The Middle Manager Role – A Case Study of Expectations, Norms, Behavior and Conflicts within the Role

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Environmental changes have challenged firm structure and traditional organization models. Downsizing in the mid-level management has led to fewer middle managers having more tasks on their hands than ever before. In order to carry out these tasks, managers are expected to play out several roles. The middle manager role affects several stakeholders with individual needs and thus the role includes competing expectations. Therefore contradictory expectations are very typical for the role; studies show that middle managers register most role conflicts of all organizational actors. A middle manager can be described as a middleman constantly working in at least two different directions.

This study explores the role of middle managers; that is, which factors affect the role behavior and which mechanisms managers use to avoid ambiguity in the work role and role conflicts. The purpose is to find obstacles to managerial top performance by examining the role set of a case organization and interpreting the effects of expectations and norms and analysing the chosen behavior. Role conflicts are identified and discussed.

The study is conducted as an in-depth case study and the method consists of ten semi-structured interviews. The research philosophy is dependent on social constructionism, meaning that the results are only valid within their unique context and thus not generalizable. The empirical research is based on giving a voice to the managers of the case study; thus important data is presented as direct citations.

The results show that the role behavior of the researched middle managers is dependent on individual personality, formal position, norms, company culture and values, and the role set including geographical position of the office, colleagues, superiors and subordinates. The norms of the case organization were significantly strong and thus affected the role behavior to a high degree. Further, the most important mechanisms for diminishing role problems turned out to be direct communication, formalization of the role, and clear borderlines for the expected behavior.

Suggestions for future research include more explanatory and exploratory role studies that factor in the meaning of the role context and interpret the researched roles.

**Keywords:** Middle manager, management, role theory, expectations, norms, behavior, role ambiguity, role conflict
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1 INTRODUCTION

Environmental changes, such as the globalization of the economy and the development of information technology, have challenged firm structure and traditional organization models. Most importantly, downsizing has been a phenomenon that significantly has challenged traditional roles of organizational actors. Between 1980 and 2006, restructuring and downsizing of organizations reduced workforce and middle management levels within 90% of the Fortune 100 businesses (Munkeby 2007:1). The effects of downsizing have led to fewer middle managers having more tasks on their hands than ever before. The various tasks require that managers take on several organizational roles through which they act differently in according to the situation at hand. The traditional middle manager tasks, such as controlling, commanding, and communicating between the top and the bottom, have gradually developed towards more specialized tasks (Marichal and Segers 2012). Bureaucratic behavior is less and less encouraged in modern organizations and thus the expectations of today’s middle managers have changed. At the very least managers are expected to manage employees, ensure communication between hierarchies, find solutions to problems, translate organizational strategies to practice and action, and also to be leaders of change and interpreters of meaning (Mintzberg, Lampel, Quinn and Ghoshal 2003). Hence, middle managers’ roles have multiplied.

While it is known that new roles of middle managers have been formed, academic research has followed behind in researching the consequences and understanding the roles (Janczak 2000; Burgoyne and Livian 1997; Nonaka and Takeuchi 1995). Given the increased need of innovations and creativity of middle managers (Bartlett and Ghoshal 1993) and recent developments of the economy, there is a severe need to understand the behavioral effects created by competing expectations (Marginson and Bui 2009; Marginson 2002). Role theory is a suitable framework for this kind of studies, which aim to understanding middle managers better and finding obstacles to managerial top performance.

Organizational role research has been conducted since 1960; however, there is a need of modern studies since many of the findings of the previous century cannot be judged valid anymore. The environment in which organizations function is constantly developing and changing, suggesting that the required knowledge and skills of middle
managers may have changed during recent times and that new knowledge about the emerged roles is needed.

1.1. Problem background

Middle managers are between two organizational levels; the top management and the first line managers and employees. They are expected to enhance organizational performance and to lead their subordinates to top performance. In top-down organizations long-term visions and strategies are decided upon by the top management and communicated hierarchically down. It is the responsibility of middle managers to translate the visions and strategies and to plan, coordinate, budget, control, and allocate resources to reach the goals (Rollinson 2008; Floyd and Wooldridge 2000). Further, as leadership theories often highlight, an inspirational leader figure is required to drive change and ensure employee satisfaction; employees perform best when they feel that their needs are listened to and taken into account. Therefore middle managers should also perform leadership tasks, in addition to management tasks. (Northouse 2013; Bass and Bass 2008)

Contradictory expectations are very typical in the mid-level manager position. Therefore it has been shown that middle managers experience most role conflict of all organizational actors (Bass and Bass 2008; Bass and Stogdill 1989). In addition to that, middle managers are afraid of losing their jobs after the downsizing trend and the cutting off divisions in the middle management level which has occurred since the 1980s (Munkeby 2007). In today’s organizations, where cutting costs and being as efficient as possible with minimal resources is of great importance, the work of middle managers is challenging and alternatives are restricted. Employees are (as well) afraid of losing their jobs and tired of being super workers expected to excel in their performance, while the top management constantly tries to renew strategies and performance concepts. Middle managers need to balance both parties’ interests and concerns, with limited resources at hand. While managers are expected to be innovative, they are given few tools in practice; the budget often restricting middle managers alternatives in the decision-making (Marginson and Bui 2009).

The above problem description is well-known in organizations and by management scholars (see for instance Bass and Bass 2008; Morgan 2006), and thus extensive amounts of descriptive research have been conducted regarding the roles of middle managers. However, it is much more difficult to find literature regarding what
managers can do to fulfil the roles, how they should behave, and what they can do to avoid a conflict of roles (Mantere 2007).

This problem background leads to many questions: Which expectations affect behavior? What is the relationship between expectations and behavior? How likely is it that managers conform to expectations? What are the effects of conformity, and when will those effects appear? What norms do managers conform to? Which norms affect expectations? When and how is non-conformity sanctioned? Under what conditions do managers fail to conform to norms? How do middle managers balance their different roles? How to cope with conflict?

1.2. Purpose and research question

The primary purpose of this Master’s thesis is to explore and explain what it is that affects the role behavior in the middle manager role. This will be done by examining how norms, expectations, and the role set affect behavior. The study is in particular interested in finding which mechanisms affect behavior, how behavior is affected, and why. Further, the mechanisms for choosing behavior to avoid a conflict of roles and ambiguity will be analysed. Following this argumentation, the research questions to be answered are the following.

RQ1: Which mechanisms affect role behavior, how, and why?

RQ2: How do middle managers construct their role behaviors to diminish role ambiguity and conflict?

1.3. Scope and limitations

The scope of this study is to see how one Finnish group of middle managers perceive their work roles and make use of them to support them in their managerial positions. It is an in-depth study and therefore the scope will only be one case organization. The results will not be applicable outside their context. The study is thus limited to the researched sample with the aim to open up a discussion and point out directions for future research. No general conclusions will be offered.

Further, the unit of analysis is an important aspect of the scope of this study. Whether ‘role’ should be analysed from a perspective of persons or social positions (Biddle 1986), and analysed on an individual or organizational level (Mantere 2007), depends
much on the aim of the study, how the researcher defines ‘role’, and the methodology of
the study. In this study ‘role’ will be analysed both from a perspective of persons and
social positions as the focus group of the study –middle managers– will be treated as a
homogenous group when considering the expectations on the managerial role in
general, however; I will argue for the fact that personal interpretations of expectations
and norms have a great impact of what behavior a person chooses. Thus the level of
analysis will be on the individual level and the occupational level, although the results
of the empirical research will be on an organizational level.

The study is also affected by limitations. The most obvious limitation of the study
regards the lack of a cultural comparison between the used literature and the culture of
the case organization. The literature review is heavily built on American studies, and it
is obvious that the national culture of the used literature is different than the culture
surrounding the case organization of this study, which is Finnish. However, presenting
theories and discussing cultural differences falls beyond the scope of this study.
Therefore, readers should note that the used literature is not completely equivalent to
the situation of the case organization.

1.4. Significance of the study

Middle managers have a poor reputation sometimes being seen as ineffective
organizational barriers, although they are the ones with potential to reduce inefficiency
and problems and have the greatest influence on strategic performance (Haneberg
2005). The agency view, for instance, has suggested that middle managers are un-
motivated organizational actors that slow down decision-making and strategy
implementation. Consequently, research is dealing with two sides of the same coin; a
number of researchers thinking that the middle manager role should be eliminated,
and a greater amount of researchers suggesting that today when unnecessary layers and
quantities of middle management have been removed in organizations, those that
remain are of great importance and should be seen as valuable resources in
organizations rather than bureaucratic controllers (Marichal and Segers 2012).

What the actual roles of middle managers in today’s organizations are will be discussed
throughout the thesis, the study thus contributing to the research discussion of the
problem. The contribution to the management literature will be to provide data on the
topic from one large Finnish organization, which can be very scarcely found in the
existing literature. The context of the research to be conducted is thus of great value,
adding to the pool of knowledge currently consisting of mostly American studies. Although the research follows the limitations of a thesis, I will try to generate conclusions that contribute to management scholars, peers, and students. I will also present some suggestions for future research based on the results and findings of this study.

1.5. **Structure of the study**

The structure of this study follows the traditional steps of a thesis. It starts with an introduction to the subject including a formulation of the problem background, the purpose of the study, and the research questions to be answered. The scope of the study, limitations, and key terms are offered in the first chapter as well.

The introduction is followed by a literature review, consisting of relevant role theories. Previous research is presented throughout the framework, and relationships between the aim, research questions, and the theoretical framework are provided. Further, recent studies will be discussed and a gap in existing knowledge will be formulated.

The following chapter considers the methodology of the study, describing the chosen method and providing insights to the research philosophy. The empirical part is based on a case study that will be presented in chapter 4 and analysed in chapter 5, with the help of the literature review. Finally, the study is concluded by discussing the results, presenting conclusions of the research, and offering ideas for future research.

All of the following chapters will be clearly linked to the research questions of the study, as they all have a part to play in order for the research questions to be answered. The structure of the study is illustrated in Figure 1.
1.6. Key concepts

In this study the following concepts will be referred to frequently; middle manager, middle management, and mid-level. These concepts hold different meanings in different contexts. In this study, ‘middle manager’ refers to as a person working on any organizational level except for the first line, as a CEO, or as a member of the board of directors.

The empirical research includes managers at different levels of the organizational hierarchy; however, all interview participants have management responsibilities of other managers, and superiors of their own, and thus they fall under the definition of ‘middle manager’ as described above. The word ‘middle management’ or ‘mid-level’ refers to any organizational hierarchy that is between the top and the bottom of an organization.

1.7. Convention

In order to produce a text as smooth as possible it was needed to decide on a third-person pronoun to use when referring to a third party and use it throughout the text. The third-person pronoun of “he” was chosen for convenience, without making any statements with the chosen pronoun. It was chosen because it is the shortest possible amongst he, she, and they. Therefore, when I write about the manager as a “he”, for instance, I do not mean that the manager position in general consists of males or that that specific statement is directed towards males.

However, it must be noted that when I write about the participants of the case study gender does count. In those writings, I refer to the respondents’ actual gender and therefore use the pronoun that is correct for that specific individual in question or alternatively use the third-person pronoun of “they” if I do not want to state the gender of the respondent in order to keep him or her anonymous.
2 LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter presents existing research of role theory. In order to understand what we know of roles today a historical overview of the topic must be given. Thus we need to know how the topic of ‘role’ has developed over time. The amount of research is extensive as research has been conducted within various sciences for nearly a century. The beginning of role theory can be traced back to 1920-1930 when social psychologists started to explain social behavior of humans through the lens of roles. This perspective withholds that humans adjust their behavior according to a set of rights, duties, expectations, and norms that are appropriate for a specific context of environment and social actors. Katz and Kahn (1978: 16) provide a brief overview of the emergence of ‘role’ in different sciences, stating that role theory emerged with Park’s discovery in 1926 of everybody everywhere always performing a role through which one is known and through which one knows oneself. Later on in 1934 role was used by Mead to explain the origins of social behavior and by Moreno as a concept in psychotherapy. Further, Linton placed role on the map of anthropology in 1936 and Newcomb made it a key concept in his research on social psychology in the 1950s. (Ibid.) As we can see from the overview of how role theory was born, much of the first research was conducted within psychology and social psychology as an attempt to understand human beings and their behavior. It did not, however, take long before role theory was used to understand organizations and the roles played by organizational actors (Fondas and Stewart 1994).

The main part of the literature review will focus on how role theory has been used in organizational research and in researching the roles of middle managers in particular. The structure of the chapter is the following; the literature review starts with a description of role theory, early research, and central definitions; continues with a presentation of role theory in organizational research; and, ends with an overview of modern research. A summary of the literature review is provided and a gap in existing knowledge will be formulated. Thus the task of the research to be conducted will be argued for.

2.1 The emergence of role theory and early research

One of the first to recognize that individuals constantly play roles was Park in 1926. He suggested that humans always act according to a role they are playing, such as parents
and children; masters and servants; teachers and students; clients and professionals; and, Gentiles and Jews, consciously or not. Park stated that faces are really masks, a metaphor suggesting that our outer selves are always in an attempt to conform to the person we wish to be; the face is a convenient mask reflecting the type we want to impersonate. According to Park the process of adapting to a role starts with humans born as individuals, observing behavior and achieving characters, and becoming persons. The importance of observing behavior and adjusting behavior accordingly was further developed by Mead (1934) to explain social behavior. He used ‘role’ to define how individuals behave in groups, seeing roles as an organization of social acts imported into organisms. Mead was interested in how individuals conduct their social behavior and saw roles as a required way of structuring behavior in human communities.

One of the true fathers of role theory is Moreno, who in 1934 defined ‘role’ as a composition of collective denominators and individual differentials. Thus Moreno developed a dual viewpoint of roles, stating that a role is always affected by the social setting of an individual and the individual himself. Moreno developed an understanding of ‘role’ separating it from personality and ego, and discussed the meanings of role-taking, role playing, and role creating. Role-taking refers to taking on a finished and fully established role leaving the individual no freedom of interpreting the role. Role playing, on the other hand, allows for some degree of freedom, and role creating permits the individual a high degree of freedom. According to the author, the self emerges from roles rather than roles emerging from the self. Further, Moreno separated social roles from psychodramatic roles, stating that playing the role of the mother, the teacher, and the Christian is different from playing the role of a mother, a teacher, and a Christian. The ideas of Moreno have developed into a group of role theories referred to as cognitive role theory. This type of research is especially interested in the impact of expectations on behavior; that is, factors leading to expectations, techniques for measuring expectations, and perceptions of expectations and their effect on behavior (Biddle 1986).

During that same time in 1934, Linton published his research regarding ‘role’, stating that role equals status. According to him, individuals are assigned with social status that is measured in relation to other individuals and concludes certain rights and duties. In order to gain status individuals have to behave according to a role and put the rights and duties into effect, which mean, playing the role. Thus there are no roles
without statuses and no statuses without roles. Just like previous researchers Linton recognized ‘role’ as dependent on other social actors; for instance, consider the quarter-back of a football team. The position and status related is meaningless except in relation to other positions of the team. From the viewpoint of the quarter-back himself the position is meaningful and dictates where he shall take his place and what he shall do in various games; the position and role both limits and defines what he shall do in the eyes of his team and himself. However, individuals are not likely to respond to roles equally; the formation of attitudes and habits begin at birth and such attributes affect how we perceive roles. Linton states that the earlier individuals’ training for a role begins, the more successful will the outcomes be. However, human beings are so mutable that almost any normal individual can be trained to the adequate performance of almost any role. Later on this perspective of roles has developed into what is called functional role theory, that is, roles as parts of a social system. Biddle (1986) found that functional role theory has been one of the most used perspectives within role research, although it has gained criticism for assuming that roles are associated with identified social positions, that social systems are stable, and that norms within a social system are shared and either confirmed or sanctioned.

According to Newcomb (1950), role taking starts with children interiorizing social norms, which means learning to perceive themselves and others in terms of the societal norms. At first, children play with no rules at all. The only fun of the game is to move objects and see them play around. Later at the age of six or seven, the rules of the games are understood as something absolute. Children tend to say that the rules of a game come from “God” and would not agree to change the rules even if everybody participating would agree on new rules. Further later on, children learn to understand that games can be played differently if all players agree to it; the children have learned to understand social relativism of rules. This results with children growing up to being able to place themselves in the place of others with whom they interact, and to treat them as persons with attitudes of their own. Hence a person’s behavior depends partly on the manner in which he perceives the situation of himself. Thus self-perceptions and self-attitudes greatly imply on how we play out our roles. For example, we can attempt to understand certain role behavior by analyzing how equal roles are usually played, however, to understand a certain individual’s role we need to understand his place in a role system and unique behavior in the light of his role prescriptions and other considerations which can account for the uniqueness of his behavior. Newcomb thus
defines ‘role’ as “a whole set of behaviors, which are more or less characteristic of all the occupants of any position” (1950: 330).

As we can see from the early research on roles, the concept of role is used very differently by its early proponents. Biddle (1986) found that this has led to confusion in role theories, as some authors use the term ‘role’ to refer to characteristic behavior, others to designate social parts to be played, and some use it to offer definitions focusing on scripts for social conduct. Further, he found that role theory suffers from non-consistent opinions about the degree to which expectations are responsible for roles. Researchers vary in their definitions of expectations as norms, beliefs, or preferences. Each of these words hold different meanings for the generated role and thus different versions of role theory is developed according to what definition the author of a text uses. Further, definitions can often be found used interchangeably and wrong; such as defining roles as a pattern of norms and attitudes, as if these would generate similar behavior. Furthermore, a very serious problem in the research of roles is the manner in which research should be conducted; that is, should roles be viewed from the perspective of a person or a social position. In this study roles will be considered both from the perspective of persons and social positions (see chapter 1.3 Scope and limitations). In addition to this, modern researchers (see for instance Balogun 2003) argue that the interpretation part of roles is often overlooked, meaning that research tend to neglect the importance of the focal person’s perceptions on the expectations and the role to be performed. A more throughout discussion of role research will be provided in the end of this chapter in the summary section.

2.2. Role theory in organizational research

As stated in the previous chapter role theory emerged in psychological and social psychological sciences. It did quickly find its way into organizational research as researchers tried to understand the behavior of individuals in organizations. Organizational role theory was developed in the 1960s. Adapted to the organizational research, role theory focuses of social entities that are pre-planned, task-oriented, and hierarchical (Parker and Wickham 2005; Balogun 2003; Madsen 2002; Biddle 1986). In this type of role research, roles are assumed to be identified social positions and generated by normative expectations. However, it is recognized that norms vary among individuals and that they are directed towards focal persons both by official demands of the organization and as pressure by informal groups (Balogun 2003). As a result of
multiple norms, individuals are prone to face role conflict. Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, Snoek, and Rosenthal provided a theory of role dynamics in organizations in 1964, distinguishing objective environment from psychological environment. According to the authors, objective environment consists of “real” objects and events, which are verifiable outside a person’s consciousness and experience. Psychological environment, on the other hand, represents a person’s conscious and unconscious representations of the objective environment (Antonioni 1996; Kahn et al. 1964). This definition of the environment in which individuals function, and their perceptions about it, is an important factor to counter in when exploring organizational roles, as individuals will respond to the environment according to how they perceive it. As we know, every organization and department is different and can be judged differently. Thus the psychological environment of individuals will be a red thread throughout the thesis, the underlying research philosophy being that we can never claim that individuals would perceive and respond to the environment in a predetermined and similar way – it is impossible even if the individuals work in the same organization. This research philosophy will be presented more throughout in the methodological chapter.

In order to more deeply be able to discuss organizational roles, central concepts must be defined. Without defining their meaning, it is impossible to measure and describe their impact later on. A common dilemma in role research is that researchers provide different meanings to central concepts, a problem that will be further discussed later on. The concepts are next defined according to definitions provided by Kahn et al. (1964: 12-17). Kahn and his colleagues’ definitions were chosen because they are referred to by many scholars (see for instance Fondas and Stewart 1994) and considered to be “real” and “correct”.

2.3. Role concepts and definitions

Organization

The organization in which a person holds a job exists in his objective environment. It exists regardless of the job-holder’s perceptions about it and is characterized by the continuous process of input by its workers, transformation, and output. The organization exists as long as the individuals working in it perform their roles (input), produce something (transformation), and sells goods or services (output).
Role

The role constitutes of the set of activities to be performed, it is the potential behavior expected. The taking on and performing of a role is related to various role-related concepts; role set, role expectation, role pressure, role force, and role behavior.

Role set

The role set or cluster is made up of the offices related to an individual's personal office. The immediate environment a person conducts work in, for instance the department of an organization, constitutes the individual’s personal office. The role set is formed by the personal office together with other offices one is connected to within the organization. Other members of organizations are included into the role set as well, for instance: supervisors, subordinates, and other members of the organization with whom one must work closely. In addition to that, other people can be included into the role set, such as role-models, family members, suppliers, and customers. Although these are not members of the organization, they have an influence of one's behavior on the job and are therefore included into the role set.

Role expectations

The members of a person’s role set are in some manner dependent on his performance. Because they have a stake in the performance, they will develop beliefs and attitudes about the role to be performed. These prescriptions are referred to as role expectations and include opinions about what the person should do, what kind of person he should be, what he should think and believe, and how he should relate to others. Role expectations go beyond formal job descriptions given by the head of the organization. Role expectations are investigated more throughout in chapter 2.7.

Sent role

Role expectations seldom remain in the heads of the members of a person’s role set. They tend to be communicated out in various ways both directly and indirectly. These communications, for instance in the form of instructions from a supervisor or expressed admiration or disappointment by a colleague, are the activity referred to as sent role.
**Role pressures**

Sent roles are usually not informational to their nature. They are attempts of influencing behavior, directed to the focal person, and intended to set action towards the expectations of the senders. All requirements and demands, legitimate and formal or not, are called role pressures.

**Received role**

Each individual responds to the organization according to his perceptions of it, which may greatly vary from the actual organization. Thus individuals do not respond to objective organizations, but to the representation of it that exists in their psychological environment. The ability to perceive organizational reality varies amongst people and thus there are not only sent roles within organizations, but also received roles consisting of perceptions of what has been sent.

**Role forces**

The sent role is the method of an organization to communicate out the do’s and don’ts. The role performance is however dependent on the received role, which is what dictates the behavior, motivation, and performance. Each sent role can be regarded as a force, especially if they are illegitimate or coercive. In those situations, the focal person may experience a strong resistance which might lead to an outcome different or even opposite to the expected behavior. Psychological force of sent pressure is referred to as role force.

**2.4. Organizational roles**

Katz and Kahn recognized that there was a lack of studies exploring individuals’ behavior on an organizational and institutional level in 1966. Before the 1960s when the authors started their throughout research process of studies regarding individuals’ roles and social behavior, these were analyzed from a very limited perspective including the effects of family and other small face-to-face groups. Next, Katz and Kahn’s early research on organizational roles and the formulation of roles will be presented.

Organizations need to function rationally in order to achieve their goal; may that be producing a good or service. Rational functioning requires appropriate behavior of the
members of the organization, which is where most weakness of any organization lies (see for instance Morgan 2006). Organizations are thus dependent on role performance in order to function. To achieve the goal of the organization, every member of it must do his part. The more complex the organization is, the greater becomes the interdependence and the need for conformity to the requirements of organizational role. (Parker and Wickham 2005) From the organization there is usually assumed consensus that individuals will “fall into place” and agree upon pre-set roles and meet the expectations of them thus contributing to the optimal functionality of the organization. This would require that individuals understand and accept the commonly held norms of the organization that give consistency in behavior and re-enforce the company culture. Thus organizations assume that individuals when entering an employment relationship understand pre-defined roles, agrees on them, and hence consensus of behavior and rationality can be reached. This expectation, naturally, fails to count in roles changing over time and the effects of having to take on various roles at one time. (Parker and Wickham 2005; Biddle 1986; Kerr 1978)

Roles describe expected behavior associated with a given position and are developed from task requirements. The concept of ‘role’ is defined by Katz and Kahn (1978: 186) as “the summation of the requirements with which the system confronts the individual member”. Role behavior in organizations is thus a process of learning the expectations of others, accepting them, and fulfilling them. Individuals are motivated to performing a role primarily by extrinsic rewards –membership-, however, intrinsic rewards such as successful meaning of efforts; meeting others’ expectations; and having one’s own expectations met by others in exchange, are regarded important incentives for role performance as well. Role theory assumes that within organizations, members’ roles build a chain of standardized pattern of behavior to ensure function, regardless of members’ personal wishes (Parker and Wickham 2005). The way individuals act in their roles does however vary. For instance, two individuals given the same task requirements interpret the demands differently and will choose different strategies to achieve the goal. This is referred to by Katz and Kahn (1978: 45) as role behavior, a concept that will be more deeply explored in the next subchapter. The opposite extreme, which is found in bureaucratized organizations requiring prescribed and standardized forms of activity, is referred to as a formalized role system. Figure 2 shows the process of taking on organizational roles and the factors involved.
2.5. **Role behavior**

As 'role' refers to a whole set of expected behavior of the role occupant, which can be similar for all occupants of a particular occupation, we need to explore role behavior in order to understand the dynamics of choosing between many alternatives of behavior within a role. This was already touched upon briefly in the previous chapter; however, a more throughout analysis is needed. At least, the motivation of taking on roles needs to be understood as well as the factors affecting role performance or behavior.

