

CRANFIELD UNIVERSITY

Paula Higson

What middle managers do to manage performance
in the public sector

School of Management

DBA
Academic Year: 2018 - 2019

Supervisor: Professor Clare Kelliher

September 2019

CRANFIELD UNIVERSITY

School of Management

DBA

Academic Year 2018 - 2019

Paula Higson

What middle managers do to manage performance
in the public sector

Supervisor: Professor Clare Kelliher

This thesis is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for
the degree of DBA

© Cranfield University 2019. All rights reserved. No part of this
publication may be reproduced without the written permission of the
copyright owner.

ABSTRACT

Performance management continues to be an important area of research in the public sector, especially with reducing budgets and the recognition of operational delivery as a core discipline in the UK civil service. The performance management literature, in all sectors, treats operational and people performance as separate topics. Middle managers were historically seen as an expensive overhead and, even now, little is known about what they do to manage performance. Equally, the research has focussed on the relationship between a manager and their direct report and not about their wider role in motivating their work-unit.

This study of 20 in-depth, qualitative interviews in a large, operational, UK government department asked middle managers what they did to manage performance. The study found four groups of activities. Middle managers monitor and oversee the performance of their work-unit, identify causes of performance gaps and supervise mitigating actions. They manage, coach and develop their frontline managers. They engage directly with the frontline staff of their work-unit: regularly investing time in this, despite being busy. They manage their own change projects and play a key role in supporting staff in coping with corporate-level change. A further, unexpected, finding was that different sub-groups of middle managers, with different demographic profiles, had differences in their attitudes and approaches to performance management.

The contributions of this study are: (i) an integration of the performance management literature: with a proposed integrated model of performance management; (ii) further development of the concept of the performance gap; (iii) demonstration that the relationship between the middle manager and frontline staff is a critical part of performance management. The implications of these findings, for middle managers and their organisations, are discussed. Further research is recommended.

Keywords:

Performance model; performance gap; relationships of trust; work-unit engagement.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I have a long list of people to thank for your part in helping me get to this point.

First, my supervisor, Professor Clare Kelliher who has patiently steered me through, and to Professor Mike Bourne and Dr Colin Pilbeam, whose ideas and challenges pushed me forward. You went well beyond what was required, thank you.

Also to Professor Emma Parry, who helped me get back to my studies and to all the other lovely people at Cranfield School of Management, in the Library, the Admin office, who have helped and advised me on my way.

Huge thanks also go to Debbie Smith; Anne Power UKCP MBACP MA; Dr Andrew McDonald CB FRHS MA. Without you, I would not have embarked upon this mission, and I certainly would not have completed it.

And two of the next generation of middle managers, setting out on your management careers, Nick Higson BEng and Captain George Bignold MA. Thank you for new insights and for my being able to share my ideas with you.

Finally, and most important of all, thank you to Ralph, my lovely husband, who has steadfastly believed in me, supported me, cheered me on and waited patiently for me to finish.

THANK YOU

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	i
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iii
LIST OF FIGURES.....	ix
LIST OF TABLES	x
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS.....	xi
1 INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.1 Defining the public sector	2
1.2 Performance management in the public sector	3
1.3 The principles of performance management.....	5
1.4 Middle management.....	6
1.5 A personal perspective.....	8
1.6 How this thesis is structured	9
Conclusions	10
2 LITERATURE REVIEW.....	11
2.1 Conducting the literature review.....	11
2.1.1 Literature review approach	11
2.1.2 Identifying suitable literature	13
2.1.3 Literature search results	14
2.2 Definitions	19
2.2.1 Defining performance management.....	19
2.2.2 Defining middle managers	23
2.3 Literature about performance management	28
2.3.1 Operational performance management	28
2.3.2 People performance management.....	31
2.3.3 Managers' behaviour and employees' performance	33
2.4 Literature about middle managers.....	38
2.4.1 Middle managers: from nuisance to asset	38
2.4.2 What middle managers do	40
2.4.3 Middle managers' roles in sense-making and sense-giving.....	41
2.5 But which managers and which relationships?	42
Conclusions	44
3 RESEARCH APPROACH	51
3.1 Research questions	51
3.2 Research philosophy	52
3.3 Research strategy.....	52
3.4 Research method.....	53
3.5 The organisation (GovDep).....	56
3.6 Operationalisation of the research	56
3.7 Interviews.....	59
3.8 Interviewees.....	62

3.9	Selecting the approach to analysing the transcripts.....	62
3.10	Coding and analysis.....	63
3.11	Quality assurance of the approach	64
	Conclusions	65
4	FINDINGS: PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT ACTIVITIES	67
4.1	Setting the context – GovDep and managing performance.....	67
4.1.1	Managing case working	67
4.1.2	Key terms.....	68
4.2	Overseeing performance.....	71
4.2.1	Monitoring performance	72
4.2.2	Identifying the causes of gaps.....	74
4.2.3	Supervising delivery.....	78
4.3	Managing, coaching and developing frontline managers	79
4.3.1	Managing frontline managers’ performance.....	80
4.3.2	Coaching and developing frontline managers.....	81
4.4	Engaging frontline staff	82
4.4.1	How frontline staff were engaged.....	83
4.4.2	What they talked about	84
4.4.3	How often middle managers spent time with them.....	85
4.4.4	How well they knew frontline staff	86
4.4.5	Why engage directly with frontline staff?.....	86
4.4.6	Problems with direct engagement.....	88
4.5	Managing change.....	90
4.5.1	Managing local change	90
4.5.2	Communicating corporate change plans.....	91
4.5.3	Handling staff resistance to change	92
4.5.4	Engaging staff in the change	93
	Conclusions	94
5	FINDINGS: ATTITUDES AND ATTRIBUTES	97
5.1	Middle managers’ attitudes	98
5.1.1	Sense of accountability or autonomy	98
5.1.2	Different management styles	99
5.1.3	Being organised	102
5.1.4	Resilience	103
5.1.5	Important to know the processes	103
5.1.6	Personal development	104
5.2	Frontline managers’ attributes.....	105
5.2.1	Knows the work.....	106
5.2.2	Management behaviours	106
5.2.3	Personal characteristics.....	107
5.3	Frontline staff attributes.....	109
5.3.1	Good quality work and engagement	109

5.3.2	Personal characteristics.....	110
5.4	Organisational factors of performance	112
5.4.1	Frontline managers' behaviours.....	112
5.4.2	High performance work practices.....	112
5.4.3	Competition.....	113
5.4.4	Keeping staff interested and engaged	113
5.4.5	Frontline staff can see their contribution	116
5.5	Middle manager differences.....	116
	Conclusions	118
6	ANALYSING DIFFERENCES BETWEEN MIDDLE MANAGERS.....	121
6.1	Emerging research question	121
6.2	Further analysis: description of approach	123
6.2.1	Tabulating the data to see the patterns.....	123
6.2.2	Grouping middle managers with similar responses.....	125
6.2.3	Comparing the middle managers in different groups	127
6.3	Results: comparison of the groups' characteristics	129
6.3.1	Demographic analyses	129
6.3.2	Comparing the size of command	131
6.3.3	Differences in groups' experiences as middle managers.....	132
6.4	Comparison of responses between the groups.....	133
6.4.1	Similarities across the groups	133
6.4.2	Group A: Dynamic and demanding	135
6.4.3	Group B: Working their way up	137
6.4.4	Group C: Old hands	138
	Conclusions	140
7	DISCUSSION.....	143
7.1	What middle managers do to manage performance	143
7.1.1	Overseeing operational performance: minding the gap	144
7.1.2	Managing, coaching and developing frontline managers.....	150
7.1.3	Engaging frontline staff	151
7.1.4	Managing change	153
7.2	Performance management: an integrated process	156
7.2.1	Integrating the literature domains.....	156
7.2.2	An integrated model of performance management.....	158
7.3	Differences between middle managers	160
	Conclusions	163
8	CONCLUSION	169
8.1	Why this research is important.....	169
8.2	Research findings and contribution.....	171
8.2.1	Middle managers' performance management activities	172
8.2.2	Middle managers' differences	173
8.2.3	This study's contribution to knowledge.....	174

8.2.4 Other interesting findings	175
8.3 Implications for practice	175
8.3.1 Middle managers' relationships with frontline staff	176
8.3.2 Tackling the performance gap.....	178
8.3.3 The integrated model of performance management	179
8.3.4 Middle managers and their own change.....	179
8.4 Limitations to this research and scope for further research	180
8.5 Personal reflections	181
8.6 And finally	182
REFERENCES.....	185
APPENDICES	203
Appendix A Search protocols.....	204
Appendix B Research protocol and analysis of interviewees' answers.....	209
Appendix C Interviewee information	218

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 2-1 Public Sector performance management framework	21
Figure 2-2 The "middle manager" in the organisation hierarchy	24
Figure 2-3 Overlapping styles of senior, middle and frontline managers	26
Figure 2-4 Model of management action triggers	30
Figure 2-5 Articles covering more than one topic	45
Figure 6-1 Example of report of topics by middle manager	124
Figure 6-2 Responses by middle manager group.....	128
Figure 7-1 Decision tree for assessing performance gaps	146
Figure 7-2 Direct engagement with frontline staff	152
Figure 7-3 Integrated model of performance management	158

LIST OF TABLES

Table 2-1 Total articles reviewed, by domain	14
Table 2-2 Distribution of papers by topic and domain	15
Table 2-3 Papers by topic and industry	16
Table 2-4 Papers by topic and year of publication.....	17
Table 2-5 Distribution of all papers by topic and research method.....	17
Table 2-6 Papers by industry sector and journal field.....	18
Table 3-1 Distribution of interviewees by age and gender.....	62
Table 3-2 Levels of coding	64
Table 4-1 Operational management terms and what they mean.....	69
Table 4-2 Staff grades and what they mean.....	70
Table 4-3 People performance management terms	71
Table 6-1 Demographic characteristics of each middle manager group.....	130
Table 6-2 Average (median) characteristics for each group.....	131
Table 6-3 Examples of Group A comments.....	136
Table 6-4 Examples of Group B comments.....	137
Table 6-5 Examples of Group C comments	139
Table 7-1 Coverage of activities in this study compared with literature	157

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AA	Administrative Assistant – junior front-line staff
AO	Administrative Officer – grade of most front-line staff
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
FLM	Frontline manager
FLS	Frontline staff
HO	Higher Officer (the middle managers' grade)
HODC	HO Data Capture (one of the performance reports)
IT	Information Technology
KPI	Key Performance Indicator
LMX	Leader-member exchange
MM	Middle manager
NPM	New Public Management
O-band	Grade of the frontline manager
PDR	Performance Development Review (appraisal)
PM	Performance Management
PQR	Post Quality Review, measure of time to process a case, from receipt to the quality review
PSA	Public Service Agreement
RAST	Reasonable adjustment support team
RTAT	Real-time attendance management
SCS	Senior Civil Service
IT	Information Technology

1 INTRODUCTION

This thesis is about what middle managers do to manage performance in the public sector: an important and yet under-researched topic.

It is important because effective performance management is at the heart of every organisation (Bourne, Melnyk and Bititci, 2018). Managers work under increasing pressures on costs and ever higher expectations. At the same time, stress is a top cause of employee absence; stress which is increasingly prompted by management behaviours (CIPD, 2019). For managers to deliver effective performance management, therefore, they need to keep a careful balance between meeting expectations, with ever decreasing budgets, while ensuring staff are motivated and supported to do their best.

Why middle managers? They are the least researched (DeChurch et al., 2010) and historically the most maligned (Balogun, 2003) set of managers in an organisation. From my own experience, which I discuss further below, they are a hidden and under-valued set of managers, who are less likely to get the development they need. I have heard them described as the “marzipan layer”, getting in the way of the icing and the cake; and yet their position in the hierarchy between a senior focus on strategy and a frontline focus on delivery, surely means they are at the heart of managing performance?

Why the public sector? The focus on performance management in the public sector has historically been on the principles, in other words, whether or not it was an appropriate way to manage performance in the public sector (e.g. (Hood, 1991; Rhodes, 2016)); or what had encouraged public sector managers to use performance management (e.g. (Moynihan, Pandey and Wright, 2012)). It has only more recently been studied from an operational perspective (e.g. (Gerrish, 2016)).

The importance of operational delivery as a core discipline alongside policy development is now recognised by the UK civil service (HM Government, 2012). There are 250,000 civil servants in operational delivery, processing benefits payments; working in prisons, or at the border; collecting taxes; or issuing

passports, visas or driving licences (GOV.UK, 2019; Institute for Government, 2018a). Through extending our knowledge about middle managers' role in performance management, they can be supported in doing it well: to the benefit of all who receive these services.

This chapter starts with defining the term "public sector": it is important to be clear about this right at the outset, since the activities of the public sector are incredibly broad and are often not precisely defined in the literature. I then set out the context for this research: examining the history of performance management in the public sector exploring in more detail the points made in the opening paragraphs about why performance management; in the public sector and why middle managers.

1.1 Defining the public sector

"Public sector" is a broad term. The Office for National Statistics (2018a) describes the public sector as incorporating central government, local government and public corporations, including those in health, local and central government and the armed forces. This is a wide range of activities and disciplines employing 5.4 million people (Office for National Statistics, 2018a).

Within this wide-ranging public sector is the civil service, employing 430,000 people (Office for National Statistics, 2018a). It states its purpose as helping the government of the day to develop and implement its policies (GOV.UK, 2019) and its vision to provide efficient, trusted services designed around user need, with effective leaders "who are inspiring, confident and empowering and who live our values", leading high performing and skilled people (Civil Service, 2016).

The term "public management" is used both to describe the activity and the academic discipline of studying management of the public sector. Lynn Jr (2007, p.28) defines public management as the means "by which officials enact the will of the sovereign authority, whether that authority is prince, parliament or civil society". Hood (2007, p.8) defined the study of public management as "the study and practice of design and operation of arrangements for the provision of public services and executive government".

1.2 Performance management in the public sector

Public sector performance management has long been a controversial topic. The civil service reforms of the 1980s and 1990s, labelled “New Public Management” by Hood (1991) in his seminal, if rather sceptical, paper, were seen as a significant shift from Public Administration, its post-war predecessor (Hood, 1991). A more demanding public less willing to pay high taxes (Hood, 1991), plus political and public opinion that the public sector was inefficient, costly and lacking in innovation (Flynn, Grey and Jenkins, 1990), were seen as the drivers for these reforms.

In the 1990s, following 20 years of focus on business planning and performance management, externally focused public service agreements (PSAs) were introduced, leading to civil servants feeling more accountable for outcomes, rather than just for policy formulation and legislation (Institute for Government, 2014). Moynihan and Pandey (2005) referred to this as the “era of government by performance management” where a previous emphasis on efficiency, such as Taylorism, now met an emphasis on effective management. In 2010 these PSAs were replaced by departmental business plans (Institute for Government, 2014).

The changes were characterized by demands for greater accountability; political determination to reduce public borrowing; and preferences for economic control through accounting, budgetary control, auditing and quality assurance (Power, 2007). New Public Management included bringing in managers from outside the public sector, new structures to place public sector operations at arm’s length from political intervention and contracting out of services to the private sector (administrative decentralization), plus an emphasis on the customer and choice (Gruening, 2001). Taking another perspective, de Leon (2007) described New Public Management as improving the public goods and services, providing them promptly, efficiently and with courtesy; while increasing autonomy for managers and holding them to account for the results.

The pressure on public sector budgets after the 2008 banking crisis led to the 2010 spending review requiring four of the five big operational departments¹ in central government to reduce their annual expenditures over the following five years by between 7.5 to 23% in real terms (HM Treasury, 2010). Since these five departments employed 70% of all civil servants, they would need to have levels of productivity as good as the best in the private sector and yet performance management was described in the civil service reform plan as “too rarely rigorous” (HM Government, 2012, p.8). This shift to a focus on internal performance was accompanied by a recognition that the work and funding of much of government activity was operational delivery rather than policy-making; and identified the need for improved performance management processes, support for managers in tackling poor performance and increased accountability for doing so (HM Government, 2012).

In the literature about public sector performance management over twenty-five years after Hood (1991), some continued to examine the principles of the use of performance management systems, and so appeared not to have moved on. For example, Rhodes (2016) feared that New Public Management had pushed aside senior public servants’ core policy advice skills; a view which runs contrary to the civil service’s recognition of the need for both sets of skills (GOV.UK, 2018) with a new emphasis on operational delivery. Others sought to test the principles. Lonti (2005) found that managers did feel they had some of the autonomy intended by NPM, but only over quality; client consultation issues; and staff issues such as training and performance management. They had less influence over organizational change, technological change, and financial issues (Lonti 2005). Worrall, Mather and Seifert (2010) drew on the literature to present their case that as New Public Management moved towards a model more akin to that of private sector of managers, low productivity was solved through efficiency, effectiveness and economy and so reduced the quality of public sector workers’ lives.

¹ The five operational departments and their numbers of employees are: Work and Pensions (83,000); Justice (72,000); Revenue and Customs (68,000); Defence (54,000) and Home Office (30,000) (Office for National Statistics, 2018b)

Other studies looked at what had encouraged managers to use the performance management systems (e.g. (Moynihan, Pandey and Wright, 2012; Nicholson-Crotty, Nicholson-Crotty and Fernandez, 2017; Try, 2008)). Try (2008) found that managers were more likely to accept results-based management when they had more control over implementation. Taylor (2014) argued that performance management was more likely to be successful when it was integrated and aligned with the organisation's culture. Moynihan, Pandey and Wright (2012) found that public sector managers were more likely to use these systems if they perceived their work had high social value. Nicholson-Crotty, Nicholson-Crotty and Fernandez (2017) found that managers were more or less risk averse in how they managed performance, depending on how well their department was performing.

Even the sceptic Hood (2012) conceded that using data could help to concentrate managers' attention, encourage stretching through competition or develop learning. Similarly, Kroll (2014) found that performance information was used in local government to take better informed decisions, track goal achievement, discuss improvements, find out what worked and to communicate about the work. Looking at how schools used performance management systems, Destler (2016) found that performance management was more likely to be in use where environments were characterised by psychological safety and organisational trust; and frontline workers felt supported by their managers and colleagues.

1.3 The principles of performance management

Performance management requires careful definition: this paper discusses three types: operational; people; and the impact of managers' behaviours on employees' performance.

Performance management can operate at strategic, operational and individual levels (Brudan, 2010). This study is interested in the last two.

Operational performance management considers how organisational performance is measured, monitored and managed (e.g. (Destler, 2016)). Its history is firmly embedded in the development and use of performance measures,

particularly from a manufacturing operations environment (Bourne, Melnyk and Bititci, 2018)

Individual performance management is described by Mone et al. (2011) as the five performance management activities: setting goals; providing feedback and recognition; managing development; conducting appraisals; and building a climate of trust. The processes of setting goals, giving feedback, managing development and conducting appraisals are described in this paper as *people* performance management. This literature has its historical origins in Human Resource Management and High Performance Work Systems (den Hartog, Boselie and Paauwe, 2004).

The activity of building a climate of trust is part of a separate literature domain, where research is about the impact of *managers' behaviours on employees' performance*. Research in this area is based more in the leadership and engagement areas (e.g. (Green Jr, Medlin and Whitten, 2004)). Managers' actions were less important in themselves, what was more important to performance was the impact their actions had on the perceptions of the relationships (Gottfredson and Aguinis, 2017).

Each of these different disciplines are seen by their proponents as “the” performance management system, with scant reference to the existence of the others.

The review of the literature found that while all three types of performance management agreed that managers were important to performance, little was written about what they did or why.

1.4 Middle management

Middle managers have historically been seen as getting in the way, no longer needed, or resistant to change (e.g. (Balogun, 2003)). More recently, De Church et al (2010) found very little research specifically about middle managers in the previous 25 years. Hassan and Hatmaker's later (2015) study continued to find this lack of coverage about middle managers in the public sector.

Some authors had always argued the importance of middle managers: Nonaka (1988), for example, pointed to the middle managers' ability to translate senior management ideas into actions, without which nothing would happen. Huy (2001) argued for middle managers' strengths as entrepreneur, communicator, therapist and tightrope artist: they provided continuity of expertise while senior managers came and went.

More recently, researchers began recognising middle managers' importance as intermediaries of change (Balogun, 2003), as an interface in strategy and change (e.g. (Wooldridge, Schmid and Floyd, 2008)) or in managing employees' emotions during change (Huy, 2002). Others found that middle managers' capabilities had the most impact on organisational performance (Johansen, 2012; Mair, 2005; Ouakouak, Ouedraogo and Mbengue, 2014).

Research about middle managers has tended to be about: what they do (e.g. (Styhre and Josephson, 2006)); differences between them and the managers above or below them (e.g. (Kraut et al., 2005)); and their role in managing change (e.g. (Radaelli and Sitton-Kent, 2016)). Research about what middle managers did found that they invested time walking the floor, getting to know staff as individuals and wanting to show themselves as approachable and that they valued the staff (Smith, Plowman and Duchon, 2010; Styhre and Josephson, 2006). These were very similar to the behaviours identified in the managers' behaviours literature as having a positive impact on performance (e.g. (Jordan, Lindsay and Schraeder, 2012)).

Definitions of middle managers were either of a branch or site manager (e.g. (Smith, Plowman and Duchon, 2010; Styhre and Josephson, 2006)) or of a very wide tier which only excluded a single layer of frontline managers and one or two layers of senior managers (e.g. (Kraut et al., 2005)). This inconsistency has obvious implications for our understanding of which managers are being discussed. My own preferred definition is discussed in section 2.2.2.

Literature about the impact of managers' behaviours only considered the managers' relationships with their direct reports, despite other literature which

gave an indication of the importance of middle managers to frontline managers' job satisfaction (e.g. (Dalal, Bashshur and Credé, 2011)).

1.5 A personal perspective

My own career has been mainly about delivering operational performance while at the same time implementing major changes in the organisations' cultures. In the early 1990s I was running a public-sector business unit of 750 people, having previously worked in the private sector. I attended the meetings where the top executives presented the strategy; I had led strategy working groups to help input to the future vision and I also regularly walked the corridors and spoke to front line staff. I felt I was ideally placed in the middle of the organisation: I had two senior managers between me and the top man and two or three between me and the front-line operations.

Ten years later, in larger central government organisation, responsible for 3,000 people, I still felt in the middle, with one or two layers between me and the top man and now five managers between me and the front line. A staff survey stopped me in my tracks – it showed that a set of managers were the most disaffected group of staff and I realised I had no idea who they were. They truly were the middle managers of the organisation. They had delivery teams and supervisors reporting to them, their working days were in operational delivery, they had to deal with individuals and their problems and performance. When I turned up to meet front-line staff, these managers stood back so their teams could talk to me direct. I spent time with their managers, but these middle managers were too many and too busy with day-to-day operations to take them away to work with them collectively. Yet, when I reviewed staff surveys with my management team and we asked ourselves “why aren't staff engaged?”; or when we reviewed performance and were frustrated with “why isn't performance being managed?”, with their role at the heart of operational delivery, it was these managers to whom we looked for improvements. When I had the opportunity to undertake doctoral research, the role of these middle managers in managing performance was therefore an obvious area of study for me: seeking to understand their role and how they might be helped to be more effective.

Before this research, I had a long career in operations management and an even longer interest in what motivates teams. I was intrigued as a 10-year old by an article about how Volvo had changed from the traditional production line to cars being assembled in teams, and how this led to more satisfied workers and better productivity. I also bring experience of working in both the private and public sectors. I have been a senior manager in the Civil Service. I have my own experiences of being managed and of managing others. During the period of conducting the research I was coaching other middle managers, helping them to perform more effectively and to manage the performance of others. Performance management in the public sector has been at the heart of my working life.

1.6 How this thesis is structured

This thesis has eight chapters, followed by references and appendices.

Chapter two provides an overview and critical evaluation of the relevant literature to identify what is already known about middle managers and performance management and to help situate the research within this current knowledge.

Chapter three sets out the research question and describes the research design, operationalisation, data gathering and analysis.

Chapters four, five and six present the findings. Chapter four analyses the results about the role of middle managers in managing performance. Chapters five and six are about the analyses to answer the subsequent research question about the middle managers' differences. In chapter five, the analysis of the middle managers' attitudes and attributes are discussed and chapter six discusses how the three groups of middle managers were created and the differences between them.

In the final two chapters, chapter seven discusses the findings in the context of the literature and sets out the contribution to knowledge. In chapter eight I discuss the conclusions from this study. I consider the implications for practice, the limitations to the research, and suggest further research. I also reflect on my own personal journey of discovery and learning.

Conclusions

What middle managers do to manage performance in the public sector is an important topic. Most of the work of the UK civil service is the delivery of services, such as collecting taxes or paying benefits, and managers are under pressure to meet rising expectations and reducing budgets. At the same time, workdays lost through stress are increasing, and management behaviour is seen as a major cause. Middle managers, who surely play an important role in performance management, are undervalued and their role poorly understood. This thesis addresses these issues through a study of UK, operational, civil service middle managers. It uncovers what they do – and its significance.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter provides an overview and critical evaluation of the literature about performance management and middle managers, within and outside the public sector.

Chapter one set out the research question as: What is the role of the middle manager in public sector performance management? and identified the benefits of knowing more about this topic. The purpose of this literature review was to identify what was already known about the role of the middle manager in public sector performance management, and so be able to position this study within the body of existing work.

In this chapter I describe the process for identifying and selecting the appropriate literature and evaluating their quality; I discuss the range of definitions of “performance management” and “middle manager”; provide definitions for the purposes of this study; and then present the literature by theme, describing what is currently known and identifying the research gap.

There are three main themes for the review of the literature: what was written about performance management; and then about middle managers; and finally a discussion on implications of the wide definition of middle manager and the narrow focus of manager-staff relationships.

2.1 Conducting the literature review

This section discusses the purpose of a literature review; describes the selection of the literature; analyses the search results; and presents the characteristics of the literature domains.

2.1.1 Literature review approach

A literature review provides up-to-date knowledge of the subject, identifies issues and themes, indicates potential gaps and so enables the researcher to build on this knowledge to make a genuine contribution (e.g. (Huff, 2009)). It does not just take place at the beginning of the research; in an inductive approach, especially,

the literature is put aside while undertaking the research and then readdressed to compare what was found in the data with what is in the literature (Gray, 2009).

The field of performance management is wide, with many thousands of articles available and so a systematic approach to reviewing the literature was considered. A systematic synthesis of the literature is a structured, comprehensive and unbiased approach to selecting articles for review; going further than selecting studies to support a particular point of view (Rousseau, Manning and Denyer, 2008). It should be transparent, inclusive, explanatory and heuristic (Denyer and Tranfield, 2009). However, in line with Gray's (2009) description of readdressing the literature, this literature review was conducted in two main phases: at the commencement of this study and then after the interviews and initial analyses. These iterations identified new developments from the literature and, equally important, new insights from this study helped in identifying what was useful and relevant from the literature. This approach has meant that while many of the characteristics of a systematic review were used, especially a structured approach to determining inclusions and exclusions, replicable counts of articles could not be maintained.

The initial question for the literature review was: "What is already known about the role of middle managers in public sector performance management?" Pilot searches of the literature identified that there had been very little written about middle managers and performance management, and even less about the role of middle managers in public sector performance management. This led to the question for the literature review being supplemented with two further questions: What is known about the role of managers in performance management? and What is known about the role of middle managers?

These changes widened the searches for suitable articles and therefore required more synthesis of the literature to form a view about where there might be potential overlaps between papers that discussed performance management and those about the role of middle managers.

2.1.2 Identifying suitable literature

A number of approaches were used for identifying appropriate literature: the main ones being database searches and following up other references in the literature which looked relevant. Recommendations from the supervisory panel and books about management, performance management or the public sector were also used.

For the database searches, a protocol was developed so that the search criteria could be clearly defined and recorded (see Appendix A). Using broad search terms such as “performance management” and “middle manager or management” found many articles and so the protocol was refined with criteria for inclusions or exclusions and so reduce the literature to manageable numbers while avoiding the loss of potentially relevant material.

The inclusion criteria were: written in English, scholarly, peer reviewed articles; from 2004 onwards. For the initial literature review, selecting studies from 2004 gave 10 years of literature: the topics of study within the disciplines changed over time and so this provided a useful range of subjects: older work of interest could still be found through the references. Studies undertaken in Western Europe, Scandinavia, North America or Australasia were most relevant and so papers on studies outside of these areas were excluded. This selection of countries reflected similar management cultures to the UK and Hofstede’s (1983) analysis, although out of date, provided a useful initial list. Studies in the health sector were excluded since health sector organisation structures are made complex, especially at the middle management level, by the hybrid clinical-management roles and hierarchies. A detailed review of articles from pilot searches enabled studies covering the sub-topics such as systems, pay or training to be excluded without losing any articles of interest.

When the searches were run, the number of articles selected was still over 2,000. The article titles and then abstracts were reviewed to continue to exclude papers according to the criteria. This left just over 300 articles, which were then reviewed in detail and scored for relevance and for the quality of their evidence underlying their claims. Wallace and Wray’s (2009) concept of warranted conclusions helped

to determine whether or not an article was sufficiently reliable to be useful, by asking whether or not the article's conclusions were sufficiently backed up with robust and logical evidence.

2.1.3 Literature search results

This section discusses the numbers of papers and their characteristics, including topics, industry sector, journal type and research method.

Literature domain	Number reviewed
Performance management	61
Performance management and middle managers	18
Middle managers	21
Total	100

Table 2-1 Total articles reviewed, by domain

The literature review searches resulted in 100 articles being identified: 61 about performance management; 21 about middle managers and 18 about both performance management and middle managers (Table 2-1). This gives a total of 79 articles about performance management and 39 about middle management, when the overlapping articles are included in both domains.

A database of the articles was set up in Excel, which facilitated analyses of the characteristics of the papers and the ability to sort them by these characteristics. The articles were classified into topics and sub-topics, and the industry sector and research method were added. The journal ranking and journal field were added, using the Chartered Association of Business Schools' (2018) Academic Journal Guide. For non-rated journals, the editorial focus was checked and then the journal field was allocated.

Analyses illustrating the key characteristics of note are discussed below: starting with the topics and then industry sectors, year of publication, research method, and journal field.

Topic	Literature domain			Totals
	Performance management	Middle managers & performance	Middle managers	
Operations performance management	11	2	-	13
People performance management	10	1	-	11
Managers' behaviours employees' performance	40	4	-	44
Middle managers important to performance	-	6	-	6
Beyond the dyad	-	5	-	5
Differences to other managers	-	-	6	6
What middle managers do	-	-	4	4
Sensemaking / sense-giving	-	-	11	11
Total	61	18	21	100

Table 2-2 Distribution of papers by topic and domain

There were three main topics in the performance management papers: operations performance management; people performance management and the impact of managers' behaviours on employees' performance (Table 2-2). Seven of these papers discussed the middle managers and performance management.

The middle management literature had a wider range of topics. There were two topics about middle managers and performance in general: six papers which discussed the importance of the middle managers' contribution to organisational performance, and five which examined the performance impact of employees'

satisfaction with managers beyond the direct reporting relationship, labelled “beyond the dyad”. There were then a further three topics about the activities, behaviours and priorities of middle managers: six which compared middle managers with those above or below them; four about what middle managers did more generally and 11 about their role in sensemaking and sense-giving.

Topic	Industry sector				Total
	Public sector	Private sector	Mixed	Other*	
Performance management	22	18	12	16	68
Middle managers and performance	3	3	2	3	11
Middle managers' activities	2	12	4	3	21
Totals	27	33	18	22	100
*Other: Not specified (21); not for profit (1)					

Table 2-3 Papers by topic and industry

Looking at the distribution of performance management papers by industry sector (Table 2-3), there was a relatively even split between papers about the public sector (27) and the private sector (33), with a further set which conducted research across both (18). The “other” papers were mainly literature reviews or conceptual papers that did not specify a sector (21) as well as one about research in the not for profit sector.

Whereas papers about performance management were relatively evenly spread across the industry sectors, the papers about middle managers' activities were predominantly research in the private sector.

Looking at the distribution of papers by year of publication, it is possible to see the movement in interest in the topics

Literature topic	Year of publication						Totals
	Pre 2004	2004-2006	2007-2009	2010-2012	2013-2015	2016-2018*	
Performance management	-	12	4	18	20	14	68
Middle managers and performance	2	1	-	5	2	1	11
Middle managers' activities	2	6	3	5	1	4	21
Totals	4	19	7	28	23	19	100
Notes: Shaded cells indicate above average numbers of articles; * 2018 half-year							

Table 2-4 Papers by topic and year of publication

In the period 2010 to 2012, all of the topics generated more papers than average (Table 2-4). Interest in performance management grew particularly from 2010, in particular the papers on managers' behaviours and employees' performance.

Literature topic	Research method				Total
	Literature review	Conceptual	Qualitative	Quantitative	
Performance management	8	12	4	44	68
Middle managers and performance	1	1	1	8	11
Middle managers' activities	1	1	12	7	21
Totals	10	14	17	59	100
Notes: Shaded cells indicate concentrations of articles					

Table 2-5 Distribution of all papers by topic and research method

Looking at the types of research conducted in each of the topics (Table 2-5), there was a marked difference in the research methods being conducted, with studies about middle managers relatively evenly split between qualitative and quantitative studies. Most of the conceptual or literature review papers were

about performance management, and empirical studies in this domain were predominantly quantitative. This distinction may indicate a difference in the stage of development of knowledge about middle managers, where the qualitative research is still gathering data about middle managers and their role.

Journal field	Industry sector				Totals
	Public sector	Private sector	Mixed	Other**	
Management	1	8	7	7	23
Human resources	5	7	2	4	18
Operations	1	6	3	5	15
Public sector	12	-	2	-	14
Sub-totals	19	21	14	16	70
Other*	8	12	4	6	30
Totals by industry sector	27	33	18	22	100
Notes: Shaded numbers indicate highest concentration of articles *Other journal fields: Psychology (12), Organisation studies (9), Strategy (4) ** Other industry sector (number of articles): Not specified (21), Not for profit (1)					

Table 2-6 Papers by industry sector and journal field

There were some marked differences in where articles about the public or private sectors were published (Table 2-6). The public sector is a specialist journal field as well as being an industry sector and 12 of the 27 public sector articles (44%) were published in the public sector journals and a further five (19%) in Human Resources journals. Research specifically about the private sector was more evenly spread, with 21 of the 33 (64%) spread across journals in the Management, Human Resources or Operations fields. Of 23 articles published in

the field of management, there was only one that was specifically about the public sector. Remembering that these are operational performance management articles and not those about the principles of performance management, this might mean that opportunities are being missed for knowledge exchange between the public and private sectors across operational aspects of performance management.

The rest of this chapter now moves on to discuss the content of the papers, starting with a discussion about definitions.

2.2 Definitions

There were a wide range of definitions of the concepts of performance management and middle manager and understanding what the research had used was not always straightforward, and so this section takes time to go into some detail, before providing definitions for this research.

2.2.1 Defining performance management

“Great management has always been about performance. Great managers get great performance from people.” (Medlin and Green Jr., 2014, p.21). This is a quote worth keeping in mind, since performance management is a complex topic and at times it is easy to lose sight of this simple big picture.

Before moving further into this topic, it is worth bearing in mind that, for some, what is now called *performance*, in earlier literature had been labelled *efficiency* (Moynihan and Pandey, 2005) or *organisational effectiveness* (Talbot, 2010). A risk with researching performance management is that it can become an attempt to develop a theory of everything (Talbot, 2010; Walshe, Harvey and Jas, 2010), because surely everything an organisation does is ultimately about its performance?

To help in understanding the different perspectives on performance management, it is worth a look at how the multi-dimensional performance models (MDPM), developed from the 1950s onwards (Talbot, 2010), attempted to capture all the aspects of performance management.

Talbot (2010) listed 22 private sector performance models developed between the 1950s and 2002; from Stewhart and Deming's Statistical Process Control to the United Nations' Global Compact Performance Model. Some of them contained the different topics of performance management found in this literature (e.g. (Burke and Litwin, 1992; European Foundation for Quality Management, 2012; McKinsey & Company, 2008)).

In the 1970s, management consultants McKinsey developed their 7-S Framework where Structures, Systems and Strategy were linked with softer issues of Staff, Style and Skills and all of these six had Shared Values at their heart (McKinsey & Company, 2008). The Business Excellence Model, developed by the European Foundation for Quality Management in the 1990s encompassed enablers, including Leadership, People Management and Processes, as well as Results (European Foundation for Quality Management, 2012). At the same time, Burke and Litwin (1992) developed their organizational performance and change model, based on their work at British Airways, which incorporated concepts of work-unit climate separate from organisational culture; and systems processes and procedures as well as management practices.

These developments have also continued in the public sector. Andrews and Brewer (2013) identified five management systems that contributed to management capacity: financial management; human resources management; information technology; capital management and managing for results. Once again, managing people (*human resources*) and managing performance (they refer to *managing for results*) are mentioned.

A recent model (Blackman et al., 2013; Buick et al., 2015) was developed specifically for the public sector, but with little apparent reference to the earlier models.

Outcome	High Performing Government			
Design principles	Clear role and purpose Clarity what high performance looks like	Individual goals aligned with high level strategies Integrated HRM and organisation systems	Employee & management ownership of Performance Management. Awareness of what drives employee motivation	Ability to adapt to changing environment Progress towards outcomes
Foundation elements	Capabilities: routines, processes, staff competencies	Data about performance trends and achievement of goals	Pragmatism about what is possible, actions fit for purpose	
based on Buick et al. (2015)				

Figure 2-1 Public Sector performance management framework

This model, illustrated in Figure 2-1 above, incorporated the different aspects (shaded) of performance management discussed in this study.

Within these models, performance management data, individuals' goals and awareness of what drove motivation are shown as part of an integrated approach to performance. In the literature they appear to work independently of each other, to the extent that they each have their own definitions of what they mean by performance management and these are discussed below.

Performance management has been defined as “a management style that incorporates and uses performance information for decision-making” (Van Dooren, Bouckaert and Halligan, 2015, p.37). The National Performance Management Advisory Commission in the United States defined performance management as “an ongoing, systematic approach to improving results through evidence-based decision making, continuous organizational learning, and a focus on accountability for performance” (Destler, 2016, p.202). These are clearly operational definitions for performance management.

When den Hartog, Boselie and Pauuwe (2004, p.556) defined performance management as dealing with “the challenge that organisations face in defining, measuring and stimulating employee performance with the ultimate goal of improving organisational performance”, they were considering people management rather than the operations’ performance measurement and management processes. Similarly, when Mone et al. (2011) describe the five performance management activities as: setting goals; providing feedback and recognition; managing development; conducting appraisals; and building a climate of trust, they were talking about managing people through the performance appraisal process.

Gruman and Saks (2011, p.123) described performance management as “the key process through which work is accomplished”. They pointed out that “although performance evaluation is at the heart of performance management, the full process extends to all organizational policies, practices, and design features that interact to produce employee performance” (Gruman and Saks, 2011).

Brudan (2010) described performance measurement as evaluating results; and performance management as taking action. He also usefully distinguished between strategic, operational and individual performance management where operational performance was the achievement of department or group objectives (traditionally evaluated in terms of efficiency and effectiveness); individual performance management the use of performance appraisal; and strategic performance related to achieving organisational objectives (Brudan, 2010).

