A Comparative Study of the Role of Middle-Management in Strategy Implementation at Public and Private Sector Universities of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan

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Abstract

Changes in the global, regional and local environment have brought many challenges to organizations in terms of intense competition and complexities, especially in higher education institutions. One impact of this is the high rate of organizations' failure in implementing strategy. This makes the middle manager's role critical in the wake of conflicting demands and varying interests during strategy implementation. This study aims to analyze the role of middle management in strategy implementation from different perspectives, focusing on public and private universities in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (Pakistan). Data were collected from heads of academic and administrative sections/departments through a standardized questionnaire employing a stratified sampling technique. The model is evaluated through Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA), Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) through AMOS,and Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM 3.0)techniques. Findings of the study suggest that middle management plays a significant role in championing alternatives, synthesizing information, and implementing deliberate strategy irrespective of contextual differences in both public and private sector universities. However, it was found that they (middle managers) have no significant role in facilitating adaptability for strategy implementation in both sector universities. The study offers many insights for future research and policymaking in the field of strategic management.

Keywords: *Strategy implementation, middle management, higher education, Multi-Group Analysis.*

1. Introduction

Top management decides on long-term visions and strategies, which are then communicated hierarchically in an organization (Gjerde & Alvesson, 2020). Middle managers are in charge of translating visions and strategies and planning, coor-

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dinating, budgeting, controlling, and allocating resources to achieve the strategic goals (Malemela, 2017). The tactical management role is, therefore, important in the successful strategy implementation. A study by Candido and Santos, (2015) focused on the strategy implementation obstacles and concluded that there are six major silent killers to successfully implementing a strategy. These include belief only in the top-down approach to managing work, conflicting priorities, senior management inefficiency to perform well, ineffective vertical communication, lack of coordination across departments, and poor management. In this perspective, the middle management counteracts against these silent killers of strategy implantation where they can build, mediate and develop coordination between organizational strategic or top and operational levels of management (Floyd & Wooldridge, 1992). Many factors, including middle management roles, practices, and contexts, significantly contribute to strategy implementation. Middle management that theoretically plays a more significant role in strategy implementation is either ignored at the formulation stage or not empowered/motivated to implement the strategy (Genc, 2017) particularly in Pakistan. This problem is even more salient in in-service sectors like education. The problems associated with Pakistan's universities are missing links between strategic plan formulations and implementation (Ibad, 2017).This study has included four middle management roles: championing alternatives, synthesizing information, facilitating adaptability, and implementing a deliberate strategy where they give inputs in strategy formulation, develop networks, coordinate through effective communication and implement strategies. This study aims to plug in the existing literature by empirically looking at strategy implementation from the perspective of tactical managers using the role theory as an explanatory framework.

The agency perspective states that middle-management is very important for effective decision-making and organizational strategy implementation (Bokhour et al., 2018). There is an excellent debate on the different roles middle managers play in organizations. Some researchers consider middle managers as an unnecessary layer in the organization structure, often find themselves stuck in between various stakeholder groups, which can produce "relentless and conflicting demands, while others consider their roles as essential to communicate the organization's vision, goals, and objectives, minimize the communication gap between organization layers and facilitate creating a collaborative working environment to materialize what has been intended in the competitive environment (Inceoglu, Segers, & Bartram, 2012). To clear this ambiguity, this study is focused on answering the questions of what roles middle-management plays in the strategy implementation process.

Furthermore, through three main areas, the significance of the study can be stated. First, the well-established literature states that a well-examined and

universally applicable concept is the phenomenon of strategic management (Joyce & Drumaux, 2014). Most studies focus on strategic planning or formulation phases, and the strategy implementation phase is the less studied concept (Nutt, 1998). In addition, work on strategy implementation is highly fragmented and segregated in general literature; also, the literature on strategy execution in the education sector in Pakistan is scarce (Neilson, 2021). Thus, it is increasingly critical to examine strategic concepts for implementation. Their significance for organizational effectiveness has been another reason to focus on strategic implementation. The practical implementation of strategic choices is widely regarded as vital for achieving organizational goals (Elbanna, Eid, & Kamel, 2015). Furthermore, theorists have not yet adequately developed specific theories concerning the critical middle management roles for implementing strategies that can address the challenges faced by organizations. No empirical research studies have been carried out in a non-Western developing country such as Pakistan, examining the nature of such middle-management roles' interactions for strategy implementation in the education sector.

