

Role of Middle Managers in Strategic Organizational Changes: A Conceptual Review

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ABSTRACT

This review examines the recent theoretical development in the changes in the organization change in terms of structural change, the role of middle managers and the execution of digitalization of organizational practices. It discusses the effectiveness of change and leadership change or transformation in the modern organization to achieve sustainable competitive advantage. This requires strategic change and the changes of the viewpoint about the role of middle managers in an organization to cope out with the uncertain and volatile external environment. Throughout the strategic change literature, conceptualization of change leadership is based on the view of top to bottom approach where, the top management has the pivotal role to design the change initiatives. In some extent, the role of mid-level managers have been recognized as linker or connector while, the first line managers have always been seen as the implementers of the process, designed at the top. Moreover, volatility in external environment due to technological disruption, changing nature of using data, virtual influence over the form of organizations and digitally organic organization management outlook have rendered the sustainability question of competitive advantage in risks. Based on the deficiencies of previous literature and scope within the trends of today's organizations, this research will investigate the prospective role of mid-level managers in strategic changes of organizational design.

Keywords: Change management, Strategic change, Organizational change, Change effectiveness, Middle managers.

INTRODUCTION

In last few decades, digital technologies have worked in such manner that these have changed the shape of traditional business environment and have create a more multifaceted and flexible online ecological unit [1]. The long-established competitive advantage is decreasing by the use of digital technologies and overcome the industry obstacles, reducing lifelong affluent business models [2]. Hence, firms yearn to develop swift and efficient strategic change to flourish a progressively digital ecosystem. The substantial change literature is processed with content and process. The first one emphasizes modification in the element of strategy, meanwhile, second one draws attention to strategic change process [3]. In such continuous advancement related environment, survival depends on change. Aware of this requirement for transform, organizations try to capture the environment progress system to adjust thereto and preserve their importance. Such changes are generally called change of strategies, which affect either a content (an objective, evaluation of the environment and nature, accessibility of resources and know-how), or process (structure, method, culture and values) for modifying long-lasting organizational excellence. The concept of strategic change considers as a distinct, particular aspect of business strategy such as product differentiation portfolio [4], accompaniments of

service [5] or financing on research and developments tasks. Strategic change means a massive alteration in an organization's general way of resource distribution with value to several extents [6]. In addition to this, any alteration in the content of a firm's action plan or strategy which can be identified by its area coverage, use of resource, advantageous market position can be named as strategic change [7]. Generally, strategic change defines to a change in the purposes and long-term goal of a company through improving economic activities. Strategic change can be defined as an enterprise's capability for reacting to an approved desire to modernize its business activities for keeping a balance with its uncontrollable surroundings [8]. The ongoing change procedure will create interactions among an organization's members to engage in crafting an outlook gradually expands to add new members, drive in an expected hope into ways of functioning diagonally the organization. It is important normally at a position when an entity needs a major revision to methods of performing to remain viable [9]. Change in strategy is a development form that responsible for alteration as a course of skill over time [10]. An anticipation about potential opportunity states that the significance with change of strategy on the desire for leading actions. However, disagreement about the viewpoints that the expectations create diverse deliberate situations that requires different replies. In reality, one of the significant barriers found during strategic change is how visions for an imagined future, redefined in settings such as workshops about strategy, can link into an organization's daily activities [11]. The term workshops can be classified as places, through specific features like borders, remoteness and association that allow an organization's employees to build intellectual ability and conduct collaborative research in ways that accomplish lead to change [12]. The senior managers are not acted as transformation mediator all the time [9] and in fact, settle in ways of performing requires a lot of attachment [13]. The commencements of organizational changes are well built by the middle managers involvement. As an alternative of downward or upward representation, many scholars have put concentration to the "middle-up-down" approach highlight the 'knowledge creation' by mid-level managers. Historically, middle managers have been perceived as information provider and the customers of Middle managers have traditionally been seen as supplier of information and the consumers of results made by the upper -level managers, in their enterprise [14]. Middle managers are identical with numerous terms such as "backwardness", "stagnation" or "resistance to change" although they are the ways to uninterrupted improvement [15]. Knowledge creation procedure consists of employees, especially the mid-level managers, act a vital character constructing a unique enterprise structure and converting skills between the conventional hierarchical structure and assignment groups [15]. The concept of middle management was becoming valueless in previous studies and mentioned as the 'double-headed monster' [16]. However, he preferred the vital role of mid-level managers in generating and managing successful management arrangement. The top-down approach is normally connected with shared decisions, dedication to loyalty and uniqueness [17]. Some of them have cutback and mid-level managers have been loaded with additional duties and the pressure of insecurity about their career. An organization's additional work load is generalizing in worsening its existence [18]. They also state that stiff consistency and extreme focus on synchronization may create it tough for middle managers to understand new strategic plans.