So, having started with a potential challenge that performance management could be the management of everything, then considered that different writers take quite narrow perspectives, without acknowledging the presence of another discipline, we need a definition which plots a course between these two positions.

For the purposes of this paper, therefore, a definition is used that incorporates the management activities of monitoring performance, of taking action and of stimulating employee commitment and performance:

Performance management can operate at the strategic, operational or individual level and generally leads to taking action. It entails defining, measuring and monitoring performance and requires an understanding of what enables or drives that performance.

2.2.2 Defining middle managers

In defining the middle manager, there are two main questions to consider: Which managers in the hierarchy are the middle managers? and How are middle managers different to other managers in what they do?

In terms of which organisational levels constitute the middle management, Hales (2005) warned of a potential controversy as to whether the first-line manager and supervisor were different management levels or interchangeable terms: he went on to define the first-line manager as the one to whom non-managerial workers reported.

Huy (2001, 2011) defined middle managers as two levels below the CEO and the level above the first-line supervisors. But this encompassed a huge range, as Huy himself (2011) pointed out: a senior middle manager could have 2,000 to 5,000 frontline staff, while a junior middle manager might have 50 to 100.

Similarly, DeChurch et al. (2010) distinguished between three layers: top management who reported directly to the board of directors; supervisors who directly managed employees at the lowest level; and middle managers who managed everything between.

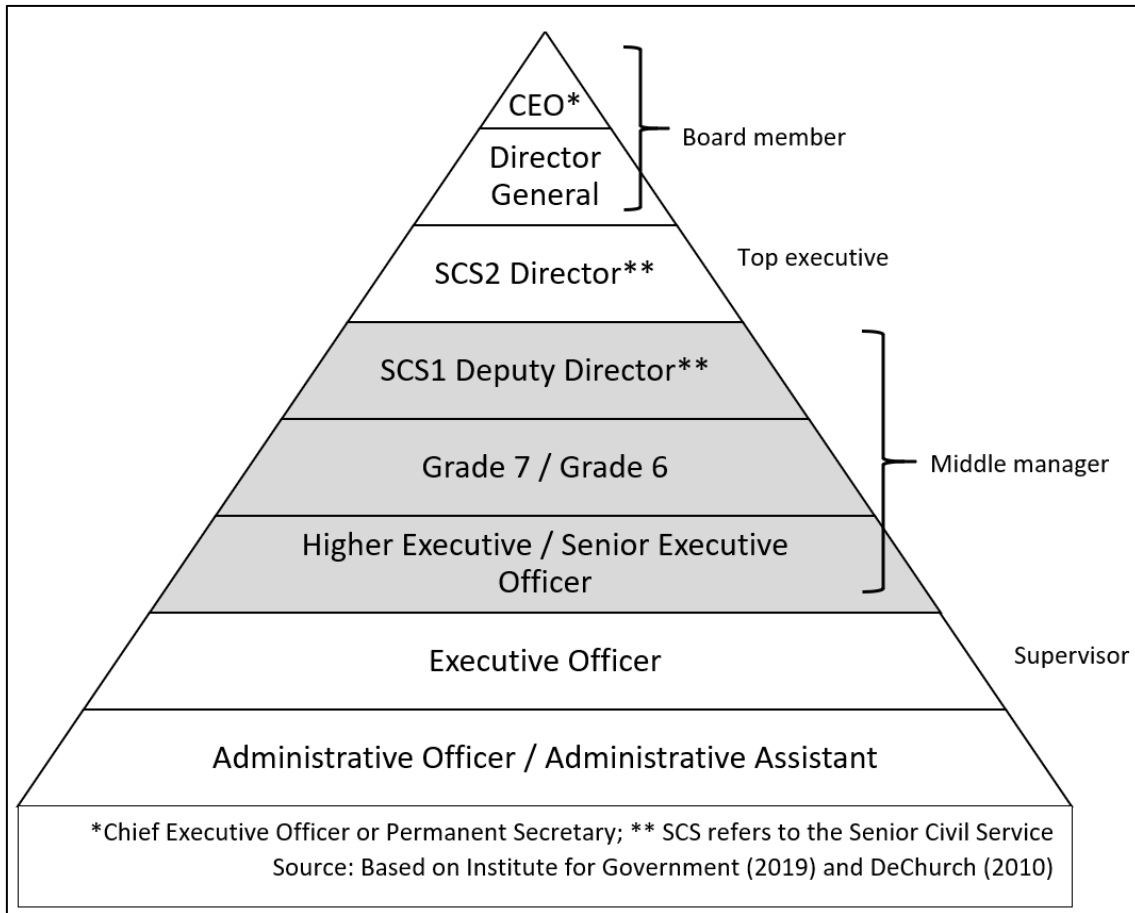


Figure 2-2 The "middle manager" in the organisation hierarchy

To illustrate this, using DeChurch et al's (2010) definition: in a large civil service department there would be three to five levels of manager who would be defined as middle managers (Figure 2-2, shaded levels); three levels, if the Higher and Senior Executive Officers and the Grades 7 and 6 are combined; five, if they are all in place in the hierarchy (Institute for Government, 2019).

The Chief Executive Officer, or Permanent Secretary, of a government department had Directors General, who were on the board, reporting to him/her. Below them, the Directors reported to these board members and so, in DeChurch et al's (2010) definition, were the top management; the Executive Officers were the supervisors who directly managed the employees at the lowest level; and the middle managers were those in-between. These ranges of responsibilities are very wide, and so there is a question about whether these are really a coherent group of managers whose activities and behaviours can be compared with each other and contrasted with managers outside this definition.

An alternative approach to defining and selecting middle managers was to use branch or site managers (Bourne, Kennerley and Franco-Santos, 2005; Mair, 2005; Smith, Plowman and Duchon, 2010; Styhre and Josephson, 2006), but of course this can only be done where the organisation being researched has that structure.

So, having identified the wide range of managers who could be defined as middle managers, the next question is whether all managers can be considered to do the same work or do middle managers do something different to those above and below them?

DeChurch et al. (2010) described the differences in their activities as: top management set strategy; middle managers co-ordinated and integrated; and lower level managers engaged and inspired their immediate work-groups. However, looking at the ranges of responsibilities between the senior and junior middle managers in Figure 2-2, this appears to be an over-simplification.

Kraut et al. (1989, 2005) identified seven groups of management tasks: managing individual performance; instructing subordinates; planning and allocating resources; coordinating interdependent groups; managing group performance; monitoring the business environment; and representing one's staff. They found that the top priority for the executives was "plan and allocate resources", and for the first line supervisors it was "manage individual performance"; these were the middle managers' top two priorities (Kraut et al., 2005).

Other studies also found significant differences between the senior and frontline managers' leadership behaviours, but found that the middle managers, who sat between, had similarities with both (Bruch and Walter, 2007; Oshagbemi and Gill, 2004).

Senior managers	Middle managers	Front line managers	References
Charismatic and visionary leadership behaviours (1)			(1) Bruch and Walter (2007)
Use inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation (3)			
Treat front line staff as individuals, show respect and trust (1)			
Involve staff in developing innovative ideas and decisions (1)			
Manage group performance (2)			
Plan and allocate resources (2)			(2) Kraut et al. (2005)
Delegative style (3)			(3) Oshagbemi and Gill (2004)
Use contingent reward as a motivator (3)			
		Manage individual performance (2)	
		Directive style (3)	

Figure 2-3 Overlapping styles of senior, middle and frontline managers

In Figure 2-3 these findings have been merged. Only senior managers showed charismatic and visionary leadership behaviours and used inspirational motivation (Bruch and Walter, 2007; Oshagbemi and Gill, 2004). Middle managers shared with their more senior colleagues, behaviours which treated frontline staff as individuals and involved them in decisions (Bruch and Walter, 2007); and activities of planning and allocating resources and managing group performance (Kraut et al., 2005); They both had a delegative style and used contingent reward as a motivator (Oshagbemi and Gill, 2004). Middle and frontline managers managed individual performance (Kraut et al., 2005) and used a directive style (Oshagbemi and Gill, 2004).

These studies, however, appeared to address only the impact on a direct report: for example, Bruch and Walter (2007) proposed that senior managers were more likely to use a charismatic leadership style than middle managers because of the differences in their direct reports' work complexity and flexibility. An alternative

view might be that the more senior managers have the potential to reach many hundreds or thousands of staff and so a more charismatic style might be more effective.

In his study of 135 organisations, Hales (2005, 2006) found differences in the amount of responsibility held by the frontline and middle managers. For about a third of the organisations, the emphasis on the frontline managers' role was supervision, where they had little authority over finance or Human Resources and were jointly accountable with the middle manager for quality, efficiency and pace of work. Just over a third had more responsibility for performance including reporting, reviewing and implementing efficiency improvements, setting objectives, controlling costs, motivating staff, conducting appraisals. Just under a quarter had larger spans of control and budget responsibility and were considered more similar to middle managers (Hales, 2005, 2006).

In a study which found similarities rather than differences, Anzengruber et al. (2017) found that frontline and middle managers needed to be capable in all three areas of managing tasks, relationships and change, rather than just task management.

The conclusions that can be drawn from these findings are that the definitions of middle manager in the literature were very broad (Bruch and Walter, 2007; Kraut et al., 2005; Oshagbemi and Gill, 2004) or were an easily identified role as a branch or site manager or school principal (Bourne, Kennerley and Franco-Santos, 2005; Johansen and Hawes, 2016; Mair, 2005; Smith, Plowman and Duchon, 2010; Styhre and Josephson, 2006). These broad definitions, unsurprisingly, result in blurred distinctions between what a middle manager did, compared with what their more senior or junior colleagues. For the purposes of this study, there are some indications that study of a specific level of middle manager has the potential to provide useful new information about the role of the middle manager.

For this paper, the middle manager is the bottom rung of middle management in Figure 2-2 above: i.e. the manager who has a frontline manager then frontline staff reporting to them.

2.3 Literature about performance management

This section discusses the three types of performance management: operational performance; people performance; and the impact of managers' behaviours on employees' performance.

2.3.1 Operational performance management

The first area of literature to be discussed is about the management of operational performance. Known by its protagonists as performance measurement and management, this literature has been described as management through performance measures (Franco-Santos and Bourne, 2005), where performance measurement is at the centre of operations management (Bourne et al., 2013). It was historically concerned with the design and implementation of performance measurement systems, but had some interest in the role of managers in the use of the systems (e.g. (Bourne, Melnyk and Bititci, 2018)).

There were very few papers about the role of middle managers in operational performance management (Bourne, Kennerley and Franco-Santos, 2005; Jääskeläinen and Luukkanen, 2017).

Bourne, Kennerley and Franco-Santos (2005) found that high performing middle managers had a clear idea of how operations, people and performance interacted; used multiple sources of formal and informal information to assess and communicate performance; and took action based on their assessment of a whole range of factors, not just handed down directives.

In a more recent study, Jääskeläinen and Luukkanen (2017) interviewed 21 middle managers in five different industries and found that they struggled with unclear targets, a proliferation of measures and insufficient root cause analysis to make effective decisions. Jääskeläinen and Luukkanen (2017) suggested that although performance measurement supported their decision-making, the managers commonly used judgement based on based on their experience.

Looking more broadly at managers' roles in operations performance management, Gerrish's (2016) review of the public sector literature found that

performance measurement and management systems had become widespread and that their use had a small performance effect, which was higher when used with “benchmarking”. He concluded that management mattered, describing their activities as setting goals, collecting information and comparing performance to previous or others’ performance; however managers acting on this information was missing from his analysis (Gerrish, 2016).

Similarly, Sun and Van Ryzin (2014) found that New York public schools performed better when fully engaged in setting measurable goals and using performance information for decision-making and to target interventions. Goh’s (2012) review found that the public sector performance management literature had focused on performance measurement as a tool to assess performance and to demonstrate accountability and concluded that by identifying problems and helping to prioritise action, could also support the employee to do their work better. Sole (2009) made the point that performance measurement was more than looking at the figures and should be for performance improvement, learning and change.

Looking at how performance measurement systems were used in the private sector, Franco-Santos and Bourne (2005) had formed a similar conclusion that, to be successful, managers should turn the performance data into insights and take action. For De Lima, Da Costa and Angelis (2008), a strategic performance management system used performance information to change something – the organisational culture, or systems or processes – and so improve, rather than simply monitor the operations strategy. However, while these studies were clear that the role of the managers should be to take action, they did not specify what these actions might be.

In an important step towards identifying the actions, Pavlov and Bourne’s (2011) theoretical model proposed that performance measurement potentially provided three effects on performance.

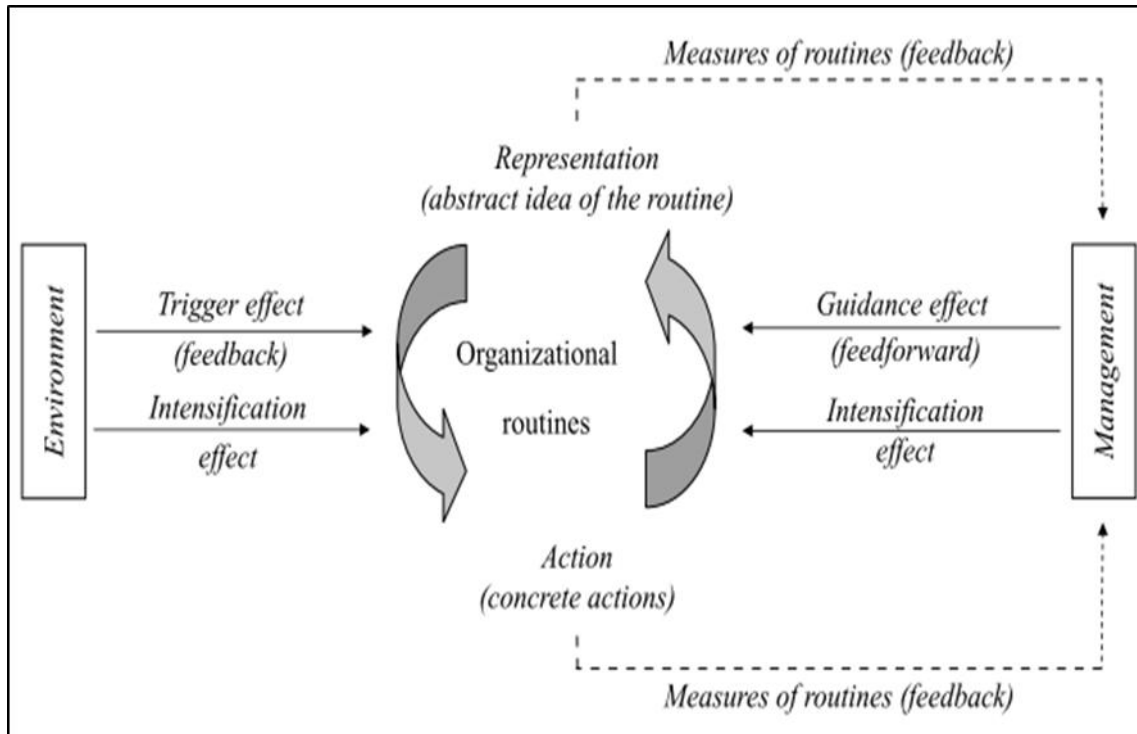


Figure 2-4 Model of management action triggers

Pavlov and Bourne (2011)

As Figure 2-4 shows, the feedback loop measured past performance and triggered actions to change something; a “feedforward” loop provided a forecast of future performance and guidance on where action might need to be taken; and finally, the focus on setting an expected performance, compared with actually happened, intensified the degree to which changes were made (Pavlov and Bourne, 2011, p.112).

Other studies began to connect the management actions of the performance management process and those of managing motivation (Baird, Su and Munir, 2018; Bourne et al., 2013; de Leeuw and van den Berg, 2011). De Leeuw and van den Berg (2011) found that discussing performance indicators frequently and openly, and defining individual and team goals, were significantly correlated with shop floor operators’ understanding, their motivation to discuss and achieve performance, and their being pro-active towards performance improvement. Bourne et al’s (2013) paper was important as one of the few which linked operational performance management with Human Resources Management practices, pointing out that the performance management system had an

important role in staff engagement by highlighting what was important and helping to channel the efforts of employees striving to perform (Bourne et al., 2013). Baird, Su and Munir (2018) linked the use of the performance management systems with the ability to empower employees: sharing information about an organisation's performance with front-line employees increased their self-efficacy through their ability to control and use resources, contributing to performance.

So, from the operational performance management literature we can see that the role of managers is seen as important; but there is little detail about what they do.

2.3.2 People performance management

A different set of literature, that also described itself as being about performance management, had its roots in Human Resources Management (e.g. (Cho and Lee, 2012; den Hartog, Boselie and Paauwe, 2004; Medlin and Green Jr., 2009; Moynihan and Pandey, 2005)).

This literature once again described the impact on performance of elements of the performance management process such as goal setting, reviewing results and giving feedback (e.g. (Cho and Lee, 2012; Moynihan and Pandey, 2005)). While this was apparently the same list of activities discussed by the operational performance management literature, in this case it was about individual performance appraisals and did not overlap with the systems-based literature.

Looking first at what the literature could tell us about the role of the middle manager, there were, again, only a small number of studies. They identified that middle managers set clear goals; communicated with staff and stakeholders; recruited, developed, motivated and rewarded staff; engaged, involved and empowered staff; and ensured workers were equipped to do the job (Johansen and Hawes, 2016). In this empirical research Johansen and Hawes (2016) found that setting clear goals correlated with performance and that management tasks were more likely to lead to performance than leadership or resource management activities.

Moving on to look at the research about managers' roles: in the public sector studies, Moynihan and Pandey (2005) found that a focus on (individuals') results

and goal clarity were positively associated with organisational effectiveness. Favero, Meier and O'Toole (2016) concluded that management mattered, especially the positive impact on performance when managers set challenging goals. Cho and Lee (2012) described people performance management as setting performance goals, measuring performance, providing feedback, and using performance appraisals to inform decisions such as accountability and rewards: all four had to be done well. Latham, Borgogni and Petitta (2008), considered that goal setting was as applicable for motivating public sector employees, although where the work was new and unknown, a "do your best" target was more effective.

In studies about the private sector, Farndale, Hope-Hailey and Kelliher (2011) found that greater use of high commitment work practices, such as involvement in goal setting and regular appraisal feedback, led to higher employee commitment and more positive perceptions of justice of these practices. Their paper, and earlier work by den Hartog, Boselie and Paauwe (2004), both made the point that although performance systems were designed by Human Resources departments, they were implemented by operations managers: how well these managers did this had an impact on how employees viewed their organisations.

Medlin and Green Jr. (2009) found that organisational goal-setting (i.e. for individuals) positively impacted employee engagement, optimism and therefore performance. Perry, Mesch and Paarlberg (2006) concluded that managers should create the right mix of task and goal interdependence; build employee commitment to their goals and give feedback and were cautiously optimistic that the knowledge about motivation in the private sector might be applied to public-sector performance management.

So the people performance management literature described the same processes of goal setting, reviews and feedback, only at an individual level and using the Human Resources Management processes.

2.3.3 Managers' behaviour and employees' performance

In this section, we now move to the third type of performance management found in the literature, which focused on how the managers' behaviours related to employees' performance. These papers each took and analysed the impact of specific behaviours, which can be considered in three groups: leadership style; staff engagement; and the importance of trusting relationships.

Before going into the detail of these three behaviours, there were a few studies that were specifically about middle managers' behaviours and employees' performance (Johansen and Hawes, 2016; Knies and Leisink, 2014a; Para-González, Jiménez-Jiménez and Martínez-Lorente, 2018; Stoker, 2006).

Para-Gonzales, Jimenez-Jimenez and Martinez-Lorente (2018) found that middle managers who used transformational behaviours helped employees to reach their collective goals; inspired them, developed them, encouraged them to solve problems, enhanced communication and inspired trust.

Stoker (2006) found that the use of consideration and a consultative leadership style by middle managers was correlated with employees' organisation commitment and job satisfaction. Knies and Leisink (2014a) found that employees who reported higher levels of commitment perceived that they received greater management support from their supervisors.

Looking at managers more generally, there were a number of studies about leadership styles which had an impact on improving employees' confidence in their abilities (Consiglio et al., 2016; Green Jr, Medlin and Whitten, 2004; Hannah, Schaubroeck and Peng, 2016; Miraglia, Alessandri and Borgogni, 2015; Paglis, 2010; Perry, Mesch and Paarlberg, 2006).

Green Jr., Medlin and Whitten (2004) found that managers who improved a feeling of optimism among staff had a positive impact on individual and organisational performance. Perry, Mesch and Paarlberg's comprehensive (2006) review of the literature found that managers who recognised good performance, showed support for the team and built their self-confidence had a positive impact on performance. Paglis (2010), described leadership as a social

influence process focussed on achieving a common objective and, in her review of the literature, found that leaders with high self-efficacy inspired followers to higher levels of collective efficacy and better results. Miraglia, Alessandri and Borgogni (2015) suggested that organisations who focussed on improving employees' beliefs in their capabilities would find they had more stable performance over time. Similarly, Hannah, Schaubroek and Peng (2016) found that managers' transformational leadership behaviours were linked to employees' internalisation of values and higher role self-efficacy. Consiglio et al. (2016) that employees who believed in their own capabilities were more likely to find ways to take control over their social environment and to build relationships with their supervisor and other management.

These leadership behaviours had to be genuine: Leroy et al. (2015) found that managers with authentic leadership behaviours and fewer ego-defensive behaviours, were more likely to satisfy followers' basic needs. Wang and Seibert (2015) that supervisors who acted out negative emotional displays lost their impact, whereas when rarely used, and genuine, a negative emotion display could improve performance. Slack, Orife and Anderson's quantitative study (2010) found that a managers' visible commitment to the vision had a positive impact on employee organization satisfaction. Watrous, Huffman and Pritchard (2006) found that shared values between employees and management mitigated the impact of direct management turnover on performance.

Vermeeren, Kuipers and Steijn's (2014) study found that a stimulating leadership style or a correcting one had a positive impact on performance, but only the former also had a positive impact on job satisfaction. In their study in the public sector, Kim and Schachter (2015) found that where managers were directive, their reports were more likely to adopt a passive style but, when provided opportunities to lead and decide, these reports took on more of a leadership role. Similarly, Fernandez and Moldogaziev (2013) found that public sector employees, given opportunities to act on their own discretion, tended to be more innovative.

Another set of behaviours that had an impact on performance were the managers' engagement of staff (Alagaraja and Shuck, 2015; Gruman and Saks, 2011; Marrelli, 2011; Wood et al., 2012).

Marrelli (2011) found that engaged employees were more likely to rate their supervisor as having good management skills and that high engagement increased their commitment to the team, the organisation and the job. Similarly, Wood et al (2012) identified that involving employees - encouraging them to think of improvements, to respond to new problems and connect their colleagues' work - was linked with performance. The connection of individual performance management with employee engagement meant that the manager would ensure employees' goals were aligned with both the organisation's and the employee's interests and appraisal and feedback would be about engagement behaviours – such as persistence or adaptability - as well as about task performance (Alagaraja and Shuck, 2015; Gruman and Saks, 2011).

The third theme, the importance of relationships, came up in a wide range of studies: feeling supported by their manager (Barbier et al., 2013); identifying as part of a team (Ellemers, de Gilder and Haslam, 2004; Solansky, 2011); and trust between the manager and the employee led to significant improvements in performance (Cho and Lee, 2012; Edgar, Geare and O'Kane, 2015; Farndale, Hope-Hailey and Kelliher, 2011; Jordan, Lindsay and Schraeder, 2012).

Ellemers, de Gilder and Haslam (2004) found that people identified with their work team rather than the larger organization and that when workers identified with team they behaved in line with the collective, and were concerned with collective goals, to the extent that they sacrificed (short-term) individual interests.

Liccione (2005) found that the most effective managers, whose staff were more satisfied with life at work, were perceived to be able to balance the potentially opposing values of managing the task and managing the relationship.

Barbier et al (2013) found that staff were more likely to be engaged where they perceived they had supervisory and organisational support and opportunities for development. In their longitudinal study, Knies and Leisink (2014b) found that

employees who reported higher levels of commitment also perceived that they had greater management support from their supervisors. Lee, Chaudhry and Tekleab (2014) found that when employees felt that their organisation had failed to provide what was due to them, they tended to reciprocate with decreased levels of performance and less helping behaviour towards the organisation.

Solansky (2011) found that team identification was linked to team performance and recommended that managers should take measures to foster this; allowing teams time to establish a shared history and considering how individuals should be placed in teams in terms of their impact on cohesiveness and productivity. Similarly, in their review of the literature, Walthall and Dent (2016) found that the quality of the relationship between an employee and their manager was positively associated with performance and was strengthened by the work structure, team dynamics and the frequency of managerial communication.

Jordan, Lindsay and Schraeder (2012) proposed a conceptual model in which individuals who believed they were valued and cared about by the organisation would have more trust and be more likely to help others. A breach in their psychological contract could lead to them becoming cynical, less loyal and more likely to display counterproductive work behaviours such as poor attendance or poor quality work (Jordan, Lindsay and Schraeder, 2012).

For Edgar, Geare and O'Kane (2015), the frontline manager played an important role in building trust and rapport: where workers felt valued, they would perform better. Similarly, trust mattered in that it increased job satisfaction, information sharing and improved performance; whereas lack of trust brought low commitment, low motivation and cynicism (Cho and Lee, 2012). Employees who perceived higher levels of organisational justice, for example in the way appraisals are handled, would have higher levels of trust in the organisation and higher levels of commitment (Farndale, Hope-Hailey and Kelliher, 2011). Mushonga, Thiagarajan and Torrance (2014) found that when supervisors were perceived to be fair and trustworthy, there was higher employee performance.

Some authors considered that leader-member exchange (LMX) theory explained the nature of the relationships between staff and their managers and the impact

of these on performance. In leader-member exchange theory, leaders develop different relationships with each subordinate through their work-related exchanges and the quality of these relationships reflects how much the manager and employee exchange resources and support (Le Blanc and González-Romá, 2012). Gottfredson and Aguinis (2017), synthesising over 3,000 studies, concluded that leader-member exchange was the mediating mechanism between leader behaviour and follower performance: it was not the leader's performance or behaviour that mattered, but how the follower perceived their relationship with the manager, who deliberately used transformational leadership behaviours to influence and enhance their followers' perceptions of the quality of this relationship.

Similarly, Hassan and Hatmaker's (2015) quantitative research in the public sector found that honesty and integrity were particularly important to developing the high quality LMX relationships that had a positive impact on in-role performance and citizenship behaviour. In an earlier quantitative study, Dahling, Chau and O'Malley (2012) found that managers who had prioritised being accessible; encouraged employees to seek feedback; and consistently provided credible, tactful and high quality feedback, gave higher ratings of their leader-member exchange relationships with employees and these employees' performance. McCarthy, Trougakos and Cheng's (2016) study in the public sector also found that leader-member exchange and co-worker exchange could mitigate the harmful effects of anxiety on job performance.

Other authors used social exchange theory to explain the relationship between how organisations treat their staff and the impact on performance: when employees perceived that their employer valued them, they were motivated to be more positive and work harder, leading to higher performance (e.g. (Alfes et al., 2013)). These social exchange relationships could operate at the organisational or at the dyadic level and required a level of trust by the subordinate that their engagement in the relationship would be reciprocated (Mushonga, Thiagarajan and Torrance, 2014).

Alfes et al. (2013) found that line managers played an important role, both in their daily behaviour with their staff and in how they implemented the human resource management policies such as training opportunities, rewards and appraisals. Similarly, Bal, Chiaburu and Jansen (2010) found that where employees had trust in, and perceived they were supported by, the organisation, a breach in the psychological contract had a lower impact on work performance.

This section has reviewed the three types of performance management found in the literature: separate islands of research about operations or people performance management processes and about behaviours by managers which have an impact on employees' performance.

We have found that managers mattered: they had an important role to play in managing operational performance, but little was written about what they did that mattered. They were important to the success of individual people performance management processes: no matter how well the process was designed, how the managers conducted the goal setting and performance appraisal processes would be what mattered to employees' perceptions of the organisation.

Managers' leadership styles were also important: building their confidence; being genuine; using a style which encouraged autonomy. Engaging staff, involving them in improvements, linking organisation and individual goals also mattered.

Finally, relationships mattered: supporting employees' development, encouraging teamwork, demonstrating they were valued, building trust, being approachable and available all had positive impacts on performance.

2.4 Literature about middle managers

In this section we move on to discuss the literature about middle managers.

2.4.1 Middle managers: from nuisance to asset

Literature about the role of middle managers has had a chequered history; for many years they were seen as getting in the way, no longer needed, or criticised as resistant to change (e.g. (Balogun, 2003)). De Church et al's (2010) review of the previous 25 years of leadership literature found that only seven percent of

studies had been specifically about middle managers and even more recently, Hassan and Hatmaker's (2015) study continued to find little coverage about middle managers in the public sector.

Some authors had always argued the importance of middle managers; for example, Nonaka (1988) pointed out the importance of middle managers' ability to draw on their operational experience to translate senior management ideas into actions. Huy (2001) argued passionately in praise of the middle managers' underestimated strengths as entrepreneur, communicator, therapist and tightrope artist: providing, he argued, continuity, commitment and experience while senior managers came and went.

In the early 21st century, a more positive view of the middle manager began to prevail, recognising their importance as intermediaries of change (Balogun, 2003), as an interface between the top management and the frontline (e.g. (Wooldridge, Schmid and Floyd, 2008)) or in balancing their own and employees' emotions during change (Huy, 2002).

More recently there have been a few studies which have highlighted the importance of the middle manager in organisational performance (Johansen, 2012; Mollick, 2012; Ouakouak, Ouedraogo and Mbengue, 2014).

Johansen (2012) found that the quality of the middle manager had a higher impact on schools' performance than the quality of higher management. In another very different type of organisation, the middle manager producers, who led teams of games developers, accounted for 21% of the variation of revenues (Mollick, 2012). Ouakouak, Ouedraogo and Mbengue (2014) found that involving the middle managers in strategy development built organisational capability and had an impact on organisational performance. In her study of 119 middle managers of a European financial services firm, Mair (2005) found that branches had a higher profit growth where the middle managers' actions were aligned with the company strategy and that higher performing bank branches were managed by lower educated middle managers with a wider range of previous experience. She proposed that these middle managers were more likely to remain at that level

and so had more experience and were more motivated to put in the effort (Mair, 2005).

2.4.2 What middle managers do

The middle management literature had a few studies which sought to understand what they did in their day-to-day activities, by following their daily work (Smith, Plowman and Duchon, 2010; Styhre and Josephson, 2006; Vie, 2010). These were different studies in different industries and yet there was a little remarked upon common theme about the middle managers regularly spending time with the front-line staff and seeing this relationship as important.

In his work on their changing tasks, Vie (2010) analysed earlier studies of middle managers' time on different activities and found that they had spent between two and ten hours a week on observational tours, compared with more senior managers who might only spend an hour a week. He then shadowed four middle managers to examine the purpose of these activities and, analysing all their verbal activities, found that they spent between a half and a full day per week on *care and consideration*; which he described as "a category to cover greetings, social chit-chat and displays of concern for other people" (Vie, 2010, p.186). The study also found that employees expected a supportive leadership style with managers being empathetic, having time to talk, being easy to talk with (Vie, 2010).

In another study, Smith, Plowman and Duchon (2010) conducted in-depth interviews and site visits with successful plant managers and found that the middle managers emphasised their roles as sensegivers; spent time walking the plant. There were common patterns, across different industries, of valuing people; openness; being positive; and being part of the community (Smith, Plowman and Duchon, 2010). The middle managers spent time observing the work, to identify opportunities for improvements, and getting feedback on what people were concerned about; they wanted to be accessible, for plant workers to get to know them; they looked after the needs of their workers, to the extent of making sure the coffee machine was properly stocked for the night shift; they

demonstrated that they saw workers as individuals, sending birthday cards, or knowing about people's interests (Smith, Plowman and Duchon, 2010).

Similarly, Styhre and Josephson (2006) interviewed 13 construction site managers about their job. These middle managers also talked about the importance of having good relationships with their workers: they found time to have lunch with them; maintained contact and emphasised the need to be skilled in communicating with them (Styhre and Josephson, 2006). They also talked about being aware that their own behaviour was being watched and judged, recognising the importance of acknowledging problems and being positive even when they did not feel like it (Styhre and Josephson, 2006).

2.4.3 Middle managers' roles in sense-making and sense-giving

Another part of the middle managers' role found in the literature, was how their position in the hierarchy, between the top and the frontline, put them in a unique position to contribute to an organisation's strategy and change (Ahearne, Lam and Kraus, 2014; Raelin and Cataldo, 2011; Riege and Zulpo, 2007).

Raelin and Cataldo (2011) found that the middle managers acted between the macro issues of the executives (mission, culture, structure, strategy, climate, protocols) and micro issues of the front line (values, tasks, practices, motivation, skills, needs) and created tangible signs of support for the frontline. Ahearne, Lam and Kraus (2014) found that middle managers had a role in adapting planned strategies to suit the specific situation of their unit. When frontline staff identified potential improvements, the middle managers transferred that knowledge to those who could use it to enhance the processes (Riege and Zulpo, 2007).

This role for middle managers between the senior-level development of strategy and the implementation of strategic changes at the front-line tended to be about sense-making or sense-giving (Neto and Lavarda, 2017; Nielsen, 2009a; Radaelli and Sitton-Kent, 2016; Rouleau and Balogun, 2011).

Radaelli and Sitton-Kent's (2016) review of the literature identified the micro-processes of how middle managers were involved with all the stages of

translating new ideas: they created the atmosphere and working environment for change, balancing their emotions, understanding subordinates' organisational lives to be able to set the emotional tone, explaining why, working to gain commitment. Similarly, Neto and Lavarda (2017) argued that middle managers were persuasive and persistent communicators of strategic options; they interpreted and evaluated the changes; and produced the interventions necessary to align organisational action with strategic intent.

Rouleau and Balogun (2011) described how the middle managers used their conversations with staff to show them that they were valued; to draw them into the change and to discuss the vision for the changes. This this meant the middle managers needed the ability to craft and share a message that was meaningful, engaging, and compelling; as well as skills in 'setting the scene' and performing the conversation (Rouleau and Balogun, 2011). Nielsen's (2009b) conversation analysis of department meetings showed that the middle managers' role was also to teach employees to think the way the organisation thought: socialising them into organisation practices and perceptions.

So in this section, we have seen that the literature about middle managers had shifted from a view that they were in the way and not needed to one that they were an asset to an organisation's performance.

2.5 But which managers and which relationships?

Clarity about which managers and which relationships are being studied is important, since studies might have overlaps or there could be gaps in our knowledge that are not apparent without this understanding. This section discusses observations about the literature reviewed, in terms of a wide range in definitions and a narrow examination of relationships.

In the studies about what middle managers did, researchers used a specific level such as a branch, site, or plant manager, or a school principal and so these papers each discussed a homogeneous group of managers (Bourne, Kennerley and Franco-Santos, 2005; Johansen and Hawes, 2016; Johansen, 2012; Mair,

2005; Smith, Plowman and Duchon, 2010; Styhre and Josephson, 2006; Vie, 2010).

In contrast, research into the differences between middle and other managers used very broad definitions of middle manager: while the top executives and the frontline managers were as little as one layer at the bottom and two layers at the top of the organisation, the middle managers were potentially three to five layers (Anzengruber et al., 2017; Bruch and Walter, 2007; Hales, 2006; Kraut et al., 1989, 2005; Oshagbemi and Gill, 2004). With narrower definitions, there could potentially have been more significant differences between the middle managers and the others.

Looking at the relationships between managers and employees, there were 44 papers about managers' behaviours and their impact on employees' performance. Of these, some studied frontline managers (Consiglio et al., 2016; Edgar, Geare and O'Kane, 2015; Favero, Meier and O'Toole, 2016; Hannah, Schaubroeck and Peng, 2016; den Hartog, Boselie and Paauwe, 2004; Lee, Chaudhry and Tekleab, 2014; Marrelli, 2011; Solansky, 2011); while others studied a single level of middle manager (Agarwal, Angst and Magni, 2009; Johansen and Hawes, 2016; Para-González, Jiménez-Jiménez and Martínez-Lorente, 2018; Stoker, 2006). In most cases however, the research examined managers at different levels (e.g. (Farndale, Hope-Hailey and Kelliher, 2011; Green Jr, Medlin and Whitten, 2004; Vermeeren, Kuipers and Steijn, 2014)) or were less specific about how they had defined "employee" or about the levels studied in their research (e.g. (Barbier et al., 2013; Knies and Leisink, 2014b; Wood et al., 2012)). This lack of distinction would appear to assume that all managers supervised their direct reports in the same way, regardless of how senior or junior their roles.

A further observation about these 44 papers was that all of them examined the relationship between the managers and their direct reports. In their review of 25 years of leadership literature, Dechurch et al. (2010) commented that most research had been about the impact of leadership behaviour on managers' direct

reports despite important unit-level constructs, such as climate, cohesion, or efficacy also being affected by leadership.

In support of DeChurch et al's (2010) concerns, there were other studies which had evidence of the importance of the relationship beyond the dyad (Dalal, Bashshur and Credé, 2011; Melián-González, Bulchand-Gidumal and López-Valcárcel, 2015; Meneghel et al., 2016).

Dalal, Bashshur and Credé (2011), researching the relationship between job satisfaction, organisational commitment and organisational justice, found that it was important to look at both the satisfaction with the immediate supervisor and satisfaction with middle management, since middle management was perceived as representing the organisation, its policies and practices. Melián-Gonzalez, Bulchand-Gidumal and Lopez-Valcarcel (2015) found that satisfaction with senior leadership was particularly important for employee job satisfaction. Employees' positive perception of their supervisor's support and encouragement; trusting relationships with colleagues; and positive perceptions of top management had a positive impact on job satisfaction and performance (Meneghel et al., 2016).

Also in support of this argument of the importance of multiple levels, the studies about what middle managers did, had also identified that they engaged directly with their frontline staff and had considered this to be an important part of their role (Smith, Plowman and Duchon, 2010; Styhre and Josephson, 2006; Vie, 2010).

Conclusions

The questions of the literature were: What is known about the role of middle managers in public sector performance management? with two further questions: What is known about the role of managers in performance management? and What is known about the role of middle managers? These latter two questions addressed all literature and did not restrict the literature to just papers about the public sector. As Rainey and Chun (2007) concluded, while there were interesting and important differences between public and private sector management, these

were not significant, and so general management theory and techniques could be applied to public management.

