Introduction

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Early contributors to the strategy field envisioned an analytic, rational process (Ansoff, 1965; Porter, 1980) driven largely by top management (Hambrick and Mason, 1984). If middle managers were considered at all, their contributions were often cast in a negative light. Guth and MacMillan (1986), for example, described negative impacts that managerial self-interest could have on strategy implementation.

Around this same time, however, others were beginning to recognize that strategy often emerged, and benefitted, from activities of participants throughout the organization (Mintzberg and McHugh, 1985). Bower (1970) articulated a resource allocation and planning process that was as much bottom-up as top-down. Burgelman (1983) developed an inductive model connecting managerial behaviors with strategic outcomes. Kanter (1984) studied middle management's role in innovation, and Schilit (1987) examined managers' upward influence in strategic decision making.

From these early beginnings emerged a diverse literature focused around three broad topics: middle managers' strategic roles and their antecedents; organizational cognition and middle manager involvement in strategy; and the relationship between middle management strategic behavior and organizational outcomes (see Wooldridge et al., 2008 for a complete review).

As the editors of the *Handbook of Middle Management Strategy Process Research*, we are proud to add the 19 chapters included here to this growing body of work. In developing the volume we were struck by both the number and the quality of the submissions we received. That such talented scholars continue to be interested in the middle management perspective bodes well for the future of the area as a fruitful line of inquiry.

In our 2008 review, we noted that while strategy process research from a middle management perspective "has contributed to a broadened understanding of strategy formation and change, the cumulative impact of this literature has been limited by the variety of issues addressed, a proliferation of research constructs, and multiple research methodologies." In one way or another the chapters included here attend to these challenges.

PART I: THE UNIT OF ANALYSIS

A key insight apparent across many of the chapters in this *Handbook* is that there is still a significant difference of opinion about who middle managers are and, perhaps more importantly, which middle managers influence strategy, when, and why. Identifying the most strategically relevant and active middle managers in an organization is problematic and many studies (including our own) have generalized from convenience samples or accessible case histories. In different ways the chapters included in Part I address these issues and sharpen our focus regarding exactly which managers strategy researchers should pay attention to.

In Chapter 1, Castañer and Yu take issue with what they identify as a tendency in the literature to overestimate middle managers' strategic role, and perhaps more importantly, to underestimate top managers' role in emergent strategy and the development of strategic initiatives. The chapter begins by reviewing what the authors see as the dominant view. They argue that the Bower–Burgelman model – originally developed as descriptive theory – has been overinterpreted as a normative model. The result is a view of top managers' role as process architect rather than active participant in emergent processes. These scholars argue that there are circumstances requiring a more substantive role. Crucial to understanding this claim, the authors observe that the unit of analysis – who is a middle and who is a top manager – depends on what level of strategy making constitutes the research focus. At the corporate strategy level, for example, subsidiary or divisional-level executive teams may be middle managers, but for divisional strategy they function as top managers. In light of this, the chapter takes a contingent view and identifies four conditions requiring direction from top management in emergent processes.

Sharma begins Chapter 2 with two observations. First, what he calls mega organizations (General Electric, Walmart) are far too large and diverse to be managed by a few executives in the top management team. Second, the research addressing the role of middle managers lumps everyone who is not a direct supervisor and not a top manager into a single middle-level category. Professor Sharma proposes that this group is far from homogenous and that there is a relatively small cadre of about 200 very senior executives that play a decisive, integrative role in mega organizations. The chapter continues by providing theoretical and empirical underpinnings of this “mezzanine” cohort and catalogues three specific integrative functions that they serve as a group: aggregation, coordination, and consolidation. In a closing discussion, Sharma considers the implications of the mezzanine for middle management strategy process research.

While middle managers' potential for strategic influence is well accepted by contemporary strategy process scholars, in Chapter 3 we assert that the extent and limits of their influence are not well understood. Why some middle managers are involved in, and influence, the strategy process more than others remains an important research issue. Drawing from established theory and 86 job descriptions, we identify five types of middle management positions. The analysis points to a position's type and degree of boundary spanning responsibility and its hierarchical status as key factors in strategic influence. The less a position represents either of these, the more transient and contingent (but not necessarily weaker) strategic influence becomes. In particular, contingencies relevant to a position's strategic influence appear to include the firm's bargaining power and the level of social cohesion among a manager's subordinates. Our intent is to contribute to the middle management strategy process literature by systematically identifying recurring types of middle management positions within contemporary organizations and drawing connections between these positions, the strategic challenges facing incumbents, and specific forms of strategic influence.

