in your current job title?	2.9.
Respondent:	This job title two years.	
Interviewer:	Okay in Pfizer for which particular unit do you work?	
Respondent:	I work for a unit called [redacted] Essential Health and that's one of three business units within Pfizer.	1.4.
Interviewer:	Okay. Just sort of briefly outline for me the hierarchy of Pfizer so that I understand it? So you have three business units, so can you please tell me perhaps what are the two other ones?	1.4.
Respondent:	Sure yes, so we have [redacted] Essential Health which I am in, [redacted] Innovative Health and Pfizer Consumer Health. Three different types of medicine that are in there, and I sit in Global Marketing which is a worldwide support organisational capability support group.	1.4
Interviewer:	Okay how many employees report to you directly?	3.2.
Respondent:	Currently none directly although over the years I've had anything between 56 indirectly and probably most has been about nine directly but for most of my 14 years in [redacted] so 12 of those, or ten of those years I've probably had people reporting to me, round about eight directly.	3.2.
Interviewer:	Okay. How many total years of work experience do you have?	2.2.
Respondent:	29 years in the pharmaceutical industry.	2.3
Interviewer:	Okay. And you said that with [redacted] you've been 14 years yes?	2.4
Respondent:	Yes.	
Interviewer:	Okay now I would like to ask you more about your management role and about your role in strategy and in particular my research is about how middle managers exercise autonomy in delivering strategy. So do you exercise autonomy and are you responsible for strategy currently?	5.1.

XS Typing

[redacted]

Respondent: Yes. So I have to pull together plans for implementation of key account management centre of excellence specifically in a geographical region which is Europe, and also in China, and so it's up to me to develop that strategy that engages country managers and their managers and their management teams in doing things a certain way to follow the global strategic plan. 5.1.

Interviewer: Okay. Can you please tell me more about the strategy so that I can sort of understand what it is about, when it's occurred, the time frames, or for example is it one year strategy, two year strategy? The reason for the company pursuing the strategy, the whole performance? 4.1.

Respondent: Yes sure. So our particular focus around key account management excellence has come about because in the pharmaceutical industry it's very much about taking sales representatives and putting them in front of prescribers. Now that's become very challenging, very expensive, it's not what our customers want, so we're amending our go to market model around a small number of specialised individuals who can identify and work closely with larger healthcare customer groups, and that means a completely different type of skill, and capability, and so it's all about how can we develop that in country and engage and align in country so that these individuals and these teams can behave in a different way with customers going forward. And so our operations planning, we ops plan every single year. It's a significant amount of effort in the organisation and when we present our ops plan it's an annual ops plan, however it has to have a five year limit behind it or plan behind it as well, so we're constantly planning five years ahead in the strategic sense but very much one year in the operational sense. 4.1.

Interviewer: Okay how do you measure the performance of the strategy? 4.9.

Respondent: Yes so measurement is ultimately always around impact and sales and potentially impact on costs. So we're looking to increase our sales revenues, we're also looking at reputation, so that's really, really important. Anything we can do to develop a positive reputation for our organisation is important. And thirdly we're also looking for how we can innovate with these larger organisations, so with healthcare groups. Because in order to be successful we have to bring innovative medicines to the market, and at the same time we have to supply generic medicines which have lost their exclusivity, so there is a degree of balance between those and if we can find larger organisations that are willing to innovate medicine with us, and we can work on the data together that shows that efficacy then that is a huge opportunity too. Does that help? 4.9. & 4.1.

Interviewer: Yes so how do you measure for example, you have mentioned for example reputation and so on, how do you measure things like that are very difficult to measure, reputation for example? 4.1

Respondent: So we use external organisations. So for instance there's an organisation called Kantar who are experts in that area and they will go into market with standard sets of questions and collect data off customers and accounts and feed that back to us. So we get an index score and it will be relative to other organisations so we know roughly how we're performing and what it is our customers are saying about us. And all that data goes into the local country plans to change behaviours, to do things slightly differently etcetera, etcetera. 4.1.

[redacted]

Interviewer: How do you measure the other performance indicators, sales and costs that are clear to measure, but how do you measure other performance indicators?

Respondent: So things like innovation that will be co-created, whether they are co-created medicines or whether they are co-created innovations around supporting patients. So for instance in a hospital there may be a challenge with length of stay, so the number of days people are in hospital, in a bed, now if we have a medicine that can help that patient move out into the community and be cared for at home more quickly, then we'll be working that hospital in order to educate their staff, educate their patients, use the right medicine in the right way, in order to get the benefit for the patient and get them closer to their home more quickly, where they are more likely to get better more quickly, and less likely to pick up an infection in hospital. So those kinds of innovations that we can share with other healthcare customers and accounts. We will measure those as a positive thing. Is that useful? 4.1.

Interviewer: Yes. So what is your – now coming more to the strategy, so we have sort of two stages usually, it's the creation of strategy and the implementation of the strategy, what is your role in the creating of the strategy? 5.1.

Respondent: So because I'm Ops Director for a particular division realistically we're quite a small team. My boss who is the Global Director, and he and I will, realistically we will sit in a room and we will bring in experts, external experts to give us environmental insights and then we will spend two three weeks building a plan that ultimately we deliver to our global colleagues. Then that goes up and up and up the chain so we're constantly refreshing that plan as we go along between March and September that looks out over that five year period. And in that plan not only will we will have activities that we believe are essential, so milestones and KPIs, critical performance indicators, and critical success factors, but we'll also have costings associated with that and potential revenues and impact that we have on countries as a result of those activities. And all that is built up over that five month period. 8.0, 5.1.

Interviewer: So in terms of the creation of the strategy is your boss or supervisor somebody who overrides decisions or is it sort of process of where you both have equal weight say? 5.1.

Respondent: Well I think my boss in particular, his style is very much, yes he has the power to override but generally he's quite discursive, so we'll talk it through and generally agree on things but ultimately he could say "Yes that's wrong [redacted]" or "Yes that's right [redacted] and let's do it this way." But he's quite consultative and we'll also, because we're a relatively small director team of five, so the boss and four of us, he will also confer with my colleagues and we'll do that as well. So when we've got our plan organised the initial test will be with our own team, so we'll talk it through as a team, build it up and take it back. 2.8 5.1.

Interviewer: And then the implementation of the strategy, what is your role with that? 5.2

Respondent: Well as Ops Director it's my job to put all the KPIs and measures in place, and to track against those KPIs and measures so the scorecard is put together capturing the data monthly, updating it, briefing back to the team, briefing my boss, sending that upstairs to more senior individuals. I literally will spend at least one day per month pulling together a report that goes up to my boss. 5.2

XS Tvpina

[redacted]

Interviewer: And what would be your sort of groundwork you would be doing, so in addition to writing reports and gathering the information, do you directly manage any people to ensure that the strategy gets implemented? 3.2.

Respondent: I suppose – we're a slightly unusual group in [redacted] in that I don't directly manage, so I have authority without portfolio to a degree. So whilst my colleagues, my peers, I'm managing them to provide me with the data and I'm managing them to give them a little nudge if they are behind or congratulate them if they are ahead etcetera, in my current role that's what I'm doing so it's a slightly different approach. I can't tell them to do it, although I can tell them to do it, they can tell me to go away, but they never do, it seems to work. We're a relatively close knit team, we've been together for a couple of years and I think there is a great deal of respect there, so because of that respect it allows me to pick up the phone and say "So and so, you need to do this." And it's "Oh I forgot to do that, thanks [redacted]" move on as opposed to "Let's talk about short term objectives..." and all that kind of stuff that you can get into when you're having to manage a larger team. So slightly different. Slightly different. 3.2

Interviewer: Okay so are there any problems ever in the creation or implementation of strategy?

Respondent: In this particular I've been really lucky honestly, and not at all. However, it's an interesting question when I reflect back on other roles I've had within the organisation where particularly around tactical implementation that's when the difficulties can come along because you've got hard KPIs and if people aren't delivering against those then that leads to a very objective but a very difficult and challenging conversation. I think with the strategic ones, provided everybody is well informed and can clearly see where you're going and what the vision is, there tends to – and also that they are on board, there tends to be a more positive energy in the room and therefore a more forward looking approach to what you're trying to achieve. And I think in this current role it's a nice place to be because we can all see exactly where we want to go and we're all pushing really hard to get there. 5.2k 5.3.