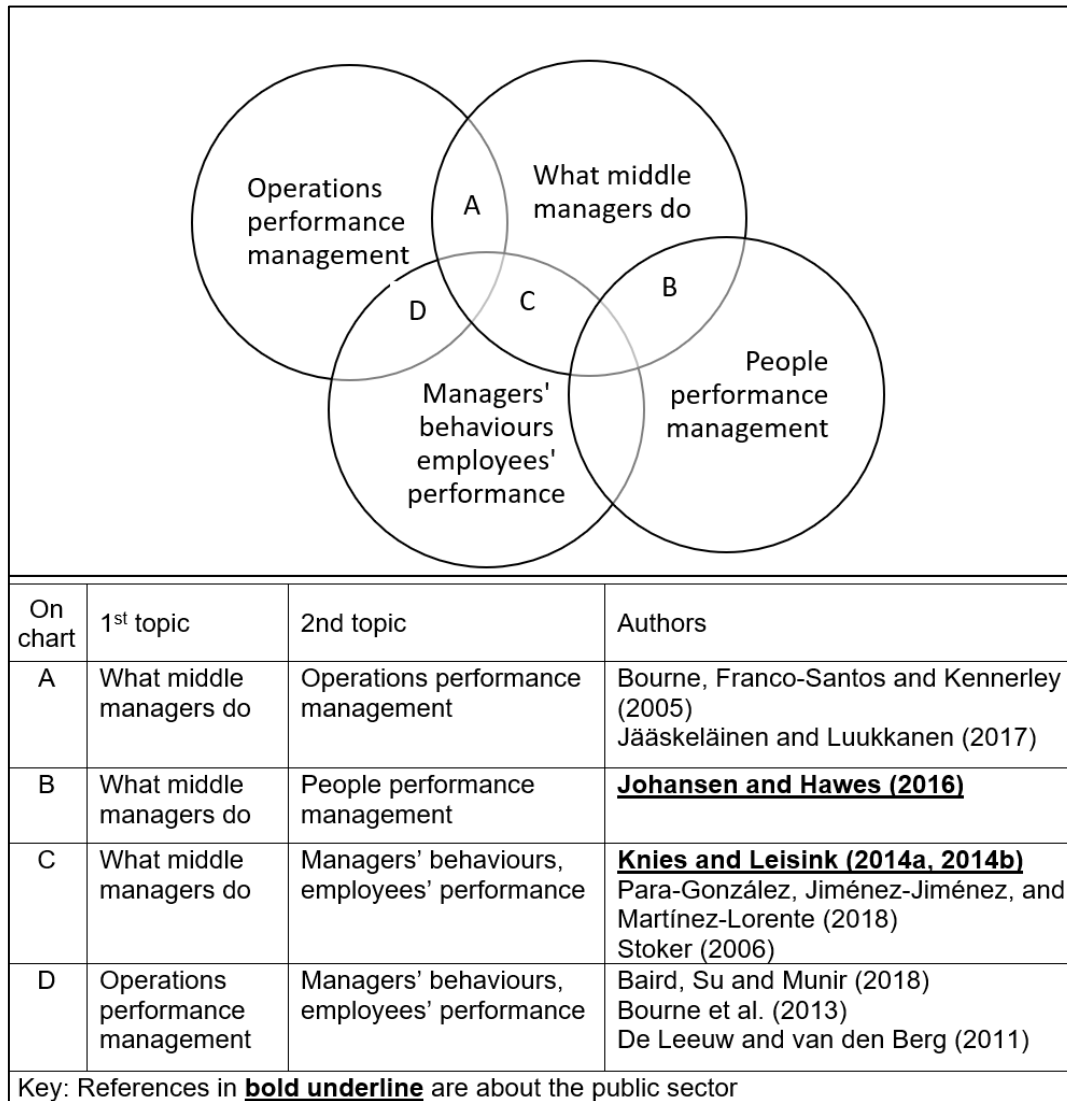


Figure 2-5 Articles covering more than one topic

To help in understanding the extent to which there were answers from the literature about these questions, the articles which overlapped more than one topic were mapped (Figure 2-5). The diagram shows the overlaps at A to D: each of which is across only two domains.

There were no articles therefore, which answered the whole of the initial research question about what was known about the role of the middle manager in public sector performance management.

The three separate literature domains about performance management (operations performance management; people performance management; and the impact of managers' behaviours) appeared to be islands, rarely sharing knowledge across their different interests.

In terms of what was known about the role of middle managers in performance management, there were some potential fragments of the story from papers which discussed middle managers and either: operations performance management (Bourne, Kennerley and Franco-Santos, 2005; Jääskeläinen and Luukkanen, 2017); people performance management (Johansen and Hawes, 2016); or managers' behaviours (Knies and Leisink, 2014a, 2014b; Para-González, Jiménez-Jiménez and Martínez-Lorente, 2018; Stoker, 2006).

Starting with operations performance management (A), middle managers in charge of high-performing units had a clear idea of how operations, people and performance interacted; used formal and informal information to know what was going on; took action based on their assessment of a whole range of factors, not just handed down directives; and adjusted quickly where required (Bourne, Kennerley and Franco-Santos, 2005). Middle managers' commonly used judgement based on their experience to support their decision-making, rather than just performance measures (Jääskeläinen and Luukkanen, 2017). These two articles give a useful indication of operations performance management activities by middle managers of monitoring information, making decisions and taking action.

Building on these, by looking more broadly at the role of managers in operations performance management, there was a consistent view that managers played an important role in managing performance, but their activities were not described in any detail. A theoretical model was proposed, in which the manager identified the gap between planned and actual performance (Pavlov and Bourne, 2011). Managers supported their employees to do their work better by providing feedback, identifying problems, finding improvement opportunities and helping to prioritise action (Goh, 2012). Where managers discussed operational performance indicators frequently and openly, and defined individual and team

goals, shop floor operators were motivated to discuss and achieve performance (de Leeuw and van den Berg, 2011). Performance measurement was seen as not a goal in itself, but should be for performance improvement (Sole, 2009). Combining these gives a potential operations performance management process of monitoring information; identifying gaps; making decisions; seeking improvements; and taking action.

Looking at people performance management (B), middle managers setting clear goals; communication; and human resources management, were more likely to lead to performance than leadership or resource management activities (Johansen and Hawes, 2016). This was consistent with broader research about managers in general (Medlin and Green Jr., 2009; Perry, Mesch and Paarlberg, 2006). The people performance management process entailed setting performance goals, measuring performance, providing feedback, including conducting performance appraisals (Cho and Lee, 2012). How managers did this had an impact on employees' perceptions of the justice of these practices and their trust in the organisation (Farndale, Hope-Hailey and Kelliher, 2011). The only connection between operations performance management and people performance management, was a few papers (D) which found that operations performance management results were a useful way to engage staff (Baird, Su and Munir, 2018; Bourne et al., 2013; de Leeuw and van den Berg, 2011).

Looking at the impact of middle managers' behaviours on employees' behaviours (C), their support for their employees (Knies and Leisink, 2014a, 2014b), or a consultative leadership style (Stoker, 2006) resulted in higher levels of commitment. Middle managers who used transformational behaviours helped employees to reach their collective goals (Para-González, Jiménez-Jiménez and Martínez-Lorente, 2018). Once again, these were examples of the link between behaviours and employees' performance identified more generally for managers.

Managers who improved employees' optimism and recognised good performance, built their confidence and so their performance (Consiglio et al., 2016; Miraglia, Alessandri and Borgogni, 2015). Similarly, when managers involved, empowered, engaged and communicated with their employees, they

were well informed, able to have confidence in making decisions and therefore performed better (e.g. (Fernandez and Moldogaziev, 2013; Kim and Schachter, 2015)). Creating a work environment where staff felt safe to express themselves was also important (Gruman and Saks, 2011).

An important finding was the importance of relationships of trust between employees and their managers (e.g. (Gottfredson and Aguinis, 2017; Hassan and Hatmaker, 2015; Liccione, 2005)). Managers deliberately used transformational leadership behaviours to influence and enhance their followers' perceptions of the quality of this relationship (Gottfredson and Aguinis, 2017). Managers' leadership behaviours aimed to build trust, respect and mutual obligation (Hassan and Hatmaker, 2015). The most effective managers were able to balance managing the potentially opposing values of managing the task and managing the relationship (Liccione, 2005). When the supervisors were perceived to be fair and trustworthy, there was higher employee performance (Mushonga, Thiagarajan and Torrance, 2014). When employees perceived that their employer valued them, they were motivated to be more positive and work harder, which led to higher performance (e.g. (Alfes et al., 2013)).

Moving now to the literature about middle managers, there was a little remarked upon activity of middle managers in engaging direct with frontline staff (Smith, Plowman and Duchon, 2010; Styhre and Josephson, 2006; Vie, 2010). The middle managers spent time identifying opportunities for improvements, finding out what people were concerned about, wanted to be accessible (Smith, Plowman and Duchon, 2010); they maintained contact, had lunch with them, saw good relationships with staff as important (Styhre and Josephson, 2006). The time spent on observational tours ranged from two to ten hours a week (Vie, 2010).

These activities bore a strong resemblance to the relationship-building activities identified in the performance management literature: involving and engaging; creating an environment where staff felt safe to express themselves building relationships of trust and respect; showing staff they were valued were all seen to have a positive impact on performance (Fernandez and Moldogaziev, 2013;

Gottfredson and Aguinis, 2017; Gruman and Saks, 2011; Hassan and Hatmaker, 2015; Kim and Schachter, 2015).

The middle managers' roles in sense-making and sense-giving were well documented in the literature but were discussed in isolation to any other part of their role (Ahearne, Lam and Kraus, 2014; Radaelli and Sitton-Kent, 2016; Riege and Zulpo, 2007; Rouleau and Balogun, 2011). Middle managers adapted the strategy to fit their work unit (Ahearne, Lam and Kraus, 2014). They created the environment for the changes and worked to gain commitment; able to set the emotional tone because they understood subordinates' organisational lives (Radaelli and Sitton-Kent, 2016). They used conversations with staff to show them they were valued and to gain their commitment (Rouleau and Balogun, 2011). They interpreted and evaluated the changes and produced the interventions necessary to align organisational action with strategic intent (Neto and Lavarda, 2017).

There was no consistent definition of what constituted a middle manager (Ouakouak, Ouedraogo and Mbengue, 2014). Some literature used such a wide definition of middle manager that in a large organisation it would include up to five levels, from a junior middle manager two up from the frontline and responsible for 50 staff, to a senior middle manager reporting to the board, responsible for 2,000 (Huy, 2011), while others used managers responsible for a particular unit (Bourne, Kennerley and Franco-Santos, 2005; Smith, Plowman and Duchon, 2010; Styhre and Josephson, 2006; Vie, 2010).

At the same time, despite literature that demonstrated the importance of managers beyond the employee's direct line manager (Dalal, Bashshur and Credé, 2011; DeChurch et al., 2010; Melián-González, Bulchand-Gidumal and López-Valcárcel, 2015; Meneghel et al., 2016), the performance management literature was focussed on the dyadic relationship between a manager and their direct reports.

The question I set out with was: What do public sector middle managers do to manage performance? The separate performance management literature domains each offered useful insights into the different processes and the role of managers, but with little detail about managers' activities of performance management. Literature about managers' behaviours and about what middle managers did indicated a potential overlap, with a role for middle managers in engaging frontline staff as part of building trusting relationships.

This question has therefore been supplemented with two sub-questions for the research: *How do they manage operational performance?* and, *To what extent do they engage frontline staff?*

The broad definitions of middle manager in the literature have been shown to cover too many different management roles, and so this research will focus on the middle management role at a specific point in the hierarchy.

3 RESEARCH APPROACH

This chapter describes the research approach. It sets out the research questions; describes the research design and the reasons for its selection; describes the interview approach and interviewees; and sets out the principles of the analysis approach.

Chapter one argued for the importance of developing our understanding of the mechanisms of performance management in the public sector and especially the role of the middle manager.

Chapter two identified that the literature has very little say about this role. Although much had been written on public sector performance management, there had been a focus on the principles of New Public Management (e.g. (Hood, 1991)) and much less about how performance management might improve government effectiveness. Across all sectors, there was literature on operational performance management, people performance management, managers' behaviours and employees' performance and on what middle managers do, but little that combined all three.

The aim of this research is to build on these fragmented findings to date, asking what kind of performance management practices do the middle managers undertake?

3.1 Research questions

The revised research question that came from the literature review was:

RQ1: What do middle managers do to manage performance?

With two sub-questions:

RQ1a: What do they do to manage operational performance? and

RQ1b: Do they engage frontline staff and if so, why?

3.2 Research philosophy

My education in the 1970s was firmly Positivist. However, in the years and decades since then, the philosophical debate has developed, and I have become aware that there is no neat simplicity where there is one truth and all one needs to do is observe and measure to reach it. Different people can observe the same phenomenon and, because of their own frame of experience, will interpret what they see differently.

I have a social constructionist worldview (Huff, 2009), based on Idealist ontological assumptions, where “social reality consists of shared interpretations that social actors produce and reproduce as they go about their everyday lives” (Blaikie, 2009, p.17) and social constructionism epistemological assumptions, based on the view that we develop this knowledge through conceptualising and interpreting our own and others’ actions and experiences, based on our experience, personality and circumstances.

In this chapter, I describe how the research strategy was selected, based on this worldview and based on the need to explore and find out more about a topic where little is known.

I then go on to describe the research method and justify why this approach was chosen; how this research was operationalised; including ethical considerations, a description of the data collection, information about the interviewees, analysis of the data and finally validity and reliability.

3.3 Research strategy

The development of a research strategy requires the researcher to be clear about how their worldview will have an impact on their approach to the research, analysis and development of findings (Huff, 2009). Without this clarity, there is a risk that differences in ontological (what exists) and epistemological (how we can know what exists) assumptions could lead to disagreements about a subject (Huff, 2009). There is also a risk that some research designs will not work with some philosophical stances. As Blaikie (2009) points out, choices about how to approach the research will depend upon the type of research question; the

research strategy; the researcher's stance and the research paradigm based on assumptions about reality and how it can be studied.

A social constructionist worldview has an idealist ontology and a constructionism epistemology; the idealist believes that people create and maintain meanings and interpretations and in a constructionist epistemology, knowledge comes from people interpreting and making sense of their encounters (Blaikie, 2009). This means that different cultures are likely to have different constructions of social reality; there are no absolute truths and so social scientists cannot make observations without interpreting them from their own knowledge and past experiences (Blaikie, 2009).

This research is seeking to discover and describe characteristics of what middle managers do to manage performance. Since this is such an under-researched area, the aim is to hear from the middle managers themselves how they describe their role and produce a framework, rather than test a model of how performance management operates at the middle management level. This is an abductive research strategy, which fits well with a social constructionist epistemology (Blaikie, 2009).

An abductive research strategy starts with understanding and discovering how the social actors conceptualise and give meaning to their world then describing the activities and meanings and deriving categories and concepts to explain the issue (Blaikie, 2009). These everyday activities are based on tacit knowledge and so the researcher needs to help the social actors to reflect so that they can find and express their meanings and theories (Blaikie, 2010).

3.4 Research method

The research sought to understand the role of middle managers in performance management through their own accounts of how they managed performance. The lack of previously developed theory around their role with front-line staff meant that generalisability was less important than gathering in-depth knowledge.

The aim was to provide a rich picture of the middle managers' role in managing performance, and from this to develop some general principals. As a piece of constructionist research with this aim, an instrumental case study was selected as the appropriate approach (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson, 2008).

Qualitative research was selected since it enables the researcher to gain an integrated overview of the system under review; to capture data from the inside; it allows a balance between structured questions and the flexibility to pursue lines of discussion where they seem to be relevant (Miles and Huberman, 1994). Other approaches that might have been used were action research, diary studies or quantitative questionnaires. In action research, the researcher is often a member of the community or of the organisation or has previously worked with them and so is known and trusted. While this has the advantage of co-creating solutions with the organisation being studied, the results are even more difficult to generalise. Quantitative research would have required more specific knowledge of the performance management activities; it risked managers giving what they thought would be the right answer; and it did not allow for any exploration or discussion with the manager about why they had given their answers. A diary study, using regular prompts and questions via a smart-phone app, would have been useful to provide supplementary data on how the middle managers spent their time but would have required a level of cost, set up time and management not commensurate with the value of the information. As a study on its own, it had been done before (Vie, 2010), but without the technology, and so would not have contributed any new information, especially not insights into why middle managers do what they do.

Although using qualitative research allowed a degree of professional distance from the interviewees and the subject, it is also important to recognise that as a member of the broader community of public sector operations managers, who had managed large operational organisations, it was not possible for me to avoid having at least some influence on the interviewees and therefore, potentially, how they answered my questions.

The research strategy of an exploratory approach, looking for rich context meant that the qualitative interviews needed to have a minimum of structure (Miles and Huberman, 1994). Interviews can be complex and so the time they take can be underestimated (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson, 2008). The analysis can also be much more difficult (Miles and Huberman, 1994). This led to some structure being required for interview approach, to help bound the data collection, for the benefit of this inexperienced researcher and to help the interviewees to reflect on the concepts being discussed rather than simply end up with vague banalities (Miles and Huberman, 1994). The semi-structured approach also allowed sufficient flexibility to follow useful lines of enquiry and allowed the conversation to flow rather than be constrained by pre-determined parameters.

The in-depth interviews were held in meeting rooms on the site where the middle managers worked. This semi-natural setting was helpful in encouraging the interviewees to focus on their role and made it convenient for them to step away from their busy jobs to reflect for a while on why they do what they do.

There are disadvantages to qualitative research methods where interviewees are asked to report on their behaviour and to explain their reasons. There is a risk of a gap between what they say and what they do in practice – we might hear more about what they would like to do rather than what they actually do (Blaikie, 2010). It is also possible that some interviewees are more able to be reflective, or those who have to work hard at a capability might be more able to describe what they do than an interviewee for whom this is a well-developed skill and therefore less conscious action or skill (MindTools.com, 2018).

To minimise differences in responses and attitudes due to differences in organisation culture, a single, operationally focussed, central government organisation was sought. Personal experience has shown that there can be differences in management characteristics in different geographical locations and so this required an organisation with sufficient middle managers at a single location.

A cross-sectional study is interested in capturing what is taking place in the present rather than being able to look over a period of time as in longitudinal

research (Blaikie, 2010). Although it has disadvantages in considering changes over time, it is a useful approach for exploratory and descriptive studies (Blaikie, 2010).

3.5 The organisation (GovDep)

The case study organisation, referred to here as GovDep, is a division of one of the large, operational, central government departments. This organisation is responsible for casework that arrives as electronic or paper files; they also deal with enquiries from members of the public and businesses.

There are 30 middle managers who, with their frontline managers and frontline staff reporting to them, are responsible for the operational delivery of the casework. These middle managers are grouped into five teams, each led by a senior operations manager (at civil service Grade 7).

In the mid-2000s, GovDep acted as an early pilot organisation for a change programme which substantially altered the way in which performance was managed; combining process improvements with leadership and management development, to improve business performance and staff engagement.

3.6 Operationalisation of the research

The head of GovDep was approached about the research and this resulted in a meeting with one of the Director Generals, who agreed to the research being undertaken.

I was keen to find a unit to study where I could minimise differences in organisational culture. From my own experience, the culture of different operating units, and even of the same units based in different locations, could vary. Also, since the role and responsibilities would be different at different organisational levels, I wanted to look at a single layer of managers. I wanted as homogeneous a group as I could get, so that differences were more likely to be due to internal differences in style rather due to differences in the culture of the organisation or in the responsibilities at different levels.

To find a department with sufficient managers for my sample who were doing similar work and were based in a single location, meant it needed to be a large operational unit.

The first stage, therefore, was to conduct exploratory interviews with middle managers in an operational government department, with the aim of understanding the department and the work done at different management levels, so that I could be clear about which units I could potentially work with. After an initial problem with being able to identify and interview middle managers with operational roles rather than technical expertise, I was able to interview four Senior Executive Officers (SEO) with operational responsibilities. These interviews provided useful information about the different types of teams, where they were located and how the team management worked. I found out that the SEO managers were being phased out and the managers at the next level below, the Higher Officers, were the people I would need to interview. Following my discussion with them about my criteria, the government department identified a suitable operations division and a manager there to be my single point of contact.

The interviewees were middle managers in this division, all at a civil service grade Higher Officer (HO). The department operated what was referred to as the “centurion model” where the aim was that case workers were in teams of 10 reporting to an “O Band” manager and 10 of the O Band managers reported to the middle managers. In reality of course, the teams were of varying sizes with many people working a range of part-time hours. These HO middle managers reported to a Grade 7 manager, who reported to a Grade 6 manager. In all there are seven layers between the front-line staff and the head of the government department.

Interviewees were recruited through a series of emails, sent initially by the department contact and then by me. Take-up was slow at first, with only seven interviewees identified. I decided to start with these seven and to hold face-to-face briefing sessions to encourage more of the middle managers to volunteer. There was a risk that no more would come forward but, once other managers had more information or heard about the interviews, they did volunteer, so that 24 of

the 30 department middle managers were eventually interviewed. However three were not responsible for large teams and one tape recording failed. Of the six I was not able to interview, five were not available on the days offered because of holidays or part-time working arrangements and one refused, saying she was too busy. All 30 managers provided me with their age and so I was able to compare the interviewees' demographics with those for the population of the department managers. Those who declined were all women, but a mix of ages; and so for this qualitative research, this was not a concern, since I had a good coverage of the range of ages and gender.

The middle managers were told that their participation in the study was voluntary and I am satisfied that this was the case. Some people did refuse to attend; I spoke to them on the phone or we exchanged e-mails, and there was no inkling from them that any pressure was being put on them to take part. The coordinating manager in GovDep was the same management level and so could not exert any hierarchical power to influence them to attend. During my first visit I invited managers to briefings so they could find out more and I had an impression that some of the earlier interviewees had fed back to colleagues that it had been an interesting experience.

There was a question about whether the later interviewees or those not interviewed were different in any way to those who volunteered at the beginning. I kept an interview tracking sheet in Excel, about who had been invited; which contact they responded to; and whether or not they accepted. The demographic and classification data collected during the interviews were added. I compared the demographics of those who had responded at each stage of contact and between those who were interviewed and the population as a whole. There were no differences between those who volunteered earlier or later.

Four middle managers were interviewed but their data not used in the final report: three managed small numbers of staff and one interview recording failed halfway through.

3.7 Interviews

The purpose of the interviews was to explore in depth with the middle managers how they viewed their role in managing performance. I wanted to hear their voice; to understand what they did to manage performance; and to find out how well they knew their frontline staff.

The interviews were conducted during three separate two-day visits to GovDep in February, March and April 2015. They were held in meeting rooms in the offices of GovDep and took between one hour and one hour 15 minutes each.

The interviews were recorded with the interviewees' permission. Confidentiality was assured by numbering the interviews and not recording names. These numbers were then randomly assigned to a letter in the alphabet from A to X, with these letters used to identify the interviewee throughout this paper.

Qualitative interviewing requires preparation, impression management, building rapport, maintaining control of the interview, listening and questioning skills (Gray, 2009). To achieve these: I set up the seating in the meeting rooms to be informal and used an informal approach. I read local newsletters to gain more local knowledge and took care to provide a friendly but professional impression. At the start of the interviews I explained what I was researching and took time to chat informally with the interviewees, to build rapport. At the end of the interviews I asked for feedback and most people said that it had been easy to talk, and they had enjoyed the opportunity to reflect on their work.

The research protocol (see Appendix B.1) shows the questions around the themes of background, what the job entails, engaging front-line staff, challenges and enablers. The questions asked were designed to prompt the middle managers to think about and discuss their approaches and attitudes to managing the performance of their teams. The aim was to encourage their reflection on their role and how they undertook it. This meant asking them to make apparent, actions and activities that they undertook, possibly without having previously thought about it consciously.

In terms of questioning, therefore, I started with some straightforward background questions about where the manager worked and who they managed. I then moved into finding out about their role by asking how they knew their teams were performing. This first part of the interview was more factual and so an effective way to ease the interviewees into the discussion. To address how they managed individuals' performance I started with a factual question about how many high performing managers they had and how many they were concerned about. I then asked the middle managers to compare and contrast these high and low performers.

To find out how well they knew their frontline staff, I initially wanted to avoid asking the direct question, since there was a risk of leading the responses. So the questions were again focussed on how many high and low performing frontline staff they had and the difference between these two groups. While half of the interviewees moved into discussing how they engaged their frontline staff, without the need for prompting, I did not get the information about how well they knew staff. The question was therefore asked as a challenge: by saying, "*it must be difficult to get to know so many people*", I was able to get a broad range of responses.

When conducting interviews for qualitative research, the interviewer needs to be able to help interviewees to explore their own beliefs (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson, 2008); building trust, using sensitivity to probe answers, able to listen without projecting their own opinions. Techniques to support this approach were therefore used in these interviews. These included use of silence to let the interviewee think and come back with more, using active listening techniques to reflect back what has been said to prompt further discussion, using questioning techniques, such as laddering, to encourage a move from the factual to the more reflective answers (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson, 2008).

In semi-structured interviews it may also be helpful to vary the question order and phrasing and to share similar experiences or to let the interview flow (Gray, 2009). This is a challenge, to allow the conversation to flow and at the same time to cover most of what was planned. Towards the end of the interview I found it

was helpful to pause and explain I wanted to check my list of questions to make sure I had covered all the areas.

To check coverage of the questions with interviewees, the questions were coded into NVivo from the transcripts and a matrix report produced. Where the question had not been asked, I checked the transcripts to see if the answer had been volunteered, without prompting. Appendix B.2 shows this analysis, produced in interviewing order rather than the interviewee code, to check for any patterns in questioning or responses over the research period. This table shows that most interviewees provided information for most questions and there was little difference between interviews that came earlier or later in the schedule. Coding the questions and then comparing how they were asked across interviews was also useful as reflective learning about the techniques. Some questions, such as “how do you know how your teams are performing?” had little variation. Others, for example, about the characteristics of high or low performing front-line staff were more different:

When I interviewed the GovDep middle managers, my worldview, experience, interest and expertise all came into the room with me. My coaching experience allowed me to “turn down” the senior manager demeanour, and to ask open questions, but the middle managers would have had some (if vague) idea that I was known to their senior management.

Reflecting on my interviewing techniques, there were occasions when I found it difficult to switch off the coaching. Or to avoid making evaluations of the middle managers’ capabilities on the basis of my observations. Being aware of this would help me to improve my technique another time. Through my checks on the data collected, I am reassured that these did not adversely impact the analyses. Awareness of the tendency to evaluate meant that I was more careful to check for any potential bias during the coding and analysis.

Managers came to the interviews with their own perceptions and perspectives. It is likely that many had spoken to each other about the interview and would have had some idea about what they would be asked. This meant that later interviewees found the questions I had about the numbers of staff they had easier

to answer. There were no differences between earlier and later interviewees in how the more philosophical questions were answered.

3.8 Interviewees

A list of the interviewees and their characteristics, along with summary demographic data, is at Appendix C.1. The 20 interviewees represented all the categories of the data, and so there was a good coverage of the characteristics of the middle managers in GovDep.

	Under 46 years		46 to 55 years		Over 55 years		Not known		Totals	
Interviewed?	Y	N	Y	N	Y	N	Y	N	Y	N
Female	5	1	6	3	4	-	-	2	15	
Male	2	-	2	-	5	-	-	-	9	-
Totals	7	1	8	3	9	-	-	2	24	6
	8		11		9		2		30	

Table 3-1 Distribution of interviewees by age and gender

Table 3-1 (above) shows the distribution of the final interviewees and non-interviewees by age and gender. This table demonstrates that the final set of middle managers' interviews covered all the age and gender categories. Further demographic characteristics are discussed in chapter six.

3.9 Selecting the approach to analysing the transcripts

Grounded theory is an approach to developing theory by comparing differences in responses about the same process: a cycle of analysis and constant comparisons (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson, 2008). Instead of starting out with a theory and seeking it in the data, the theory is allowed to emerge; giving a flexible approach which can provide insights from different sources (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson, 2008).

A grounded approach was selected for this study, since it is based on a constructionist worldview and there was plenty of data from the in-depth interviews and little prior knowledge from the literature. However, there are two roots to the development of grounded theory, based on differing philosophical

and methodological stances which are useful to review and, for a few moments, to reflect on how they compare with this study. Glaser avoids all presuppositions, allowing ideas to emerge whereas Strauss and Corbin see understanding the literature as an important previous step (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson, 2008). My own approach started with a more constructionist worldview: after a career in performance management it is impossible for me to avoid pre-supposition and probably unrealistic to expect all of them to be conscious (and therefore possible to put aside), rather than unconscious.

The coding was a mix of the two approaches: initially it was emergent, and so the lower levels of coding remain close to the interviewees' experiences. However, the grouping and labelling of the top-level codes were most definitely influenced by a re-reading of the literature and a deliberate refreshing of the searches to find out how the data and theory would interact. This, from my perspective, has provided the opportunity to represent the voice of the middle managers, rather than impose current knowledge. At the same time the connection with the current knowledge has provided opportunities to develop theory from the interaction between understanding what the middle managers were discussing and what is already known.

3.10 Coding and analysis

Interview recordings were securely uploaded to the transcription service and, when returned, transcripts were loaded into NVivo, a qualitative data analysis computer software package. For the first review, recordings were listened to, to keep in mind the voice of the interviewees. Transcripts were reviewed, reflected upon and re-read.

Transcripts were coded after each of the three two-day interview sessions. The coding aimed to capture the topics being mentioned by the middle managers. Coding was an iterative process of reviewing content, allocating to an existing code, or creating a new one. After each batch of interviews, the coding was reviewed and grouped. This process of grouping and checking continued, merging topics and themes where they were felt to overlap, checking labels to

ensure they captured the content well. Codes were then grouped into broader topics, with up to five levels of coding.

The coding was a lengthy and iterative process. As more was understood about the themes, it was possible to either group them or to code in further detail. Coding was reviewed regularly: codes with few references were checked to see if they might be merged into a similar code; codes with many references were checked for sufficient identification and separation of topics. The coding structure was saved after each batch of interviews and at points in the analysis, so that the evolution of the coding could be retained.

Within each of the top-level themes were up to five levels of topics and sub-topics. Table 3-2 below shows how these levels relate to each other and the labels applied to them. The number of levels reflect the amount of content that was coded and has enabled detailed analysis of how different middle managers talked about the themes and topics.

Level of coding	Label	Example
Level 1	Main theme	How MM manage performance
Level 2	Sub-theme	Monitor performance
Level 3	Topic	Review performance data
Level 4	Sub-topic	Measures
Level 5	Detail of content	KPI cases per day

Table 3-2 Levels of coding

3.11 Quality assurance of the approach

A study conducted to a constructionist design has to be believable, with transparency in how an organisation was accessed, how informants were selected, how data was collected, recorded, analysed and used to develop ideas and explanations (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson, 2008).

Constructionist research should be able to show that the study had been able to access the subjects' experiences (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson, 2008).

This is demonstrated by having interviewed 24 of the 30 managers; and through the open questions asked during the interviews.

As well as questions about how they managed performance, the middle managers were given plenty of opportunities to discuss issues and activities that they thought were important. Questions were asked about what helped or hindered the managers in their role and the final question asked them if there was anything they would like to add. Some had little to add while others had more to contribute. The ranges in responses also provide confidence that their experiences had been accessed.

Conclusions

This study, based on a social constructionist worldview, successfully conducted and analysed twenty in-depth interviews, which resulted in a rich data-set.

The semi-structured interviews elicited a wide range of responses while providing sufficient structure for the middle managers to be supported in their reflections and discussions. I was happy with the approach I used in asking open questions and using active listening techniques to get the depth of answers. Occasionally I fell into a coaching mode, which, with this experience, could be more easily avoided another time.

At times the analysis, using a grounded approach, seemed long and burdensome. As the data became clearer, the coding had to be re-addressed, in many iterations. It is not an approach to be undertaken lightly and it was reassuring to discover that the feelings of being lost during the sensemaking process are part of the social constructionist approach. With persistence, it has delivered some great and unexpected insights, which are discussed in the following chapters four, five and six.

4 FINDINGS: PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

The analysis of the twenty in-depth interviews with the GovDep middle managers elicited a great deal of information about the middle managers' performance management activities, which are discussed in this chapter.

There was also plenty of data about they described themselves and how they viewed the attributes their frontline managers and staff, which are discussed in chapters five and six.

This chapter starts with a short section setting the context to the work undertaken by GovDep. Then the findings have been grouped according to the main themes from the analysis about their role in managing performance, which are: overseeing performance; managing, coaching and developing their frontline managers; engaging directly with frontline staff and managing change.

4.1 Setting the context – GovDep and managing performance

This section provides a short context to the work undertaken by GovDep: it describes the processes of managing case-working operations in general and explains some of the terms that were used by the middle managers, that are in the quotes from them.

4.1.1 Managing case working

Much of the operational work of government is in deciding cases from individuals and businesses. This includes issuing passports or driving licences, making immigration decisions, collecting taxes or paying benefits (GOV.UK, 2019).

In GovDep, there were around 25 different types of cases, often requiring different knowledge and skills to be able to work on them and each with its own performance standards. In general terms, the key management task was to ensure cases were considered and an appropriate response made. These decisions and responses needed to meet a set of quality criteria (e.g. correct decision, correct process, data entered on system, response sent); and be

completed on time to meet an internal turnaround time target (such as 95% responses within three weeks of receipt).

The planning department forecast how many cases are expected and have statistics on how long each will take to respond to and so the staffing requirement can be calculated to meet these. Everything is in equilibrium as long as the target number of cases per day is being achieved, to the right quality; work volumes stay the same; and staffing levels are as planned.

Poor quality of the work can mean incorrect decisions, or poor records, or responses that generate more queries and so more work. Higher volumes, more complex cases, fewer staff, or lower productivity will all lead to the turnaround target not being met and, before long, backlogs build up. Backlogs in casework cause as many management challenges as the more visible backlogs of (for example) passengers at an airport after an incident such the drones at Gatwick (BBC, 2019).

4.1.2 Key terms

As with any job, terms used every day become abbreviated, or a single word is used as a shorthand to describe something that to a newcomer would take a sentence or two. The civil service manages by its grade structure and so staff would regularly talk about workers or managers by their grade. There were performance measures and operational performance management terms with particular meaning to the middle managers. Similarly there were terms around the performance appraisal processes worth a quick explanation. So this section provides context on talking about staff and management; operational performance management; and people performance management.

Monitoring performance followed a quite prescriptive process set down by the department. Each team had a whiteboard on which performance figures and any issues were entered each hour throughout the day. These were summarised for the middle manager on their HO whiteboard.

Each team met at 10:00 each morning to review the figures on the whiteboard – hence it was called the board meeting – to discuss the previous day's

performance. At 10:30 the frontline managers met their middle managers to discuss the results for their teams. The middle managers used these meetings to familiarise themselves with the performance, to challenge the figures where there were unusual results and to prepare themselves for the challenge from their Grade 7 managers at their twice-weekly performance review meeting.

Term used	Abbreviation	What it means
Key Performance Indicator	KPI / PI	Throughput measure: number of cases per day expected for a worker or team
Post Quality Review	PQR	Total elapsed time from receipt of case to work completed – i.e. the time taken from receipt to when the quality review is done.
Staff utilisation		How many hours a worker is on cases compared with total hours worked.
Staff productivity		How many cases worked compared with the KPI.
Whiteboard		Board visible to the team for recording each team's hourly performance
HO whiteboard		Middle manager's board for recording hourly team performance figures
Board meeting		Daily team performance meetings held around the whiteboard
Higher Officer Data Capture	HODC	Performance report: calculated number of cases expected to be done for the week (number of hours expected to be worked times KPI) compared with actual daily performance.
Hub meeting	Hub	Performance meeting for middle managers with their manager: held twice weekly.
Workload		Used to describe the work and/or team for a case type: "I went out to every workload to ask for..."
Surge management (also known as flexing)		Teams trained to work on a range of cases, or to handle phone calls so that they could support work where a backlog had built up a or where there were seasonal changes in demand.
Telephony		Handling incoming calls from the public, rather than working on paper / electronic case files.

Table 4-1 Operational management terms and what they mean

There are many short-hand terms used by the managers to talk about their work, especially when talking about the performance standards (Table 4-1).

Term used	Abbreviation	What it means
Administrative Assistant	AA	The most junior level of worker, mainly being phased out, average salary £17,000 ² pa
Administrative Officer	AO	Core case-working staff, average salary £19,000 pa
Officer	O band manager	Frontline manager/team leader average salary £24,000 pa
Higher Officer	HO	Operations management - 1 st level of middle management, average salary £30,000 pa
Grade 7	Grade 7	Senior operations management, HOs report to, average salary £50,000 pa

Table 4-2 Staff grades and what they mean

The civil service talk about sets of people by their grade, which sounds strange to outsiders, but which does act as a useful shorthand once you understand the context. So it would be quite typical to talk about “the Grade 7 managers”, or “the O-band managers”, when explaining what a particular level of management does to manage an issue, or who attends which meetings.

Table 4-2 sets out the different grades, the abbreviations used, and the sort of work done. Since these grades mean little outside the civil service, average salaries have been provided to help relate these levels to work in other sectors.

Teams consisted of up to 10 frontline staff³ (mainly at Administrative Officer and some at Administrative Assistant level) managed by a frontline manager (O-band). Each middle manager (Higher Officer) would then manage 10 frontline managers and reported to the Grade 7 manager. The Grade 7 and their (Grade

² Average salaries (Institute for Government, 2018b)

³ These are averages for full time working and so the actual numbers varied considerably due to the ranges of working hours at each level.

6) managers were the senior operations roles, after which the levels were in the Senior Civil Service, from deputy director to permanent secretary.

Term used	Abbreviation	What it means
Keep in touch	KiT	One-to-one meeting between employee and their manager
Performance management review	PMR	Annual performance appraisal cycle
Validation meeting		Annual meeting where managers will meet to justify to their manager the performance gradings given for their members of staff. Used also to moderate and get consistency.
Disability passport		Record of staff assessment for any required adjustments to their work environment or performance standard as a result of disability.

Table 4-3 People performance management terms

There are also the terms used around the human resources management aspects of managing performance (Table 4-3).

4.2 Overseeing performance

The first subject discussed with most interviewees was how they knew their teams were performing. It was a useful concrete topic about reports and processes to help the middle managers in their reflections about what they did to manage performance and why they did it.

Many of the middle managers talked about the processes of performance management, including how they reviewed the performance data, attended daily meetings and reviewed the detail of the frontline staff performance.

Within this activity of overseeing performance, the middle managers talked about monitoring the daily performance, compared with targets set centrally, to identify any performance gaps; understanding the causes of these performance differences, especially any shortfalls, and so identifying what actions they would expect to see in place; supervising their frontline managers' actions in resolving

or mitigating these performance gaps. These three topics are discussed in the subsections below.

4.2.1 Monitoring performance

Virtually all of the middle managers talked about how they monitored performance. They reviewed performance reports, attended the daily meetings with their frontline managers and the twice-weekly meetings reporting up to their managers.

The middle managers reviewed the different reports and performance data, comparing the actual performance with the plan, so that they could discuss the figures with their frontline managers at the daily (white)-board meeting.

“I have all sorts of spreadsheets that are telling me what is going on. I can look at them and know what's being done in the business, and then I use that information to influence my discussions at the board meetings” (G)

While most managers mentioned the cases per day performance standard (KPI), some also mentioned other measures including turnaround time, known as PQR (see Table 4-1), progression (a case progressed but not completed) and quality.

Drawing on the information from the reports, the middle managers would challenge results and ask for explanations.

