

# Managing Curriculum Change from the Middle: How Academic Middle Managers Enact Their Role in Higher Education

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## Abstract

Literature shows that the role of academic middle managers (AMMs) has been a subject of contestation for a long time the world over owing to the fact that there has not been a clear cut articulation of what exactly this role constitutes or means. Such a situation according to literature has tended to affect the way the AMMs enact their role in their different departments and organisations. Traditionally, the role of the academic middle manager has been viewed as transmitters of top management views to the lower echelons of the organisation. This view has however greatly changed over the last couple of decades owing to the realization that academic middle managers play a critical role in both educational change and curriculum change and it is the later view that this paper seeks to explore and highlight. More specifically, this study examines the concept of role as understood by the academic middle managers (AMMs) and also as shaped by the different contexts in which the AMMs perform their curriculum change roles in higher education. Literature shows that the way the AMMs understand and hence enact their role in curriculum change is framed by the nature of the activity, role expectation, role conflict and the demands of the role sender among others. This study therefore examines how AMMs understand and eventually enact their role in the light of different competing demands and interests during curriculum change in higher education.

**Keywords:** Academic middle manager, Curriculum change, Role expectation, Role conflict, Role sender

## 1. Introduction

The purpose of this study is to explain how AMMs understand and enact their role in the planning and implementation of curriculum change in higher education. The historical development of the AMM's role and the conception of AMM's role in higher education with regards to how the role of AMMs in curriculum change is defined and shaped by the different contexts in different higher education institutions are therefore discussed in this study.

## 2. The Concept of Academic Middle Manager Role

The definition or meaning of role in the context of what AMMs do in colleges and universities has been a subject of contestation over a long time (Prichard, 2000; Meek, Goedegebuure, Santiago & Carvalho, 2010; Kallenberg, 2007). Role is viewed as an intuitive but problematic notion in knowledge representation, meaning that the concept of role is an elusive one (Sunday & Somoye, 2011). In terms of definition, role is viewed as a pattern of behaviour associated with a position in a social framework (Madden, 2013). Other authorities also define role as the way an entity participates in a relationship (Sunday & Somoye, 2011). Research also shows that there are a number of factors that help to explain how and why AMMs assume the roles they play in higher education institutions, and these include role expectation, role conflict, and role autonomy.

### 2.1 Role expectation

Literature shows that since role is socially constructed, its holders more often than not, determine the way they behave based on the expectations of their role (Madden, 2013). Literature further shows that the sources of these expectations within an organisation are wide and varied but more specifically, are derived from the following three sources (Biddle, 1979 in Madden, 2013; Madden, 2013): i) specific hierarchical positions that are pre-planned, task-oriented and clearly defined; ii) interpretations from more covert sources such as pressures from informal groups; and iii) the role holder's characteristics that determine his/her role behaviour hence variations in the role behaviour by people occupying the same roles.

## 2.2 Role conflict

Role conflict is defined as the incompatibility or incongruity of the expectations associated with a role (Katz & Kahn, 1978 in Madden, 2013), creating barriers to meeting role demands (a situation called role strain). According to Madden (2013), role conflict arises as a result of interpersonal processes that happen between the role holder who receives expectations and the people who send those expectations (role senders), including several organisational, personal and interpersonal factors that affect the meaning or definition of role. Role senders can be anyone within or outside the organisation with whom the role holder associates and who are most affected by organisational factors such as organisational level, structure and practices in addition to task characteristics and physical settings (Madden, 2013). Personal factors such as status, education, age, and tenure of both role holders and role senders also affect the meaning and/or understanding of role (Madden, 2013). Literature further shows that the mode and frequency of interaction, visibility, physical location and feedback between the role sender and role holder are all interpersonal attributes that also contribute to the reframing of role as understood by AMMs (Madden, 2013). Since organisations are role systems that require individuals to perform certain roles for the achievement of organisational and departmental goals, role conflict therefore arises when the role sender's expectations diverge from one another in ways that cannot be reconciled by the role holder, posing a serious threat to the role holder and his/her performance in the organisation (Madden, 2013).

Madden (2013) also shows that the following are negative consequences of role conflict on AMMs' perception and enactment of their role: lower levels of commitment, less confidence in the department and organisation, high levels of job anxiety, lower job performance, and lower job satisfaction.

## 2.3 Role autonomy

Role autonomy is defined as the degree to which a job allows the job holder freedom, independence and discretion to schedule work, make decisions and select the methods and approaches to perform tasks (Morgeson et al, 2005). Role autonomy has been seen to help AMMs to modify and/or reconstruct their existing psychological states (Vallerand & Rousseau, 2001) resulting in both the AMMs and the people they lead developing more flexible attitudes that stretch boundaries of mere compliance with rules and the fulfillment of formal orders (Hornung & Rousseau, 2007; Morgeson et al, 2005). Research also shows that AMMs with less role autonomy tend to follow a path of least resistance, refraining from the use of personal initiative and extra effort to avoid potential punishment (Parker et al, 1997).