Interviewer: Can you tell me about your role when this was not the case, or where there were for examples issues in creation of the strategy and also issues with implementation of the strategy and why was that the case? 5.3.

Respondent: Yes, I can think of some examples. I think in my experience where it's been frustrating difficult, challenging, when strategy hasn't been put in place has often been because from my perspective, the other people haven't ultimately understood it. They haven't understood the strategy, haven't seen the vision, haven't seen where we're going and so therefore they've chosen their own path instead of – I mean it's the classic, this might sound quite simple, if we say we're going to Edinburgh, the first question is where are we, so we're in Cranfield. Okay so when do we need to get there, how are we going to get there, all those kinds of questions, if they are answered up front everyone is more likely to jump onto the bus or get into a car and go on the same journey. Whereas if it's not clear then different people are going to go in different ways, and if the leader then thinks afterwards "Oh what are you doing on the bus when you should be in the car?" then you're going to have challenges and so in my experience when that communication hasn't been really clear at the very, very beginning and there isn't a passion around the 5.3.2

final goal that's often led to challenges.

Interviewer: Do you think it's just a communication problem or can there be any other reasons, so for example people have personal reasons why they do not support strategy, there are politics, there are resources, people have their own views as to why strategy could be done differently and better and so on. Could you give me perhaps some example of what you've experienced? 5.3.2.

Respondent: I think you've led me up the garden path nicely there because you're absolutely right. All of those things come into it, so what's going on in someone's personal life if there are things going on at home and there isn't a good relationship between manager and report to be aware of those kinds of things and then problems arise and they do arise, and that's happened to me in the past, or I've seen that happen in the past definitely. It's not always about communication no, although communication is just about words and pictures, it's that nonverbal stuff as well and I suppose that's where you look for an individual to pick up on those kinds of things. Tools and processes are really, really important, so in my organisation and in general in pharma organisations at the moment we have significant compliance pressures on us. So everything we do, we tend to make sure it's been signed off by medical and legal before we do it. Just to make sure we're doing the right thing, and that leads to tension because of course you want to do something, you want to do the right thing for the organisation, for the patients and the customer, and even though it is the right thing, and you believe it's the right thing, you have to go through process and if that process isn't set up effectively it causes all kinds of frustrations because you want to do it, do you do it, don't you do it, it leads to negative feelings about the organisation, because they're stopping me from doing it where in fact the process is there to protect everybody but those kinds of frustrations build. And the same with technology, so if the strategy is to do X and the technology is there that doesn't allow you to do it or in fact gets in the way of it, that can cause frustrations and it does actually happen in our organisation as well. It's not uncommon. 5.3.2

Interviewer: You are a big company, a very well-known company, you have lots of very clever people working for you so there will be other middle managers who will think that they know better, and that they can change the strategy in a way that actually benefits, in good faith, to the company and they for example try to execute it in different ways, have you experienced something like that? 5.3. 5.3.1 5.3.2

Respondent: Yes. Yes definitely. So I think in our organisation and in previous pharma organisations I've worked in, the middle manager, I still firmly believe the middle manager is the most powerful individual that can either prevent or make something from happening. So we have strategy, it's communicated, generally communicated down, let's face it, it comes from the board, it goes and drops down through the organisation, and the people closest to the customer they are more likely to do what they're asked to do, but it has to get through that middle group in order for that effective message to get to the people who are going to do the doing and the customer facing people. So if those people in the middle, the middle managers are as enthusiastic positive and can see the vision and have the tools etcetera, etcetera it's going to happen. If there's anything that prevents that it's not going to happen and that happens all the time in our organisation and causes all kinds of frustrations and interestingly if that middle manager is – still wants to show that they are a high performer but doesn't want to do whatever it is that they are being expected to do, 5.3 5.3.1 5.3.2

honestly they can cover it up and that's the reality of it.

Interviewer: How will they go about it?

Respondent: How will they go about?

Interviewer: Covering it up.

Respondent: It's easy to smile up and say 'Yes it's been done' and to make things look as though they've been done, and it happens, it really does happen. And I think it's a responsibility of senior managers to watch out for it because all sorts of relationships are there in large organisations, those subcultures and those relationships where Person A who is a senior manager has known Person B the middle manager for many, many years and therefore trusts them at their word. And whilst they are trustworthy they still might just tweak that strategic message slightly so that it loses the impact to the guys on the...and they have influence over their own team as well because good managers have good relationships with their team, whether that good relationship is a difficult one or a very happy one is about the situation but they tend to have good relationships and they are massively influential, because they are usually, as you say, very capable people. And so if they want to, excuse my terminology, 'play the game' it can be done. It's a very political environment in a large organisation.

Interviewer: And playing the game, would you think that this is always the [19.28] of the organisation or can it be in certain circumstances to the advantage of the organisation?

Respondent: Oh now that's interesting, I suppose you could find cases where an individual like that has gone off strategy and it can have a massive impact, a positive impact. However the question then is if they'd have stayed on strategy, could it have been an even bigger impact and I think ultimately I can't remember, there's something in the fact that as part of a large global organisation the whole idea is that we have strategy that we all stick to and whilst that is to some individuals a difficult thing to swallow, that's the way it really is and the way it should be and ultimately if we're not comfortable with that as individuals we need to be asking some questions about why we are where we are. So I feel quite strongly about that and I think that's an organisational view.

Interviewer: But you acknowledge that that's not sort of doing exactly, following the strategy could have other positive impact yes? You would acknowledge that that is possible?

Respondent: I think it's possible of course yes.

Interviewer: Have you seen it, could you tell me an example of it?

Respondent: I think I've seen – let me think, have I seen it? I think what I have seen, so I can give you an example and it's mildly generic but it's factually based, so historically in the pharmaceutical industry it was very much call rate driven. So a sales person was asked to see three doctors a day for instance, in the morning, that was it. You must deliver three doctors a day, and it became the monster, so it was the ultimate measure of input, and the outputs of course were the sales but the inputs became

[redacted]

more important. And I know of managers and I know of sales people who would completely ignore that, so they would – their argument would be "I can go and see three customers a day, but frankly I'll have to – by the time I get to Friday I'll be waiting around and fighting to get to see these three people and frankly are low value, they won't give me very much time. They probably won't interact with me, it will be a low value sales call. Whereas if I say and wait for this one person that could have a huge impact on sales and on the patients. But if you want me to see three I'll see three." And I know some managers who said "See one." Now they are not doing anything wrong in the sense that, so that sales representative's call rate is one a day, the organisation is saying it should be three a day, when it comes to the yearend review which effects the individuals bonus potentially, the hardened senior manager will be sending a message down of 'that person hasn't achieved their call rates therefore they get a low score in their end of year review.' But the manager would basically fight back for them and say 'the data is wrong.' It might be a white lie, it might be true I don't know, different people handle it in different ways but they will protect that person because ultimately historically I've seen the sales really benefit as a result of it. And that's why we're changing to the way we're changing now, and call rates going out the window, and it's about that quality of call as opposed to the quantity of call. Now that's just one example as an industry, that's why we're changing.

4.10 & 7.1. & 7.2

Interviewer: That's an excellent example. Do you have any more examples like this?

Respondent: I think there's probably lots of little ones but they are potentially bordering on the edge of the extreme...

Interviewer: This was an excellent example because that's easily understood for me and for anyone else yes. It's the quality of the interaction with the doctor who prescribes the medicine rather than seeing lots of them and not having time for them or coming in the wrong time when they don't have time for you and so on.

Respondent: Well I can think of one, I mean again similar kind of example and it's all based around that call rate, so when CRM systems came in there was lots of pressure put on sales people in particular to input data into the CRM. And the interesting thing about some CRM systems, particularly again in my industry, is instead of them becoming an information source where account teams could use them, because you can put patient related data, in other words any of our colleagues in medical can't put data around, even if it's anonymised around patients, anywhere near the sales persons data because it's not compliant, it's totally inappropriate, it's not really a CRM system. It becomes basically a policing system, how many calls a day have you done? How many times have you seen different people? A target list. And good quality sales people have said "What's the point in me doing it then?" Whereas the organisation has said you must do it, again you get this tension around "But what's the value for me, because I'm just basically putting this data in and nothing happens to it." So that also has been an end of year kind of discussion around "Well you haven't got any data in your CRM system" "So what, look at my sales, look at my performance" etcetera, etcetera "Look at what the customers are feeding back but I've only got a little bit of data in the CRM that nobody looks at." And again you'll have managers who will protect those people because they are good employees. It's just they haven't...and that's where you get the strategy at the very top is, around patient and sales, the strategy at senior manager then becomes mildly

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operational about "You must do your calls and you must put data in the CRM system" and then another layer says "But that's doesn't make sense" and the bottom layer is doing the right thing generally, and has got all those kinds of tensions in the system.