“[at the 10:30 meeting] I’ve also got my asks in the background. Most of the time they cover them but if they don’t, I’ll say, ‘Well your PI was seven, you actually only hit five. Can you explain to me why you hit five?’ That happens every single day.” (T)

The middle managers then used the information from these meetings to prepare for the twice-weekly performance review meetings with their Grade 7 manager.

“so on a Monday I’m looking at the figures from the previous week, so I would then look at my notes that I had done over the five days and if we’re over, we’d give explanations why. If we were under, I’d give explanations why.” (A)

At this meeting they and their colleagues reported on their performance; what work had come in, what work had been cleared, why a target hadn’t been

achieved, any problems with sickness absence. They expected to be challenged on any performance gaps, and what was being done about them.

“we’ll go and present our stats to our manager at the hub. Then, they’ll come back with any challenges. They might look at it from a different point of view, so they might spot something that we didn’t see, because they’ve got an outsider’s perspective on it.” (K)

Many of the middle managers talked about methods they used to gain their own independent view of what was going on, rather than just relying on the reports and meetings with their managers. The most common approach was to talk to frontline staff to find out what they were doing and what concerns they might have. They either sat among the staff and could hear conversations, or they sought conversations with frontline staff about how things were going. Another way was to attend the meeting the frontline managers had with their staff: the middle managers talked about standing at the back and listening to the discussion. In areas where the work was still in paper files, they mentioned they could visually see how work was progressing.

I use the data on the boards and what we call the HODC, but I actually talk to people, go and sit and talk to them and ask how they’re doing but then link into what’s happening today, ‘What are you doing? Any issues?’ sort of thing. So just a bit of both really, data and face to face. (W)

Some felt there was too much information or that it was too overlapping. There was a sense that the performance management processes had been in place for quite a while and that information demands had grown and needed to be refined.

There’s a lot of duplication; so, there’s a report for this person, a report for that person, and you do wonder what happens to all these reports and does everyone look at them? (K)

In the activity of overseeing performance, the middle managers used the different reports and meetings to identify how the actual performance for the period, often the previous day, compared with the targets that had been set. They would then use this knowledge to understand what had caused these differences.

4.2.2 Identifying the causes of gaps

Having reviewed the performance, the middle managers would then work through any gaps between expected and actual performance, seeking to understand the causes of the gaps.

I can see performance on a daily basis, and I know what results every team should have in, and what they have had in. So based on what they should have had resource-wise, what production they should have got and what they have got, and it gives a KPI. (D)

Task complexity, staff availability, utilisation and productivity were reviewed as key drivers of performance. How did the work coming in compare with what was expected (and therefore planned for)? Were there sufficient staff in that day? Were there sickness or holiday allocation issues? Were those staff, who were in, working on cases? What was going on with their productivity? The middle managers would work through, drilling into detail where necessary, seeking to gain explanations of the issues that seemed reasonable and made sense.

If the work was more complex than anticipated or planned for, the throughput would be slower, and the team would not achieve the target number of cases per day.

[talking about a discussion with a frontline manager] 'normally you clear [number] bits of work a day. Yesterday and the day before, I notice you've been around the [80%] mark, but your utilisation has been high, so that tells me you've had all the staff on process, so what has it been?' [...] It could be, you know, we do get cases that are naturally more complex than others. (K)

Another important driver was staff availability: if too many were on holiday or off sick, then the target cases per day will not be met. One middle manager told of an occasion where he had allowed too many staff to book too many days off between Christmas and New Year. Through some careful negotiation with staff and the union, he had to cancel some of this leave to ensure sufficient staff were available for work.

Sickness absence had historically been a concern to GovDep and so it was closely monitored and managed. It was a common theme in the middle managers' discussions about performance management.

we don't have a lot of short-term absences, but if someone has been off five days, or they have been off three times within a 12-month period you need to have that conversation to say they are heading for a level where that attendance is not acceptable. [...] we've had at least five or six people who have had six months off sick, so that just takes everybody's quota off all in one go. (G)

Even once staff were at their desk, there was still a further challenge of how much time they were working on cases, referred to as staff utilisation. While there was an expectation that some time would be lost each day to meetings or training, utilisation that was lower than planned would mean the team completed fewer cases than the performance standard.

I may know prior to a particular day that the stats are going to be low, or the utilisation's going to be low, because the manager has taken a team out for a training event, or they've taken them out for a two-hour team meeting. (K)

They might have been in a meeting about their sickness absence, or in their appraisal meeting.

how much is our utilisation down? Why? I've just been doing it this morning. How much time have I lost on HR? (V)

Or someone may have been moved to other work, helping out a team member or deputising for the frontline manager. The loss of time to these activities would reduce the total number of cases that could be completed that day.

if they're under the baseline, 'why are they under the baseline? You must have a reason for them; were they your deputy? Did they have complex cases? Are they a technical person?' Things like that. (U)

Staff productivity was also an important performance driver: if they were completing fewer cases than the target, was it because of their skills or experience of the work? Was there another issue with their performance that

needs to be addressed with them? The middle manager would look at the figures for the team and anonymised data for each individual.

we do discuss what the average KPI is, the ones who are overachieving, but focusing on the ones who are underachieving, and then bringing the PMR process into that.
(C)

The ranges of individual productivity were wide, sometimes with good reason:

a performance indicator is based on an average but there are two or three people I've got who are two or three times over that daily, and there are people who are not. I've also got the other spectrum where people are not even hitting 50% of that
(D)

A new team member might still be inexperienced and so take longer to complete the cases; they might have recently returned from an illness and be given a return-to-work plan that allows time to get back up to speed; they might have an adjustment to their target cases per day due to a disability.

On one of the teams there's about five of them who have got reduced KPIs so that's [...] half the team, can't attain the KPI of the big hitters, or what's expected of everybody. (L)

It may not be an issue with their skills, for example it could have been something at home which was having an impact on performance. The importance to the middle manager is that the frontline manager knows who is performing and who is not; has a clear view of why that performance is not as expected and is putting in place training or support for that member of staff if required.

It could be sometimes it's not that they're underperforming at work, sometimes it can mean there's something outside work that's affecting that. That's your starting point, especially if it's somebody who has in the past performed well and there's a dip, different question to somebody who has never perhaps got up to speed. (F)

Changing workstreams also had an impact on productivity as it could take time to bed-in new skills or to adjust to a new process. It also made it more difficult to assess an individual's performance.

the cyclic nature of flexing means that some individuals and teams can be on a workload for a very short period of time, [so] it's difficult to assess their performance on a particular workload. (R)

If a computer system was unavailable or was running slowly for some reason, or a process is inefficient, then less work could be achieved than planned.

They reckon that the IT is quicker on the weekend because there are less people on it so there's less strain. (C)

For example, a new information technology (IT) system had been implemented for some of the workflow, which had slowed processes down rather than speeding them up.

It's a much longer process but we don't really understand why it takes so long. So that's a bit of an issue. So their productivity has gone down (N)

In case of another system, the team had to share a workflow queue and so items were being missed until they had already gone over their target completion dates. Some of the computers were not configured for some of the systems, causing access issues. In each of these cases, the middle managers' role was to identify, escalate and follow up the issue to resolution.

The issues for work processes tended to be more about middle managers identifying opportunities for improvements in processes and therefore throughput or quality.

Having used the reports and meetings to find out about what performance has been achieved, described in the previous section, the middle managers then worked through the causes of any performance gaps as described above. They considered whether there had been any differences in task complexity, or in staff availability or utilisation or whether something had affected their productivity. By understanding what has caused the shortfall in performance, the middle managers could identify what mitigating actions they would expect to be in place and to supervise these, discussed below.

4.2.3 Supervising delivery

The middle managers reviewed the performance gaps with the relevant frontline manager to understand what they were doing about it. What did they consider to be the causes of the gaps? Were their explanations reasonable? Did they appear to be on top of the reasons? Were their follow up actions what would be expected? Were these actions being done and having the appropriate impact?

So, I will say to a manager, 'Look, I've noticed this on all the workloads, this person, who is that?' and they say, 'That's so and so just come back off sick leave. We're putting a lower measurement in for them' - fine. 'But how are we working to get them back up?' Fine. 'What about that person?' 'That's so and so and I know that person is quite new to the group and they are less skilled than the others so they're training. So, the expectation is they wouldn't be hitting the same measurement as their colleagues'. (F)

Some middle managers mentioned tackling consistent underperformance through the annual performance management review (PMR) cycle.

Some also mentioned the challenges experienced by frontline managers in managing sickness absence: the processes were complex and less experienced frontline managers needed help in getting the right balance between the paperwork, showing concern and providing support.

It's probably a hard message but it's getting across that if somebody is off [with] cancer, an operation or whatever, when they come back you don't dismiss that they've been off for two months, you are concerned about that absence. So you need to have that discussion and then document it, but also document the support you can put in place. (C)

Some of the middle managers also talked about how they checked up on the quality of the frontline managers' administration, to make sure tasks were being done as expected.

I assurance check things. Probably sounds a bit cruel actually but I never tell them when I'm going to check, so it keeps them on their toes all the time. So, when I do their monthly meetings,

*I'll ask for three elements of their job role to bring in with them.
[...] They never know when I'm going to ask. (S)*

Often this was paperwork that otherwise wasn't seen unless there was a problem, by which time it would be too late.

I need to [...] see what conversations the managers have been having. Because they are supposed to document these conversations as well, and they are supposed to be signed off by the individual that they've done them. (G)

Some of the middle managers had learnt to do this checking from their own managers in the past. Others had learnt the hard way that it couldn't be assumed that this work was being done.

*I [used to] trust them that they're doing it right. There's been a few instances when I've realised that they're not but if I never checked, why would you do it? So I've really stepped up my assurance to say, 'Actually you haven't been doing this right'
(X)*

So in this section, the first of the four main activities in managing performance was discussed: overseeing performance. In this activity, the middle managers talked about how they monitored the performance, using reports, meetings and finding out for themselves by talking to staff. They described the sorts of issues they would consider in why there was a gap between expected and actual performance. A positive gap (i.e. overperformance) would be investigated as well as a shortfall, although the latter would get most attention. The final topic in this section was the activities middle managers described in how they supervised their frontline managers, checking that appropriate mitigating actions were in place and that paperwork was in order.

4.3 Managing, coaching and developing frontline managers

The middle managers managed their frontline managers; setting expectations of what was required, giving feedback, tackling underperformance, helping them develop their skills and capabilities. They also coached them in particular aspects of their work, encouraging them to think for themselves, rather than just giving the answers. They identified development opportunities for them, pushing them

where necessary, and encouraged them to work with colleagues as a team and learn from each other.

Listening to the middle managers talking about the management of the frontline staff, it was sometimes difficult to be clear whether they were talking about their own or their managers' work, as they would speak as if they were implementing the actions rather than supervising their frontline managers.

4.3.1 Managing frontline managers' performance

In talking about what helped the frontline managers to perform, the middle managers discussed the need to be clear about what was required, giving feedback and using the formal performance management processes.

Many of the middle managers talked about the importance of being clear with their frontline managers about their priorities. They described how they explained what was required, checking their understanding, giving clear directions, and making sure they drew on other resources where necessary rather than tackling everything themselves.

I don't mean tell them as instruct them, I mean actually tell them why I need them to do it, explain it, and if they are still not clear, not sure, explain the implications. (D)

For example, one middle manager mentioned how a frontline manager was tackling a staff problem when they should have drawn on the helpline that was available.

a member of staff who had some serious mental health issues, this manager's answer was to take them in a room, sit and talk to them for an hour, they'd be crying. Sometimes their manager would end up crying, but actually we weren't moving forward (F)

They would check acceptance of a target, for example, or set out their expectation of how the frontline manager would undertake a responsibility.

I said [...] 'you must take ownership. [...] It's no good coming to see me or [name] all the time, you've got to do [it]. I'm happy to

help you with that but I'm not going to tell you what to do, that's what your job is.' (W)

Some managers mentioned giving feedback; pointing out where frontline managers' performance was not of the required standard.

part of the PMR process: kind of explaining that 'you signed up to continuous improvement; you signed up to manage your team and at the moment, you're not doing it'. (U)

Or, where necessary, putting in place a formal performance improvement plan.

[I] put a performance improvement plan in place. [...] that manager was devastated, at the beginning didn't recognise those behaviours, actually thought it was my fault [...] that manager now is one of my most proactive and enthusiastic. (F)

4.3.2 Coaching and developing frontline managers

Many of the middle managers mentioned coaching their frontline managers, for example in helping them to develop their capability in dealing with sickness absences.

We've had people off for six months at a time [...] so there is a lot of coaching with the managers who go out [...] and have those conversations with people - around health and wellbeing first and foremost, but then around 'how are we going to get you back to work'. [...] I had to support, [...] coach and counsel her all the way through that process. (G)

Providing coaching takes time and therefore requires an investment of effort from the middle managers in the short-term, with the aim that in the longer term the frontline managers' skills, expertise and confidence would be improved and they would be able to work with less supervision.

So it's not that I don't want to help them, but it's putting it back on 'well what would you do? What would you think?' For some of them it's just a confidence thing: some of them, they know the answer, they know what to do, but they like to run it by you. (K)

Some middle managers discussed how they encouraged their frontline managers to develop, making sure they were making the best of opportunities that were available.

opportunities had come up and the full-time individuals got them, and she hadn't because she was part-time. [...] I've had to do a lot of work with that to give her the opportunities and put that trust in her, and I think that's turned her around. (G)

Some of the middle managers also mentioned how they would encourage their frontline managers to work with each other. They wanted to create a one-team ethos where frontline managers would share ideas. Using a bit of rivalry to encourage frontline managers to think about their own teams was also mentioned; for example, a frontline manager hearing a colleague praised for the performance of their team.

Then the best thing, when I sit at a meeting and I am talking about it, is then I can sit back because the other managers will start saying 'it is much better if you do it this way.' I can sit back then because they start engaging with each other and bringing each other on (D)

This section gave examples of how the middle managers discussed managing their frontline managers, being clear what was expected of them, giving feedback and, where necessary, moving to a more formal process of a performance improvement plan. In talking about the coaching and development elements of managing the frontline managers' performance, the middle managers described examples of improving knowledge of the sickness absence management process, the need to encourage them to think for themselves rather than just tell them what to do and the importance of encouraging their managers to develop their skills.

4.4 Engaging frontline staff

Most of the middle managers talked about how they spent time engaging with frontline staff. They saw this as an important part of their work, creating opportunities to find out for themselves what was going on at the frontline and taking time to communicate with staff. Some talked about a more strategic

purpose of wanting to be seen as human and approachable; that building this relationship would contribute to staff performance.

4.4.1 How frontline staff were engaged

The middle managers had a wide range of approaches to making sure they regularly engaged directly with their frontline staff, from a chat in a corridor to holding meetings with them.

Most middle managers mentioned taking the opportunity to stop and chat. They made sure they regularly stopped to talk to staff at their desks or used their time in the kitchen while making coffee; or in the smoking area, to chat to staff.

They also sometimes attended the frontline managers' team meetings, to listen to the discussion and be available to answer questions.

I try to go to at least one board meeting every day; a different board meeting, [...] I just go along and stand in the background.
(U)

Many of the middle managers mentioned sitting among their staff and being able to hear what was going on or talking to staff as they walked past. Some middle managers were "hot-desking" - where they sat at any available desk and moved regularly among the different teams' locations.

I'll just say, 'anybody got a spare seat today?' They'll say, 'you can sit there'. I just plonk myself there and log on and then just become part of the team. It gets to the point now where people don't actually think you're sitting on the team, they just accept you. It's the norm. (W)

This was mentioned as being in contrast to previous generations of middle managers, who were hidden away in offices with closed doors.

When I was an O band sometimes the HO used to sit at the top of the room, never really got involved whereas I'm really, really in the hub with the staff. (S)

Some other middle managers mentioned holding forums or formal whole team meetings of 100 staff or more.

sometimes I hold forums with the staff, get 20-30 together, or I hold a whole floor, get 100 together (D)

4.4.2 What they talked about

When asked what topics they discussed with frontline staff, these went from talking about their families and holidays, deliberately to avoid only talking about the work, to getting staff involved in projects and giving their input to what changes might be required to improve the work.

Many of the middle managers mentioned the importance of involving staff in developing solutions or improvements. They talked about making sure staff understood what they were doing, rather than just being told; asking for their ideas, involving them in the performance meetings; finding their own solutions

They're the ones that should be able to see the savings, and the people engagement was: 'well tell us. Come forward. Don't just sit back, and we'll have a look.' [...] people engagement is trying to get them to engage with the job. (O)

One of the managers talked about how this involvement had helped to double the number of cases that could be completed in a day.

It was a slow start, it was, but I've got to say, the buzz is there, and you hear... At the board meetings that I go to now compared to the board meetings that I went to last April, there's a lot more talk. There's a lot more of the staff getting engaged and them talking, which I love. (V)

Another mentioned the difference between frightening staff, by telling them they had to meet the target, and encouraging them to get involved and to be able to ask for help.

I've seen other areas where people are in tears, literally are in tears because they're told, 'You must hit this'. That's great and you get your productivity but really, are people motivated? They're actually probably just quite frightened. I've had people come to me saying, 'I'm really struggling because...' and that's how people manage, that's fine. To me though it's about are you happy at your work? What can you do? Are you involved?

Would you like to be involved? Would you like to have a say?
(X)

Some of the middle managers mentioned listening to staff and their issues, even if that meant the middle manager was in the middle of something else, so that staff felt they were listened to. Letting them let off steam, if necessary, particularly where something was going well, and staff were feeling frustrated.

it's listening to them; I think that is the biggest part of my job when we're bringing on something new or learning something new or getting them to move (V)

A few middle managers talked about making sure it was not just about the work, taking an interest in the staff as people rather than just a resource, talking to them about their lives and families.

I'll have a big chat with some of them, or maybe a joke or something which is topical [...] It depends. Family-orientated; the grandkids. Football; something that's happened. It might be something that they've seen on the TV. Basically just, it could be anything. (O)

Others mentioned the importance of celebrating success, looking at the things that had gone well rather than just focusing on problems. saying "thank-you".

I would say [...] on a Friday, 'Right, we've done this, we've done that. We plan to do this. Well done everybody. Look how far we've come this week. Have a good weekend. Thanks for all your help and all your support this week, look what we've achieved'. (M)

4.4.3 How often middle managers spent time with them

In terms of how often they would spend time engaging frontline staff, there were a wide range of responses: some making sure they spoke with frontline staff every day or every week.

I don't like two days to go without actually walking through the floor myself, if I miss a day, I know I've got to go in the next day (H)

Others struggled to make time every month.

Well it should be a regular thing but it's depending on my workload. I enjoy those things. I love doing that but sometimes your own workload takes you away from that. So I would try and maybe do one a fortnight or something like that or one a month or whatever. (A)

4.4.4 How well they knew frontline staff

When asked how well they were able to get to know so many people, some of the middle managers were adamant that that they knew every individual by name.

I knew every single person. In the morning I would come in and say, 'good morning' and through time you get to know the individuals on the team (M)

Others talked about knowing enough about individual frontline staff to be able to talk to them.

I would know everyone by sight. I wouldn't necessarily know everyone by name. That sounds terrible, but there are so many staff. (K)

4.4.5 Why engage directly with frontline staff?

Why did they spend time engaging with the frontline staff? Given that the middle managers struggled for time to do everything and often felt there were too many meetings and too many emails to deal with, why did they go to so much trouble to do this? They had to go around their frontline managers to spend time with their frontline staff; why not just supervise and coach their frontline managers?

Many of the middle managers mentioned that they could find out what was going on for themselves, particularly about what staff wanted to know.

so, then I'm getting a feel from the shop floor what the staff are raising and what they want to discuss. They can also ask me questions as well which proves very valuable in getting communication across. (L)

Others talked about it being a useful way to check-up on the frontline managers, particularly how well they were managing communication with frontline staff.

I'm testing also the messages that my managers have sent out and my managers know I'm doing that. I'm quite open about that (F)

It also helped the middle managers to have their own unfiltered view of what was going on.

so I can't ever be blinded with science. When the managers come in, I know exactly what their staff members are doing. (S)

It was a useful way for them to get behind the performance reports especially in understanding individuals' performance.

observational, really. Who's picking up the phone? Who's asking questions? Who's sitting and talking to their friend? [...] you get a feel for people who are always on the phones; who are always asking questions. You are your people. (Q)

Some mentioned that by communicating directly with the frontline staff they could ensure that they heard a consistent message.

"so everybody knew, so everybody heard what was happening from me rather than Flossie hear it from Joan. (J)

Using these communications to build enthusiasm was mentioned by a number of the middle managers. They felt that by showing enthusiasm themselves and by encouraging the enthusiasm of the staff, they could create an energy.

I once did a room meeting in another area talking about my work and the work that my teams do. They went, 'Have you forced your staff to train?' I went, 'Nobody in my area is forced to do anything. What happens in my area is my staff get an opportunity to develop'. They just started to laugh, but I do believe that, I do. I think if you go in with a bit of enthusiasm, if you go being excited about it, because I often say to my team, 'Are you excited about this?' and they'll laugh but I do believe that. (F)

Building good relationships with frontline staff was seen as an important aspect of engaging with them. Many of the middle managers talked about the importance of showing they were approachable.

I do have an open-door policy. Rightly or wrongly, I do. I just say, 'if you ever need me just drop me an email. I'll put an invite in my calendar and I'll find some way to come and talk to you about it.' (S)

Some middle managers talked about showing frontline staff that management was interested in them.

people do need you to notice them other than for work. They appreciate that you can remember and took the time out. (A)

Some mentioned the importance of showing that they were human.

Trying to be human with them, especially if the manager says, 'Well, they've been ill.' I was trying to go up to them, obviously not to discuss necessarily their ailment but just to say, 'Well done back. How are you doing? How are you feeling?' just a bit of human contact and to show that management is interested in their wellbeing (L)

Others made the link between engaging staff and improved performance. When questioned further, they made the connection between the relationship with the frontline staff, their feeling valued and motivated, and performance.

if you just purely come in and don't have anything to do with your staff, you can still manage your performance. [...] if you are out there working with your people and they see that, I think they tend to give you a little bit extra [...] they warm to you, trust you (M)

4.4.6 Problems with direct engagement

Many of the middle managers were mindful of the problems of engaging direct with frontline staff. They mentioned risks in undermining their frontline managers by potentially taking over their meetings, or that, by opening up a direct route of communication, that staff could circumvent their own managers.

Staff may also feel the heat of the attention from a middle manager or might feel left out – that others were getting more attention or favourable treatment. Or they might refuse to engage because they were unhappy with an aspect of the management.

The middle managers talked about how they managed to engage successfully, while being mindful of the pitfalls and having strategies to avoid them. They were aware that they needed to treat everyone equally, making sure they visited all teams:

you've got to be careful because if one team sees [you talk with another team], and they think, oh, he's just... So, I've got to try to get around. It's basically getting your face seen. (O)

When they were hearing more about one team, to take that into account when discussing issues with the frontline managers, otherwise they would risk believing there were many issues with a particular team, when it was just that they were hearing more about them.

The only thing we've got to be mindful of, and I've made the mistake before, is because you're sitting in close vicinity to one team you're hearing the talk, so I would say, [...] 'there's a lot of chit-chat going on here in that team', [...] but team 2's probably doing the same, it's just I can't hear them. I learned very quickly that that's probably going on and I can't just pick on one team. (J)

Keeping a direct communication channel open with staff while making sure they didn't just end up managing all the staff issues themselves, required being clear with staff what they would discuss or how they would handle any issues between a member of staff and their manager.

I'll always say to the staff member, 'right, I'll listen to what you say, but the manager's not here. There's two sides to every story, so you either have a chat with me about it and we'll move on, or I need to make sure that the manager listens to your side of the story and has an opportunity to say their side of the story, as well.' (S)

Some managers talked about the issues of knowing staff well and how this led to getting more involved where their line manager should be.

sometimes you get dragged into the staffing issues with people that really the O band should deal with, but you know them. You tend to know your people. (M)

Some also mentioned the importance of being aware of the risks of being too close to people they were managing, a distinction one manager described as being friendly rather than being friends.

you've got to be careful because sometimes you've got to deal with them as well so it's not just about being friends, it's about being friendly. (W)

The middle managers also talked about how their frontline managers felt about this direct engagement. Some of their responses to such concerns tended to be robust: pointing out that they needed to find out what was going on.

Some are okay, some don't like it. They do see it as this over the top of their head and hierarchy and should have gone through me and then it's a conversation, 'Well why don't your staff feel as if they can come through you?' So there's a block somewhere, so we need to put that right. (J)

In this section, the middle managers' role in engaging frontline staff has been discussed. This engagement was seen by all managers as an important activity, which is significant, given their responsibilities and how much of a challenge they found in managing their time.

4.5 Managing change

The last of the four performance management activities that middle managers described was managing change. During the period of the interviews, there were major changes being communicated to staff about their taking on different types of work. There were also smaller corporate change projects, such as systems changes, as well as improvements to the work processes instigated by the middle managers themselves.

4.5.1 Managing local change

The middle managers talked about their own change projects. These were improvements implemented in their own work-unit. One middle manager described how she wanted all her staff in one team to be able to undertake all the types of their work.

what I wanted was everybody to be able to do everything. [...] by multi-skilling all of the teams to be able to do all of the work so if I got a peak in one area of the work, I could flex some of the staff from that workload into there and vice versa. [...] I think it kept the staff quite engaged that they were learning different parts of it, but it also helped them understand how it all connected together. (M)

Others talked about introducing a quality co-ordinator to tackle problems; or changing systems so they could prioritise the work more effectively; or aligning processes.

volunteers from each team and each area, each workload, [came] to me as a working group [...]. [I said] 'If there are lots of things we do and you think why on earth do we do it, I want to know all them.' [...] Because they were AA's they weren't used to being involved in making decisions. [...] I had about 30 odd people involved, [...] I got all the managers to do exactly the same thing from a management perspective. (D)

Some of the improvements were described by middle managers as having made a substantial difference in performance, such increasing throughput or reducing the numbers of staff working on those cases. Others described improving staff engagement or team working.

Our PI in April last year was five, lifted it to eight, lifted it to 10, now it's 12. (I)

The engagement levels were huge because it wasn't me that said you have to do all this; they had actually done it with my coaching. That's one of the biggest successes (D)

4.5.2 Communicating corporate change plans

The middle managers talked about the corporate changes, the impact of these on staff and their reactions. Much of their role was in communicating these changes, including coping with their reactions and engaging staff in why these changes were important.

For the move to answering phone calls, the middle managers were instructed to hold briefing sessions with their staff, at fixed times so that the communications were rolled out consistently. Before going into these meetings, the middle managers needed to understand what the changes entailed and how their teams might be affected. They would also take into account their teams' current exposure to work flexing and their previous experiences of how well changes to their work had been handled. Making sense of the changes and the potential impact on their staff allowed them to explain the changes in context and to make their own decisions about how to balance providing all the information with the risk that it would then change significantly or not be relevant to their teams.

we have done a lot of work behind the scenes as managers, discussing what all the options are and what's going to happen. [...] [I] tell them 'this is the rough outline of the plan, it is a plan, it might change, but this is where we are aiming for'. But again, that goes back to giving them some information up-front and then maybe firming it up later on. If it changes direction, which it could, just tell them about the change (C)

The middle managers used these meetings to set the context for the frontline staff, connecting it to GovDep's vision, explaining what the work was and why they were being asked to do it, making the connections relevant to them.

We talk to them about the vision a lot [...] it's not about the bigger vision for [GovDep] because when you're sitting there you just think, 'Well I'm just one little individual.' [...] when you talk about what difference your group could make in the bigger picture, I think that helped them understand where we were going. (M)

Some talked about relating the work to the customer in some way. They emphasised the need to tailor the message for the staff, so that it felt relevant for them and they could understand their role in the changes.

4.5.3 Handling staff resistance to change

The initial staff reaction to change tended to be very negative and their early reactions could lead to some very difficult meetings. GovDep did not have a good reputation with staff for how previous changes had been managed: their bad

memories of, for example, poor training, had an impact on how they received the news of new changes.

They were horrible. They were absolutely nasty. Not all of them. I think at that particular day there might have been about 50 of them in and there was about eight of them. [The other staff] were stunned because they'd never seen their colleagues react like that before. (A)

The middle managers, given the strength of this reaction, were matter of fact about it and talked about how they supported staff. They did not call it “resistance” and were not exasperated or even negative about it, instead explaining these reactions in terms of how people respond to change generally.

staff have worked on the same process for 20 plus years, [...] They're very, very knowledgeable about their work, but a lot haven't had much insight into other work. So that's why this week is a very trying week, because they're learning something new. (V)

A fear of failure was mentioned as a reason for the anger.

you don't know the work and you don't know the customer, and I think that frightens them. [...] they think they're going to fail. (A)

They also found that after the initial shock and resistance, staff would settle into the new work and might even find themselves enjoying it.

after a couple of weeks they started saying, 'You know, this isn't too bad.' In fact they were saying, 'I quite like it'. [...] most people don't relish change, do they? (T)

4.5.4 Engaging staff in the change

Despite the strength of the reactions, the middle managers emphasised the importance of telling it as it is, rather than glossing over the detail. For example, explaining that some customers would be angry by the time their call was answered; being honest when things were not going to plan.

I wanted [...] just to give that honest overview, that you are going to get the people who have been on the phone for half an

hour and are just happy to get through, so they will be absolutely fine. But you are going to get the people who have been on the phone for half an hour who are furious because they have been waiting, they have got better things to do with their time, and you are going to have to try and calm them down. (G)

As well as the challenge of dealing with the staff reaction to the changes, the middle managers were not in control of the processes and so had to make the best of situations. With staff already feeling fearful and resistant to the changes, any hitches in the training or unexplained changes could quickly escalate. In dealing with these, the middle managers had to find out what was going on and help them to cope with the changes and uncertainties.

keeping everybody motivated, shall we say, is the hardest thing, [...] it's the frustration with the staff, they just want to get the work started and we can't because of little problems here and there. (V)

This section has discussed the last of the four main activities of performance management: the middle managers' role in managing change. There were major changes taking place in how GovDep balanced the staffing of different workloads. and middle managers described how they dealt with these reactions, how staff would settle into the new work and how they dealt with their frustrations as well as the challenges of training or systems not being ready when intended.

Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to understand what middle managers in the public sector do to manage performance; particularly the processes of performance measurement and management and in finding evidence of whether and (if so) how they developed relationships with front-line staff. The research was conducted with a single level of middle manager – those with front-line managers and then front-line staff reporting to them.

Four main groups of activities were identified: ranging from the immediate day-to-day tasks to activities that looked to the longer term.

There was the daily work of overseeing the casework to be done to the required performance standards. To do this, the middle managers used the performance reports and formal processes to find out about the daily performance. However many of them also used informal methods to keep on top of the performance, especially talking to staff to find out what was going on. They reviewed performance gaps, seeking to understand what the causes were and checking to make sure they were content with the mitigating actions being put in place by their frontline managers. They appeared to have a mental model of the performance drivers, which they would work through.

The middle managers managed the performance of their frontline managers, making it clear what was expected of them, giving feedback and using formal processes where necessary.

They also invested time in engaging the frontline staff. This was a key part of the research question and the activity was definitely seen by the middle managers as an important part of their role in manage performance. Even though they were busy, and mentioned struggling with too many meetings and emails, they invested their time, talking to frontline staff, finding out issues that would impact performance, getting to know them and building their trust.

Finally, the middle managers managed the implementation of changes to the work done by the frontline staff; overseeing corporate-led changes, engaging frontline staff and overseeing training; also introducing their own changes to resolve issues, improve throughput and quality. Staff often reacted badly to the changes, which was often ascribed to fear of failure and lack of confidence in being able to meet the challenges of the changes. The middle managers described talking to staff about the reasons for the changes, interpreting the vision to make it relevant to them, keeping them motivated when setbacks messed up the training plan or systems weren't ready.

This is the first of three chapters discussing different aspects of the findings. This chapter has set out how the middle managers described their role in managing performance. Chapter five will move on to discuss findings about the ways in which they talked about themselves - their attitudes - and how they described the

attributes of their frontline managers and staff. Chapter six then goes on to describe the further analysis and findings about the differences between sets of middle managers.

5 FINDINGS: ATTITUDES AND ATTRIBUTES

This chapter discusses further findings from the interviews with the middle managers. Whereas chapter four described the findings about how the middle managers described their role in managing performance, this chapter discusses findings about the middle managers' attitudes to their own work and to the attributes of the frontline managers and frontline staff.

As the middle managers described their role in managing performance, their own attitudes and behaviours came into the discussion. They would describe how they handled a particular challenge. When asked how or why they did things, their own views and values became apparent. They were also asked about high and low performance in their frontline managers and frontline staff.

Although these findings go beyond the initial research question about the role of middle managers in managing performance, during the analysis of the interviews, an unexpected finding was that there appeared to be patterns of differences between middle managers' descriptions of themselves and their role. To pursue this further required analysis of what had been coded about the middle managers' attitudes and their views on the attributes of high performance. This chapter therefore sets out the findings from the interviews about the middle managers' attitudes to their role and about their views of the attributes of high or poor performing frontline managers and frontline staff. A stage of further analysis and results are then discussed in chapter six.

Section 5.1 discusses the middle managers' attitudes as they described their performance management activities. Section 5.2 looks at the middle managers' views on the frontline managers' attributes and 5.3 at the same for frontline staff. Section 5.4 looks at what middle managers said about organisational factors that contributed to the performance of frontline staff and 5.5 considers the need for further analysis about individual differences.

5.1 Middle managers' attitudes

As the middle managers talked about their role, attitudes emerged about their sense of personal accountability or autonomy; performance management being about helping people; different management styles; the importance of knowledge about the technical processes; and their own personal development.

5.1.1 Sense of accountability or autonomy

One set of the middle managers' attributes was the extent to which they felt accountable and how much they perceived they had the autonomy to get on with their role as they saw fit.

For some, this was a sense that "the buck stops here". Whatever the performance issue, it was their role to get it sorted and get the performance back on track. The removal of the management layer immediately above them had sharpened this sense of accountability: they had to tackle issues rather than bother busy, senior managers.

You do feel, as an HO, sometimes, that the buck stops at you, because your manager's a couple of grades up from that and you don't want to bother them; you know how busy they are.
(K)

Some of the middle managers felt this loss of their immediate line manager more keenly. They had lost their sounding board; someone who could help if the middle manager felt unsure or needed more support.

they took that senior level out, and really what's happened is all the senior officer roles have fallen under the H grade, which is a little unfair, I think, in a processing environment. I think it's a lot unfair because you've lost your sounding board then, sometimes you feel a bit insular, that you can't talk about issues proper to you. (H)

Some middle managers had a responsibility for a business process as well as for their own work teams and for these managers it felt as though their colleagues would step back, leaving them to feel as though they were running everyone else's teams.

another one of my problems is that when other HOs are doing my work they will tend to step back rather than taking accountability for it. (S)

Other middle managers felt at the brunt of changes that had given them more to do, but without being involved in the decisions about these changes. Examples include the loss of technician roles and a recruitment drive for compliance roles had left teams without some of their most experienced staff and managers.

we used to have technicians in the role who could actually come in, look at the techno cases and take that away from the managers. So if someone was really struggling with their case they could go in and help them with the cases, and we have systematically lost the technicians, yet the work hasn't got any simpler. (H)

Some of the middle managers felt they had lost their autonomy: they felt they no longer had the discretion to make their own decisions and that the planning managers made decisions about their teams without consulting them.

The planning teams make decisions, but they don't consult me, and I have to deliver that. They don't know the business and they don't make the best decisions sometimes for the business. (W)

Other managers did not mention lack of autonomy and seemed able to persuade where necessary to get extra overtime agreed or a process changed. A couple of the middle managers mentioned the need to work out their role, balancing what was required of them with what they knew would work.

[the performance management system] brought in a standard of working, but you've got to float above that, and sometimes you've got to float below it. That's where the management side comes in. It's being able to say, well what can I accept, and what can I not accept? I think it's the balancing between that, that you need to get right. (O)

5.1.2 Different management styles

As the middle managers reflected on their role and gave examples about particular activities or to illustrate their point, their own management styles came

up or became apparent from the discussion. They talked about the importance of being a role model; being approachable; they described a no-nonsense approach where they did not set out to be liked. At the same time there were middle managers who described themselves as interested in people and saw performance management as being helpful and their role as part of the same team.

In terms of being a role model, the middle managers were aware of the effect of their own behaviours on those around them and talked about the importance of how these were perceived. Doing what you said you would, leading by example, not asking managers to do anything they wouldn't do themselves, were all mentioned.

if I show that I'm willing to step in and do those things then it makes it a little bit easier for them and they might see I'm not asking them to do anything that I wouldn't do myself. (N)

Being approachable or accessible or being a people-person were how some middle managers described themselves.

I'm a very, very hands-on HO [...] Staff will approach me about certain things. But then I think you build up that level of trust and then hopefully that level of respect. (S)

When some of the middle managers described an incident or an interchange between themselves and a member of staff, their attitude was no-nonsense. They would use phrases such as "This is what we are here to do", or "I'm not here to be liked".

I really don't care if anybody likes me. It's about them respecting what I do. [...] 'don't like me maybe because you don't like what I wear or what music, but don't not like me just because I'm doing my job properly' (S)

This no-nonsense attitude was also apparent in talking about staff attitudes to the work: a view that they were there to get on with it, to service the business and service the customer, not just do what was best for an individual member of staff.

I've heard some of them say, 'when you told us it was busy here, I didn't realise it was that busy'. [...] but that's what we're paid for: to be busy. (O)

A few of the managers expressed a view that performance management was about helping people. Staff who were not meeting their performance targets might be struggling, but not feel able to ask for help. They might need more training, or there might be personal issues: not addressing the poor performance would not be helpful for them. It was the same with the frontline managers. Telling them that performance was not good enough was not a successful approach in middle managers' views. Helping them, making it clear they were all part of the same team was described as being much more effective.

[the team] went from the worst performing to one of the top performing, just because I went in, I listened, I learned, I looked, and I've got people involved. [...] But it's by also getting the trust from the manager to say, 'I know what you do, and vice-versa, and I will do everything I can to help you'. It's lifted performance on every level. (K)

Not addressing poor performance was described as unhelpful. It might be that a team had become complacent or had a new manager. If someone was struggling with their cases, they might not have wanted to admit it and then the whole team would get behind. Noticing and acting on the poor performance was important.

if you don't address it, you're not doing them any favours. You're not giving them an opportunity to address it, and I think that's important. (F)

A few of the middle managers described themselves as "a people-person"; they liked working with people, felt that, despite all the rules, the importance was to treat everyone as a human with different sets of problems and anxieties and not be mechanistic. It was important to get the balance between getting everyone engaged and pushing for performance.

So how do you combine the two? If you've got people who are in tears and they're terrified of not hitting their KPI but they're doubling their production; then your teams who are happy,

working, motivated and are willing, they want to do well for you, but maybe aren't achieving the productivity (X)

All being part of the same team was also mentioned by a few of the middle managers.