Newcomb state that individuals are motivated to take on roles; it is satisfactory to be responded to in a certain way by those with whom one interacts with in the role (1950: 332). This means that individuals are likely to take on roles even without being forced to do so. However, the taking on a role can be done by negative motivation as well, for...
instance by an employee who resents the role in question but takes it on not to lose his job.

Role behavior is based upon interdependent performance, perception, thought, and affect. Thus what a person does, thinks, and feels is dependent on what he perceives. The way an individual perceives himself is dependent upon group norms, because only when we perceive us in terms of shared norms can we perceive ourselves with the eyes of others and thus anticipate others perceptions and responses to ourselves. (Fondas and Stewart 1994) Hence, when we communicate out our role behavior accordingly to how we perceive that others perceive us, we are actually communicating out what we think we are communicating out. If we act on how we privately perceive ourselves, we do on the other hand have no way of knowing what we are communicating out with our behavior. However, individuals that share the same group norms are still likely to choose different role behavior in similar roles. This is explained by Newcomb with the fact that self-perceptions are never fully shared, people’s different ability to constitutional make-up, and the different previous experiences individuals have gone through and the lessons they have learned from them. Katz and Kahn (1978) explain the ability to choose different behavior in similar roles by the fact that each individual responds to their psychological environment, that is, in terms of their perceptions of the environment. Thus role behavior is not dependent only on sent roles, but also on received roles. Further, personality affects the role behavior of individuals. Personality traits can be expressed in all roles of an individual, or just in some. A very energetic person might take on several roles and behave energetically in all of his roles; however, an authoritarian person might express his personality trait in the work role, but not in his personal roles. Therefore role behaviors are always unique to each individual. (Newcomb 1950) Mintzberg did, in his extensive research regarding what managers actually do come to the same conclusion as he summarized that “Individual personality may affect how a role is performed, but not that it is performed” (1973: 54). Next, the theoretical framework is developed towards the focus group of this study and Mintzberg’s proposition of managerial roles is presented.

2.6. Managerial roles

Numerous researches have been conducted to find out what managers do and which roles they have. Perhaps the most famous and cited definition of managerial roles was created by Mintzberg in 1973. By observing the work of five CEOs he came up with ten
roles that are more or less played by all managers. According to Mintzberg, the formal position of managers is of small importance when discussing the roles to be played. Each manager stands between his organizational unit and its complex environment, and thus it is of secondary importance whether one is managing a department, division, or the whole organization. According to Mintzberg, all managers must perform the same set of managerial roles.

The ten managerial roles invented by Mintzberg are divided into three groups; three interpersonal roles, three informational roles, and four decisional roles. As suggested by the terms, interpersonal roles are mainly involved with interpersonal relationships; informational roles with the transfer of information; and, decisional roles with decision-making. Mintzberg’s ten managerial roles are presented in Figure 3.

The three interpersonal roles are derived from formal authority and status. They refer to a manager’s unique position of getting information. External contacts ensure that managers get special outside information and the leadership activities ensure that managers get organizational information. Figurehead refers to the role of representing the organization in all matters of formality. Leader refers to the relationships with the manager’s subordinates, including responsibilities of staffing, coordinating, and so on. The formal status of a manager enables him to interact with peers and other people outside his organization to gain favours and information; a manager role called liaison.
Figure 3  Ten managerial roles.


Of the informational roles, the first –monitor– refers to the manager as a receiver and collector of information. The monitor role enables the manager to develop a throughout understanding of the organization. The disseminator role refers to the manager as involved with the transmission of special information to the organization. The spokesman role is about the manager disseminating special information of the organization into its environment.

The unique position over information, the status, and the authority that managers hold equals that managers are a central figure in taking important, strategic decisions and being a part of organizational decision-making. This responsibility of managers is divided into four additional roles. Within the entrepreneurial role the manager is initiating change, in the disturbance handler role the manager takes charge in times when his organization is threatened, in the resource allocator role the manager decides where the organization should enlarge its efforts, and in the negotiator role the manager negotiates on behalf of his organization.
Mintzberg highlights that the roles of a manager cannot be isolated; together they form a gestalt which is the manager. The roles thus go into each other and many roles involve similar tasks and behavior. Together all ten roles shall ensure efficient production of the organization’s goods and services, design and maintain organizational operations, adapt the organization to its changing environment, ensure that the organization meets the ends of its owners, serve as a link between the organization and its environment, and operate the organization’s status system. (Mintzberg 1973: 54-99) Mintzberg’s classification of managerial roles have been widely used and further developed by other researchers.

In contrast to Mintzberg’s suggestions, Stewart (1967, 1976, 1982) found that managers’ role requirements vary between the types of managerial positions, and thus she proposed a model of demands, constraints, and choices as factors shaping and influencing managers’ behavior. According to Stewart, managerial behavior requirements are heavily dependent on the differences between positions in demands, constraints, and choices.

*Demands* are role expectations sent to the focal person by people with power to obtain compliance; the superior for instance. Thus demands comply what one must get done, otherwise facing the risk of sanctions or loss of the position. Deadlines, preparing budgets, signing documents, and filing reports are examples of demands managers deal with.

*Constraints* refer to characteristics of the organization and its environment limiting what a manager can do. Bureaucratic rules, regulations, policies, legal constraints, labor laws, and safety regulations are just a few examples of constraints managers have to work with and overcome. Together demands and constraints limit the *choices* of what managers can do. However, in the long run managers have opportunities to modify or remove demands and constraints, thus opening up the possibilities for more choices. In line with what Katz and Kahn called psychological organizations, Stewart argues that the demands and constraints of managers will vary with their perceptions.
2.6.1. The middle manager

When the above described managerial roles are adapted to the focus group of this study, middle managers, some researchers argue that the entrepreneurial role and leader role are the most important ones (Bass and Bass 2008). Indeed, fewer of the roles are, according to Bass and Bass, relevant at the middle management level. Current trends suggest that the middle manager role should be eliminated. Pressures to be more cost conscious in a global market, adaptable, and flexible have made middle managers a target for downsizing. Middle managers are seen to add costs, slow down decisions, and obstruct the information flow in organizations. Modern flat organizations have lesser need of people translating the senior management’s orders downwards in the organization and particularly so if the middle managers cannot perform that role effectively (Marichal and Segers 2012). This overall opinion has been a great stressor for middle managers, having to deal with an increasing workload, broader task-requirement, and more performance pressures combined with more subordinates and fewer manager colleagues, as well as fewer job and promotion opportunities. On the other hand, research has also found that new organization models enable middle managers to having more challenging jobs with more accountability, freedom, and greater strategic input. Thus middle managers today have a more important job; something that should in itself be regarded as a motivational factor. With other words, research can be found to confirm both a wider range of roles of managers, sometimes including contradictory expectations and various roles; but also, more important organizational roles – and thus one has to choose whether one takes a pessimistic or positive view of the emerged roles. (Aime, Van Dyne and Petrenko 2011; Balogun 2003; Antonioni 1996) It can be guessed that the organization a manager works in will have a great input on which view he chooses to take. It is

![Diagram](image-url)
however clear that change in managerial roles has effects including role ambiguity and role conflict, and therefore we need to understand the new roles of middle managers better and investigate how middle managers can contribute in their emerged roles.

Now as we have gone through the key concepts and ideas of role theory in organizations, focus will be directed towards practical implications and meanings of the theory. Thus I aim to develop the theoretical framework towards understanding what happens —and why— when managers fail in their attempts to taking on and playing roles. Next, theories regarding role expectations, ambiguity, and conflict will be presented.

2.7. Role expectations

Role expectations are what an individual is expected to do at his work place in relation to the various duties and responsibilities within a work environment. In a manager's case, an expectation of the role to be fulfilled might be to meet the budget “no questions asked” or alternatively, that the manager is not expected to meet the pre-set budget due to uncontrollable factors. Further, a typical and contradictory expectation of managers is to produce quality products or services, while on the same time demanding higher product quantity. (Antonioni 1996)

Role expectations are communicated in the form of letting one know what is expected of an individual. This knowledge of expectations leads to a psychological force, commonly referred to as role force. The individual is trying to live up to the expectations of his role in the organization. When the expectations are conflicting, the individual experiences a role conflict. If, for instance, a manager is expected to gain data that is unavailable through normal channels, yet is forbidden to break the law, there is a conflict between the role expectations. Conflicting role forces lead to an objective role conflict, that when remains unsolved leads to a psychological role conflict. Thus psychological role conflict occurs when an individual experiences objective role conflict, acknowledges the disadvantageous consequences, yet fails to solve the objective role conflict. Psychological role conflict is claimed to affect job satisfaction, perceived ability to affect decision-making, the attitude towards supervisors, performance reports, and in worst case; the individual's health. Competing values in any form are a common reason causing role conflict, which will be further described in the next chapter. (Marginson and Bui 2009; Fondas and Stewart 1994)
2.8. Role ambiguity and role conflict

Role ambiguity refers to unset boundaries; that is, when rules to define specific roles are lacking. Role ambiguity is also a possible outcome of uncertainty about one’s authority. Role ambiguity affects people both psychologically and physiologically. (Antonioni 1996) According to Kahn et al. (1964), certain organizational positions are more greatly expected to lead to role ambiguity and conflict, suggesting that jobs including (1) crossed boundaries (2) expectations of innovative solutions to nonroutine problems, and (3) responsibility of other’s work - are occupational factors that are prone to lead to role ambiguity. These factors are often included in the role expectations of middle managers. The authors further argue that the consequences of role ambiguity are dependent on an individual’s need for clarity. Individuals experiencing role ambiguity with a low need of clarity will not experience negative outcomes such as tension, job dissatisfaction, and low self-confidence to the same extent as individuals with a high need of clarity. Consequently, Balogun (2003) found that formal and planned communications with senior management were important for middle managers to gain a perspective about their roles and responsibilities. Much of the research regarding role ambiguity, the need of clarity, and communications show similar results; however, most of that research is conducted in the USA. If one were to research Nordic countries, the results might be different. It must be noted that personal preferences in the work role are most likely influenced by a person’s national culture.

Rizzo, House, and Lirtzman (1970: 155-156) have further expanded the theory of role ambiguity and argue that it means, in addition to unpredictability to behavioral outcomes, “a lack of existence of clarity of behavioral requirements, often in terms of inputs in the environment which would serve to guide behavior, and provide knowledge that would confirm that the behavior is appropriate”. Pearce (1971) simplified the two definitions of role ambiguity here provided by Kahn et al. (1964) and Rizzo et al. (1970), using the definitions of “unpredictability” and “information deficiency”.

Role ambiguity and role conflict are two separate phenomena, although one might lead to the other. Next, a definition of role conflict will be given.

Role conflict is generally perceived negatively. It is known to cause job-related tension and anxiety, job dissatisfaction, attitudes towards role senders, and propensity to leave the organization (Miles 1976). Individuals experiencing role conflict will have to come up with some kind of coping behavior to resolve the problem, otherwise risking the
functionality of themselves and the whole system (Biddle 1986). Marginson and Bui (2009) argue that these days it is especially important to understand role-conflict on the middle-management level due to increasing and new expectations. The globalized economy of today, where companies compete over national borders and continents, has led to more expectations of creativity and innovations. However, the budgets are kept strict and middle managers are targets for colliding expectations in the form of expecting both creative innovations and goal achievement (that is, following a pre-set budget and being “as efficient as possible”), and improving employee work efficiency while knowing that such actions might lead to higher turnover (Antonioni 1996). These contradictory expectations of managers are a source of great stress.

In addition to pressures of the new economy, there are long lists of traditional managerial role expectations that are common sources of conflict. In their research about human costs of multiple role expectations, Marginson and Bui list the responsibility of being both a strategy developer and implementer, and performance measurements as common examples leading to role conflicts. Middle managers are, in many firms, expected to be the primary implementers of the company’s strategic plan; however, on the other hand, they are expected to contribute to the formulation and development of strategy as well (Currie and Procter 2005). Middle managers are also expected to be creatively innovative, meaning that they should find new methods to meet organizational goals. On the other hand, managers’ work is measured by efficiency, that is, target achievement. This expectation is contradictory, because it promotes innovativeness although it is measured against how well pre-set numbers are met.

Leadership tasks and expectations of middle managers can be added to the list of sources of conflict. Managers are expected to control employees, allocate resources, and organize and staff; however, employees will expect their supervisors to be inspirational leaders. This suggests that managers are expected to manage and lead at the same time (Northouse 2013). Additional sources of role conflict for leaders are “ambiguity of role, personal inadequacy to meet the demands of the role, various incongruities, incompatibility of several roles, conflicting demands, mixed costs and benefits associated with playing the role, and discrepancies between actual and self-accorded status” (Bass and Stogdill 1989: 274). For leaders, followers’ conflicting demands on the leadership role causes great stress to satisfy the various expectations. The legitimate power of being the superordinate whose judgement is the final and shall settle disputes
of followers rises anxiety and stress to make great decisions. Middle-management and lower-level management are even more prone to role conflict than other leaders, because the clarity of their responsibilities and authority is usually less defined than for top managers. Due to this, they are unsure about what to do and what they are expected to do by others, a factor that affects their job satisfaction and causes stress. Thus, it has been noted that middle management register more role stress than their colleagues higher up in the organizational hierarchy, sometimes feeling that they are not given enough authority to feel that they are part of a company’s management team and to solve problems presented by subordinates. (Ibid.)

Limited control over resources needed to complete a job is another common reason for role conflict. Managers are supervised by higher authorities, and research has shown that the predictability of supervisors affect role conflict. Thus, a manager that is able to predict the resources available and the behavior of his supervisor is less prone to experience role conflict than a colleague that has to work “blind-folded” and guess the behavior of his or her supervisor. High predictability has also shown to enhance productiveness. (Ibid.) Another interesting research finding is that supervisors who need to interact less with their own boss tend to manage role conflict better. In a study made by Kahn et al. in 1964 it was suggested that as much as 88 % of all role conflict was with an individual’s own boss.

Bass and Stogdill state that most people play many roles in their everyday lives; for instance the role of parent, subordinate, peer, sibling, and supervisor. Some individuals switch between roles without much effort. This is explained by those individuals’ talent to “switch on” and “switch off” roles. For managers, this would require separating their personal lives from their public image. Neglecting personal preferences and opinions would make it easier to play the role of the supervisor at work, however, leaders often experience that the multiple roles they play are incompatible and that separating roles from their personality is a very difficult task. According to Bass and Stogdill, organizational and personal needs must be fused to reach high levels of satisfaction and achievement in the work role. Thus, leaders are satisfied only when their organizational efforts match their personal reflections of meaning, identity, and success (1989).

Differences in perceived needs, values, interests, and goals are another source of conflict for managers and leaders in regard to those of followers and superiors. Employees, managers, and top management are likely to have different opinions about which are the most important issues within an organization. Middle management is
between employees and top management in the organizational chart, needing to align their decisions to both directions. Middle managers work with many rules, regulations, and they need to follow a certain structure, which do not necessarily provide solutions to the leadership issues that managers face. Members of different levels of the organization expect different appropriate behavior of middle managers, which can be completely contradicting. In addition to that, middle managers often need to take other stakeholders’ interests into consideration, such as suppliers and customers. Superiors tend to expect results, initiative, planning, firmness, and structure of middle managers, while employees expect recognition, opportunity, consideration, approachability, encouragement, and representation of those same middle managers. Thus, top management expects more task behavior from middle managers while employees expect socializing. (Ibid.) In addition to these stressors, middle managers have experienced stress of losing their jobs according to the global phenomenon of cutting off levels of middle management which has occurred since the 1980s (Munkeby 2007).

2.9. Summary and implications

The purpose of the literature review has been to provide a map of role theory; that is, what is known and how the subject has developed over years. Central ideas relevant for the thesis were presented with a focus on the various roles of middle managers, and sources of ambiguity and conflict in the middle manager roles. The chapter ends here with concluding thoughts and open questions that remains to be answered. However, first a reminder of why the topic is relevant is provided.

The reason management exists is the belief that organizations function and perform better under good management. Endless research has been conducted in order to find the ultimate management principles that make organizations succeed. (Bloom, Sadun and Van Reenen 2012) Managers can be seen as doctors of an organization, a metaphor used by Pfeffer and Sutton (2006). Managers are hired to use their skills and expertise to prevent and cure illnesses of the organization using the right methods that fit the problem in question – just like doctors need to use their medical knowledge when prescribing the right medicine to patients’ illnesses. Yet, there is still a lack of knowledge about how middle managers can contribute and how they can play the roles needed (Mantere 2007; Balogun 2003). Especially now after the downsizing trend (Munkeby 2007; Antonioni 1996), role theory is needed to understand the results and effects of the new roles. Haneberg (2005) contributed to this lack of research, stating
that understanding middle managers better can lead to performance breakthroughs with creative and proactive middle managers; team satisfaction and productivity; real and meaningful understanding of the corporate plan; reduced sources of inefficiency, barriers and waste; improvement of short-term and long-term execution and results; and, meaningful conversations regarding strategy implementation, future changes, and the organization’s current capacity between senior executives and middle managers. With reference to these various benefits, I argue that we need to make efforts to understanding middle managers better.

Role conflict and ambiguity affect managerial performance and therefore we need to attempt to understand these phenomena better (Burkert, Fischer, and Schäffer 2011), although studies reporting the opposite — no or weak relationship between role ambiguity, conflict, and managerial performance— have been conducted as well (see Burkert et al. 2011). However, role theory is a useful perspective in managerial studies. We need to further research the role of expectations and perceptions within the role set. We need to understand what the main contribution of middle managers today can be and how obstacles to the required behavior can be eliminated. We need to understand the relationship between norms, ambiguity, behavior, role conflict, and managerial performance. There is still much to do; several researchers argue that there has been moderate consistency in the focus of and results of studies (see for instance Fondas and Stewart 1994; Pearce 1981). Actually, there are several areas of role conflict and ambiguity relatively unexamined in research. Taken into consideration the changed circumstances of today’s middle managers, it is more relevant than ever to fill that gap by researching organizations of today.

A problem with the research of role theory has been that researchers perform a-contextual and too theoretical studies of managerial jobs and behavior (Stewart and Fondas 1994; Hales 1986; Van Sell, Brief and Schuler 1981). This means that researchers lack in factoring in which organizational factors affect the roles they research. Hence, we cannot judge from studies available what organizational factors there are affecting the role behavior. In order to understand this, contextual factors and more explanatory studies would be needed. With other words; there is a lack of explanatory studies and an overload of descriptive studies (Parker and Wickham 2005). Endless research exists describing what managers do, how, and with whom they spend their time, and how time is allocated over tasks. However, role theory suffers from a lack of connected studies, different research fields having developed “own” concepts.
An example of this is the much used framework developed by Mintzberg (presented in chapter 2.6), a study describing ten roles that managers need to perform. Mintzberg’s study has led to a number of research contributions identifying similar or not-so-similar roles, but it is difficult to find studies that integrate concepts of various studies. Further, the conducted studies are too shallow and descriptive to provide a real understanding of the managerial roles. Thus a throughout framework of managers’ roles still is missing.

Furthermore, research within role theory suffers from too strong a tendency of inductive research. Inductive research is used to analyze research findings according to a theoretical framework, which has led to findings conforming earlier research and to implications building on the various lists of managers’ tasks, roles, and functions (see for instance Stewart and Fondas 1989; Hales; 1986; Willmott 1984). There is thus a gap in the literature regarding explanatory studies that would document the conditions of role expectations and the role receiver’s perceptions of them, and their implications on the behavior. In addition to that, those studies that have been correctly done are to a large part out-dated. Parker and Wickham (2005: 2) noted, for instance, that organizational role theory had its bloom in the 1960s when organizations were much less complex and markedly different than organizations of today are, suggesting that those findings have little value today.

Another challenge in the role research is that ‘role’ is heavily dependent on social identities and context specific situations, making it hard to generate generalising results. More explanatory studies can however help scholars to analyse how various context-specific factors affect role sets and psychological organisations. By identifying factors affecting the role set of focal persons, it is possible to generate results indicating how behavior is affected by perceptions, sent roles, received roles, and also what the effects of role behavior are. Further, the interpretation aspects of roles are often overlooked in research (Balogun 2003) and more explanatory studies are needed in regard of that as well.

As we can see from the above overview of role research, there are still many questions to be answered. How many and which of the middle manager problems are not only context-specific but also global? In which cases are the context-specific factors non-relevant, if ever? Which are the new roles of middle managers and what do we need to understand regarding them? How should role research be developed, what do we need to know?
The research questions of this study are designed according to the literature review as presented in this chapter. The research questions will not provide specific answers to all of the above listed questions as the area of questions unanswered are too wide to be answered to within a single study. However, the remaining parts of the study will discuss context-specific factors, the new roles of middle managers, and the development of role research – thus providing data to the questions, yet leaving it for somebody else to specifically answer to these questions.
3 METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this chapter is to explain the process of data collection for the empirical research and to present the research method of the study. First, the research perspective and strategy will be presented. This is followed by a presentation of the research design and the data collection method. Further, the selected method for data analysis will presented, and last, I will argue for the quality of the applied research method and describe how ethical considerations have affected the study.

The research methodology can be concluded into a simple figure; the research onion. The research onion is a figure commonly used to summarize methodological frameworks (Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill 2012: 128). The framework of this study is pictured in Figure 5, showing the different phases of the study starting with the inner layer presenting the data collection method and moving outwards to the shell of the onion presenting the time horizon of the study, research strategy, research approach, and the research philosophy. This chapter will describe each layer of the onion in detail.

![The research onion](image)

**Figure 5** The research onion – A methodological framework of the study.
Source: Adapted from Saunders et al. 2012.

3.1. Research philosophy

The research philosophy of this study relies on a philosophical perspective of social constructionism. This epistemology position withholds that social phenomena and
their meanings are shaped by social actors, rather than claiming that social entities can or should be considered objective entities with a reality external to the social actors of the entity. The constructionism position thus challenges the objectivism suggestion that organization and culture are pre-given. According to social constructionism, social phenomena are produced through interaction and are in a constant state of revision. (Bryman and Bell 2011) Hence, reality is not objective; it is socially constructed and given meaning by people. It belongs to the group of research approaches that is referred to as interpretive methods. (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe, and Jackson 2012)

The social constructionism philosophy suits this study as the researcher will present a specific version of a social reality that is constructed by organizational culture and the individuals working in the case organization, rather than claiming to present part of something that exists independently of social actors. Constructionist research is building on the assumption that an absolute truth does not exist, and the task of the researcher is to explore how the reality is constructed in the every-day life of the researched organization taking into consideration different constructions and meanings that people place upon their experiences. External causes to explain behavior are neglected in this type of research. (Easterby-Smith et al. 2012) When exploring how norms and role expectations affect behavior and role conflicts of middle managers, the social constructionism approach directs the research to be conducted away from finding general assumptions explaining these phenomena, and instead considers a sample of middle managers’ thoughts about how they perceive norms, expectations, and role conflict.

3.2. Research strategy

Research strategy is defined for the same reason any other kind of strategy is decided; a plan of action is needed in order to achieve a goal. Research strategy is thus a plan of how to answer the research question; it is the methodological link between the research philosophy and the method of collecting and analysing data. (Saunders et al. 2012) The research questions to be answered in this study are “Which mechanisms affect role behavior, how, and why?” and “How do middle managers construct their role behaviors to diminish ambiguity and role conflict?”

To be able to answer the research questions it is important to understand the processes of norms, role expectations, behavior, and conflict -which have been done with the help of theoretical studies in the literature review. In addition to that, actual experiences of
middle managers from the case organization are needed to answer the research questions, considering that the study is performed as an in-depth case study. It is therefore important to choose a research strategy that aligns with this thought and with the philosophical perspective of the study. The research philosophy of this study indicated that a suitable strategy would be an interpretive one, as the social constructionism belongs to the group of research preferring interpretive methods (Easterby-Smith et al. 2012).

Both qualitative and quantitative data can be used in all the different research perspectives, however, the purpose of this study gives clear signals of which strategy is the most appropriate. The purpose of the study is explanatory to its nature, indicating that the qualitative strategy is the only suitable choice (Ibid.). Qualitative research is usually theory building, it develops contextual understanding, provides rich and deep data, and provides meaning. As the aim of this study is not to create generalizable conclusions -it is rather to explore feelings and inner thoughts- the qualitative strategy is an obvious choice. Through interviews the researcher can conduct his or her study using words instead of numbers and generate results that consider the viewpoint of participants rather than the researcher’s. (Bryman and Bell 2012) Table 1 shows contrasts between quantitative and qualitative research, and the attributes of the qualitative column speak for the chosen method of this study.