Therefore, to fill in the existing gaps, the current study has concentrated on the dynamics of strategy implementation in both public and private sector universities from the perspective of middle management. As a result, this study has made an incremental contribution to understanding and explaining different middle management strategic roles in effective strategy implementation in both public and private sector universities of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

2. Review of literature

Organizations' long-term success is primarily attributed to how well they make sense of the macro environment (political, social, economic, and technological environment) in which they operate. Therefore, all systems, structures, and strategies are aligned to the external environment (strategic fit). This is done by carefully formulating an organizational strategy, implementing it effectively, and evaluating it in due course to see if it delivers the desired results (Devinney & Dowling, 2020). Most often, more attention is given to environmental assessment and strategy formulation with an assumption that implementation of the strategy is an inside matter and does not require much deliberation (Bryson & George, 2020). However, it has been found that wisely formulated strategies have gone astray because of poor implementation. It is, therefore, essential to understanding the dynamics of strategy implementation in both public and private sectors. Based on the published literature in the field of strategic management, this study looks at the role of middle managers in strategy implementation from the following four different perspectives:

a. Synthesizing information

Middle managers are responsible for transferring information from lower to top and top to bottom related to internal as well as external events of an organization (Kasperson & Kasperson, 2015). The synthesized information by middle-management becomes the basis for effective decision-making by top-management related to arrays of issues (Sherf, Gajendran, & Posner, 2021).

b. Facilitating adaptability

With the middle-management role of facilitating adaptability, organizational strategies are facilitated for adaptability and implementation. With the help of this middle-management role, team members are inspired to progress, support learning, and are encouraged to implement strategy (Gjellebæk, Svensson, Bjørkquist, Fladeby, & Grundén, 2020).

c. Championing alternatives

By championing alternatives, the middle management can reshape or change the strategic thinking of top management and their current concept about strategy implementation (Splitter, Jarzabkowski, & Seidl, 2021).

d. Implementing deliberate strategy

Currie and Procter (2005) argue that deliberate strategy implementation is the process of translating strategic plans and objectives into action. A certain degree of uniformity is required between what strategy has been formulated and implemented, and this is done through an active role of middle management (Köseoglu, Altin, Chan, & Aladag, 2020).

2.1 Theoretical framework

The role of middle managers in strategy implementation can be understood through role theory. The role theory dates back to the 1920s and 1930s, when social psychologists began to understand human social behavior through the framework of roles (Thakur & Srivastava, 2018). Humans change their behavior as per a set of rights, responsibilities, expectations, and conventions acceptable for a specific contextual environment and in a social setting. The role theory concept comes with Park's findings in 1926 that everyone everywhere has always been performing a role by which one is identified and recognized in an organizational setting (Saalfeld & Müller, 1997). Park claims that the individual adapting to a position begins with humans being born as individuals, observing behaviors, developing personalities, and

eventually becoming whole persons. Mead and Schubert (1934) discussed the social behavior theory and expanded on the significance of observing and changing behavior (Serpe, Stryker, & Powell, 2020). He defined 'role' as an arrangement of social acts transferred into individuals in a given social setting. The "role" that distinguished it from "personality" and "ego," as well as the meanings of "role-taking," "role-playing," and "role-creation" (von Ameln & Becker-Ebel, 2020). Role-taking is defined as taking on a completed and fully-formed role that does not allow the individual to interpret the role in any way; role-playing provides you a certain amount of flexibility while the role creating is framed with the highest degree of individual freedom. Moreno's concepts have evolved into a range of role theories known as cognitive role theory (Lee, Townsend, Troth, & Loudoun, 2019).

The role is the expected behavior of individuals to be performed in an organization (Yong, Garcia-Cardenas, Williams, & Benrimoj, 2020). Role refers to the set of activities carried out to perform a particular job. Roles are created from assigned tasks and indicate expected behavior linked with a specific position. Role is the summation of the requirements with which the system confronts the individual member (Troyer, Mueller, & Osinsky, 2000).

Role theory states that inside organizations, individuals' roles form a chain of established patterns of conduct that ensures function, independent of individual preferences (Orkibi, 2019). When looking at organizational roles, it is critical to think of the work environment in which people work because people will react to the environment following how they experienced it. The organization is referred to as an entity where the jobholder performs his duty (role) as input, processes the goods in the transformation phase, and offers goods or services to the end-users (Pattanayak, 2020).

