

Who are the middle managers

A semi-structured literature review

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The era of perpetual upheaval

Who are the middle managers

Methodology of the literature review and results

Dominant themes and findings

Conclusions and further research

References

The era of perpetual upheaval

Geopolitical shifts

Fractured world
Misinformation
Climate and
Sustainability

Economic shifts

Deregulation
Global competition
Efficiency pressure

Workforce shifts

Generations
Technology
Remote-working
Matrixed teams



Most organizations experience a form of radical change - a qualitative alteration of an organization's rules of organizing.

Middle managers' contradictory situation

Translate **strategy** into **action** and **outcomes** for their teams.

1

**Maintain business
continuity**

2

Implement change

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Who are the middle managers'

“Managers with access to top management, coupled with a very good knowledge of operations.”

One size doesn't fit all

- Org chart: Senior Function Head, Function Head, Senior Manager level I or II, Management level 1 or 2
- Access to top and operations: HR Business Partner, Customer Centricity Transformation Lead
- Field: dean and head of research departments in higher education, laboratory manager in healthcare, director of territorial government

(Steward & Thompson, 1990; Gjerde & Alvesson, 2020; Buick et al, 2017; Currie & Procter 2005)



The systemic impact on middle managers

History

- 1900 - mid 70s': the golden age
- 80s' - present: the struggle to stay relevant

Middle managers misbeliefs

- bureaucracy
- manipulation
- mediocrity
- resistance to change

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Methodology of the literature review

5066

Scopus* title + keywords + abstract:
'middle manager' OR 'middle
management' OR 'middle-manage*' OR
'middle-level manage'*

2639

English in the area of 'Business,
Management, and Accounting'

875

2018 - 2024

140

Abstract & conclusion content analysis

28

Seminal work and key themes
selection

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Steady interest in middle managers