4.10 & 7.1 & 7.2

Interviewer: That was very good examples.

Respondent: Good.

Interviewer: How much autonomy do you have in delivering strategy?

Respondent: Personally quite a lot I think because I'm responsible for Europe and therefore I interact with the country managers. I can choose the target markets so I can tier my market into priority one, two and three. However I will always go back and check with the regional leadership team, very senior managers to make sure they are happy with what I have but ultimately it's I'm putting forward the strategic suggestion if you like for Europe.

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Interviewer: Okay. Can you just sort of tell me what does it involve? So you sort of say you want to sell so much drugs to let's say Germany, so much drugs to Finland, so much drugs to Sweden, is it how it works or is...?

Respondent: So no, so that's done by someone else. So there's lots of regional marketing groups in – well I mean there is anywhere between [redacted] people in any one time, so we, what my role is very much around - the numbers are already in place, that's not my job, so the numbers that each country is chasing is already in place, and there's a country manager responsible for those numbers. My job is very much around, so the strategic marketing piece, so they will currently have X number of sales people, blah, blah, blah and they will be going through certain channels. So I come along and suggest you could do it a slightly different way. I've segmented your market and found that you have potentially ten or even three huge accounts in your market, in order to approach those in a different way, this is how we could do it, these are the kind of messages we would use, these are the kind of processes we would use and then the country manager will say yes or no, and then it's my role then to drive that through.

Interviewer: Okay if they say no what happens then?

Respondent: If they say no realistically that's it, it's their call. However, what will happen then is I will report that back to New York, my boss in New York, and then there could be pressure put on them in a slightly different way. They probably wouldn't say no. If they wanted to push back they would just be difficult, so 'Can't get the team together this week' 'Can't get the team together...' that kind of thing but ultimately they would probably have to crumble. But it's almost a good example of that there is a strategy, we will implement, key account management, and certain countries, very senior leaders, not wanting to do it, is because they can't see the value, it's irritating because it's more work and they've got a lot of work on. Or they don't agree with it.

5.3.2.

Interviewer: So what would you do in this kind of situation, if they don't agree?

[redacted]

Respondent: Honestly if they don't agree and they can give me a good reason that's fine, I'll go somewhere else, there are 48 – we operate in 48 countries in Europe, I can only target two or three, maybe five, seven at the most. There are plenty of other people who – I've got people on the phone all the time, that's the reality of it. So for me it's not so bad, and there have been countries that haven't really been interested.

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Interviewer: So you don't mind if they don't follow the strategy when you know they aren't interested because you have other interests to deal with?

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K 7

Respondent: In this particular case that's the reality yes, so it's slightly unusual. There will be at one point the regional president will say "Thou shalt do this. Thou shalt do what Geoff is trying to get you to do." But at the moment for me in Europe that's not the case because they've got lots of other things to do. So Europe is 30% odd of our global business, maybe not that much, 25, there's probably 40% of it in America, so it's a big market, they've got lots to do.

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Interviewer: Okay so actually that is another example so the strategy implementation is not so critical, if it's not your focus, or if there are other sort of demands on your time and resources, is it? Have I summed it up correctly?

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Respondent: I think you're right, I think if in a big organisation like mine there will be lots of strategic imperatives and I think the realistic part of it is if you're a country manager of for instance one of the big five in Europe, everyone is trying to support that strategic drive and as a country manager you've got ten people coming at you, you're going to prioritise the top two or three. And every other strategic imperative is going to have to go somewhere else, go away, I can't cope, and in a big organisation that is the reality.

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Interviewer: Okay could you, you said you have now very good examples of when the strategy implementation is implemented differently, or not implemented at all? Can you think of any other examples where the implementation is due to middle managers change? Because for example they were not interested, they don't want to do it, they think it can be done differently?

Respondent: I think it can be, so the only one I can think of that's close to me is changed, tweaked for all sorts of reasons. Here's one, so here I am, coming to a market with a support structure around key account management, a big country wants to do it but at the same time wants to engage these other strategic imperatives that are coming in. So one country in particular has tried to put them together and tweak them. So in my view happy to go with that because that's what they want and it's a start but deep down I know that that weakens the strategic message slightly. So the question then is do you or don't you engage? And my view is yes because it's the thin end of a wedge, it gets me into them, and they can start. Does it mean a longer journey? Yes. Does it mean potentially we'll have to go back to the beginning again? Maybe. So it's a balance sometime that we have to make in order to do the best for the business because it's such a big market you have to support it. But rather than say no, and walk away, and let that opportunity disappear it's best to do at least something. So that's a...so it's always combining the strategy sometimes.

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Interviewer: So compromise in order to make it work yes?

[redacted]

Respondent: Compromise, negotiation, all those things are always in the room. 5.3

I'm going to have to go, sorry but we'll come back later. K 7

Interviewer: Okay. 5.3.2

Part 2

So we are resuming where we have left off and I would like to ask you about autonomy, how did you as middle manager gain autonomy so what was the process whereby you have gained autonomy? How did you get to have autonomy? 5.4.

Respondent: Yes, for me personally autonomy has always been a bit of a given. Maybe there's lots...so there's a little bit in there about personal mind set isn't there. You can own it if you like and you can push on, or you can allow managers to dominate you and – so it's a bit of personal style. So I'm the kind of person who likes to know exactly what, where the boss wants me to go, so what's the bosses objectives. What's the organisational objectives, and then I like to just be left alone to get on with it. So I've worked in situations where I've been allowed to do that and I've worked in situations where my boss has been irritating and wanting to micromanage me so, and that's been for me personally difficult. So I think there is a bit of emotive behaviour in there around – there are different people doing different ways. So autonomy is a bit of personal drive and it's also a bit of managerial style if that answers the question, that's my opinion anyway. 5.4.1

Interviewer: Okay but how in the situation where you had autonomy how were you able to get it, was there anything about you, about your...? 5.4.5

Respondent: Yes I think it's interesting isn't it, the more you perform in a positive way generally speaking the more autonomy you are given. So if you are delivering, then the sort of trust to leave you alone aspect builds, when you're not performing that's when suddenly you feel a little bit as though you're being micromanaged. And that's probably fair because either you're not doing it right so you're not aware of that, you need some help or you're just struggling and you can't do it, there's all those kinds of things. So it's often in my experience down to performance. When you're delivering what's expected of you, you tend to be left alone and the autonomy kicks in. 5.4.6

Interviewer: Is there anything else that you think in addition to your delivering what is required?

Respondent: I suppose if you're not, if you don't have a relationship with your boss or bosses it's difficult, but if you do then it's all that background that you have. So if you're perceived to be someone who is able, conscientious, delivers in previous jobs and you come into a new job, then that comes with you if the people who are managing you know you so they tend to give you more autonomy. It's almost – what's the cliché – the bit about previous success dictates your current standing. So it's this credibility really isn't it? So if you're a credible, a really credible individual with a history you either give or are given more autonomy. If you're an unknown then clearly I suppose inexperience and one would assume that you would be guided more closely, or you might feel that – I don't know if that's where – is that the kind of thing you're thinking of? 5.4.3. 5.4.4. 5.4.5.

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Interviewer: Yes, yes it is. These are the kinds of things that I'm looking for yes. So how do you exercise autonomy once you have it, once you've got it?

Respondent: Well. Yes how do you exercise it... It's an interesting area really isn't it, autonomy, so I think how do you exercise it, if you're managing a team it's very much about, like I say taking all that evidence of what's expected of you, what's required, and rolling that out and creating a vision for your own team that's in line with everything that you're expected of, or expected to deliver for want of a better term. So the autonomy piece is then about, like I say, create that vision, motivate, clarify objectives, support people who are struggling, do everything you have in your armoury to ultimately meet the original goals. So it's about – I mean there's all the other stuff in there around having energy, having enthusiasm, having desire to want to get the job done, all those kinds of things come into it, so that's – they're my instant thoughts.