The role theory can be used as a theoretical lens to explain how and why middle managers perform different roles and to what extent they move away from the "ideal" role. To put it differently, the theory supports the assumption that middle managers are not passive recipients of orders given by superiors (Serpe, et al., 2020). They make sense of what they are expected to do, how they will do it, and what can be done within the given constraints (Orkibi, 2019). In other words, they define their role within the broader framework of organizational strategy and various structural/cultural constraints.

Middle management framework, presenting the overlapping managerial roles which have both upward and downward influences (Floyd & Wooldridge, 1992). The upward middle management roles influence the top management view while taking decisions or actions, which can ultimately align the formulated strategy with the organizational operations across units (Vaz, 2019). For downward influence, middle

managers are the change agents of any organization. This is done by implementing the formulated strategies using the middle managers' facilitating role. The process involves flexible organizational arrangements through employee involvement, engagement, and consulting (Loutfi, 2018).

Therefore, it is most likely that the vision and mission of an organization, as reflected in the strategic plan, may not be fully realized or partly if middle managers have a blurred understanding of their roles.

Middle management role of championing alternatives and strategy implementation

Middle managers endeavor to persuade senior managers to implement new strategic ideas (Pfister, Jack, & Darwin, 2017). some studies have provided detailed accounts of how middle managers conceive and build (bottom-up) strategies, indicating that middle management has a more significant impact on organizational success than senior management (Wang, Gibbons, & Heavey, 2017). Championing alternatives is communicating strategic options to senior management consistently and persuasively. This job is distinct from assisting adaptability in that it focuses on persuading corporate executives to shift their current strategic thinking. The championing action as a managerial position rather than a role (Van Rensburg, Davis, & Venter, 2014). Thus, the first Hypothesis was developed below to confirm or reject the overall impact of the central role of championing alternatives on strategy implementation in the university context of Pakistan.

H1: (Alternate Hypothesis)

The middle managers' role of championing alternatives positively influences the effectiveness of strategy implementation.

Middle management role of synthesizing information and strategy implementation

Middle managers interpret and send information to senior management in this function. Middle managers' synthesized data could become the primary basis for upper management decision-making (Shujahat et al., 2017). Middle managers' roles have traditionally been limited in strategy research to providing feedback on strategy development, with strategy making considered to involve the top manager or senior management team (Wooldridge, Schmid, & Floyd, 2008). Thus, the second Hypothesis of the study has been considered as follows:

H2: (Alternate Hypothesis)

The middle managers' role in synthesizing information positively influences the effectiveness of strategy implementation.

Middle management role of facilitating adaptability and strategy implementation

In this role, middle managers can exert a downward impact by encouraging adaptation, which allows them to support more radical initiatives within their areas of responsibility that are outside upper management's official expectations (Currie & Procter, 2005). This role seems to be as the social craftsperson (Nordqvist & Melin, 2008). Fostering flexible organizational arrangements is defined as facilitating flexibility; middle managers are supposed to facilitate experimentation and autonomous development within their areas of responsibility (Dittes, Richter, Richter, & Smolnik, 2019). Thus, based on the above literature, it has been hypothesized that:

H3: (Alternate Hypothesis)

The middle managers' role in facilitating adaptability positively influences the effectiveness of strategy implementation.

Middle management role of implementing deliberate and strategy implementation

Middle managers put the strategy into action by converting company strategy into action plans and individual goals (Currie & Procter, 2005). There is much more clarity about what is expected regarding explicit purposes when it comes to deliberate strategy (Chia & Holt, 2006). In this case, the middle manager's function is more closely linked to adherence to strategic guidelines than an offer to join them. A respectful environment appears to be achieved through an exchange in which top management respects the capabilities of middle managers and their teams, who in turn respect the competencies of top management (Mantere, 2008). Thus, the last study hypothesis has been developed as follows:

H4: (Alternate Hypothesis)