The meaning of role with regards to what AMMs do is also compounded by the fact that the concept of middle management is not also well defined, open to interpretations, and multifaceted in nature (Cragg, 2011; Hellawell & Hancock, 2001). Literature presents ambiguities about the concept of role (Wooldridge, Schmid & Floyd, 2008; Raes, Heijltjes, Glunk & Roe, 2011). This situation is made tenuous by the fact that on one hand, AMMs are expected to perform their roles in a manner that shows them assume a more school-wide managerial approach while on the other hand they are expected to create conditions that show the departments they lead as student-centered, teaching and/or research focused as well as collegial (Prichard, 2000). Prichard's assertion is further extended by Gunter (2002) who asserted that the AMM is therefore situated in contexts which increasingly reflect work intensification, role overload and ambiguity, and an increase in managerial administrative work. This new emphasis on managerialism has led to the widening of the definition and meaning of the role of the AMM and also added to the confusion of what exactly the role of AMM should be in higher education institutions (Smith, 2007). According to Knight & Trowler (2001) as cited in Inman (2007) how the AMM therefore enacts this duality or dual role within the framework constructed by their institution will eventually depend on the following factors: the nature of the activity as defined by the participant (academic middle manager), the community of practice in which the academic middle manager works, the identity of the individual academic middle manager (which is likely to be multiple, dynamic and situational), the meaning attributed to the academic middle manager's role, and the discourse in which the academic middle manager operates.

The above factors also mean that the role of the AMM is no longer constituted alone by the number and scope of managerial responsibilities but also by the institutionalised meaning of management in a particular society or context (Clegg & McAuley, 2005). This argument is rendered very true in that in some institutions, AMMs teach while in others they do not, and for those middle managers who teach, there is no determination in most of the institutions on how these managers balance their teaching role and the administrative role (Daniel, 2009). The role of middle managers is further made fuzzy by the fact that right from the beginning, when these managers assume their management role, literature shows that in most of the higher education institutions, the middle managers must deal with (Daniel, 2009) the following situations: strained financial resources that constrain their role in curriculum

change, high demand for relevant programmes and curricula, external accountability pressures from government, parents, employers etc., technological advances and their effect on curriculum change and education delivery, ill-equipped faculty who struggle to meet demands for higher education system and their students, diversity issues in departments, and imbalance of professional and personal duties (Daniel, 2009).

All the above competing demands on the role of the AMMs tear their role between two polarities of faculty instructional duties and institution-wide administrative duties making their role in curriculum change very difficult (Daniel, 2009). In the end as alluded to above, one agreed way of understanding the role of the academic middle manager is then to consider that role can be defined as what the individual, i.e., the role holder understands their job to be (Wise & Bennett, 2003). This is supported by the fact that how middle managers enact their role in curriculum change is strongly influenced by contextual factors as well as by the responses and agency of the academic middle managers themselves (Bennett et al, 2003).

On the question therefore of who the academic middle managers are in higher education institutions, a number of authorities give different conceptions and such conceptions arise because the role of the middle manager is difficult to define (Feist, 2007; Fitzgerald & Gunter, 2006) due in part to the fact that the line between top management and middle management is often blurred, and so also is the line between that of classroom teacher and the academic middle manager (Cragg, 2011; Hellowell & Hancock 2001). Literature shows that as a result of failures to both qualify and quantify the role of academic middle managers, a number of issues therefore around the definition of middle manager arise (Cragg, 2011; Blandford, 2006) with the first such issue being role ambiguity which relates to middle managers not having a clearly articulated and specific job description that delineates their role (Fitzgerald & Gunter, 2006). Other authorities also argue that the term middle manager in and of itself is far too general to adequately capture and categorise the myriad of roles which fall into the term (Wise & Bennett, 2003). Such role ambiguity is seen as contributing in a large part to variability in practice by middle managers within and between higher education institutions leading to an even wider web of confusion of what exactly middle managers are or do (Cragg, 2011).

In the maze of this definitional confusion of the term academic middle manager, a number of authorities provide positional definitions of middle management by focusing on middle managers' position as occurring between two polarities, namely the upper echelon and the operating core (Currie & Proctor, 2005; Kumarasinghe and Hoshino, 2010). Using the positional context, middle managers are defined as people occupying a position at the intermediary level of the organisation, a position that is two or three levels from top managers and one level above front-line managers (Madden, 2013), i.e., a position that enables them to supervise supervisors and are also in turn to be supervised by others.