Table 1  Common contrasts between quantitative and qualitative research methods.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quantitative</th>
<th>Qualitative</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Numbers</td>
<td>Words</td>
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<tr>
<td>Point of view of researcher</td>
<td>Point of view of participants</td>
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<tr>
<td>Researcher distant</td>
<td>Researcher close</td>
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<tr>
<td>Theory testing</td>
<td>Theory emergent</td>
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<tr>
<td>Static</td>
<td>Process</td>
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<tr>
<td>Structured</td>
<td>Unstructured</td>
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<tr>
<td>Generalization</td>
<td>Contextual understanding</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hard, reliable data</td>
<td>Rich, deep data</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
3.3. Research design

The research design is developed according to the research philosophy, strategy, and the purpose of the study. A case study is a strategy used to explore a phenomenon within its contexts; it is a qualitative strategy that fits well to the research philosophy of this study seeking to explore a phenomenon and to build on the knowledge of organizational role theory. Thus unique cases can be seen as valuable for the results of the study. Case studies are relevant in research where the researcher wishes to gain a rich understanding of the context of the research and it provides great answers to the questions “why?”, “what?” and “how?”, which is why the strategy is often used in explanatory and exploratory research. It can be conducted using quantitative or qualitative methods, such as interviews, observations, documentary analysis, and questionnaires. (Easterby-Smith et al. 2012) Taken into consideration the advantages a case study can offer and the fit with the research philosophy of this thesis, a case study will be an appropriate strategy for the research to be conducted. A qualitative method of interviewing middle managers of one organization is therefore chosen as a method to access meaningful data.

Another feature of the research design is the timeframe of the study. As indicated in Figure 5 – The research onion, the study will be of cross-sectional nature. Cross-sectional studies involve data collection from a representative sample at one specific point of time and they take distance from longitudinal or experimental study techniques. Further, cross-sectional studies can be used to describe features of cause and effect. Applying the cross-sectional research design to this study means that all interviews will be held at approximately the same time with no longer pauses in between. (Bryman and Bell 2011)

3.4. Data collection

The nature of the data collection method should be consistent with the research questions, the purpose of the study, and the research strategy. Semi-structured
Interviews are a method commonly used to gather data that is analysed qualitatively, for instance as a part of a case study or when using a grounded theory strategy. Semi-structured interviews are based on a list of themes and key questions, and they allow variations in the interviews to be held. This means that some questions can be left out in certain interviews and that the order of the questions may be varied depending on how the conversation naturally flows between the researcher and the participant. Further, additional questions supporting the research question and the purpose of the study may be asked. The data gathered with semi-structured interviews normally goes beyond answering the “what?” and the “how?” as it provides explanations to the “why?” as well. (Saunders et al. 2012)

Semi-structured interviews can be used in explanatory studies to understand relationships between variables, which in this study are the relationships between norms, role expectations, behavior, and role conflict. Through interviews it is possible to get a throughout understanding of the phenomenon of interest. Hence, semi-structured interviews are likely to provide understanding of the reasons for the respondents’ attitudes and opinions. The benefit of having interviews semi-structured is that the researcher can probe answers, that is, ask the respondents to explain or build on their responses. This allows the researcher to add significance and depth to the obtained data. (Ibid.)

3.4.1. The interview guide

In this study structured and semi-structured interviews were both considered suitable. The benefits of structured interviews are that each respondent is given the same starting situation and questions, resulting in pre-defined structures and similar data. The disadvantages are that the interviews become lead, inflexible, and might harm the depth of the study. (Patton 2002) Semi-structured interviews, on the other hand, allow a certain amount of control to the interviewer, however not on the cost of flexibility and asking follow-up questions. Semi-structured interviews as a method can also allow pre-defined questions and the same starting point, however; the interviewer is free to guide the interviews in the most suitable direction. Thus, the semi-structured interview guide was chosen, allowing the researcher to probing and adding depth to the answers. Further, respondents could be encouraged to continue their answers or clarifying them. (Ibid.)
The interview guide of this study is built in accordance to the research philosophy, strategy, and design of the study. The aim being to provide new data in relation to existing theories, an explanatory strategy was chosen. This study is interested in finding a sample of middle managers and discussing their points of view regarding norms, role expectations, behavior, and role conflict; hence rich and deep data is needed. Semi-structured interviews were chosen to give the interviews a certain structure and to ensure that the interviews flow, and thus an interview guide that groups themes and questions with topics divided into different parts, taking main questions and key concepts of interest into consideration was used. This means that the interview guide first and most importantly groups all the themes for the interview into categories, consisting of a number of open questions. The questions are formed to be neutral, clear, and as unambiguous as possible to generate natural discussions and honest answers. Further, the questions were designed as open and non-directing as possible, to ensure that respondents were given neutral questions which they could answer without risking the answers to become what the researcher was looking for. The questions are designed to be easily understood by respondents. The aim of the semi-structured interviews in this study is to ensure that each respondent has the same starting point and theme of questions, as a means of not affecting the outcome of the study too much.

The interview guide consists of five themes that are relevant for the study. The themes are 1) Background 2) The role of the respondent 3) Role cluster 4) Expectations, norms and role behavior, and 5) Role ambiguity and conflict. The themes of the interview guide evolved from the literature review and were carefully designed with the aim of creating questions that would generate data helping to answer the research questions. The interview guide consists of 12 questions and several follow-up questions and comments. The interview guide was translated from English to Swedish and Finnish as these were the preferred languages of the respondents. Table 2 presents the core questions of each theme with references to the literature review, that is, which theories formed the questions. All questions are directly linked to the research questions of this study, except the first question which was a background question. The interview guide as a whole can be found as an appendix to the thesis, showing the various and very relevant supporting questions and comments used in the interviews.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Interview questions</th>
<th>Link to the literature review</th>
<th>References (adopted from the literature review, chapter 2)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Theme 1: Background</td>
<td>1. What is your title, position and background at this company?</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Describe yourself in your work role and as a person.</td>
<td>2. Early research, 2.5 Role behavior</td>
<td>Kahn et al. 1964; Moreno 1934; Mead 1934; Park 1926</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme 2: The role of the respondent</td>
<td>3. Describe your rights, duties and responsibilities at this company.</td>
<td>2.4 Organizational roles</td>
<td>Parker &amp; Wickham 2005; Biddle 1986; Kerr 1978; Katz &amp; Kahn 1978; Katz &amp; Kahn 1966; Linton 1934</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme 3: Role cluster</td>
<td>4. If you were asked to describe your work place, how would you describe it?</td>
<td>2.2 Role theory in organizational research, 2.3 Role concepts</td>
<td>Parker &amp; Wickham 2005; Balogun 2003; Madsen 2002; Antonioni 1996; Biddle 1986; Kahn et al. 1964</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5. Which organizational actors do you work close with? Which other people / what else affects your work?</td>
<td>2.3 Role concepts, 2.5 Role behavior</td>
<td>Katz &amp; Kahn 1978; Kahn et al. 1964</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme 4: Expectations, norms and role behavior</td>
<td>6. Are there expectations on your position and organizational role?</td>
<td>2.5 Role behavior, 2.7 Role expectations</td>
<td>Balogun 2003; Fondas &amp; Stewart 1994; Katz &amp; Kahn 1978; Mintzberg 1973; Kahn et al. 1964; Newcomb 1950</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7. Do the top management and/or employees have expectations on you? What kind of? How do you deal with these (expectations)?</td>
<td>2.6 Managerial roles, 2.7 Role expectations</td>
<td>Marginson &amp; Bui 2009; Mintzberg 1973; Antonioni 1996; Fondas &amp; Stewart 1994; Kahn et al. 1964</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8. How are expectations communicated to you?</td>
<td>2.7 Role expectations</td>
<td>Kahn et al. 1964</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
9. Which factors affect your behavior in the manager role?

2.5 Role behavior, 2.6 Managerial roles

Bass & Bass 2008; Fondas & Stewart 1994; Mintzberg 1973; Kahn et al. 1964; Newcomb 1950

Theme 5: Role ambiguity and conflict

10. How do you experience your manager role? What is most positive and what is less positive?

2.8 Role ambiguity and conflict


11. Which mechanisms do you think are important or helpful for managers trying to balance contradictory expectations?

2.7 Role expectations, 2.8 Role ambiguity and conflict

Katz & Kahn 1978

12. Other. Would you like to add something to this interview?

- -

### 3.4.2. Presentation of the respondents and the case organization

The method for selecting a case or sample is of highest importance when it comes to qualitative studies. Qualitative studies focus on depth rather than width, and therefore it is important to research a sample that is rich on information regarding the topic of the study. Usually it is best to focus on a handful of respondents that truly are appropriate for the study in question and can contribute to the purpose of the study. Because qualitative studies generate extensive amounts of data, it is necessary to narrow down the number of respondents and choose wisely; that is, respondents that actually bring the researcher closer to answering the research questions. This is the only way for a researcher to get the essential insight into the process of interest, taking limitations of time and resources into account. Therefore, qualitative studies take distance to the random sampling method of quantitative research. (Bryman and Bell 2011; Patton 2002)

The sample of this study involves ten middle managers from one case organization. The case organization is a Finnish family-owned corporation that conducts its business
within the grocery industry and has a stable position in the Finnish market. In line with common ethical considerations of qualitative business research the case organization will be kept anonymous. Thus key figures cannot be presented. It can, however, be stated that the annual turnover of 2012 was >200M€ and that the personnel at that time consisted of more than 1000 individuals. The corporation has been a pioneer in developing Finnish producing methods within its industry and therefore innovation, high quality products, constant development, and fast adapting to consumers’ changing requirements describe the values of the corporation. The case organization’s principles include collaboration, involvement, and traceability. (The annual report of the case organization 2012)

As this study is interested in contextual factors and norms affecting the expectations on and the behavior of individuals, it is important to provide a pre-understanding of the case organization’s culture. As stated in the annual report of 2012, family-values can be used to describe the working culture. Thus the values are soft; promoting a nice work culture where employee well-being is part of the daily management and leadership activities. A personnel policy was planned throughout the year of 2012 by various representatives of employees, first-line supervisors, and managers. The personnel policy was discussed and approved by the corporation’s top management team and it resulted in a personnel guidebook. The guidebook is open for all employees of the corporation, the purpose being to build a shared company culture and fair treatment for all. In conclusion, the corporation has shown serious efforts to work for the well-being of its employees.

The chosen respondents, ten middle managers, work under various titles and with different tasks and responsibilities. This was a strategic choice of respondents, in order to generate a width of data. The respondents were selected by the corporation’s HR director with the only prerequisite that all respondents should be middle managers (as defined in chapter 1.6 Key concepts). Table 3 presents the ten respondents, including titles and a short description of the respondents’ hierarchy.
Table 3  The interview participants.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Degree of responsibility</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Respondent 1</td>
<td>Production manager</td>
<td>Head of several divisions, works directly under the CEO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent 2</td>
<td>Production manager, owner</td>
<td>Head of several divisions, works directly under the CEO, chairman of the TMT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent 3</td>
<td>Employee supervisor</td>
<td>Manages employees and first-line managers, works below the technical manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent 4</td>
<td>Quality-, employee safety-, and safety manager, owner</td>
<td>Head of several divisions, works directly under the CEO. Chairman of the employee healthcare organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent 5</td>
<td>Hygiene manager</td>
<td>Employee supervisor, member of the TMT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent 6</td>
<td>Laboratory executive, employee supervisor</td>
<td>Head of the laboratory, works below the hygiene manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent 7</td>
<td>Manager of logistics</td>
<td>Manager responsibility of product delivery, works below the sales- and marketing manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent 8</td>
<td>Employee supervisor</td>
<td>Manages employees and first-line managers, works below the manager of logistics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent 9</td>
<td>Employee supervisor, process manager</td>
<td>Manages employees and first-line managers, works below the product manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent 10</td>
<td>Head of division</td>
<td>Works between a production manager and four employee supervisors</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.4.3. **The pilot interview**

Before conducting interviews the interview guide was tested. The purpose of the pilot interview was to ensure that the questions were easy to understand and that they generated discussions in the wanted direction. Another purpose of conducting a pilot interview was to test the researcher’s ability to effectively manage time. The interviews in the case organization were booked to last for approximately 60 minutes and whether this was possible with the planned interview guide needed to be tested.

The interview guide was tested on one middle manager that does not work in the case organization. The pilot interview showed that the amount of questions was correctly estimated as the pilot interview lasted for almost 60 minutes. Further, the pilot interview revealed that some questions generated similar answers. These questions were combined into one. After having conducted a pilot interview the interview guide was modified into its final form. In conclusion it can be stated that the interview guide changed its form many times before the final version. The interview guide can be found as an appendix to the thesis (Appendix 1).

3.4.4. **The interviews**

The interviews were conducted between March 5th and March 7th 2014 in the headquarters of the case organization. The interviews were held in the respondents’ private offices and in closed seminar rooms. The aim of this setting was no-one else being able to listen to the interviews, a factor perhaps adding to the respondents willingness to talk openly. The interview guide was translated into Finnish and Swedish to ensure that all respondents could answer in their mother tongue, and consequently the interviews were conducted in Finnish and in Swedish.

A certain introductory procedure was used with every respondent, the purpose being to gain respect and build confidence into the relationship between the respondent and the interviewer. Further, the introduction served as a method to ensure that the ethical aspects of the study were taken into consideration, allowing the respondents to ask questions before the interviews started and freely choose whether to participate or not. The introductory procedure of the interviews consisted of the following steps:

- Presentation of the researcher and the study
- Stating that participation is voluntary and anonymous. Asking the respondent if they wanted to participate in the study (→ Re-assuring face to face)
- Thanking the respondent for participating
- Checking the time-table of the respondent
- Asking for permission to record and transcript the interviews
- Explaining that the study is not regarding the case organization per se, guiding the respondents to answer according to their experiences as a middle manager rather than referring only to their formal role in the case organization

No respondent chose not to participate in the study. The interviews were conducted individually and they lasted between 40 and 60 minutes. Field notes were taken throughout the interviews to ensure that body language, tone of voice, and other communication forms eventually could be included into the data analysis. After the interviews, a transcript of all data was made and the recordings were destroyed.

### 3.5. Data analysis

The importance of the method of data analysis in qualitative studies cannot be highlighted enough. Qualitative research generates rich amounts of data, meaning that no proper conclusions can be made without correct methods for analyzing the data. The method of analyzing data is dependent on the other parts of a study’s methodology; the research philosophy, strategy, and design.

The adapted data analysis approach is abductive to its nature. The purpose of this study indicated that the aim is to explore a reality of middle managers that is constructed by the middle managers themselves by the way they give meaning to their role behavior through norms and expectations, and to see which mechanisms they use to avoid ambiguity and role conflicts. This study thus provides new data and combines it to existing theory. The abductive approach is signified by its process of interplay; contrasting theory and empirical research. Thus the abductive process is effective in research projects where the researcher wishes to gain new insights to a known phenomenon, which is the exact purpose of this study. (Dubois and Gadde 2002)

The empirical research consisting of a unique case study will be compared to the literature review in the analysis. This will be done by presenting data in the results chapter and linking it to the literature review in the following chapter. The method of handling and sorting data will be the following. First, data will be sorted according to the themes of the interview guide. When all data is sorted, the researcher will go
through it and choose what data is relevant to include into the thesis. The selection of what data to include is dependent on the research questions; only data helping to answer the research questions will be used. The selected data will be provided to the readers in the results section and in an appendix to the thesis (Appendix 2). Only the selected data will be analyzed. After having presented the interview data in chapter four, an analysis of it follows in chapter five, linking the interview data to existing theories. Thereafter, after having followed the logical order of first presenting data and then discussing and analyzing it in relation to the literature review, conclusions of the study can be drawn and suggestions for future research provided.

The unit of analysis is dependent on the research sample (Patton 1990). Thus the setting of data collection affects the level on which data can be analysed. In this study, the unit of data analysis will be mostly on the individual level, with some analysis on the occupational level. The interviews will provide data from the individual level, organizational level, and group or occupational level; however, the purpose of the thesis and the research questions direct the study towards the individual level and the occupational level. Therefore these will be the main unit of analysis of the empirical research.

### 3.6. Research quality

One of the most crucial aspects of the constructed research is the quality of it. While the positivism research approach focuses on how close the researcher has come to the truth of the research problem, the epistemology of constructionism pays attention to how well the researcher has understood and used the experiences of the respondents and how transparently the interpretation of the data is performed. In reference of these concerns for the quality of research, I will next argue for the quality of my study.

The general judgments or evaluation criteria of research studies are their reliability, validity, and generalizability. As stated prior, generalizability is not what this study aims for, and thus it is a criterion not applicable for judging the quality of this study. Reliability does, according to Saunders et al. (2012: 395), measure the degree to which a study can be replicated. The authors continue with defining validity as the degree to which findings can be generalized across social settings. However, qualitative research can be measured according to alternative standards more suitable for the aims of qualitative studies. These are: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. In line with the social constructionism research philosophy of this
study, simply measuring the study’s reliability and validity according to external factors would be dependent on relying on an absolute truth existing. The alternative quality measurement criterions presented above take constructed social reality into account when measuring a study’s reliability and validity and will therefore be used to measure the quality of this study. (Ibid.)

Credibility refers to whether the researcher has made objective interpretations of the phenomena being studied, and whether or not observers are consistent and agree about what they have observed and heard in groups of researchers (Bryman and Bell 2011). In this study there is only one researcher and the interpretations’ objectivity can be measured by readers only through their transferability; a quality criterion next presented.

Transferability is about the degree to which a study can be replicated. It is a quality criterion quite tricky in qualitative studies, as they usually research a social setting and their circumstances, meaning that if the study were to be replicated, it would have to be replicated in that same setting. And as known, it is impossible to freeze time and provide the same research settings for someone else. However, the researcher providing throughout explanations for the analysis of the data and the results of the study in line with a theoretical framework, the research process is made as clear as possible for the readers thus strengthening the transferability of the study. (Bryman and Bell 2011)

The third quality measurement of this study, dependability, regards how solid the research process is (Ibid.). In this study, solidity will be strengthened through objectivity, that is, providing an open and transfer description of the different stages of research. The methodology chapter serves this purpose. It offers the readers a throughout picture of the philosophy, strategy, and design of the study. Further, the data collection and analysis method is described as means of opening up the different research stages from the beginning until the end of the study.

Finally, confirmability is used to measure objectivity of the study (Ibid.). Objectivity in qualitative research can be ensured by offering a possibility to follow the argumentation and interpretation of the researcher. In this study objectivity will be strengthened by offering transcripts of the interview data to the thesis content supervisor. Further, using un-modified data in its original form when presenting the results helps ensuring that no biases of the researcher is finding its way into the results of this study. It is
however noteworthy, that data will be translated from Finnish and Swedish to English and thus minor changes of the data might occur, even though the purpose is to literally translate the data, without adding or moving any words or meanings. Another aspect of confirmability in this study is acknowledging the fact that the research philosophy relies on social constructionism. Thus, being completely objective is not fully possible. The researcher always bring certain biases into the social settings of interviews, however, the measurements described above strengthen the confirmability of the study. Further, providing the interview guide as an appendix to the thesis allows readers to familiarize themselves with how the interviews were structured. Additionally, all personal opinions and thoughts of the researcher will be neglected in the interpretation of the data to the highest extent possible. All interviews were taped and transcribed in order to secure that the data analysis will follow the contents of the interviews and that the biases of the researcher is not included into the analysis. In addition to that, field notes were taken during the interviews to ensure that elements of the interviews not put into words can be concluded into the analysis and correctly remembered.

Finally, the final and one of the most important features of the quality of this study involves the neutrality and anonymity of it. The researcher has no previous connections to the case organization and does not know anybody working in it. Further, the industry of the case organization was not more familiar to the researcher than on a general level. Thus the researcher has few or zero biases of the case organization and the business industry in question. This will probably strengthen the ethical aspect of the study and strengthen the objectivity of it. It was a conscious choice of case organization; choosing a company that is as distant as possible to the researcher. However, the annual report of the case organization was read by the researcher prior to the interviews – in order to ensure that a certain degree of professionalism can be withheld in the interviews; understanding industry jargon and having some pre-information about the case organization, allowing the interviews to run smooth. Also, the fact that the interviewees and the case organization will be kept anonymous in the thesis promoted open communication and honest answers in the interviews. Thus results can be openly presented here without risking the ethical stance of the study.

3.7. Ethical considerations of the study

There are some general rules regarding ethical stances of business research. The most common aspects of ethical research include confidentiality, anonymity, and plagiarism.
However, the task of researchers is to look even further, beyond common ethical criterions, and design their study so that it becomes as ethical as possible taking everybody and everything that affects the study and that the study affects in consideration. This means, for instance, ensuring that the research is not causing harm for anybody and that the research process is just for all participants.

In this thesis ethical considerations have great importance. It is always important to pay attention to ethical aspects when doing research, however; it is even more than important in this study where the topic and research area are sensitive by their nature. The topic involves a dilemma; the middle manager as a “middle hand” expected to work in two directions and the consequences of that, and therefore the study is sensitive not only because its qualitative method requiring that the researcher works closely with the respondents, but also due to the nature of the topic. As seen in Table 2, qualitative studies aim for rich, deep, and meaningful data collected in a natural, micro setting. This was done in the thesis, and the collected data involves very personal comments.

The way ethical aspects have been carried out in practice has been discussed throughout this chapter. The most important factor involving the ethical stance of the study has been to keep the case organization and the respondents anonymous. Another important factor has been transparency. The respondents received information regarding the study, its purpose, and the problem area of the study via e-mail before the interview process begun. Further, as described in chapter 3.4.4, the same information was provided face to face to the respondents as an introduction in the interview situations, allowing the respondents to ask questions before the interviews started. Thereafter the respondents were asked again whether they wanted to participate or not. In sum, each respondent could take an informed decision regarding their participation.

Although anonymity towards the general audience of this thesis has been attempted to secure, it would be wrong to state that the respondents are fully anonymous. Members of the case organization might be able to recognize respondents from the text whenever data is provided together with a reference to the respondent in question or through any comment that reveals who the respondent is. It would be appealing to present all data with a reference to which respondent’s statement it is, if the only concern would be the research and learning aspects of this study. However, this cannot be done in all cases. Indeed, the data transcript shows that the interview data includes quite sensitive comments. The interviews floated naturally and the respondents seemed relaxed. Some of them opened up on a deep level and shared private thoughts with the interviewer.
Even though this is what every researcher aims for, the researcher must remember his responsibility in situations like this. Although all the traditional (ethical) steps have been followed – permission to record has been asked, the respondents participated willingly, and names are leaved out – the ethical responsibility of the researcher does not end there. Hence, in order to secure the anonymity of the respondents also within the case organization, some of the sensitive data will not be included in the thesis. Further, sensitive data that is included into the study will be referred to without a reference to the respondent. These citations will be referred to as “Respondent X”. With this technique, the respondents’ anonymity will be improved.

Another important factor regarding the ethics of this study involves being transparent towards the readers. As stated in the previous chapter, qualitative studies can be considerably enforced in research quality with transparency. When the readers understand as much as possible of the research process, they can understand how certain conclusions have been drawn. This lessens the risk of the researcher coming up with subjective interpretations of the data. The methodology chapter has provided open and transfer descriptions of the different research stages, and thus the research process has been made as clear as possible for the reader. The fact that the researcher has no previous connections to the case organization has been another, conscious attempt of enforcing the ethical standards of the study. Finally, the next chapter will present the used data in in its raw format, as a means of providing the readers with what was actually said by the respondents. Thus readers can take their own conclusions of what the case study showed. It should however be noted that the interview data has been translated from Finnish and Swedish to English, which might change nuances of the statements, although the researcher has made serious efforts to keep the English transcripts as close as possible to the originals. This is also why the data presented is written in a talkative tone; it was a conscious choice not to write the transcripts grammatically correct and rather to translate the comments to how they might have been stated in English.
4 PRESENTATION OF THE EMPIRICAL MATHERIAL

The previous chapter described the methodology of the study. The data collection method was presented; semi-structured interviews with questions grouped into themes formed with the help of the literature review. In this chapter the results of the case study will be presented. The chapter is divided into five main sections according to the themes of the interview guide. All of the chosen themes are important for the study. The themes and questions were built up strategically, starting with easy and formal questions and gradually moving towards more sensitive and challenging questions. Next, the chosen themes will be shortly described and their relevance for this study argued for.

4.1. Presentation of the interview themes

The interview guide consisted of the following themes:

- Background and personality
- The role of the respondent
- Role cluster
- Expectations, norms and role behavior
- Role ambiguity and conflict

The background and personality theme consisted of questions regarding title, position, and background in the case organization. This is important information because it defines the respondents’ formal work roles and their level of responsibility, and because it provides knowledge about which different formal roles the respondents have had previously in the organization. Age, gender, and education are additional variables that would have been interesting components of this theme; it would for example have been interesting to analyze whether education affects role behavior. However, the study needed to be limited and thus personality was chosen as a variable. The respondents were asked to describe themselves at work and privately for two reasons. First, to get an overall picture of what type of person each respondent was, which is important to know as personality affects how individuals behave in their roles (Katz and Kahn 1978: Newcomb 1950) and second, to see whether respondents would describe their
personality differently when they are in their work role and personal role or whether they perceived their personality as the same at work and otherwise. In addition to that, it has been noted that the interpretation part of roles is often overlooked in research (Balogun 2003), and to ensure that that does not happen in this study, it was important to get a throughout picture of each respondent.

The second theme, the role of the respondent, includes questions regarding the respondent’s rights, duties, and responsibilities in the work role. Respondents were asked to describe their position in regard to the organization as a whole, their most important work tasks and responsibilities, the degree of freedom in their work, and whether performance is measured or not. The aim of these questions was to generate a picture of each respondent’s formal work role.