RESEARCH PROBLEM & PURPOSE

Strategic change interventions can be classified into three kinds, namely these are transformational or radical change which transforms the structural components, continuous

change which is adaptive in nature and trans-organizational change due to merger and acquisition [19]. This research deals with the transformational change. Digital technologies have impact on almost every area of operating, controlling, and coordinating the operations of organizations [20]. The digitization of society has a significant effect on customer needs, product and service characteristics, delivery method, and design of organization [20]. A new organizational paradigm needs flexibility, survivability and system thinking would act as pivotal success factors [21]. Significant responses were active within the boundary of existing hierarchical structures of organizing [20]. The very first significant shift has already taken place in some obvious sectors in structures- shift to platforms over products in form, as outcomes of e-commerce growth rendered virtual, liquid and dynamic formation. Some new forms of organizational designs in past 5-10 years; here the lines of belongingness are not understandable [21]. These make capable toward further flexibility as well as resilience to business environment. A second big shift in organizations of today is the concentration on the digital instead of mechanical methods of running business. For technology becoming more attached with human lives, the increasing need for quickness and pace in entities responds to data wants that they accept a modern mindset and put of methods. The second big shift in organizations of today is the concentration on the digital over mechanical methods of running business. For technology becoming more integrated into our lives, the increasing need for agility and speed in businesses responds to information wants that they accept a digital mindset and set of methods. A third major shift focuses on the use of data. From the discussion above it is clear that these new types of organizational forms are actually producing data. Though the use of data, it frequently experienced in organizations, but the assumptions of how these data is controlled and used is changing dramatically. As suggested earlier, the collection and processing of this information only is not enough. A modern business landscape, organizations are continuously increasing focus on getting insights from that data which will inform business decisions, take particular actions and help in setting future business directions. It is truth that, the merger of digital transformation and the demand for generating insights from the huge amount of data being produced come together in the Big Data phenomena [22]. A fourth and last move that we can see in organizations now a day is somehow taken as more divisive than the last one, which is focus on capacity above workers [23].

- Research Question: How do mid-level managers contribute to the organizational strategic change processes?

METHODOLOGY

The study is conducted on the basis of conceptual review research. Organization change management have been researched extensively over last 50 years [24] and shows over 2700000 Google Scholar references [25]. At the initial phase of this study, some selected research databases have been used to refer relevant articles. Primarily, 'Google Scholar', 'Research Gate' and 'Academia' have been used to collect relevant journals and articles through searching title like; 'change management', 'strategic change', 'organizational change', 'middle managers' and 'change effectiveness'. Based on primary conceptualization of topic issues further journals and articles have been searched through five specific databases. Through the titles like; 'planned change', 'change process', 'change leadership', 'bottom to up & top to bottom approach of change' 'change readiness' 'organization culture change', and 'mid-level managers in change' etc. searches have been given to 'Scopus', 'Business Source Complete', 'EBSCO

discovery services' by researcher's personal and institutional accesses. For comprehensive concept development, aids of textbooks have also been taken.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Strategic Change