5.3.1

Interviewer: And how much credibility did you have, did you have to have in order to exercise autonomy, you have mentioned past success yes. You have mentioned the relationship with your supervisors, is there anything else?

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5.4.5

Respondent: Well credibility I suppose, for me personally in my experience with people both ways, there's a whole knowledge thing, so you know if you know what you're talking about and you have insight into the area, so that knowledge piece is really important. There's also the skills, so either you can demonstrate them or you have demonstrated them. And then there's always that piece in there around both knowledge and skills around the assumptions that people make. So if they don't know you they have to assume you've got them, so that's either interview process or what they've heard about you from other people. And there is also what you can demonstrate, so there's knowledge and there's the skills, and then there's ultimately the attitude piece isn't there? So you know that when people walk in the room they either give out that aroma of 'I know what I'm talking about, and I have the skills' because they demonstrate them quite quickly, or they don't. Whether they actually have them or not there's something about that when they walk in the room you think "Wow, right this person can handle this" or I don't know, so there's the factual tangible items and there's also the intangibles that are very emotive but they are just as important some times. You know when you have a bad day and you walk in the door and someone says "How are you?" and you say "Oh I feel terrible." You're the light, in the room that nobody wants to see whereas if you walk in the door and say "Right! Let's do it, let's get on with it! It's going to be a good one." Completely different conversation. So there are those hard pieces, knowledge, attitude and then – knowledge skills and then there's that attitude piece and it's really important for me personally and either as a giver or a taker.

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Interviewer: I mean confidence can be highly deceiving people...

Respondent: Very much so.

Interviewer: People can be confident and all sorts of things and not necessarily based on the job.

Respondent: Very much so.

Interviewer: They can come across as very confident yes?

Respondent: So there is that classic isn't there, that unconsciously incompetent and consciously competent and everything that goes around it. So if you are totally unconsciously incompetent you're as happy as can be not knowing what you don't know and that's a great place to be because it's comfortable but for everyone else around you, if they are conscious of your incompetence that's a very uncomfortable place to be when someone says "Did you realise you're incompetent?" It's a horrible, horrible place but you can only move out of that, so as a manager it's really important I suppose to tell somebody, "Look I'm not telling you this to hurt you but did you realise you haven't the foggiest idea what you're talking about?" so you're into that difficult conversation, "Okay let me help you become competent. Now you're incompetent, let me help you become conscious, now you're incompetent and it's uncomfortable but let's get you over to the other side." 5.4.

Interviewer: But in terms of you and your autonomy how do you project this credibility? How do you make sure that people understand that you actually know what you are talking about? So let's say they don't know much about you yes, you just sort of have to convince them that this kind of autonomy or this kind of change or this kind of detail is beneficial to the company, how would you sort of demonstrate this credibility? 5.4.

Respondent: That's an interesting one as well isn't it? I mean the older you get the more you realise that it's about, in the modern world there's a lot of electronic messaging you can do, potentially, so get your LinkedIn profile up to date and all those kinds of things blah, blah, blah. But there's also that bit about, I think for me credibility is an interesting one so about physical presence. So when you're in the room a credible person to me, if they don't know what's going on will say "Hang on a minute, can you explain that to me?" So rather than if you excuse my terminology 'bullshitting' so there's just something in there around credibility for me that's really important. A lot of credibility is initially built off knowledge and then it goes in towards the skills piece but I'm not sure I can eloquently put it, it's a...credibility comes with certain behaviours like I say, certain behaviours but also it's got to be positive experience hasn't it? It's a difficult – it's very difficult to come across as credible if you haven't walked the walk. It's easy to talk the walk, but to be able to say "I've done it" or if I haven't done it can you explain to me how you did it so I can emulate your good work. It's a difficult one, it's a difficult one. 5.4.1

Interviewer: So you think credibility is closely linked to autonomy yes? Would you say so? 5.4.1

Respondent: For me personally yes. Although I appreciate for other people it might be different. So like I say, as I said a moment ago, I'm always inspired by people who have done it. I really am. However, there are people who are quite inspiring when they haven't done it, but there is something in me personally that makes me look at them and think 'You're talking it, because you've read a book, I'm not totally taken by you." I think it's very personal. 5.4.1

Interviewer: So it's about the experience yes?

Respondent: I think so yes. Well that gives – to me that gives someone extra credibility, that really compounds that credibility for me when they say "I built a house" you think "Wow, that's very impressive. You know how to build a house." So if I'm doing 5.4.1.

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some DIY and they say that to me all of a sudden I'm listening to them.

Interviewer: Okay. So how exercising of autonomy or did you exercise autonomy strategy to improve performance against the strategy objectives?

Respondent: I'd like to think so. I think the majority of times yes. So if ultimately most of my career been in commercial environments, 29 years of basically being given a number to chase. So in order to do that I'm aware of the fact that if I don't deliver then I can be criticised and I don't like not delivering, I'm quite a driven competitive individual, so for me I'll do whatever is appropriate in order to support people in my team or me individually to deliver. And that for me works better when I'm in an autonomous environment.

Interviewer: So what does this autonomy give you extra? What does it mean for you?

Respondent: Oh that's a good question. I think autonomy for me is a positive thing. However I suppose it's positive when I'm in a relative comfort zone so I'll get on and do things. I think autonomy can be a little bit dangerous and uncomfortable when you're struggling a little bit because if you're a 'do more try harder' kind of person you will just keep trying really hard and you'll end up very, very stressed and not achieve. Whereas if you're more likely to put your hand up and ask for help type person quickly, then you're going to be better for it. So there's two sides to it but I think – I've just forgotten, what was that question – what was the start of that question again?

Interviewer: So why is autonomy important for you? What does it allow you to do?

Respondent: I think yes, so okay, where I was trying to go is it allows me to express myself, so to try, to feel confident to – I think it gives that confidence that someone has had the faith and belief in me to do what I've demonstrated I can do or they believe I can do. So I'm quite inspired to go and do it. The other side of that is, if someone doesn't give me autonomy I feel as though I'm also being controlled, what I'm here to do and the value that I have to add isn't being allowed to come forth, so it's almost there is a very, very big positive side but there is this little negative side on the other edge that can sometimes, if people don't give autonomy come out and that I think has a huge impact on a person's desire to want to get on with things. It's almost a little bit of lack of autonomy has a massive impact whereas that "Go on Geoff, I've told you what I want, I want a six foot by six foot by six foot hole and I want built by Thursday" "Thank you boss." "I don't mind how it's done, just get it done" "Great I'll get it sorted, I'll have it done before then for you." And that's much more motivational than "I want you to do it this way and I want you to do step one first and step two..." You think well what's the point of having me here, you can get anyone to do that? You don't need my brain for that. You don't need my skills and abilities for that, so the autonomy allows that "okay I can actually do it in less time and therefore save you money, so I'm more likely to be inspired to do it."

Interviewer: And so you think that giving more autonomy, if this is in your comfort zones, improves strategy performance yes? Is this correct?

Respondent: Personally I do yes provided you have that capability.

XS Typing

[redacted]

Interviewer: Provided you have the capability. 7.1.

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: And it is because you can find your own ways to do the job best? 7.1.

Respondent: Yes, I think without autonomy how do you know that the system that's currently in place is the best? So if you allow a bit of autonomy within that system someone might find one improvement and add to it and that for me is worth. I mean that's a relatively risk averse approach. You could have someone who is highly concerned about process, risk etcetera who would say "[redacted] that's complete nonsense because if you allow autonomy they might go off track and therefore they might do something different." So my world is very much a sales environment where it's around customers relationships in business. I can imagine in manufacture if you said to someone who is making a part for a BMW motorbike, "Yes you just carry on Geoff and do what you like." That would be an absolute catastrophe because that part has been manufactured in that certain way to meet that certain QA and QC standard, if you allow someone to go off... So I can understand in different situations you might not... 7.1

Interviewer: So that's actually a very good point that you have mentioned, of situations and environments, yes, so which kind of environments you would give more autonomy and which kind of environments you would give less autonomy? 8.

Respondent: Oh I think in a process like that, very straight linear process, autonomy is difficult to give in this modern day because so many – that's why we have robots, robots are autonomous they do what they do. They only stop when there's a fault, whereas when you're in that other side of the environment where it's very much a people, we're all different, we need that kind of flexibility, I think that's a different environment. 8

Interviewer: So you think autonomy is people, anything else? 8

Respondent: People, systems, what else is there?