I do feel I'm part of a team. I know I've got to make the higher-level decisions at times; however I just feel like we're all part of a team. I couldn't do my job the way I do it if I didn't have the staff and the management team that I've got, and hopefully they feel that they wouldn't be able to take the process forward as well if they didn't have me as an HO. (S)

5.1.3 Being organised

The middle managers had different approaches to how they managed their time and priorities. Some managers appeared more able to be organised or more able to take charge of their own diaries or email.

So my diaries now are nothing like they used to be, five years ago my diaries were pretty blank, but now, because of what I've learnt, I write it down, tick it off, tick it off, not done, moved on. (V)

Some felt they were constantly being pulled from one thing to the next. Others were more ruthless about prioritising what they thought to be important.

I'll never get everything done. I know that, and I think once you realise that then that's when you can just be calm and just, as I say, prioritise your priorities. And I have just learnt to risk-assess. I've learnt to risk and think, what will happen if I don't do that one today? Which is the job that I can put off until tomorrow or the next day after that? Which are the main ones? (S)

Dealing with requests to attend meetings were met with a similar approach to prioritisation.

sometimes I attend too many meetings, but now I question why I attend those meetings, and if there is a need for me to attend those meetings. I think what stops me being effective as a manager is having that quality time instead of running from this to that to the other (J)

Some struggled with the number of emails they had to deal with.

you tend to take the last few emails, and then you miss something important, that is a real bind I think, a real irritant for me, the number of emails that get issued. (H)

Others had found techniques for managing their emails, delegating work to a deputy and trusting them to deal with much of the work themselves and just leaving the important ones for the middle manager to deal with.

Emails are not a big thing; I know that some HOs complain about the number of emails, but if I'm not there I get my deputy to go in and work through stuff. I don't need to look at all my emails. If it's important, they'll leave it for me; if not, they will deal with it. (U)

5.1.4 Resilience

Some of the middle managers talked about the need to be resilient or described an incident where they needed to bounce back, or to persist.

I knew there was going to be a fight because the managers didn't want to change their teams, because they were happy with what they had, so I did it anyway. I pushed it through, [...] as quickly as I [could ...], and then it really settled down very, very quickly. [...] It was well, well worth it, but when I look back now, I think, well, would you still be as brave next time (Q)

5.1.5 Important to know the processes

A few of the managers felt that it was important to understand and be familiar with the technical processes. Some of the work was technically complex and it was important to know what they were talking about.

it's a complex process so you do [need to know it] because when you go into the meetings you need to know what you're talking about, so you have to learn it and that's hard. (A)

Without this knowledge, these middle managers felt that it was difficult to challenge things or to be able to distinguish between good and inadequate explanations for why performance was not at the required level. However, their

managers were less convinced and had told these middle managers to keep out of the detail.

I have been told 'we're not paying you to manage at this grade and do the work of that grade'. But I wasn't actually doing the work, I was watching the work. (A)

Despite the challenge, the middle managers were insistent about the importance of this knowledge. One compared the difference of view as similar to changing views on education – in other words, their views on knowing the detail were out of favour at the moment but would come back in the future. Another made the point that he had to make it happen and so couldn't just deal in the generalities.

I feel personally that the higher you get up the chain, that is actually lost in upper management sometimes. [...] you tend to get numbers and units, and fixed FTEs and that type of thing when you get up there. We have got to make it work. (H)

5.1.6 Personal development

The middle managers were asked what had helped them to develop as managers. They talked about how they had learnt on the job; from their own managers; from having taken on different roles; and by watching or asking others.

Many of them mentioned learning from experience, for example balancing the need for interpersonal skills as well as technical skills.

I think as well, experience brings that to you because when you're a new manager, you're concentrating so much on learning the work that you're not learning the skills that you need for interpersonal skills. That comes with time. (A)

A few mentioned organising a mentor or making sure they arranged their own attendance on a course or time to reflect on feedback. There was a strong sense from the managers that they were responsible for making it happen for themselves and little was mentioned about formal training or development programmes.

I've been here two years now and really, could I say I have been trained for the job? [...] I don't always think there's

enough sort of initial training [...] to get managers to understand how to be managers. (K)

A few said they didn't have time for personal development.

In this section, the middle managers' attitudes have been discussed. They said they felt accountable for their teams' performance, especially since the management layer immediately above them had been removed. Some felt they had lost autonomy while others seemed able to persuade where necessary. They described different management styles. They were aware of the impact of how their behaviours were perceived, not asking frontline managers to do anything they would not do themselves, being approachable and accessible, being a people-person. Some middle managers described a style that was no-nonsense, others talked about performance management being about helping people, being organised, resilient, the importance of knowing the processes. The middle managers' attitudes to their own personal development ranged from saying they had no time for such things, to being frustrated there wasn't more management training and feeling left to find out for themselves.

5.2 Frontline managers' attributes

The middle managers were asked about what characterised a high performing frontline manager. The subsequent discussions elicited quite a range of views about the characteristics that constituted high or low performance.

In a useful overview of their range of skills, a high performing frontline manager was described as being a good all-rounder, who was organised, who could work well with staff and the performance data.

I think basically the good ones tend to be good all-rounders, tend to be pretty organised, pretty steady, understood the board, everything was up-to-date, understood their staff, worked very well with the staff and you can generally see that in the team data. (M)

Looking more at individual factors, the middle managers described frontline managers' knowledge of the work; their management behaviours and personal characteristics.

5.2.1 Knows the work

The high performing frontline managers were seen by the middle managers as being knowledgeable about the many aspects of the work.

These frontline managers were described as actively managing performance whereas a low performer would not be on top of the performance of their team.

He's not talking to the staff. He doesn't know what his performance indicator is on the team. He doesn't know what the quality is. I don't think he's using data. He's not holding the monthly meetings with the staff and just lots of issues. If we ask for something, he'll say 'yes I've done it' but then we find out later on he hasn't done it. (W)

High performing frontline managers were comfortable with the figures, able to use the information technology (IT), were familiar with the processes.

We have got some who are really good on the IT skills, and a lot of the data-capture is to do with IT, so the ones who are not so good take a lot longer than the other ones. So I have actually been coaching a few of them on how to quicken things up, just around the IT (C).

A few of the middle managers thought that knowing the technical processes was important for the frontline managers as it gave them the confidence to spot mistakes when checking the quality of the casework.

the higher performing managers will go that extra mile to actually dig in and understand the process more fully, of their own volition, to do that. Once they have got that confidence of knowing the work, that gives a confidence to the team. (H)

Being good at managing sickness absence, being able to plan effectively and keeping records up to date were also mentioned.

5.2.2 Management behaviours

Most of the middle managers described some management behaviours as factors of high performance: the ability to motivate; to communicate; develop the

frontline staff; to be approachable while also being able to give difficult messages; and to hold the boundary between themselves and their staff.

High performing frontline managers were described as having high expectations and giving staff the confidence that they could do the work. They knew how to get the best out of people and how to take the team with them.

I think one other thing about the high performer is the demand he puts on the team to deliver; he somehow gives them the confidence to say that they can do that job. (H)

They were described as able to communicate effectively with staff, confident leading their team meetings; they took ownership of the message.

There's the confidence, communication: 'This is where we're going to go. This is what we're going to do. This is our plan,' that type of thing. Getting things down to their level. (M)

They developed their staff, were able to identify their capabilities and made it clear where they needed to work on themselves.

"we've had some staff who never dreamt that they'd be able to get where they are now, but it's where a manager has been able to identify those capabilities." (S)

A few of the middle managers mentioned the importance of the frontline managers being able to maintain the boundary between themselves and their staff.

you can see the difference between the managers who are managing it really well. They are able to remember that they are their manager, not their friend. They seem to have that ability. They can deliver a difficult message without tying themselves up in knots, whereas the manager who is struggling, really has a very hard time delivering a difficult message. (F)

5.2.3 Personal characteristics

Virtually all of the middle managers described some personal characteristics of a high performing frontline manager. These high performers would take the

initiative; get involved beyond their immediate role; were ambitious, organised and confident.

Many of the middle managers described their high performing frontline managers as taking the initiative. Some of the frontline managers would identify a problem and then bring it to the middle manager for help with deciding what to do, whereas others could work it out for themselves, make their own decisions and put in place their own solutions. They were described as digging deeper into a problem or encouraging the staff to do more.

I've got somebody for example who is nearly there, but she tends to come to me and say, 'I've picked up an issue, here it is,' whereas the other person who is right in there says, 'I found this issue, I did that. This is what we're going to do.' (X)

The higher performing frontline managers were described as getting involved in initiatives outside their immediate work, rather than doing just enough. They would volunteer to go to a meeting about the business or manage a team to take on a new piece of work.

this person has sort of taken to my management, so they're doing a lot for us. They're managing the team but doing add-ons, as well, and they're coming for me for add-ons because they find they can get their teeth into things. (U)

By comparison, other, lower performing, managers were described as less willing to get involved, who just wanted to come in, do a day's work and go home again without engaging more in the organisation.

I've got a couple who are a little bit more laid back. They're not disinterested, they are [interested] and they do what they need to do, but they're perhaps not quite as forthcoming as some of the others (N)

The high performers were seen as more ambitious, keen to get on, to be recognised as successful.

They want promotion. Promotion obviously financially, but they want the recognition of the next grade and further, if possible.
(L)

These frontline managers would make their ambitions clear and actively identify how they could get the top marking in their appraisal.

So he'd asked us, he'd said, 'I need, and I want to be in that top. What have I got to do to get there?' (A)

Compared with less well performing frontline managers, the high performing frontline manager was also described as being a strong leader as well as being able to see the bigger picture.

she is proactive, she is a really strong leader in terms of the team that she leads, she has goodwill with people who want to work for her and do a good job, and she can just see the bigger picture. (G)

So in this section, how middle managers described high performing frontline managers has been discussed. They were described by the middle managers as all-rounders, knowledgeable about the work, able to see the bigger picture, able to motivate, to communicate and able to manage staff, being approachable while holding the boundary – friendly rather than a friend. They had a good work ethic, actively managed performance, they were involved rather than just doing enough and leading by example.

5.3 Frontline staff attributes

The middle managers were then asked the same questions about the frontline staff: what were the characteristics of high or low performing frontline staff and what helped contribute to high performance?

5.3.1 Good quality work and engagement

Many of the middle managers talked about the frontline staff skills and knowledge, saying that high performing staff had good technical knowledge and experience; were able to work on different casework; and were IT literate.

*it's down to how they use the system, their knowledge, [...]
They also are asked by their colleagues, the less experienced staff, for help (L)*

They were also able to work quickly and without errors: quality was described by one middle manager as being paramount.

they can process the work quickly without the errors, so we have people who can process the work very quickly but out of every three they get one wrong, but these can process it very quickly [and accurately] (J)

However, these capabilities to produce quick, accurate and high-quality work were only an important baseline. For the frontline staff to be considered a high performer, all of the middle managers mentioned the importance of getting involved in broader department activities as well as being able to do good work.

what makes the difference with the high performers is they're exceeding their productivity and their KPI but what they're also doing is exceeding their behaviours. So, not only are they exemplar examples of individuals on the floor plate, but they're also tending to take on additional duties but do those additional duties very, very well. (S)

The extra duties included getting involved in projects, such as looking for ways to improve a process or the quality of a workstream, or they might be deputising for a frontline manager or attending management meetings on their behalf.

some of the AOs who are getting involved in the management team meetings, some people are doing projects and initiatives over and above (R)

This was in contrast with other frontline staff, who just wanted to come in do their job and go home again; and who were not motivated to get more involved.

They come in; they just want to do their job and they want to leave, and they're not engaged. It doesn't matter how many [corporate communication] events you take them to. They'll sit, and they'll nod, and they'll say 'yes' to everything, and they'll fill in the skills matrix, but they're not interested. (Q)

5.3.2 Personal characteristics

Most of the middle managers also described some of the personal characteristics of their high performing frontline staff.

Many of the middle managers described the high performing frontline staff as hard-working, wanting to do a fantastic job, interested in the work, always wanting to do better. They were seen as having a passion for the work, taking a pride in a job well done and wanting to know their work one hundred percent.

They have a passion for the work. They're interested in the work. They've got a good strong work ethic and they take pride in their job well done and they want to be here. (F)

Frontline staff who were ambitious would be more likely to be high performers.

when you get people interested in promotion, interested in the wider picture, and then they start taking on the responsibility and seeing the difference, then the amount of work they produce is much, much higher, and they expect much, much higher. (Q)

Other characteristics that the middle managers described of the high performers were that they were more confident in their abilities,

I would say the big word is confidence, I think we are dealing with lots of different personalities, different types of people coming in, and I think confidence is a big factor, so it's very important to give that confidence. (H)

They loved their job, were interested in the work and were willing to do what it took to get the job done. They were flexible and agreeable, willing to give things a try, they worked well as a team. They wanted to please the customer.

they want that customer to get what they're entitled to, what they should have, there and then in the quickest way they can get it (V)

The attributes, then, that the middle managers talked about that characterised high performing frontline staff included having the skills and experience to process work quickly without errors; being knowledgeable, especially in the technical aspects of cases, and at the same time getting involved in projects and other duties. They had a good work ethic, were ambitious, confident, enthusiastic, wanting to do well.

5.4 Organisational factors of performance

In the previous sections, we saw how the middle managers described the characteristics of high performing frontline staff. The organisational factors that contributed to this performance were also discussed. The middle managers talked about the role of their frontline managers; the performance management process, reward and recognition systems; able to see their contribution; and the role of competition in encouraging greater performance.

5.4.1 Frontline managers' behaviours

Some of the middle managers mentioned the importance of the frontline managers' behaviours on the performance of the frontline staff. The way in which frontline staff felt supported; the recognition of their work, feeling their manager was interested in them, and was encouraging them; and supporting their development were mentioned as examples.

I think firstly to have a manager that they want to work for, someone positive, can do, slightly demanding. Recognition from the manager, I think day-to-day recognition is far more valuable than, for example, a cash incentive (H)

5.4.2 High performance work practices

Many of the middle managers mentioned the roles of the appraisal and reward and recognition processes in improving performance.

Some mentioned the relatively new performance management review system, in helping to make clear to staff what was expected of them.

staff have come to me before and we've sat in rooms and they've got upset, and they say, 'I'm worried because my performance is not where it needs to be, and I'm worried about what it's going to mean for my PMR'. That would never have happened years ago, because we just didn't delve into it as much as we do now. It's obviously getting the staff to sit up and think as well. (K)

Other middle managers described how the reward systems were used for their teams. As well as the box marking on the performance management system

having an impact on someone's pay, there were one-off payments for £20 or bonuses of between £100 to £300 that managers could award if they felt an individual or a team had done a particularly good piece of work.

Sometimes these people might not be recognised under what we call our performance management system. They might not be what we call one of our highflyers but actually they've done something that's really outside their comfort zone that's made a difference to the business, so we do think that should also be recognised. [...] people get a pleasant surprise and they think 'crikey'. Sometimes just saying 'thank you' helps (F)

5.4.3 Competition

A few middle managers mentioned using what they called a small amount of healthy competition between teams or individuals. As a general approach, individuals were not able to see each other's performance and figures were kept anonymised. Competition therefore appeared to be used cautiously and only within certain teams, who maybe responded to this approach.

there's nothing better than a little bit of peer pressure, and, 'everybody's hours are in the green except ours. Why? How did we not plan right?' (V)

5.4.4 Keeping staff interested and engaged

All of the middle managers mentioned the challenges of keeping staff informed, interested and engaged in their work.

Most of the middle managers mentioned the challenges of managing part-time staff. Part-time workers risked missing important information; for example, while some might be able to be flexible and come in on an off-day for an important meeting, others might not; or two part-time managers who job-share may not have any working days which overlap. Term-time contracts could mean that someone was in and then away for periods of time. All of these meant that extra effort was required from the member of staff and their manager.

when you work term-time you are in for six weeks and then you are out of the company for six weeks. It is hard to manage a business unit with that, but I have worked part-time all my life

and I have still got on, so I try to help and support people that do that. (G)

While most of the middle managers were supportive and accepted the challenges as part of their role, some talked about the problems of part-time working, with a lack of sufficient controls over how many staff were required and matching this with what flexibility could be made available. Another issue middle managers mentioned about part-time working was staff being able to remember the work when there were gaps, and the impact of this on performance.

where people have got consecutive days in work seems to work better than the gap, but we have lots of people with gaps: in a day, off a day, in a day, off a day. Then they've got a day off and then they come back and it's like a weekend, 'Oh what's changed?' (J)

Keeping older workers motivated was mentioned by a number of managers. Very few staff were under the age of 30 and the average age overall was between 47 and 50 years old. Many staff were in their 50s and 60s, some in their 70s. There were staff who had worked for GovDep for over 30 years, often on the same process. The issue for the middle managers was how they could motivate these staff and managers.

For example, it had been difficult to persuade frontline managers to take an interest in strategies that were set in a future long after they would be retired.

[on attending strategy presentations] it's getting my managers involved in these things. They go, 'well there's only a couple of years left'. It's like, 'yes, but you have got to set an example to your staff. You're still here, and you're still paid and employed, and whether it's ten years or two days you've got left, you're still here, so you have still got to put in the same amount of effort.' (K)

After a career of doing the same work, staff had to adapt to new processes and types of work and older workers viewed retirement as an option to avoid having to change.

she went, 'you know I'm 63, I can't be doing with all this changing, I might have to retire early' (V)

With the changes in the performance appraisal processes, it was no longer enough to just come in, work well and go home again: frontline staff were expected to get involved in projects and contribute to identifying potential improvements. Some of the middle managers talked about the difficulty of persuading staff who were close to retirement to put in that extra effort.

the majority of my staff are partially retired and, as I say, some just work two days, which I've got no problem with, but they just want to come in, do a good job, be proud of what they do, don't like getting quality errors, they like to make sure they're hitting their PI. There's that little bit of competition there, but as I say, I'm not quite sure [...] how you would get them to move to go that extra mile. (T)

Another challenge of keeping staff interested, mentioned by a few of the middle managers, was keeping staff fresh, or stopping them getting jaded, by changing what work they were doing.

For example, even though it had an impact on the overall performance, a middle manager talked about how he had encouraged high performers to help with solving problems rather than keep them working on cases. Even though this had an impact on the immediate performance, it was important to keep staff engaged and not to take them for granted.

The middle managers mentioned moving staff around, making sure they had variety of work, or suddenly changing the pace. For example, new tasks were introduced for an hour or so at a time.

we used to get odd, random things that made it more interesting. [...] 'How many would need a letter issued?' 'How many would need this scan?' 'How many would need that?' 'Can we have them by 4:00?' So you would literally be running around floor going, 'can you do this?' 'Can you do it now?' 'They'd be stopping what they're doing and be doing that, and then it's like, cor...' Then, they'd go back to their normal work, and it would happen time, and time, and time again. (Q)

They also described how staff were encouraged, focussing on what had gone well rather than just the negatives; celebrating successes. One middle manager

pointed out that staff had to motivate themselves as well and another described the motivation as general management skills; being able to communicate, performance manage.

5.4.5 Frontline staff can see their contribution

A couple of the middle managers mentioned the importance of staff being able to see how their work contributed to the customer's experience

if you're just doing one process you don't necessarily need to understand how you fit in with the bigger picture - what you're actually doing for the customer - but when you're doing four different elements of that to see the bigger picture and what it means for the customer, I think you think, 'Oh well actually my little bit I'm really proud of the bit I do.' (M)

For example, one manager described how they re-organised the processes so that staff were able to take on more of the work and so had the satisfaction of seeing something finished.

we'd been fighting very hard for a work mix for all three commands to keep the motivation, because they can see clearances' (Q)

So, in this section, as well as talking about the characteristics of high performing frontline staff, the middle managers also talked about what contributed to staff performance. Many of them mentioned the role of the frontline managers. Some mentioned the performance management review and the reward and recognition processes. A few mentioned encouraging competition, and staff being able to see their contribution.

5.5 Middle manager differences

The previous sections have discussed the different attitudes of the middle managers and their views on what characterised and supported high performing frontline managers and staff. As the research was being analysed, it became apparent that there were differences in how the middle managers thought about their role, and in their attitudes and behaviours. Some of the middle managers seemed to talk just about the problems and difficulties they experienced. Some

were more philosophical in the way they viewed their role and relationships, while others were much more focussed on the daily processes and whether they worked.

Reflecting further on the discussions, the recordings and the transcripts and also thinking about the impressions formed about the individual middle managers, a further question arose about the middle managers. Were there patterns in how the middle managers were talking about their role? Did some managers always give answers which were about being very driven about performance? Were there other managers who were always talking about the problems? Did the “driven” managers have particular ways of talking about performance? Or about how they engaged with their staff? Were these different responses to those managers who seemed more concerned about the problems and issues?

There was a sense of a pattern of more driven, more capable managers who talked about managing performance in a different way to managers who seemed to struggle with the problems they encountered persisted through looking at patterns of responses, using matrix coding queries.

Eisenhardt (1989) describes two stages of analysing the data: within case analysis to gain familiarity and generate preliminary theory; and cross-case pattern search using divergent techniques to see the evidence through multiple lenses. Looking at the data as a single case gave the broad range of answers, helpful in understanding the range of the role and responsibilities. With 20 interviews and a potential pattern of responses, could I find more about how different middle managers managed? Could these differences provide insights into how to support middle managers in their development? Although these were qualitative interviews, with no link to performance information for the managers, could some dimensions of performance be identified which would be helpful in defining and designing subsequent quantitative research?

These differences seemed worth exploring in further analysis, which is discussed in the next chapter.

Conclusions

In this chapter the analysis moved from the findings about the middle managers' performance management activities set out in chapter four, to being about their attitudes and opinions. How the middle managers viewed themselves, their frontline managers and the frontline staff were analysed and discussed.

The middle managers described their own knowledge, behaviours and attitudes. They talked about how they felt accountable, especially since the relatively recent restructure had taken out the layer that had been immediately above them. They now had a more senior line manager who they felt was busier and more remote; some enjoyed this increased responsibility while others missed the relative safety of their sounding board. This restructure had also introduced a more centralised planning department and, while some of the middle managers had found ways to influence and impact this new role, others felt they had lost their autonomy and decisions were being taken elsewhere without involving them.

Some middle managers described the importance of being a role model, being seen to be reasonable and not asking anything they wouldn't do themselves. Being approachable as important to some of the middle managers: being available to staff if needed,

The middle managers' attitudes to performance management also came up. Some talked about performance management being about helping people and emphasised the difference between this approach and just telling staff and managers they were not good enough when performance was not meeting the required standards. Others had a no-nonsense approach, saying things such as "I'm not here to be liked" and "this is what we are here to do".

Some of the middle managers described how they made sure they were organised, keeping track of what needed doing, prioritising their work, not trying to do everything. Resilience was also mentioned: not being deterred from how they managed performance, finding a way round things, not being discouraged.

Some of the middle managers felt that it was important to know the detail of the work technically. Despite their own managers having concerns, they felt justified

in persisting, saying they needed the detail to know what they were talking about in other meetings, to make things happen and to challenge the performance.

The middle managers' attitudes to their own personal development ranged from saying they had no time for such things, to being frustrated there wasn't more management training and feeling left to find out for themselves.

The middle managers talked about what made a high performing frontline manager, describing them as good all-rounders, who could see the bigger picture and were comfortable with both people and the numbers. They were experienced, able to motivate, approachable while holding the boundary between themselves and their staff. They had good interpersonal skills and were able to be challenging, encouraging staff to do well. They tackled staffing issues and were good at handling sickness absence. They were effective in managing the work, comfortable with handling the statistics, managing their time well, knew the work and had the appropriate IT skills.

The middle managers also talked about what made frontline staff high performing. It was a combination of being able to consistently produce high quality outputs while also getting involved in projects. They had good technical knowledge and IT skills. They were ambitious and enthusiastic, wanting to do well.

The organisation's systems helped in motivating staff: the performance management processes in setting objectives and tracking progress, recognition systems such as bonus payments, the frontline managers' capability. The challenge of keeping staff interested, especially those who were part-time and older staff. Keeping staff fresh, giving challenges, variety of work were also mentioned.

The challenge of keeping staff engaged and interested was mentioned by some. Moving the work around, especially when it was tedious, encouraging high performers to be engaged in projects and problem solving, even to the detriment of the immediate performance were mentioned. Keeping older workers motivated was a challenge discussed by many of the middle managers.

During the research analysis phase, discussed in the sections above, it became apparent that there were differences in how the middle managers thought about their role, and in their attitudes and behaviours. Some of the middle managers seemed to talk just about the problems and difficulties they experienced. Some were more philosophical in the way they viewed their role and relationships, while others were much more focussed on the daily processes and whether they worked. These differences seemed worth exploring in a second round of analysis, which is discussed in the next chapter.

6 ANALYSING DIFFERENCES BETWEEN MIDDLE MANAGERS

This chapter is the third and final chapter that presents findings from the data. Here, the unexpected findings, that there was a pattern of different responses by different groups of middle managers, are discussed.

These unexpected findings arose during the initial coding. Reflecting further on the discussions, recordings and transcripts and also thinking about the impressions formed about the individual middle managers, it seemed that some middle managers were more driven than others. Some of them talked about how they decided their priorities, or how they persuaded senior managers to allow overtime. Others seemed weighed down by the problems they encountered.

This led to further reflection about what was in the data and whether there was any pattern to these differences. Did some managers always give answers which were about being very driven about performance? Were there other managers who were always talking about the problems? Did the “driven” managers have particular ways of talking about performance? Or about how they engaged with their staff? Were these responses different to those given by the managers who seemed more concerned about the problems and issues?

These reflections led to posing a further question about these differences and led to a further round of analysis of the data. This chapter presents this emergent research question; the development of a suitable analysis approach; and the subsequent results.

6.1 Emerging research question

The purpose of this study was to find out more about what middle managers do to manage performance and these activities were identified and discussed in chapter four. However, despite the detailed coding and analysis to that point, there was still something missing. During the interviews and also while coding, it seemed as though there were differences between the middle managers. Some of them appeared to be driving their work, in control, making their own decisions

about their priorities and how they could best address the challenges of managing performance. At the same time, other middle managers seemed to be more focussed on talking about the problems and difficulties they experienced. Some were more reflective in the way they viewed their role and relationships, while others were much more focussed on the daily processes and whether these worked.

These differences can be seen in the responses in chapters four and five, but the potential for there to be a pattern was not easily apparent. For example, in section 4.2.3, some middle managers described how they would assurance-check their subordinates' work. They did not just leave it to trust that these frontline managers had done the work correctly. In sections 4.4.1 and 4.4.5 some talked about how and why they engaged with frontline staff. For some middle managers, the aim of the engagement was to find out more about what was driving performance while for others it was about building relationships with the frontline staff. As another example, in section 5.1.1, some middle managers described how they no longer felt in control following the recent organisational changes: they felt they had lost autonomy. A further question was therefore posed:

RQ2 Are there groups of middle managers with different attitudes to performance management?

This was broken down into two sub-questions:

RQ2a Are there any patterns to the differences in how the middle managers described their performance management activities? if so:

RQ2b Are they related to differences in the middle managers' characteristics?

While it would be difficult to find substantive evidence from a qualitative study of 20 interviews, an indication of a pattern of differences and some insights into the types of differences would be helpful. If a pattern were identified, then more specific research could be designed to explore these initial findings.

6.2 Further analysis: description of approach

An analysis approach was developed which could capture these apparent differences in the ways that the middle managers talked about their performance management activities.

The aim of this second stage of analysis, then, was to find sub-groups of middle managers who were most similar to each other in their responses to different questions. This section sets out how the method to do this was developed.

6.2.1 Tabulating the data to see the patterns

Initially the transcripts were re-read, and the style of the responses was coded according to whether it could be described as self-driven. However, this still did not adequately capture the differences.

Another approach was then tried which tabulated the findings so that any potential patterns might be seen in the data. In her seminal paper on building theories from case study research, Eisenhardt (1989) described using quantitative techniques in analysing case-studies to identify relationships that were not immediately obvious. The approach of tabulating and counting results to make large quantities of data easier to understand was also discussed by Krippendorff (2004), the author of the standard text on content analysis. He describes content analysis as “finding patterns and relationships within findings that an unaided observer could easily overlook, to test hypotheses concerning various relationships” (Krippendorff, 2004, p.191).

To tabulate this study’s results, reports from NVivo were run, which showed the coding intersections between the middle managers and the performance management activities. In other words, these reports showed which middle managers talked about which performance management activities. In NVivo11, this tabulation of the results for each activity code for each middle manager is called a *matrix coding query*.

Middle manager	C : Attend FLM mtg	D : Hold forums	E : Hot desk	F : Involved with workload	G : Other ways to engage	H : Sit among them	I : Stop and chat
A	2	0	0	0	1	1	1
C	0	0	0	0	4	0	0
D	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
F	0	2	0	0	0	3	0
G	1	0	1	0	1	0	1
H	1	0	1	0	0	0	1
J	1	0	0	0	0	2	0
K	0	1	1	0	0	0	0
L	1	0	0	0	0	1	0
M	1	3	0	3	0	0	3
N	1	0	0	0	0	3	1
O	0	0	0	0	2	0	1
Q	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
R	0	1	1	0	0	1	0
S	1	1	0	0	1	0	2
T	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
U	2	1	1	0	0	0	0
V	1	0	1	0	0	0	1
W	1	0	7	0	0	4	2
X	2	2	0	1	0	0	1
Total MM	12	8	7	2	5	9	12
Key	n	Number of paragraphs mentioned by this MM					
	0	Not discussed by this middle manager (MM)					
	n	No. MMs who discussed this topic (many: 8-11)					
	n	No. MMs who discussed this topic (most: 12+)					

Figure 6-1 Example of report of topics by middle manager

Figure 6-1 (above) shows the matrix of the middle managers' responses that had been coded to *how middle managers engage frontline staff*. Within this activity there were seven different sub-topics, shown here in columns C to I. The numbers in the cells show how many references (or paragraphs of the transcript) were coded to each of these activities for each middle manager.

In this example, the data from the *matrix coding query* has been exported from NVivo11 to an Excel spreadsheet. In Excel, any cell with a value of greater than zero was highlighted in pink, using the *conditional formatting* function (this is now also possible in NVivo12). This meant that any cell where a middle manager had

been coded as discussing an activity was now highlighted in pink, and any cell where a manager had not discussed that topic was white.

As well as colour-coding the middle managers' responses, the total number of middle managers who mentioned each coded activity was counted: shown in the figure as *total MMs*. This total is counting the *numbers of middle managers* who discussed each topic, rather than the *numbers of references*, as the interest was in those who spoke about which topic, rather than how much they said. These numbers of middle managers were also colour coded to show where most (i.e. 12 or more) or many (eight to 11) middle managers had mentioned a topic.

From this colour coding, it is possible to see, therefore, that 12 of the middle managers said that they would *stop and chat*. Nine of them discussed sitting among their staff and eight talked about *holding forums*. Only one middle manager did not mention any of these three types of engagement; none mentioned all three; and the remainder mentioned one or two of them.

This analysis was run for all of the main topics coded into NVivo for the 20 valid middle manager interviews. These tabulations of which middle managers discussed each performance management activity, attitude or attribute, once colour-coded, gave a visual image of the patterns.

6.2.2 Grouping middle managers with similar responses

Having found a technique which showed the patterns, an approach was now required which would group the middle managers based on being most similar in their responses.

Once again, the data was explored to see if patterns could be found. The data was sorted and sifted to look for the most prominent patterns and a number of analyses were tried. For example, one approach which was tried and discarded was to group the middle managers within each activity and then compare the groupings across questions. However, this approach meant that there was a subjective approach to the groupings that proved difficult to codify and explain.

As an alternative approach, a single variable was sought, which could form the basis for grouping the middle managers. The aim was to find a single topic which could represent this apparent difference between the middle managers. From the grouping of middle managers according to their responses to this single topic, could other similarities in their other responses also be found? The way in which middle managers discussed this single variable, then, would need to encapsulate the differences that appeared to be present in the way they expressed their drive to do things their way. It would also need to have been mentioned by some, but not most middle managers. A topic mentioned by five or fewer middle managers or by 15 or more would create unbalanced groups. A few candidate responses were considered, and one emerged as being suitable.

During the interviews, some of the middle managers had described how they checked up on their frontline managers' paperwork, asking them to bring copies of reports to their one-to-one meetings, or using follow up techniques to be sure actions had been completed. While this checking-up mirrors the quality audits for front-line staff, it is not generally required of managers to undertake these checks and seems to have come from personal experience of the consequences of not having done so or to have been learned from their own line manager in the past. This activity had not been anticipated from the literature review; it was not the topic of a specific question in the protocol but had emerged from the coding.

This particular discussion about checking up on subordinates' work was therefore tested as the single variable on which to base the grouping of the middle managers. It fitted the characteristic of managers who had their own drive - who set their own agenda, managing as they saw fit, rather than simply following the procedures set out for them. The numbers of respondents also met the criteria: there were seven middle managers who had described themselves as checking up on their frontline managers' work.

The middle managers were initially allocated to two groups: Group A, who had talked about the importance of checking up on their frontline managers' work (the checkers); or Group B, who had not discussed checking up (the non-checkers). Looking at the demographic characteristics of the middle managers in each of

these groups, most of the middle managers in Group A had similar characteristics. There were two quite distinctive sets of characteristics in the non-checkers group (discussed below in section 6.3.1) and so Group B was split again into Group B and Group C.

6.2.3 Comparing the middle managers in different groups

There were now three groups of middle managers and each middle manager was allocated to group A, B or C, based on whether they had mentioned checking-up on their subordinates and (if they didn't mention checking-up) on their demographic profile. Analyses of how the middle managers' responses had been coded to all of the main topics or sub-topics were then produced for each of the three groups. The responses for each group were then compared, to see whether there were patterns of topics raised mainly by middle managers in one or other of the groups. In the rest of this chapter, the findings are presented about these differences.

Having grouped the middle managers' responses to the topics into the three groups, it was possible to see that, for certain topics there was a strong pattern of the responses being different for the three groups. There were also topics where most of the middle managers responded, and so there was no pattern across the groups. Then there were other topics where the responses were spread across the three groups, but with no discernible pattern.

Group	Middle manager	C : Attend FLM mtg	D : Hold forums	E : Hot desk	F : Involved with workload	G : Other ways to engage	H : Sit among them	I : Stop and chat
A	D	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
	G	1	0	1	0	1	0	1
	K	0	1	1	0	0	0	0
	O	0	0	0	0	2	0	1
	S	1	1	0	0	1	0	2
	U	2	1	1	0	0	0	0
	X	2	2	0	1	0	0	1
B	C	0	0	0	0	4	0	0
	N	1	0	0	0	0	3	1
	Q	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
	V	1	0	1	0	0	0	1
C	A	2	0	0	0	1	1	1
	F	0	2	0	0	0	3	0
	H	1	0	1	0	0	0	1
	J	1	0	0	0	0	2	0
	L	1	0	0	0	0	1	0
	M	1	3	0	3	0	0	3
	R	0	1	1	0	0	1	0
	T	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
	W	1	0	7	0	0	4	2
	Total MM	12	8	7	2	5	9	12
	Key	n	Number of paragraphs mentioned by this MM					
		0	Not discussed by this middle manager (MM)					
		n	No. MMs who discussed this topic (many: 8-11)					
		n	No. MMs who discussed this topic (most: 12+)					

Figure 6-2 Responses by middle manager group

The data in Figure 6-2 (above) is the same as for Figure 6-1, but now with the three groups added, and the data sorted by these groups. This makes it easier to see some patterns emerging. For example, none of the Group A middle managers talked about sitting among their staff, whereas two of the four in Group B and seven of the nine in Group C did. In contrast, five of the seven Group A middle managers discussed holding forums while only three of the nine in Group B, and none of Group B, mentioned this approach.

However, at this point it is worth re-iterating that the results from this analysis can only be indicative. This question had emerged from the analysis of the data; the

findings had not been anticipated; and the research had not been designed specifically to find out this information.

Also, as Krippendorff (2004) cautions, there is a risk of viewing numerical data as having greater accuracy, but interpretations have still been made to reach these numbers. The nature of this open-ended qualitative research means that these patterns can only be an indication of something worth following up by more specific research. Not every middle manager was asked exactly the same questions and only broad patterns are being sought, which indicate areas of potential further interest. These distinctions are also only as good as the underlying coding. While most were checked for consistency of content, there was no validation of coding by a second researcher. And, of course, just because there is a pattern, it does not mean there is a relationship.

6.3 Results: comparison of the groups' characteristics

In this section, the demographic differences and the differences in the middle managers' behaviours and attitudes are described for each of the groups.

6.3.1 Demographic analyses

Each of the groups was compared in terms of the gender-split; ages of the middle managers; the amount of time they had been at their current middle manager grade; and how long they had been in their current role. The split of the three age groups is not standard but had been allocated from the raw data so that there was a relatively even split between the groups and, more important, no individual interviewee could be identified from their age. These age groups were re-assessed during this analysis, to ensure there were no other patterns within the age groupings.

Group	Number of middle managers	Gender		Age			Years as MM			Years in role		
		M	F	<46	46-55	>55	0-5	6-15	>15	< 1	1-3	> 3
A	7	3	4	5	1	1	4	1	1	3	3	-
B	4	1	3	1	3	-	4	-	-	4	-	-
C	9	4	5	1	2	6	-	5	3	3	1	4
Total	20		Highlighted cells show concentrations of middle managers									

Table 6-1 Demographic characteristics of each middle manager group

The three groups of middle managers had quite different demographic characteristics (Table 6-1). Looking at gender, both Group A and Group C had relatively even numbers of men and women, whereas three of the four in Group B were women. In terms of their ages, of the seven middle managers in Group A, five were aged under 46 and only one aged 46 to 55 and one aged over 55 years old. Most of Group C were aged over 55 and only one was aged under 46. Three of the four in Group B were aged 46 to 55.

Their numbers of years as a middle manager at this grade also had a distinctive pattern. The majority of Group A and all of the Group B middle managers had been promoted to their current middle management grade in the previous five years. This was in contrast to the middle managers in Group C who had all been at their current grade at least six years, with three of them having been Higher Officers for 15 years or more.

Finally, looking at time in role, half of all the middle managers had been in the current role for 12 months or less. This included all of the Group B middle managers. None of the members of Group A had been in their current role for more than three years, whereas all of the four middle managers who had been in their current role for more than three years were in Group C.

Group	Median age	Median year promoted	Median time as MM (years)	Median time in role (years)
Group A: Dynamic and demanding	38	2011	3.75	1
Group B: Working their way up	50.5	2011	3.5	1
Group C: Old hands	58	2003	12	3

Table 6-2 Average (median) characteristics for each group

While the mean values for the characteristics of each group would have been distorted by some single high values, the median gives a useful indication of the differences between the groups (Table 6-2).

These figures show that the main difference between Group A and Group B is their ages. With a median age of 38 years, the middle managers in Group A had been in their role for a median time of one year and had been middle managers for a median time of almost four years. This compares with the middle managers in Group B who had been at this grade for a similar amount of time as those in Group A, with a median age that is almost 23 years older. These middle managers in Group B were much closer in age to those in Group C, who had been middle managers for eight years longer, with a median of 12 years. Only managers in Group C had been in their current role for more than three years.