Strategic organizational changes affect the entire organization and usually change the strategy and the structure, culture, people, and processes [26]. Conclusions indicate to mechanistic and organic organizations. Mechanistic organizations have commitment to chain of command, operational section, high specialization, formal hierarchy, explained job description, vertical interaction, and behavior cared of by instructions [27]. On the other hand, organic organizations are contrasting and hardly concerned about chain of command, job descriptions are not defined enough and lateral communication. Dissimilarities in the structure, quality, or condition over time [28] in an organization's alignment with the external environment can be identified as the necessity of strategic organizational change. Planned changes have two patterns, namely first-order or transactional change and second-order or large-scale change. Transactional changes are applied with past behaviors, systems, or procedures shape mechanism of works [29]. On the contrary, large scale change has an impact on the basic characteristics of culture of the organization, the formation & the presumptions people possess employee motivation etc. The aim of big changes is to make better of long-term performance of the whole organization [29]. The preliminary objective of leadership is to bring the need for change to a point where it's clearly visible to the whole organization and encourage everyone to see and feel the need for change.

Mid-level Managers

Every organizational culture is built on the base of values, beliefs, norms, attitudes, and philosophies that plays a vital role in the ultimate success or failure [30]. The literature on organizational culture follows two different directions [31]. Literatures that followed Peters and Waterman, Ouchi, and Deal and Kennedy, publicized the theme that culture can be managed and shaped by good managers that allows them to get expected outcomes. Whereas, the other group of writers had a belief that culture is actually an organizational force and not included in the subject list of leadership control. The causes of change a right of employees to know where, he focused on to assign and empower middle managers and supervisors who ultimately communicate goals and rationales of changes toward the members of an organization specially employees [32]. The broader dimensions of operations, structures, process and systems are the primary roots for understanding any organizational change through communication and networking, leaders of an organization work on making a sense which at the end reduces the ambiguity, confusion, vagueness; instead of making the original meaning of change toward the employees [33]. Leaders who want to initiate effective changes in organization should inspire employees to cooperate and stay aligned because this is the way in which people find new dimension to think [34]. Leaders should establish a positive culture in which employees have faith on each other, have ownership of their own tasks, and can communicate freely to create a bond and teamwork in order to prepare the environment for innovative idea generation [35]. Considering strategic change as a top-down learning process, the idea has put an effort to understand the ways of top manager's sense making, mid-level manager's skill creation and skill promoting [36]. This viewpoint states that planned modification is commenced by upper level managers, after that passed on to mid-level managers and finally flowed downward to

people [37]. New organizational forms are showing a boosted research interest which is due to the growing competition and heterogeneous business landscape. The new structures of managing are frequently linked with modification, reduction of hierarchy, dissemination, downscaling, and geological allocation [38]. On one hand advancement pose a threat of reduction in number of middle managers [39]; on contrary, recent researches come up with opposite arguments which state that “flatter” and more vigorous organizations, in fact, heightened the function of mid-level managers as the strategic bridge that connects macro and micro levels in organization [40]. Meantime, organizational design usually reckons that since the top management designs the organization [41]; the role of mid-level managers is hardly known during organizational design. Till date, the majority researches have concentrated on the mechanism of enterprise blueprint’s influence on middle managers confidence, job pressure, and duties [42] take mid-level managers as receivers of enterprise blueprint relatively than dynamic position players. Thus, the middle managers were both receivers and implementers of the organization. They have no other option but create the innovative blueprint work though a limited participation in the primary restructuring. The result show that the practical reorganization were established by the implementations in which managers embraced new design, although middle managers might had a grip on the latest blueprint by the beginning of the reformation. Middle managers stand at a point where they are both leaders and followers [11]. Recent tendency of layoff, reconstruction, and a large extent of self management has resulted in a decreased number of mid-level managers in several enterprises [13]. Since as an outcome, the role of mid-level managers is threatened; there is also arguments with the aim of mid-level managers are insignificant in contemporary business enterprise [43]. Although, modern researches insist that the middle managers indeed participate a vital deliberate function in modern organization [13].