Positional definitions of middle management are viewed as confirmation of the strategic position of academic middle managers in higher education institutions that gives them leverage to have both an institution-wide overview and an understanding of the needs of those at the operational level with regards to the curriculum change process (Fitzgerald, 2009). The positional definitions of an academic middle manager also confirm the advantage of middle managers being at a vantage point in higher education institutions, a view that is enhanced by the fact that middle managers because of this vantage position, possess better institutional knowledge than any other member of the institution that allows them to be innovative enough to be able to propose, plan and led curriculum change in their institutions (Kedian, 2006; Gmelch, 2004).

Academic middle managers can also be described using non-positional definitions. The following are a number of non-positional definitions given to describe middle managers:

- Academic middle managers are people who perform a coordinating role where they mediate, negotiate and interpret connections between top management and the operational levels (Floyd & Wooldridge, 2000), and hence are the people who are directly involved in the planning and coordinating of the change implementation processes in organisations and departments. This is also confirmed by O'Shannassy (2014) who posited that middle managers are viewed as implementers of management corporate changes, relationship managers who mediate between top management and lower level employees and are also strategic actors in emergent change (Balogun, 2003; 2007).
- Other authorities also view academic middle managers as administrators whose tasks and responsibilities typically encompass the management of human resources within the subject departments, paired with the coordinating responsibilities, budget administration and instructional planning (Dimmen, 2000).

- Middle managers are viewed as individuals who make decisions about how to implement the organisation's and also department's strategic change objectives (Balogun, 2003), doing this by interpreting information and knowledge from top management to make it meaningful to those at the operational level below, and also by interpreting information and knowledge from functional managers about the technical, day-to-day realities of the organisation and the department (Balogun, 2003). Such managers also select those pieces of information that need top management's attention so that change issues in the department that need top management intervention can be attended to timeously and adequately (Beck & Plowman, 2009).

Coupled by being also referred to as teachers and hence people whose possible avenues of social influence in their departments are then rooted in a seemingly inconsistent work role where the incumbent is both superior and professional colleague (Paulsen, 2008; Jones & Duckett, 2006), academic middle managers can best be understood in two context, i.e., the school wide context and department context (Wise, 2001). In the school wide context, by virtue of their position in the school hierarchy, middle managers are seen as operating at the interface between different levels and different sources of influence and change with their role shifting towards managerialism in which the middle managers find themselves managing the intersection of traditional and new organisational cultures and trying to exert school-wide influence (Wise, 2001; Hancock & Hellawell, 2003). In the department context, middle managers are tasked with ensuring good teaching and learning, a role that has traditionally been recognised as at the heart of the middle manager's work and which comes with the inherent problems of the monitoring and collegiality duality (Bennett et al, 2003; Wise, 2001). As a result of this role conflict and role ambiguity, tensions are therefore frequently observed that characterise this duality in the work role of the academic middle manager (Bennett et al, 2003; Wise, 2001). Middle managers are also referred to as specialists in subject knowledge, didactics and pedagogy within their specific knowledge domains (Busher, et al, 2000), whose expertise and legitimacy is grounded on professional knowledge (Clegg & McAuley, 2005).

### 3. Historical Development of Academic Middle Manager Role

Debate about the role of middle managers in higher education in general and in curriculum change in particular has largely been confined to the dominant discourse of managerialism with middle management being viewed largely as a multifaceted phenomenon representing the four dominant role dimensions of core organisational values, self-interested agent of control, corporate bureaucrat, and repository of organisational wisdom (Clegg & McAuley, 2005). The role of the academic middle manager has been conceptualised from the above four historical discourses that referred to middle manager as representing the core organisational values, as a conservative self-directed agent, as a reinvented managerialist corporate bureaucrat, and as a transmitter of core strategic values and organisational capability (Clegg & McAuley, 2005) as shown in Figure 1. These discourses show that the concept of middle management has often been misunderstood in organisational terms as a quintessence of what it is to be a manager, and at other times as the conservative impediment between top management and the workforce (Clegg & McAuley, 2005). However as years went by, the dominant narrative about the role of the middle manager centered on the twin discourses of managerialism and collegiality, with this duality pointing to the dilemma middle managers face in their day-to-day interaction with colleagues on one hand and with top management on the other (Hancock & Hellawell, 2003). As a result, since the 1970s, four dominant discourses on the role of the middle manager emerged (Clegg & McAuley, 2005; Gordon, Clegg & Kornberger, 2007).