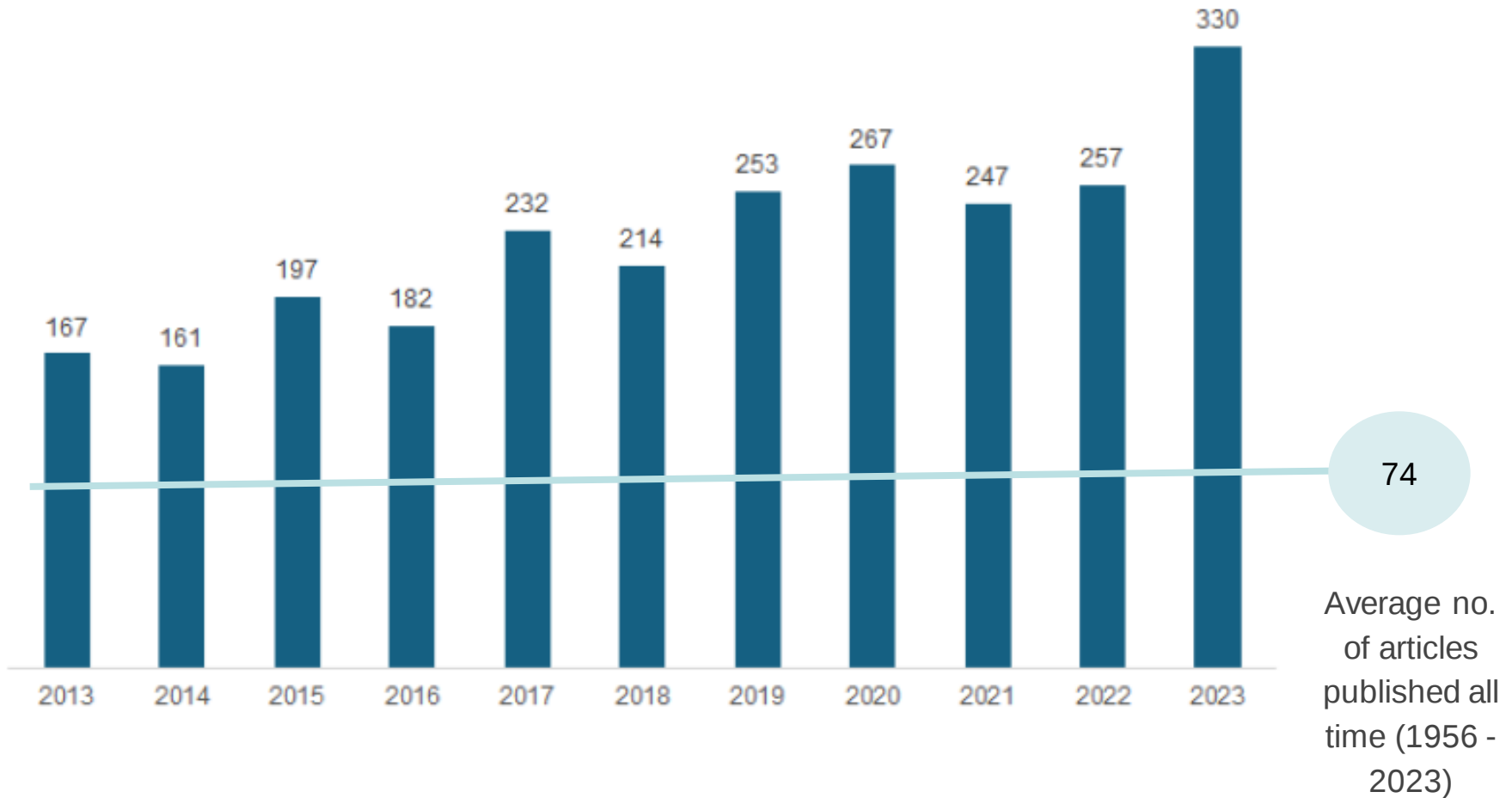


Figure 1. No. of articles evolution 2013 - 2023

Foundation of middle managers' perspective

Choice strategy perspective

Social learning strategy perspective

Premises

Strategy formulation and strategy implementation are two separate activities.

The separation between formulation and implementation creates an eronate differentiation on the strategy process.

Roles to strategy

Top management as central actor of strategy, play the key role as strategy thinkers.
Middle managers' contribution to strategy formulation is to provide information.

Multiple key actors, with middle managers mediating between hierarchies and functions.