The Group A middle managers were those who had talked about checking up on their frontline managers' work and have been labelled "Dynamic and demanding". The Group B middle managers were labelled as "Working their way up" and Group C as "Old hands", reflecting how long they had been managers at this level.

6.3.2 Comparing the size of command

Another characteristic that was examined between the three groups of middle managers was whether they had different sizes of command. For example, did the *Group C: old hands* middle managers tend to manage more teams than their more recently promoted colleagues? Since there were relatively wide variations

in hours worked by both the middle managers and their frontline staff, their team sizes were pro-rated based on their working hours to enable the comparison.

Once their working hours were taken into account, there was very little difference between the groups in terms of the sizes of their teams. The middle managers in Group A had the most staff on average, but also worked the most hours. Five of the middle managers in Group A worked full-time; one worked 90% and one 60% of the full hours. Of the Group C middle managers, four worked full-time and five worked part-time, reflecting managers moving to reduced hours as they neared retirement.

6.3.3 Differences in groups' experiences as middle managers

Given the differences in the amount of time that the middle managers had been at this level, it is useful to consider what different external factors may have had an impact on their management approach and style.

One major government-level change during their time as managers was the introduction of the Public Service Agreements (PSAs) in 1998 (Institute for Government, 2014). Two of the Group C and one of the Group A managers had already been promoted to middle manager by this point.

More local changes at this time were that their operational unit had been a Next Steps Agency and was transferred into GovDep during 1999. GovDep's performance targets included increasing the productivity of operations, with timeliness, efficiency improvements and sickness absence reduction targets (HM Government, 1998).

In 2005 there was a major restructure of GovDep. By 2006, the GovDep performance improvement programme was started, in the operating unit of these middle managers. By 2010, staff numbers had reduced and productivity improved. However there were still challenges in meeting turnaround and quality targets.

By 2008, all of the Group C middle managers interviewed were in place and still only two of those in Group A and none of those in Group B. Most of the Group A

and all of the Group B middle managers were promoted after the introduction of the performance management programme in GovDep, and so had come into already well-established performance management processes and procedures. The Group C middle managers had already experienced one or two major organisational changes, the introduction of operational targets and a growing focus on their delivery.

Having identified how the three groups of middle managers differed in their demographic characteristics, the next section examines the differences in their activities and attitudes to performance management.

6.4 Comparison of responses between the groups

In this section, the responses are compared for each group of middle managers for all the topics discussed in chapters four and five. This starts with looking at the topics that were mentioned by many or most middle managers and then each groups' characteristic responses are considered.

6.4.1 Similarities across the groups

Most of the middle managers talked about the GovDep performance management process: performance measures; the cases per day performance indicator; and how data was gathered and reported. Most of them also discussed how they reviewed and challenged the performance of individual frontline staff rather than just look at the performance of the team overall. Many of the middle managers talked about the daily performance review meetings.

In terms of managing the frontline managers, most of the middle managers talked about coaching their frontline managers and many of them mentioned the importance of encouraging the frontline managers to work as a team.

In engaging frontline staff, most of the managers mentioned attending the performance meetings the frontline managers hold for their staff and also stopping and chatting to staff. Many of them mentioned using the engagement to find out what was concerning the frontline staff. Many of them also commented on the fact that this risked a demarcation issue with their frontline manager.

In the management of change, many of the middle managers talked about what changes they were implementing. In communicating the changes, many mentioned setting the context, the importance of being straightforward about the challenges and not shying away from these (“tell it as it is”). Many of them also described frontline staff reaction to change.

When the middle managers talked about their own attitudes as a manager, many of them mentioned being a role model, conscious of the impact of their own behaviour. Many of them also mentioned learning on the job as a method that had helped them to develop as managers.

In describing what made a high performing frontline manager, most of the middle managers mentioned aspects of knowledge of the work as important and also management behaviours and personal characteristics.

A common theme mentioned by most middle managers about what would constitute high performance for both frontline managers and frontline staff, was the ability to do a good job as well as being willing to get involved in other initiatives. Just coming in, doing a good job and going home again was no longer considered sufficient.

In terms of frontline staff attributes, many middle managers mentioned ambition as an important driver of performance. Many of them also considered that the performance management processes of agreeing goals and reviewing performance and the rewards system were important performance factors. Motivating older workers to do that bit extra, and the challenges of managing part-time working were also mentioned by many of the middle managers.

These were the main similarities across the three sub-groups of middle managers. The following sections now describe the main areas where these groups differed from each other.

6.4.2 Group A: Dynamic and demanding

From the ways in which they discussed managing performance, the seven middle managers in *Group A: dynamic and demanding* appeared to be more detached from their teams. They talked more about the importance of managing the frontline managers than about the challenges of managing frontline staff. They did not go into detail about different performance measures.

These were the middle managers who discussed how they checked up on the work being done by their frontline managers, to make sure paperwork was to the required standard and to avoid discovering too late that actions had not been taken which could then prevent performance being managed effectively.

They talked about coaching and pushing their managers as part of developing them. They were more likely to describe engaging frontline staff by holding forums, bringing all their staff together to discuss an issue. Apart from one manager in this group, who had made a specific effort to learn everyone's names, they did not know all staff by name, but said they would know them by sight. They were more likely to want to engage staff to show that management was interested and to show that they were approachable.

When describing how they managed, these middle managers mentioned leading by example, demonstrating that they would only ask staff or managers to do what they would do themselves.

They did not talk about issues of autonomy but appeared to be prepared to take the initiative and manage as they thought appropriate, working out their role. They described themselves as organised and mentioned the importance of avoiding unconscious bias.

These middle managers described high performing frontline managers as those who could see the bigger picture and did not mention more detailed aspects of their skills and experience.

Table 6-3 (overleaf) provides examples of quotes from the middle managers in *Group A: dynamic and demanding*.

Group A: Dynamic and demanding	
Monitor performance	<i>I assurance check things. Probably sounds a bit cruel actually but I never tell them when I'm going to check, so it keeps them on their toes all the time. (S)</i>
Manage, coach and develop FLMS	<i>I'll be saying to them, 'What are you going to do?' They're the kind of people who I think have got it, they just need to figure it out themselves. (X)</i> <i>[encouraging a manager working term-time hours to take on projects] It is hard to manage a business unit with that, but I have worked part-time all my life and I have still got on, so I try to help and support people that do that. (G)</i>
Engage FLS	<i>I would know everyone by sight. I wouldn't necessarily know everyone by name (K)</i> <i>sometimes I hold forums with the staff, get 20-30 together, or I hold a whole floor, get 100 together, [...] I just tell them what needs to happen and why they are doing it, because most people need to understand why they are doing something, (D)</i> <i>being visible, letting them come, and if they've got an aspect: 'speak to me. I'll see what I can do'. (O)</i>
Attitudes	<i>hopefully I lead by example. [...] It's not as if I'm ever asking staff or managers to do something I wouldn't do. (S)</i> <i>we've not got a lot of [time] so it's about utilising that time effectively. (K)</i> <i>I'm a lot more organised now: I do save my emails. I put things in my calendars. If I ask for something by a certain date, I will put a reminder on my calendar. [...]. I'll go back to them and say, 'okay, you haven't replied'. (U)</i> <i>That's where the management side comes in. It's being able to say, 'well what can I accept, and what can I not accept?' (O)</i>
Views on FLMS' attributes	<i>she is a really strong leader [...] she has goodwill with people who want to work for her and do a good job, and she can just see the bigger picture. (G)</i>
Views on FLS performance drivers	<i>The new PMR system has been a great driver to performance. [...] when people [...] have difficult conversations at the end of the year, and say [...] you're a 'must improve', if they're having regular conversations [...] about performance and they have put the support in place and the people still aren't improving, then they might not like it, but it's very difficult for them to argue, so it gives the managers more confidence. (K)</i>

Table 6-3 Examples of Group A comments

6.4.3 Group B: Working their way up

From their responses about how they managed performance, the middle managers in Group B were more down to earth in their discussions.

When talking about monitoring and supervising performance, the middle managers in Group B focussed more on the performance measures than other middle managers, mentioning the turnaround time (PQR) and staff utilisation.

In terms of engaging with the frontline staff, the middle managers in Group B claimed to know most of them very well. These middle managers did not mention holding forums as a way of engaging staff. They described high performing staff as wanting to please the customer.

Group B: Working their way up	
Monitor performance	<i>That's got lots of information on there to do with utilisation, KPIs. [...] The white boards to me are more about the history, so you can see week by week, month by month, how the teams are performing (C)</i>
Manage, coach and develop FLMs	<i>is there anything that I could do, just step in and help them? If it's to do with gathering stats and things actually could I not do that and free her up to do something else (N)</i>
Engage FLS	<i>I'd worked with [some] people [before] so I knew them anyway, so it was only a few that I didn't really know very well. But I've chatted to them and got to know them (N)</i> <i>I've used holidays, 'your holiday got cancelled and nobody told you, went to the airport, how would you feel? (V)</i>
Attitudes	<i>In the five years I've been an H[O], I've been in four different areas. So it's like constant movement. I pick things up from each area (V)</i>
Views on FLMs' attributes	<i>[FLM] is very, very good, very passionate about her job, wants to know why things aren't happening and really gets into it. (N)</i>
Views on FLS performance drivers	<i>I think your middle of the road people, you find they're really conscientious, [...] They want to do a good job for the customer, but they don't always realise the way the businesses work. (Q)</i>

Table 6-4 Examples of Group B comments

6.4.4 Group C: Old hands

The middle managers in Group C were more likely to talk about comparing actual performance with the plan and were the only middle managers to mention the progression of cases when discussing performance. None of the Group C middle managers talked about pushing their frontline managers as a way of developing them.

In terms of engaging staff, most of these middle managers said that they sat among their staff and were most likely to say they knew all their names or that they knew most of them well. Only Group C managers mentioned engaging frontline staff as a way to build enthusiasm or mentioned saying “thank-you” as being important and that they engaged staff so that they could make sure everyone had a consistent message.

They were most different to their colleagues in the other groups in the way that they talked about engaging frontline staff. They either knew all of the frontline staff by name or felt they knew most of them very well. This may have been because they had been in their current roles for much longer: with all four of those who had been in their current role for more than three years in this group.

These managers sat among their staff and made sure they didn’t only talk about work, but also about people’s families or holidays or interests outside work. They were more likely to talk about engaging with frontline staff to build their enthusiasm and to use staff engagement so that staff heard consistent messages by communicating more themselves.

These middle managers were most likely to feel they lacked the autonomy to act and to feel that key decisions were made elsewhere. They had felt the loss of the grade above them, feeling more exposed with no-one to go to for advice or as a sounding board and their own manager more distant, too senior and too busy for such things.

These managers described high performing frontline staff as having good technical knowledge, ambition and a good work ethic, who would volunteer for work or projects beyond their core job. These managers were close to the work,

feeling that it was important to know the processes themselves. They were keen to drive improvements in the processes and were more likely to talk about the detail of system issues. They considered high performing frontline managers to be those who had more experience, were more ambitious and were good at managing performance challenges such as sickness absence.

Group C: Old hands	
Monitor performance	<i>You'd say: 'we're expected to hit this amount, we've actually exceeded - what has actually happened?' (A)</i>
Manage, coach and develop FLMS	<i>There are some managers who need a lot support to implement those processes [...] but you are also coaching your manager, and they want you to be a sounding board for that. That takes [...] a massive amount of time (H)</i>
Engage FLS	<p><i>I would know all of their names; I necessarily wouldn't know what their lifestyle was like or their families. (L)</i></p> <p><i>generally I don't have a desk, I move around. That's another good way of finding out what's happening. (W)</i></p> <p><i>I think 'thank you' goes a long way (F)</i></p> <p><i>Sometimes it's to support the managers [...] if they've got some difficult message to put across [...] maybe a different way to what their manager would have said, or it might be even to help them, back the managers explanation up. (A)</i></p>
Attitudes	<p><i>when I was managing a smaller office in [town], basically I could make decisions, and stand or fall by the decisions. Now if you make a decision you are going to offend three or four people somewhere along the line (H)</i></p> <p><i>I don't feel as in control, [...] years ago, as an HO, you were the business unit manager. Now I sometimes just think I'm the link between planning and telling my business what to do. (T)</i></p>
Views on FLMS' attributes	<p><i>[Name] [has] been [on temporary promotion] before on regular occasions, you can tell the difference (R)</i></p> <p><i>Some of them have got good planning skills (A)</i></p>
Views on FLS performance drivers	<p><i>They have a passion for the work. They're interested in the work. They've got a good strong work ethic and they take pride in their job well done and they want to be here. (F)</i></p> <p><i>[The] really good ones [...] have the technical knowledge. (T)</i></p>

Table 6-5 Examples of Group C comments

Conclusions

This is the last of three chapters presenting the findings from the 20 interviews with middle managers about what they do to manage performance. This chapter has described the analysis and findings in response to the additional question: *Are there groups of middle managers with different attitudes to performance management?*

The analysis found there were three groups of middle managers with different characteristics: *Group A: dynamic and demanding; Group B: working their way up; and Group C: old hands.*

The Group A middle managers were generally younger than the other groups of managers and were relatively recently promoted. They checked-up on their frontline managers' paperwork and talked about pushing them to develop their skills. They were more distant from the frontline staff, did not generally know them by name and did not describe sitting among them. They talked more about how they managed through their frontline managers and engaged frontline staff to show them that management was interested in them and accessible. They described themselves as organised. They did not mention any issues with feeling a lack of autonomy or with the restructure of the department or the loss of staff but described working out the role for themselves. Their criteria for high performing frontline managers was that they could see the bigger picture. When asked what helped high performance in frontline staff, they were more likely to talk about organisation level systems, such as appraisals, and the role of the frontline managers.

The Group B middle managers were older but had been middle managers for less than four years. Three of the four were female. They tended to talk about more performance measures and, unlike the other two groups, mentioned the importance of the customer.

Group C had been middle managers for many years and had a median age of 58 years. They were more hands-on and more likely to value practical and technical skills. They sat among the frontline staff, engaged them to build enthusiasm, to

ensure consistent messages and to say, “thank you”. They felt that they lacked autonomy and were unhappy about the loss of technical staff and their immediate managers. They described the high performing frontline managers as experienced and good at record keeping and planning. High performing frontline staff were described as wanting to do well and having good technical knowledge.

The original research methodology had not been designed for these questions and so to explore the possibility of these differences had required an analytical approach to be developed. These findings, therefore, while interesting, can only be tentative. Further specifically designed research would be required, that could explore this further.

7 DISCUSSION

This chapter discusses the findings from this study and places them in the context of what is already known from the extant literature about performance management.

The research question was: *What do middle managers do to manage performance?* with two sub-questions: *What do they do to manage operational performance?* and: *Do they engage frontline staff and, if so, why?*

In section 7.1, the middle managers' four performance management activities are discussed in turn and compared with the literature about these activities. Section 7.2 then considers the activities as a whole: looking at how the different literature domains relate to all four activities and proposing an integrated model of performance management.

Section 7.3 considers the unexpected findings about differences between different groups of middle managers. A further line of analysis was pursued to explore: *Are there different groups of middle managers with different attitudes to performance management?* Within this: *Are there any patterns to the differences in how middle managers described their performance management activities?* and if so, *Are they related to differences in the middle managers' characteristics?*

Finally, the conclusions from the study and its contribution to the body of knowledge are discussed.

7.1 What middle managers do to manage performance

Chapter 4 identified that the middle managers had talked about four groups of performance management activities. These were: overseeing the performance of their teams and supervising mitigating actions to meet any performance gap; managing, coaching and developing their frontline managers; engaging frontline staff; and managing local and organisational changes. Each of these four activities is discussed in turn below.

7.1.1 Overseeing operational performance: minding the gap

The first activity is the day-to-day management of their teams' performance. For the middle managers this is about assessing and mitigating performance gaps. They monitor the performance, seek to understand the causes of any difference between the expected and the actual performance and oversee the mitigating actions that their frontline managers put in place.

The middle managers described how they monitored performance by reviewing reports which compared actuals with the targets and talked to or observed the frontline staff themselves. They would then look for the causes of any differences between targets or planned outputs and the actual performance. From their own experience they would have an idea about what they would expect to see as potential responses. They then supervised their frontline managers by checking with them what they were doing to mitigate any performance shortfalls. Some of the middle managers would also check-up on the frontline managers' administration and paperwork (for example, notes from a meeting with a member of staff) to ensure it was being completed and to the right standard.

When they considered potential causes of a performance gap, the middle managers worked through what could potentially have an impact on the team's performance. For example, if the target numbers of cases per day were not being met, was this due to having insufficient staff doing the work or was their productivity lower than expected? If it was a staffing issue, was it that more staff were off sick or on holiday than expected? These were issues of staff availability. If staff were in work, were they working on the cases or had they been called into a training session, or a meeting, or maybe to help someone else? These were issues of staff utilisation.

If the staff availability was as expected, could the problem be one of productivity? Problems with staff productivity could be due to their not being as skilled as expected and so taking longer to complete the work. Had they been recently trained and so were still inexperienced? Had they recently returned after a period of illness and were still coming back up to speed? Did they need further training or mentoring to help them? Another reason for a caseworker having lower than

expected productivity could be that they had an issue outside work which was distracting them. Differences in productivity might also be down to the ability of their managers to motivate them. Or it could be due to slow IT systems.

The numbers of cases per day could also be lower than expected because the cases were more complex, and so took longer to complete than expected.

If fewer cases were being completed per day, this could result in the total time to complete the work becoming longer than the target. This measure of elapsed time was called *post quality review*, or PQR, relating to the total time until after this final check was undertaken. If the cases per day target was being met, but the elapsed time was not, then the volumes of work coming in may be higher than planned. Gaps in meeting the quality targets would be worked through in the similar way. In each case, the middle manager had what appeared to be a mental model of the performance drivers, which they worked through systematically.

This process of establishing the causes of the performance gap required the middle manager to have a good understanding of the drivers of performance and the ability to work through these in a structured and logical way and so be able to understand what mitigating actions needed to be in place. This process would include their spending time with their frontline managers, in team meetings or informally, exploring what they understood about the performance information and their analysis of the reasons for the gaps.

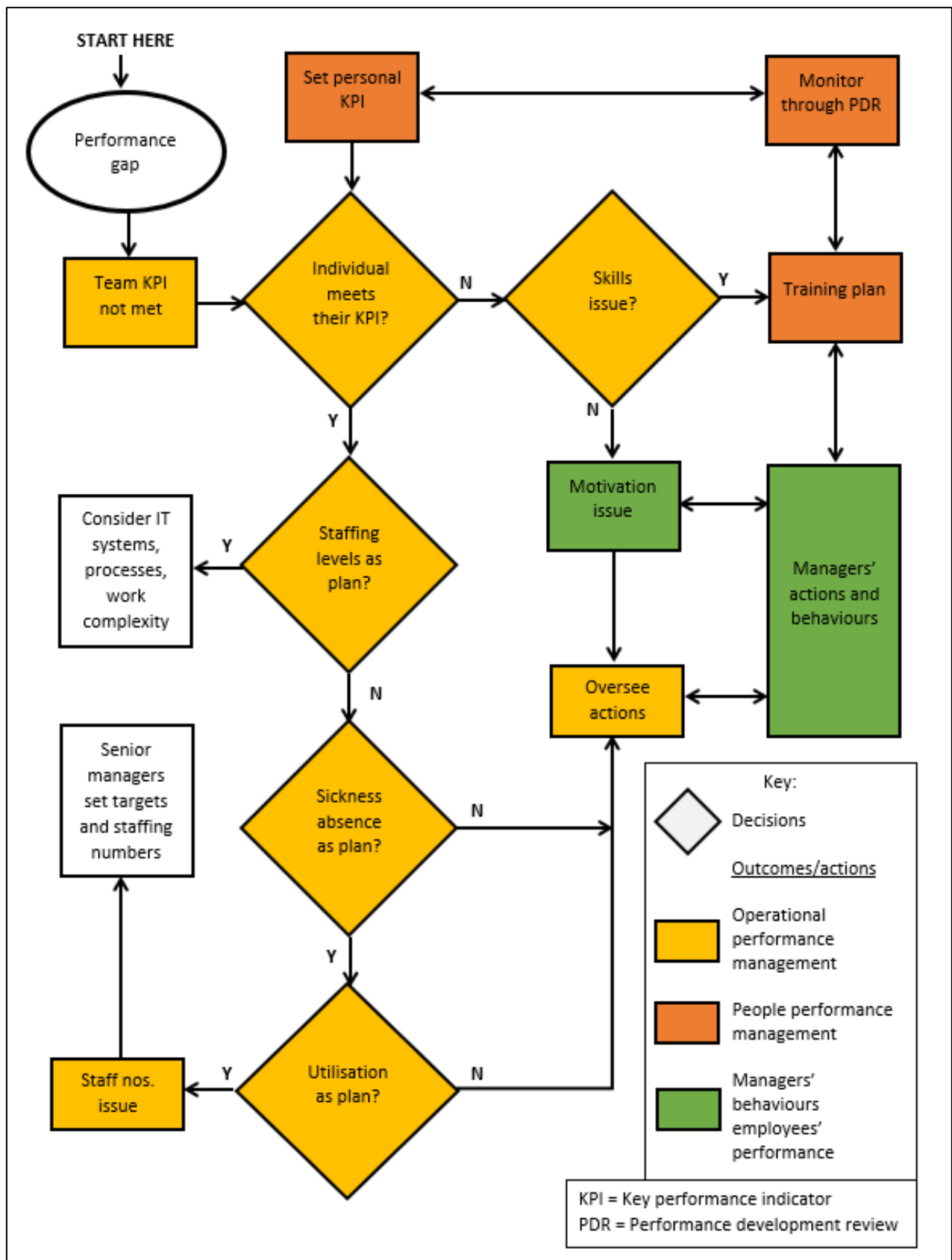


Figure 7-1 Decision tree for assessing performance gaps

Figure 7-1 shows the middle managers' decision-making processes following a gap in a team's performance. In this example, at the top left of the diagram, the team performance on their KPI (number of cases to be completed per day) has not been met. The middle manager would check – was the performance gap due to individuals' gaps in performance? If an individual had not met their KPI, was this due an issue with their skills? If so, then was further training being arranged? If this became a persistent problem, the personal appraisal discussions (PDR) would be used to discuss concerns and actions, which may require a change to their personal KPI. If it was not an issue with skills, what else might have been happening to affect that individual's performance, and how might the frontline manager, or the middle manager, contribute to improving this performance?

If the problem was with staffing levels, then the different drivers of staff availability would be addressed⁴. Had the staff sickness absence been higher than expected? Were staff working on cases, or had they been taken away from their work because they were deputising for a frontline manager, or providing technical advice, or in an appraisal meeting or on training? Once again, for each of these, the middle manager expected their frontline managers to be clear about the reasons and to have put in place appropriate mitigating actions. If the issue was with staffing levels, but not about staff absences, then staff numbers would need to be addressed with more senior managers.

If the performance gap was not caused by individuals' performance, or by staff availability, then some of the middle managers also described the implications of other performance drivers, for example: complexity of the work, slow IT systems, or complex processes.

Looking at these staff related causes of performance gaps, the process of assessing reasons for performance gaps and determining the mitigating actions, was a mix of the three types of performance management that had been identified from the literature review (see section 2.3). These have been illustrated by the

⁴ In the interviews, performance was described as a combination of issues: for simplicity, this description considers each cause for the performance gap in turn

colours of the shading in **Error! Reference source not found..** The operations management processes consider the staffing levels, skills and productivity levels. These link into the people management processes, where the appraisal process is used to consider longer term concerns with absences, skills or motivation. All three types of performance management come together in the managers' actions or behaviours, which have an impact on staff motivation. These behaviours include how well the managers conduct appraisals and how they implement the actions.

These sets of activities, described by the middle managers in this study, can each be found in the performance management literature. However only a small part of the overall process is described in any specific part of the literature.

Looking at the operational management processes, Bourne, Kennerley and Franco-Santos' (2005) paper identifies similar performance management activities: gathering, analysing and interpreting the data; communicating insight and taking action. They also refer to high performing middle managers using their own mental model of the performance factors and finding out for themselves how well performance is going, rather than waiting for the formal reports (Bourne, Kennerley and Franco-Santos, 2005).

The concept of the performance gap is described by Meier, Favero and Zhu (2015), However, they proposed a theoretical model of how middle managers might create a target against which to compare actual performance, rather than how actions to mitigate a gap might be determined. Pavlov and Bourne (2011) did *not* mention the concept of a performance gap. However, when their model shows actions being triggered, this is the consequence of a performance gap between the performance information and the modelled performance. Jääskeläinen and Luukkanen's (2017) also do not mention a performance gap, but found middle managers were struggling with insufficient root cause analysis to make effective decisions and so commonly used judgement, based on experience, when making decisions about how to act on performance information.

There are some papers which start to link operational performance management with staff engagement. Bourne et al. (2013); Baird, Su and Munir (2018); and de Leeuw and van den Berg (2011) all made connections between operational performance management and engaging staff through sharing this information.

One of the papers about the impacts of managers' behaviours on employees' performance also contained some of the operational performance variables (task complexity; employees' skills, ability, knowledge and effort) in their performance framework (Perry, Mesch and Paarlberg, 2006).

Finally, having determined what actions they would expect to see in place to mitigate performance gaps, the middle managers supervised their frontline managers: challenging them to make sure they were in full command of the facts and causes of the gaps; and had in place the appropriate mitigating actions. The middle managers made sure that their frontline managers had looked carefully at individuals' performance, their skills and experience, and whether further training should be put in place or, occasionally, whether or not they were suited to that type of work. Another aspect of supervision that some GovDep middle managers talked about was making sure that their frontline managers' administration activities had been completed to the required standard.

In the literature there were references to similar activities, but these, again, were piecemeal. Writing about managers generally, Hales (2001) listed directing and monitoring the work of subordinates and Anzengruber et al (2017) identified task-oriented behaviours which provided structure and direction to subordinates. The activity of checking-up was little mentioned in the literature, but one piece of research, comparing British and German middle managers, found that while British middle managers used management information systems and exception reporting to keep an overview, the German middle managers used specific controls or spot-checks to review cases in detail (Delmestri and Walgenbach, 2005).

The way in which the frontline managers managed the performance management processes have an important impact on employees' performance. Employees who perceived higher levels of organisational justice, for example in the way

appraisals were handled, trusted the organisation more and showed higher levels of commitment (Farndale, Hope-Hailey and Kelliher, 2011). Mushonga, Thiagarajan and Torrance (2014) found that when supervisors were perceived to be fair and trustworthy, there was improved employee performance.

7.1.2 Managing, coaching and developing frontline managers

In the second set of activities discussed by the middle managers in this study, their focus was on how to help and support their frontline managers to do their best. This was an active, hands-on approach: making it clear what was expected of them; giving feedback; tackling performance issues; recognising that the sickness absence processes were complex and needed experience in handling them, so helping and coaching where necessary. Some managers gave detailed examples of how they were tackling under-performance of a frontline manager.

These findings were close to those found in the people performance management literature; which included being clear about and setting challenging goals; gaining commitment to them; and giving feedback (Favero, Meier and O'Toole, 2016; Moynihan and Pandey, 2005; Perry, Mesch and Paarlberg, 2006).

In terms of coaching and developing their frontline managers, the literature on managers' behaviours and employees' performance, discussed how coaching and social support helped to develop self-efficacy, hope, optimism and resilience (Gruman and Saks, 2011). However Stoker (2006) did not find a strong relationship between coaching behaviour and effectiveness; the middle managers rated themselves higher than their staff did on how much coaching they were giving.

Middle managers in this study also encouraged the frontline managers to work as a team. This was close to the findings of Ellemers, de Gilder and Haslam (2004) that people identified with their work team rather than the larger organization. Also to Solansky (2011) who found that identifying with the team was important and proposed that managers should encourage and allow time for their employees to get to know their team colleagues. Similarly Telleria, Little and MacBryde (2002) found that teamwork had a positive impact on business

performance, linked to managers with high emotional intelligence who could build good relationships with their employees.

7.1.3 Engaging frontline staff

The third group of activities identified in this study were about how the middle managers engaged with the frontline staff of their work-unit. The middle managers saw this engagement as an integral and important part of what they did to manage performance.

Some of the middle managers sat among their staff, either “hot-desking”, so they could be with all of their teams over time, or sitting in a fixed location. They would stop and chat to people at their desks; in the kitchen while making coffee; in the smoking area. They made themselves available to answer questions during the frontline managers’ team meetings, or by setting up their own forums. Some did this every day or every week while others struggled to make time every month.

This regular contact with frontline staff was undertaken by the middle managers despite their having raised lack of time to do everything as an issue. For a full-time middle manager, positioned in the hierarchy two steps above the frontline staff, this would be up to 130 people (or around 100 full-time equivalents) in addition to their 10 frontline managers.

The middle managers had a range of reasons for why they invested their time in this engagement. It was a useful way for them to find out about what was happening with performance in the individual teams. They took the opportunity to check that their front-line managers had been effective in their communications to staff. They also sought to build their relationships with frontline staff. They wanted to appear human, to build trust and to show that they valued the staff. They had made the connection between their relationship with the frontline staff and performance: *If you work for them, they’ll work for you.*

This level of contact was a relatively new phenomenon as a management style: when they had been junior employees, these middle managers had hardly dare knock at the office door of their managers.

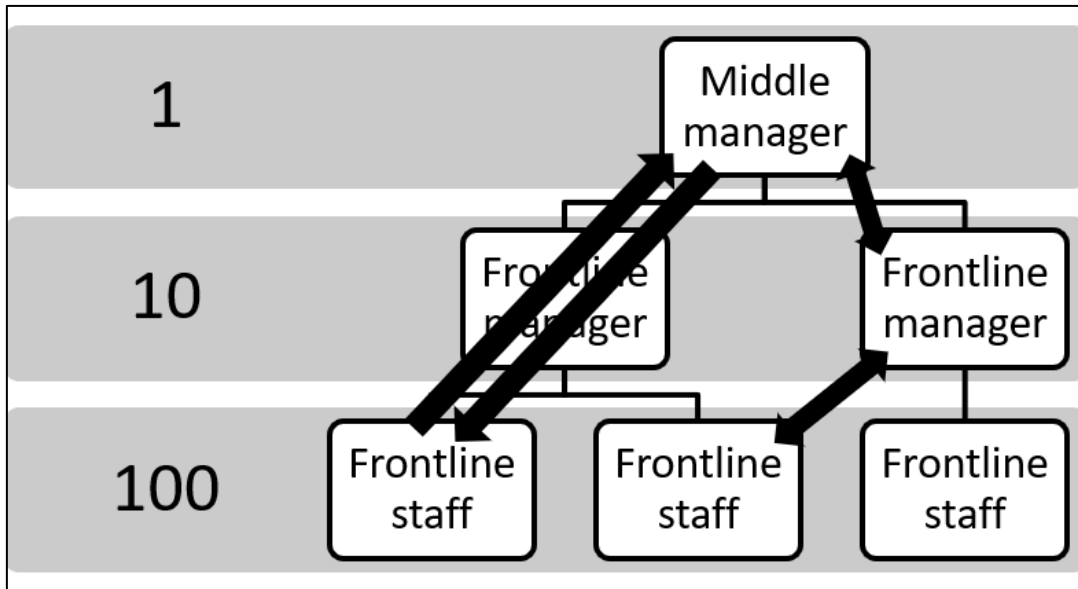


Figure 7-2 Direct engagement with frontline staff

In engaging directly, these middle managers were reaching beyond their direct reports (Figure 7-2) but were cognisant of the issues this might cause. Frontline managers could feel undermined and the middle managers' direct contact could cause frontline staff to circumvent their own manager. Frontline staff could judge that other teams were getting more attention and so feel they were not being treated equally. The middle manager could spend more time with one team and then assume they were more of a problem, forgetting they were not so exposed to potential problems being experienced by other teams.

Some middle management literature (Smith, Plowman and Duchon, 2010; Styhre and Josephson, 2006; Vie, 2010), mentioned activities such as walking the floor, taking time to engage with staff, making sure they knew them; but these papers did not link these activities to managing performance. The importance of managers building good relationships with subordinates was identified in the literature about how managers' behaviours impact employees' performance (e.g. (Gottfredson and Aguinis, 2017; Hassan and Hatmaker, 2015)); but only looked at relationships with direct reports.

Gottfredson and Aguinis (2017) observed that although leadership behaviour and follower performance had been widely researched, *why* these behaviours improved performance was still not understood. They proposed that everything

led back to the relationships between managers and staff (Gottfredson and Aguinis, 2017). Hassan and Hatmaker (2015) considered that understanding the influence of managerial leadership on the performance of public employees was largely unexplored; and yet the ability to influence frontline staff performance could have an important influence on the effectiveness of government organisations.

The positive impact of satisfaction with middle managers on frontline staff job satisfaction has also been identified (e.g. (Dalal, Bashshur and Credé, 2011)); but with no description of what they did.

In their review of 25 years of leadership literature, DeChurch et al (2010) observed that most research focussed on the relationship between a manager and their direct report; and that less than six percent looked at the outcomes at the level of team or unit rather than the individual or the organisation level. In contrast, this study has identified that middle managers do make an effort to engage with staff beyond their direct reports and regard this as an important part of their role in managing performance.

7.1.4 Managing change

Finally, this study found that as part of managing performance, the middle managers managed their own improvement projects as well as playing an important role in communicating and facilitating the organisation-led operational changes.

For their own improvement projects, the middle managers described how they initiated these, and how they involved staff in identifying problems with current processes, and how these might be redesigned, and the changes implemented. This finding supports Wood et al's (2012) work which identified that involving employees by encouraging them to think of improvements was linked to performance. The middle managers' motivation to identify improvements, and the degree of performance improvement achieved does not support Gatenby et al's (2015) findings that middle managers in the public sector lacked the scope to develop locally relevant solutions and approaches to performance.

In terms of the corporate level changes, the biggest change for most staff was the requirement for them to move to answering telephone calls from the public about different workstreams to their usual casework. The change role described by the middle managers in this study was complex and difficult. Others in the organisation were responsible for making the changes; while the middle managers were responsible for communicating what changes were going to happen. Experienced middle managers would seek to tread a careful line between doing as they had been asked and causing more disruption than necessary. In deciding what to say, they would judge the likelihood of a team being moved to the new work, or when the changes might take place.

The middle managers were not managing the change processes themselves. Staff were sent information or allocated to training sessions, for example, without involving their immediate managers. Systems could be unavailable on the day, training sessions re-arranged or re-allocated. Staff who were already sensitive to being asked to make these changes could become quickly disconcerted by what was happening and so key messages could be mis-interpreted.

Some staff would be upset and anxious about the proposed changes. They may, until now, have been working on the same processes for 20 years. They may lack the confidence in their ability to do this new work well and in the organisation's ability to provide sufficient training. Persuading and encouraging staff to embrace the changes; giving them confidence they could do the work; recognising their fears as valid while not allowing disruptive behaviours; and at the same time not being in control of the implementation, were the challenges for the middle managers identified by this study.

The middle managers balanced their own concerns with the need to stay positive for the sake of the staff. They worked out what they should say, interpreting the corporate messages into something relevant for their staff. The middle managers had to handle staff issues such as who was to be trained when and where, or what systems would be available. They had to help staff make the best of the situation, while often struggling to find out for themselves what was going on. The staff issues took careful management and communication. The middle managers

talked about the importance of being honest about what was happening, while at the same time pitching communications at a level of detail that allowed for things to change; maybe giving a rough outline and then a further update when plans seemed more settled. They played an important role in connecting the change back to the vision in which staff had already been engaged.

This role in managing change was one of the most discussed in the literature about what middle managers do, but authors wrote about this change role as a stand-alone activity, rather than as part of an integrated set of actions to manage performance (e.g. (Neto and Lavarda, 2017; Radaelli and Sitton-Kent, 2016; Rouleau and Balogun, 2011)).

These sensemaking and sense-giving activities for middle managers were described in the literature as significant (e.g. (Rouleau and Balogun, 2011; Wooldridge, Schmid and Floyd, 2008)). But in this study, it was found that managing change went much further than understanding the changes and reinterpreting them so that staff could understand what was required and why. The middle managers described how some staff reacted with great negativity. The middle managers understood why and didn't just write this reaction off as resistance. Rather, they used their understanding of why, to encourage and cajole frontline staff, while also holding firm and not allowing them to avoid it.

These descriptions by the middle managers from the study provide further colour to the description by Huy (2002) of their role in balancing their own and others' emotions during change. Acting as a broker of information, selling ideas up and down the organisation are described by a number of authors (e.g. (Ren and Guo, 2011; Shi, Markoczy and Dess, 2009; Wooldridge, Schmid and Floyd, 2008)), but in an operational setting, this activity may not be as straightforward as the literature might make it sound, especially when staff are angry and upset and will do anything they can to avoid making the change.

For some staff the negativity was because it was a change too far: they were familiar with the work they did and had no appetite to change. For others though, they were fearful of doing a bad job: they had past experiences of poor preparation or did not think they had the capability to do the work. The managers'

responses fitted the descriptions of their role by Raelin and Cataldo (2011) of acting between the executives' macro issues and the micro frontline issues of motivation, skills and needs. The behaviours the middle managers described were also important to performance, such as improving optimism (Green Jr, Medlin and Whitten, 2004), inspiring followers (Paglis, 2010) or improving employees' beliefs in their own capabilities (Miraglia, Alessandri and Borgogni, 2015). The important point to conclude here is that these activities to help manage change went well beyond those described in the literature as simply being an intermediary in the processes.

In this section, the findings about each of the four main activities in managing performance have been compared with the literature. The performance gap has emerged as an important and useful concept. The importance of middle managers engaging with frontline staff has been confirmed. They invest time in this to improve their understanding of the performance; to check up on their frontline managers' communications and to build trusting relationships with the staff. Managing change is part of performance management for these middle managers, not a separate isolated activity. In the next section, these findings are considered as a whole.

7.2 Performance management: an integrated process

The section above has shown that, while the literature about performance management has remained in separate domains, the middle managers in this study saw all of them as integral to managing performance. In this section, the way in which the literatures are related is demonstrated, showing that these previously separate literatures can be integrated. A new model of performance management is proposed, which integrates these activities.

7.2.1 Integrating the literature domains

As discussed in chapter two, the literature on performance management was divided into three separate domains: operational performance management (e.g. (Gerrish, 2016)); people performance management (e.g. (Farndale, Hope-Hailey and Kelliher, 2011)) and the impact of managers' behaviours on employees'

performance (e.g. (Hassan and Hatmaker, 2015; Perry, Mesch and Paarlberg, 2006)). A few performance management papers were specifically about what middle managers do to manage performance (e.g. (Bourne, Kennerley and Franco-Santos, 2005)). However there is a further literature about middle managers, where papers have either discussed what middle managers do (e.g. (Smith, Plowman and Duchon, 2010; Vie, 2010)) or their role in communicating strategy (e.g. (Wooldridge, Schmid and Floyd, 2008)).

None of these separate domains in the literature encompassed all of the activities that were found in this study. However, the findings from this study demonstrate that middle managers' activities in managing performance do encompass all of these areas of the literature.

