Public Administration in Ethiopia

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Strategic Contribution of Middle Managers in the Ethiopian Civil Service Organization

Alebachew Asfaw Yimer

Box 1: Key conclusions

- Middle managers in the Ethiopian civil service context are managers who are placed between the top layers of executives (heads and deputies) and the operating staff (supervisory level managers and frontline workers) in the organization.
- Middle managers presently contribute a great deal in the overall strategic management of civil service organizations.
- The key role middle managers play in the Ethiopian civil service falls in the fourth quadrant of the competing value framework (CVF), where an emphasis is given to facilitation and mentoring activities.
- Middle managers serve as an information hub in the organization due their unique place in the organizational hierarchy.
- Middle managers manage both human and physical resources to achieve organizational objectives.

Box 2: Middle managers’ contribution in organizations

Reading this chapter will give insights in:

- defining middle managers in civil service organizations;
- articulating the strategic contributions of middle managers in the Ethiopian civil service at present;
- understanding the competing roles middle managers play in Ethiopian politic-administrative contexts.

Box 3: Abbreviations used in this chapter

CSOs = Civil Service Organizations
CHANFOC = Change Focused
CVF = Competing Value Framework
1. Introduction

Middle managers (MMs) occupy a unique position that enables them to mediate between an organization’s top-level executives and lower-level employees. They are responsible for planning, coordinating, leading, and controlling staff and other resources in the execution of tasks. Recent literature in the field (Balogun, 2003; Balogun & Johnson, 2004; Huy, 2001; Kaiser, Craig, Overfield, & Yarborough, 2011; Mintzberg, 2009; Wooldridge, Schmid, & Floyd, 2008) asserts that middle managers are active in the entire strategy process of organizations, from formulation to implementation and evaluation. Yet, there are also scholars like Kealy (2013) who consider middle managers as order recipients from the organization’s leadership. This topic is an uncharted area in the Ethiopian public sector case. Consequently, this chapter aims at contributing to the understanding of middle managers’ strategic contributions in civil service organizations in Ethiopia. A document review on how the civil service works toward strategy development and execution was conducted. The theoretical foundation used in analyzing the strategic roles middle managers play in the Ethiopian civil service was the competing value framework (CVF) initially developed by Quinn, Faerman, Thompson, and McGrath (2003) in the 1980s. 368 middle managers and 12 senior officials participated in this research project. This study contributes toward the scant literature regarding middle managers in the Ethiopian context.

2. The Problem

Significant work in the area of public managers has been made across the globe; yet, there is a paucity of literature concerning middle managers in relation to the Ethiopian context (Mitiku, Hondeghem, & Troupin, 2017). In addition to this, researches of public management are more focused on senior public managers engaged in political decision-making than those working to interface decisions with actions in the public sector (Kellerman & Webster, 2001).

The government of Ethiopia has introduced various change initiatives to ensure efficient and effective service delivery. The BPR, BSC, Kaizen, Citizen’s
Charter, Change Army, and similar other outside-tested tools have been introduced in this respect (Araya, 2019; Ethiopian Civil Service University, 2016). BPR was used to reorganize government institutions in early 2000, while the introduction of BSC was an immediate follow-up to the BPR. Kaizen was also introduced in many of the state-owned enterprises to reduce waste and improve efficiency. The application of the Change Army concept was a recent effort by the government in building teams at the organizational level to streamline efforts by the different actors, including the public (Araya, 2019). Although middle managers are the center in all these initiatives, no special attention was given to them. Little was done to learn about their influence in the change process.

Examining the Ethiopian civil service, this study highlights the strategic engagement of middle managers in general and their inclination at present in executing their tasks in particular. The study utilizes the competing value framework (CVF) to conceptualize the current experiences of organizations’ middle managers.

Professional middle managers play a vital role in connecting the entire workforce with the top executives of the civil service. That is why it is important to deal with the definition, roles, and responsibilities of middle-level public managers in civil service organizations at present. We rely on a literature review, observations of practical situations, and findings from interviews to arrive at a clear framework describing middle managers in the Ethiopian civil service. This research set out to explore who middle managers are in civil service organizations and identify the most dominant roles they are playing at present. Through the use of cross-sectional data, this chapter examines the following two research questions:

1. Who are the middle managers in the Ethiopian civil service?
2. What managerial roles are most emphasized by middle managers in Ethiopian civil services at present?

3. **Review of Literature**

3.1. **Managerial Jobs in the Public Sector**

Managers are individuals responsible for the work of other people (Drucker, 2008; McIntosh & Luecke, 2010) to achieve an organization’s objectives. Managers are expected to be rational (Clegg, Kornberger, & Pitsis, 2015) and predictable by making sense of things around them. They are expected to demonstrate a steady focus in times of confusion, ambiguity, and puzzle by making sense of their environment (Clegg et al., 2015; Weick, 1995). Being the representative of
their organization, managers interact with different stakeholders from within and outside the organization. Stakeholders’ need for information, assistance, direction, and authorization requires the attention organization managers (Yukl, 2010). The degree of managerial activities, skills required, and roles played are different at different hierarchal levels (Hales & Mustapha, 2000). Managers influence systems, conditions, and environments as they strive for success in their unit or organization. Consequently, the functions of management carried out by managers depend on the hierarchical level, functional specialization, and jobs given to them at a given time (Hales & Mustapha, 2000).

Managers engage in a variety of activities that are brief in duration, fragmented, and varied in nature (Mintzberg, 1971, 2009). They encounter frequent interruptions (Daft, 2008; Mintzberg, 2009; Yukl, 2010). Due to the voluminous and fragmented nature of activities and an overload of trivial activities, managers devote little time to reflective planning (Daft, 2008; Mintzberg, 2009; Yukl, 2010). Public managers differentiate among issues to be resolved based on pressure from subordinates, superiors, peers, staff, and people from government agencies (HBR, 2011; Yukl, 2010).