#### 3.1 The first discourse (Early 1980s): Middle manager as representing core organisational values

This discourse views the role of AMMs as being concerned with the enactment of the complex roles of *living* as a subordinate, an equal and also as a superior, with the ability not only to manage all the three relationships but also to shift quickly and frequently from one role to another (Uyterhoven, 1972 in Clegg & McAuley, 2005). To be able to effectively play the triple roles above therefore, AMMs are expected to master both the technical and commercial knowledge of their institution and departments, and also develop an understanding of the procedures and relationships in the institution so as to be able to more efficiently facilitate them (Clegg & McAuley, 2005; McAuley, 2002). This discourse sees the AMMs as repositories of truth in organisations (Clegg & McAuley, 2005).

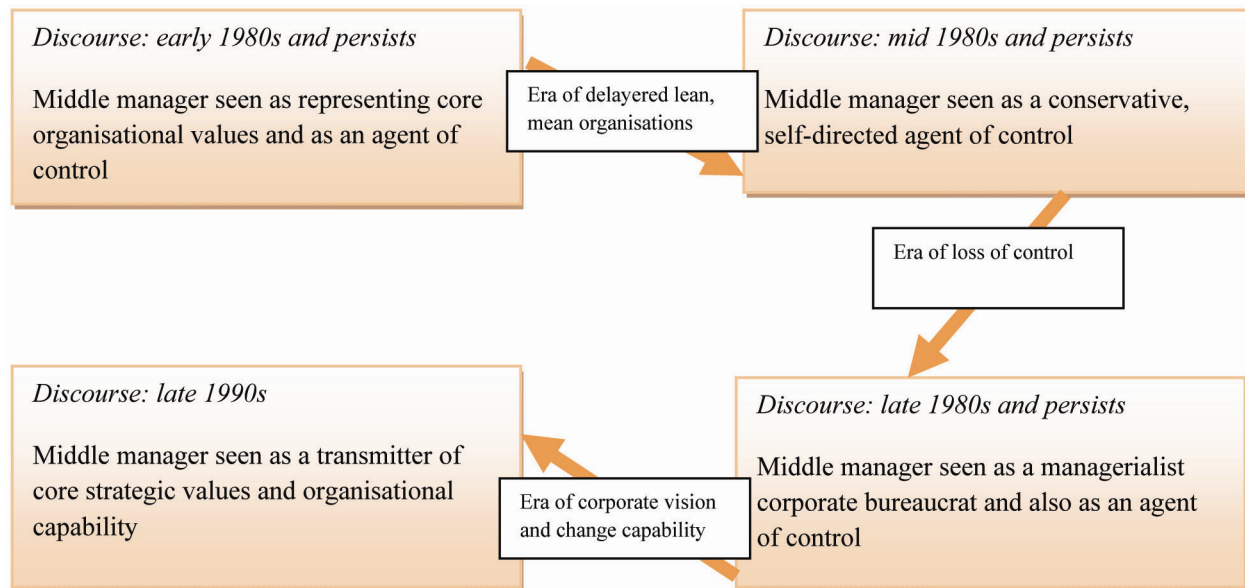


Figure 1. The discourses of AMM role (Clegg & McAuley, 2005)

This discourse further proposes that the way AMMs enact the complex roles of a subordinate, an equal and also a superior all at the same time, with the ability not only to manage all the three relationships but also to shift quickly and frequently from one role to another as mentioned above, is a true reflection of the academic middle manager's life in organisations even today (Militello et al, 2007). This discourse that began in the period of the early 1980s and still persists, places the AMMs where: i) they have to work with senior management to create a sense of shared organisational identity in which the middle manager fosters the linkages that intensive knowledge transfer in higher education requires, and ii) the middle manager has to play the role of maintaining the internal systems of the organisation by viewing him/herself as a disturbance handler, resource allocator and negotiator (Militello et al, 2007; Clegg & McAuley, 2005). The role of the AMM as defined in this discourse calls upon the role holder to possess both the technical and relationship knowledge of the organisation to be effective in the role.

### 3.2 The second discourse (Mid 1980s): Middle manager as conservative, self-directed agent of control.

According to this discourse, the AMM is viewed as a conservativist who may want to protect his/her position in the organisation by keeping things as they are (Clegg & McAuley, 2005). According to Militello et al (2007), the middle manager would attempt to maintain the status quo by doing the following: i) preventing ideas from the operating core to be transmitted to the top echelons of the organisation, and ii) protecting the top echelon from bad news. The above AMM actions are seen happening in organisations where the AMM feels powerless and insecure, i.e., feels squeezed between events and activities he/she has no power to influence because senior managers wield too much power and influence on everything in the organisation including the power to delay middle managers without consultation (Militello et al, 2007).