The middle managers' role in implementing deliberate strategy positively influences the effectiveness of strategy implementation.
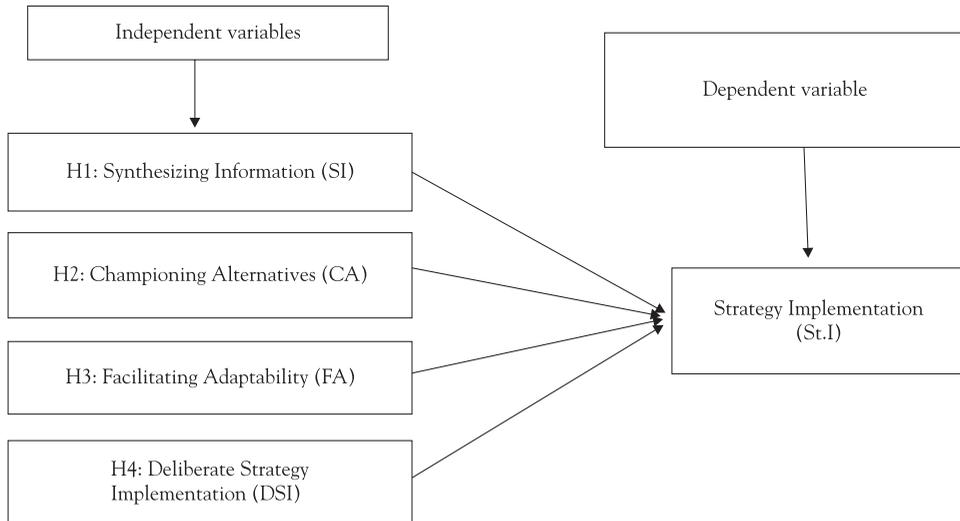
2.15 Conceptual Framework

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Methodology

Population and sample

The target population for the present study includes only those universities established before 30th June 2010. The list of the universities was obtained from the higher education of Pakistan. These specific universities and their employees were the target population of the current study. These include the head of departments, directors, deputy directors, controller of the exams, deputy controllers, and section heads. The data for middle-management roles and strategy implementation has been collected using two significant scales, dichotomous and like scales. This study has taken a proportionally stratified strategy, with each stratum's sample size proportional to its population size. After that, to administer the questionnaire, a systematic random sample technique was used to draw a sample from each department and faculty.

Table 1: Population and sample size of public sector universities

Strata Name	Public Sector Universities	Population	Sample
Pb1	Abdul Wali Khan University, Mardan	49	19
Pb2	Hazara University, Mansehra.	43	17
Pb3	Islamia College University, Peshawar	34	14
Pb4	KUST Kohat	31	13

Pb5	Shaheed Benazir Bhutto University, Sheringal	35	14
Pb6	Shaheed Benazir Bhutto Women University, Peshawar	41	17
Pb7	University of Malakand, Chakdara	43	17
Pb8	University of Peshawar, Peshawar	73	29
Pb9	University of Science and Technology, Bannu	32	13
Pb10	Gomal University, D.I.K	36	15
Pb 11	IM Sciences Peshawar	13	06
	TOTAL	430	174

Table 2: Population and sample of private sector universities

Strata name	Private Sector Universities	Population	Sample
Pr1	Abasyn University, Peshawar	12	05
Pr2	CECOS University of IT & Emerging Sciences, Peshawar	13	05
Pr3	City University of Science & Information Technology, Peshawar	15	06
Pr4	Preston University Kohat	17	07
Pr5	Quotable University, Peshawar	16	06
Pr6	Sarhad University, Peshawar	27	11
Pr7	GIK Swabi	19	08
Pr8	Northern University Nowshera	23	09
	TOTAL	142	57

Participants

In this research, study participants were drawn from the middle management levels of both public and private sector universities of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The selection of the participants was based on a specific inclusion criterion. Only the university employee who supervises at least one subordinate level manager and at the same time report to the top-level management were included in this study. These include department heads, chairmen, deputy directors, section heads, etc. The current study has applied both purposive and stratified sampling techniques for data collection from these participants. In the first stage, the purposive sampling technique has been used for selecting universities based on their establishment dates, and in the second stage, the stratified sampling technique was used to divide the whole population into two strata, i.e., public and private sector universities.

Procedure

In this survey study, questionnaires were self-administered and sent to the respondents' email addresses, which were received from their official profiles after locating the target respondents. After sending the questionnaires, they were requested to complete and returned to the researcher. Before distributing questionnaires, the participants were informed about the study's purpose and importance for practitioners and the research community. The participants could decide whether to participate in the survey or not. This way, participants were protected through informed consent, the study's purpose, and data collected before filling the questionnaires. Besides this, the researcher also assured them of their confidentiality and anonymity. The participants were given the right to participate, withdraw at any time, or seek more details about the study objectives.