Managerial work is defined by the functions of management, such as planning, staffing, coordinating, supervising, negotiating, representing, and evaluating (Mahoney, Jerdee & Carroll, as cited in Allan, 1981). For Mintzberg (1990), managerial work involves performing regular duties that link the organization with its external environment. Exploring managerial work carried out by public managers in city governments, Allan (1981) found that they are highly engaged in task dimensions that include supervision of employees, harmonizing or integrating work activities, information handling, analyzing and evaluating, change-initiating, and monitoring regardless of title or agency.

Managers play different roles in organizations, from showing how to operate a machine to making decisions about where to invest scarce company resources. Clegg et al. (2015) concludes that managers’ jobs:

… involve interpreting, understanding, directing, cajoling, communicating, leading, empowering, training, politicking, negotiating, enthusing, encouraging, focusing, explaining, excusing, obfuscating, communicating – a job full of action words that are all to do with the manager as a speaking subject, a person who manages to shape and express directions, in writing and in speech. (Clegg et al., 2015:9)

Using an importance rating, Kraut, Pedigo, McKenna, and Dunnette (1989) conducted research to find out the difference in managerial roles and activities across different levels and functions in organizations. Based on their research,
they identified seven major factors or groups of management tasks, including:
managing individual performance, instructing subordinates, planning and
allocating resources, coordinating interdependent groups, managing group
performance, monitoring the business environment, and representing one’s
staff. Therefore, managerial work in an organization is full of activities that
are not as limited to specific engagement as one would think.

3.2. Strategy Process and Public Managers

Public managers formulate and execute strategies with many actors, including
elected officials, legislative bodies, the courts, interest groups, the media, and
the general public (Feldman, 1980; Nutt & Backoff, 1995). Consequently,
public managers have constrained capacity over different issues in formulating
and executing government strategies. Though constrained by internal and
external factors, public managers are expected to work and deliver results
for their organization. Public managers execute a plan with scarce resources,
pressures from within and outside the organization, and poorly coordinated
teams. Weak cross-functional cooperation, time pressures, the poorly defined
nature of tasks, and lack of incentive and support from above add to the
challenge they face in their journey (Noble, 1999a).

Strategy development in the public sector must consider government poli
cies, direction and objectives based on its place in the governance structure.
The institutional mission or purpose and basic goals of public organizations
are determined externally by the legislature and hence, the freedom of public
managers in setting goals, amending missions, or adjusting the methods is
far less than that of their private sector counterparts (Tompkins, 2005). The
growing complexity of societal demand for better goods and services (in
education, health, transportation, ecology, and other social services) is leading
governments to the introduction of various measures, including privatizing
firms, issuing laws on consultations to workers and citizens, and adding a
business flavor to publicly owned enterprises (Ansoff, 1990). In this regard,
public managers are contributing significantly to the strategy-making process
of organizations by linking endorsed policies with the daily operations of the
organization. Cascading goals, allocating resources among the different units,
formulating and implementing strategies that span individual work units and
providing leadership are the duties of public managers.

Execution is the other stage of the strategy process that is crucial in the
public sector. Many observers agree on the problem of executions rather than
planning in public organizations (Kaplan & Norton, 2001; Rajasekar, 2014;
Zagotta & Robinson, 2002). Execution is a disciplined process with a logical
set of connected activities that create a conducive platform for an organization to realize its strategy (Hrebiniak, 2005). It is a process of selecting the most appropriate organizational structure for the chosen strategy, support systems for resource allocation, suitable leadership, and control mechanisms for a smooth flow of operations (Alkhafaji, 2003). Implementing strategies requires going beyond rational decisions by public managers and incorporating calibration to the existing situations, which leads to what Mintzberg and Waters (1985) described as emergent strategies. It also requires focusing on business priority, cascading accountabilities, high-quality interactions, and ensured sustainability (Coon & Wolf, 2005).

Strategy execution takes place through the fabrics of the organizational architecture, including structure, policies, procedures, systems, incentives, and governance (Lussier & Achua, 2015). The ability to execute strategy flawlessly contributes to the success of organizations. However, there are formidable roadblocks or hurdles that get in the way of executing strategies (Hrebiniak, 2005). According to Hrebiniak (2005) and Noble (1999b) the major problems or hurdles affecting strategy implementation include the longer time frames needed for execution; the need for the involvement of many actors in the execution process; poor or vague strategy; conflicts with the organizational power structure; problems in cross-functional coordination; poor structure, including information sharing and coordination methods; unclear responsibility and accountability in the execution process; and capacity problems in managing change, including cultural change.

3.3. Understanding Managerial Roles at the Middle

**Defining Middle Managers in Organizations**

Middle management is a broad term (Carlson, as cited in Mintzberg, 2009) and so the subject of much confusion in organizations (Hassard, McCann, & Morris, 2009). Authors like Huy (2001) and Mintzberg (2009) define middle managers as any managers who are positioned two levels below the senior executives and one level above the frontline workers, including professionals. According to some scholars (Hassard et al., 2009), MMs are individuals currying favor from above and communicating top management’s orders down to the bottom ranks. For Kaplan and Norton (2001), middle managers implement programs based on orders from the senior managers. Middle managers (MMs) are managers who are found between the senior management that formulates strategy and the frontline supervisors and employees who implement it (Livian & Burgoyne, 1997; Mintzberg, 2009). Kay (as cited in Livian & Burgoyne, 1997) defined MMs as managers and technical
people found below the senior executives (presidents and vice presidents) who run businesses without a profit/loss responsibilities. Similarly, Breen (as cited in Livian & Burgoyne, 1997) also defined MMs as people who keep the wheel of business running through a multitude of small and continuous decisions. Dopson, Neumann, and Newell (as cited in Livian & Burgoyne, 1997) defined MMs as individuals who are placed below a few top strategic managers and above first-line supervisors in organizations.