Interviewer: Well people systems, environments, or environment can be economics, political?

Respondent: Yes. That's a big question so politics...

Interviewer: No it's different yes, for example in your industry yes, the health industry, it's highly susceptible to political decisions yes, [18.48] so. Yes another one. So do you think there is anything about autonomy which I have forgotten to ask you about, autonomy and middle managers and how middle managers exercise autonomy and strategy? 8

Respondent: No I don't think so. It's a fascinating subject so you know I'd be intrigued to see what you find. I'm sure you'll find lots but I'll be intrigued to find what you conclude. Autonomy, is it management style, is it autonomy in people... There is something in there isn't it, we are people and if you tell me or I tell you exactly what to do, there is something mildly uncomfortable about that, for all of us. 5

Interviewer: You have said yourself there are advantages to it, so there are processes which need to be done accurately to a particular standard, low autonomy is required in order to get exactly that standard and autonomy, low autonomy is also required if the person is out of their comfort zone as you said yourself.

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: This is because otherwise they just wouldn't know where to start because they need to be guided as to what needs to be done. Then there might be other reasons why low autonomy is the best choice. Can you think of any other ones?

Respondent: There are always things that need doing in a certain way, so I suppose from that point of view there is a system to do it, and if an individual is happy doing it that way, great. And there are always things that require that level of flexibility provided the appropriate management style is executed in the right place, that's great. But if a controlling management style is used in an area where autonomy is beneficial, and vice versa, that's when the problem occurs for me. So I think there is a degree of common sense in the management style required in both places. And I think both employees and managers totally understand that. And when it goes wrong people are uncomfortable and good people leave quickly and that's not what any organisation wants to happen. So that's probably where I'd leave it.

Interviewer: Do you think that the ambitiousness of the strategy has something to do with the level of autonomy as well?

Respondent: Possibly, yes, possibly. If the organisation, whatever the service is they provide, or the product they're providing all those things come in to it. Possibly yes.

Interviewer: But lest say the normal strategy is let's say grow by 10% within a year okay.

Respondent: Yes, yes.

Interviewer: So how about if suddenly you got a strategy grow by 25% by next year, do you think that autonomy should change in one or another way?

Respondent: Personally not really because the processes in an organisation are already there so you've got to follow those, and the level of autonomy should always be there, when appropriate in order for people to excel. So if it is grow by 10% I would personally expect people to try and grow by 30/40/50% whatever, just do their best. So the autonomy should always be there in that particular scenario if it's appropriate.

Interviewer: How about if the environment is very risky?

Respondent: Well then you would have all the processes set in place to prevent – so everything about autonomy for me is if there is a line that you cannot go over autonomy is about going to that line, but never going over it. So if you allow autonomy for people to go over the line then that's recklessness, that to me is not autonomy, that's stupidity almost. There are rules and regulations that must not be broken and that's the absolute, that's where autonomy ends. But everything behind that line provided it's legal, etcetera, etcetera, etcetera, well autonomy is almost tantamount to creativity and creativity is a good thing because that's how we get better and

[redacted]

better and better in business.

I have to go again.

Interviewer: Okay, so thank you very much, [redacted] for contributing to my research and I will send you what I have concluded once I have interviewed all middle managers.

[End of recording]

APPENDIX E FURTHER SUPPORT FOR FIRST-ORDER CONCEPTS AND SECOND-ORDER THEMES

Chapter 4 focused on explaining the four data structure and their 16 second-order themes. This Appendix provides selected additional support and quotes, and focuses more on many of the 40 first-order concepts.

First-order concept – a3 weak top manager engagement

Weak top manager (TM) engagement creates a situation where an MM has more autonomy in strategy. There are several ways in which there may be weak TM engagement. First, the TM may not be there. Second, the TM does not monitor strategy. Third, the TM is not 'looking'. Fourth, the TM is 'asleep'. Fifth, the strategy is not so important to the TM.

When the TM is not there MMs still have to make decisions in strategy. As there is no TM to ask for permission MMs can increase their autonomy in strategy because there is no TM to restrict their autonomy in strategy.

> "Okay because sometimes when you are in the field you have to make certain decisions that the people back in the office are not aware of and …. sometimes don't go the way you planned." (MM11)

One middle manager explained how she 'seized an opportunity' to expand autonomy because her manager was very busy and did not have time to do much monitoring or to manage her.

> "I think it is mainly because of my manager. There are different playing paths, so my managers are very, very busy. I think you have to demonstrate you can do it and it's about seizing the right opportunity to demonstrate that you can go beyond what you are asked. " (MM33)

The situation when a 'TM is not looking' was described by an MM who expanded their autonomy to find a way to be able to 'cover-up' non-compliance with strategy and still look like a high performer.

> "If that MM is – still wants to show that they are a high performer but doesn't want to do whatever it is that they are being expected to do; honestly they can cover it up and that's the reality of it." (MM01)

One MM pointed out that it is was possible to expand autonomy in strategy when working in a different time zone from her superior.

> 'The top manager in [US city] is normally fall asleep when you're awake, so that means that you enjoy more autonomy.' (MM33)

In an example of a strategy being not so important to TMs, an MM was able to expand her autonomy by going to work in a region (Asia and Pacific) which was 'less strategically important' to TMs in the (USA). As the strategy implementation for Asia-Pacific was not so important, there was no TM there. And in addition to the TM being far away, and the strategy was not so important to the TM, the TM was not supervising the MM because of the time zone difference. When setting out ways of expanding autonomy in strategy, this MM said:

> "[you have more autonomy] If you go to and if you work in a region that is strategically less important. In Asia-Pacific, we have less footprint than in North America and Europe because of the time zone and everything." (MM33)

Emergencies where decisions, often difficult ones, need to be made quickly present an opportunity for MM to expand their autonomy because there is no time to consult TMs as decisions need to be made immediately. This was well-described MM31 who said that he could expand his autonomy because a decision had to be made 'on the spot'.

> "Very often the speed of response is often quite critical. There isn't necessarily time to consult everyone because that is the downside of working in larger

teams. It takes a long time for a decision to be made. So, I have to go and decide very, very quickly and it's often without approval of certain of my line managers or someone else." (MM31)

First order concept – a5 situation change

Situation change often presents an opportunity for MMs to expand their autonomy.

MM31 talked about how challenges in production mean he can 'stretch' his autonomy

and 'deviate from plan'.

> "I have got the autonomy where I can decide where we should order cars outside of our agreed plan. So, we often face some kind of production challenges, in terms of, whether maybe not the right things are available at the right time, to us. And then I have to quickly decide how far should we deviate from the plan? So, do we, as an example, do I order too many [Model Xs] or not enough [Model Ys], as an example." (MM31)

Situation change can also mean that MMs decide that a strategy is not doable.

> "I can say to (top) management: I will do it, but in actual I will not because I feel … some strategy that has been set and it is not doable. And I can convince [top] management that is not doable and then try to do change and do something else." (MM05)

Situation change that affects MM autonomy in strategy can be caused by

political and economic changes and thus be outside of MMs' control.

> "And the economic outlook, and within the organisation, and the same thing would apply in government as well as business." (MM07)

First Order Concept - a6 gained autonomy via contacts

Many MMs were able to gain autonomy via people, for example, because MMs were

seen by them as trustworthy. An MM said that she worked on gaining trust of her

managers. She has won the trust of her managers by demonstrating that she could go

beyond what she was asked to do. She worked on gaining trust and after he has gained the trust of top management, she was delegated more autonomy from her managers.

> "I gained their trust so they can delegate more and more responsibilities and gained autonomy via this route." (MM33)

Other MMs also pointed out that relationships are important in the process of gaining autonomy in strategy:

> "It is about relationships, the ability to influence people is quite important, crucial part of the jigsaw." (MM38)

Also, other MMs identified that getting TM's trust and as an important opportunity to get autonomy in strategy which can be used in both positive and negative ways to affect the strategy.