Measurement

The current study's questionnaire is based on a Likert scale. For all of the independent and dependent variables in the underlying study, the instrument was based on a seven-point Likert scale (ranging from strongly disagree = 01 on one side to strongly agree =7 on the other side strongly). Questions for the middle-management roles of championing alternatives, facilitating adaptability, synthesizing information, and implementing deliberate strategy were adopted from the work of Floyd and Wooldridge (1996), and questions related to university strategic plan implementation were adapted from the work of Goldman and Salem (2015). For championing alternatives, questions include I justify and define new programs in the university; I propose new programs and projects to the top-level management of the university. To facilitate adaptability, I encourage information sharing and informal discussion in university. For synthesizing information, I am responsible for collecting information about the feasibility of new programs in the university and assessing changes in the external environment affecting the university operations. For implementing deliberate strategy, I am responsible for observing staff activities to support top-management objectives, I am responsible for translating and operationalizing goals into individual objectives, and I am responsible for implementing top-management initiatives through my faculty members in the university. While strategy implementation as a dependent variable was measured base on the questions like The departments are involved in launching aggressive promotional campaigns to enhance students' enrollment, The University Enrich the existing programs by developing a specialization in specific areas, and The University recognizes service quality as the over-riding objective of the university, and The University is committed to modernizing the libraries by making them IT-intensive and equipping them with text/reference books and research journals, etc.

Data analysis

For the data analysis, the study used PLS-SEM analysis and the MGA through Smart-PLS (Ringle, Da Silva, & Bido, 2015). A multivariate statistical approach is used to analyze all of the interactions between variables in a conceptual model simultaneously, including measurements. The structural model was evaluated by evaluating the R2, path coefficients, and values of standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) as an approximate model fit for PLS-SEM in public and private university settings, as well as the measurement model by evaluating the reliability and validity of reflective constructs (Henseler, Hubona, & Ray, 2016).

Results

Table 3: Descriptive Analysis

	Public Sector Universities		Private Sector Universities	
	Mean	**Std. Deviation**	**Mean**	**Std. Deviation**
Construct/Associated items				
Championing Alternatives				
I justify and define new programs in the university.	5.2420	1.42055	5.3108	1.59559
I participate to evaluate the merit and demerits of new proposals in the university.	5.0828	1.29576	5.0135	1.59187
Sometimes, I propose new programs and projects to the top-level management of the university	5.3185	1.33991	5.2973	1.65297
I justify those programs which have already been successfully established in the university.	5.2229	1.42594	5.2973	1.66124
Facilitating Adaptability				
I encourage information sharing and informal discussion in university.	3.7134	1.64493	3.3649	1.70072
I am in favor to relax rules and regulations to get new programs or projects started in the university.	3.7134	1.61345	3.2838	1.53962
I am getting involved to develop long term objectives and strategies therein, for new programs and projects in the university.	3.6624	1.57119	3.3784	1.55010

I am in favor of multidisciplinary problems solving teams in the university.	3.9745	1.67159	3.6216	1.86314
I am in favor to encourage new ideas generation to improve performance.	4.0637	1.82462	3.6216	1.89955
Synthesizing Information				
I am responsible to collect information about the feasibility of new programs in the university.	4.9873	1.59722	5.0000	1.72809
I am responsible to communicate information about upward and downward in the university.	4.9045	1.60841	5.0000	1.72809
I am responsible to assess changes in the external environment affecting the university operations.	5.2357	1.46384	5.2432	1.62860
I am responsible to communicate the implication of new changes in the external environment on university operations.	4.9108	1.55405	4.9595	1.69963
Implementing Deliberate Strategy (IDS)				
I am responsible to observe staff activities to support top-management objectives.	5.5605	1.41121	5.1081	1.38057
I am responsible to implement action plans and strategies designed to meet the objectives of the university.	5.4395	1.30255	5.1757	1.02514
I am responsible to translate goals into action plans in the university.	5.5414	1.36575	5.2027	1.26035
I am responsible to translate and operationalized goals into individual objectives.	5.6306	1.17280	5.2703	1.13834
Strategy Implementation (SI)	4.7580	1.45620	4.9595	1.39901
The University is involving alumni by increasing alumni activities on the campus	4.5350	1.52974	5.0811	1.56815
The University Enrich the existing programs by developing a specialization in specific areas	4.8790	1.58660	4.9730	1.60456
The University is capitalizing on its brand name and resources for enriching its existing programs and launching some new ones to expand its market share	4.4904	1.59975	4.3378	1.59001
The university is assessing faculty performance and providing incentives for excellence in teaching and research	5.3949	1.43562	5.6622	1.03734
The university considers faculty training as an integral part of the university mission statement	5.2803	1.44042	5.2027	1.22731