In the case of public sectors, middle managers occupy the place between first-line supervisors and department heads in local government (Morgan, Bacon, Bunch, Cameron, & Deis, 1996), bureau heads in regional governments, and ministers and their deputies at the federal level. They receive directions and milestones from the top, communicate these to employees, and critically follow up progress in implementation. It is the duty of this level of management to observe signs and symptoms of deviation and to take measures accordingly (Livian & Burgoyne, 1997).

Middle managers need to interpret corporate goals and strategic objectives into daily actionable plans so that frontline employees engage in operation effectively (Balogun & Johnson, 2004). Similarly, they secure senior management attention through “issue-selling,” which creates an opportunity for them to exert influence upward in the organization hierarchy (Dutton & Ashford, as cited in Dutton, O’Neill, Hayes and Wierba, 1997). They serve as resource persons in strategy formulation and as key drivers in strategy implementation (Kuyvenhoven & Buss, 2011). They are important in connecting diverse work areas, serving as an interface between disconnected actors and an agent of change (Wooldridge et al., 2008).

Organizational performance is heavily influenced by what happens in the middle of the organization, rather than at the top (Currie & Procter, 2005). As most organizations are organized in multi-tier hierarchies, MMs who are found between the top executives and the frontline supervisors and employees play a critical role in realizing organizational objectives. Middle managers carry out a variety of tasks, serving as nodal officers who help coordinate different units. They have tacit knowledge about their organization, which can help in addressing issues of high importance in executing strategies. They coordinate, mediate, negotiate, interpret, and connect organizational objectives at the strategic level with operational units at the lower levels (Floyd & Wooldridge, 1997). They serve as the providers of information to the upper-level management and as the people who are responsible for exerting pressure on the frontline workers and supervisors.

Middle managers occupy a strategic position in an organization, which enables them to observe daily routines with challenges and opportunities.
They are always involved in reading the general environment for any opportunities or threats relevant to the organization (White, 2004). Due to this unique position, they easily recognize the need for change and influence perceptions around the organization – up, down and across the hierarchy – regarding the required change (Huy, 2001). Therefore, they are management groups that translate strategies into detailed plans and enable employees to make sense of the plan to achieve the business’s end result (Caye et al., 2010).

Having a better opportunity than others to understand the inner and outer environment of the organization, MMs are capable of detecting new ideas essential to the strategy (Dutton, Ashford, O’neill, Hayes, & Wierba, 1997). This task requires industry knowledge, working with others, and searching for current information. Implementation is more of the middle managers’ job in an organization, and with this task they take the lion’s share in completing the feedback loop in the system. During the implementation of a strategy, MMs are required to help others through the process, meeting the continuing operational demands of the business, and implementing required change in the system (Kuyvenhoven & Buss, 2011). Although strategy implementation brings many actors together, the middle managers have a strong influence on the way the lower-level actors interpret, adapt, and implement the designed strategy (Balogun, as cited in Kuyvenhoven & Buss; Hantang, 2005).

In general middle managers are indispensable in organizations, for three main reasons (Livian & Burgoyne, 1997). First, they serve as a lynchpin between the upper and the lower level, easing downward and upward communication in the strategy formulation and implementation process. Secondly, they help organizations in the articulation and transformation of organizational culture by aligning institutional and personal goals. The final reason for their importance lies in their role in matching jobs and individual action through experiential learning and their responsibility in dealing with a broad range of human resource issues within the organization. Hence, their managerial tasks are mainly integrative, focusing on cultural flexibility, experiential learning, and human resource management responsibility.

Managerial Roles at the Middle – The CVF Perspective
Named one of the forty most important frameworks in the history of business, the competing values framework (CVF) has been used in studying organization’s effectiveness, managerial leadership, culture, development need, and other features for more than thirty years (Cameron, Quinn, DeGraff, & Thakor, 2006; Have, Have, Stevens, Elst, & Pol-Coyne, 2003; Lindquist & Marcy, 2014). According to Cameron et al. (2006, p. 6), the CVF serves as “a map, an organizing mechanism, a sense-making device, a source of
new ideas, and a learning system.” The framework shows the relationship, contradictions, and complementary nature of organizational features that coexist in a system. In analyzing the role of managers in an organization, eight roles of managers were identified through this framework. These roles are identified as innovating, brokering, producing, directing, coordinating, monitoring, facilitating, and mentoring. According to Denison, Hooijberg, and Quinn (1995, p. 526), effective managers are “those who have the cognitive and behavioral complexity to respond appropriately to a wide range of situations that may, in fact, require contrary or opposing behaviors.” These roles are also designed in alignment with the four quadrants of organizational effectiveness models (Lindquist & Marcy, 2014; Quinn et al., 2003): the rational goal, internal process, human relations, and open system models.

The competing value framework (CVF) explains what makes managers effective in a paradoxical environment. Divided by two axes, each continuum between internal-external and flexibility-stability highlights an opposite value at the end of their range. The two axes form two-by-two tables (four quadrants). The four quadrants are labeled based on the orientation and relationships among the competing values that can arise in organizations. The first quadrant is called the “human relation model,” which results from internal orientation and flexibility in the framework. The human relation model emphasizes people who are working in organizations. Core values in this model include participation, conflict resolution, and consensus building in the workplace. The “open system” model is focused on leading change, which requires adaptability and external focus in an organization. In the “rational goal” model, executing results is important and maintaining a stable structure is considered as a significant factor in achieving results. The “internal process” model associates itself with the strength of the organization, which includes the quality of internal communications, rules, and procedures. This model is related to formal organizational structure and bureaucratic arrangement of work processes, including documentation, measurement, and management of information.