### 3.3 The third discourse (Late 1980s): middle manager seen as a reinvented managerialist corporate bureaucrat

The third discourse demonstrates a paradigm shift on the role of the academic middle manager as the academic middle manager became viewed as a key factor and actor in the development of the managerialist narrative (Clegg & McAuley, 2005). This discourse was informed by the need to create hierarchy and to improve accountability (Militello et al, 2007; Clegg & McAuley 2005; Gordon et al, 2007) as well as by the growth of numbers of people in the organisations who specifically had management role, and whose management work was defined by the types of management discussed in the first two discourses. This discourse marked a period when the role of the academic middle manager in higher education was viewed as that of a representative of top management, a transmitter of top management views.

### 3.4 The fourth discourse (Early 1990s): Middle manager seen as transmitter of organisational wisdom

While the second discourse viewed middle managers as an impediment to change as it was felt that they were people who slowed down decision-making (Boyko & Jones, 2008; Nieswandt, 2011), current research as confirmed in the fourth discourse showed that middle managers in fact make crucial contributions to both organisational and departmental performance and change (Huy, 2002; Currie & Proctor, 2005; Boyko & Jones, 2008; Nieswandt, 2011;

Conway & Monks, 2011). In this fourth discourse, the middle manager is viewed as being concerned with the management of tensions between long-and short-term organisational purposes linking dispersed knowledge and best practices across the organisation, and the development of individuals in embedding the processes of change and renewal into the organisation (Ghoshal & Bartlett in Militello et al, 2007). This discourse views middle managers as being far better than senior managers at leveraging the informal networks and staying attuned to employees' moods and emotional needs (Huy, 2011) and hence the middle managers are seen as better in managing tensions between continuity and change. Middle managers in this discourse are viewed as *synapses within a firm's brain* who are able to reconcile the top management perspectives and the lower level implementation issues (King et al, 2001).

#### **4. Conception of Middle Manager Role in Higher Education**

The premise of the nature of the AMM role in higher education is the belief that it depends on the type of higher education institution the academic middle manager is engaged (McAuley, 2002a). Literature shows four different higher education institutions which frame the role of the AMM in higher education in general and in curriculum change in particular. These higher education institutions include the corporate higher education institution, the strong culture higher education institution, the arena higher education institution, and the communication or collegial higher education institution (McAuley, 2002a).

##### *4.1 The corporate higher education institution*

The corporate higher education frame is a definition of a higher education institution which is well managed and that puts emphasis on the capabilities of managers at every level of the institution. The institution also emphasises core vision and purpose, organisational design and structure, and strategic business planning (McAuley, 2002a; Clegg & McAuley, 2005). Such an institution employs a top-down management approach with the following three scenarios defining how AMM are treated in the institution (Clegg & McAuley, 2005): i) in the early days of the institution coming up with its corporate image, it tends to trim the number of AMMs in the institutions to reduce the threat of the more traditional and powerful middle managers, and to ensure that the top-down management style is enacted, unhindered, ii) the remaining few AMMs who are believed to be well aligned with the top management expectations are then given/assigned symbolic leadership responsibilities, and iii) of the same few remaining AMMs, some are assigned core corporate bureaucratic roles (managerial roles). This type of higher education institution therefore defines and represents the AMM as conceived in the first three discourses (McAuley, 2002).

##### *4.2 The strong culture discourse higher education institution*

The strong culture higher education institution represents a strong understanding of what it is to be a strong higher education culture by its ability to satisfy local, national and international educational needs (Clegg & McAuley, 2005). In such an institution, the role of the AMM is to transmit institutional culture horizontally and vertically within the institution and also to ensure institutional integration and the preservation of the sense of mission and purpose within the institution (McAuley, 2002). This institution also describes and represents the role of the AMM in the fourth discourse.

##### *4.3 The arena higher education institution*

The higher education institution in this context is viewed as a political arena constituted by many competing interests in relation to how the institution should be run (Clegg & McAuley, 2005). The role therefore of the AMM in such an institution is political. This institution therefore represents the first discourse, i.e. the discourse of managerialism where the role of the AMM is viewed as that of representing core organisational values (McAuley, 2002).

##### *4.4 The communication or collegial higher education institution*

In this type of institution, academics create complex networks of interest and mutual understanding and involvement by agreeing implicitly (psychological contract) to work with each other while keeping their individual interests in teaching and research (Clegg & McAuley, 2005). The role of the AMM in this institution therefore is to collaborate with other institutional members for them to be able to get the job done.