PART II: EXPLORATIONS OF EXISTING THEORY

A second idea we were reminded of when putting this volume together is how firmly grounded the middle management perspective is in theory. Early contributions by Mintzberg, Burgelman, and Ashford continue to be highly relevant, and later work on sensemaking and emotions have developed as a kind of overlay. Thus, in Part II we present four chapters by authors who extend their already substantial contributions to middle management strategy process theory.

In Chapter 4, Ashford, Ong, and Keesee provide a comprehensive review of the literature on middle management issue selling since 1993. In addition to issue selling per se, the authors include contributions from three other related literatures: silence, voice, and strategic championing. Their review is organized around three major themes: personal and contextual conditions influencing issue selling; how middle managers issue sell; and individual and organizational outcomes associated with issue selling attempts. Concluding their review, the authors present four observations regarding the state of the literature and where it needs to go. Interestingly, the authors note that while issue selling has clearly had an impact with micro-level scholars, the construct has been less influential with strategy researchers. They argue for the importance of the topic within strategy and suggest that future studies place a priority on: (1) organizational outcomes

associated with issue selling; (2) how differences in national culture affect middle managers' issue selling; and (3) how the nature of the issue being raised influences whether and how it is raised.

Balogun and Rouleau, in Chapter 5, review strategy-as-practice (SAP) research on middle management sensemaking and strategic change, developing an organizing framework that identifies existing contributions and high priority research issues. These authors note that, consistent with its emphasis with what managers do, to date most middle management SAP research has focused on processes underlying middle managers' interpretation of strategic change. They argue that more work is needed exploring temporal linkages and related constructs such as "sensegiving" and "sensebreaking." Their chapter concludes by outlining an agenda for future SAP middle management sensemaking research. Studies examining how sensemaking occurs both within and between managers, the limits of shared sensemaking, and the impact of emotions and social loyalties, are highlighted. The chapter serves as a useful primer on SAP middle management research and encourages new innovative research by articulating a broadened research agenda.

Huy and Guo argue in Chapter 6 that the strategy process, as a sequence of events characterized by social interactions and change, evokes emotions that importantly impacts outcomes. They review the extant literature, combining insights from previous studies to develop a prescriptive framework that positions emotion management as the central explanatory factor in the strategy process. Their framework suggests alternative emotion management roles that effective managers perform during three phases of the strategy process: definition, impetus, and context determination. Recognizing that emotion management may be viewed as manipulative and selfish the authors suggest "practical wisdom" as a well-suited ethical principle. They conclude with a discussion of research opportunities suggested by their model.

Kuratko (Chapter 7) reviews the evolution of corporate entrepreneurship (CE) over the last four decades. Initially seen as incompatible within established organizations, (corporate) entrepreneurship is now recognized as a fundamental way in which organizations renew their competitive positions and enter new businesses. The author identifies five stable antecedents of middle managers' entrepreneurial behavior, arguing that managers are most likely to act entrepreneurially when these five conditions are widely known and accepted. The chapter then describes middle managers' role as "lynchpins" of CE activity and outlines four key challenges that middle managers face in the CE process. It concludes with a discussion of research challenges and priorities for researchers. The chapter contributes to the literature by providing insights into the field's understanding of the

corporate entrepreneurship process and the critical role played by middle managers.

PART III: THEORETICAL DEVELOPMENTS

Despite its firm grounding, theory development has not stood still and in Part III we present five chapters that explore the theory development process and present novel theoretical contributions. Mintzberg has given the middle management perspective three of its most important foundational theories: on the nature of managerial work, on patterns of realized strategy, and on the structure of organizations. What better author, then, to explain how to develop theory. In Chapter 8, Mintzberg first describes what theory is not: it is not true, objective, or deductive. Then, he briefly, tentatively and with a considerable degree of uncertainty, describes what theory and theory development might be. In the chapter's most expansive section, he articulates 20 points that constitute his approach to developing theory, and that provide the rest of us with a rich set of observations on how to build theories that are more interesting and relevant than they are rigorous or tested. If you really want to dissuade yourself or someone else from pursuing another incremental, theory-testing study, give them this chapter as a starting point.