Mid-level Managers in Strategic Change

Both top down and descending types of mid-level management implication on a task while assessing the function of them in firms’ policy and verified how they acted in execution of the strategies [11]. Mid-level management’s top-down execution tasks have the areas to affect the enterprise’s deliberate flow through informing the upper level management about the assumptions of upcoming concerns with showing something innovative to handle those. Managers elucidate ambivalent data and change the strategic lineup in a synthesizing role and recommend unique concepts and reform the deliberate idea of upper level management; these two are included in upward impact. The role of middle managers as change agents in downward influence is consists of two roles- facilitating role that encourages development of other members and nurture knowledge, and executing function in which supervisors participate in a running arrangement of involvements to facilitate align firms’ actions with total policies [44]. The experts says that during every function mid-level managers has prospect to influence an entire firm’s strategy mechanism through posing a challenge to the existing mindset [11]. Middle managers’ practical role in bringing change works in two different ways: they keep top management updated with information of an appropriate environment and execute the strategies that top management created. Recently, researchers have extended the role regarding act, and effect of mid-level executives in formulating policy & execution method (Floyd & Wooldridge, 1997). The fact that organization’s readiness’s to accept changes and the change’s nature actually somewhat control the top management’s preference of choice [45]. Middle managers must influence the employees to execute top management’s desired

strategies [11]. The execution style to influence others will be determined by managers' capability [46]. The roles of middle managers in strategic change are summarized with following figure:

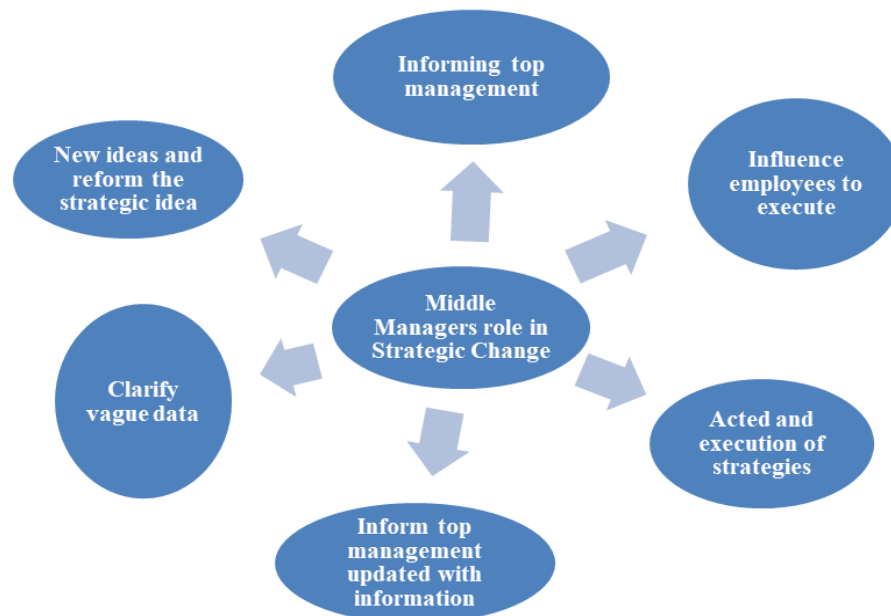


Figure a: Role of middle managers in strategic change

Matrix of Previous Researches about the Role of Middle Managers in Strategic Change