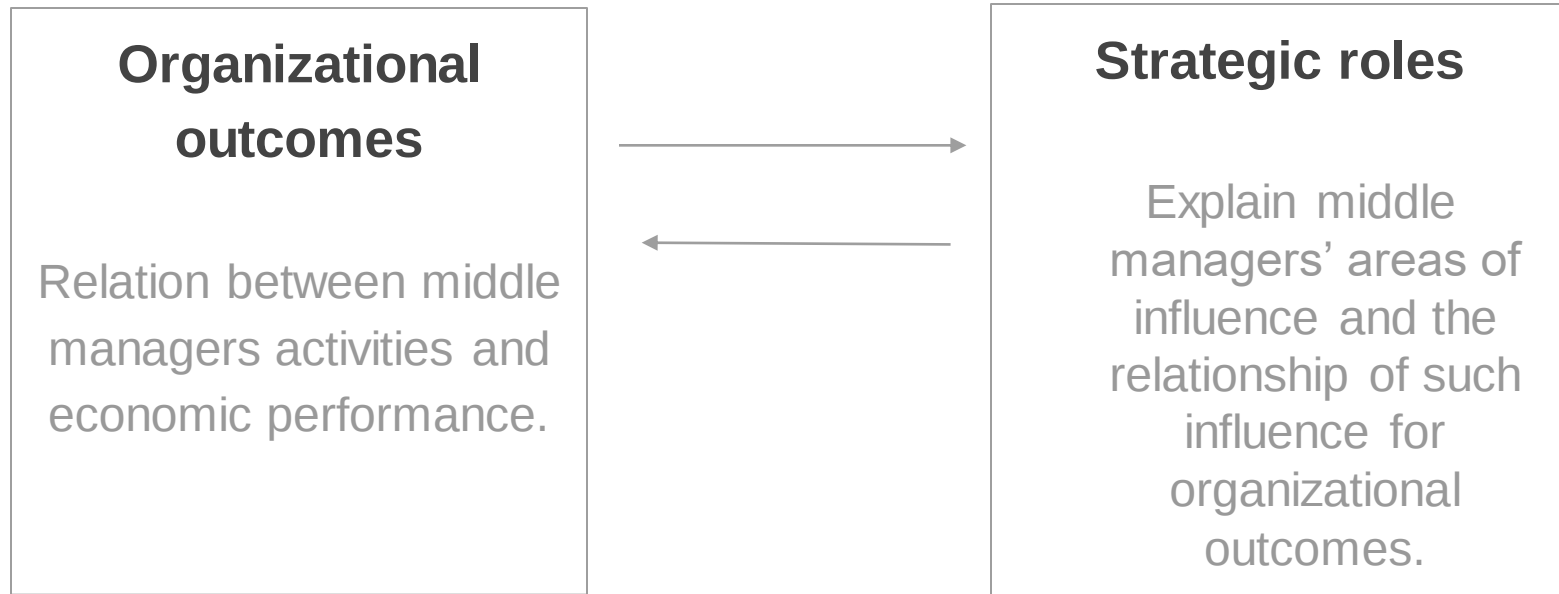
Main thinkers

Chandler (1962), Child (1972), Ansoff (1965), Andrews (1971), M. Porter (1980), Hambrick & Mason (1984)

Bower (1970), Kanter (1982), Mintzberg (1978), Mintzberg & Waters (1985) Schilit (1987)
Burgelman (1983)

Seminal work on middle managers

Steven W. Floyd and Bill Wooldridge (1990 & 1992)