Another seminal author, Burgelman, has provided rich case studies and an inductive theoretical model connecting managerial behaviors with strategic outcomes. In Chapter 9, he describes how large, complex, multi-business organizations achieve complex strategic integration. Drawing on the classic Bower–Burgelman (B-B) model of strategy process and through a concrete strategy-as-practice lens, the chapter offers an in-depth process analysis of the “change the game” initiative within Nike; an initiative intended to transform a historically marginalized women's apparel business into a centerpiece of the company's strategy. The result is a narrative connecting upward, downward, and most importantly, lateral leadership practices to a process described in the B-B process model.

In Chapter 10, Wang, Gibbons, and Heavey provide an overview of existing theory on middle managers' roles in the strategy process and develop a conceptual framework detailing drivers and mechanisms underlying managers' strategic role flexibility. They describe strategic role flexibility as being comprised of: (1) multifaceted role behavior; (2) multidirectional patterns of influence; and (3) temporal agility. Their framework suggests that strategic role flexibility is driven by human and social capital considerations and is achieved through a three-step process: envisioning, assessing, and enacting. After presenting their framework,

they identify 11 broad research questions to guide future research on the drivers, mechanisms, strategic contexts, and manifestations of middle managers' strategic role flexibility.

Mantere enters the conversation on middle management and strategy by reminding us, in Chapter 11, of the implications of work by Henry Mintzberg and others focused on emergent influences. The notion that the boundaries of strategy making do not coincide exclusively with those of the top management team means that there are many listeners and many voices in the strategy conversation; albeit some voices are louder than others. Except perhaps in the very smallest organizations, there really is no one set of goals driving a collective intent. As researchers, the reality we face is a polyphonic strategy. With this as his premise, Professor Mantere goes on to produce a rich, well-developed theory that challenges much of what has been taken for granted about the meaning of "strategy." Wonderfully, he completes the argument by acknowledging the methodological challenges of capturing strategy as polyphonic processes and practices. He closes with the hopeful proposition that polyphonic strategy can provide a meeting point for strategy process and strategy as practice research.

Finally, in Chapter 12, Wolf focuses on middle managers' engagement with the strategic planning process. She begins with an authoritative review, and proceeds to identify three ways in which middle managers may engage with strategic planning: conforming, decoupling, and shaping. The theoretical principle animating relationships between middle managers and strategic planning is mindfulness, and the extent to which it is a feature of management behavior. If mindfulness is needed, perhaps it is ironic that planning so often becomes routine. Professor Wolf draws on institutional theory to show why this is true, even inevitable, and more importantly, how institutionalization may defeat the flexibility and adaptation that constitutes the very purpose of strategic planning.

PART IV: METHODOLOGICAL ALTERNATIVES

"Diversity" is a word that comes to mind when describing the array of methodologies appropriate to middle management strategy process research. The three chapters in Part IV highlight methodological issues associated with middle management strategy process research, and explicate three very different alternative methodological approaches. In our view, all three have great potential and represent interesting research opportunities.

Schmid's Chapter 13 suggests an "alternative template" approach as a method for adding new insight into empirical phenomena. He begins with

a review of the literature on power and middle managers' (MMs) role in strategy making organized around three key themes: MMs as resisters of top-down strategy, MMs as politically skilled change agents, and strategic empowerment. Following this review, he presents an empirically derived case vignette to examine MM power dynamics through three alternative theoretical lenses. Through this pluralistic approach he demonstrates the utility of examining phenomena through multiple lenses to challenge, enrich, and elaborate upon extant knowledge. He then applies this thinking to introduce three research "moves" (enriching, problematizing, and elaborating) that he argues can add new insight into the MM perspective and advance the emergence of a pluralistic theory of power.

In Chapter 14, Cohen and Nair present an overview of basic social network analysis (SNA) concepts, data collection techniques, and analytic methods. They suggest SNA as a potentially valuable research tool that is especially well fitted to middle management research. The authors note that while to date there are relatively few middle management SNA studies, the approach is uniquely suited to examine associations among managers' structural positions, network connections, roles, behaviors, and influence. The chapter includes references to key data collection and analysis resources and will no doubt be of interest to middle management researchers and others wanting to become more familiar with SNA.