#### **5. Role of Academic Middle Managers in Curriculum Change**

There is a general agreement in literature that the AMMs are key players in higher education institutions in general and in curriculum change in particular, with a high degree of responsibility derived from their strategic position within the organisational structure that enable them to be knowledgeable of day-to-day activities and strategies of the organisation (Rouleau & Balogun, 2011). Such a situation then makes AMMs effective vertical mediators between top management and the operational core as well as a horizontal integrator that ensures the distribution of knowledge throughout the organisation and the departments (Costanzo & Tzoump, 2011; Del Favero, 2006a; Hyun, 2006; Huy,

2011). AMMs therefore are critical to the planning, implementation and management of curriculum change in higher education institutions (Floyd & Wooldridge, 2000; Floyd & Lane, 2000; Clegg, & McAuley, 2005; Kallenberg, 2007). They also contribute significantly to the overall success and growth of organisations through activities in their departments or work units (Harvey & Newton, 2004; Del Favero, 2005; 2006b) by being advocates for their institutions and departments as well as by controlling the inflow of information in the institutions, accumulating and allocating resources and by assessing the performance of their faculty and staff (Wood, 2004; Huy, 2002). As part of their roles and responsibilities in curriculum change, AMMs champion innovative initiatives, facilitate adaptability to new behaviour, synthesise information within and outside their departments and organisation, and implement and manage changes (Floyd & Wooldridge, 2000; Floyd & lane, 2000, Kallenberg, 2007; Meek, Goedegebuure, Santiago & T. Carvalho, 2010; Lavarda & Giner, 2009).

Literature shows that AMMs operate at the nexus of social interactions in the organisation, act as a node in a network of communications, connect the flow of information from top to operating levels and vice versa, and integrate these communications (Floyd & Wooldridge, 2000). By virtue of their strategic position, AMMs are seen as being in a unique position that enables them to know the availability and depth of capabilities in an organisation and thus can help in synchronising curriculum change plans with reality (Floyd & Wooldridge, 2000). By being linking pins between top management and the operating core, the middle managers are viewed as being able to act to supply feedback to both top management and the operating core to ensure effective adjustments of plans for effective implementation. According to Fenton-O' Creevy (2001) the role of AMMs can therefore be put into four broad categories as those of developing strategic practice (devising curriculum implementation strategy), developing and sustaining learning and the learning environment (service and student service roles), leading teams and individuals (managing the tasks, the team and the individual), and managing resources (staff and tangible assets).

To successfully perform the above roles therefore, AMMs need to engage in a series of activities that occur at the institution's boundaries since firstly, AMMs are strategically positioned to bridge information, knowledge and objectives from different parts of the loosely coupled institutional design (Busher & Harris, 1999), and secondly they bridge the external interests with their professional domain (Busher, 2005). The boundary spanning activities the AMMs should perform therefore include those that occur at the internal boundaries and separate organisational subunits (Pawlowski & Robey, 2004). Such activities include scanning, mapping, and constructing a picture of the environment in which curriculum change will take place as well as predicting future trouble spots or potential allies with certain specific boundary spanning dimensions. These boundary spanning dimensions that define the middle managers' boundary spanning role include the bridge dimension, the translation dimension, the liaison dimension, the facilitator dimension and the broker dimension.

### 5.1 The bridge dimension

The bridge narrative captures two distinct perspectives of AMM practices, i.e., the internal and external boundary spanning role. *Internally* middle managers perform the role of heads of department (HODs) and hence are responsible for downward influence, i.e., ensuring acceptance of school-wide and department-wide goals and priorities (Floyd & Wooldridge, 2000) particularly those which relate to issues of curriculum. In this HOD role, AMMs are also responsible for filling communication gaps between top management and the operating core in their departments and hence are responsible for achieving effective working relations between teachers and senior management during curriculum change. *Externally* AMMs' bridging role relates to developing, cultivating and using external linkages to gain access to knowledge and information that is dispersed across the institution (Newell, Tansley & Huang, 2004), especially the information that relates to curriculum change. In this external perspective, social linkages enable the middle managers to bridge incompatible understandings and leads to integration of knowledge and interests (Newell et al, 2004).

### 5.2 The translation dimension

AMMs communicate institutional goals across internal boundaries (Busher & Harris, 1999; Allum, 2005). As a result, they are responsible for re-interpreting and manipulating curriculum change information, institutional goals and policy derivatives in order to frame and re-frame the interests of different individuals and groups. As internal communicators, AMMs are also responsible for introducing top management perspectives about curriculum change to department staff and vice-versa to ensure both perspectives are integrated into the institution and department's aims. In this case, the AMM's translator function is to synthesise the external knowledge with local (departmental) knowledge in order to make informed decisions that may facilitate effective curriculum change. As internal translators also, AMMs play the role of reducing the cognitive distance between actors that have different views,

understandings and interests (Cillo, 2005) with regards to curriculum change, with the effectiveness of the translating role depending on a common knowledge base and widely shared understandings among the different actors.