The third theme, role cluster, was designed to widen the scope of the interviews. This theme included questions that would lead the interviews from the personal role to the role setting, that is, what and which other factors and persons the respondents deal with in their work role. The respondents were asked to describe their work place, the company culture, networks, working habits, and which organizational actors they work together with. They were also asked to think of what or who else might affect their work in any way. The purpose of this theme was also to identify psychological organizations (as described in chapter 2.4) of the respondents.

The core themes of the interview guide were theme four and five. The fourth theme was about expectations, norms, and role behavior. These factors are directly related to the purpose of the study, as defined in chapter 1.2. The respondents were asked whether there are expectations on their position and organizational role, and if there are, what the expectations are and which people have them. As a means of finding out how the respondents find out -or learn- about expectations, they were asked if they can think of formal and informal ways that expectations are communicated out to them. The respondents were also asked if they perceive that their superiors and employees have certain expectations on them and if they consider those expectations consciously and do something about them. The same questions were asked about norms. The respondents were also asked if they think that expectations and norms have changed with time. Further, this theme included questions about the respondents’ role behavior. Examples of the questions asked are: which factors affect the behavior in the manager role, whether the work is independent or dependent on others, if there are certain rules
or guidelines that define expected behavior, whether personal values can be actualized at work, and in what errands the employees are given a voice.

The fifth and final theme was about role ambiguity and conflict. These factors are as well directly related to the purpose of the study. The questions were formed as open, neutral, and non-leading as possible. The respondents were asked how they perceive their manager role; what is most positive, and what is less positive. They were also asked whether the manager role is perceived unclear or contradictory at any times. Further, they were asked if the responsibility ever feels heavy and if there is anything burdening them on a psychological level in their manager role. Their methods of finding solutions to difficult situations were asked for as well. The final question was which mechanisms they find helpful or important for managers trying to balance contradictory expectations and whether they believe that it is possible to satisfy all stakeholders in the manager role. Finally, the respondents were given a chance to add anything they wanted to the interview before ending it.

4.2. Strategy of presenting data

The aim of this chapter is, as stated before, to present the collected data of the case study. As the generated data is extensive (~10 hours) there will be no attempts of presenting “everything”. This chapter serves as a general presentation of the collected data and readers that are interested into familiarizing themselves with the collected data in detail are referred to Appendix 2. In there, all data that is used for the analysis and to generate conclusions is presented as direct citations. Data that is non-relevant for this study will not be included. Further, I will not describe what each respondent has answered to the questions. I shall illustrate what I mean with an example. The second question of the interview guide was “Describe yourself at work and privately”. When I present the data I received from that question, I will not list the ten respondents’ descriptions of their personalities. Although that is important information, such writings would make this chapter unclear and difficult to read. Therefore I will present that information whenever it is needed in the analysis. If for instance a respondent has stated that he is insecure as a person and therefore has a problem with how he should behave in his role, I will provide this explanation to the readers when I write about that respondent’s role behavior. In sum, I aim to present the data in a natural and logic system. An analysis of the empirical results will be provided in the next chapter, that is, chapter 5.
4.3. Theme 1
The first theme of the interview guide was “background and personality”. Data will be presented under two subheadings, starting with background.

4.3.1. Background
The respondents of the case study represented both genders, the respondents consisting of two women and eight men. The age of the respondents varied between younger middle managers in their 30s up to more senior managers around their 60s.

The sample consisted of individuals having worked for a long time for the case organization. The average number of working history in the case organization was 17.4 years, the lowest being 8 years and the highest 29 years. These calculations leave out one respondent who had worked in the organization from time to time since 1978.

None of the respondents had entered the organization directly as a middle manager. They have all worked in various positions and gradually received more and more responsibility over time. The titles and positions of the respondents were presented in Table 3, which can be found in the methodological chapter.

All of the respondents’ positions fall under the definition of middle manager as defined in chapter 1.6, as every respondent worked as a middleman between superiors, manager subordinates, and subordinates. The case organization has a flat and wide organization structure that consists of the following positions (listed from the bottom to the top):

Employees -> First line supervisors -> Employee supervisors -> Managers and Division managers -> Concern CEO -> Board of directors.

The first line supervisors are the managers with direct personnel responsibility and no administrative responsibility. As can be seen from the titles of the sample (Table 3), these were not included in the research sample. The choice of researching managers that supervise other managers (the other alternative being employees only) has been conscious, due to the problem background of the research topic.

4.3.2. Personality
Within the sample of ten respondents different types of personalities were represented.
Well, I'm different. I'm more forward than others by nature, I talk about difficult stuff too. I face stuff immediately. In the beginning it raised amazement as well, they took it personally here. I talk more directly than others and I deal with stuff immediately. I'm firm and demanding, but according to myself fair. (Respondent 1)

In my work role I can be perceived as hard or quite difficult, because I try to hold up two completely different facades at work and in my private life. I usually say that I'm not at work to make friends, I am here to do my work, the department needs to perform and we shall have clear goals and reach them. So then you have to leave out the friendship and be similar towards everybody. As a private person I'm quite calm and I'd say that I've been a little bit shy. Today I am not that shy, I can reach out, but I don't say so much for no reason, I don’t do small talk. (Respondent 10)

I'm very analytical to my personality. And perhaps not that social. It has to do with my technical background, in this field you work more like an expert and as a leader of other experts. It’s not about leading a large organization and motivating the personnel, it's the technical challenges that motivate the personnel and oneself. But in my current role I have a larger organization under me and I have to motivate others and get them to work. (Respondent X)

I have an advantage because I'm very technical and understand machines. The men have dropped comments like “Well, you're a woman, you don't understand anyway so there's no point in explaining this to you”... And I've been like “But I want to know!” And also, with men the talk is different, what they talk about. When I first came here they were a little insecure whether they could continue with their jokes and so on; what is okay to say. So it can be noted that they have had to find their place again, in a way. (Respondent X)

The citations above and those presented in Appendix 2 describe a few ways of how some of the individuals perceive themselves. All respondents except one stated that they behave quite similarly at work and in their private lives.

Respondent 1 compared his behavior to what he found was typical behavior of the organization, stating that his direct personality has raised amazement and that others sometimes get offended by his way of talking about difficulties aloud. Respondents 3 and 8 said that they would describe themselves quite similarly at work and in other situations, although they considered themselves to be a bit more responsible in their work roles. Respondent 3 stated that company values affect the work personality and directs him to be more responsible than he is by his personality in his free time. Respondent X spoke about the meaning of personality in the role, stating that his current role directs him to behave in a way that is more against his personality than previous roles that he has had in the organization. He found that the current role included expectations on him as a motivational leader, and that he needed to adjust his personality -which is more analytical- to the requirements of the role.

On the contrary to the above, one respondent stated that he has taken a conscious choice of separating his work role from his personal role. Respondent 10 stated that he is holding up two completely different facades, which he thought was a natural way for him to ensure that he provides fair treatment for everybody in the work place and that things happening at the work place do not interfere with the private, social life.
Finally, one respondent talked about her personality in the view of common stereotypes. According to the respondent, her technical knowhow had been questioned in the beginning and thus she had needed to prove her personality before it was commonly accepted by her the role set that she is as qualified as anyone else on the department in question.

4.4. Theme 2

The second theme of the interview guide was “the role of the respondent”. In order to form a picture of each respondent’s formal work role questions included work tasks and responsibility, the degree of freedom, and how performance is measured. Data will be presented under the next subheading, categorized in three classes.

4.4.1. The role of the respondent

The work itself

The respondents were asked to describe their rights, duties, formal and informal tasks, and fields of responsibility in order to get an overall picture of each respondents formal work role.

The respondents found that their work roles included informal work tasks in addition to formal work tasks. As two respondents stated:

I mean, there shouldn’t be any informal work tasks. There shouldn’t be anything that is not included into the job description. The job description has become more and more précised through the years. Then again, on the other hand, it is so general that almost anything can be listed under it. As an example, “management tasks” can mean basically anything. (Respondent 7)

It happens that I come out here in the middle of the night to check something. Nobody has told me to do this, I take the decision myself, but I feel that it is a part of the job. There isn’t anybody that told me to do so. (Respondent 9)

The work was also perceived to consist of different responsibilities, and sometimes it seems hard to know where one’s true efforts should be directed. The employee supervisors did in particular find that they need to balance employee wellbeing and cost efficiency. One employee supervisor and one manager working as a head of a division concluded their responsibilities as following:

I try to think of both sides of the coin, but I would say that employee well-being is more important to me than cost efficiency. Of course, one cannot rule out the other. [...] Here in this organization we make a big deal about the fact that we care about our employees, we don’t just do but also talk about it a lot, we have these values that you should treat others as you yourself
would want to be treated. And for me personally it doesn’t work that you just say these things, and sometimes this comes into conflict with economical stuff and so on. (Respondent 8)

A part of my job is to try to keep a balance, to keep the department running on a more long-term way than those that are beneath me. They are more responsible of the day-to-day operations and perhaps I am more involved with the long-term planning. (Respondent 10)

The respondents described their work in various ways. Some of the respondents did mention that they constantly balance cost efficiency and employee well-being. It is important to remember that the researched sample work on different levels, hence their responsibilities towards the top and down shifts. In general, many respondents talked about the fact that they are very busy and spend a lot of time in the office. Some of the respondents stated that they would like to have more contact to the personnel and spend less time doing routine tasks.

The results also show that the middle manager role includes informal work tasks that are not listed in a job description, however the respondents feel that they belong to them anyhow. The informal work tasks were in particular considered to add to the list of requirements of the middle manager role occupant. Respondent 8 stated (see Appendix 2) that the skills and strengths you need as a manager really vary from A to O. As an example he mentioned that the father of one of his employees had just died, and that the comforting and respect that he is expected to show is an informal task expectation that he experiences is laid upon him. He found these kinds of informal expectations as quite surprising; basically they can be anything and he needs to always be prepared.

The degree of freedom

It is really free. We have strategic goals and a yearly budget. Those are the borderlines for my actions. How I reach those goals is up to me. [...] (Respondent 1)

I experience that I am completely free. (Respondent 2)

My work style is basically that I get a budget and then I direct myself to how I will reach the goal with that budget. [...] (Respondent 7)

As the above presented interview data shows, the majority of the respondents described their work as very free. In fact, no respondent stated that they experience being directed. What the respondents thought of that varied. Respondent 1 stated, for instance, that a great degree of freedom suits his personality well and that he would have difficulties with adjusting if his work was very strict. Some respondents also experienced that the degree of freedom can be too big at times. As an example, respondent 7 discussed the consequences of freedom under change management.
I am free. Let’s say that if big changes were to happen, then you would need support, and then the degree of freedom is perhaps too high. Anyway, I get support if I need support, but my boss is the sales director and his main task is really to handle sales and marketing… (Respondent 7).

Another respondent described similar experiences. The respondent in question presented a request of more dialogue when he stands in front of bigger changes, and it seems as if he feels that he need to be careful and weigh whether matters are worth disturbing his superior with or not.

Well, I can experience it like, really, sometimes it is hard to find common meetings with my boss. We do meet almost every week, or at least every other… But it’s rather that you think, like, if this is worth taking their time, or should we just do it by ourselves. I would say, I guess, that as long as everything is stable there’s no problem, but if you are about to do bigger changes, then you perhaps want to check more. Actually we are now facing an operation that we should perhaps try to become a bit more cost efficient… And that requires more dialogue. […] (Respondent X)

Performance measurement

According to the interview data, performance of middle managers in the case organization is usually measured. The most common methods of measuring performance was according to the respondents performance appraisals, personal goals and a yearly evaluation of them, feedback that the managers receive from employee well-being surveys, and feedback regarding how well the managers meet budgetary goals. The managers did also express a strong interest into having their performance measured.

Well, I hope that my performance is measured somehow. Maybe there isn’t a lot… Basically every process that I am developing is presented every other week in a meeting in which the CEO and other top managers might participate. I do also present the results of my departments to the top management team. (Respondent 2)

We have performance appraisals. But I have some difficulties with setting up concrete goals. In order to have concrete goals you would need some kind of meter. (Respondent 3)

I have performance appraisals with the CEO every year. And in our bonus system we build in three to five goals within one’s field of responsibility and the following year we review those goals and see how they have developed or if there is something that needs to be changed. And it has been good. (Respondent 4)

I want direct feedback, by which I mean that my supervisor would tell me things unmodified, just as they are. I want to hear the truth, things as they are. And I will forward it in the same way. (Respondent 10)

A few of the respondents did experience that their performance was not measured at all or that the measurements were lacking true meaning.

No, it is actually quite funny that you ask me about that, because it is something I just discussed a while ago with another employee supervisor. Because I have a little problem with that, indeed. I am the kind of person who, how should I put it, would need to have some sort of… I would need to know that there is someone or something measuring my performance, it would spur me. Or in a way, we do well-being surveys here, and there are a few questions in there where the personnel shall evaluate their supervisors. In a way I get some kind of feedback that way. But it is often
difficult to know whether they mean the employee supervisor or the first line manager... In sum, I really don’t experience that my performance is measured in any way. (Respondent X)

The goals that we put up do not really have any meaning. Or, okay, we have a bonus system in the company through which you can get a certain monetary bonus and for the employee supervisors this bonus system is partially bound to the different goals that we have set up for us. So in a way they work, with concrete goals. I remember the year we had just started with performance appraisals and my goal was to have them with every employee. Then it spurred me to know that I will get a bonus if I arrange discussions with everybody. But otherwise, stuff that you write down in January and don’t hear about in a whole year, before the next performance appraisal... No, I can’t say it spurs me. I guess you could ask for instruments to have your performance measured, but that would kind of feel like you are trying to get something for yourself... (Respondent X)

The data shows that the employee well-being surveys can be difficult to use as a personal feedback because one cannot know if the employees are writing about one or some other superior of theirs. Further, the setting up of personal goals on a yearly basis divided opinions. Respondent 4 stated, for instance, that they are motivating and work well, while Respondent X found that the personal goals that he set for himself lack meaning because they are not incorporated into the daily work in any way. In general, the respondents wished for straightforward feedback and a direct dialogue.

4.5. Theme 3

The third theme of the interview guide was “role cluster”. This theme was included into the study to see how the social setting of each respondent affects the individual in his work role. The respondents were asked to describe their work place, the company culture, networks, working habits, the social atmosphere of the work place, who they work with, and if there is anything else affecting their working. Data will be presented under the next subheading.

4.5.1. Role cluster

The managers described their role context from various angles. One of the owners summarized the atmosphere and spirit of the organization as following:

When you see the people and when each person has an opportunity to actualize themselves, and when you follow up that people are doing well, that’s when they are motivated and want to do their part and ensure that the business is moving forward. It is of course through the people that the company can succeed, the machines don’t do anything by themselves. The most important thing is to motivate people to do their jobs, to contribute, and ensure that the company is moving forward. We see each other, take care of each other, and like each other. We like working together and this is noticeable because you can’t walk the corridor without receiving a comment, a greeting, or a friendly nod. It is a nice atmosphere. (Respondent 4)

The unique atmosphere of the case organization was reinforced by other respondents. Thus the above citation does not reflect an owner’s subjective opinion; it really is that
way. The company culture was frequently mentioned as something that was unique and truly described the work place.

I have worked in other companies as well and would describe the culture here as the step between a supervisor and a subordinate being very low. There isn’t a lot of hierarchy. I can go down to the departments and basically talk to anybody. (Respondent 2)

I think that we have a very open work place, that we really care about each other. Because it really is the way that supervisors greet everybody. There are no hierarchies here, at least in my opinion, except for a few persons due to their personalities. No one is too low to be taken notice of. Everybody sees everybody and we have really good pauses here. (Respondent 7)

I don’t know if anybody has told you about that relay race, that we like to think of our work as a relay. Either you run the whole distance yourself, or you have different relay teams and we like to think of ourselves as relay teams. Each department represents a certain part of the distance and the oscillation points are very important. For us this means that we get the product when we need it, which requires communication with those before us and that we communicate with those that we are supposed to hand the baton over to. (Respondent 8)

As the interview data shows, the majority of the respondents highlighted the humanity of the company culture when they were asked to describe their work place. According to them the company culture is of a very rare kind, promoting everybody’s well-being, that people should have a chance to contribute to the corporate mission and thus actualize themselves, that employees are motivated and that the company tries to communicate out the importance of every work task, that there is no formal hierarchy, and that everybody gets along and that greeting and small-talking is a very important part of the company culture (See Appendix 2).

One respondent thought that even though the company culture is beautiful and unique, it sometimes becomes “too much” and thus harms decision-making, slows down processes, and he felt that he had to be careful not to hurt anybody’s feelings.

The company culture is very open, we talk a lot about everything. It is very humane, at times maybe too humane. I mean that those hard decisions might be really difficult to make. These things are difficult by nature, but here nobody wants to upset anyone, which is a really big resource but sometimes it can be damaging. [...] (Respondent X)

Quite a few of the managers told that they make conscious efforts to get closer to the personnel by showing their faces in the departments almost daily. Taking tours around the department was a common method used to create contact and talk with employees.

I go down regularly on tours because that is when you mostly get to hear uncomfortable truths. They tell me what doesn’t work and what should be improved. (Respondent 2)

The empirical material further shows that the managers are not only interested in building relationships with employees and in collecting information. Another important aspect of the role cluster seems to be the possibility of sharing thoughts and
opinions with colleagues, which in the case organization is done by organizing “ventilation days”.

We have meetings with the employee supervisor group, but it’s too seldom. Everybody who has subordinates or employees get to meet and we discuss changes and ventilate ourselves... We try to make things as similar as possible on each department. I would prefer to have them a couple times each month so that we could talk and discuss. (Respondent 6)

I try to tell them that they shall let me know, that we should have a constant direct dialogue. Each week we have a meeting with all key persons and we try to ventilate. Once a month we have a meeting under free circumstances. We take turns with who’s turn it is to organize something and take a few hours and go somewhere for a coffee or to make a barbeque, and ventilate. We do this to get everything out, if somebody has something they want to say they can ventilate it. (Respondent 10)

4.6. Theme 4

The fourth theme of the interview guide was “expectations, norms and role behavior”. The respondents were asked to think about whether there are any expectations on their positions and organizational roles, how expectations are communicated out, and what affects them in their manager role. Data will be presented under the next subheading, categorized in three classes.

4.6.1. Expectations, norms and role behavior

Expectations

The interview data shows that all respondents recognized that there are expectations on their positions and organizational roles. The employee supervisors described that they are expected to balance the interest of the company and the interest of their employees.

The expectations are that everything should work with minimal costs. And with minimal costs it’s difficult to live up to those expectations. (Respondent 3)

They expect that I should be available. This year I’ve received quite much feedback from the personnel that I’m too difficult to find, that I’m too seldom in my room. And that’s something I’ll need to do something about, because I have a little philosophy regarding this, that 50% of my work day I shall be here in my room. As I experience it, my employment today regards being there for the personnel. [...] (Respondent 8)

Other respondents described that they are expected to continuously develop within their field of work and that they are expected to lead change.

Since the organization changed the expectations on me are that the budget and strategy will be fulfilled. This is the top priority. It is also expected that I actively participate in developing the company and other things within my field. (Respondent 1)

Perhaps they expect me to have an even bigger role in the future. The personnel have another kind of expectation, that I will be their voice in the company. (Respondent 2)
The respondents also described various informal expectations that they experience are laid upon them. Informal expectations were usually communicated out as something the respondents snap up between the lines; a tone of voice or a hidden message. Some respondents also mentioned that it is difficult to snap up and interpret informal expectations.

There might be quiet expectations as well. And sometimes it’s a little bit difficult to interpret them. Because in the meantime you can get, you know, like from two different persons, and they can be different. So it’s difficult to choose, to know what it is that they really want. Sometimes I have difficulties with that. (Respondent 6)

[…] And then from the top management, it comes quite blurry. You don’t get a lot of feedback, neither good nor bad, nothing else than this performance appraisal. You get to hear “Well, you made it”. (Respondent X)

Well, let’s say that this is where the weak part of humans is usually revealed. Especially when it comes to expectations of the supervisor… We went through that process when the organization was renewed. One of the hardest things was me asking what they expect of me. It was really difficult for anyone to say what they wanted. (Respondent X)

The majority of respondents wished that people would be more straightforward, that expectations would be communicated directly out to them. Many stated that they had asked subordinates or superiors to tell what they expect of one.

**Norms**

The case participants did acknowledge that there are norms guiding the behavior in the case organization; the company’s mission to treat everybody as you would like to be treated yourself was mentioned by several respondents as a norm to which individuals are expected to conform to.

We have our mission about treating people as you’d like to be treated yourself. So yes, there are norms. And when it comes to me… […] When I became a manager, first as a first line supervisor, I needed to think of what I’m doing and consciously try to change my manners. (Respondent 10)

Respondent 10 explained that he had to adjust to the norms of the organization when he got his first management position, because his behavior consisting of an attitude and his using a jargon typical for the department in question was not considered suitable for a manager. In opposite to that -conforming to norms- some of the respondents also gave examples of how they have tried to challenge the norms for instance by providing “brain gymnastics” to their colleagues in order to teach them that things does not have to work like they always have – that change can be good.

I’ve worked quite much with knocking ideas around; finding different alternatives and scenarios that perhaps been set in stone previously and I’ve discussed quite much with those under me if there’s alternative ways we could work. […] And I think like this; even if we weren’t
implementing these changes it’s a good brain gymnastics for them, to see that there are alternative ways to how we do today. (Respondent 7)

The empirical material further shows that norms can be contradictory. Although norms are what guides -or should guide- the behavior, interpreting norms differently is in itself a source possibly leading to conflict. As one respondent stated:

I guess there are norms and sometimes it can be difficult to know what the rules are and what you’re expected to do. Sometimes I find it hard to know, because sometimes it can be here that it’s decided that we’ll do something in a certain way, and then it’s done in a completely different way. Sometimes that disturbs me. (Respondent X)

**Behavior**

The respondents described various factors that affected their behavior in the work role.

My behavior is affected quite much by the response I get. (Respondent 2)

To be served with a silver tray, that just doesn’t exist. It is really important to have this ability to snap up things, because we are not that good at communication that we would give each other an honest concept. And in addition to that, you have to take your own decisions, you can’t wait until somebody else takes that certain decision. (Respondent 5)

What’s special with this organization is that in general it’s not as clear as I’ve tried to make it. It’s more like, when you start here, I tend to say that you get a bunch of elastics, all of them representing a person or a department. But nobody tells you which elastics you need to pull to get a change actualized. [...] There’s no clear structure. In a linear organization it should be enough that you talk to the person responsible and then he will take it forward, but here you have to talk with everybody concerned. (Respondent X)

One important factor that was brought up was how time and experience affected the behavior. Quite a few of the respondents said that they had struggled to grasp what their role and the expected behavior was in the beginning and that they had worked hard on finding their place in the group. In general, time had helped overcoming these challenges, as in the example below.

It has basically gone a year since my organization was changed. Of course my role grew then, or changed, so that I went from being an operator who implemented changes and took decisions to a mentor or leader. It was of course unfamiliar to me in the beginning. In the beginning it even felt horrible, but now that I’ve gotten into it I have found my place. It was a process of growing personally to let go of old operations models. (Respondent 1)

Further, the respondents stated that sometimes they need help in their roles and finding support from a trustworthy source was incredibly important for the role behavior. The case organization does provide education and coaching, which was highly valued by the managers. Not being afraid to ask for help – from all directions – was encouraged by the respondents. And finally, having an ego to fall back upon was considered helpful. (See Appendix 2)
One woman experienced that her gender had affected the expected behavior of her and that she needed to make sure not to take too much place in the group in the beginning in order to be accepted by her role set.

In the beginning you might have to work on adjusting to the group even more and think of what you say and what you do. If you come into a gang of only men you of course have to think like a man first and gradually get them to understand that, let’s say... You shouldn’t show too much in the beginning. That is perhaps the adjustment you need to do in the beginning, let’s say with those that perhaps have most difficulties with there being a woman in the picture. (Respondent X)

4.7. Theme 5

The fifth theme of the interview guide was “role ambiguity and conflict”. The respondents were asked how they perceive their middle manager role; what is most positive and less positive about the manager role. They were also asked if the role ever feels unclear or contradictory. Follow-up questions were asked in relation to the two main questions. Data will be presented under the next subheading.

4.7.1. Role ambiguity and conflict

The most positive about being a manager is freedom. I can truly affect things and basically I get the numbers and if I can’t achieve them... I can truly decide what to do to achieve those numbers. That’s been the most interesting and challenging thing. (Respondent 1)

The respondents described their roles as very free, which was something that was experienced positive although the results of the case study show that a role that is very free and without much formal guidelines heightens the risk of experiencing role ambiguity.

Sometimes my role can be unclear because I’m divided into so many different areas. Like, how much stake should I put on this, what’s expected of me, and what’s required of me... Because my responsibility is divided into so many areas [...] it can sometimes be difficult to know where the line between the different areas of responsibility lies. (Respondent 4)

Due to the fact that I don't have a detailed target or work description in any way it's quite much up to me how I interpret things and what I think about stuff. So it might be quite unclear what I'm expected to do and how I should function. [...] (Respondent 8)

The respondents were however able to describe various ways of reducing ambiguity within the role.