In Chapter 15, Gylfe outlines how the use of videos can be used to "fill in spaces" left by more conventional qualitative methods focused on verbal transcripts or audio recordings. The author contends that visual behaviors such as pointing, gesturing, shifts in bodily position, and so on, provide important insight into how middle managers enact their strategic roles. He argues that video data should be used in conjunction with other data sources (for example, verbal transcripts, field notes, documents), and identifies three analytical stages: detailing, sequencing, and patterning. He then connects specific types of behaviors (movements, use of material objects, and gestures) to managers' integrative and divergent roles, and uses two vignettes from a video shadowing study to illustrate the methodology's potential. This chapter contributes to the middle management strategy process literature by introducing and providing an overview of a potentially powerful, and increasingly practical, research methodology.

PART V: EMPIRICAL EXPLORATIONS

Existing empirical work emphasizes middle managers' strategic roles, and this remains the most comfortable theoretical footing for researchers. Indeed, three of the four empirical chapters in this section examine

managers' roles as champions, knowledge brokers and corporate entrepreneurs. The fourth chapter tackles less well-worn territory by elaborating the top and middle management interface.

In Chapter 16, Ateş, Tarakci, Ahn, Floyd, and Wooldridge integrate literature on goal orientation and team contextual factors to develop and test a cross-level model predicting middle manager championing behavior. The authors assert that individual differences in goal orientation motivate managers to search for or avoid new strategic initiatives, and that individual motivational orientations flourish within different intra-team contexts. Based on data from 181 middle managers in 26 teams of a large European firm, the study finds that "learning" and "prove" goal orientations affect championing behavior positively, whereas avoid orientation has a negative effect when the team is not behaviorally integrated. Organizations rely on middle managers' championing of novel strategic initiatives for strategic renewal, and while the existing literature highlights how structural conditions affect whether and when managers champion new initiatives, this chapter examines how individual motivational drivers influence middle manager championing behavior.

Currie and Burgess (Chapter 17) examine the knowledge-brokering role of "hybrid" middle managers in two hospitals. Drawing from interviews, focus group discussions, and direct observations they present findings organized around four themes: downward knowledge brokering, upward knowledge brokering, knowledge brokering across professional boundaries, and knowledge brokering across organizational boundaries. Their study focuses on a unique type of middle manager – the hybrid manager, with both clinical and managerial responsibilities – and provides insights into how organizational and institutional context impact managers' knowledge brokering. They note significant power differentials among middle managers, finding – perhaps surprisingly – a higher level of brokering activity among lower status middle managers.

In Chapter 18, Mair examines the strategic roles of 150 middle managers in different units of a large European financial services firm. Her study takes place in the context of a major corporate initiative aimed at creating a more entrepreneurial culture within the firm. Drawing on insights from 40 exploratory interviews, Mair develops an instrument to identify four unique middle manager roles in corporate entrepreneurship: leader, broker, businessman, and architect. She interprets these roles relative to existing literature and uncovers associations between three roles (architect, leader, broker) and organizational performance. The chapter contributes to middle management research by adding new insight into the roles of middle managers in corporate entrepreneurship initiatives and how these roles are connected to organizational performance.

Finally, in Chapter 19, Raes and Vlijmen employ the process model developed by Raes et al. (2011) to examine the interface of top and middle managers during a period of strategic renewal in a multinational European financial institution. Qualitative data were collected from 21 semi-structured interviews with top and middle managers. Interviews centered on managers' relational role behavior, engagement in decision making, and leadership style. Coded themes emerging from the interviews aligned with the framework and added new insight. In particular, transparency and top management team unity emerged as important constructs not explicitly identified in the Raes et al. model. The chapter concludes by describing implications for future research.

SUMMARY

Together, the chapters in this book constitute an impressive body of work that demonstrates the field's continued interest in middle management strategy process research. The authors address a diverse set of issues, from a variety of theoretical perspectives. Similarly, a wide variety of research methodologies are employed and examined. While challenging, this diversity speaks to the breadth of the middle management perspective's impact and its ongoing potential to inform our understanding of strategy-making.

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