Theoretical lenses

1

Role theory
Organizational
theory

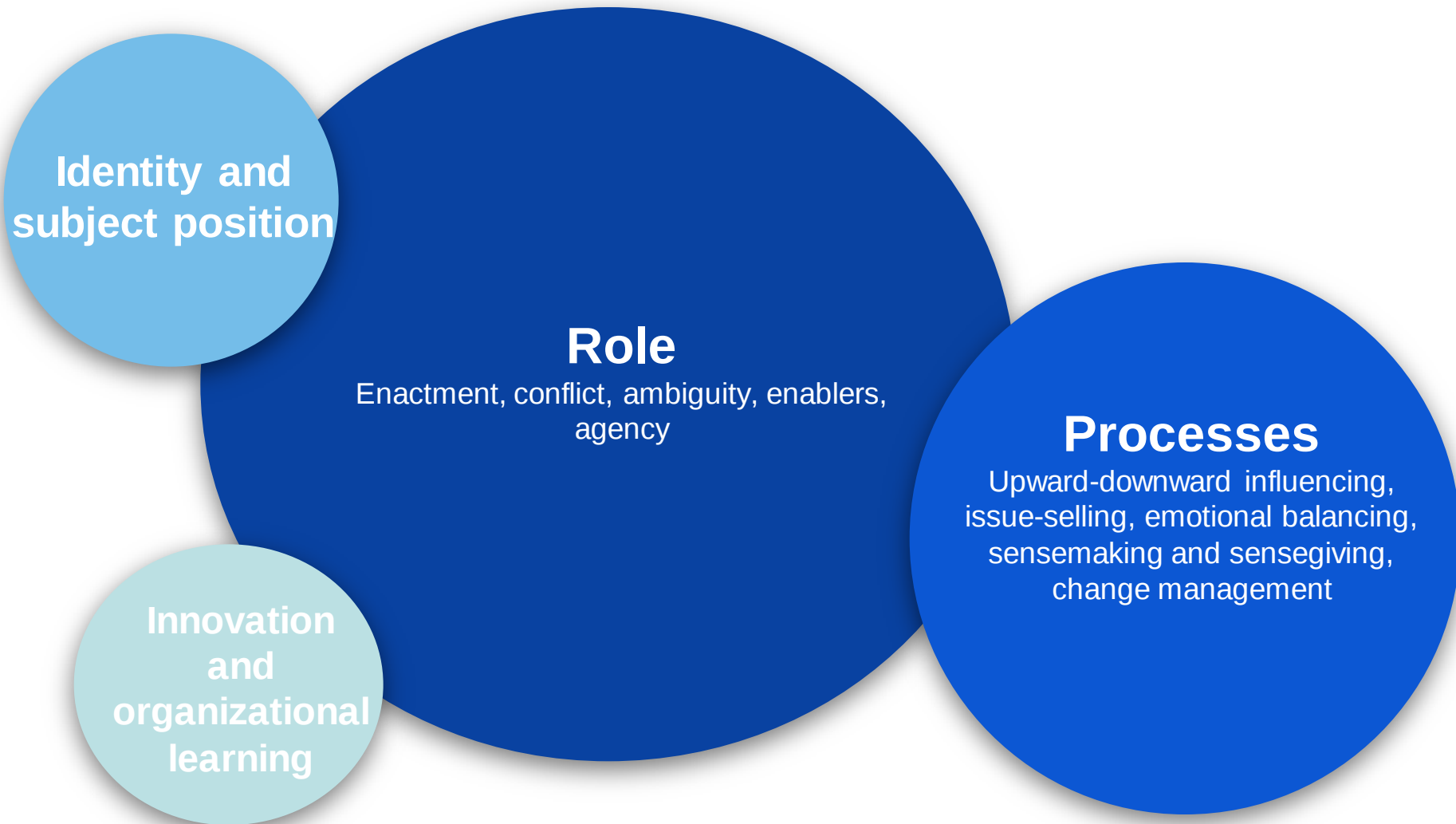
2

Sociological theory
Identity constitution
theory
Social identity
Behavioural theory