When it comes to difficult situations, for instance with the personnel, open communication is usually the solution. I deal with stuff immediately and using common sense is allowed as well, it takes you quite far also in these matters[...] It’s sort of about taking care of things immediately and wiping the table, I guess that’s my way of dealing with these things. Fruitless speculating and turning things over, I skip that face. Usually when people talk about contradictory situations they talk about creating good relationships with the subordinates, but you need to remember that the same thing goes for superiors as well. You expect that they'll tell you when there’s something you
should hear. But you need to remember that if something's not working you have to take that role yourself, you have to go and ask them what they expect of you. [...] (Respondent 1)

I’d say it’s quite much up to oneself whether the role is unambiguous or not. You have to take the responsibility into both directions. If you get a contradictory task that you experience you can’t fulfill, bring that up immediately. Don’t knock your head approvingly while walking to your office thinking what on earth you’re going to do. Life would get difficult then. In the beginning it was for me as well, they weren’t used to this here, that I asked straight out, but I tell you... It’s much easier to act and find solutions if you do it like this. Usually if you ask and require an answer from your own superior... But of course, it won’t work in every place. You could get fired, but here it’s worked well, discussing openly. But I’m sure it doesn’t work in every place. If the superior’s insecure they’ll probably experience that they’re being questioned. But I’ve always thought that if I don’t ask I’m not doing my job. And if the superior gets nervous about that, then it’s better that they fire me. (Respondent 1)

I think it’s important to deal with different problems immediately and objectively. And having a line that you can fall back upon. It gives... Many might experience a value or routine as something that... That they don’t have space or that it becomes less free, but usually it’s the opposite. You can base your decision on the fact that this is how we do and we do it similarly for everybody. Then you don’t have to hesitate so much or explain yourself every time. Rather, once you’ve taken a decision you stick to it. But you’re always a representative of the employer, that you might need to battle with. You’re always in the middle. You’re in the situation of the personnel or the top management, and well... When it comes to judging who’s benefit a decision will do, it’s the benefit of the company that comes first. But you should still see the personnel and their needs as far as possible, and in that way you might get a benefit for the company as well. So a decision might mean a loss for the company in the short run and gain for the personnel, but in the long run it’s an investment and the company will gain of it. But either way, you have to think of the gain of the company. (Respondent 3)

As the citations above show, it was considered important not to fall into that common trap of accepting tasks that one finds impossible to do. The respondents stated that in order to reduce ambiguity there has to exist functioning communication into all directions. Thus, they thought that they could affect whether their role is unclear or not themselves. Further, Respondent 3 argued that finding an objective criteria and judging all decisions on that criteria reduces the need of explaining oneself.

The respondents had also experienced role conflicts for different reasons. They were able to give various examples of what they do in order to reduce conflicts.

I think that the values of the company, to always treat people like you would want to be treated, lessens the amount of conflicts. It goes both ways, from the personnel up, but also the other way. (Respondent 3)

One important thing is to be able to listen and really listen in. Not just to listen, but to understand the message and be able to bring forward arguments that support the different things that come up in discussions. But the most important is to be able to listen, to find out what these persons or stakeholders in the end really want. And to use a method of five rounds; when somebody comes and says something, start asking questions and ask “why?” and really get to the bottom of it. [...] You should ensure that the person coming with requests and expectations also gets to think through for himself what it is that he really wants. It could be that that person hasn’t really thought it through and comes to you in frustration and stress and states that he needs this and that, but when you go through it carefully it might show that there was something else hidden behind that request. (Respondent 4)

Our values include that you should treat others as you’d like to be treated, and it’s of course nice that everybody greets each other and so on. And under these values there are informal rules that this is how we usually do it, which is stuff I don’t react to anymore having been in the house for
quite some time but I know that new people react on everybody greeting each other in the corridors, that the mornings consist of one big good morning ceremony. And I think that's quite funny, because you can notice that in the beginning new people think for themselves whether they should say hello to this person and that person, but after some time you start to think according to these values automatically. Common rules have always existed, but only orally. Now it's definitely positive that there's a written manual. It's easier for a superior to find these rules, to know what they should do, because some things you might not need to know before after many years on the job. And you can practice the rules in different ways, but there are these basic thoughts to fall back upon. (Respondent 5)

You have to just ask straightforward, I have this opinion that you shouldn't walk around and try to figure out yourself if you're unsure about whether you did the right thing, too much, too little… You should just grab them, people above or below you, and ask what's going on. How we should do, which the rules of the game are. I experience myself that sometimes I've done more than I've been told is a part of my job and always when I have performance appraisals I ask my superior if they think I've taken on too much authority to decide. I ask them to tell me. (Respondent 9)

4.8. Summary

This chapter has presented the empirical material of the case study. The results have been grouped according to the structure of the interview guide, that is, five themes. Each theme of the interview guide generated valuable data and has a connection to the research questions of the study.

The presentation of the empirical material was heavily built on direct interview quotations. It is important to remember that the presented material only consists of a minor part of the total data that was collected with the case study. Thus the citations do not represent finished and fully formulated ideas; they are statements that are a part of wider contexts.

In order to make this study as interesting as possible meanwhile keeping this chapter clear and easy to read, the used interview data is provided as an Appendix to the thesis. The citations presented in this chapter are only the tip of an iceberg. I highly recommend readers to familiarize themselves with Appendix 2, where much interesting data can be found. Further, providing the data was a conscious choice of adding to the transparency of the study. Now readers are given a possibility to follow the ideas of the researcher and see what kind of data has been used to generate conclusions of the study. As this is an exploratory study, I focus on presenting and analyzing comments and opinions rather than making generalizing summaries of each interview theme.
The aim of this chapter is to analyze the results of the empirical research. While the previous chapter presented data, I will now discuss the meaning of the data with the help of the literature review. Thus I will analyze the collected data in light of the chosen theories, however; my aim is not to verify or falsify any of the theories that were used in the literature review. Rather, I am aiming towards analyzing the unique comments and opinions of the respondents of the case study and try to understand what is happening in the case organization with the help of the chosen literature review. As stated in the summary section of the literature review, more exploratory and explanatory studies are needed within role theory. Therefore I have chosen not to make a descriptive study, where the aim would be to describe the collected data and to build a wholesome picture of the case organization. Instead, I will try to understand the inner meaning of the respondent’s statements in relation to my research questions, how the organization the respondents work for affect them, and generate conclusions that can be used to understanding middle managers better. These analysis criterions are directly connected to the research questions of the study.

At this point, when the results are discussed, it is important to remember that the conducted empirical research is an in-depth study and that the generated results are not valid outside of their context. However, the results do benefit the general audience because the case organization has been described in this study, allowing readers to make general comparisons between the case organization and other organizations that are alike. Further, the case study that has been done is valuable because it provides something new and unique, and thus we can learn something from it. We can learn from the experiences of the middle managers in question. In addition to that, I will contribute to the on-going discussion about what the role of middle managers in today’s organizations is, based on what I judge from the empirical research.

Before beginning with the analysis of the case study, a brief reminder of the research questions of the study will be provided. The aim of the analysis is to answer to the research questions.

*RQ1: Which mechanisms affect role behavior, how, and why?*

*RQ2: How do middle managers construct their role behaviors to diminish role ambiguity and conflict?*
The analysis starts with a table that summarizes the case study. Thus a very brief profile or interview summary is provided for each of the respondents. The intent is not to summarize the interviews *per se*; it is rather to provide the readers with an overall picture of each respondent in the same manner as it was formed for the researcher after having read the interview transcripts several times.

### Table 4  A profile of the interview respondents.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondent #</th>
<th>Profile / Summary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Technical, practical, and self-confident personality. Leadership and management behavior based on what works best in practice. This is a great strength; however, the respondent has needed to work on finding a role that is accepted by the organization and on adjusting his behavior towards the line of the company culture, norms, and values. Does not snap up expectations, wants more direct communication. Asks people directly what they expect.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Sensitive personality, sees each individual person. Conflicts happen mostly on the emotional level. Has received support through studies and coaching, which has led to personal development and growing into the manager role. Does snap up hidden needs and expectations and has consciously worked on getting a certain distance to others needs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>The respondent is a middleman between the top management and personnel, emphasizes the interests of both strongly. Finds education and other supporting functions organized for managers by the organization of great value and support for his manager role. Talks about the importance of finding yourself and your own line as a basis for the leadership style and manager role.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Very open and calm personality. Talks about the importance of gaining everybody’s trust and building confidence by being oneself. Experiences that he can be quite alone with decisions and that the role can be unclear because it is consisting of so many roles and because it is not always clear who is responsible for what on the different departments. Talks about the importance of really listening to others</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
as a method of understanding expectations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>5</th>
<th>Finds the entrepreneurial background beneficial to the manager role. Highlights the importance of education and knowledge as a reference adding to one’s credibility. Talks about standards and structures as something that makes organizational life easier. Discusses the education provided by the case organization as something great, however; it would be better if individuals got to choose freely amongst what is provided, according to the respondent.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Talks about the importance of time; it takes time to find one’s place in the organization. Finds that everything that happens on the department is on the manager’s responsibility, takes problems personally. Experiences role ambiguity due to not always knowing what the subordinates want, would prefer standardized behavior on all departments. Finds it hard to interpret expectations. Does not experience being one of the gang with the employees, would prefer more time with manager colleagues as a support mechanism to the role.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Has great responsibilities and needs to take decisions alone. Talks about the importance of recognizing yourself as a leader and thinking about your behavior as a leader. Finds that his personality reduces the amount of conflict situations as he is very fact-based in his mindset.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Experiences conflicts between the values regarding employee well-being and managers’ constant need to be cost efficient. Finds that the professional secrecy is problematic because employees experience that they are being treated unfairly if someone gets certain benefits. Experiences role ambiguity due to no meters that would measure performance. Would want more support. A middleman, choosing sides between the company and his subordinates.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Enormous engagement in the personnel, values employee responsibility higher than economical responsibilities. Self-confident and comfortable with his work role, does not suffer from conflicts or ambiguity. Entrepreneurial background, experience, and personality</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
are individual strengths of the respondent. Stands for his opinions and decisions. Finds the information jargon in the organization problematic at times.

| 10 | Discusses the relationship with the superior, finding that a functional relationship lessens conflict situations in one’s individual role. The own superior being a strong facade to stand behind leaves little room for uncertainty. Has consciously adjusted his behavior towards the existing norms of the case organization. |

As can be seen in Table 4, the results of the case study show that each of the respondents had their own story to tell. Although the ten middle managers work for the same organization -presumably amongst the same norms, beliefs, and preferences- they provided very subjective interpretations of their role as a manager. This has been explained by Balogun (2003) as each individual’s perceptions of expectations and the role to be performed. Organizational role research tends to analyze roles as identified social positions which are generated by normative expectations. The case study however reconfirms the modern view of role research; that the only logical way to analyze a role, it seems, is to analyze it both from a perspective of persons and social positions.

The aim of the analysis being to answer to the research questions, the structure of the study now changes from how it has been structured so far. The results are not discussed under each theme separately; instead, the collected data will be used to answer to the research questions.

5.1. **Which mechanisms affect role behavior, how, and why?**

The interview participants were asked to describe their personalities, work, and role set in various ways to get a wholesome picture of what affects their behavior in the middle manager role. All respondents described their work as very free when they were asked about the degree of freedom directly; however, the degree of freedom can be understood in different ways. In general, when interpreting the results of the case study, the respondents’ work can be described as the efforts and actions they choose to make in order to reach certain strategic goals within a certain budget. In that way the
role is free, the managers were free to direct their work in any way they wanted as long as they reached the goals. However, how the managers are expected to behave in their roles is not independent to the same degree as how they conduct their work.

The company culture of the case organization is deeply rooted into daily actions, and it is expected that individuals behave according to the common norms of the organization. The norms of the case organization are definitely the most important mechanism affecting the behavior of the respondents. As one respondent stated:

The humanity is really unique. It goes so far that it almost becomes a burdensome. [...] But if you don’t do it, people will react immediately. (Respondent X)

It seems as if the norms of the case organization -to treat other people as you would like to be treated yourself and to avoid hurting anybody’s feelings- are more directing than norms of companies in general are. Thus norms have a significantly strong impact on how the respondents behave in their roles. Concrete examples of how norms were expected to be carried out in practice were given; greeting everybody you see in the corridors, socializing with everybody, and being sensitive to other people’s feelings. The norms were in particular perceived to be communicated out, or requested, by the top management team. Due to the humanity of the norms, the respondents found them to be something positive; something that makes the case organization a nice place to work in. Some individuals however had needed to work on finding their place in the organization and these individuals were able to critically discuss the meaning of the organizational norms.

Organizational role behavior is heavily dependent on perceptions (Fondas and Stewart 1994; Katz and Kahn 1978; Newcomb 1950) and it seems as the degree to how easy the respondents had conformed to the norms and thus adjusted their behavior towards the behavior that is desired by the organization varied according to individual personality and previous experiences (Newcomb 1950). For instance, one respondent found that the company norms can sometimes be too humane and thus ineffective, which probably has to do with that individual’s strong and direct personality. Another respondent stated that the company values certain leadership styles (social, comforting, and available leaders) more than others, which he found close-minded. He found that this would harm the success of other, good leaders whom just happen to lead in another way than what is typical for the case organization. This individual described himself as analytical and result-oriented, and thus found the company norms to be quite different from his individual preferences. A third respondent stated that in order to be able to
work as a leader at the company, he had needed to adjust his behavior according to company norms. He was not considered “leader material” before he adjusted his behavior towards the humane and mild style that is in line with the norms of the organization. This finding of the case study suggests that norms significantly affect the behavior of the researched managers, even to a higher degree than an individual's personality. However, knowing oneself and building a certain ego and self-confidence was considered important for the role behavior as well, suggesting that once a person behaves within certain norms that the role set is requiring of him, it is up to his individual personality how to interpret and play the role. Further, having a certain ego seemed to facilitate role playing. A few respondents stated that it is important to find your own line, a certain principle, on which you ground your decisions, defend them, and always fall back on. This was perceived to reduce uncertainty within the role.

Although the norms of the case organization were heavily affecting the behavior of the respondents, some respondents had not fully conformed to the expectations. Two individuals, whom both described themselves as “different” and not “typical” managers of the case organization, both stated that they had made efforts to change the norms of the case organization. One of them had asked the top management team to be more direct in their communication and the other had used a quite different management style from the beginning and stuck to it, although he knew that the style in question was not the desired one and might affect his career success within the company. Both of these respondents found the existing norms to be too set in stone. Hence, the company norms are not absolute; some individuals are constantly asking for and making concessions with the organizational culture trying to create a “personal office” (Kahn et al. 1964) that reflects both the needs of the company and their own.

One respondent stated that he do step into a work role, conforming that some managers actually do separate their typical behavior in the work role from other roles that the individual has. This phenomenon was described by Bass and Stogdill (1989) as a talent that some humans have, being able to step in and out of a work role. The respondent in question described himself as shy and very focused in his work role, and he is the employee supervisor of a department with outstanding personalities consisting mostly of men that do hard, physical work. He found that it is easier for him to behave as required –which might be against his individual personality- if he consciously steps into a work role that is formed by his perceptions of his individual psychological organization (Antonioni 1996; Kahn et al. 1964). It was interesting to see
that the respondent’s role behavior had been judged differently by his role set (Kahn et al. 1964). His immediate superior was his greatest support, the respondent saying that the superior understood his leadership style and manager behavior. The superior in question participated in the case study and he described his own management style as “learnt by trial and error”. The superior had worked in the same position earlier, and thus understood what was required of the employee supervisor of that department. The wider role set, however, did not share the two individuals’ perceptions of the department. This had strengthened the relationship of the superiors, and although both seemed confident with their current roles, they both stated that they had told the company that they are not irreplaceable and that it is better to get fired than to be quiet. This warning can be interpreted as a received role where the two individuals are responding to perceived role forces and try to communicate out expectations to their role set; that they have strong wills of their own, to which the role set has to adjust, otherwise having to fire them (Kahn et al. 1964).

The results of the case study show that the researched individuals are quite independent, alone even as some respondents stated, in their roles. The case organization does communicate out norms, and it is expected that everybody follows the norms. Other than that, the middle managers were free to design their work however they wanted. The budget was the only restriction point they needed to pay attention to. The respondents did not find that people or factors outside their immediate role context affected their role behavior. This is probably because all respondents except one stated that they stay in their personal roles when they enter the work place. The researched individuals strongly believed in being yourself at work, and thus the company culture, its values, and norms are the organizational factors affecting how the respondents choose to behave in their work roles. In addition to that, individual preferences of course affect how the individuals perceived the expected behavior of them (Katz and Kahn 1978). Quite contradictory to what could be expected, the respondents actually wished for more rules regarding how they should behave in their work roles. The results show that in positions where individuals hold great responsibility for other people’s work and well-being, more clarity of behavioral requirements is needed (Pearce 1971; Rizzo et al. 1970). The majority thought that there should be pre-defined and standardized rules on all departments, which had recently been actualized when the organization published the personnel handbook and superior manual. This means, that although all respondents valued the degree of freedom in their work, it is perhaps considered positive only when it comes to how they conduct
their work. How they should behave, that is, treat employees and lead, is something they wished more guidelines for.

### 5.1.1. Summary

The results of the case study showed that the middle manager role is dependent on both the manager’s individual personality and his social position. As stated prior, role researchers should define what lens they use when they perform role research (Balogun 2003). When the respondents were asked to describe their personalities at work and in other situations, all respondents except one stated that they do not step into a work role; they are themselves in the work role and thus their behavior is shaped by a mixture of personality, formal position, norms, company culture, and the role set including geographical location of the office, colleagues, superiors, and subordinates. This finding of the case study leads to one important practical implication; that every time research is conducted through the lens of personality or social position alone, one or many parts of the researched role is neglected. The results of the case study show that an organizational role is so heavily dependent on the personality of the role-performer, formal expectations on the role, and the social setting in which role-playing is conducted, that studying roles from only one of the perspectives can seriously affect the outcomes of the study.

The factors affecting what behavior the researched middle managers use to reduce ambiguity and conflicts in the work role will be more throughout discussed in the next subchapter.

### 5.2. How do middle managers construct their role behaviors to diminish role ambiguity and conflict?

Although the respondents enjoyed their great degree of freedom in the work role, some were, in the mean-time, wishing for more guidelines to adjust their behavior to. The case study showed that quite a few of the respondents would prefer more standardized behavior within the organization. Although freedom was described as something good by every respondent, it seems as having a very free role also makes the role more uncertain, which has been noted earlier (see for instance Antonioni 1996).

The respondents did in general find that there are informal work tasks that they are expected to do and that there are other informal expectations laid upon them as well.
Some individuals found it difficult to “read between the lines” and interpret how other people expect them to behave, and thus experienced ambiguity within their roles. The formal role of a middle manager is unclear, as the respondents described their work; it is about receiving a big picture from above and developing forward within one’s field of responsibilities. Within the researched sample, all ten managerial roles presented by Mintzberg in the literature review were mentioned as parts of the managerial role. Some personality types seemed to have an easier time interpreting their role set and understanding what kind of behavior is expected of them, while some were struggling with this. Those persons who described themselves as sensitive by nature did also state that they have no problems with understanding informal expectations and what other people need of them, while those who were used to direct communication, openness, and result-focused actions also in their private lives had problems with understanding the expectations that were informally directed towards them. An analytical mindset did as well seem to affect how well one is able to grasp informal expectations and thus understand what one should do in one’s role, as two respondents described themselves as mathematical and analytical – and these two individuals also stated that they have a problem with understanding expectations. The case organization has developed a superior manual and a personnel guide in order to standardize the behavior between the different departments. Still, the respondents felt that the most important way of finding out about what is expected of them is through communication. Communication was the most frequently mentioned and highest valued method of understanding the role set, sorting out problems, and thus preventing role ambiguity and conflict.

The case study shows that common contradictory expectations involved being cost efficient, developing, and representing in two directions. This finding is in line with previous studies (Marginson and Bui 2009; Bass and Stogdill 1989). The respondents discussed quite much about finding a balance between contradictory expectations. For instance, one respondent stated that it is still unclear how much their department should actually do, since they are expected to ensure top quality products without decorating their work to the extent that it becomes costly. Other examples of conflict situations involved sharing of one’s special knowledge, although there is no time for extra work tasks; keeping a professional secrecy, yet remaining fair to all employees (not being able to tell why certain employees receive benefits); and, working for innovativeness, however having to kill ideas that do not fit the pre-set budget. Consequently, the researched sample gave examples of very typical, common role conflicts that they experience in their roles (for more examples, see Appendix 2). These
findings are as well in line with previous research, which suggests that although the middle manager role has developed more towards a specialist’s role over time, the expectations of the role have not become clearer. They have only grown to a larger number. The middle manager is still the middleman that should be able to solve everybody’s problems while constantly developing the company, and often he is expected to be cutting costs as well. The participants of the case study were, however, able to describe various coping methods by which they were able to solve problematic situations of conflict and ambiguity. This is of particular interest for the research. Examples of what the respondents have done to lessen the amounts of role ambiguity and conflict include:

- Directness, taking action and bringing up matters immediately
- “Ventilation days”, that is; informal meetings outside the work place where managers meet and interact, and those that have something on their mind have a chance to speak up
- Hiring a coach and a psychologist
- Writing down all work tasks and putting a name behind each one thus reducing “grey areas”
- Starting the day with a “walking tour” down on the floor and getting to know about employees’ expectations and uncomfortable truths
- Neglecting certain responsibilities to give time for more important ones
- Seeking support from outside of the organization if the role includes responsibilities that people within the role set do not understand
- Challenging others and training them to accept changes; discussing changes without meaning to actualize them as a “brain gymnastics”
- Trying a method of five rounds; asking “why?” five times until you have reached the bottom of a demand
- Finding sounding boards and using them
- Releasing pressure through leisure activities

Further, the middle managers did during the interviews have a unique possibility to tell what they would need in their role. Their needs turned out to consist of factors that are independent of the managers themselves and thus it is the organization that should understand the needs and meet the requirements. The respondents’ needs included:

- Borderlines from superiors
• Performance measurement and incorporating measurements into all managers’ daily work and following up on the results
• Incorporating expectations into the performance measurements. Check-ups whether expectations have been met
• More direct communication, especially from the top
• Freedom to choose between educating seminars

As we can see from the list of needs, the respondents did in general perceive their middle manager role as something that should be as structured as possible. The managers in question wished that their role would be clarified through formal communications with seniors, that they would be given borderlines for their work, and that the company would follow up whether the managers meet expectations and perform as required. It goes without saying that they wished to get to hear directly about eventual failures. In addition to that, the various education seminars organized by the organization should be voluntary, so that one could choose which ones one wants to participate in.

Although the respondents found that their roles do involve ambiguity and conflicts, it did not seem to disturb the everyday life of the respondents. Each individual had come up with some coping methods of their own (Biddle 1986), through which they were able to handle problematic situations. However, the interview participants had worked for the case organization for a long time, and that has clearly affected their role-playing and role behavior (Parker and Wickham 2005; Biddle 1986; Kerr 1978). Although the respondents had experienced various conflicts and found that their role can include ambiguity at times, the respondents had in general found their place and roles that they are comfortable with. For this study that meant that the respondents were very suitable; they did recognize the problem area of the study; however, they were also able to describe their coping methods – which was of particular interest for the second research question.

Many stated that they had to struggle with finding their role in the beginning, with being accepted by the role set, and with being comfortable in their middle manager role. Now that these things have more or less fallen into place, many individuals thought that they actually set higher expectations for themselves than the organization does. However, the way the role set communicates out expectations was something that the respondents clearly wished would become more direct. Expectations are a large part of what forms the role (Kahn et al. 1964), and the respondents thought that this is
hard to find between the lines and that their work would be easier to do if all stakeholders of their job would state out clearly what they need and want. Many of the managers found that although the organization has formal methods of measuring performance, these lack true meaning. The problem seemed to be that the respondents found performance measurements as something that is done by routine, however; that no-one really cares about them. Follow-ups and activity were asked from in regard to one’s own superior. Additionally, the respondents thought that expectations should be on the formal level and incorporated in the performance measurements. Clearly, the respondents wished for more feedback regarding their work, from all directions. A few respondents thought that it was contradictory that the organization promotes certain things strongly, but does not follow up how those things are actualized. It was in particular from the top that expectations were experienced as blurry. This finding of the case study suggests that organizations can help middle managers in their role by ensuring that performance is measured and that the measurements have true meaning; that is, that feedback is given and confrontation arranged if needed. If managers would get some sort of assurance that they are doing things correctly, they would experience less ambiguity of behavioral requirements (Rizzo et al. 1970).

The case study further showed that the middle managers found communication to be the most important method of reducing uncertainty and conflict situations. As one respondent stated, it is usually not impossible to understand each other on some level and find an agreement, as long as there is communication. Another respondent said that people usually remember to build networks and communicate downwards, but that one should communicate towards the top as well. It is common to talk about developing good relationships with one’s employees, however; the same conscious efforts should be made upwards as well. Another individual stated that to find the bottom of a demand, he uses a method of five rounds asking “why?” in order to get the counterpart to understand the meaning of his own demands, as well. This seems to be a really smart way to reduce conflict situations, as a large amount of conflicts happen due to misunderstandings and comments or demands that are dropped without much prior considerations. However, one important advice provided by one of the respondents was that at a certain point a middle manager needs to be able to make his own decision and move forward, even though the decision is not necessarily the best one. Organizational actors are too busy to constantly share their knowhow and help each other, and the manager role includes a certain amount of uncertainty which means that individuals need to be able to make decisions and not wait until someone else is doing it for them.
(Stewart 1976). The same goes for other responsibilities of the manager; interpreting strategy and developing business.