The competing value framework (CVF) is an appropriate framework in public organizations, as “there are certainly multiple values, different leadership and managerial styles, and considerable change and evolving challenges at play” (Lindquist & Marcy, 2014:7). It is an integrative approach to contradictory and paradoxical elements within organizations. The imperatives to be efficient, effective, and responsive on the one hand and being legal, ethical, and impartial on the other often contradict each other, while both are needed equally from managers in public institutions. The CVF is helpful in integrating important managerial leadership values and behaviors that seem
Table 1: Summary of managerial roles and their descriptions in the competing value framework

<table>
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<th>No.</th>
<th>Managerial Roles</th>
<th>Defining descriptions of the managerial roles</th>
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| 1   | Mentoring role (human relation quadrant) | – Relates to being considerate, helpful, sensitive, approachable, and open to followers  
- It is about empathy, credibility, and recognizing emotions in others (Clutterbuck & Megginson, 1999)                                                                                                                                                    |
| 2   | Facilitating role (human relation quadrant) | – Emphasis on managerial intention and action that foster collective effort, team spirits and morale in overcoming interpersonal conflicts (Quinn et al., 2003).  
- Enable managers to develop teams, ensure participative decision making, and apply conflict management skills in order to carry out the role effectively                                                                                     |
| 3   | Monitoring role (internal process quadrant) | – Controlling internal issues to ensure consistency and consolidate continuity  
- Seeking information to make a sound judgment regarding the organization                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| 4   | Coordinating role (internal process quadrant) | – Oversee routine work performances of subordinates and give due attention to tasks and projects, results, and people (DiPadova & Faerman, 1993)  
- Responsible for connecting the different individuals and work units  
- Emphasizes structures, including rules, policies, and procedures                                                                                                                                                                           |
| 5   | Directing role (rational goal quadrant) | – Relates to setting goals which reflect the vision and mission of the organization  
- Emphasis on providing direction and clarifying expectations to subordinates to achieve predetermined goals (DiPadova & Faerman, 1993)                                                                                                                                 |
| 6   | Producing role (rational goal quadrant) | – Reflected in the manager’s personal productivity, commitment, and empowerment  
- Relates to the motivation and encouragement of employees (DiPadova & Faerman, 1993)                                                                                                                                                                      |
| 7   | Brokering role (open system quadrant) | – Networking with the external environment to create a strategic alliance (Belasen, 1998)  
- Influencing subordinates through trust, expertise, social capital, and opportunity to command resources (Quinn et al., 2003).                                                                                                                                 |
| 8   | Innovating role (open system quadrant) | – Focusing on adaptability and responsiveness as important features in organization  
- Creatively deal with risk and uncertainty, envision needed changes, and help others adapt to the turbulent environment (Belasen, 1998)                                                                                                                                 |
opposed to each other. Managers as leaders are required to carry out different roles in achieving organizational goals while they are working with others. These responsibilities are not always compatible with one another and may put managers in paradoxical tensions. Consequently, such responsibilities demand that they wear different hats on different occasions. The CVF considers this tension and helps managers to reach their goal by creating a balance among the conflicting demands for managerial leadership in organizations. Accordingly, the eight managerial leadership roles incorporated in the CVF were used in this study, to help find out where Ethiopian MMs focus at work. A brief explanation of these roles is presented below in table 1.

The four quadrants forming the overall model in the CVF are essential, as they are simultaneous and complementary opposites (Quinn & Rohrbaugh, 1983). Therefore, overusing any of the managerial leadership traits is catastrophic, as focusing on some leads to marginalizing the others. Overusing the internal
process model (monitor and coordinator roles of managers) will result in maintaining the status quo. Too much focus on the human relation model (mentor and facilitator roles of managers) will lead to insufficient concern for productivity and goal accomplishment. Unchecked emphasis to change (focusing on innovator and broker roles) can lead to chaos. Therefore, managers are required to assess the dynamic environment regularly and play managerial roles in a balanced manner to accommodate conflicting demands in their organization. The four quadrants with the eight distinct managerial roles are presented in figure 1.

4. Methodology

4.1. Population and Sampling Design

This study focuses on the assessment of middle managers’ strategic contribution in civil service organizations. The research approach was nonexperimental, mixed, and descriptive. For the purpose of this study, middle managers (MMs) are defined as people working under the heads or deputy heads of organizations and managing other managers and/or employees in that same organization. Based on this definition, the study required a national representative sample to generalize finding related to MMs in the country. Collecting data from a widely dispersed population of MMs in the entire public sector in the country was not possible due to cost as well as time constraints. Therefore, sample data were collected from representative offices identified randomly.

To represent offices at various levels, civil service organizations were categorized based on the government’s mode of sectoral arrangements during the first half of 2018. 121 institutions were found at the federal level (Ministry of Public Service & Human Resource Development, 2015) and 21 were taken as a sample frame for the study. Educational institutions (like universities and colleges) and those engaged in medical care (like hospitals and health centers) were excluded from the sample due to the nature of their operations and administration. One regional state (Amhara), federal institutions (ministries and agencies), and a chartered city administration (Addis Ababa) were considered as appropriate for taking samples for this study. Though institutions at different levels follow one framework designed at the federal level, each level is mandated to craft their own procedures, manuals, and regulation based on their unique situation. Accordingly, proportional numbers of samples were included in the study to represent the clusters identified for this research.
4.2. Sample Size and Sampling Techniques

The sample size of quantitative data was calculated based on the total number of mid-level public sector managers in the federal, regional, and chartered city administration levels. For the purpose of this study, the Yemane sampling formula (as cited in Israel, 1992) was used to determine the appropriate sample size. Based on data acquired from the Ministry of Public Service & Human Resource Development (2015), the number of directorate and process owners (considered as middle managers in this study) was found to be around 4626. At a 95 percent confidence interval and with 0.05 margin of error, the sample size to be used was calculated as 368 MMs.

The population and sample size for the study were 4636 and 368 respectively. Proportional stratified sampling (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015) was used to apportion the total sample to each category in this study. Accordingly, the sample distribution for federal, regional, and city administrations were 125, 195, and 48 respectively. All 368 responses from middle managers were collected through strict follow-up and replacing missed participants in the process.