Source	Contributions	Implications	Variables	Year and Title
Hasan et al.,2020	Contributions to Management Science, innovative work behavior, impact on problem identification, new idea generation, idea promotion and the realization of these ideas.	Implications on idea comprehension, investigative resource dependence theory, organizational trust and eco-innovations.	Strategic roles, Strategic sense-making, Discursive skills, Leadership activities and socio-cultural systems.	Springer International, Mid-Level Managers in Terms of Strategic Role and Functions, 2020.
Rydland et al.,2020	Middle managers' ability in assisting strategic change is significant factor to manage the increased pace of organizational change successfully.	Implications on the features of modern organizations for the middle managers' roles and practices for strategic change.	Change initiatives	Middle Managers' Role During Strategic Change: One Size Does Not Fit All, Beta – Scandinavian Journal of Business Research, 2020.
Lucio et al.,2019	Middle managers can contribute to build customer value with continuous and larger	Implication on the progress of talent and inspiring motives of collaborators, to	Formal capability, Informal capability, ‡ Creativity, empowerment,	Reorienting the Role of Middle Managers for Creating Value within the Organization: an

	orientation of employees.	create new type of surroundings for the employees based ethical value.	‡ Teamwork, ‡ Agent of change.	Economical, Social and Ethical Proposal. Revista Empresa Y Humanismo. 2019.
Kung, E,2022	Middle managers, had influence on shared leadership in their relationship with management and their engagement with the organization.	Implications are involving to the middle managers, strategic planning and leading as well as organizational changes with sensitivity to the Asia Pacific cultural context.	Training and coaching business leaders, Personal value.	Exploring the Leadership-As-Practice of Middle Managers Engaged in Organizational Changes in Asia Pacific Multinational Setting.2022
Momin, et al.,2018	Competencies for adding strategy implementation, value for middle managers leadership, as well as a disruptive mindset – and while indifferent to interpersonal skills.	Implications for business leaders to alleviate the risk of wrong selection and develop the probability of achieving successful strategy execution outcomes.	Educational background, Company work environment and National cultural aspects.	Identifying the competencies of middle managers leading successful strategy implementation. 2018.
Laith et al.,2011	Contribution to prior studies through the conceptual framework, links to holistic theory of knowledge and resource based-view.	Implication on the determination of knowledge management, implementation on innovation by middle managers is necessary to innovation enhancement.	Technological innovation, administrative innovation, Radical innovation and Incremental innovation.	The Role of Middle Managers in Knowledge Management Implementation for Innovation Enhancement, 2011.

RESEARCH CONTRIBUTION

This paper is a review of relevant literature of the middle managers role in the context of strategic organizational change, especially from change leadership perspective with the involvement of mid-level managers. This paper is a review of relevant literature regarding middle managers role in the context of organizational performances. From one perspective this research will integrate the design thinking which, in literature substantially shown as abstract, with structural changes including people, process, strategy, hierarchy etc. mostly material in nature. This paper will also create an avenue for subsequent researches regarding the role of mid level managers, transcending from merely perform as a link in a top to bottom approach and, a feedback managerial role of a bottom to a top approach of organizational learning of strategic change. Lastly, this paper will also create scope for further query regarding the comprehensive realization of mid-level managerial talents and hence, leadership competencies therein to bring sustainability of change efforts.

CONCLUSION

This research is based on transformational change which is essential to understand strategic change and adopt by the members of an organization. It focuses on the role of mid-level supervisors to bring strategic change in an organization. In a mechanistic organization, there are several factors such as chain of command, an operational unit, division of the labors, formal hierarchy, detailed job instruction, vertical interaction is maintained strictly. On the other hand, organic organizations are concerned for less chain of command, no specific job descriptions and creative communication among the members of an organization. Transactional changes are related with previous actions, systems, or procedures shape mechanism of works and large scale change will relate to organizational culture, creation and people's perception of employee motivation. For creating a link with such changes middle managers are playing facilitator and implementing role that align organizational actions with strategies as a whole. Although the role as well as number of middle managers has decreased due to an excessive tendency of layoff, reconstruction and dependency of self - management but the tasks of middle managers of an organization will affect the strategic flow by informing the top management about the assumptions of upcoming issues by presenting a new system. The participation of middle managers is crucial to bring any strategic change in an organization especially for manufacturing organization. Organizational change occurs endlessly which create new role for middle managers in order to cope out with it. The pressure from external as well internal modification will allow an organization to execute importance of middle managers skills.

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