As explained by Bass and Stogdill (1989), predictability of supervisors affects role conflicts and ambiguity, and consequently the interview respondents gave many examples of how their own superior affected how they perceived their manager role. One respondent stated that the ideal relationship to one’s own superior would be that they follow the work from a certain distance, not being close all the time, but still being involved in some way. This was reinforced by another respondent, who said that the best possible work relationship between individuals is when there is a certain distance between them. This was considered to enhance performance and reduce ambiguity. In general, the relationship to the superior was considered very important. It was for instance generally perceived that formal expectations should come from one’s own superior and that he should also provide the middle manager with direct feedback. One respondent discussed his relationship with the superior and brought up the fact that how the personalities match can be quite important too. According to the respondent, his own superior being less socially minded, led to him having to deal with various problems alone—it led to one more expectation of him; that he should deal with informal situations and problems that his boss is not comfortable dealing with. The technical knowhow of one’s superior was considered important as well, one respondent stating that when she had a boss that was good in every aspect except that he lacked technical knowhow of her work field, she had felt very alone with all decisions. A third respondent stated that his superior having worked his way up from the bottom meant that he knew every single work task of the department and thus functions as a “shield” for the entire department, immediately stating out aloud if some expectations were impossible. Thus, in conclusion, the case study showed that a middle manager’s superior has a significantly strong impact on the amount of uncertainty and conflicts in the role.

5.2.1. Summary

The results of the case study show that the respondents deal with various role conflicts in their daily job and that the middle manager role includes ambiguity. The respondents did give examples of not knowing exactly which responsibilities they have, where someone else’s responsibility starts, and what they are expected to do.
The level of management affected the perceived role and thus also what kind of role conflicts the respondents experienced. Positions that are near the top of the organizational hierarchy involved more ambiguity than conflicts. It can be assumed that those positions are more independent than other positions, and therefore do not include that much conflicts (Kahn et al. 1964). On the contrary, choosing side between the company and the personnel was a common example of a role conflict that the employee supervisors in particular experienced. They, who have significant personnel responsibility, were working hard to find a balance between different needs and constantly ensuring fairness for all employees. Thus positions that are closer to the employee level involve conflicts regarding costs, fairness, and employee well-being. As one employee supervisor summarized:

> It gets hard as well, because you’re sort of a funnel in which they spill. But if you can trust that you do your best and when you receive feedback or succeed – that’s what you should build on. And try to do your best, in the end it will work out. If you see everything as a big wholesome of others and as something you can’t get a grip of, then it’ll become heavy. Then you’re close to e burnout.

In conclusion, this chapter has identified role conflicts and ambiguity within the middle manager role. The reasons for these phenomena have been analyzed according to the formal roles, individual perceptions, and the role context. This has been done in order to see what the middle managers in question have done to reduce ambiguity and role conflicts. The findings of the conducted empirical research can be used to gain advice of how to reduce role conflicts and role ambiguity. The list on page 71 summarized how the ten respondents of the case study have conducted their behavior in order to diminish role ambiguity and conflict.
6 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This is the final chapter of the thesis. The study has so far included a problem description, a literature framework, a presentation and argumentation of the research methodology, a presentation of the empirical research, a research analysis – and now it is time to finalize the study in the form of a concluding discussion and by giving suggestions for future research.

6.1. Summary and critical discussion of the conducted research

The study has discussed and analyzed the role(s) of middle managers in today's organizations from various perspectives. First and foremost the study has aimed towards answering the research questions as defined in the introduction of the study. A brief reminder of how the research questions were formed will next be given, and why.

The problem background of this study discussed the fact that organizations have gone through major changes due to the globalization of the economy and the development of information technology (Munkeby 2007; Antonioni 1996). These environmental changes have led to significant downsizing of the middle management level and thus those middle managers that have remained in organizations are expected to take on various specialist roles and to be experts of a wide range of tasks (Marginson and Bui 2009; Marginson 2002). Thus the roles of middle managers have changed and grown in number.

The middle manager role affects various stakeholders with subjective expectations on the role. The middle manager is commonly known as a middleman who works in -at the very least- two opposite directions. Changes in the economic structure have affected the expectations of middle managers; they are now larger to their number than ever before. The problem background of the study suggested that the role expectations are therefore more contradictory than before. It was pointed out that in order to understand middle managers better, we need to understand their new roles. Research has so far not caught up on the changes and researched the emerged roles (Janczak 2000; Burgoyne and Livian 1997; Nonaka and Takeuchi 1995). Consequently, researchers are inconsistent with their opinions whether roles affect managerial performance or not (Burkert 2011) and whether the role of middle managers are needed in today’s organizations or not – some scholars arguing that the role is outdated and do not fit into modern, flat organizations while others think that the current middle manager role is more
important than ever. (Marichal and Segers 2012) This study has discussed the role of middle managers in modern organizations with the help of both a theoretical framework and the results of the conducted empirical research, thus contributing to the ongoing research discussion of the middle manager role. The researched organization consisted of a flat and wide organizational hierarchy, which made it very suitable for the topic.

The summary of the literature review suggested that role theory is in need of new and modern studies. It has been shown that role research suffers from outdated results; organizations change so quickly that findings from the blooming times of role theory in the 1960s cannot be judged valid anymore. Further, it was shown that role research suffers from a-contextual and too theoretical studies. This means that much of the conducted research has neglected to factor in those contextual factors that assumingly have affected the researched roles and the role behavior. (Stewart and Fondas 1994; Hales 1986; Van Sell et al. 1981) The severeness of this problem can be easily understood if one thinks of the case organization of this study. The findings showed that the case organization has outstandingly strong norms which affect the behavior of the respondents, and hence; if this contextual understanding of the organization had not been included into this study, it would have little or no value for research and little or no validity as a study. Further, role theory has suffered from a narrow research perspective consisting mostly of inductive studies.

In sum, role research has been affected by the fact that it has been conducted within various sciences and therefore there has not been any consistency in how research should be conducted. This study was carefully designed with respect to the mentioned challenges of role research. The underlying thought has been to contribute to the role research by providing data from one large, Finnish organization in form of a unique case study and by designing a research methodology that do not fall into the common problems of role research. Thus, an abductive research design was chosen, with the aim of exploring a sample of middle managers’ perceptions of their role and explaining the meanings of these perceptions. The research questions were designed to examine the effects of norms and expectations in the middle manager role; their impact on the behavior, and what middle managers can do to prevent a conflict of roles and ambiguity within the role. Semi-structured interviews did as a research method best suit the aims of the study.
The results of the case study answered to the research questions. It was shown that the middle manager role includes a variety of colliding expectations, role conflict, and role ambiguity. The participants of the case study consisted of individuals having worked for a long time for the case organization; thus the respondents were quite confident in their roles. This fact led to the respondents being able to explain also how they had coped with ambiguity and conflict and which mechanisms they had used—and still use—to clarify their role.

The conducted empirical research provided valuable data. The results show that the conducted empirical research succeeded well; the respondents were very open in the interviews and the discussions floated naturally and well. It did not harm the interviews that the research topic was sensitive. The collected data provided findings needed in order to answer to the research questions. Chapter 4, the presentation of the empirical research, presented some of the collected data in its raw format, however translated from Finnish and Swedish to English. A more throughout presentation of the empirical material can be found in Appendix 2. Chapter 5, the analysis, discussed the meaning of the collected data in light of the literature review and answers to the research questions were given.

An underlying purpose of this study has been to contribute to the academic research of managerial roles. Ultimately, if the study succeeded, the research questions were answered and a framework for conducting role research on the middle-management level has been developed. The researcher has attempted to make the research process as transfer as possible, in order to ensure that the used research process can be used as a model for other studies.

The contribution of this study has been argued for several times. It has been to explore and explain a sample of middle manager’s perceptions about how they perceive their role, which mechanisms affect their role behavior, and what they to do avoid role ambiguity and conflicts, which can be used to understanding middle managers better. However, the results are not valid *per se* outside of their unique context. The collected data was analyzed according to personality and contextual factors, which ensured that the meaning of the role context was factored in into the results. Due to this, the results cannot be generalized. It is, however, possible to compare the findings of the study with other organizations that are alike the described case organization, and more importantly; the findings generate a wider understanding for the research topic in general.
In sum, the contribution of the study has included to provide data and discuss results of a role study from a Finnish organization, to allow readers to make generalizations with organizations that are alike the case organization, and to develop a research design that currently is scarcely found within role research.

6.2. Conclusions

The analysis of the empirical research showed that the role behavior of the researched middle managers is dependent on individual personality, formal position, norms, company culture and values, and the role set including geographical position of the office, colleagues, superiors and subordinates. Further, the results of the case study showed that the case organization has outstandingly strong norms that people are expected to conform to, and consequently these norms had the strongest impact on the role behavior of the respondents. This was the most important finding in reference to the first research question.

The case study did further show that the respondents had come up with various role ambiguity and conflict coping methods. Each individual had his own way of dealing with those problematic aspects of the middle manager role and a summary of the chosen behavioral mechanisms (coping methods) is the greatest contribution of this study for the general audience and in relation to the second research question. In total the methods consisted of:

- Directness, taking action and bringing up matters immediately \(\rightarrow\) Avoiding speculation, giving false promises, and over-exaggerating one’s skills
- “Ventilation days”, that is; informal meetings outside the work place where managers meet and interact, and those that have something on their mind have a chance to speak up \(\rightarrow\) “Wiping the table” and receiving collegial support
- Hiring a coach and a psychologist
- Writing down all work tasks and putting a name behind each one thus reducing “grey areas”
- Starting the day with a “walking tour” down on the floor and thus getting to know about employees’ expectations and uncomfortable truths
- Neglecting certain responsibilities to give time for more important ones \(\rightarrow\) Reducing bureaucratic management tasks and thus making oneself more available
- Seeking support from outside of the organization if the role includes responsibilities that people within the role set do not understand
- Challenging others and training them to accept changes; discussing changes without meaning to actualize them as a “brain gymnastics”
- Trying a method of five rounds; asking “why?” five times until you have reached the bottom of a demand
- Finding sounding boards and using them
- Releasing pressure through leisure activities

The respondents did mention additional factors that would clarify their role; however, these factors are independent of the respondents and need to come from the organization. Thus they are yet remaining to be fulfilled. Their needs were the following:

- Borderlines from superiors
- Performance measurement, and incorporating measurements into all manager’s daily work and following up on the results
- Incorporating expectations into the performance measurements. Check-ups whether expectations have been met
- More direct communication, especially from the top
- Freedom to choose between educating seminars

The most important mechanism to diminish role ambiguity and conflict was communication. It was strongly highlighted that communication is needed in all directions and that it should be direct, which was partly considered to be problematic due to the company norms. It was experienced that the norm withholding that no one’s feelings should be hurt do not encourage direct communication. Formalization of the role and clear borderlines for the behavior expected was another important mechanism that the respondents found lessening the amount of role ambiguity and conflict. These were the most important findings in reference to the second research question.

Now that the research questions have been answered, it is time to analyze how the study succeeded with its other purposes. As stated previously, an underlying purpose of the thesis has been to critically discuss the meaning of the middle manager role of organizations of today, based on the literature review and the findings of the empirical research.
The empirical research showed that the case organization has a flat organization structure and that the middle managers have very broad fields of responsibilities. The middle managers in question did wish that their roles would be more precise and formalized. This finding of the case study is not in line with current trends of the middle manager role, which suggests that managers should be more and more specialized on various things and able to make an effort wherever it is needed. However, the case study showed that the middle managers were expected to be leaders, find solutions to problems, ensure that the communication between hierarchies works, implement the strategy into practice and action, and to be leaders of change and interpreters of meaning (Mintzberg et al. 2003). The conclusion of this is that if there were not middle managers to perform these roles, who would? Although organizations of today want to be flat, I argue that organizations need some sort of structure in order to function. This was assured during the interviews in the case organization. It is the benefit of the personnel and the management of a company that some sort of hierarchy exists. Thus I argue that the task of future research will not be to analyze whether the middle manager role is a role that should be distinguished or prevailed, it is rather to perform more in-context and explanatory studies of what middle managers need in order to perform as outstanding as possible in their roles.

6.3. Limitations and suggestions for further research

The conducted empirical research leaves room for additional research. This study focused on behavior; that is, how middle managers behave and should behave in their roles in order for the roles to be as functional as possible. Functional roles ensure rationality of organizations and improve everybody's wellbeing within a role context. Therefore expectations, norms, role ambiguity, and role conflict were analyzed in order to see how these form behavior and what behavior is used to avoid problems within the role.

First it must be noted that additional, similar studies are needed within organizational research. This is due to the fact that results generated with a research design such as the one used in this study can never be generalizable and it is in particular therefore that more studies are needed – preferably within different organization types, so that a deeper understanding of different contextual factors can be reached. The findings of this study discuss the contextual meaning of only one, certain organizational environment. Second, it would have been interesting to add more components to the
scope of this study than the limits of the conducted research allowed for. Personality was used as a variable in the study because personality is assumed to significantly affect role behavior. However, it would have been interesting to see how education affects role behavior as well.

Further, it was noted that most of the conducted role research consists of American studies and consequently this study was heavily built on American literature. The effects of national culture in the work role fell beyond the scope of this study, which was explained in chapter 1.3. It was only stated that there probably are cultural differences that assumingly affect the work role. Future research should widen the scope of research from contextual factors to national culture, and analyze whether and how an individual’s national culture affects preferences in the middle manager role. It remains to be investigated whether American studies can be used to understand the behavior of Finnish middle managers, for instance. The cultural effects on the manager role can be investigated with the help of Hofstede’s cultural dimensions theory for instance. The theory can be used to make hypotheses, and the study should then compare the findings of an empirical research with existing literature.

Another interesting angle to conduct research from would be to focus on the effects of expectations. Expectations are the sources of role pressures, as defined in chapter 2.3. Thus, expectations have a significantly strong impact on behavior, and although expectations were a variable of this study, more studies that focus on expectations alone are needed. In this study the meaning of expectations was touched upon only shallowly. It would be interesting to see why certain expectations are conformed to and why certain expectations are not conformed to. This case study showed that formal expectations are conformed to and that various informal expectations are conformed to. It would however be interesting to investigate why some expectations are not conformed to and when and why non-conformity is sanctioned by the role set.

Finally, it must be noted that the gender of the role occupant was touched upon only briefly in this study. The empirical data shows that the women participating in the case study had experienced gender-related challenges in their manager roles, however; these were not of particular interest for the study as the problems mentioned was the perceptions of some members of the role set, rather than the managers’ perceptions. The message however is, that there is room for gender research within role research.
In sum, the conducted study is only a baby-step towards understanding the middle manager role better. More explanatory and exploratory in-depth studies relying on a social constructionism perspective are needed.
SVENSK SAMMANFATTNING

Mellanchefens roll – En fallstudie om normer, förväntningar, rollbeteende och konflikter.

Inledning

Förändringar i den ekonomiska omgivningen, såsom globaliseringen av ekonomin samt informationsteknologins utveckling, har utmanat traditionella organisationsstrukturer, modeller och roller. Nedskärningar har varit ett fenomen som särskilt mycket har påverkat de organisatoriska rollerna. Organisatoriska omorganiseringar och nedskärningar har minskat på personalstyrkan och mellanchefshierarkin inom 90 % av Fortune 100-företagen mellan 1980 och 2006 (Munkeby 2007:1).

Effekterna av nedskärningar i mellanchefshierarkin har lett till att färre mellanchefer nu har fler uppgifter att sköta än någonsin. De olika uppgifterna kräver att mellanchefer tar på sig ett flertal organisatoriska roller genom vilka de anpassar sitt beteende till den för tillfället aktuella situationen. De traditionella mellanchefsuppgifterna, såsom att kontrollera, dela ut uppgifter och sköta kommunikationen mellan ledning och personal, har utvecklats i motsatt riktning från det byråkratiska tänkandet som länge präglat utformningen av chefsuppgifter (Marichal och Segers 2012). Det förväntas åtminstone att mellanchefer ska leda personalen, hitta lösningar till problem, garantera att kommunikationen mellan olika nivåer fungerar problemfritt, implementera företagsstrategin i praxis och konkreta åtgärder, samt leda förändringar och tolka och sprida budskap och mening i organisationen (Mintzberg, Lampel, Quinn och Ghoshal 2003).

De förväntningar som finns på dagens mellanchefer konkurrerar sinsemellan eftersom mellanchefens roll påverkar ett flertal intressenter med olika krav. Motstridiga förväntningar är väldigt typiska för just mellanchefspositionen. Forskning har påvisat att mellanchefer upplever mest rollkonflikter bland alla organisatoriska aktörer (Bass och Bass 2008; Bass och Stogdill 1989). En mellanchef kan beskrivas som en mellanhand som konstant jobbar i åtminstone två olika riktningar. Förändringar i den ekonomiska strukturen har gjort att förväntningarna på mellanchefen har utökats ytterligare, vilket eventuellt har lett till att förväntningarna är mer motstridiga än tidigare. Dessutom är mellanchefens roll krävande eftersom alternativen i dagens organisationer är mycket begränsade. Det förväntas allmänt att nyckelpersoner hittar nya lösningar och samtidigt främjar kostnadseffektivitet inom företaget. (Marginson

**Problemområde och syfte**
Organisationer är beroende av rollspel. För att organisationer ska kunna fungera, det vill säga presta och göra vinst, krävs det att varje individ inom organisationen känner till sin egen roll och slutför sina uppgifter. Detta förutsätter i sin tur att individer fungerar rationellt och beter sig ändamålsenligt för sin roll. Forskning har påvisat (se bland annat Morgan 2006; Parker och Wickham 2005; Biddle 1986; Kerr 1978) att organisationers största svaghet är att de litar på att individer hittar sin plats och förstår sin roll, samt tar för givet att människor accepterar förutbestämda roller och de förväntningar som finns på rollen. Detta problemområde är välkänt inom organisationer och följaktligen existerar det rikligt med forskning som försöker beskriva vilka olika roller mellanchefer har. Det är däremot mycket svårare att hitta forskning gällande vad chefer kan göra för att förverkliga rollerna, hur de borde bete sig i sina roller, samt vad de borde göra för att undvika en rollkonflikt. Därför ämnar denna avhandling närma sig dessa frågor med hjälp av en explorativ undersökning och således öka förståelsen för mellanchefsers roller.

Det primära syftet med denna avhandling är att undersöka relationen mellan normer och förväntningar samt dessas effekter på beteendet i mellanchefsrollen. Studien är intresserad av att finna vilka mekanismer det är som påverkar rollbeteendet, hur beteendet påverkas samt varför. Följaktligen kommer mekanismer för att undvika rollkonflikter att analyseras. De slutliga forskningsfrågorna som studien ämnar svara på är:

**Forskningsfråga 1:** Vilka mekanismer påverkar rollbeteendet? Hur påverkar de och varför påverkar de beteendet?

**Forskningsfråga 2:** Hur konstruerar mellanchefer sitt rollbeteende för att minska på rollotydlighet och konflikter?
**Litteraturgenomgång**


Litteraturgenomgången inleds med en historisk tillbakablick för att sedan fokusera på hur man använt sig av rollteorier inom organisationsforskning. Litteraturgenomgången omfattar en redogörelse av centrala rollbegrepp, en beskrivning av organisatoriska roller, förklaringar till varför individer beter sig olika inom samma roll samt presenterar teorier gällande förväntningar, rollotydlighet och rollkonflikt. Kapitlet avslutas med ett sammandrag av litteraturgenomgången, där ett gap i den existerande forskningen påvisas.


Rollforskningen har antagligen lidit av att olika vetenskaper och forskare inte har varit av samma åsikt gällande hur forskningen bör bedrivas. Modern forskning har dock klart redogjort för sin synpunkt gällande rollstudier: man kan inte enbart forska i roller utgående från en roll som en personlighet eller en social position. Man borde bedriva forskning som undersöker roller som en kombination av personlighet och en social position. (Balogun 2003) Denna avhandling ämnar göra precis så, det vill säga...
undersöka mellanchefsrollen som en roll som består av såväl rollinnehavaren (en personlighet) samt av den formella roll som mellanchefsyrket omfattar.

Metodik

Avhandlingens metodikkapitel redogör för den empiriska studiens datainsamlingsprocess samt studiens forskningsmetod. Den empiriska studien genomfördes som en fallstudie och omfattar tio semistrukturerade intervjuer. Semistrukturerade intervjuer valdes som metod i och med att de garanterar samma utgångspunkt och huvudfrågor för varje respondent, dock med möjlighet att utveckla samtalen i önskvärd riktning genom att ställa tilläggsfrågor och be om kommentarer. Data som insamlas med hjälp av semistrukturerade intervjuer kan användas till att generera forskningsresultat som utöver att svara på frågan ”vad” och ”varför” dessutom svarar på ”hur”, vilket är syftet med denna studie. (Saunders, Lewis och Thornhill 2012)


Den empiriska undersökningen genomfördes 5.3–-7.3.2014 på fallföretagets huvudkontor. Organisationen hålls av forskningsetiska skäl anonym. Intervjuerna pågick i snitt 60 minuter och frågorna baserade sig på fem teman som var direkt kopplade till forskningsfrågan. De utvalda intervjuemana var bakgrund och personlighet, respondentens formella roll, rollkluster, förväntningar, normer och rollbeteende samt rollkonflikt och rollotydlighet.

En av forskningens viktigaste aspekter är forskningskvaliteten. De vanligaste bedömningskriterierna för forskning berör studiens reliabilitet, validitet och generaliserbarhet. Socialkonstruktionistisk forskning fokuserar dock på hur väl
forskaren har förstått och använt sig av det insamlade data samt hur transparent tolkningen av data är. (Saunders et al. 2012) Med hänvisning till denna studies epistemologiska forskningssynsätt kommer studiens kvalitet att bedömas med alternativa villkor: trovärdighet, transparens, precision och konformitet (ibid.). Detta innebär att studiens kvalitet mäts genom hur objektiva tolkningar forskaren har gjort, huruvida studien kan replikeras, hur solid forskningsprocessen är samt hur objektiv studien är.

Den empiriska undersökningen

Den empiriska undersökningen omfattar tio mellanchefer på olika nivåer inom fallföretaget. Respondenternas titlar är följande:

- Produktionschef
- Produktionschef, ägare
- Personalchef
- Kvalitets-, personalskydds- och skyddschef, ägare
- Hygienchef
- Laboratoriechef, personalchef
- Logistikchef
- Personalchef
- Processchef, personalchef
- Avdelningschef

Ett viktigt kriterium vid valet av respondenter var deras ansvarsnivå. Studien beaktar endast chefer vars ansvarsområde omfattar personal och individuella arbetsuppgifter. Med detta menas att varje respondent skall ha såväl underordnade som överordnade, och att det i hierarkin skulle finnas chefspositioner underställda respondenten. Detta var viktigt med tanke på studiens problemställning, det vill säga att undersöka sådana mellanchefer som faktiskt befinner sig i en mellanhandsroll där de är lika mycket ansvariga såväl uppåt som neråt inom organisationen.

Intervjufrågorna formades till att vara så öppna, neutrala och icke-ledande som möjligt. En pilotintervju utfördes på förhand för att testa den utformade intervjuguiden. Pilotintervjun visade att antalet frågor var korrekt, eftersom pilotintervjun varade i
nästan 60 minuter. Dock visade det sig att respondenten under pilotintervjun beskrev samma fenomen under ett antal frågor och följaktligen gjordes det förändringar i intervjuguiden innan de verkliga intervjuerna hölls. Sammanfattningsvis kan det konstateras att intervjuguiden genomgick många förändringar innan den togs i bruk.

**Resultatredovisning**

**Tema 1: Bakgrund och personlighet**

Detta tema inkluderades i studien för att få en helhetsbild av varje respondent och för att förstå hur personligheten påverkar rollbeteendet. Ett annat syfte med temat var att undersöka huruvida respondenterna upplever att de har en arbetsroll som inte är densamma som deras privata roll (med tanke på rollbeteendet). Resultaten visar att de utvalda respondenterna har jobbat en lång tid för fallföretaget, i medeltal 17,4 år. Könsfördelningen var två kvinnor och åtta män. Åldern varierade mellan yngre mellanchefer runt 30 år till mer seniora mellanchefer kring 60 år. Varje respondent hade arbetat sig uppåt i organisationen och innehaft ett flertal positioner före den nuvarande rollen.

Inom samplet av de undersökta respondenterna fanns olika personlighetstyper representerade. Alla respondenter förutom en sade att de inte byter roll när de kommer till arbetsplatsen, de upplevde att de stannar kvar i sin individuella roll även på arbetsplatsen. Två respondenter sade dock att de blir mer ansvarsfulla på arbetsplatsen än vad de annars är. En respondent sade att han medvetet stiger in i en arbetsroll, detta för att han upplevde att det var lättare att sköta arbetet genom att ta en annan roll än vad han "egentligen är". Genom att stiga in i en separat roll upplevde respondenten att det blev lättare att försäkra sig om att han är lika rättvis mot alla på arbetsplatsen och att förhindra att privata angelägenheter påverkar arbetsbeteendet.