4.3. Characteristics of the Research Participants

Based on reviewed literature and existing practice in the civil service, middle managers in the Ethiopian civil service organizations are managers who are placed next to the politically appointed officials. As they assume their post through the merit system, middle managers are professionals in their work unit. Participants for the research were nominated using this definition, even though a variety of names and job titles are used in the civil service currently. With regard to individual middle manager characteristics, the majority of the study participants were young and adults below forty-five (65 percent), predominantly male (87 percent), and mostly from line departments (70 percent). According to the data, the gender gap at the middle management level was found to be significant. In terms of education, 50 percent of MMs held a BA degree, 48 percent held master’s degrees, and 2 percent were PhDs. In addition, participants were taken from various sectors to represent the civil service in the country, namely, the economic (34 percent), administrative and governance (29.3 percent), and social sectors (27 percent).

Interviewees were senior public officials who were supervising middle managers in civil service organizations. A total of twelve participants (one female) were included from the three locations for this study. Five officials were taken from Amhara region, four were from the federal institutions, and three were from Addis Ababa city administration. All senior managers
interviewed had attained the MA degree and worked as professionals in the civil service prior to their assignment in their current position.

4.4. Research Procedures and Measurement of Variables

The purpose of the study mainly was to explore the dominant role MMs play, in an effort describe their strategic engagement in the civil service organization. In the meantime, “who MMs are” in the civil service was assessed. Self-administered survey questions were used to collect information about managerial behaviors. Senior executives were interviewed on critical roles MMs play in organizations to triangulate the result from the survey. In addition to this, documents related to MMs’ engagement in the strategy process were reviewed in sampled institutions.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted and interview questions were directly linked to middle managers’ strategic engagement in organizations. The questions also include elements helpful for discerning the way senior officials defined MMs in the actual work setting. Accordingly, efforts were made to solicit the perceptions of senior managers on who middle managers are and how much they contribute to the overall strategic management of a civil service organization. Documents reviewed for this research include BPR and BSC documents from the Bureau of Civil Service and the Bureau of Finance and Economic Development in the Amhara region.

As use of standardized and widely used measures would help a researcher to save time and effort (Blankenship, 2010), avoid mistakes (Tharenou, Donohue, & Cooper, 2007), and enable findings to compare with earlier work in the field (Price & Mueller as cited in Hinkin, 1995), tested measures with amendment were used for this study. Consequently, indicators developed by Quinn et al. (2003) were used to assess the basic research question in this study.

As data collected for this study were mainly ordinal data in nature, special attention was given to the design and coding to fulfill the requirement of equidistance. Consequently, a 7-point Likert scale having a mid-point in the center and using linguistic qualifiers for each category was utilized to assess the responses from the research participants.

The eight managerial roles identified by Quinn et al. (2003) are considered for the purpose of this study. The four quadrants in the CVF are made up of two major dimensions in organizations. The first dimension is the vertical axis, which demonstrates the flexibility-control continuum indicating how much an organization emphasizes centralization and control over flexibility and change. The second dimension indicates the internal-external continuum demonstrating the degree to which the organization is oriented toward its
own internal issues as opposed to the external environment. Based on these premises, the CVF employs the human relation model, the open system model, the rational goal model, and the internal process model in the four major quadrants indicating the inclination of managers in organization. Considering the required behavioral needs of managers with respect to these four quadrants, the managerial roles in each quadrant were coined as change focused (CHANFOC), rule focused (RULFOC), production focused (PRODFOC), and human relation focused (HRFOC) in this study.

4.5. Data Analysis

The theoretical perspective of the competing value framework requires data analysis methods that would facilitate exploration of the most emphasized roles middle managers play in the civil service at present. This involved summarizing the quantitative data into categories to identify the roles middle managers play and the interviews with senior level officials about who middle managers are in their organizations. Quantitative data was analyzed using simple descriptive statistics, while qualitative data from the interviews was analyzed by aligning responses to predetermined themes. Analysis of qualitative data starts with transcribing the recorded documents. Transcripts were verified separately by the researcher to ensure accuracy and fill gaps that were found to be difficult by the stenographer during transcription.

Data obtained from the survey questionnaire on the demographic profile of participants was analyzed using descriptive statistics, including measures of mean, median, and standard deviation. Similar statistical analysis was used to identify dominant managerial roles played by MMs. Mean was calculated to understand what MMs on average think about their role in the civil service. The results from the quantitative data are also presented in a radar chart. Content analysis was used to analyze the data found through interviews. This was done using Microsoft Word and printed output from the interview transcripts.

5. Results

5.1. Who Are the Middle Managers in the Ethiopian Civil Service?

Based on the confirmation of all the research participants, an agreed upon definition of middle managers in the civil service is nonexistent. Consequently, senior officials’ perspective about who middle managers are and what they do in the civil service is reviewed in this research, mainly using interviews. In
the process, senior officials were asked to describe the various names given to middle managers in their organizations. They were also asked to give details on the various tasks (repetitive and occasional) middle managers perform in organization.

Senior officials mainly identified middle managers as directorate directors, process owners, and in some cases team leaders mostly working immediately under them. Research participants agree on the general pictures of middle managers, with very few differences between organizations. All those managers below the politically appointed officials are considered as middle managers in general. However, some officials in the civil service also consider professionals participating in the management committee as middle managers, even though these individuals do not have any managerial responsibilities in their work unit. For this reason, some described them as post holders below politically appointed officials, while others see middle managers as all individuals who belong to the management committee in their organization.