Relational demography
theory
Control and resistance
theories

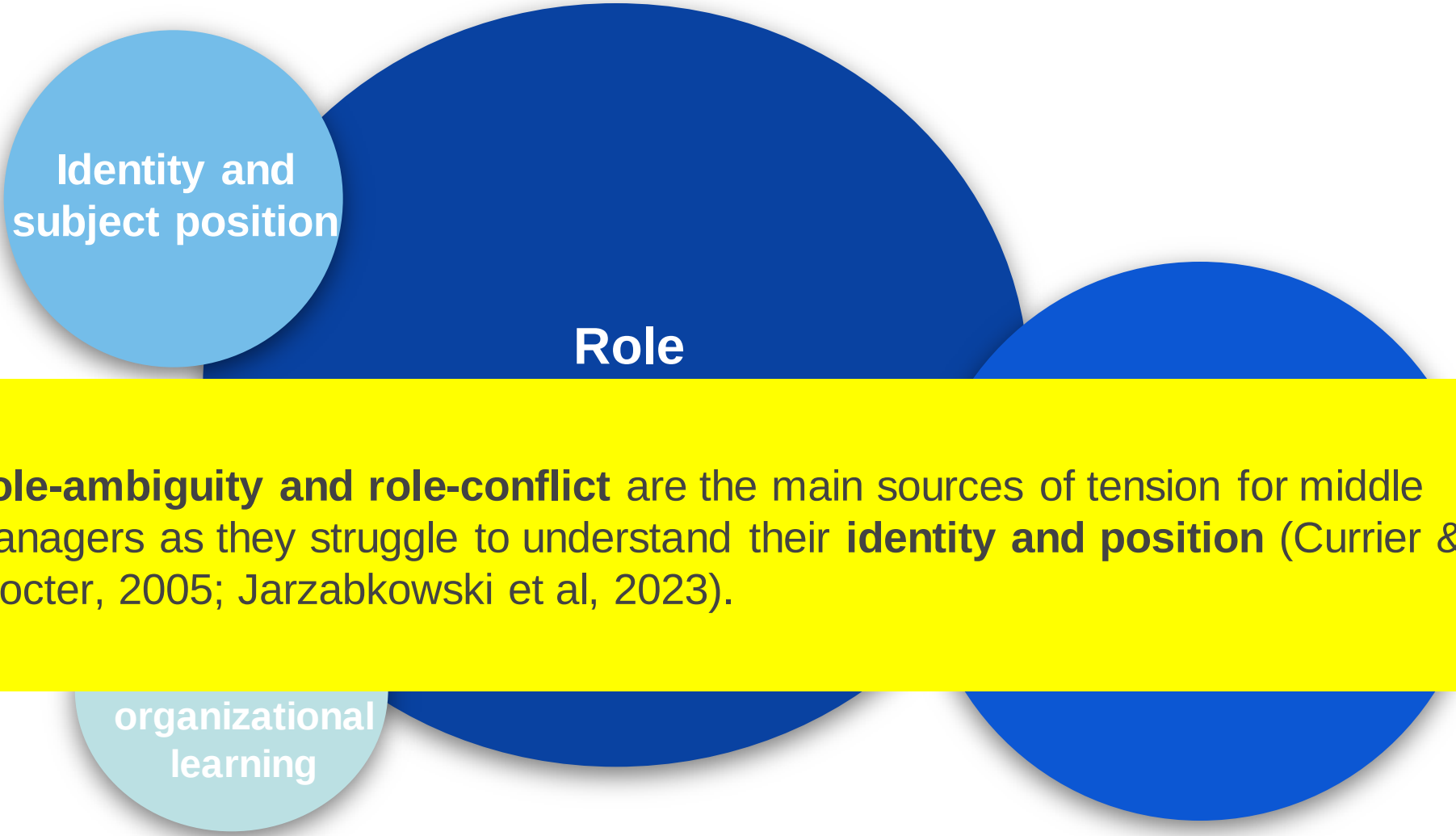
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Labour process
theory
Lean and mean
theory