Middle manager activities from this study	This study	Literature domains			
		Operational PM*	People PM*	Managers' behaviours	Middle Manager
Oversee performance	✓✓✓	✓✓✓		✓	
Manage, coach, develop FLM*	✓✓✓		✓✓	✓✓✓	
Engage frontline staff	✓✓✓	✓✓		✓✓	✓✓✓
Manage change	✓✓✓			✓	✓✓✓
Key: ✓✓✓ Broad ✓✓ Some ✓ Slight					
*PM = performance management FLM = frontline manager					

Table 7-1 Coverage of activities in this study compared with literature

Table 7-1 (above) shows how the literature domains can be mapped to the middle managers' activities found in this study. The four columns in this table use the grouping and labelling of the literature domains discussed in chapter two. The four rows of middle managers' performance management activities listed in the left-hand column are those identified in this study. This table shows how each of the literature domains covers only some of the middle managers' performance management activities. None of the literature domains encompassed all of the

activities that were found in this study to be a part of what middle managers do to manage performance.

7.2.2 An integrated model of performance management

The decision tree in **Error! Reference source not found.** showed how the middle managers consider the different aspects of the performance management process when they are reviewing performance. As they explored the reasons for a performance gap and what mitigating actions should be in place, the middle managers encompassed the operational, people and motivational aspects of performance. These are now brought together to propose a single integrated model of performance management.

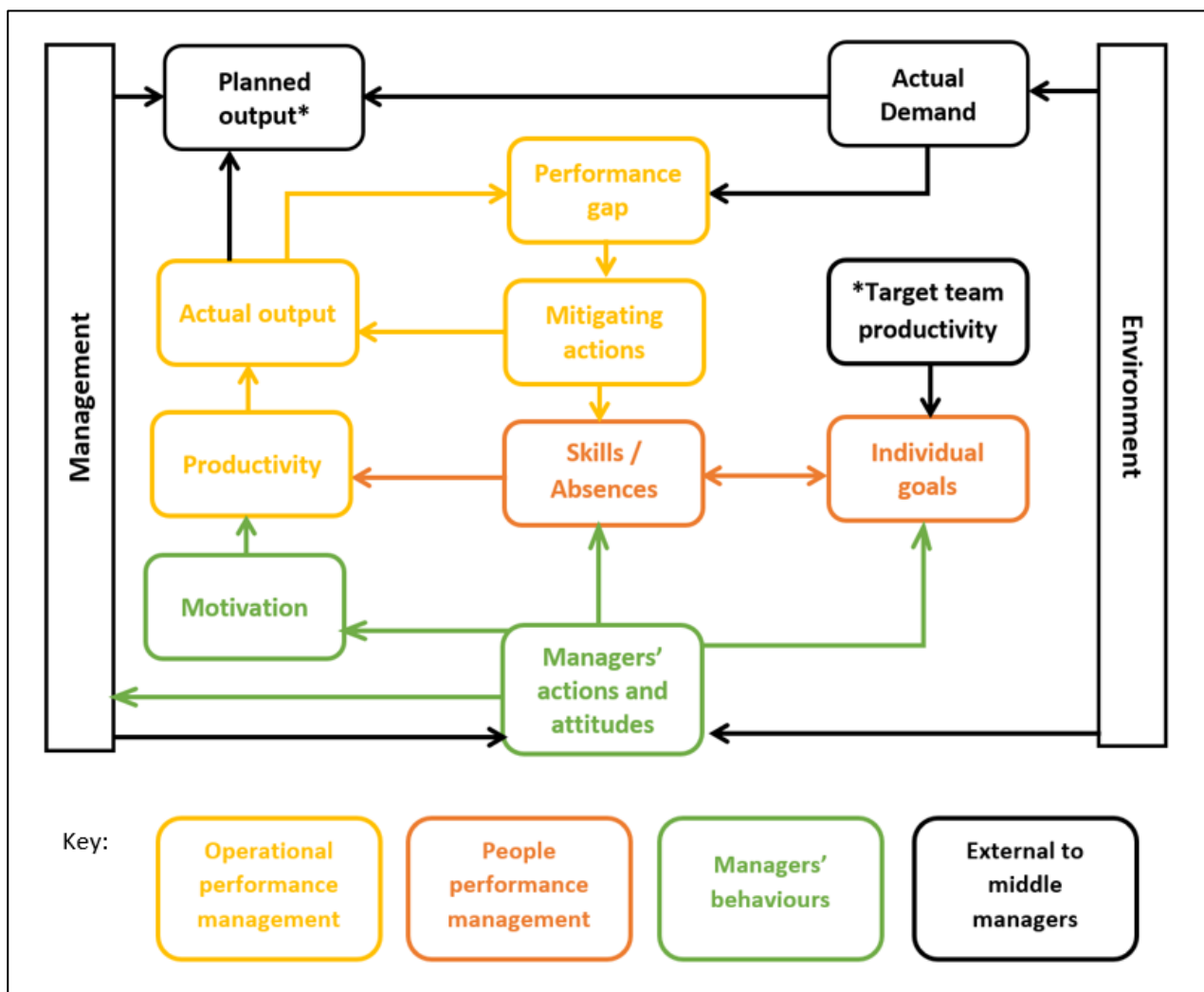


Figure 7-3 Integrated model of performance management

Figure 7-3 above builds on the concept of the performance gap described by Meier, Favero and Zhu (2015); and on Pavlov and Bourne's (2011) model of how performance information triggers management actions.

Starting at the top left-hand side of the model, the planned work output is calculated – that will meet the expected demand coming in. This work output is the product of staff availability and their productivity. Based on this, a target number of cases per day (the KPI) will be set as the target team productivity.

Looking at the causes of a performance gap: changes in the environment, internally and externally, could have an impact on the expected volumes and complexity of the work. Therefore, the actual demand may be different to what had been expected (top right-hand side of the model). At the same time, changes in staff availability and / or their productivity would have an impact on their output of the work. These changes to either demand or output could potentially lead to a performance gap (positive or negative).

To maintain the planned performance standard, mitigating actions would need to be put in place to correct the performance gap. For example: training plans; sickness absence management; or staff engagement would be considered and addressed, aiming to get the output to the planned levels. This operational performance management process was illustrated in the decision tree in **Error! Reference source not found..**

The people management process creates a further loop in the model. The expected team productivity (number of cases per day) would be used to determine individual goals for the appraisal process. The other input to the appraisal process would be any discussion about an individual's productivity, and any impact of skills, absences and levels of motivation. The appraisal discussion may lead to a change in the individual's goals or a longer-term development plan.

The third loop is then the impact that managers' actions and attitudes could have on their relationship with the staff member and how this has an impact on their skills, absences and motivation.

Along the bottom of the model, other aspects of more general management, such as the culture, others' attitudes or expectations or the types of training programmes, could have an impact on those managers' actions and attitudes. Impact on their behaviours could also come from outside the organisation, for example, how customers interact with them and their requirements.

Finally, where the output cannot be met as forecast because there are fewer staff available than expected, the middle managers' role would be to influence more senior management to agree to overtime being worked, or more staff being recruited or moved to their workstream. If the manager had improved a process so that outputs increased, they would influence management to revise the targets, or reduce the staffing levels.

The integrated model of performance discussed in this section, then, is built around the concept of the performance gap. It shows how the activities to manage performance connect those of operational performance management, people performance management and management actions.

7.3 Differences between middle managers

In this section we move on to consider the unexpected findings that there were differences between middle managers in their attributes and in their attitudes to managing performance.

The middle managers in this study were grouped, based on similarities in their characteristics within a group and the differences between groups. The groups were then compared in their attitudes to performance management and in their characteristics. Three groups were identified: *Group A: dynamic and demanding*; *Group B: working their way up*; and *Group C: old hands*. The characteristics and the attitudes of the managers in Groups A and C were most different.

This approach of creating sub-groups of managers is little mentioned in the performance management or middle management literature domains. Bourne, Kennerley and Franco-Santos (2005) did compare the responses between managers of high and average performing branches of a service organisation and found striking differences in their attitudes towards managing performance. This

study adds further detail about the characteristic of different groups of middle managers and potential reasons for these differences. However, since performance data were not available from this study, it has not been possible to link the different characteristics to high or low performance.

Looking at the characteristics in more detail, the *Group A: dynamic and demanding* managers were mostly in their thirties or forties, with a median age of 38. They had been middle managers on average (median value) for four years. Most of these Group A managers therefore, had been working at this level since the GovDep performance management programme had been introduced. This would mean that most of them had become familiar with the concepts and processes of the performance management programme as frontline managers.

These managers did not have concerns about their autonomy but appeared to be prepared to take the initiative and manage as they thought appropriate, working out their role. These findings are similar to those in the literature where researchers found that a sense of autonomy was linked with performance (Caza, 2011; Glaser, 2016; Lonti, 2005; Ouakouak, Ouedraogo and Mbengue, 2014; Parris, Vickers and Wilkes, 2008). The connection between the managers' characteristic of being self-driven and higher performance of their work-unit was also found in Bourne, Kennerley and Franco-Santos' (2005) paper in the operational performance management literature.

These *Group A: dynamic and demanding* managers, when describing how they managed, mentioned leading by example. This is similar to the construction site middle managers in the literature, who were aware that their own behaviour was being watched and recognised the importance of acknowledging problems and being positive even when they did not feel like it (Styhre and Josephson, 2006).

Some of these managers described being part of the same team as their staff. They described high-performing frontline managers as those who could see the bigger picture. They talked about pushing their frontline managers as part of developing them. They were more likely than Groups B or C to describe engaging frontline staff by holding forums, bringing all their staff together to discuss an issue. They wanted to make sure their communications helped staff relate to the

vision, so they could relate to where they fitted in. In the managers' behaviours and employees' performance literature, these behaviours, such as visible commitment to the vision (Slack, Orife and Anderson, 2010); or sharing the organisations' values (Ellemers, de Gilder and Haslam, 2004); where they were genuine, had a positive impact on performance.

In contrast, the *Group C: old hands* were mainly aged in their fifties and sixties and had been middle managers on average for 12 years and at least for six years. All of them had been appointed middle managers before the performance management programme had been introduced. They were most different to their colleagues in the other groups in the way that they talked about engaging frontline staff.

These *Group C: old hands* mainly sat among their staff and were most likely to say they knew them well - maybe because they had been around longer. They made sure they didn't only talk about work, but also about people's families or holidays or interests outside work.

They were more likely to talk about the details of the performance management processes. They felt they lacked the autonomy to act and that key decisions were made elsewhere. This may have been linked to the fact that they also felt the loss of the grade above them. They were close to the work, feeling that it was important to know the processes themselves; were keen to drive improvements in the processes and were more likely to talk about the detail of system issues.

These Group C middle managers considered high performing frontline managers to be those who had more experience, were more ambitious and were good at managing performance challenges such as sickness absence. High-performing frontline staff in their view were those who had good technical knowledge, ambition and a good work ethic, who would volunteer for work or projects beyond their core job.

Given their age and time as middle managers, the *Group A: dynamic and demanding* managers were more likely to be promoted further. In contrast, the *Group C: old hands* had been at this management level for much of their careers

and so were presumably not seen as potential for promotion to senior management. Mair (2005) found that the more experienced middle managers in her study of bank branches were positively associated with profit growth. She suggested that these successful middle managers were less likely to be “passing through” and so were more committed to their role.

Conclusions

This chapter has addressed the research questions: *What do middle managers do to manage performance?* and *Are there different groups of middle managers with different attitudes to performance management?*

In answer to the first research question - *What do they do to manage performance?* - the findings from this study have demonstrated that the middle managers:

- Monitor performance; supervise mitigating actions required to close performance gaps.
- Manage, coach and develop their direct reports, the frontline managers.
- Engage directly with frontline staff, despite having limited time.
- Manage their own and the organisation's change projects.

All of these activities were mentioned by the middle managers in the study as important activities in managing performance. In the literature, these activities are all mentioned but are dispersed across disparate domains. For example, the operational performance management literature mainly covers the activities of overseeing performance using performance information (e.g. (Bourne, Kennerley and Franco-Santos, 2005; Gerrish, 2016)).

The people performance activities relate to those between the middle manager and the frontline manager and between the frontline manager and the frontline staff. The people performance management literature addressed these topics of goal setting and feedback (e.g. (Cho and Lee, 2012)). How managers behaved in these activities was important in building trust and a sense of organisational justice (e.g. (Farndale, Hope-Hailey and Kelliher, 2011)).

The engagement of the frontline staff by middle managers is a particularly interesting finding which contributes to a broader understanding of the role of middle managers in relation to their whole work unit. Middle managers saw this activity as important, despite their having described the lack of time to do everything they felt they should. The middle managers did this to: find out for themselves what was going on; to support and manage their direct reports; to provide uniform communication to staff; and to build trust through demonstrating to staff that they were approachable, that they valued their staff and were interested in them as people.

Some middle management literature (Smith, Plowman and Duchon, 2010; Styhre and Josephson, 2006; Vie, 2010) mentioned the activity, but did not link it to performance. The importance of managers building good relationships with subordinates was identified in the literature about how managers' behaviours impact employees' performance (e.g. (Gottfredson and Aguinis, 2017; Hassan and Hatmaker, 2015)), but only looked at relationships with direct reports. Research by Dalal, Bashshur and Credé (2011) found that frontline staff satisfaction with their middle managers was important to total job satisfaction but with no indication of what the middle managers did. DeChurch et al. (2010) found that most research only considers the relationship between the manager and direct report.

Finally, the fourth activity for the middle managers in their performance management was how they managed change. This was an integral part of their work in managing performance. The two types of change they described were their own local improvement initiatives and strategic change programmes for GovDep as a whole. In developing their own change initiatives, the middle managers involved frontline staff, as well as their managers, in identifying and developing local improvements to processes. In supporting the GovDep change programme, the middle managers encouraged the frontline staff to have confidence in their new work, balanced their communications to ensure they were appropriate for each staff group and balanced their own emotions while dealing with others'.

Much of the middle management literature has referred to the middle managers' role in managing change, especially their sensemaking and sense giving activities (e.g. (Rouleau and Balogun, 2011)), the importance of these in developing and implementing strategy (e.g. (Wooldridge, Schmid and Floyd, 2008)) or how they balance their own emotions (e.g. (Huy, 2002)). However, these activities have stood alone and have not been seen as part of an integrated set of performance management activities.

Having demonstrated that the different literature domains about performance management can be integrated, a model of performance management has been proposed which shows how the different activities are interrelated. The model enables us to improve our understanding about the links between these previously independent performance management activities.

Within the performance management literature there is the concept of the performance gap (Jääskeläinen and Luukkanen, 2017; Meier, Favero and Zhu, 2015; Pavlov and Bourne, 2011). This study has enabled the concept to be described in more detail and has highlighted its importance to performance management.

Moving on to the second research question: *Are there different groups of middle managers with different attitudes to performance management?* The answer was that this study found indicative differences in middle managers' attitudes to performance management that appear to be related to how long they had been a middle manager. There were three groups of middle managers, with differences in how they managed performance:

- Group A, dynamic and demanding
- Group B, working their way up
- Group C, old hands

Group A: dynamic and demanding were middle managers who were most likely to have been promoted in the past four years and be aged under 45. They checked up on their frontline managers' work. They appeared to be more independent: able to drive their own agendas; more detached from their work-

unit; worked more through their frontline managers. These managers would already have been introduced to the current performance management processes as more junior staff.

This contrasts with *Group C: old hands* who had been middle managers for much longer. These middle managers were more focussed on the performance management processes and they appeared closer to their frontline staff. These middle managers had learned their management techniques in an earlier era. They talked about how they missed the previous structures and felt they had lost their autonomy.

The third group of middle managers, *Group B: working their way up* had characteristics between these other two groups. They had been relatively recently promoted but were closer in age to the old hands. They focussed more on the performance management measures. They knew staff well.

These emergent findings indicate that it is possible to identify different groups of managers who have different characteristics and approaches to performance management, possibly as a result of learning their management skills in different work unit climates.

In conclusion, then, the contribution to knowledge from this study is:

- Demonstration that performance management is an integrated process of operational and people performance management as well as the impact of middle managers' behaviour. Previously discrete literatures about different aspects of performance management can therefore be brought together and integrated (e.g. (Bourne, Kennerley and Franco-Santos, 2005; Farndale, Hope-Hailey and Kelliher, 2011; Gerrish, 2016; Gottfredson and Aguinis, 2017; Perry, Mesch and Paarlberg, 2006)). An integrated model of performance management has been proposed, which can help to extend knowledge about performance management processes by looking at the links between the different types of performance.
- The concept of the performance gap has been identified as an important step in the performance management process, building on earlier work by

Meier, Favero and Zhu (2015), Pavlov and Bourne (2011) and Jääskeläinen and Luukkanen (2017). Middle managers use their mental map of the performance drivers to identify causes of performance gaps and to determine what mitigating actions should be in place. Considering this concept in more detail allows further exploration and understanding of how this process is managed and what skills and expertise is required.

- Knowledge about the importance of the middle managers' role in engaging frontline staff has been strengthened and linked with their performance management activities. This builds on earlier work by Dalal, Bashshur and Credé (2011) about the importance of frontline staff satisfaction with middle managers to their job satisfaction. It also contributes to a broader understanding of the role of middle managers where DeChurch et al. (2010) found that most research only considered the relationship between the manager and direct report. These findings also serve to link research about what middle managers do (Smith, Plowman and Duchon, 2010; Styhre and Josephson, 2006; Vie, 2010) with literature about the importance of managers' actions on their direct reports' performance (e.g. (Gottfredson and Aguinis, 2017; Hassan and Hatmaker, 2015)).

Other interesting findings that are worth further consideration are:

- The differences in the middle managers' actions, attributes and attitudes could provide some potentially useful insights into how different groups of middle managers respond to change.
- The way in which the newer managers talked about the importance of checking up on their direct reports' work as a form of quality assurance. This behaviour was described in one research paper as more prevalent in German middle managers than those in Britain (Delmestri and Walgenbach, 2005).
- Managing change was clearly an important aspect of the middle managers' performance management activities. Their role in change was central to their responsibility for operational delivery and not simply an add-on as a transmitter of information up and down the line found in earlier

literature (e.g. (Wooldridge, Schmid and Floyd, 2008)). The information in this study builds on Huy's (2001, 2002, 2011) earlier work on the importance of middle managers.

This chapter has discussed the findings in relation to the literature and concluded with how this study has contributed to knowledge about what middle managers do to manage performance. In the final chapter, this contribution to knowledge, along with the other interesting findings, are discussed and conclusions drawn in terms of their implications.

8 CONCLUSION

In this final chapter, I reflect on and draw some conclusions about why this research is important. I discuss the implications for the practice of performance management: especially how to support middle managers in their important role. I consider the study's limitations and propose some ideas for further research. I then reflect on my own personal journey in this endeavour, in terms of what I have learnt about performance management, what I learnt about becoming a researcher and about myself along the way.

8.1 Why this research is important

This research set out to understand what middle managers do to manage performance. The study was undertaken in the UK public sector. In terms of current management research, this is an important but surprisingly under-researched subject, and not just in the public sector.

In chapter one, the performance management pressures on the public sector were described. Getting performance management right has an important impact on an organisation's ability to deliver its services effectively and efficiently. This is especially so in central government departments that are focussed on operational delivery. The civil service was historically poor at performance management (HM Government, 2012), however the government austerity programme meant that budgets in the large operational delivery departments reduced by up to 23% in real terms between 2010 and 2015. Being able to do more with less continues to be critical (Institute for Government, 2015).

At the same time, recent figures from the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development show that stress was the cause of more than two thirds of long term absence in the public sector (CIPD, 2019). Workload and management style were the first and second most commonly cited causes of this stress (CIPD, 2019). Done badly, performance management could exacerbate this problem. Done well, there is surely reason to believe it could help to alleviate workplace stress.

Chapter two discussed how, although much has been written about performance management, it is a series of fragmented topics. What middle managers do to manage performance has been even less well-covered.

Earlier research on public sector performance management tended to focus on whether or not it was an appropriate way to manage the sector (e.g. (Hood, 1991; Worrall, Mather and Seifert, 2010)). Later literature has found that operational performance management is useful in the public sector (e.g. (Gerrish, 2016)) but has not gone beyond describing management as generally useful. With notable exceptions (e.g. (Perry, Mesch and Paarlberg, 2006)), operational performance management research in the public and private sectors are published in different journals, risking a limited sharing of the learning across sectors.

Research about what middle managers do to manage performance has been limited. Some papers describe middle managers' activities (e.g. (Styhre and Josephson, 2006)) but they have no link to performance. These activities, however, bear a strong similarity to the performance enhancing behaviours of managers more generally (e.g. (Paglis, 2010)). Other research about the middle managers' contribution as a communications link - in strategy formulation, change management or knowledge exchange (e.g. (Radaelli and Sitton-Kent, 2016; Wooldridge, Schmid and Floyd, 2008)) - does not relate these activities with their roles and responsibilities. Finally, there is literature about the importance of middle managers to employee or organisational performance (e.g. (Dalal, Bashshur and Credé, 2011)), but not connected to what they do to manage performance.

Careful definitions of both *performance management* and *middle manager* have been required for this research. The term *performance management* means different things to different management researchers. When Human Resources Management researchers are writing about performance management, they mean setting individual's goals and personal appraisal systems (e.g. (Farndale, Hope-Hailey and Kelliher, 2011)). Whereas a Performance Measurement and Management researcher will mean operational management systems such as performance reports and measurement systems (e.g. (Gerrish, 2016)). A third

line of performance management research has been about the impact of managers' behaviours on employees' performance (e.g. (Perry, Mesch and Paarlberg, 2006)).

As well as the issue of disparate domains, there is also a risk that, rather than focussing on too narrow an area of performance management, any research could attempt to be a *Theory of Everything*, since surely anything managers do must in some way be ultimately about the organisation's performance (e.g. (Walshe, Harvey and Jas, 2010)).

Equally, it can be difficult to define who we mean by *middle managers*. In organisations where there is a clear branch or site structure (e.g. (Bourne, Kennerley and Franco-Santos, 2005; Smith, Plowman and Duchon, 2010)), then it is straightforward to select a relatively small and well-defined part of the management hierarchy. In large organisations without such structures, however, there is a tendency for researchers to define middle managers as everyone between the executive and the frontline manager (e.g. (DeChurch et al., 2010; Huy, 2011)). This encompasses a wide range of management levels, roles and responsibilities.

Even once the levels of the middle managers are understood, most research is only interested in their relationships with and management of their direct reports: their wider impact on their work-unit is not studied (DeChurch et al., 2010).

8.2 Research findings and contribution

This study set out to answer the question: *What do middle managers do to manage performance?* For this study, twenty middle managers in a UK government department (GovDep) were interviewed. These middle managers were all at the same single management level, two above the frontline staff. They were all based in one location, working for the same business unit in GovDep. The in-depth interviews were coded into NVivo using a grounded approach. Chapter three described the research philosophy, strategy and method.

The analysis shows that these middle managers actively manage the performance of their work unit. The findings about their performance

management activities, and the differences in their attributes and attitudes, are discussed below, followed by the study's conclusions about how they have contributed to knowledge about performance management.

8.2.1 Middle managers' performance management activities

In answer to the question - *What do middle managers do to manage performance?* - the answer was that they:

- Monitor performance; supervise mitigating actions required to close performance gaps.
- Manage, coach and develop their direct reports, the frontline managers.
- Engage directly with frontline staff, despite having limited time.
- Manage their own and the organisation's change projects.

These findings were discussed in chapter four. To oversee performance, the middle managers monitored results: looking through reports and talking to staff. They used their understanding of what could impact the performance to identify why any gaps had occurred, especially where there was a shortfall. They then supervised the frontline managers' mitigating actions.

As well as these day-to-day activities, the middle managers created an environment where their frontline managers could do their best. They made it clear what was expected of them, gave feedback and managed any performance issues. They coached the frontline managers; supported their development, in some cases pushing them to take on projects or training; and encouraged them to work as a team.

The middle managers also invested time in engaging directly with frontline staff despite also describing lack of time as one of their key issues. They walked the floor to stop and chat; attended staff meetings where they could answer questions; or held forums to introduce and explain planned corporate changes. They took time to get to know frontline staff; to be accessible; to show they were human and to build relationships with them.

Finally, the middle managers facilitated corporate-led changes and introduced their own changes to resolve issues or improve throughput or quality. They involved frontline staff and managers in making improvements to processes that had a significant impact in some cases on the performance. They described the staff reactions to the changes, which were often ascribed to fear of failure and lack of confidence in being able to meet the challenges of the changes. They talked to staff about the reasons for the changes, interpreting and reinterpreting the vision to make it relevant to them, giving them confidence and keeping them motivated when setbacks messed up the training plan or when systems were not ready.

8.2.2 Middle managers' differences

In analysing the data from these in-depth interviews, a further question emerged: *Are there different groups of middle managers with different attitudes to performance management?* In answer to this question the study found indicative differences in middle managers' attitudes to performance management that appeared to relate to how long they had been a middle manager. Three groups of middle managers were found, which each had differences in how they managed performance. These groups were also different in their levels of experience as middle managers. They were:

- Group A, dynamic and demanding
- Group B, working their way up
- Group C, old hands

The experienced managers, who had been long in their role, had struggled with a sense of loss of their previous responsibilities. Others, who had been relatively recently promoted, seemed to take the changes more in their stride – possibly because they were more familiar with the newer methods. It may also be that some of the newer managers were destined for higher management in future. Others, who were later in their careers and had been in this role for many years already, were possibly less likely to see further promotion at this stage and so may have reached their full capability as managers.

Chapters five and six describe finding the middle managers' different characteristics and analysing them to find the groups.

8.2.3 This study's contribution to knowledge

Chapter seven concluded that this study has made a contribution to knowledge about performance management and what middle managers do, by:

- (1) Demonstrating that performance management is an integrated process compared with the current performance management literature being a set of discrete domains (e.g. (Bourne, Kennerley and Franco-Santos, 2005; Farndale, Hope-Hailey and Kelliher, 2011; Gerrish, 2016; Gottfredson and Aguinis, 2017; Perry, Mesch and Paarlberg, 2006)). These can be integrated to a single performance management literature. An integrated model that incorporates operational performance management, people performance management and the impact of managers' behaviours on individuals' performance has been proposed.
- (2) Developing the concept of the performance gap, based on earlier work by Meier, Favero and Zhu (2015), Pavlov and Bourne (2011) and Jääskeläinen and Luukkanen (2017) enables us to understand more about how a manager decides what action should be taken.
- (3) Demonstrating that the relationship between the middle manager and their frontline staff is an important one, building on work by DeChurch et al. (2010) and Dalal, Bashshur and Credé (2011) about the importance of looking beyond the relationship between a manager and their direct reports. This supports and links earlier work about middle managers spending time engaging frontline staff (Smith, Plowman and Duchon, 2010; Styhre and Josephson, 2006; Vie, 2010); and the importance of a positive relationship between an individual and the organisation in contributing to the work unit's performance (Gottfredson and Aguinis, 2017; Perry, Mesch and Paarlberg, 2006).

8.2.4 Other interesting findings

As well as these three areas of contribution, there were some other interesting findings that are worthy of mention and further discussion

- (1) The findings about the differences in the middle managers' actions, attributes and attitudes provide some potentially useful insights into how different groups of middle managers respond to change.
- (2) The way in which the newer managers talked about the importance of checking up on their direct reports' work as a form of quality assurance was interesting and would be useful to follow up further.
- (3) The middle managers, in describing how they managed change, clearly played an important role and the information in this study builds on Huy's (2001, 2002, 2011) earlier work on middle managers. Their role in change was central to their responsibility for operational delivery and not simply an add-on as a transmitter of information up and down the line found in earlier literature (e.g. (Wooldridge, Schmid and Floyd, 2008)).

The implications for each of the contributions and other findings, and ideas for further research, are discussed in the sections below.

8.3 Implications for practice

As I stand back and reflect on my work experiences and link them with what was found in this study, the implications for middle managers seem significant. How middle managers seek to build relationships with their frontline staff; how they tackle the performance gap; the way in which the integrated model provides insights into why some managers struggle with some of their performance management responsibilities. The differences between managers who learned their craft in different management eras. These are discussed below.

8.3.1 Middle managers' relationships with frontline staff

"If we do not clearly understand why leadership behaviours—follower performance relations occur, we will be limited in our ability to provide accurate and actionable recommendations for leaders that will result in the most favourable performance outcomes".

Gottfredson and Aguinis (2017, p.559)

"When you command a platoon, you should know each man in it better than his own mother does. You must know which man responds to encouragement, which to reasoning and which needs a good kick in the pants. Know your men."

Field Marshall Sir William Slim (1891-1970)
(Royal Military Academy Sandhurst, 2013, p.36).

This finding about the role of middle managers beyond their direct reports has been little remarked upon previously. So it is worth considering how managers in another sector engage their staff. The army, for example, appears to go further, advising young officers that their responsibility for the welfare and effective management of the soldiers is "entirely dependent upon the time you spend getting to know the men and women in your troop or platoon" (Royal Military Academy Sandhurst, 2006, p.82).

Given the era in which Field Marshall Sir William Slim was in active service, we might allow him his male only perspective, but his point about knowing your staff as individuals, each with their own needs and interests, is as modern an outlook as anything written today. Supporting this, a manager who had previously been in the army, said:

"[O]ne of the biggest misconceptions of the army is that it manages people using fear. In fact, what it is very good at is listening to people and gaining a proper understanding of what makes them tick. It's important to learn about people's home lives, their interests"

Welham (2014)

While the rigours of military life would put an emphasis on such relationships, the learning from this focus on the importance of knowing people as individuals

appears to support findings from the less demanding areas of everyday management. It may be that an essential part of performance management is to lead people by getting to know them well and building relationships with them. They will use these relationships to assess how much they feel they know and can trust the managers they see and meet. From this they will judge how much they can trust their organisation with a consequent impact on performance.

It may be that this relationship-building is so important to how frontline staff trust their organisations, that it cannot be left to just the frontline managers. The middle managers represent the bigger organisation: trust in them potentially represents trust in the organisation.

What this means for middle managers is that their ability to engage staff is an important skill for their role. They need to be good at direct communication and building relationships. They need to be encouraged to make time to talk to staff and to recognise that being genuinely friendly and interested in all members of staff in their work-unit is as important a performance management activity as reviewing the daily reports.

Middle managers who understand the importance of building trusting relationships with their frontline staff, and who have the skills to do so, will be able to encourage staff to perform to the best of their ability. Doing this well could have a positive impact on the organisations' outcomes; for its customers and, in the case of the public sector, for the taxpayer. It could also have a positive impact on staff, with the potential to reduce stress.

The improved understanding, from this study, of what middle managers do to manage performance, could lead to improvements in their support and training. In the longer term it could mean that middle managers are recruited and rewarded for the skills that will make the positive difference to how their teams perform.

The Civil Service development available to middle managers includes sessions on motivation and engagement, the importance of interpersonal skills and being able to match management style to individual needs (e.g. (Civil Service College,

2018a, 2018b)). Connecting these to getting to know staff as individuals would be an important addition to these topics.

8.3.2 Tackling the performance gap

This study has expanded the concept of the performance gap - by recognising it as a key point in the process of moving from understanding the performance problem to taking appropriate mitigating action.

Jääskeläinen and Luukkanen (2017) found that middle managers were using intuition and judgement based on experience; whereas they had expected to see more evidence used from performance information. Intuition, judgement and experience are all important in assessing how to respond to a performance problem. However, they take time to amass and relying on this experience to build could risk unnecessary inconsistencies as well as lost time. There is also the potential risk of managers jumping to conclusions and so leaping at solutions that may or may not work.

Middle managers with a clear understanding of what drives the performance of their unit, will be able to make more effective, evidence-based decisions about what actions to take. Through this understanding they can have more autonomy in determining and implementing the solutions of their choice. More senior managers who share this understanding may be less likely to expect miracles and will be able to engage effectively in the assessment of the causes of a gap and the potential effects of a proposed solution.

Understanding what drives performance can be complex. Having a stage in the performance management process that is about the performance gap is a bit like freeze-framing. By “slowing it down”, the detail of the information required, as well as the skills needed to evaluate, can be considered in more detail.

For middle managers to take evidence-based decisions about appropriate mitigating actions, there needs to be an agreed model of the performance drivers. This may mean more training for middle managers in how to evaluate the gaps and therefore result in greater consistency of results. It may well be that some of these performance drivers are outside the middle managers' own business

operation and therefore outside their immediate control. Encouraging senior managers to become more involved in understanding the performance drivers and engaging their middle managers in the processes of analysing the performance gap could also prompt wider intra- and even inter-department approaches to performance management.

8.3.3 The integrated model of performance management

The purpose of the integrated model has been to illustrate the importance of considering how research about one aspect of performance management might relate to the other aspects. It also has implications for practice. For example, the model could potentially help in the improvement of the design of people performance management systems. From personal experience, while the importance of setting goals and giving feedback is generally accepted by managers as useful for managing performance, there are many criticisms of the appraisal processes. They can be seen as onerous and some managers can appear to be doing everything they can to avoid having the meeting with their member of staff.

Looking further at the model in Figure 7-3: this shows the link between the managers' actions and the employees' behaviours. The discussion above has further emphasised the importance of these relationships. Could it be that appraisal conversations are put off by some managers because it soon becomes only too clear that they are appraising their own abilities to manage and motivate as much as the skills and performance of the employee? This might prove to be a more uncomfortable look in the mirror than would be expected from the process.

8.3.4 Middle managers and their own change

The differences between the different groups of middle managers mean that implementing change and provision of training and development programmes cannot be "one size fits all". Managers who have been in post for many years may take longer to adjust to organisational changes, because they have to "unlearn" more from previous ways of doing things. They may need more help in making sense of new changes being required and be given time to work through

their questions without being seen as difficult and resistant. For example, Lüscher and Lewis (2008) describe workshops for managers, who come with “paradoxes,” to help them in their sensemaking.

It may be hard for senior (and busy) managers to acknowledge this. They have some (more dynamic) managers who apparently “get it” and so “get on with it”. Accepting that other managers might need more help and more time to deal with change could potentially mean these managers will be able to manage greater levels of performance. William Bridges (1995) used the analogy of the “marathon effect”: where the front runners (the managers leading the change) were almost finishing their race and thinking of the next one, while the Sunday runners (more junior staff) were still waiting to start. Senior managers who remember this image may be able to support their teams to be the best they can rather than simply leaving them behind.

8.4 Limitations to this research and scope for further research

There is a question about how far these results can be generalised. From the results of a qualitative research study of a set of managers in one central government department, can we say anything about middle managers in other public sector organisations or even in the private sector? The presence of similar concepts across the literature domains and across industry sectors, to those found in this study, provides some indication that they can be applied further than this team of managers in this public sector context. It would no doubt be useful to extend this study to other public and non-public sector organisations.

Looking specifically at how middle managers engaged their frontline staff, this study identified the importance of this relationship. Further work is required, to build on this.

In Burke and Litwin’s (1992) causal model of organisational performance they include the concept of work-unit climate as distinctly separate from organisational culture. Work-unit climate is related to how employees feel and is strongly related to conditions such as systems, structures and managers’ behaviours: culture, in contrast, relates to organisational level values and beliefs (Burke and Litwin,

1992). Further work to explore these concepts and how managers have an impact on their work-unit performance would improve our understanding of these extended roles.

The checking-up by some of the middle managers of their frontline managers' work quality seemed to be a learned behaviour that was supported by a cross-cultural comparison of management styles (Delmestri and Walgenbach, 2005). Further research could possibly see if this phenomenon is found elsewhere.

These results rely on what the middle managers had to say about their role and activities. While the questions aimed to minimise their giving what they thought might be the right answer, their descriptions of how they engaged with frontline staff might not be corroborated by the frontline staff or might be viewed differently. Further research which included the views of the frontline managers and frontline staff would be helpful in giving greater validity to the results.

It was not possible to link the activities of these middle managers with their performance. Because of the nature of the work, the way in which teams were co-managed and the ways in which work was moved around the different teams as priorities changed, the performance of the teams was not felt to be reflective of the performance of the middle manager. It was also likely that a well-regarded middle manager was more likely to be asked to manage teams who were considered to be poorly performing. The timing of the research meant that the managers' performance appraisal ratings were not available. Further research that links these findings to performance of the middle managers would be useful.

8.5 Personal reflections

This has been some personal journey. I set off as a recent senior manager who had spent much of her career managing operational performance. I thought I knew quite a bit about it. I wish I had known then what I know now. The risks of gaming have been experienced in the public sector (for example in the National Health Service) where lack of iron control over the quality of an outcome can lead to that quality being compromised in order to meet a process target (The King's Fund, 2017). More recently, these compromises have emerged in the private

sector (for example Volkswagen (Leggett, 2018)). The ways in which targets are set: the importance of an evidence base and of engaging the delivery managers in developing performance standards - these are well documented in the literature and a more detailed understanding of these aspects would have been useful to me in managing these processes.

Becoming a researcher is a very different discipline to being a manager. The creation of a strong evidence base, the rigour in the approach and the clarity required in what this all means have been an enormous challenge at times and have been useful skills to develop. Being a researcher requires becoming an expert in one's field, finding literature that is relevant and appropriate, having a structured approach to justify why papers are selected or rejected. Accumulating and assimilating the knowledge from these papers required a disciplined and ordered approach, being able to extract the meaning and usefulness of the papers as well as being able to critically evaluate the content. Conducting and analysing the research is as creative a process as any artist might experience and as challenging to the inner person.

Each of these stages required new skills to be learned and hard-won. I, who could rattle off a proposal, presentation or report, could chair a meeting and deal with all the challenges of the daily life of an operational manager found myself having to re-read, re-do and repeat many activities while I learnt to do them effectively. I had to swap competence and confidence for incompetence, and it was hard. I had not expected it to be easy, but what started off in my mind as a challenge of daunting but manageable proportions, seemed at times to be beyond my reach. With much help and support I have made it. I started out with a curiosity about middle managers; I end up with a passion for their role and as an advocate for their significance.

8.6 And finally

The last words should be about middle managers. This study has demonstrated that far from being “the marzipan layer”, they have a significant role to play in performance management. Their role requires a wide mix of skills, in being able

to oversee and supervise day-to-day actions as well as build trusting relationships with up to 130 staff.

They need to be a role model, with consistent values and behaviours. They also need to be a trusted colleague: someone who knows staff well and understands “what makes them tick”. They need to be able to balance their focus on both the task and their relationships: making consistently good judgements about when to push and when to coach and encourage. These are what make a good middle manager. Few organisations can function well without them.