Participants broadly explained the lack of consistent and standard definitions of middle managers in civil service organizations (CSOs). Some also questioned the need for defining it, as they are civil servants who are not different from the others in any form, including skills, knowledge, and remuneration in general. In sum, participants reflected on the complexity and lack of clarity in the definition of middle management in CSOs, which often provoked personal consideration to the issue. Concerning the issue, one respondent said

_I never come across a clear and standard definition to middle management. The only criterion we consider is the place of the manager in the organizational hierarchy. When managers are placed just below the politically appointed heads, we consider them as middle managers._ (Participant 12)

Participants explained that MMs are managers who take care of the day-to-day operation in the organization. The majority of the participants expressed their belief that MMs are the pillars of organization, placed next to the senior appointed officials. In praising middle managers’ role and expressing their influence on the overall successes of CSOs, one participant said,

_We, the politically appointed officials, are not experts in many respects. We spend much of our time in carrying out political assignments which made middle managers very crucial in running the organization. They have the expertise and the knowledge of the internal and external environment. They understand employees’ and citizens’ demand in respect to the given organization. Middle_
managers are the ones who take care of the detail in the overall mission of the organization. (Participant 4)

Documents were reviewed based on the information received from head and deputy heads of organizations about middle managers. Accordingly, MMs were found to be active in many respects covering the planning, execution, and evaluation of various tasks in CSOs. Jobs at the middle management level vary widely; however, some basic roles of MMs are fairly common. Based on job descriptions from various offices at the federal, regional, and Addis Ababa level, MMs are given tasks related to understanding and interpretation of organizational strategy, management of daily operations, and the management of resources in organizations.

Table 2: Middle managers’ strategic involvement
(Sample tasks taken from middle managers’ job descriptions)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Job title</th>
<th>Issues included in job descriptions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Operations Head</td>
<td>• Ensures possible synergy among work units</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Advises the head and deputy head on policy matters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Sets goal and objectives to guide the overall operation of the organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Monitors work unit performance and takes actions for improvements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Monitors department materials and supplies, ordering as needed and verifying the accuracy of supplies received</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Prepares strategic HR Plan consistent with the overall organizational strategies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Designs and recommends administrative policies by adapting national and regional policies to ensure consistent standards with others in the civil service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human Resource Management (HRM)</td>
<td>• Develops HRM-related strategies and operational plan to execute later</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director</td>
<td>• Ensures efficient and effective handling of HRM tasks, such as human resource planning, recruitment, placement, development, promotion, and transfer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Coordinates the human resource tasks across the organization</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Job descriptions from the civil service offices

Job description documents found in the Amhara civil service commission were reviewed in order to check similarities and differences in task assignment for middle managers. Accordingly, it was observed that some MMs were found to enjoy a narrower span of control while the others have many
subordinates under their supervision. Managers in the staff departments have more subordinates than technical (line) managers in organizations where they use pool administrative services. Line department heads have a wider span of control, especially in bureaus like Finance and Economic Cooperation at the regional level. But, as data for such comparison were not collected, it would be misleading to conclude such observation as final for the entire civil service. Therefore, this area can be considered as a limitation in this research.

According to the findings, MMs were found to be responsible for detailed planning and execution. Conclusions drawn from the interviews and document review on the definition of middle managers revealed that

1. middle managers (MMs) are not defined well in CSOs, though they serve as a bridge between the top-level officials and the employees to achieve objectives;
2. middle managers (MMs) are assigned by merit fulfilling the minimum requirement, even though there is a point (up to 15 percent) to be given by the head of the organization during the competition;
3. middle managers in CSOs are found to be professionals who can guide and coordinate complex tasks in the area they are assigned to lead.

5.2. Emphasized Roles Middle Managers Play in the Ethiopian Civil Service

The roles of middle managers in the civil service were assessed using the CVF. These roles include broker, facilitator, mentor, director, innovator, producer, coordinator, and monitor. The CVF defines each of the roles by four distinct variables or statements. The managerial roles again are divided into four major groups following the quadrants that are formed on the basis of two axes: stability/flexibility on the vertical and internal/external on the horizontal line. Accordingly, MMs were asked to evaluate their actions in organizations based on these four categories: inclinations to change (CHANFOC), orientation toward production/result (PRODFOC), focus on rules (RULFOC), and their tendency to emphasize human relation (HRFOC).

Table 3 shows descriptive statistics for roles played by middle managers as perceived by themselves in CSOs. As the data was skewed slightly, central tendency measures like mean, median, and standard deviation with the coefficient of variation were taken to assess the result. By calculating the average focus of MMs based on the four quadrants of the CVF, efforts were made to identify which inclination was prevalent during their tenure. The median measure of the data was also taken to assess the tendency to check whether there exist significant discrepancies with the mean. The standard
deviation and the coefficient of variation were also considered to see variability in the data.

As observed in table 3, MMs were found to be more engaged in human relation activities (HRFOC) compared to other models in the competing value framework (m=5.18, med=5.25, STD=0.97, and CV=.19). Managers focusing on the fourth quadrant of the CVF (human relation model) are active in communicating effectively with their subordinates, mentoring and coaching employees, engaging followers in decision-making, and building strong teams to tap talents and ideas from their employees. This show the human resource concern MMs have in CSOs, indicating their effort in handling subordinates during task performance. Based on this study, therefore, the most emphasized role of MMs in civil service organizations was their human relation focus, which involves realizing potential and commitment of staff, encouraging a supportive workplace, developing teams, and serving as facilitators and mentors in work settings.

| Mean | 4.52 | 0.045 | 4.97 | 0.05 | 5.14 | 0.046 | 5.18 | 0.05 |
| 95% CI for Mean | 4.44 | 4.88 | 5.05 | 5.08 |
| 5% Trimmed Mean | 4.61 | 5.05 | 5.23 | 5.28 |
| Median | 4.54 | 4.99 | 5.17 | 5.22 |
| Variance | 0.761 | 0.762 | 0.791 | 0.938 |
| Std. Deviation | 0.872 | 0.873 | 0.889 | 0.968 |
| Skewness | -0.224 | 0.127 | 0.554 | 0.13 | -0.529 | 0.127 | -0.629 | 0.127 |
| Kurtosis | 0.373 | 0.254 | 1.003 | 0.25 | 0.747 | 0.254 | 0.519 | 0.254 |
| Coefficient of variation | 0.19 | 0.18 | 0.17 | 0.19 |
Focusing on results (PRODFOC) was found to be the second priority for middle managers in this research (m=5.14, med=5.13, STD = 0.90, and CV=.17). Goal attainment is a feature found in the second quadrant of the CVF with competing values that directly oppose the first orientation middle managers possess in the study. Managerial actions considered in this quadrant (rational goal model) include structure and direction in an organization. The key roles middle managers play in this quadrant are those of producer and director, which are characterized by focusing on tasks and clarifying expectations and objectives in the work unit. Developing meaningful goals and communicating them clearly to subordinates are the main task of middle managers in this quadrant.