Dominant themes



Dominant themes



Identity and
subject position

Role

organizational
learning

Role-ambiguity and role-conflict are the main sources of tension for middle managers as they struggle to understand their **identity and position** (Currier & Procter, 2005; Jarzabkowski et al, 2023).

Backbone framework of middle managers' roles

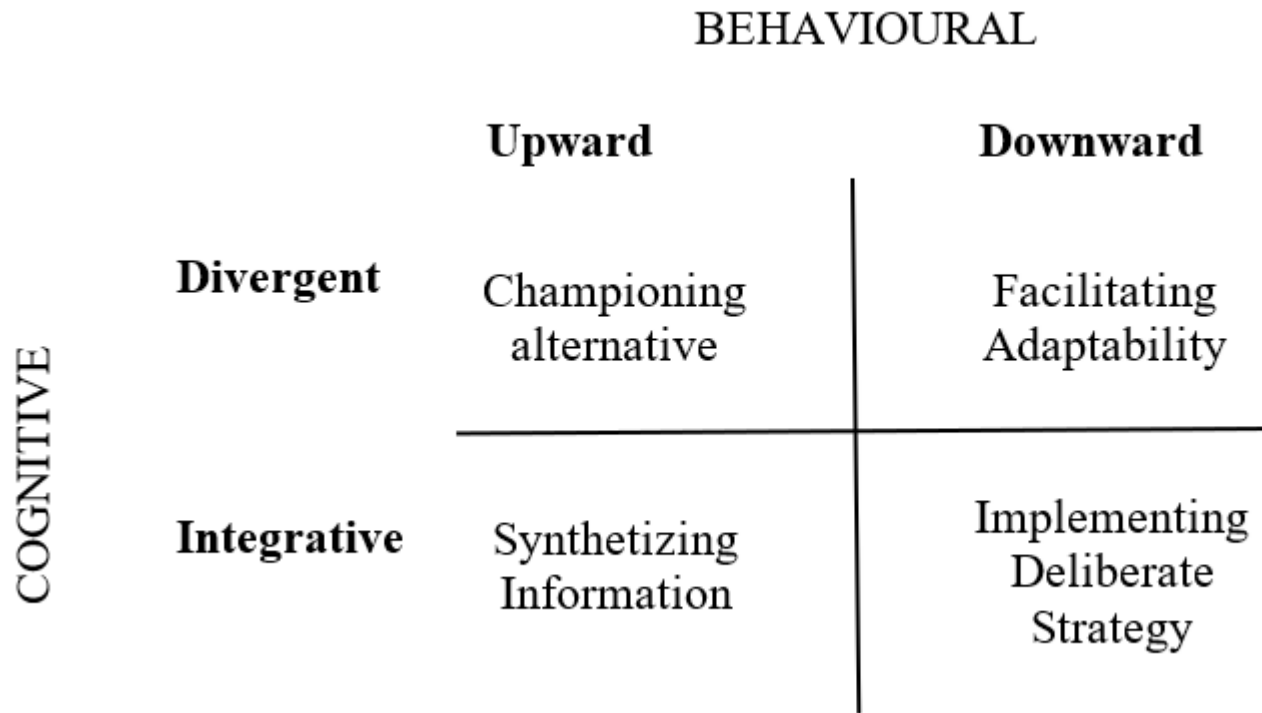
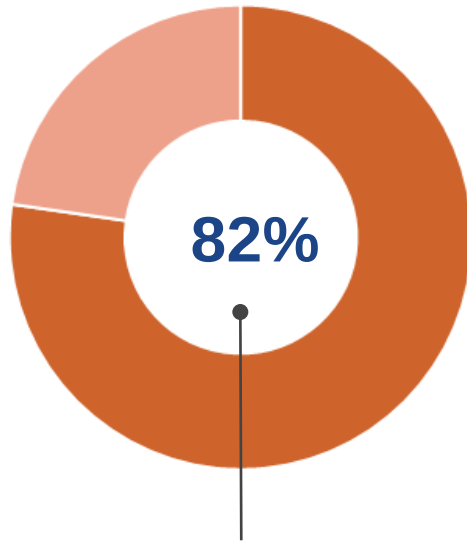


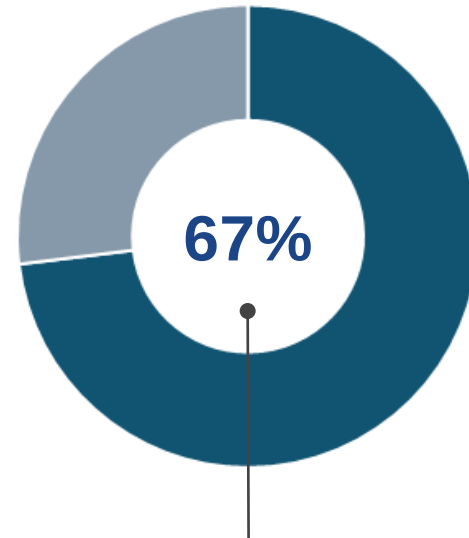
Figure 2. **Role matrix for middle managers**

(Wooldridge & Floyd, 1992; Mantere, 2008)

Middle managers' fragile position



Portrayed in **positive light**.
Negative traits include sabotage, delays, bias, opportunism and other ethical concerns (Wooldridge et al, 2008)



In a **bad state**, tensioned, miscast, lacking support and psychological safety. Empirical studies such as Hassard & Morris (2008) show also a tonic, resourceful profile.

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Current state on middle managers contribution

- ✓ intermediary in shared strategic understanding and commitment
- ✓ strategic change
- ✓ organizational learning
- ✓ capability building
- ✓ better strategic decision making
- ✗ the relationship leading to economic performance

Opportunities for further research

- ➡ Prove impact on organizational outcomes
- ➡ Update understanding of roles in the digital era
- ➡ Connect roles with systemic changes
- ➡ Recognize middle managers' diversity
- ➡ Purpose-driven understanding

Thank you

Mulțumesc

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