REFERENCES

- Agarwal, R., Angst, C.M. and Magni, M. (2009) 'The performance effects of coaching: A multilevel analysis using hierarchical linear modeling', *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 20(10), pp. 2110–2134.
- Ahearne, M., Lam, S.K. and Kraus, F. (2014) 'Performance impact of middle managers' adaptive strategy implementation: the role of social capital', *Strategic Management Journal*, 35, pp. 68–87.
- Alagaraja, M. and Shuck, B. (2015) 'Exploring organizational alignment-employee engagement linkages and impact on individual performance: A conceptual model', *Human Resource Development Review*, 14(1), pp. 17–37.
- Alfes, K., Truss, C., Soane, E.C., Rees, C. and Gatenby, M. (2013) 'The relationship between line manager behaviour, perceived HRM practices, and individual performance: Examining the mediating role of engagement', *Human Resource Management*, 52(6), pp. 839–859.
- Andrews, R. and Brewer, G.A. (2013) 'Social capital, management capacity and public service performance', *Public Management Review*, 15(1), pp. 19–42.
- Anzengruber, J., Goetz, M.A., Nold, H. and Woelfle, M. (2017) 'Effectiveness of managerial capabilities at different hierarchical levels', *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, 32(2), pp. 134–148.
- Baird, K., Su, S. and Munir, R. (2018) 'The relationship between the enabling use of controls, employee empowerment, and performance', *Personnel Review*, 47(1), pp. 257–274.
- Bal, P.M., Chiaburu, D.S. and Jansen, P.G.W. (2010) 'Psychological contract breach and work performance', *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, 25(3), pp. 252–273.
- Balogun, J. (2003) 'From blaming the middle to harnessing its potential: Creating change intermediaries', *British Journal of Management*, 14, pp. 69–83.
- Barbier, M., Hansez, I., Chmiel, N. and Demerouti, E. (2013) 'Performance

expectations, personal resources, and job resources: How do they predict work engagement?', *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, 22(6), pp. 750–762.

BBC (2019) *Gatwick drones: Military stood down after airport chaos.*, News Website Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-sussex-46741687> (Accessed: 17 February 2019).

Blackman, D., Buick, F., O'Donnell, M., O'Flynn, J. and West, D. (2013) *Strengthening the performance framework: towards a high performing Australian public service*. Australian Public Service Commission, Canberra, Australia.

Blaikie, N. (2009) *Approaches to Social Enquiry*. 2nd edn. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Blaikie, N. (2010) *Designing Social Research*. 2nd edn. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Le Blanc, P.M. and González-Romá, V. (2012) 'A team level investigation of the relationship between Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) differentiation, and commitment and performance', *Leadership Quarterly*, 23(3) Elsevier Inc., pp. 534–544.

Bourne, M., Kennerley, M. and Franco-Santos, M. (2005) 'Managing through measures: a study of impact on performance', *Journal of Manufacturing Technology Management*, 16(4), pp. 375–395.

Bourne, M., Melnyk, S. and Bititci, U.S. (2018) 'Performance measurement and management: theory and practice', *International Journal of Operations and Production Management*, 38(11), pp. 2010–2021.

Bourne, M., Pavlov, A., Franco-Santos, M., Lucianetti, L. and Mura, M. (2013) 'Generating organisational performance', *International Journal of Operations & Production Management*, 33(11/12), pp. 1599–1622.

Bridges, W. (1995) *Managing Transitions: making the most of change*. 1st edn. London: Nicholas Brearley Publishing.

Bruch, H. and Walter, F. (2007) 'Leadership in context: investigating hierarchical

impacts on transformational leadership', *Leadership and Organization Development Journal*, 28(8), pp. 710–726.

Brudan, A. (2010) 'Rediscovering performance management: Systems, learning and integration', *Measuring Business Excellence*, 14(1), pp. 109–123.

Buick, F., Blackman, D.A., O'Donnell, M.E., O'Flynn, J.L. and West, D. (2015) 'Can enhanced performance management support public sector change?', *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, 28(2), pp. 271–289.

Burke, W.W. and Litwin, G.H. (1992) 'A causal model of organizational performance', *Journal of Management*, 18(3), pp. 523–545.

Caza, A. (2011) 'Testing alternative predictions for the performance consequences of middle managers' discretion', *Human Resource Management*, 50(1), pp. 9–28.

Chartered Association of Business Schools (2018) *Academic Journal Guide*.

Cho, Y.J. and Lee, J.W. (2012) 'Performance management and trust in supervisors', *Review of Public Personnel Administration*, 32(3), pp. 236–259.

CIPD (2019) *Health and well-being at work*. London.

Civil Service (2016) *A Brilliant Civil Service: Civil Service vision 2015 to 2020., Government efficiency, transparency and accountability* Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/a-brilliant-civil-service-vision-statement/civil-service-vision-2015-to-2020#vision> (Accessed: 14 February 2019).

Civil Service College (2018a) *Managing Performance and Motivation., Course outline* Available at: <https://www.civilservicecollege.org.uk/newsfuse/uploads/documents/2018-Jan/93-Managing-Performance-Motivation.pdf> (Accessed: 12 March 2018).

Civil Service College (2018b) *Introduction to management*. Available at: <https://www.civilservicecollege.org.uk/course/leadership-management/introduction-to-management-82> (Accessed: 18 April 2019).

Consiglio, C., Borgogni, L., Di Tecco, C. and Schaufeli, W.B. (2016) 'What makes employees engaged with their work? The role of self-efficacy and employee's perceptions of social context over time', *Career Development International*, 21(2), pp. 125–143.

Dahling, J.J., Chau, S.L. and O'Malley, A. (2012) 'Correlates and consequences of feedback orientation in organizations', *Journal of Management*, 38(2), pp. 531–546.

Dalal, R.S., Bashshur, M.R. and Credé, M. (2011) 'The Forgotten Facet: Employee Satisfaction with Management above the Level of Immediate Supervision', *Applied Psychology*, 60(2), pp. 183–209.

DeChurch, L.A., Hiller, N.J., Murase, T., Doty, D. and Salas, E. (2010) 'Leadership across levels: Levels of leaders and their levels of impact', *Leadership Quarterly*, 21(6) Elsevier Inc., pp. 1069–1085.

Delmestri, G. and Walgenbach, P. (2005) 'Mastering techniques or brokering knowledge? Middle managers in Germany, Great Britain and Italy', *Organization Studies*, 26(2), pp. 197–220.

Denyer, D. and Tranfield, D. (2009) 'Producing a Systematic Review', in Buchanan, D. and Bryman, A. (eds.) *The Sage Handbook of Organisational Research Methods*. 1st edn. London: SAGE Publications Ltd.

Destler, K.N. (2016) 'Creating a Performance Culture: Incentives, Climate, and Organizational Change', *The American Review of Public Administration*, 46(2), pp. 201–225.

Van Dooren, W., Bouckaert, G. and Halligan, J. (2015) *Performance Management in the Public Sector*. 2nd edn. Abingdon: Routledge.

Easterby-Smith, M., Thorpe, R. and Jackson, P.R. (2008) *Management Research*. Third. London: SAGE Publications Ltd.

Edgar, F., Geare, A. and O'Kane, P. (2015) 'The changing dynamic of leading knowledge workers', *Employee Relations*, 37(4), pp. 487–503.

Eisenhardt, K.M. (1989) 'Building Theories from Case Study Research', *Academy of Management Review*, 14(4), pp. 532–550.

Ellemers, N., de Gilder, D. and Haslam, S.A. (2004) 'Motivating Individuals and Groups at Work: a Social Identity Perspective on Leadership and Group Performance', *Academy of Management Review*, 29(3), pp. 459–478.

European Foundation for Quality Management (2012) *EFQM Model*, *EFQM News* Available at: <https://www.efqm.org/index.php/efqm-model-2013/> (Accessed: 18 March 2019).

Farndale, E., Hope-Hailey, V. and Kelliher, C. (2011) 'High commitment performance management: the roles of justice and trust', *Personnel Review*, 40(1), pp. 5–23.

Favero, N., Meier, K.J. and O'Toole, L.J. (2016) 'Goals, Trust, Participation, and Feedback: Linking Internal Management with Performance Outcomes', *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 26(2), pp. 327–343.

Fernandez, S. and Moldogaziev, T. (2013) 'Using employee empowerment to encourage innovative behavior in the public sector', *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 23(1), pp. 155–187.

Flynn, A., Grey, A. and Jenkins, W.I. (1990) 'Taking the next steps: the changing management of government', *Parliamentary Affairs*, 43(2), pp. 159–178.

Franco-Santos, M. and Bourne, M. (2005) 'An examination of the literature relating to issues affecting how companies manage through measures', *Production Planning and Control*, 16(2), pp. 114–124.

Gatenby, M., Rees, C., Tuss, C. and Alfes, K. (2015) 'Managing Change or Changing Managers? The role of middle managers in UK public service reform', *Public Management Review*, 17(8), pp. 1124–1145.

Gerrish, E. (2016) 'The impact of performance management on performance in public organizations: A meta-analysis', *Public Administration Review*, 76(1), pp. 48–66.

Glaser, L. (2016) 'Managing the risks of proactivity: a multilevel study of initiative and performance in the middle management context', *Academy of Management Journal*, 59(4), pp. 1339–1360.

Goh, S.C. (2012) 'Making performance measurement systems more effective in public sector organizations', *Measuring Business Excellence*, 16(1), pp. 31–42.

Gottfredson, R.K. and Aguinis, H. (2017) 'Leadership behaviors and follower performance: Deductive and inductive examination of theoretical rationales and underlying mechanisms', *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 38(4), pp. 558–591.

GOV.UK (2019) *Civil Service: About us*. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/civil-service/about> (Accessed: 14 February 2019).

GOV.UK (2018) *Operational delivery profession*. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/civil-service-operational-delivery-profession/about> (Accessed: 14 December 2018).

Gray, D.E. (2009) *Doing Research in the Real World*. 2nd edn. London: SAGE Publications Ltd.

Green Jr, K.W., Medlin, B. and Whitten, D. (2004) 'Developing optimism to improve performance: an approach for the manufacturing sector', *Industrial Management & Data Systems*, 104(2), pp. 106–114.

Gruening, G. (2001) 'Origin and theoretical basis of New Public Management', *International Public Management Journal*, 4, pp. 1–25.

Gruman, J.A. and Saks, A.M. (2011) 'Performance management and employee engagement', *Human Resource Management Review*, 21(2) Elsevier Inc., pp. 123–136.

Hales, C. (2005) 'Rooted in Supervision, branching into management: continuity and change in the role of first-line manager', *Journal of Management Studies*, (May), pp. 471–506.

Hales, C. (2006) 'Moving down the line? The shifting boundary between middle

- and first-line management', *Journal of General Management*, 32(2), pp. 31–55.
- Hales, C. (2001) 'Does it matter what managers do?', *Business Strategy Review*, 12(2), pp. 50–58.
- Hannah, S.T., Schaubroeck, J.M. and Peng, A.C. (2016) 'Transforming Followers' Value Internalization and Role Self-Efficacy: Dual Processes Promoting Performance and Peer Norm-Enforcement', *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 101(2), pp. 252–266.
- den Hartog, D.N., Boselie, P. and Paauwe, J. (2004) 'Performance management: A model and research agenda', *Applied Psychology*, 53(4), pp. 556–569.
- Hassan, S. and Hatmaker, D.M. (2015) 'Leadership and Performance of Public Employees: Effects of the Quality and Characteristics of Manager-Employee Relationships', *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 25(4), pp. 1127–1155.
- HM Government (2012) *The civil service reform plan*. London.
- HM Government (1998) *Public services for the future: modernisation, reform, accountability*. London.
- HM Treasury (2010) *Spending Review 2010*. London.
- Hofstede, G. (1983) 'The cultural relativity of organizational practices and theories', *Journal of International Business Studies*, 14(2), pp. 75–89.
- Hood, C. (1991) 'A public management for all seasons?', *Public Administration*, 69(Spring), pp. 3–19.
- Hood, C. (2007) 'Public Management: The Word, the Movement, the Science', in Ferlie, E., Lynn Jr, L. E. and Pollitt, C. (eds.) *The Oxford Handbook of Public Management*. Paperback. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 7–26.
- Hood, C. (2012) 'Public management by numbers as a performance enhancing drug: Two hypotheses', *Public Administration Review*, 72(51), pp. 585–592.
- Huff, A.S. (2009) *Designing Research for Publication*. Thousand Oaks, California:

SAGE Publications, Inc.

Huy, Q.N. (2001) 'In praise of middle managers', *Harvard Business Review*, 79(8), pp. 72–79.

Huy, Q.N. (2002) 'Emotional balancing of organizational continuity and radical change: The contribution of middle managers', *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 47(1), pp. 31–64.

Huy, Q.N. (2011) 'How middle managers' group-focus emotions and social identities influence strategy implementation', *Strategic Management Journal*, 32, pp. 1387–1410.

Institute for Government (2018a) *Operational delivery in government: Leading the civil service largest profession*. Available at: <https://youtu.be/FBaAsoAWQHM> (Accessed: 2 March 2019).

Institute for Government (2014) *Civil service reform in the real world: Patterns of success in UK civil service reform*. London.

Institute for Government (2019) *Grade structures of the civil service.*, *Explainers* Available at: <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/explainers/grade-structures-civil-service> (Accessed: 27 March 2019).

Institute for Government (2015) *Managing with less: The 2015 spending review*. London.

Institute for Government (2018b) *Civil service pay.*, *Explainers* Available at: <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/explainers/civil-service-pay> (Accessed: 1 March 2019).

Jääskeläinen, A. and Luukkanen, N. (2017) 'The use of performance measurement information in the work of middle managers', *International Journal of Productivity and Performance Management*, 66(4), pp. 479–499.

Johansen, M. and Hawes, D.P. (2016) 'The effect of the tasks middle managers perform on organisational performance', *Public Administration Quarterly*, (Fall), pp. 589–616.

Johansen, M.S. (2012) 'The direct and interactive effects of middle and upper managerial quality on organizational performance', *Administration & Society*, 44(4), pp. 383–411.

Jordan, M.H., Lindsay, D.R. and Schraeder, M. (2012) 'An examination of factors influencing performance in public sector organizations: A conceptual model', *Public Personnel Management*, 41(4), pp. 661–684.

Kim, C. and Schachter, H.L. (2015) 'Exploring Followership in a Public Setting: Is It a Missing Link Between Participative Leadership and Organizational Performance?', *American Review of Public Administration*, 45(4), pp. 436–457.

Knies, E. and Leisink, P. (2014a) 'Leadership Behavior in Public Organizations: A Study of Supervisory Support by Police and Medical Center Middle Managers', *Review of Public Personnel Administration*, 34(2), pp. 108–127.

Knies, E. and Leisink, P. (2014b) 'Linking people management and extra-role behaviour: Results of a longitudinal study', *Human Resource Management Journal*, 24(1), pp. 57–76.

Kraut, A.I., Pedigo, P.R., McKenna, D.D. and Dunnette, M.D. (2005) 'The role of the manager: what's really important in different management jobs', *Academy of Management Executive (reprint)*, 19(4), pp. 122–129.

Kraut, A.I., Pedigo, P.R., McKenna, D.D. and Dunnette, M.D. (1989) 'The role of the manager: What's really important in different management jobs', *Academy of Management Executive*, 3(4), pp. 286–293.

Krippendorff, K. (2004) *Content analysis: an Introduction to its Methodology*. 2nd edn. Thousand Oaks, California: SAGE Publications, Inc.

Kroll, A. (2014) 'Why performance information use varies among public managers: Testing manager-related explanations', *International Public Management Journal*, 17(2), pp. 174–201.

Latham, G.P., Borgogni, L. and Petitta, L. (2008) 'Goal setting and performance management in the public sector', *International Public Management Journal*,

11(4), pp. 385–403.

Lee, J., Chaudhry, A. and Tekleab, A.G. (2014) 'An interactionist perspective on employee performance as a response to psychological contract breach', *Personnel Review*, 43(6), pp. 861–880.

de Leeuw, S. and van den Berg, J.P. (2011) 'Improving operational performance by influencing shopfloor behavior via performance management practices', *Journal of Operations Management*, 29(3), pp. 224–235.

Leggett, T. (2018) *How VW tried to cover up the emissions scandal.*, *BBC News* Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-44005844> (Accessed: 13 February 2019).

de Leon, L. (2007) 'Public management, democracy, and politics', in Ferlie, E., Lynn Jr, L. E. and Pollitt, C. (eds.) *The Oxford Handbook of Organisational Psychology*. Paperback. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 103–130.

Leroy, H., Anseel, F., Gardner, W.L. and Sels, L. (2015) 'Authentic leadership, authentic followership, basic need satisfaction, and work role performance', *Journal of Management*, 41(6), pp. 1677–1697.

Liccione, W.J. (2005) 'Balanced management: A key component of managerial effectiveness', *Performance Improvement*, 44(2), pp. 32–38.

De Lima, E.P., Da Costa, S.E.G. and Angelis, J.J. (2008) 'The strategic management of operations system performance', *International Journal of Business Performance Management*, 10(1), pp. 108–132.

Lonti, Z. (2005) 'How much decentralization? Managerial autonomy in the Canadian public service', *American Review of Public Administration*, 35(2), pp. 122–136.

Lüscher, L.S. and Lewis, M.W. (2008) 'Organizational Change and Managerial Sensemaking: Working through Paradox', *Academy of Management Journal*, 51(2), pp. 221–240.

Lynn Jr, L.E. (2007) 'Public Management: A Concise History of the Field', in

Ferlie, E., Lynn Jr, L. E. and Pollitt, C. (eds.) *The Oxford Handbook of Public Management*. Paperback. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 27–50.

Mair, J. (2005) 'Exploring the determinants of unit performance: The role of middle managers in stimulating profit growth', *Group & Organization Management*, 30(3), pp. 263–288.

Marrelli, A.F. (2011) 'Employee engagement and performance management in the federal sector', *Performance Improvement*, 50(5), pp. 5–13.

McCarthy, J.M., Trougakos, J.P. and Cheng, B.H. (2016) 'Are anxious workers less productive workers? It depends on the quality of social exchange', *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 101(2), pp. 279–291.

McKinsey & Company (2008) 'Enduring Ideas: The 7-S Framework', *McKinsey Quarterly*, March, pp. 2–3.

Medlin, B. and Green Jr., K.W. (2014) 'Impact of management basics on employee engagement', *Academy of Strategic Management Journal*, 13.2(2), pp. 21–35.

Medlin, B. and Green Jr., K.W. (2009) 'Enhancing performance through goal setting, engagement, and optimism', *Industrial Management & Data Systems*, 109(7), pp. 943–956.

Meier, K.J., Favero, N. and Zhu, L. (2015) 'Performance gaps and managerial decisions: A Bayesian Decision Theory of managerial action', *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 25, pp. 1221–1246.

Melián-González, S., Bulchand-Gidumal, J. and López-Valcárcel, B.G. (2015) 'New evidence of the relationship between employee satisfaction and firm economic performance', *Personnel Review*, 6, pp. 906–929.

Meneghel, I., Borgogni, L., Miraglia, M., Salanova, M. and Martínez, I.M. (2016) 'From social context and resilience to performance through job satisfaction: A multilevel study over time', *Human Relations*, 69(11), pp. 2047–2067.

Miles, M.B. and Huberman, A.M. (1994) *Qualitative Data Analysis: an expanded*

sourcebook. 2nd edn. Thousand Oaks, California: SAGE Publications, Inc.

MindTools.com (2018) *The Conscious Competence Ladder*. Available at: https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newlSS_96.htm (Accessed: 1 April 2018).

Miraglia, M., Alessandri, G. and Borgogni, L. (2015) 'Trajectory classes of job performance', *Career Development International*, 20(4), pp. 424–442.

Mollick, E. (2012) 'People and process, suits and innovators: The role of individuals in firm performance', *Strategic Management Journal*, 33, pp. 1001–1015.

Mone, E., Eisinger, C., Guggenheim, K., Price, B. and Stine, C. (2011) 'Performance management at the wheel: Driving employee engagement in organizations', *Journal of Business and Psychology*, 26(2), pp. 205–212.

Moynihan, D.P. and Pandey, S.K. (2005) 'Testing how management matters in an era of government by performance management', *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 15(3), pp. 421–439.

Moynihan, D.P., Pandey, S.K. and Wright, B.E. (2012) 'Prosocial values and performance management theory: Linking perceived social impact and performance information use', *Governance*, 25(3), pp. 463–483.

Mushonga, S.M., Thiagarajan, P. and Torrance, C.G. (2014) 'Fairness in the workplace: The mediating role of trust in the relationship between supervisory justice and work outcomes', *SAM Advanced Management Journal*, 79(3), pp. 17–25.

Neto, R.R. and Lavarda, R.A.B. (2017) 'The language studies in strategy as practice and the middle manager roles: An essay', *Rebrae*, 10(3), p. 366.

Nicholson-Crotty, S., Nicholson-Crotty, J. and Fernandez, S. (2017) 'Performance and Management in the Public Sector: Testing a Model of Relative Risk Aversion', *Public Administration Review*, 77(4), pp. 603–614.

Nielsen, M.F. (2009a) 'Interpretative management in business meetings', *Journal*

of Business Communication, 46(1), pp. 23–56.

Nielsen, M.F. (2009b) 'Interpretative Management in Business Meetings: Understanding Managers' Interactional Strategies through Conversation Analysis', *Journal of Business Communication*, 46(1), pp. 23–56.

Nonaka, I. (1988) 'Toward middle-up-down management: Accelerating information creation', *Sloan Management Review*, 29(3), pp. 9–18.

Office for National Statistics (2018a) *Public sector employment, UK: September 2018.*, *Statistical Bulletin* Available at: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/publicsectorpersonnel/bulletins/publicsectoremployment/september2018> (Accessed: 14 February 2019).

Office for National Statistics (2018b) *Civil service employment by department*. London.

Oshagbemi, T. and Gill, R. (2004) 'Differences in leadership styles and behaviour across hierarchical levels in UK organisations', *Leadership & Organization Development Journal*, 25(1), pp. 93–106.

Ouakouak, M.L., Ouedraogo, N. and Mbengue, A. (2014) 'The mediating role of organizational capabilities in the relationship between middle managers' involvement and firm performance: A European study', *European Management Journal*, 32(2) Elsevier Ltd, pp. 305–318.

Paglis, L.L. (2010) 'Leadership self-efficacy: Research findings and practical applications', *Journal of Management Development*, 29(9), pp. 771–782.

Para-González, L., Jiménez-Jiménez, D. and Martínez-Lorente, A.R. (2018) 'Exploring the mediating effects between transformational leadership and organizational performance', *Employee Relations*, 40(2), pp. 412–432.

Parris, M.A., Vickers, M.H. and Wilkes, L. (2008) 'Caught in the middle: Organizational impediments to middle managers' work-life balance', *Employment Responsibilities and Rights Journal*, 20, pp. 101–117.

Pavlov, A. and Bourne, M. (2011) 'Explaining the effects of performance measurement on performance', *International Journal of Operations & Production Management*, 31(1), pp. 101–122.

Perry, J.L., Mesch, D. and Paarlberg, L. (2006) 'Motivating employees in a new governance era: The performance paradigm revisited', *Public Administration Review*, 66(4), pp. 505–514.

Power, M. (2007) 'The theory of the audit explosion', in Ferlie, E., Lynn Jr, L. E. and Pollitt, C. (eds.) *The Oxford Handbook of Public Management*. Paperback. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 326–344.

Radaelli, G. and Sitton-Kent, L. (2016) 'Middle managers and the translation of new ideas in organizations: A review of micro-practices and contingencies', *International Journal of Management Reviews*, 18(3), pp. 311–332.

Raelin, J.D. and Cataldo, C.G. (2011) 'Whither middle management? Empowering interface and the failure of organizational change', *Journal of Change Management*, 11(4), pp. 481–507.

Rainey, H.G. and Chun, Y.H. (2007) 'Public and Private Management Compared', in Ferlie, E., Lynn Jr, L. E. and Pollitt, C. (eds.) *The Oxford Handbook of Public Management*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 72–102.

Ren, C.R. and Guo, C. (2011) 'Middle Managers' Strategic Role in the Corporate Entrepreneurial Process: Attention-Based Effects', *Journal of Management*, 37(6), pp. 1586–1610.

Rhodes, R.A.W. (2016) 'Recovering the Craft of Public Administration', *Public Administration Review*, 76(4), pp. 638–647.

Riege, A. and Zulpo, M. (2007) 'Knowledge Transfer Process Cycle: Between Factory Floor and Middle Management', *Australian Journal of Management*, 32(2), pp. 293–314.

Rouleau, L. and Balogun, J. (2011) 'Middle managers, strategic sensemaking, and discursive competence', *Journal of Management Studies*, 48(5), pp. 953–

983.

Rousseau, D.M., Manning, J. and Denyer, D. (2008) *Evidence in management and organizational science: Assembling the field's full weight of scientific knowledge through syntheses*.

Royal Military Academy Sandhurst (2013) *Serve to Lead: the British Army's anthology on leadership*. 2nd edn. Sandhurst, Berkshire: Royal Military Academy Sandhurst.

Royal Military Academy Sandhurst (2006) *The Queen's Commission: A Junior Officer's Guide*. Sandhurst, Berkshire.

Shi, W., Markoczy, L. and Dess, G.G. (2009) 'The role of middle management in the strategy process: Group affiliation, structural holes, and tertius iungens', *Journal of Management*, 35(6), pp. 1453–1480.

Slack, F.J., Orife, J.N. and Anderson, F.P. (2010) 'Effects of commitment to corporate vision on employee satisfaction with their organization: An empirical study in the United States', *International Journal of Management*, 27(3), pp. 421–436.

Smith, A.D., Plowman, D.A. and Duchon, D. (2010) 'Everyday sensegiving: A closer look at successful plant managers', *The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, 46(2), pp. 220–244.

Solansky, S.T. (2011) 'Team identification: a determining factor of performance', *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, 26(3), pp. 247–258.

Sole, F. (2009) 'A management model and factors driving performance in public organizations', *Measuring Business Excellence*, 13(4), pp. 3–11.

Stoker, J.I. (2006) 'Leading middle management: consequences of organizational changes for tasks and behaviors of middle managers', *Journal of General Management*, 32(1), pp. 31–42.

Styhre, A. and Josephson, P.-E. (2006) 'Revisiting site manager work: stuck in the middle?', *Construction Management and Economics*, 24(5), pp. 521–528.

Sun, R. and Van Ryzin, G.G. (2014) 'Are performance management practices associated with better outcomes? Empirical evidence from New York public schools', *American Review of Public Administration*, 44(3), pp. 324–338.

Talbot, C. (2010) *Theories of Performance: Organizational and Service Improvement in the Public Domain*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Taylor, J. (2014) 'Organizational Culture and the Paradox of Performance Management', *Public Performance & Management Review*, 38(1), pp. 7–22.

Telleria, K.M., Little, D. and MacBryde, J. (2002) 'Managing processes through teamwork', *Business Process Management Journal*, 8(4), pp. 338–350.

The King's Fund (2017) *Whats going on with A & E waiting times?*. Available at: <https://www.kingsfund.org.uk/projects/urgent-emergency-care/urgent-and-emergency-care-mythbusters#ae-performance-measurement> (Accessed: 13 February 2019).

Try, D. (2008) "Mind the gap, please": Using public value theory to examine executive take-up of results-based management', *International Journal of Productivity and Performance Management*, 57(1), pp. 22–36.

Vermeeren, B., Kuipers, B. and Steijn, B. (2014) 'Does leadership style make a difference? Linking HRM, job satisfaction, and organizational performance', *Review of Public Personnel Administration*, 34(2), pp. 174–195.

Vie, O.E. (2010) 'Have post-bureaucratic changes occurred in managerial work?', *European Management Journal*, 28, pp. 182–194.

Wallace, M. and Wray, A. (2009) *Critical Reading and Writing for Postgraduates*. 3rd edn. London: SAGE Publications Ltd.

Walshe, K., Harvey, G. and Jas, P. (2010) 'Introduction: knowledge and performance - theory and practice', in Walshe, K., Harvey, G. and Jas, P. (eds.) *Connecting Knowledge and Performance in Public Services*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 1–15.

Walthall, M. and Dent, E.B. (2016) 'The leader-follower relationship and follower

performance', *The Journal of Applied Management and Entrepreneurship*, 21(4), pp. 5–31.

Wang, G. and Seibert, S.E. (2015) 'The impact of leader emotion display frequency on follower performance: Leader surface acting and mean emotion display as boundary conditions', *The Leadership Quarterly*, 26, pp. 577–593.

Watrous, K.M., Huffman, A.H. and Pritchard, R.D. (2006) 'When coworkers and managers quit: The effects of turnover and shared values on performance', *Journal of Business and Psychology*, 21(1), pp. 103–126.

Welham, H. (2014) Military managers: ex-armed forces share their leadership secrets, *The Guardian*, 21 August.

Wood, S., Van Veldhoven, M., Croon, M. and de Menezes, L.M. (2012) 'Enriched job design, high involvement management and organizational performance: The mediating roles of job satisfaction and well-being', *Human Relations*, 65(4), pp. 419–445.

Wooldridge, B., Schmid, T. and Floyd, S.W. (2008) 'The middle management perspective on strategy process: Contributions, synthesis, and future research', *Journal of Management*, 34(6), pp. 1190–1221.

Worrall, L., Mather, K. and Seifert, R. (2010) 'Solving the labour problem among professional workers in the UK public sector: Organisation change and performance management', *Public Organization Review*, 10(2), pp. 117–137.

APPENDICES

.

Appendix A Search protocols

A.1 Performance management search terms

[\(Exact\("performance management"\) AND stype.exact\("Scholarly Journals"\) AND la.exact\("English"\) AND pd\(2004-2018\)\) NOT \(loc.exact\("India" OR "China" OR "Malaysia" OR "Brazil" OR "Taiwan" OR "Japan" OR "Indonesia" OR "Romania" OR "Ghana" OR "Iran" OR "Russia" OR "Singapore" OR "South Korea" OR "Thailand" OR "Vietnam" OR "Pakistan" OR "Turkey" OR "Greece" OR "Israel" OR "Uganda" OR "Asia" OR "Africa" OR "Hong Kong" OR "Nigeria" OR "United Arab Emirates" OR "Czech Republic" OR "Estonia" OR "Kenya" OR "Kuala Lumpur Malaysia" OR "Latin America" OR "Lithuania" OR "Mexico" OR "Philippines" OR "Saudi Arabia" OR "Slovakia" OR "Slovenia" OR "Kazakhstan" OR "Korea" OR "Middle East" OR "Oman" OR "Serbia" OR "Tunisia" OR "West Africa" OR "Abu Dhabi United Arab Emirates" OR "Ankara Turkey" OR "Armenia" OR "Asia-Pacific region" OR "Azerbaijan" OR "Bahrain" OR "Bangladesh" OR "Beijing China" OR "Bulgaria" OR "Cambodia" OR "Cameroon" OR "Central Europe" OR "Colombia" OR "Croatia" OR "Cuba" OR "Dubai United Arab Emirates" OR "East Africa"\) AND at.exact\("Article" OR "Feature"\) AND stype.exact\("Scholarly Journals"\) NOT subt.exact\("training" OR "organizational change" OR "strategic planning" OR "information systems" OR "small & medium sized enterprises-sme" OR "management accounting" OR "hospitals" OR "supply chain management" OR "sustainability" OR "health services" OR "project management"\) AND la.exact\("ENG"\) AND PEER\(yes\)\) AND pd\(2004-2018\)](#)

Limited by:

Date: From 2004 to 2018

Databases: Business Premium Collection; The Vogue Archive

A.2 Middle management search terms

[Exact\("middle managers" OR "middle management"\) AND stype.exact\("Scholarly Journals"\) AND at.exact\("Article"\) AND la.exact\("English"\) AND \(pd\(20040101-20181231\) AND PEER\(yes\)\)](#)

Databases: Business Premium Collection; The Vogue Archive

A.3 Criteria for literature selection

Main domain	Source of literature		
	Database searches	Snowballing	Recommendations
Performance management	Main approach	supplement	supplement
Middle manager	Main approach	supplement	supplement

The search engines most relevant to management and business research are ABI Proquest, and EBSCO. I have focussed on ABI Proquest since it has a reputation for providing the most relevant articles. The main inclusion criteria were literature in the subject areas of middle manager or performance management.

A.4 Exclusion criteria

	Exclude	Examples	Rationale for exclusion
Period	Pre 2004		Number of papers, older work referred to
Language	Not in English		Most literature is in English.
Document type	General Papers	Case study, interview Commentary	Sufficient good quality primary research.
Location	Regions that do not have a western work culture.	Middle East, Asia, Africa, South America, Russia	Not straightforward to determine whether (e.g.) findings from a factory in China would be applicable to UK public sector.
Subject Performance management	Performance measurement systems	Implementing performance system, measurement techniques, assessment, standards, balanced scorecard	These were found to be technical papers on process, systems and implementation
	Articles about broader organization and systems	High performance work systems, how to implement appraisal system. Incentives /rewards	Not about the role of the manager
Subject middle management	Where middle manager is not the central topic	Risk, governance, supply chain, procurement, IT, TQ, gender differences,	Reviews of abstracts did not find information about the middle managers' activities or role
	Other topics about middle manager	Career development of middle manager, ethics	
	About the function rather than the middle manager	Acquisitions and mergers, Accountants, capital and debt management, SMEs	

A.5 Additional sources

While the database searches identified much of the recent and relevant literature, literature was also added from: advice from the supervisory panel; use of books to identify seminal authors; snowballing.

Source	Further detail	Comments
Supervisory Panel		Knowledge of performance management and middle management literature. Knowledge of HR literature and middle management.
Sources of seminal authors or papers: books	The Oxford Handbook of Public Management edited by Ewan Ferlie, Laurence E. Lynn Jr and Christopher Pollitt (2007)	Useful summaries by key authors up to 2005.
	Theories of performance by Colin Talbot (2010)	Specifically on public sector performance.
	Connecting knowledge and performance in public services: from knowing to doing. Edited by Walshe, Harvey and Jas (2010)	
	Performance Management in the Public Sector by Wouter Van Dooren, Geert Bouckaert and John Halligan (2015)	
	The Oxford Handbook of Organizational Psychology, edited by Steve W. J. Kozlowski (2012)	Useful on performance management and work motivation
Sources of seminal authors or papers: snowballing	Key Writers identified from references in articles	

Appendix B Research protocol and analysis of interviewees' answers

B.1 Research Protocol

<p>1. Introduction</p> <p>This is interview number <input type="text"/> - we won't use your name on the tape – to keep it confidential</p> <p>Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed</p> <p>The recorder is on and I will be using the information for coding and analysis – can you confirm that is ok? I will also be taking some notes as we go.</p> <p>Your answers will be confidential and your identity kept anonymous.</p> <p>Just to give you a bit of background - I'm a student on the executive doctorate programme at Cranfield School of Management. I am interested in the role of middle managers in an organisation. This interview is part of my research into the role of middle managers in HMRC.</p> <p>Can I just check how much time we have today?</p>	
<p>2. Outline</p> <p>There are three areas I would like to explore with you. I will just mention them now and then we can go back to each in turn.</p> <p>Start with the organisation structure how many people you manage</p> <p>Go on to talk a bit more about what your job entails</p> <p>Then to talk about what helps you to deliver performance in your teams and what gets in your way.</p> <p>I am not looking for any particular answer, just your views and perspectives.</p> <p>Please feel free to ask me to clarify any question you do not understand. Please feel free to elaborate or illustrate in any way you want</p> <p>At the end of the interview I would also find it helpful to have your feedback on the process.</p>	

3. Organisation background	
a) Who do you manage? (How many; how are they organised?)	
b) Who do you report to and what is their role?	
c) How long have you been doing this job?	

4. Moving on to what your job entails	
<p>a) How do you know how your teams are performing?</p> <p>Can you give me an example?</p> <p>What do you mean by?</p> <p>Please explain further</p> <p>Can you elaborate further?</p> <p>In your answer you mentioned</p>	
<p>b) How are they performing? How many of your teams do you think are doing really well and how many are not performing well? How many of your FLS; how many of your FLM</p>	<p>The MM responded in terms of which of the FLS or which of the managers was performing. The concept of team performance came up later in the interviews</p>

<p>c) What makes teams work well? If you think of the top performers, what is it that makes them different?</p>	
<p>d) What makes teams not work so well? If you think about the bottom performers what makes them different?</p>	
<p>e) Have you found there are particular things that you do which most help in making a difference in their performance?</p>	

<p>f) If you need some extra performance, e.g. there's some extra work; a backlog; performance has dropped, how do you get the teams to respond to this?</p>	
<p>g) What's your manager's assessment of your unit's performance? How do they work with you in terms of your performance?</p>	

<p>5. Challenges and enablers: Moving on now to what helps you in managing performance and what gets in your way</p>	
<p>a) If you could change one thing that would help you to improve the performance of your teams, what would it be?</p> <p>Can you give me an example? What do you mean by? Please explain further Can you elaborate further? In your answer you mentioned</p>	
<p>b) What sorts of things have helped you develop as a manager</p>	
<p>c) What sorts of things stop you being as effective in managing performance as you would like?</p>	

6. Conclusion	
<p>Thank you</p> <p>Is there anything else you would like to add?</p> <p>And finally – can I ask for your feedback - How did you find the interview?</p>	
Other notes	

B.2 Further information about interview questions and answers

Interview questions / Interviewee (in sequence)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	11	12	13	14	15	17	18	19	20	22	23	24
Background																				
1 Background about business																				
2 How long as HO																				
3 How long in role																				
4 How many FLM																				
5 How many FLS																				
6 Who do you report to																				
Performance																				
7 How do you know teams are performing																				
8 How are your FLM performing																				
9 What are characteristics of FLM perf																				
10 How do you get FLM performance																				
11 How are FLS performing																				
12 What are characteristics of FLS performance																				
13 How do you get FLS performance																				
14 How does your manager know you are perf																				
Engage staff																				
15 Can you know everyone																				
16 How do you engage staff																				
17 How persuade																				
Challenges and enablers																				
18 If you could change one thing																				
19 What has got in the way of managing perf																				
20 What helped you develop as a manager																				
Anything to add																				

Key: Question asked Response given without question being asked Question not asked

Appendix C Interviewee information

MM	Gender	Age Group	Time in role	Years as MM	No. FLS	No. FLM	Working week
A	Female	> 55	Up to a year	6-15	60-99	8	FT
C	Male	46 - 55	Up to a year	≤ 5	100+	7	FT
D	Male	≤ 45	1 to 3 years	≤ 5	100+	9	FT
F	Female	> 55		> 15	60-99	9	> 0.75
G	Female	≤ 45	Up to a year	6-15	100+	12	FT
H	Male	> 55	Over 3 years		100+	8	FT
J	Female	> 55	Over 3 years	6-15	40-59	6	0.5-0.75
K	Female	≤ 45					FT
L	Male	> 55	Over 3 years	> 15	60-99	7	
M	Female	46 - 55	Over 3 years	6-15	100+	10	FT
N	Female	46 - 55	Up to a year	≤ 5	60-99	8	FT
O	Male	> 55	1 to 3 years	> 15	40-59	4	0.5-0.75
Q	Female	≤ 45	Up to a year	≤ 5	40-59	6	
R	Male	46 - 55	Up to a year	6-15	60-99	10	FT
S	Female	> 55	1 to 3 years	≤ 5	100+	8	> 0.75
T	Female	≤ 45	Up to a year	6-15	40-59	6	0.5-0.75
U	Male	≤ 45	Up to a year	≤ 5	100+	10	FT
V	Female	46 - 55	Up to a year	≤ 5	60-99	8	0.5-0.75
W	Male	> 55	1 to 3 years	> 15	60-99	8	0.5-0.75
X	Female	≤ 45	Up to a year	≤ 5	60-99	7	FT