The University is committed to Developing/enhancing international academic linkages	5.5159	1.37564	5.4595	1.31575
The University encourages faculty and students to participate in research conferences/seminars	5.5860	1.26615	5.8649	1.18581
There are adequate discussion centers facilities for students in each department of the University	5.9236	.54937	5.8378	.66264
The University is providing on-campus hostel facilities to female students	6.0255	.46615	5.9730	.61873

As shown in the above table, the middle management roles of championing alternatives, synthesizing information, and implementing deliberate strategy and strategy implementation had the highest mean values for both public and private sector universities. Facilitating adaptability had the lowest means values in public and private sector universities. The lowest value for facilitating adaptability is due to the strict rules and regulations, which can create barriers to flexibility in the work setting to plan, acquire, and utilize resources according to their needs. However, there are higher values for middle management roles of championing alternatives and synthesizing information for effective strategy implementation, which shows that overall, middle management, plays a very critical role in bridging the gap between strategy formulation and strategy implementation in public and private sector universities contexts.

Assessment of measurement models

The figure and table below, show the measurement model for all four middle-management roles of championing alternatives, synthesizing information, facilitating adaptability, and implementing deliberate strategy and strategy implementation. This model consists of a single reflective factor consisting of 48 items. After measurement confirmation analysis, the results show that the given model has good fit indices.

Table 4: Baseline Comparisons for model fit

Model	CMIN/DF NFI	RFI	IFI	TLI	CFI RM-SEA
Default model	3.44	.854	.925	.892	.885
	.872				.109
Refined Comparisons for Model fit					
Model	CMIN/DF NFI	RFI	IFI	TLI	CFI RMSEA
Default model	3.792	.932	.969	.939	.969
	.966				102

Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) for middle management roles as independent variables and strategy implementation as a dependent variable

The figure below shows the measurement model for the middle management roles of synthesizing information, facilitating adaptability, championing alternatives, and implementing deliberate strategy as independent variables and strategy implementation along with its components as a dependent variable. This model consists of a single reflective factor with 48 items. After measurement confirmation analysis, the results show that the given model is a good fit.
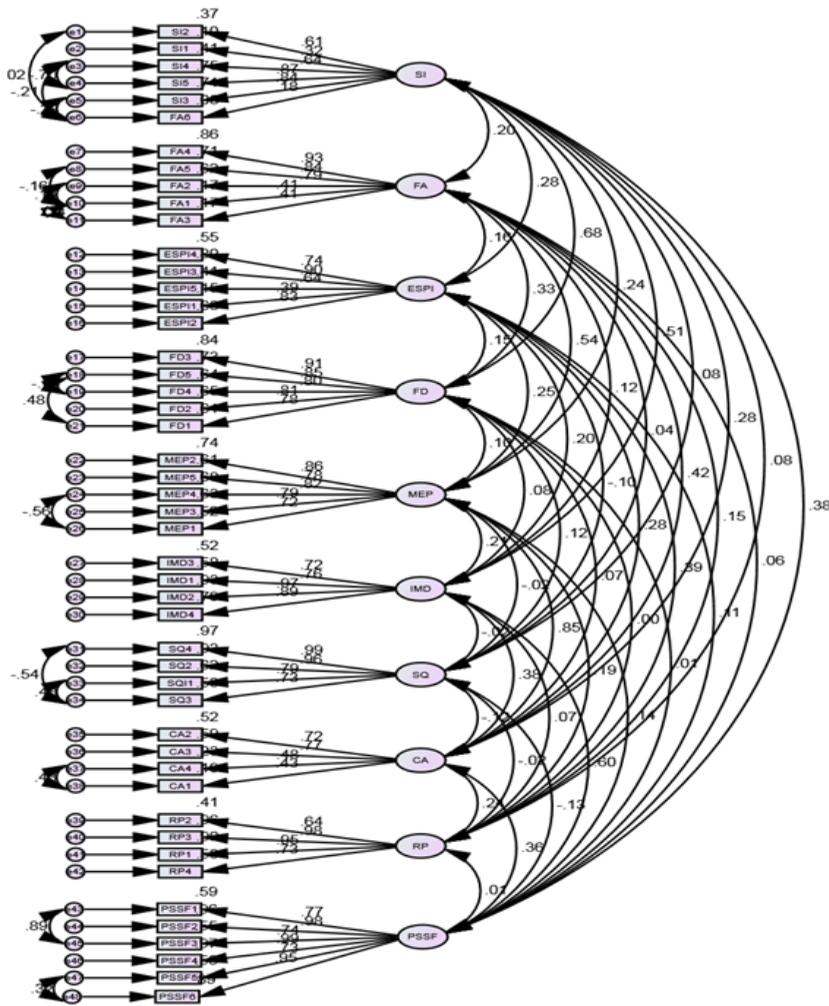