**Tema 2: Respondentens formella roll**

Detta tema inkluderades i studien för att få en helhetsbild av varje respondents formella roll på arbetsplatsen. Frågorna var indelade i tre undergrupper: arbetet i sig, rollens frihetsgrad samt hur rollinnehavarens prestationer mäts.

Resultaten påvisar att flera respondenter dagligen jobbar med att balansera kostnadseffektivitet och personalens välbefinnande. Vidare så framkom det att respondenterna generellt är mycket upptagna och måste tillbringa en stor del av sin tid på kontoret, även om många önskade att de skulle ha mer tid för personalen.
Respondenternas position inom organisationshierarkin påverkade starkt hur de beskrev vem de är mest ansvariga gentemot, det vill säga huruvida de fann att deras främsta ansvar gällde företagets verksamhet eller personalen.

Alla respondenter fann att deras roll var mycket fri. I huvudsak var den enda restriktionen som respondenterna förväntades beakta budgeten. Således är respondenterna fria att styra sitt arbete hur de vill så länge de uppnår de önskade resultaten. Detta uppfattades generellt som något positivt, även om det framkom att man i förändringssituationer eventuellt skulle vilja ha mer stöd och riktlinjer i sin roll.


Tema 3: Rollkluster
Detta tema inkluderades i studien för att bredda undersökningsperspektivet från den personliga rollen till rollkontextens betydelse för rollen. Såsom tidigare förklarades kan vi förstå respondenternas beteende och upplevda roller endast genom att beakta de kontextuella faktorer som finns i fallföretaget och vilka således påverkar rollen.

Resultaten visar att fallföretaget har en unik företagskultur med starka normer. Respondenterna beskrev företagskulturen som varm, äkta, sällsynt och intresserad av varje individs välstånd. Det framkom att organisationen har en mycket låg hierarki och att chefer är chefer endast i den bemärkelsen att de har andra uppgifter än övrig

**Tema 4: Förväntningar, normer och rollbeteende**

Detta tema har direkt anknytning till forskningsfrågorna. Syftet var att utreda vilka mekanismer påverkar rollbeteendet med en särskild tyngdpunkt på effekterna av förväntningar och normer.

Alla respondenter upplevde att deras positioner och organisatoriska roll innehåller förväntningar. Personalcheferna beskrev hur de upplever att de förväntas balansera personalens välbefinnande och kostnadseffektivitet, samt följderna av det. Ibland kunde förväntningarna bli motstridiga. Övriga respondenter tyckte generellt att de förväntades konstant utveckla sina ansvarsområden och leda förändringar. Dessutom tyckte respondenterna att deras roller omfattar ett antal outtalade förväntningar. Majoriteten av respondenterna uttryckte en önskan om att kommunikationen skulle bli mer rak och att individer skulle säga rakt ut vad de förväntar sig av en. En del av respondenterna tyckte att det var svårt att uppfatta förväntningarna och att tolka dem.

Då det gäller normer framkom det att respondenterna upplevde att de förväntas anpassa sig till företagets normer gällande att man ska behandla andra såsom man själv vill bli behandlad. En del av respondenterna hade upplevt att de varit vilse då de började arbeta inom organisationen, men att tiden hade påverkat rolluppfattningen positivt och att de nu visste hur de förväntas bete sig, i stora drag. Ibland sker det dock ännu händelser där respondenterna är osäkra på vad som egentligen förväntas av dem, hur de ska bete sig, vem de ska tjäna i sitt arbete och huruvida de fattar rätt beslut.

**Tema 5: Rollotydlighet och rollkonflikt**

Även detta tema har direkt anknytning till forskningsfrågorna. Syftet var att utreda huruvida respondenterna tidvis upplever att deras chefsroll kan kännas oklar eller motstridig och vad de gör i sådana fall.
Resultaten visar att respondenterna upplever att mellanchefsrollen kan vara otydlig och att man ibland befinner sig i en rollkonflikt, speciellt på grund av motstridiga förväntningar. Sådana rollkonflikter som skulle bero på att företagets värderingar krockar med personliga värderingar finns inte, vilket verkar ha ett samband med fallföretagets humana normer. Eftersom företagskulturen är human och otroligt stark finns det inte mycket utrymme för konflikter på det emotionella planet. Således kan man tänka sig att den unika företagskulturen rensar bort en hel del potentiella konflikter.


Avslutning


Tanken med studien har varit att mellanchefer har en roll att uppfylla i dagens organisationer. Chefskap och ledarskap existerar för att det allmänt uppfattas att dessa främjar organisationers funktionalitet och prestationssförmåga. (Bloom, Sadun och Van Reenen 2012) Chefer är som läkare för en organisation (Pfeffer och Sutton 2006), de är
anställda för att med hjälp av sina kunskaper och sin expertis förebygga och bota ohälsa inom organisationen – precis som läkare använder sin expertis då de skriver ut medicinska recept åt en patient. Denna avhandling har syftat till att identifiera faktorer som kan hindra chefer att hålla prestationcnivån på topp, vilket har studerats med hjälp av ett rollperspektiv. De intervjuade mellancheferna beskrev utförligt och variationsrikt sin vardag i mellanchefsrollen och gav många exempel på faktorer som påverkar deras beteende i rollen samt faktorer som de upplevde att främjade att rollotydlighet och konflikt uppstår. Trots att den utförda studien är en fallstudie och således inte strävade efter generaliserbara resultat gynnar resultaten allmänheten. Man kan använda respondenternas berättelser för att allmänt förstå vilka faktorer som påverkar mellanchefsrollen samt generellt jämföra organisationer som liknar det beskrivna fallföretaget.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX 1  THE INTERVIEW GUIDE

Theme 1: Background

1. Describe your title, position and background at this company.

2. Describe yourself in your work role and as a person.
   - Attributes and traits that characterize you as a person and your behavior.
   - Do you behave similarly—as described in the previous question—at work and in other situations; for instance with family and in leisure activities?

Theme 2: The role of the respondent

3. Describe your rights, duties, and responsibilities at this company.
   - Describe your position in relation to the organization as a whole.
     - Number of employees beneath you, who is your boss?
   - Most important responsibilities and tasks.
   - Formal vs. informal.
   - Degree of freedom.
   - Is performance measured? How? By whom?

Theme 3: Role cluster

4. If you were asked to describe your work place, how would you describe it?
   - Company culture.
   - Networks.
   - Working habits.
   - The social aspects; coffee breaks, lunches, sharing of thoughts and opinions, events.

5. Which organizational actors do you work close with? Which other people / what else affects your working?
   - How do these affect your work?

Theme 4: Expectations, norms and role behavior

6. Are there expectations on your position and organizational role?
   - What are you expected to do? By whom? Try to think of all stakeholders.
   - Are there norms (informal understanding of expected behavior) that guide or dictate your behavior in the work place? If yes, which are they?
     - Have these changed with time? How? Why?
   - Do you get support in your work role? By whom? How?
7. Do the top management and employees have expectations on you? What kind of? How do you deal with these (expectations)?

- Target oriented (focus on results, initiative, planning, firmness, structure, strategy, decisions, budget)
- Socializing (focus on confession, possibilities, consideration, concern, respect, leadership, support, encouragement)

8. How are expectations communicated to you?

- The story of what one experiences that is expected of one.
- Formally (work description, rules, discussions, directives)
- Informally (communication via spoken words or text – a hidden tone, pressure, threat, begging, something that is found “between the lines”)
  - Creativity, innovation, new ideas.
  - Budget and resources.
  - Implementing strategy and developing strategy.
  - Controlling and inspiring.

9. Which factors affect your behavior in the manager role?

- What guides your decision-making, priorities and time management?
- Is the work independent or dependent on others? How? Why?
- Do you find that there are set rules generating certain expectations regarding how you should behave in your work role (how you should deal with your work)?

**Theme 5: Role ambiguity and conflict**

10. How do you experience your manager role? What is most positive and what is less positive?

- Does the role ever feel unclear or contradictory? How? Why?
  - Needs, values, interests, goals.
- Does the responsibility burden you?
- Is there anything you feel is burdening you on a psychological level in your manager role?
- Wherefrom do you find strength in difficult situations and how do you find solutions?

11. Which mechanisms do you think are important or helpful for managers trying to balance contradictory expectations?

- Can everybody be satisfied, in general?
  - Interaction with superiors.
  - Interaction with subordinates.
Clarity of responsibilities and authority.
Clarity of resources.
Switch on and switch off role.

12. Other.

- Would you like to add something to this interview?
APPENDIX 2 PRESENTATION OF THE EMPIRICAL MATERIAL

In this appendix data that was collected during the empirical research is presented. The data is presented as direct citations of the respondents and it was used to build up the analysis and conclusions of the thesis. In order to keep the thesis easily read, the citations are provided as an appendix instead of including them in chapter 4.

Theme 1: Background and personality

I'd describe myself as a person with no educational background to this thing, everything is learned by trial and error. Very product focused course of action in everything. I know all work tasks of the department and therefore it is easy for me to lead. (Respondent 1)

I'm very open, head-on, and build confidence by being open. [...] I'm bold, not afraid of showing sensitive things, talking about sensitive things, very open towards the personnel, and that I have noticed because people from all over the organization come into my room. They are not afraid of me although I am the production manager... I can't play games. (Respondent 2)

I think I have changed quite much while working in this organization. I used to be very impulsive and have always been very social, but in a way I get very dominant under pressure. But I think it has evened out, I think I'm quite balanced these days... I'm very social in both directions, I wouldn't say that I am a military leader. (Respondent 8)

I think it's natural to have two different facades. If I for instance run into a colleague in the supermarket, it feels as if we can have a different relationship. It feels completely natural, then I can be their buddy. So if we have some disputes at work it doesn't affect the private life. I think it needs to be that way. I hold to my principles, if I have promised to get a job done I get it done. (Respondent 10)

Theme 2: The role of the respondent

The work itself

I try to think of both sides of the coin, but I would say that employee well-being is more important to me than cost efficiency. Of course, one cannot rule out the other... But in a conflict situation I think the boss is more upset than the personnel. Here in this organization we make a big deal about the fact that we care about our employees, we don’t just do but also talk about it a lot, we have these values that you should treat others as you yourself would want to be treated. And for me personally it doesn’t work that you just say these things, and sometimes this comes into conflict with economical stuff and so on. And it is a given, it doesn’t work if you put all your efforts in the personnel and consciously run the business with a profit loss, this is after all a work place. But anyway, they cannot become empty words, then it just doesn’t work for me. (Respondent 8)

My boss is not inhumane in any way, so I don’t think that I have to fight for my personnel’s sake. When tougher times come you can discuss with the personnel about haggling over something for a certain period of time, even if it is something that you wouldn’t want to be without. And usually they understand. So it works quite well to combine these things as long as you don’t have it in your style that you just calculate on a piece of paper and decide to haggle on this and that and just drop the message to the employees. Perhaps the way in which you do things is quite important too. (Respondent 8)

I know that they, the personnel, know that this is business as usual even more in other companies (haggling), that this is nothing serious. But of course, they rather want two candies than one. (Respondent 8)
Yeah, I think I have informal work tasks. I think all employee supervisors experience that, because you can’t write down all work tasks in a job description. Only in large headings, but not in details. For instance, there was a boy that lost his father a time ago. It doesn’t say anywhere in my job description that I should bring him flowers and deal with the discussions that arise in those situations... So, let’s say, the skills and strengths you need in those situations compared to those that you need when you implement a change here... It is really from A to O. And, lots of white-collar work. (Respondent 8)

No, I don’t think that I have informal work tasks because I have so much work to do that I haven’t had time for anything else, I haven’t had time to do my own work either. I have been quite behind the schedule with my own tasks, but now I’m about to catch up with the work. (Respondent X)

**The degree of freedom**

It is really free. We have strategic goals and a yearly budget. Those are the borderlines for my actions. How I reach those goals is up to me. The top management doesn’t have a lot of information about these things. Let’s say that this suits my personality quite well. There is a tendency to, let’s say, if the directions would be too strict it would be difficult for me. (Respondent 1)

Of course there are certain things that just need to be done. But I have in fact built up the hygiene department myself, because when I came to the house there was no department, each division had their own key persons who did things in their own way. We have built it up from there as a group, because I don’t want to build alone, I want all of us to do it together and I’d rather hear everybody’s opinion. We have agreed with my boss that he doesn’t have to come in here every day asking if everything is okay, that I will tell him if I need help. So in that sense my work has been very free. (Respondent 5)

My work style is basically that I get a budget and then I direct myself to how I will reach the goal with that budget. And then I report monthly how things are going and bring up eventual problems and discuss what we should do about this or that. And because the competition on the market has become tougher I might need to do a plan of actions that we can take to make savings, but then I want to check with my boss too. [...] It is like this; you want to agree with your boss first, before you start implementing changes. But then you have to check on beforehand that you have their support. (Respondent 7)

Well, I can experience it like, really, sometimes it is hard to find common meetings with my boss. We do meet almost every week, or at least every other... But it’s rather that you think, like, if this is worth taking their time, or should we just do it by ourselves. I would say, I guess, that as long as everything is stable there’s no problem, but if you are about to do bigger changes, then you perhaps want to check more. Actually we are now facing an operation that we should perhaps try to become a bit more cost efficient... And that requires more dialogue. But... It might have to do with my character as well, that I am quite independent. But I want those guidelines, I want to know within which borderlines I shall keep myself. (Respondent X)

**Performance measurements**

Well, we have different systems showing how well a product line is performing, so in that sense we get a little feedback. And then we also receive feedback regarding the delivery safety. And then I guess one thing is how satisfied the customer is, which in our case is the production department, that is our customer, how satisfied they are. But it is not always possible because many times a department sees only themselves and their machines. They don’t know about other problems. So if you have to remove a resource or machine they don’t understand it, although that thing can be more important for another department to have. So they are not always satisfied. It is a rather great factor for the general well-being that things run smoothly, so when a machine or something else is struggling, it can get pretty emotional. Some get really, really angry... And some less... They can show any emotion. (Respondent 5)

I have some meters that I try to fulfill, but they are not dependent solely on me. If I have 150 people in the department it means that I cannot affect that much. But I have the final responsibility... In fact, I am new in my position and have nothing to compare with. I don’t know
exactly which meters I have, there is a bonus system and I have been promised a full bonus because there aren’t any meters for my performance. But it’s getting tighter and tighter, more responsibility will be put on me... But this is a transit period, I said from the beginning that it would take at least two years to reach a standard level. (Respondent 10)

What I find the most difficult is that I work with a receipt in my hands. I don’t see the numbers until a certain month’s calculations are done. And then it is sort of too late to do anything... I just received January’s numbers and now it is too late to do something for February-March based on what those numbers tell me. (Respondent 10)

**Theme 3: Role cluster**

[...] I am responsible for a very wide field and I am a member of many groups. I can’t escape anything. Therefore I need to try to focus. (Respondent 2)

Basically you are constantly shifting between different roles. (Respondent 3)

As I said, I don’t step into a work role. I go there as I am as a person. If I took a work role, I don’t think I would work in the same way and be as motivated as when I work according to my personality and emotions. I do definitely think there is a connection there. (Respondent 4)

I like my work place very much. I do often describe it as familiar, everybody are included. Regardless of who you work with you get to know the people in the house. It doesn’t matter which are the bosses and which are the employees, you discuss with whomever happening to pass by. I think that’s very nice, that you can be with everybody. (Respondent 5)

I try to read leadership books, we have a library here and we get some recommendations. At the moment I am trying to read “Good to great”, but it is also a bit scary to read. I don’t know if you should believe everything... I guess I take leadership on an emotion base, I look around... And sometimes I can be perceived as being too direct, but I also think that can be a great strength. (Respondent 10)

I like it very much here, the only disadvantage is that our department is a bit far away. We are not close to the other group which disturbs the contact if I want to see somebody, and sometimes... It would be better to go and talk to my boss directly, but because of the distance I might call him or write to him. And that is a disadvantage. I would prefer to have more personal contact, I would like to be able to step into their office and discuss. (Respondent X)

We are always together on coffee breaks and lunches, but there have been some schisms. Therefore we have a coach here. I have a responsibility in that and I think I take on more responsibility than I should. My coach is telling me that too, that I take on too much responsibility and faults when it in fact is everybody’s responsibility. I guess when disorders happen it is everybody’s fault. But I am that kind of person, I take everything to myself and think that it’s my fault. I take it personally and I take it on me. And I am currently working with that, not to take everything on me... It is really good to have a coach. There are other people I could talk to, outside my team, but it is good to have the coach. It is good to have somebody from outside. (Respondent X)

Previously we have had three employee supervisors here that were quite soft, it was possible to run them over... And I’ve never liked that, that employees mess with the employee supervisors. Therefore I think they have got used to that and might see me as too straight forward and as quick to say no. Because I don’t have a problem with rejecting stuff, if somebody wants a free day and it’s impossible, well then it’s impossible. It doesn’t happen that I would say that we shall consider it further. Therefore I might be perceived as too straight forward. I get to hear about this. Not directly, unfortunately not directly. (Respondent X)

The company culture is very open, we talk a lot about everything. It is very humane, at times maybe too humane. I mean that those hard decisions might be really difficult to make. These things are difficult by nature, but here nobody wants to upset anyone, which is a really big resource but sometimes it can be damaging. We have a good reputation and we have earned it. It should be that way. Our good reputation is earned by our true principles, it is not that we just try to build an image of something. It is not something we just put on a piece of paper as in many
other companies these days. Here it really is that way. The humanity is really unique. It goes so far that it almost becomes a burdensome. As you can imagine, if I have over 200 beneath me on the department, and everybody receives Christmas gifts and there are handshakes and daily when you run the corridors you greet people for who knows how many times. But if you don’t do it, people will react immediately. (Respondent X)

Theme 4: Expectations, norms and behavior

Expectations

I think that the expectations I set for myself are much tougher than the ones set by the company. It’s in my nature, it has always been that way. (Respondent 1)

We have made changes and rebuilt the organization from scratch. We have tried to clear out what everybody’s field of responsibility is and which work tasks belong to whom. We have even gone so far that we’ve written down all work tasks and put a name behind each task. When the organization is as big as this one and when there are a lot of people, grey areas usually emerge and for a while things are running, but in the end the grey areas become no-mans-land. Nowadays when grey areas emerge we immediately change them to work tasks and put a name behind each task. In the beginning I didn’t understand the need of this, because my own field of responsibilities has always been very broad, but it feels like the employee supervisors feel safe with this method. There’s no need for explanations and I don’t have to get involved now that everything’s so clear. (Respondent 1)

I have to be quite clear about this with the employee supervisor beneath me and really sort out what they expect from me. Because my leadership style is of the kind that I give away lots of responsibility and freedom, I guess it could happen that I’m thinking “Okay, they’ll do it” but perhaps they expect something else regarding how they want responsibility and directing. I’ve told them straight forward that I want them to tell me what they expect of me; how I can help them in their job. Because it varies from person to person. Most of the time I think I can see it, that this person needs this and that person needs that, but… (Respondent 2)

I’m very sensitive when it comes to informal communication. If there is a comment, someone says something in a certain situation, I’m very sensitive towards that. Then I just ask them to come into my room and then we discuss and see what it’s all about. And as I said, when you go down to the department you might get to hear these uncomfortable truths sort of in a hidden way. Then you try to grasp it and clear it out. And I do notice these things, I’m quite sensitive in that way. And I don’t like uncertainty, that someone tells half of the story… I think they have noticed that, that if they say something, then something will happen. (Respondent 2)

The expectations are that everything should work with minimal costs. And with minimal costs it’s difficult to live up to those expectations. We are a department that doesn’t make any money for the company and therefore we cannot cost too much. There is a possibility to actualize these expectations, but usually there are one’s own expectations as well and they tend to be tougher than others expectations. (Respondent 3)

Because my department doesn’t produce any money for the company, quite the opposite, we are costly, there are expectations regarding that. We are not allowed to decorate our work to the extent that it becomes too costly. But then again, we can’t get too careful and get the opposite problem, that our products get a quality problem and become impossible to sell. So it’s always about that balance, how many we should be, how much we should do, and how we should do it. But I think we’ve gotten a better contact to the employee supervisors, which is something we’ve worked really hard with to get, to get that communication started. That they would understand that we are not the police, rather we are the ones helping them when they need help. If we get their confidence it could be that we don’t have to run down there, they would let us know if there’s something. But yeah, these costs have been something that we’ve discussed a lot, trying to figure out on which level they shall be and how much we should do. (Respondent 5)

It is always about finding that balance, weighing advantages and disadvantages. (Respondent 5)

There are of course expectations of me. In a way there are quite many expectations regarding my knowhow, because there isn’t anyone else here with the same education that I have. Sometimes I
feel that there should be more time for me to share the basic knowledge that I have. But I've also
learned that I can't serve everywhere, I have to prioritize. I tend to say that I can't ever get
finished with my work, that I can't close the door on a Friday and say that now all work is done.
(Respondent 5)

Yes, I think there are expectations on me and I think I should try to actualize those expectations.
And I want to do that. (Respondent 6)

I think that my superior expects me to develop the laboratory and I want to do that in the best
possible way. I want to develop and I also want them with me in that. But I don't want them
there close to me the whole time, you know, I can contact them if I need to and they can contact
me if there's something. It doesn't have to be that super-tight. I shouldn't have to ask about small
things. I am after all an employee supervisor and I think that I shall be able to decide about stuff,
but bigger stuff we should be able to discuss. If I'm insecure about something. (Respondent 6)

There is an expectation that you should always represent your department. It is expected that the
one who leads a department is proudly showing it off whenever needed. And that's perhaps
something you get in an informal way, sort of. (Respondent 7)

The most important source of getting to know about expectations is your superior. I mean, we
have performance appraisals once a year and during them expectations should be communicated
out. And they should be quite directing. In addition to that, it's quite much about discussing or
via problems or challenges that you experience. Then you have to ask if this's okay and if this's
what we're expected to do in the future. (Respondent 7)

In the end, we just have to take a decision and then move forward. In that sense no one has veto
rights in the group. But then again, if someone's unwilling and he's the person who has to
implement the change it might get a bit difficult. It might get... Changes and savings are quite
tough things... We take the decisions together, but then it's those below me that have to motivate
them to the personnel. And then I have to be at disposal and help them and do the informing so
that they don't have to bear the blame, because I'm more responsible for this part than they are,
it's I who started the change. (Respondent 7)

Yes, there are expectations that I should handle this and that and be able to answer to questions
and concerns. And especially during changes I experience that I am expected to walk in the first
line. I'm not needed in daily operations, but I experience that I'm needed in change situations.
And when it comes to how you lead and how great a leader you should be, I guess that's
something that there might be expectations about. I guess the subordinates can have completely
subjective expectations on that part, about how authoritarian I should be and whether I shall
have the last word... I don't want to be authoritarian, but in the same time I know I'll never be
one of them. As a person I don't want to be on another level, but I know I'll never become their
buddy because after all, I'm their boss. It can be good to have a certain distance. I tend to say that
with a boss and an employee supervisor – it works best when he (the employee supervisor) is a bit
uncomfortable in both directions. Because he has to represent the company and his boss towards
his subordinates but towards his boss he has to represent the employees and the department.
(Respondent 7)

It can of course be a little contradictory to represent in two directions, but you can learn that part
too. Let's say, I'm not that social that I'm dependent on being a friend with all of them. If I were,
it would probably feel quite contradictory, but I'm not dependent on them. It's not like I have a
problem, I can discuss with them and sit down and share lunch with them. But I'm not
dependent on them, even though they start talking when I leave. Because that's how it often goes,
that while the boss is there you talk about one thing and when he's gone, the true discussions
begin. (Respondent 7)

You have to adjust to the expectations you get and interpret other signals that you get. Of course,
I've worked here for so long that I know the company, the superiors, and other persons. But of
course, you have to interpret quite much of what's said when you have discussions, as an
example, that we're not flexible enough. I am quite sensitive in that way, I do interpret opinions
but it doesn't mean that I immediately go and change things. And it happens a lot that it's
contradictory, the sales department wants one thing and the marketing department something
else... (Respondent 7)
They expect that I should be available. This year I’ve received quite much feedback from the personnel that I’m too difficult to find, that I’m too seldom in my room. As I experience it, my employment today regards being there for the personnel. So it’s up to me to decline some other responsibilities, I have to tell my superior that I don’t want to be a part of that (project, group, etc.) because it involves too many meetings, that I’m not available for what I experience I’m hired for, the personnel. In the end it’s them (the personnel) that should get the last word, I think. They have to get to feel safe at work. (Respondent 8)

I don’t get any direct expectations from the employees directly. I have to read between the lines and interpret what I get from employee well-being surveys and monthly meetings. And also from the rumors I hear from the floor. (Respondent 9)

The expectations I get from above are quite focused on the economic aspect, that we find better and better profitability and more and more business. But due to my own superior being so incredibly strong and him having a certain authority, it feels quite good to stand behind him. Because it comes directly down through him, goals and what we’re expected to achieve, but in the meantime he’ll know immediately whether it’s possible or not and he’s also a part of the top management team. (Respondent 10)