Maintaining stability and managing through strict control was found to be the third orientation (RULFOC) middle managers have in CSOs (m=4.97, med=5.00, STD dev. = 0.87, and CV=.18). According to the CVF, this quadrant (internal process model) focuses on giving attention to internal work processes, such as record keeping, documentation, and measurement. It focuses also on keeping order as a means for effective workflow in an organization. Key managerial roles in this model are those of monitor and coordinator, which focus on detailed task analysis, coordinating staff efforts, monitoring facts, and applying of rules and regulations during task accomplishments.
Compared to the previous three orientations, the least focused model by middle managers in CSOs is the open system model (CHANFOC), where change is the central purpose of their work \((m=4.52, \text{med}=4.50, \text{STD dev.} = 0.87, \text{and CV}=.19)\). Change-related activities are the central area in this model, whereby middle managers are required to exhibit entrepreneurial and innovative characteristics. The key managerial roles in this model are broker and innovator. Managers in this category represent their subordinates in the external world effectively and are expected to be creative, skillful, and take risks to achieve organizational objectives.

As the descriptive statistics indicated in table 3 and the radar diagram presented in figure 2, MMs play all roles that can influence the overall strategic management processes in CSOs in the country. However, two roles (HRFOC and PRODFOC) are more dominant than the other two (RULFOC and
Successful managerial leadership requires the ability to navigate across the various managerial roles to balance contradictory demands from diverse environmental conditions. Effective public managers are required to demonstrate all eight managerial roles, with a frequency depending on situational demands that exist in CSOs. As indicated in figure 2, middle managers in this study exhibit all managerial roles (though with varying magnitude), which can be related to the actual work environment they are assigned to at present. Analysis was done to compare differences in managerial emphasis based on respondents’ places of work. However, we did not conduct such a comparison based on sectoral categorization in the civil service, which can be taken as limitation in this research. As to the former, a significant difference was not observed for the different category of MMs who work at federal, Amhara region, and Addis Ababa levels, as indicated in the separate radar diagram in figure 3.

As indicated in the diagrams, MMs at all locations exhibited similar inclinations; i.e., privileging human relations and result-orientation as compared to change and rules. The conventional judgment in theory and practices regarding MMs assumes their preference for strict adherence to rules and regulations. However, the finding clearly demonstrated their engagement in all the four categories of managerial activities, integrating all roles indicated in the competing value framework (CVF).

According to senior officials, although there is a great deal of similarity in tasks carried out by MMs, their roles are varied. Detailed planning, human resource management, record keeping, operation follow-up, and representing the work unit are jobs performed by middle managers. Depending on their position (line or staff), networks (internal and external), skills, and experience, their tasks may differ from one to the other. Some MMs quite mature, with long years of experience, education, and professional training while others are fresh graduates without any managerial experience and training. As most of the participants stated, middle managers are professional who have access to information from both the lower level employees and their supervisors. Due to the long tenure they have in the environment, they are well-informed about the opportunities and challenges of their organization compared to the top-level managers assigned by the government.

Middle managers have complex and demanding roles (Balogun, 2003) to play. They carry out mediation, buffering, and negotiation tasks during the generation of new ideas, the preparation of detailed plans for implementation, and an active involvement in the final execution. They also engage in counseling staff, mentoring, coaching, communicating, and team building.
The following excerpt from the interviews (senior managers) indicates the strategic engagement middle managers have in their respective organizations.

*We are more of politicians than professionals. And sometimes we are assigned in offices that we don’t have any clue about its past, current operations, and future directions. Yet, the government expects us to run the organization effectively, including by leading specific projects and programs as head of the organization. We are also expected to engage in entrepreneurial activities to transform our institution into a more citizen-oriented domain through an effective and efficient service delivery. We, the senior officials heavily rely on middle managers skills, knowledge, and efforts for all these responsibilities. Therefore, it is possible to say that CSOs are as strong and effective as the middle managers working in that given organization. (Participant 9)*

In practice, middle managers set goals with top managers in organizations. As interviewed officials confirmed, the job of a middle manager has never been limited to execution as described in the literature. They actively participate in the design of strategies, communicate goals to front-line managers, and engage in operational activities with their subordinates. According to interviewees, strategic plans, including the Growth and Transformation Plan (GTP 1 & 2) were prepared mainly by MMs and senior experts within the organizations.

Similarly, research participants confirmed that most of the MMs in their organization care for their staffs, listen to their problems, and try to solve problems within their jurisdictions. They try to mediate between the need of the employees and the organization’s requirements when these are incompatible. Aligned with this, most participants mentioned the need of empowering MMs and encouraging teamwork as a venue for performance excellence. This is how one senior level manager described their contribution:

*When allowed to exercise power, MMs perform a great deal in organizations. Most of the failures in the civil service are the results of not including the MMs in both planning and decision making as well. Senior managers should give open space for MMs to exercise their managerial and expertise power to achieve organizational objectives. They should listen to their comments, suggestions and in some cases give the whole power to them. You can’t lead alone, you know … on your own. This is challenging, especially for us who are politically appointed. We need the support of the people around us, mainly the MMs. (Participant 6)*
6. Discussion

Defining a concept is a basis for scholarly discourse, yet the concept of middle manager still requires definition on a contextual basis (Huy, 2002). Until recently, middle managers were considered as operational people in organizations, mainly focusing on coordination and control. Though variability is common, middle managers these days enjoy the liberty of presiding over budgets, making personnel decisions, and engaging in strategy development. However, there are institutions that are so centralized and controlled that middle managers are still passive receivers of orders from the top. These managers are denied appropriate power to make their own decisions. Consequently, the influences of these middle managers in such organizations is very low.