### 5.3 The liaison dimension

This narrative describes tasks and responsibilities carried out by AMMs in order to gain information, position, resources and knowledge in the institution's environment (Briggs, 2005). The liaison role of AMMs connects external stakeholders with departmental activities with a signature feature of this role being the strong expectation of AMMs to be professional, reliable, unbiased and independent spokespersons for professional interests such as curriculum change (Mintzberg, 2009).

### 5.4 The facilitator dimension

This dimension takes the AMMs as change intermediaries whose role is to help professional colleagues to make sense out of external feedback and change initiative (Balogun, 2003). Sense giving in this case relates to the AMMs helping others understand change initiatives and demands (Rouleau, 2005) hence the significant role of AMMs would be to help department members work their way through the change transition (Balogun, 2003). Therefore, through their access to external information, AMMs are able to provide their colleagues with new ideas, good practice or alternative solutions during curriculum change. As part of their facilitating role, AMMs should therefore create enabling conditions in their departments and at their institutions for adaptive learning among staff through workshops for teams, the allocation of resources and time for department members to effectively carry out curriculum change. Within this facilitating discourse therefore, the role of AMMs is described through the enactment of the role as mentor, coach and guide (Clegg & McAuley, 2005).

### 5.5 Broker dimension

In this narrative, AMMs play a more active and transactional role associated with intense engagement and inference (Sadler, 2001; Briggs, 2003) where they exercise their power over others through their judgement, interpretation and perceptions of the curriculum change environment. Such power is used for dealing with issues of resistance to change, lack of political will, dysfunctional practices, ignorance and lack of skills at operational level (Briggs, 2003). In the same vein, the AMMs may also play the role of broker with senior management in order to modify policies (Briggs, 2003) that may hinder the effectiveness of curriculum change. Literature shows that for AMMs to be able to effectively play the brokering role, they need to be trustworthy and to demonstrate the following characteristics: expertise, trust, genuineness and legitimacy in all their dialogues and negotiations with both departmental staff and senior management during curriculum change.

## 6. Typology of Middle Manager Role

There are a number of models that describe the role of AMMs in higher education (Briggs, 2003; 2004). Among such models are the Wise (2001) model which is premised on the idea that AMM responsibilities fall somewhere on the continuum according to whether the AMM is principally concerned with management of tasks (task-orientation) or with the management of people (people-orientation) and the Floyd & Wooldridge (1994; 1996; 2000) typology of middle manager influence on strategic change which posits that the AMM performs the following four different roles: championing strategic alternatives, facilitating change, synthesising information, and implementing deliberate strategy. Among the typologies of AMM role in change which stands out and which shall be discussed in this study is the Floyd & Wooldridge (2000) typology as shown in Figure 2. This typology is adapted to suit the current study.

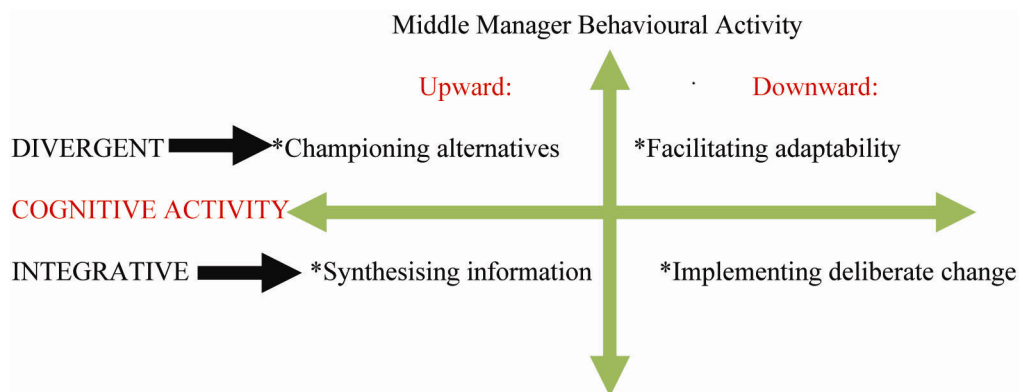


Figure 2. Typology of middle manager influence on curriculum change (Adapted from Floyd & Wooldridge, 2000)



The framework shown by Figure 2 describes four roles of the AMM that extend beyond the traditional provision of inputs and direct implementation of strategic change such as curriculum change. It shows the role of AMMs extending to serving as important sources of innovation in the curriculum change process. In playing this role, AMMs exert both upward influence and downward influence in the change process (Floyd & Wooldridge, 2000).