> "And while they [MMs] are trustworthy they still might just tweak that strategic message slightly so it loses impact." (MM01)

Also important was to gain the confidence of TMs. One MM, when asked how MMs gained autonomy in strategy, said:

> "Well, obviously a key issue is the confidence level in the [middle] management of how much autonomy they are given…. Confidence at the end of the day is obviously performance." (MM07)

First Order Concept – a7 gained autonomy via positioning

The way how MMs and their teams are perceived is an important determinant of how much autonomy in strategy they will get. Many MMs work hard on establishing good relationships with other teams or parts of the company in order to get more autonomy. An MM was able to articulate how his team had worked on being seen as the department to go to:

> "I think that … we had a degree of freedom … in the risk and value management … because I think we came to be known as the department which would help

> out with problems that no other … could solve……Our department had that reputation because of facilitation skills." (MM26)

An MM put herself in a position where she was extremely valuable to her employer because of her knowledge of the local language and political context, and so expanded her autonomy.

> "..all of a sudden you know there is a transition of the CEO….So, when I see they don't understand something, they have to sign documents in Spanish and they don't know one word in Spanish, they don't know who to trust, so how can you get to them so that they can trust you? And I think the only way is to tell them the truth, to be very honest, to tell them in simple words. So, I think this has created a bond." (MM39)

Another MM used positioning and networking and influencing to get approval to hire more people for her team which she wished to grow and so expand her autonomy in strategy.

> "….go to the decision-makers and sort of network and influence, for example, the HR [department], by sort of getting to the fact that there not so many people and that people need to be hired or paid more or they will leave." (MM25)

First Order Concept – a8 gained autonomy via resources

MMs have good understanding of what resources are available. Many MMs were able to utilise resources to get more autonomy in strategy. Resources can be given to the MM to do their work. MMs also identify slack resources or create new resources. Finding new ways to utilise existing resources and commercialise resources also proved to be ways for MMs to gain more autonomy in strategy.

> "He found out some options to develop the project …. to earn money on not utilising but on commercialisation of associated gas and at the end of the day he became project manager and project director within I think three to four years." (MM02)

An important 'resource' is the MM themselves and many MMs were able to use their characteristics, knowledge, skills and experience to expand their autonomy in

strategy. Many MMs recognise themselves as an important resource that they use to expand their autonomy in strategy. This was well articulated with one MM who, when he was hired, brought lots of autonomy with him into his new job.

> "So, if you are perceived to be someone able, conscientious, who delivers in previous jobs and you come into a new job, then that comes with you…. people who are managing you then give you more autonomy." (MM01)

This MM also saw his ability to perform as a resource that allowed him to get more autonomy in strategy.

> 'So, it's often in my experience down to performance. When you're delivering what's expected of you, you tend to be left alone and the autonomy kicks in.' (MM01)

MMs implementing strategy are constantly busy with monitoring resources and use autonomy in strategy to decide how to use the resources available. It is also apparent that MMs who want to expand their autonomy in strategy are on the watch out for opportunities to create additional resources.

> 'So, he just spotted an opportunity, he captured it and he just brought benefits to the company and himself.' (MM02)

MMs use their capabilities and ability to get 'results' to get more autonomy in strategy by getting promotion.

> "I basically proved what I was capable of. I was quickly promoted. He [boss] gave me lots of autonomy and he was just interested in the results." (MM02)

In summary, the second-order theme A3 "Gained Autonomy" shows that MMs gain autonomy via contacts, positioning and getting resources.

Second Order Theme C1 – Unclear on strategy

MM23 points out problems of wasted resources in a situation when there is 'something going on in the background that we're not aware of 'or something that 'we're not 'privy' to. This quote below by MM07 shows deliberate obfuscation by TMs because they did not want to reveal planned job losses which led to demotivation of MM that was kept on and to lots of wasted cost.

> "…they couldn't tell me they were making that decision because people's jobs were at risk so they didn't want to create uncertainty in the company but equally I wasted quite a lot of effort, in their terms, because I developed a framework for [disease X] and they are not interested." (MM7)

This next quote by MM01 shows how hard it is to get a clear message on the strategy to pass down a large organisation:

> "So we have strategy….. but it has to get through that middle group in order for that effective message to get to the people who are going to do the doing, and [to] the customer-facing people." (MM01)

In order to avoid MMs using their autonomy to not implement a strategy, MM01 stressed the importance of strategic communication to be 'clear' not only about what the strategy is (in his example it was, 'getting to Edinburgh') but also on the 'journey' and how to go about the journey which needed to be clearly spelled out.

> "Whereas if it's not clear then different people are going to go in different ways, and if the leader then thinks afterwards 'Oh what are you doing on the bus when you should be in the car?' then you're going to have challenges." (MM01)

MM06 also saw good strategic communication as a key to ensuring that everyone is aligned with the strategy.

> "Sure, again for me it's less relevant because it's somebody that you're reporting in to but it's all levels because communication is the key. You need to have very good communication to ensure that everybody is aligned with their strategy." (MM06)

It was also the openness of strategic communication and the importance of people understanding the need for change and buy into it that MM06 saw as vital to full successful implementation of strategy.

> "I think openness and communication is key here because if people don't understand something, if people aren't bought into it, they don't understand the need for change, that's when they to their resistance or you don't get the full success or deploying the strategy." (MM06)

MM13 stressed the importance of communication and pointed out that poor communication could be stifling.

> "Autonomy is great but without positive communication, it doesn't matter, see what I mean? Or you can be completely un-autonomous but if the communication is still poor then you could be stifling people." (MM13)

The clarity and timing of the communication was stressed by MM01, who said that communication has to be clear from the beginning.

> "It is in my experience when that communication hasn't been really clear at the very, very beginning and there isn't a passion around the final goal that's often led to challenges." (MM01)

Second-Order Theme - No belief in strategy

MM15 stressed the importance of ensuring that the strategy is written down and aligned to 'what the company wants' rather than to be 'some crazy idea'. So, in other words the strategy needs to be credible and be articulated as part of the marketing objectives, product, programme.

> "…the strategy needs to be written down very much as part of the objectives of the product or the programme, the marketing objectives, the regulatory objectives, the product design objectives, the features, these sorts of things. They are embedded in very much the strategy of that product and they need to be in line with what the company wants. They can't just be some crazy idea that isn't part of the company's remit or isn't even going to make it to market for whatever reason." (MM15)

It is important that the proposed strategy is seen by MMs as feasible, good for

the company and applicable, as pointed out by MM29. Otherwise, MMs are going to 'go back', 'discuss', 'submit', or 'close'. In short, they are not going to implement the strategy.

> "We agree with 92% to 100% but there are about 10% that we don't. Sometimes they don't seem feasible to us. They're not actually with us in the department so sometimes they miss out a few things and then we would go back to them and say this is not applicable to us and this is not good for the company and we have justification and there comes a little bit of discussion and yeah, at the end we submit the elements of the discussion to the vice president… and the case is closed." (MM29)

MM03 stressed that TMs when formulating strategy have to take into account people's attitudes and personality, employees' motivation or the lack thereof, the company's culture, policies, procedures.

> "Maybe one more thing is the people's attitude and personality. Maybe I have all of these what I just mentioned, very efficient and very at a level where I wanted them to be, but I have very lazy employees and they are not well trained. They, I don't know, their culture is – there is a bad culture within the organisation. So, one more factor that I have to take into consideration is the culture as well, along with the policies and procedures, and all of this stuff." (MM3)

First Order Concept c5 - uses own opinion

The MM37 quote below provides a good picture of some of the resource pressures that MMs implementing strategy face, and which make the implementation of strategy difficult.

> "So, not just my manager had left; we had two people on maternity leave. That's why I was too busy because I was doing a lot of people's job. So, we said let's hire a contractor for these people that are on maternity leave. So, I hired one, and then he left very quickly because contractors can leave very quickly. He didn't like the job and after three months he left. That's why I was too busy because I was doing a lot of people's job." (MM37)

Second-Order Theme D1 - Uses Prioritisation

Many MMs had sufficient autonomy in relation to strategies that they could simply prioritise what and when they delivered, without having to gain extra autonomy. This second-order theme was based on two first-order concepts: power of position and uses own judgment to act

First Order Concept d1 - power of position

Simply from the power of their position, some MMs had autonomy to prioritise what strategies they implemented:

> "… I still firmly believe the middle manager is the most powerful individual that can either prevent or make something from happening." (MM01)

In order to justify prioritisation, MMs will use context and systems so for example MM02 mentions referring to 'compliance' and to 'Service Level Agreements'.