Despite the fact that the term “middle manager” is used widely both in the private and the public sectors (Van Rensburg, Davis, & Venter, 2014), it is not possible to find individuals with such a title in an organization. Rather the position of middle manager indicates the placement of a position within the organizational hierarchy. The term refers to managers having equal positions in the organizational hierarchy but with different responsibilities. Different authors attempted to conceptualize the term in the past. It has been described as managers managing managers (Osterman, as cited in Van Rensburg, Davis, & Venter, 2014), as mediators between strategy and operation (Nonakaas, cited in Van Rensburg, Davis, & Venter, 2014), as positions between the top executives and supervisors above employees (Huy, 2001), and managers operating at the middle of the organization (Floyd & Wooldridge, 1992). Similarly, Ikavalko (as cited in Van Rensburg, Davis, & Venter, 2014) considered them as individuals who have both superiors and subordinates within the organization. Authors like Kaiser et al. (2011) took access to senior executives and knowledge of operations as the bases for being considered a middle manager. Similar to what has been narrated by various scholars in the field, respondents in the present study described middle managers as individuals who are placed at the middle of an organizational hierarchy. They associated them with titles like director, process owners, and department heads, whose positions are next to the politically appointed officials in that organization. This was further checked by observing individuals who are appointed politically and termed as senior executives, though they have an equal hierarchical position in the organization.

In the Ethiopian civil service, those considered as MMs are individuals located between the strategic apex and the operating core of the organization. They manage human and physical resources in an effort to achieve organizational objectives. They easily access both the senior managers at
the top and operating staff on the frontline, influencing information flow between the two groups. They have a unique place in the organization as they have access to each and every move made by either the senior manager or the operating staff.

Based on the survey, there was a high level of agreement among study participants on who middle managers are and what they do within the civil service. According to participants, middle managers in CSOs were found to be managers two levels below the senior officials assigned on the basis of civil service regulations. Research participants agreed that middle managers in most cases are knowledgeable individuals in relation to their work unit.

Middle managers engage in a variety of assignments in the organization, either in teams or individually. According to research participants, middle managers carry out tasks that are related to both the present and the future. According to the data from the interviews and survey questions, MMs were found to be active in all strategic and operational activities. Based on the study finding, therefore, the researcher defined MMs in CSOs as those managers who have a responsibility of running and representing their work unit and who have the privilege of accessing organizational officials directly to sell their ideas by assuming responsibility on a meritorious basis.

The findings in this study also revealed the positioning of middle managers in terms of the competing value framework (CVF). Middle managers participating in this study were confirmed to have been balancing the different competing roles that are expected of managers particularly in CSOs. As results from both quantitative and qualitative data analyses indicated, middle managers in the civil service were engaged in carrying out the eight managerial roles identified by Quinn et al. (2003). Based on empirical data from the field and knowledge from the scholarly community, middle managers in Ethiopian civil service are managers who report directly to appointed officials in their organization. Though it was found from the interviews that senior level officials manipulate the process, generally middle managers are assigned through a competitive process. This research identified middle managers' managerial priorities to include implementing strategies, interpreting and communicating information, and exerting both upward and downward influence.

7. Conclusion

This study examined the most emphasized roles of middle managers in the Ethiopian civil service using the competing value framework (CVF). Though the magnitudes are different, the findings from this study confirmed that
MMs in the Ethiopian civil service play pivotal roles in their organization. Based on the research findings, the most emphasized roles MMs play in CSOs fall in the fourth quadrant of the CVF, where an emphasis is given to facilitation and mentoring roles at the internal-flexible junction. Production, rule, and change orientations were found to be the other areas of concern for MMs in this study. Similarly, the research showed the need to define MMs in the civil service, as an agreed-upon definition for the concept is lacking. A definition is proposed in this chapter to help CSOs in recruiting, selecting, developing, and retaining talented managers.

In general, the conclusions of this study indicate that MMs have a contribution to the strategic management of a civil service organization. However, contrary to declarations in the literature, the findings indicate that middle managers focus more on human relation than rules in executing their organizational task. Although the conclusions were drawn based on responses of managers on a given day whose views might change at another time/place, the findings revealed different managerial roles played by MMs that require specific sets of skill. Hence, this study clearly unveils the critical need by institutions in capacitating this group of managers to deliver the best possible goods and services to citizens by the government.

Failure or unsatisfactory results in delivering government goods and services are a common problem in Ethiopia. Though many factors may contribute to such inefficiency and ineffectiveness, different studies have indicated managerial problems as fundamental challenges in the Ethiopian civil service. The attention given to MMs, in this regard, requires due consideration as they are very crucial in the overall management of an organization. Thus, rather than expecting MMs to be effective and efficient by simply following the conventional career path in the civil service, executives above them should design contextual mechanisms that enable them to do a better job in their organization. After all, experience show that these groups of managers are the successors in the bureaucratic hierarchy of the government structure.

8. Limitations and Suggestions for Further Research

Like any study in social science, this research has limitations that must be acknowledged. First, strategic involvement in CSOs is a relative issue, as most strategies emanate from the ruling political parties. This research considers the wide room middle managers have in design, implementation, and evaluation at the civil service. Thus, similar studies in such an environment may result in different findings and conclusions. Second, as discussed earlier, the study
excludes health and educational institutions. The reason for such exclusion was the different structural and managerial arrangement of educational and medical institutions in the country. Third, comparison to prior findings was not done as getting prior research on Ethiopia was difficult. This may be considered as another limitation for this study.

Future research is necessary for areas where this research lack depth or coverage. Among others, assessing the situation in specific areas like health and education is recommended. Future research could also explore the strategic contributions of middle managers in relation to formulation, implementation, or evaluation separately.

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