#### *6.1 Upward influence during curriculum change*

AMMs influence curriculum change by altering the institution's direction by providing top management with unique interpretations of emerging curriculum issues (synthesising curriculum information) and by proposing innovative, entrepreneurial curriculum initiatives (championing alternatives) (Floyd & Wooldridge, 2000). In the interpretation context, AMMs interpret ambiguous diverse curriculum data related to the curriculum issues, framing the perceptions of other managers and team members and changing towards the curriculum change agenda. In the context of championing change alternatives, middle managers redefine the strategic thinking of top managers resulting in curriculum change revolving not as originally planned but in a whole new way. AMMs use persistent persuasive communication to champion alternative curriculum changes to top management. The upward influence of AMMs affects top management's view of institutional circumstances both at strategic and implementation levels and is an influence crucial in garnering top management support for the AMM initiated curriculum change.

#### *6.2 Downward influence during curriculum change*

Middle managers also influence curriculum change by aligning institutional arrangements with the institution's overall strategic goals. In this role, the more traditional role of AMMs of being mere transmitters of top management views in the implementation of curriculum change is complemented by a potential role of being a change agent who fosters institutional teaming or facilitate adaptability by making institutions more flexible and also to stimulate behaviour that diverges from official expectations (Gmelch & Wolverson, 2002). This is done by encouraging institutional members including departmental members to sense (sense making) changing conditions, experiment with new curriculum change ideas and to adapt appropriately (Chakravarthy, 1982 in Lachiver & Tardif, 2002). In this way, AMMs nourish adaptability apart from the plans embedded in deliberate curriculum change in the institution or in spite of the changes (Kanter, 1983 in Lachiver & Tardif, 2002).

Each of the four roles above of the AMM in the typology above adapted from Floyd & Wooldridge (2000), is a synthesis of action and cognition unique to the position of the AMMs. This is supported by Burgelman (1988) in Honig (2004) who posited that within the change process, action and cognition are intertwined so that for each of the four roles in the typology above, a synthesis of action and cognition unique to the position of the AMM is defined. Also the four roles of the AMM in the above typology do not suggest discrete breaks in the behaviour of middle managers during curriculum change as they combine synergistically into patterns of middle manager involvement (Floyd & Wooldridge, 2000). As an example, when the AMM uses his/her downward influence to build adaptive structures, he/she often promote the development of divergent alternatives. The explanations of the above typology of middle manager roles in curriculum change can therefore be summarised in Table 1.

Table 1. Summary of middle manager role typology (Adapted from Floyd &amp; Wooldridge, 2000).

Role Dimension	Role Description	Functional purpose of role
Relationship building	Middle manager makes effort to build and maintain working relationships with both internal and external stakeholders on matters of curriculum and curriculum change.	Middle manager lays foundation of trust, encourages reciprocity to enable future exchanges of value on curriculum issues.
Championing alternatives	Middle manager makes effort to influence top management on curriculum change alternatives.	Middle manager promotes new ideas to top management that may result in the enhancement of the institution's current and future curriculum change goals.
Synthesising curriculum change information	Middle manager interpret and deliver privileged or insider curriculum change information to top management.	Middle manager brings to top management privileged curriculum change information that is needed to anticipate curriculum changes and assist in the institution's ability to respond.
Facilitating adaptability	Middle manager makes effort to provide flexibility to the institution to implement curriculum change initiatives.	Middle manager directly modifies the institution's internal environment in a manner that is conducive to the work of the institution with regards to curriculum change.
Implementing curriculum change	Middle manager implements curriculum change in the institution.	Middle manager directly implements and supports curriculum change in the institution.
Building communities of practice (internal and external)	Middle manager communicates with both internal and external stakeholders in areas of shared projects related to the curriculum in order to acquire information, ideas and other resources needed to inform the role of the middle manager I curriculum change	Middle manager brings into the institution information and resources that are needed to support curriculum change. The middle manager also enables curriculum change in the institution to proceed where work is dependent on contributions of outside resources.

## 7. Conclusion

The above discussion has been able to expose a number of issues concerning the role of the academic middle manager in curriculum change in higher education key of which is the fact that the academic middle manager position is important for the smooth flow of both strategic and operational information within organisations and also departments. Another issue raised by the above discussion is that the role of academic middle managers in higher education institutions is still a misunderstood phenomenon and hence work in progress which is the reason why the meaning of role of the academic middle manager still gravitates between managerialism and collegialism. This study therefore able to both generate debate on as well as develop some pointers at what role in relation to what academic middle managers do in their departments constitutes and more importantly, at what needs to be done to ensure that middle managers understand their roles and use this understanding to effectively carry out their curriculum change roles.

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