> "So, they have to ask compliance, and we have SLA, Service Level Agreement within the time frame. Like within two days or three days we will respond to you and this is how we are prioritising our work, daily work." (MM02)

MM09 exercised the power and autonomy inherent in her role to do things that were most 'synergistic' with what she was interested in and focus on her 'sweet spot' because that way she was engaged and that was also the area that she was knowledgeable about.

> "Yes, they fall to the bottom of the queue because I had autonomy to do the things that I felt were the most synergistic with what they were interested in, that's where the sweet spot was for me because I was engaged, I was knowledgeable about it, I could impact the company, I could apply my framework so they let me get on with it and do that." (MM09)

First Order Concept d2 - uses own judgment to act

Closely related to the power inherent in their position, many MMs were simply able to use their own judgement as to whether or not to implement a strategy:

> "So, if it is something that is purely within my department, then I have autonomy to set it, to manage it and to change it if I need to. If it's something that goes out of my department and affects others then that's where we have to have a collaboration and the decision making, maybe between myself and another, or it may be that it needs to escalate to the CEO." (MM05)

MM11 had the power to decide on matters that were not forecasted and that have not been considered at the planning stage and decide to go ahead as long as it 'complements' what she was trying to do.

> "Because you cannot accurately forecast for everything. So, there are things that come in, and you have to make a judgement call, as long as it is not outside the strategy. You might not have considered it at the planning stage but as long as it complements what you are trying to do you can go ahead." (MM11)

It was rather common for MMs to give examples of being able to prioritise. MM31 was able to prioritise as long was it done with 'respect and consideration to others.

> "So, you have to be able to prioritise; you have to be able to plan your work; you should be able to have the end in mind, what you're trying to achieve and how you're going to do it. You need to be methodical as well as structured as well as adaptable, right, so you can adapt your approach. All this requires self-autonomy and be able to prioritise what you need to do to deliver those results. Now, if you cannot exercise personal autonomy with respect and consideration to others, you will not be successful in this organisation." (MM31)

Many MMs saw the ability to prioritise as a part of what MMs job was about:

> "You see, as I said, I had to step up to my manager's role, and I have to do so many things. He says I have to prioritise, and yes…" (MM37)

MMs said that they have the opportunity to prioritise what they are working on to implement strategy, as articulated by MM35.

> "I think within our office we can…I, me and my two staff we definitely have an opportunity all the time throughout each working week to, you know, change priorities, change what we're working on so we definitely can influence our workload and priorities and how we meet that ultimate strategy but not…we don't have any impact on strategy at the top of the house but within our own office, yes. (MM35)

Some MMs such as MM01 used prioritisation not only in the context of strategy

implementation but also to put forward strategic suggestions, thus, in other words, to input into formulation of strategy.

> "Personally, quite a lot, I think because I'm responsible for Europe and therefore I interact with the country managers. I can choose the target markets, so I can tier my market into priority one, two and three. However, I will always go back and check with the regional leadership team, very senior managers to make sure they are happy with what I have but ultimately it's I'm putting forward the strategic suggestion if you like for Europe. (MM01)

In summary, the second-order theme D1 "Uses prioritisation" arises from the first-order concepts of "power of position" and "uses own judgment to act".

Second-Order Theme D2 - Uses Capabilities

While MMs might be able to prioritise what strategies they implemented or changed (theme B1), a different issue was whether they had the capability to implement or change a strategy. Hence, I found a theme about using capabilities made up of three first-order concepts: ability to adjust strategy, uses exploration to create a better strategy, and adapts the strategy to fit the team.

First Order Concept d3 - ability to adjust strategy

Many MMs were able to make small changes in strategies. Such small changes took the form of 'translating' strategy as done by MM06.

> "So, you're not looking at changing it, you're looking at very much adhering to it but to adhere to it you might need to change what you're doing, or it's a different translation. So, a strategic direction translation as translated into my team might be very different than the team next to me." (MM06)

Other small changes to strategy included that MMs were able to 'flex' the strategy where necessary.

> "…the financial targets weren't flexible, but the strategy in order to achieve those targets could adapt or flex where necessary." (MM09)

Also, small changes to strategy were made by MMs who had the 'flexibility to execute without a lot of micromanagement.

> "Autonomy means, from my perspective having the flexibility to execute without a lot of micromanagement, I believe." (MM34)

MM40 appreciated having almost instantly available the resources to make changes to improve strategy.

> "So, I have the autonomy to do whatever kind of assessment to make sure that they are doing their best. I have the autonomy to point any gaps to improve. I have the autonomy to seek things and to even access anything that's needed." (MM40)

First Order Concept d4 - uses exploration to create a better strategy

Some MMs actively explored to find better strategies by talking to people, looking at changes in the environment, canvassing opinions and different points of view, and by trying 'the signals'.

> "You talk to people. So, you keep different opinions, so you need to have total flexibility so accommodate different points of views, and you move along, you try the signals and see what has changed in the environment and adapt your actions and strategies accordingly." (MM02)

MM10 used exploration to adapt strategy and to tailor it for customers and the needs of his unit.

> "So, different strategies. You've got one which is highlighting problems and asking questions in the business in the local markets, and two, highlighting solutions and telling the local markets to go out there and have this conversation. So, that I would say is a good example of adaption of strategy tailored to the accounts and the needs of my unit." (MM10)

First Order Concept d5 - adapts the strategy to fit the team

Most MMs operated in teams and many found it necessary to adapt a strategy to get team support and to make it more 'relatable'.

> "I think you can change it in the sense that you can make it more relatable. Let's say it might not necessarily be the strategy employed at one level is relevant or relatable to what you're doing, so the value of having conversations and say

> ‘Okay this is where we want to get to, this is how I can make that happen in my area.’ ” (MM03)

MM06 would also seek an agreement if the proposed strategic change was interdepartmental, in order to align the deployment of the strategy.

> “If it was something that affected others then of course you need to have a structure in place to make sure that you are all in alignment with how you’re deploying a strategy but if it's within my own team then I have autonomy to create a risk framework to create the structure around deploying the strategy.” (MM06)

In summary, the second-order theme D2 “Uses capabilities” arises from the first-order concepts of “ability to adjust strategy”, uses exploration to create better strategy” and “adapts to fit team”.

Second-Order Theme D3 - Uses Status and Trust

MMs often used their status or trust to gain significant autonomy in strategy. This theme was made up of three first order concepts:

- superior trusts the MM
- long experience
- good past performance

First Order Concept d6 - TM trusts the MM

Many MMs gained their TMs’ trust because they had ‘insights’, were ‘credible’ had experience and ‘knowledge’ and because they ‘know’ what they are talking about.

> “Well, credibility I suppose, for me personally in my experience with people both ways, there’s a whole knowledge thing, so you know if you know what you’re talking about and you have insight into the area, so that knowledge piece is really important.” (MM1)

Other MMs mentioned that a 'really great relationship' contributed to them gaining their TM's trust.

> "So, the current supervisor is a really great relationship, for the most part. I do feel because there are only two of us in the UK, and I don't blame him, but he'll take the best bits of work and allow me to be autonomous for the bits he doesn't really want." (MM8)

In addition to gaining TM's trust MM18 pointed out that it is important to gain trust from shareholders and in relation to strategy to 'deliver' what they had promised.

> "The autonomy I've got is based on the capacity to gain trust from my boss and my stakeholders. Basically, I think that I usually tell what I will deliver, and I will deliver what I told, okay, that's the process to get trust and autonomy." (MM18)

First Order Concept d7 - long experience and unique skills

Another route to MMs having status and gaining a TM's trust was if they had long experience; especially relevant was if they had unique knowledge and or skills or more experience than the superior in the relevant strategy/context. This was articulated by MM22 who said that in order to gain TMs' trust it was useful to develop an expertise and to be the person to go to in relation to specific aspects of services.

> "So, they wouldn't necessarily go and ask somebody else, they want me to opine on it because they trust my expertise and my judgement regarding all aspects of the services we provide to Africa." (MM22)

The importance of credibility and being not being 'unknown' was pointed out by MM01.

> "So, if you're a credible, a really credible individual with a history you either give or are given more autonomy. If you're an unknown then, clearly, I suppose inexperience and one would assume that you would be guided more closely, or you might feel that..." (MM01)

MM05 stressed the importance of credibility, knowledge and experience, which allowed MMs to change strategy.