Yes, I might snap up indirect expectations, but I’m no expert on that. Usually I’m very observant, but that’s more about mechanical stuff, it’s more about technical stuff... I get these things from the people below me, those that I have the best contact with. I see it as their strengths complementing my weaknesses. So I’m not very good at seeing the people, or I do see them, but I can be quite cold. I absolutely wish people would be more direct and that you wouldn’t have to read between the lines. (Respondent 10)

From the personnel expectations are communicated out quite clearly. We have this well-being survey yearly and therefrom you get quite a good picture of what they expect of the company and their superior. So when it comes out once a year you read it quite meticulously to get a picture of what they expect... And then from the top management, it comes quite blurry. You don’t get a lot of feedback, neither good nor bad, nothing else than this performance appraisal. You get to hear “Well, you made it”. (Respondent X)

I have noticed that people... For instance, I just had a first line supervisor here from another department and I am not their boss in any way, they come here and tell me things, and perhaps expect that I can do something. Affect their situation. You can really notice it, that if the employees have problems they come here and perhaps expect that I will do something about it. Perhaps you can see it in other organizations as well, that sometimes I get questions and discussions that perhaps don’t belong to me, but it is expected that I do it for others. Sort of like fixing for others, perhaps not always in a positive way. This comes from all levels. (Respondent X)

Well, let’s say that this is where the weak part of humans is usually revealed. Especially when it comes to expectations of the supervisor... We went through that process when the organization was renewed. One of the hardest things was me asking what they expect of me. It was really difficult for anyone to say what they wanted. I don’t know if it’s a cultural thing or what... In my opinion it would be the easiest if they told me what they expect, then it would be easier to take action. Now it’s quite clear to me, but I had to try the nets for quite some time. Basically it was about giving support when needed and that the work field and directions would be clear. To know what one’s doing. Those aren’t big things but if you don’t know them it’s impossible to do anything. If we talk of those superior to me, perhaps my boss isn’t the best with these things, but we have performance appraisals and during them I’m given objectives. And I might receive other tasks from the top management team, so yeah, I would say that I get stuff directly enough. And for me, it has never been a problem to ask. (Respondent X)

I think that when it comes to being on the personnel’s side or the company's side, you can’t be on either one, you have to try to balance. But when it comes to my own values, I think if I had a boss that would be a lot more active and do follow-ups, a boss that would be more focused on costs and require that you do certain changes to save a euro here and there, I think there would be many more conflict situations. But now I don’t have that, I don’t get a lot... I’m quite free to do what I want, so... (Respondent X)
Yes there are expectations. Quite a lot of efforts are put on the employee supervisors, such as education seminars and such. I think we have many occasions where it’s emphasized that it’s in particular we, the employee supervisors, that have a key role in motivating. It’s not the department managers that can motivate the personnel in the same way, it’s us, and a lot of focus is put on that and... Well... That’s sort of what I find is conflicting with the fact that performance isn’t measured, I have a little problem with that. When it’s emphasized so much I think it should be in their interest to measure performance. If it’s so important they should make sure they have the right people in the right spots. (Respondent X)

Sometimes I can think that those below me perhaps not completely realize the reality. The guy who hires people, I can reckon that he is a bit... Or, that he sees... Or, if we think of packing. He has to hedge himself and see that they have enough personnel there. But he might get a bit unstinted with that, overdo it. And that’s a dilemma. Then you have to try to explain facts, that perhaps we could do with less employees. [...] Let’s say that it’s hard to get the employee supervisors to understand this and to think more about this. And that’s a discussion I don’t stand for at all. I mean, it could be that he simply doesn’t understand, and then the question inevitably comes whether he can continue. But then you have to bring up the question of what is expected of him again. Ask him if he’s on board or not. And if he isn’t you have to think of whether he’s in the right place or not. And this is something that causes troubles if you’ve worked for a few years already with something and then the expectations change within the role, for him there’s come a new superior two years ago. Perhaps that’s what’s changed. But you just have to inform about what’s changed and why. (Respondent X)

I don’t lay awake in the night thinking of these things. Perhaps it’s come with the age, that you realize you don’t have to solve all problems at once. And you can’t get blind for the fact that through change people many times find a role or a job that they are more content with and that suits them better than just continuing in their old role year after year, I’ve seen it many times throughout the years. But you have to check a little bit, it’s different from case to case. (Respondent X)

[...] They (the rest of the company) don’t know what we are doing here. They have no clue about our work here, they don’t know this work. If you tell them that we have done 1700 analysis in January-February, it tells absolutely nothing to anyone. I can’t seek help from... You know... I’ve had to take decision on my own. Sometimes that’s good, I’m quite free. But in the meantime it feels like it would be good to have someone to reflect and discuss with. So I’ve discussed with others, outside the company, what they do and how they do it... So in a way I’ve taken quite much support from outside the house and sought contact. You know, it used to be very confidential, that you weren’t allowed to discuss anything. But it’s changed, it’s changed many years ago. (Respondent X)

There’s informal communication to some degree here. I’ve been here for a long time and I’ve learned to read these people. If we talk about the culture, I would say that when the top management team is dissatisfied with something, for instance, my boss would have great difficulties with letting me know. It comes as a hidden message. They don’t say that this should be better handled, it comes indirectly. You’d hope that it’d come directly, I’m used to going straight forward to the point. Here that’s taken personally. They are too careful with what they say so that no one would get hurt or take it personally. You can notice it when you talk about goals, they are not given out directly. But I tend to ask “Is this what you mean?” (Respondent X)

It gets hard as well, because you’re sort of a funnel in which they spill. But if you can trust that you do your best and when you receive feedback or succeed –that’s what you should build on and try to do your best, in the end it will work out. If you see everything as a big wholesome of others and as something you can’t get a grip of, then it’ll become heavy. Then you’re close to a burnout. (Respondent X)

[...] Now I have a boss that gives me really much freedom, we have performance appraisals once a year and then of course, we discuss almost every week, but still... He doesn’t give me tasks, like do this and then check on them. He’s painting a broad picture of something, like try to run this cost efficiently and try to produce as high a delivery safety as possible. And you know, that’s as broad as it can be. But an active boss could as well check and ask for follow ups, see how it’s going and so on... I believe that my boss trusts me, absolutely, but then again, we have so different personalities. Consequently, my boss is absolutely not social minded. He’s not comfortable with that kind of discussions, he’s really uncomfortable with that, with conflicts and
all that. So it’s not laxity, but he’s really uncomfortable with that. I do think he trusts me, that I think, but unfortunately I’m not sure of it, but I believe so. (Respondent X)

It happens that I get information that I can’t forward higher up although perhaps I should. It’s different from case to case, but now I have a boss who doesn’t want to know about these things. He doesn’t want to know about these things, he wants me to know them and fix them. So in that sense it’s quite easy. And it wouldn’t… He’s not this wall I can bandy with, I wouldn’t win anything by telling him, it wouldn’t give me anything. (Respondent X)

In general terms my employees expect me to be available if they have a problem or need something. And they expect me to be fair. Well, mostly it’s those things. And also that I’ll ensure that they can do their job and really solve problems that arise. But then you also notice that some expect that you should be sort of a psychologist. Don’t misunderstand me now, it’s about the first contact. We have some people whom had personal problems, how to put it, not psychological problems but problems in life, with their family, and so on... And some would never say a word to me, perhaps they would to a psychologist and they might ask me to book a time for them, because we do hire a psychologist regularly. But some do talk with me two or three times about stuff they actually should speak about to a psychologist before they take the step to talk with a professional. I think that when these discussions come I definitely have to take them, but it’s not a confidence I try to build in any way. I don’t think it’s a part of my job to take them. I think fairness is the most important thing, also for the personnel, and you see that in the well-being surveys too. If there’s something they find unfair, then we have a crisis. And it happens a lot that they come to me with problems and then you’d sort of want to give them certain benefits, sometimes you have to. For instance, you might want to let them work only day time for some time because they don’t have energy to work in the night shift. And that’s easy for me to defend if I’ve received a recommendation from the employee healthcare. I can’t just say that this person is going through a difficult time and therefore we have to do this way. So there’s a conflict regarding this professional secrecy, in combination with being fair to all. It becomes a conflict really many times, I really think so. I can’t say why some people are given certain benefits, but I can say that I’ve received recommendations from the employee healthcare. That’s an easy way to say it and get everybody to understand. I try to avoid taking that kind of decisions as long as possible because I have to be able to defend my decisions and I can’t do it due to the professional secrecy... (Respondent X)

**Norms**

I’ve worked quite much with knocking ideas around; finding different alternatives and scenarios that perhaps been set in stone previously and I’ve discussed quite much with those under me if there’s alternative ways we could work. But then there might be some insecurity whether they trust my calculations and whether the calculations match their experiences. But then you have to try to sort it out and make them believe. And I think like this; even if we weren’t implementing these changes it’s a good brain gymnastics for them, to see that there are alternative ways to how we do today. Everything doesn’t have to be like it always has. (Respondent 7)

We have our mission about treating people as you’d like to be treated yourself. So yes, there are norms. And when it comes to me... When I was an ordinary employee I used to use quite a rough language. I was a part of this existing jargon on the floor and was quiet direct. And that’s been perceived in quite a negative way, regarding me, and there’s been this opinion that I’m not leader material, not with that attitude... So when I became a manager, first as a first line supervisor, I needed to think of what I’m doing and consciously try to change my manners. But in the meantime I think that it’s required that you’re not too soft, especially in a department that consists of individuals with a strong will of their own and with strong characters. (Respondent 10)

I’ve found a perhaps different method than my predecessors; I sit more by my desk and calculate which things would be possible for us. My predecessor perhaps looked more on the personalities and led in that way, and I’m sure that works too, but he’s working style was that when it was really busy he went down himself and helped with the work. I don’t do that, I haven’t chosen that style. I can go down there and help, but that’s not how you’re supposed to help, it’s not how it’s supposed to work. So in that way I’ve found my own style with calculating and analyzing. (Respondent X)
I guess there are norms and sometimes it can be difficult to know what the rules are and what you’re expected to do. Sometimes I find it hard to know, because sometimes it can be here that it’s decided that we’ll do something in a certain way, and then it’s done in a completely different way. Sometimes that disturbs me. Because I am more like a person who wants rules and I’d like to follow those rules and I’d want others to follow them too. There was an incident many years ago when I said to my employees that now we have to do this way because it was agreed like this on a meeting, that we would do this way. This thing was about which calendar days employees could take out some free days. And then we ended up in a situation where they asked me why people in other departments are allowed to do it in another way. What do you answer to that? I really don’t like that, it was quite awkward. (Respondent X)

**Behavior**

Perhaps I trust myself too much. In the end it is I who directs my work. Perhaps this is one of the things I should work on most, to listen more to others. In my daily work I have most contact with the employee supervisors and we make decisions together. Let’s put it like this; in my current role it’s more important to listen although that’s not really suitable for my personality. I’ve sort of had to learn that. (Respondent 1)

I have recently taken a self-development course, and I experience that I received a lot of support with coaching therefrom. It was a leadership and management education, and also, how to lead yourself. I took it two years ago and it included regular coaching, it has been very helpful. (Respondent 2)

You need to have an ego image or a confidence to lean back on. If you would accept and take on everything I think it would get tough. (Respondent 3)

Sometimes I feel helpless, or you could feel that way. But my philosophy is sort of like a bookshelf. When you take a book out you work with it and when you’re done you put the book back. I can have three or four work tasks similarly, but not more than that. And when you put the book back into the shelf, it’s still there, but I don’t think of it anymore. Because if you start working on 100 or 300 things at the same time it just doesn’t work. I wouldn’t have any brain left afterwards. I work with one task at the time although there are many tasks. (Respondent 3)

It is all about not being afraid to ask. You can get support and help from the top, down, and the sides, as long as you’re not afraid. You can’t be afraid. You’ll get support if you ask for it. You have to dare to show that you can’t do something, you have to dare to be weak. (Respondent 4)

I’ve built up my own net, I have a few persons in the management team with whom I’ve built up a confidence. And then there’s my boss, he’s always there to bandy with. (Respondent 5)

It is granted that you constantly snap up stuff in discussions. For instance how the company’s doing at the moment, what other departments do, what they are currently striving for - and then you understand that that’s where we’re going. Then I’ve also participated in strategy days and there you get this basic strategy and you sort of understand that this is what you’re supposed to do, you take little pieces of it to yourself. Perhaps you don’t get to hear directly what your department’s expected to do, but you hear about in which direction the company as a whole is going and can build your own strategy based on that. So... I guess that I’ve written my own work description, so I don’t get it from there... I can’t say that I get these things delivered in a mail, that this year you should focus on these things. Usually I put down stuff myself and knock them around with my superior. To be served with a silver tray, that just doesn’t exist. It is really important to have this ability to snap up things, because we are not that good at communication that we would give each other an honest concept. And in addition to that, you have to take your own decisions, you can’t wait until somebody else takes that certain decision. (Respondent 5)

It was of course more difficult in the beginning to take decisions alone, but then again, I’ve never been afraid of taking decisions. You just have to test and see whether they work out, sort of. This job is one in which you are not liked every day, you might have to make a decision that something is not working, meaning that the employees have to do it all over again, from the beginning. But I have to always remember that safety comes first and that if we were to cause something, we would cause it to the entire company because of rumors that would spread. So that’s important too, that safety always comes first. You need to think of what they would print in the paper the next morning if you took the wrong decision... (Respondent 5)
[...] And it happens that I have to explain to my assistants and others that there’s information that I get from being a member of different groups, that I unfortunately can’t share. It might be information that I can share with them later or information that they don’t have any use of, they would just get worried by that information. And that’s where the difference lies, that a supervisor needs to be able to take these discussions that others perhaps don’t. But other than that, I think it works well being friends anyway. It does happen quite a lot that they complain that they don’t get enough information. And then you can conclude that “Okay, but that’s information you don’t need”. I provide the information I know is necessary for them to have in their jobs, but some things are classified information and things they don’t need to know of. (Respondent 5)

I do go down to the unit, it’s always the first thing I do in the morning; to change my clothes and go down for a tour. I go there to say good morning and check that everything’s okay. But as I said, I’m not there the whole day, perhaps one or two hours per day. (Respondent 8)

You have to meet different people in different ways. I treat calm and kind persons equally back, and if there’s somebody storming in loudly shouting I might behave the same way myself. (Respondent 10)

What’s special with this organization is that in general it’s not as clear as I’ve tried to make it. It’s more like, when you start here, I tend to say that you get a bunch of elastics, all of them representing a person or a department. But nobody tells you which elastics you need to pull to get a change actualized, you have to find out by yourself that in order to implement this change I need to pull all of these certain elastics and nobody can be forgotten, because then the change won’t work. So it’s sort of, how should I put it, unstructured, it’s a very flat and wide organization. And it works well when you know the organization and know that to get this done, I need to talk to this and that person. But if I forget someone it won’t work. It has been like this, but it’s slowly becoming better. And when you’ve worked here for a while there’s no problem, because then you already know of this. You need to have contacts. Because it’s precisely like that. When the organization is so flat and wide you need to have contacts in many directions to get something done. There’s no clear structure. In a linear organization it should be enough that you talk to the person responsible and then he will take it forward, but here you have to talk with everybody concerned. (Respondent X)

**Theme 5: Role ambiguity and conflict**

It does of course happen all sort of things in an organization as large as this one and with this personnel. It’s always my role to deal with that and therefore I’ve been given the nickname of Bad-XXXXX (the respondent’s first name). If someone’s done something bad they end up discussing with me. I’ve been talking with my wife about this, that it of course belongs to my job, but that I don’t like it. It feels bad to take that discussion every single time. Let’s say for instance that someone wants more responsibility and you have to crash their dreams and say that they don’t have what it takes. It belongs to my role due to the employee supervisors deferring it to me, it’s a negative thing that I don’t like. But I guess someone has to do that, but I’d rather give it to someone else. (Respondent 1)

There have of course been different situations throughout the years in which the role has felt unclear or contradictory, mostly due to a change or a growth face. But these days I don’t really feel that way anymore. Perhaps earlier when my role’s been smaller I’ve perhaps had problems with authorities due to my own role being small but my opinions being strong. I’ve sort of run over the superior and in that way my role has grown, perhaps... But that’s when the conflict was bigger, perhaps. Nowadays I feel that my role is clear. (Respondent 1)

When it comes to difficult situations, for instance with the personnel, open communication is usually the solution. I deal with stuff immediately and using common sense is allowed as well, it takes you quite far also in these matters. I don’t experience these things as a burden, I know they’re a part of my job and the expectation is that matters get solved. It’s sort of about taking care of things immediately and wiping the table, I guess that’s my way of dealing with these things. Fruitless speculating and turning things over, I skip that face. Usually when people talk about contradictory situations they talk about creating good relationships with the subordinates, but you need to remember that the same thing goes for superiors as well. You expect that they’ll tell you when there’s something you should hear. But you need to remember that if something’s not working you have to take that role yourself, you have to go and ask them what they expect of you. Open communication, that way it becomes clear to the superior as well. (Respondent 1)
When it’s tougher times contradictory expectations might get worse for a guy like me that leads with the style of giving away lots of responsibility and campaigning for development of the processes. I mean, when it comes to investments and suggestions by the production department... So when the employees do come with suggestions of how to develop processes and when they have many ideas, and I have to realize that “No sorry, it’s not doable. We don’t have any money.” -here I see a conflict... They have expectations, me solving problems, they come with expectations and the top management says that this is the budget and its nothing more than precisely this. I do get into these situations, and they’re perhaps the most conflicting situations that I get into. (Respondent 2)

I’d like to get more time for development and less time for running errands. I feel that takes too much out of me. But it’s probably possible to find that. It would make it easier for me. (Respondent 3)

I experience that I’m quite alone, because all reading of laws falls solely on me and I’m not that interested in that. Although I send out messages to the organization, in the end it’s usually I who stand alone and my comments and opinions that I’m left with. (Respondent 4)

Sometimes my role can be unclear because I’m divided into so many different areas. Like, how much stake should I put on this, what’s expected of me, and what’s required of me... Because my responsibility is divided into so many areas I can’t do everything myself and I need to build teams that take care of it. And then it can be that someone in the organization expects me to do something that I’ve delegated to a team. Those things exist. And within the environment area, it’s about where the line between my role and the technical manager’s is. He’s more practical, knowing different things that make it work and I’m more the one looking after us following certain laws and receiving reports needed and also that we have a functioning reporting system. Within this area it can sometimes be difficult to know where the line between the different areas of responsibility lies. (Respondent 4)

In the end, a boss is a pageboy because a superior is the one who needs to ensure that their subordinates can perform their work tasks. If you realize this and see the role you have, you succeed with your subordinates. Then you don’t come from above and hit your subordinates down, instead you come from below and lift your subordinates up and get them to succeed. If you get your colleagues to succeed and make yourself unnecessary, then you’ve succeeded as a boss. That’s how I see it. (Respondent 4)

One important thing is to be able to listen and really listen in. Not just to listen, but to understand the message and be able to bring forward arguments that support the different things that come up in discussions. But the most important is to be able to listen, to find out what these persons or stakeholders in the end really want. And to use a method of five rounds; when somebody comes and says something, start asking questions and ask “why?” and really get to the bottom of it. Because if you do something based on the first demand, it might be that you do something that perhaps wasn’t best for the situation at hand. So you should ensure that the person coming with requests and expectations also gets to think through for himself what it is that he really wants. It could be that that person hasn’t really thought it through and comes to you in frustration and stress and states that he needs this and that, but when you go through it carefully it might show that there was something else hidden behind that request. (Respondent 4)

I won’t let difficulties affect me on a psychological level. I tend to say that without my horses and my leisure activities I wouldn’t be able to let go of the pressure. Usually when I’m out on a riding tour, I find solutions to problems. (Respondent 5)

Everybody should get themselves a sounding board. It’s perhaps the most important thing, having someone on the same level to knock around with, to see if you’re thinking right and acting right in a certain issue. And then I also believe you have to draw your own line. To decide how I think, myself, so that you’re always confident with your way of thinking and acting. But then of course, in some situations you need to discuss with the personnel and ask if something makes sense, if it’s worth doing in a certain way. And if you receive a task by the top management that you think doesn’t suit you it’s usually possible to discuss it as long as you have a reasonable explanation. So first you discuss with the personnel whether it’s possible to succeed with something that’s been suggested, and if you come to the conclusion that it’s not possible, then you discuss with the top management if that thing can be different in some way for your department. (Respondent 5)
Sometimes you can judge that it’ll become very costly when it comes to hygiene requirements and various certificates that we have in this house for our department. And then you have to ask if they really think this makes sense. And then you get to hear either that the decision will be reformulated or that you’ll have to do it the original way. And then you just have to state that “Okay, let’s try this” even if you’ve been of a different opinion from the start. It’s usually about what different customers need and that we think the needs are ridiculous, but the top management might argue that this is a very important customer. And often it’s just about learning to understand why the customer wants something, why it’s that important, and then we need to find a solution to that. So I think communication is very important, it’s rare that you do not understand each other at all as long as you discuss. (Respondent 5)

Now we’ve tried with common management training for a couple of years, but perhaps it would be better if you got to choose in which ones you participate. That you would receive information about what’s being organized and then decide for yourself whether that’s something you need. Because some have worked here longer than others and I’m sure that affects your needs. And then we’ve finally received this superior manual. It’s been a weakness for a long time that the company has grown in different directions and that things have been done differently in different departments, but now we try to standardize it. Because it can be a little bit frustrating to hear that someone else is doing something differently as a superior. You’re like, "Okay, how should I do it?", so it’s quite important to have standardized rules. (Respondent 5)

Sometimes it can get pretty lonely because the employees can form a pretty tight group together, and you’re not really a part of that group. You’re outside of it. And I think you’re supposed to be outside of it, but sometimes it can feel a bit lonely. Yeah, indeed it does feel lonely. (Respondent 6)

Due to the fact that I don’t have a detailed target or work description in any way it’s quite much up to me how I interpret things and what I think about stuff. So it might be quite unclear what I’m expected to do and how I should function. It’s a burden sometimes, especially if we talk about changing the working hours for the entire personnel. I know that can lead to big reactions and stuff, so it would feel very safe to have something to lean against and have somebody else deciding and so on, but then again, it’s a freedom as well. Especially when it comes to smaller decisions, then it’s just nice. (Respondent 8)

You shouldn’t be rancorous or stick and seize up stuff and overthink them, because then there’s a big risk you’ll fail. Because you have to deal with many things and sometimes you’ll need to give up on something and sometimes you’ll have to do stuff you don’t believe in. It’s a personality thing, if you’re a person that easily gets stuck and stay disappointed for a long time, well, that’s not a good quality. (Respondent 8)

Sometimes it can be that something’s burdening me on a psychological level, but very seldom. During these years it’s happened a few times, you hear something, that some changes are happening, and you actually hear it from the employees before you’ve got any information about it yourself. And I’ve pointed this out to my superior, that this information jargon is a bit weird. I don’t know how this can happen. It’s happened a few times and then you do get a bit frustrated. (Respondent 9)

Yes, it’s unclear how I should be as a manager, of course. Or actually, I don’t know, but there are certain situations when I feel that something’s too difficult or that it might feel unclear. Then I knock it around with my superior. The responsibility might burden me. Of course you might ponder from time to time, but in the meantime I think that this is a job and if I can’t do it they can replace me. And I’ve said that out aloud, that I’m not irreplaceable. I try to leave work at work, but it happens that you wake at night and think about how you should solve something… But I try to leave that at work. (Respondent 10)

I think it’s natural that someone’s always dissatisfied, because I know I can’t satisfy everybody. I’ve never really asked for a superior position, I received an offer and accepted it and I sort of take that as a meter, that other people perhaps think I’m a leader. (Respondent 10)

I think that the behavior changes a lot over time. In the beginning you had to search your place and you had no idea where you should be and who you should be. Sometimes you didn’t get invitations to meetings you were supposed to participate in and so on… It was, really, well… It’s quite hard to come in the way I did. [...] It was sort of like “Oh well, are you really gonna participate in employee supervisor meetings?”, it was like they didn’t count on me as an
employee supervisor. So yes, it was about elbowing forward in the beginning. But I solved it by starting to ask when these meetings were going to be held and if I’m not supposed to participate. Because information started to sip in through others to my employees, information I hadn’t heard of, from others. And then I started to think of how they can get to know things that I don’t even know and found out that the information had been distributed in an employee supervisor meeting in which I wasn’t invited to. (Respondent X)

I’d also like to talk about the leadership style and how the organization affects that. The company culture has to match the leadership style to some degree. I’ve been, I’m a bit different, I assume you’ll be interviewing others too and then you’ll see this. I’ve found a role that I think agrees with this organization anyway. I think it’s important for a company as well to try to see that it has different kinds of leaders. Sometimes it’s been too one-way here, that there’s a certain style that’s doing best. And those people that best fit into this culture of networks and working with contacts. But it’s gone towards the better direction, you can work as an analytical leader here as well. I do, however, think that my style would be more successful in another company. I think it’d be more appreciated. Anyway, I don’t experience any direct resistance towards me, it’s just that it’s a bit different. (Respondent X)