> "The credibility it is to change the strategy, it is the knowledge, and experience together. So, a time ago we have noticed in my department that if someone is experienced, he is credible, but now experience is not enough. If someone [is] knowledgeable and experienced, this is the credibility to change." (MM05)

And without long experience, it can be difficult for an MM to get recognition:

> "I struggled getting Commercial on board at the time. I didn't have an example I could copy and my boss at the time was such an iconic person that everyone was recognising him as the person to go to and even though he wanted to get away from that responsibility and he had shifted it on to me, people were still going to him and so I had to really build my persona if you want within the business so that I could get traction from the Commercial team." (MM25)

First-Order Concept d8 - good past performance

Good past performance was a powerful way of getting status and trust that could be sued to exercise autonomy in strategy.

> "I think it just means it's easier and quicker to implement change because there is less red tape. It's easier to get buy-in I think if you can reference previous success." (MM05)

MMs' confidence and the confidence in them was also seen as an important factor that allowed MMs to change strategy.

> "Confidence, at the end of the day, obviously performance. Once you see how an individual performs, performing in whatever way, managing people in their department whatever, so gaining confidence in somebody from how they perform." (MM06)

In summary, the second-order theme D3 "Uses status and trust" arises from the first-order concepts of "superior trusts the MM", "long experience" and "good past performance".

Second-Order Theme D4 - Uses Persuasion

The next level of why MMs were able to change strategy came from how they used

persuasion, which is different from Theme C3 "uses status and trust" in that an MM's ability to use persuasion did not necessarily depend on status or trust. Some fairly inexperienced MMs were still able to use persuasion. This theme was made up of two first-order concepts:

- works with superiors
- works with teams

First Order Concept d9 - works with superiors

Some MMs worked with their superiors to persuade these to allow a modification of the strategy to be delivered.

> **"**If they say no realistically that's it, it's their call. However, what will happen then is I will report that back to New York, my boss in New York, and then there could be pressure put on them in a slightly different way. They probably wouldn't say no." (MM01)

Presenting and convincing superiors was used by MM11 to change strategy.

> "And at those board meetings, I present what is going on and things that we need to address. So, in terms of autonomy I don't necessarily come up and change the strategy, but I will have to present why it needs to be changed and then get a vote." (MM11)

Other MMs such as MM10 would specifically look for or even create an opportunity for his TM to be receptive to strategy change.

> **"**…well you have to choose the right moment and my setting, so I took him out for breakfast, and we had a breakfast meeting about it, and we talked about it, and he was receptive….there's formal meetings for the numbers and processes but there is an informal opportunity to shape the direction and strategy through relationships and through empathy and through understanding people's position." (MM10)

So, MM10, has by meeting his boss for breakfast, 'created an informal opportunity' to extend his autonomy.

First Order Concept d10 - works with teams

Many MMs worked with their own or broader teams to get the strategy implemented.

> "…it's an implicit understanding of who has the roles and responsibilities and then I will be able to relay back to management 'this is why – this is what it means' so we're looking at taking this strategy, relaying it to my team, this is what it means for my team." (MM06)

MM22 found it important in order to change strategy to be able to influence and motivate people by good leadership

> "Influence, for me, is to be able to, because the reality is, we have moved away from the command and control organisation where you just, where people bark orders at people, and then they expect everyone to do stuff, right? Even if when people are reporting to you, you have to be able to influence them to stay motivated to achieve goals. And as a leader, part of your responsibility, is to motivate and influence people." (MM22)

In summary, the second-order theme D4 "Uses persuasion" arises from the first-order concepts of "works with superiors" and "works with teams".

Second-Order Theme D5 - Uses Politics

Some MMs used politics to gain autonomy needed to avoid change or deliver a strategy.

The first order concepts leading to this second-order theme were:

- seeks powerful allies
- creates alliances
- uses networks.

MM11 used her network, created good relationships, generated alliances and canvassed opinion to provide change strategy by providing input into the formulation of strategy.

> "I also get support from them because they come from different backgrounds. So, even in formulating the strategy to consolidate on what I think I'm thinking I can sound off my ideas and get their views even before the board meeting. So, I

am thinking of something that we should do, somewhere I can call on any of them and discuss that and get their views, get their guidance because sometimes they are specialists in that field. So, to that extent I would say that's a good relationship." (MM11)

MM31 saw it as important to engage in organisational politics and to understand where people on the spectrum.

'Be able to understand where people are on that spectrum and then have a plan of communication and engagement." (MM31)

MM18 saw it as essential to work with the 'right people'.

"You need to present thing[s] to the right people. I think, therefore, we always live in a community of humans and humans are political by definition. I would not have a negative concept of politics. Politics are part of our daily life." (MM18)

First Order Concept d11 - seeks powerful allies

Some MMs realised the need for powerful allies further up the hierarchy to get support for a strategy to get implemented. MM10 turned his TM into a powerful ally:

"I gave him [my boss] some feedback on things that we could be doing better as a team, and he was very receptive to that, and he said 'let's go and implement it, you have the ability to go and do that, go and put it into play' and it's not something that's just generally under my area, but it's something that I felt that we could do better at." (MM10)

MM30 appreciated the importance of being seen as someone working with very top executives as that way there not many refusals from others.

"Well, it helps that the request to develop a strategy came from the COO, I'll be honest, because people know that it's him that asked me to do it, so I don't get a lot of no's. 'I'm not going to help you,' because everyone kind of knows that I'm representing someone quite powerful, much bigger than me, so I've often told my own staff, managers, when I'm coaching them, developing them, 'don't play the authority card very often'." (MM30)

MM38 articulated very eloquently how decision making in the strategy process also often depends on the impact it has on individuals.

"But that, again, has to be that the top management are the custodians of the way the ship is steering but there also are, shall we say, political situations where

decisions are being made based on the circumstances and how it may impact other individuals and how they may feel by it." (MM38)

First Order Concept d12 - creates alliances

All the MMs operated in large, complex organisations in which there were many opportunities to form alliances across unit boundaries. MM18 stressed the importance of alliances and networks and pointed out that to keep them alive is a 'never-ending job' and that he works on them 'constantly'.

> "[alliances]…it's working towards the tie of my network, on a custom basis. That's very important, communication, so it's important. And being aware of the objective of the company, and all this kind of stuff. It's all the things that we do to work on constantly; it's a never-ending job to keep alive these relationships." (MM18)

MM23 created an alliance to 'get something done'

> "I think rather with autonomy I am thinking of alliance, an internal alliance with people working together either formally or informally to get something done. So, I think for me one of the big things I was very, very keen on at [my company] was to involve the HR community in the strategy planning…" (MM23)

MM15 would find a mentor who would act as a sounding board and to give opinions. MM15 also created alliances and got on board all key stakeholders before presenting her strategy for approval.

> "…I would involve all my key stakeholders along the way with decision making. Like I asked for a woman who I really respected to be my informal mentor so that I had a sounding board kind of outside of the people directly related to my particular area of the business.….. It was a kind of unwritten part of my role that I needed to have everyone, all the directors, kind of, on board with what I was presenting." (MM15)

First Order Concept d13 – uses networks

Middle managers are part of key organisational networks. In my study, some MMs used networks to avoid, delay, change or deliver strategy.

Some MMs used networks to solve problems:

> "I like a lot of autonomy and if I can't do something or I am having problems I immediately say "I can't do this" or I find a way or I use my network to try and solve a problem." (MM08)

> "So, I suppose there was a track record as well as there being a network relationship, there was a track record of results I think which also counts for a lot in the business I was working in." (MM13)

> "I'll raise my hand, and I'll talk to my managers. And, also, sometimes when you're talking to other people in the department, the other departments you're quite free to ask for information that can enhance your own understanding of the business. Not necessarily immediately required for your position, but it's nice to have." (MM33)

Trustworthy MMs may be able to change the strategic message and can do so because they have a good relationship switch their teams, influential, and uses organisation politics

> "And whilst they are trustworthy they still might just tweak that strategic message slightly so that it loses the impact to the guys on the [lower level] And, so, if they want to, excuse my terminology, 'play the game' it can be done. It's a very political environment in a large organisation." (MM01)

In summary, the second-order theme D5 "Uses politics" arises from the first-order concepts of "seeks powerful allies", "creates alliances" and "uses network".