Figure 2: Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) for middle management roles as independent variables and strategy implementation as a dependent variable

The table is given below for independent variables, i.e., synthesizing information, facilitating adaptability, Championing alternatives, and dependent variables, i.e., strategy implementation, show greater Cronbach's Alpha which is almost greater than 0.70 for each of the given variables. Some other techniques used to check the reliability of the given instrument include rho, the threshold value for which > is 0.70, composite reliability bearing the threshold value is >0.70, and for convergent validity, Average Variance Extracted (AVE), which should be more significant than>.50 (Hair, Hult, Ringle, Sarstedt, & Thiele, 2017). The table given below by using Smart-PLS.3 shows the results for each instrument. All of these results are under the acceptable range, showing that each construct used either for the independent variable or dependent variable is reliable, and convergent validity is conferment to conduct further analysis in the study.

Table 5: Assessment of the Measurement Model

	Cronbach's Alpha	rho_A	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Champ_Alter	0.898	0.957	0.927	0.762
Facili_Adapt	0.817	0.70	0.727	0.544
Imp_Deleb_Strgy	0.916	0.934	0.936	0.786
Strategy_Imp	0.817	0.829	0.792	0.626
Synth_Inform	0.947	0.947	0.96	0.826

Correlation Matrix

Table.6 reported Inter Scales Correlation among middle management roles of Championing Alternatives (CA)), Synthesis zing Information (SI), Facilitating Adaptability (FA), and Implementing Deliberate Strategy (IDS) as independent variables and Strategy Implementation (SI) as dependent variable across public and private sector universities.

Table 6: Pearson Correlation Matrix

Sector			Champ_Alternatives	Synth_Information	Faci_Adaptability	Imp_Delib_Strategy	Strategy_Implementation
Public	Champ_Alternative	Pearson Correlation	1	.302**	.180*	.349**	.257**
		Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.024	.000	.001

		N	157	157	157	157	157
	Synth_Information	Pearson Correlation	.302**	1	.382**	.365**	.521**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000	.000	.000
		N	157	157	157	157	157
	Faci_Adaptability	Pearson Correlation	.180*	.382**	1	.059	.578**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.024	.000		.463	.000
		N	157	157	157	157	157
	Imp_Delib_Strategy	Pearson Correlation	.349**	.365**	.059	1	.172*
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.463		.031
		N	157	157	157	157	157
	Strategy_Implem	Pearson Correlation	.257**	.521**	.578**	.172*	1
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	.000	.000	.031	
		N	157	157	157	157	157
Private	Champ_Alternati	Pearson Correlation	1	.397**	.505**	.392**	.433**
		Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.001	.000
		N	74	74	74	74	74
	Synth_Information	Pearson Correlation	.397**	1	.383**	.151	.460**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.001	.198	.000
		N	74	74	74	74	74

Faci_ Adaptability	Pearson Correlation	.505**	.383**	1	.362**	.621**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.001		.002	.000
	N	74	74	74	74	74
Imp_ Delib_ Strateg	Pearson Correlation	.392**	.151	.362**	1	.299**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	.198	.002		.010
	N	74	74	74	74	74
Strategy_ Implem	Pearson Correlation	.433**	.460**	.621**	.299**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.010	
	N	74	74	74	74	74

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

b. Cannot be computed because at least one of the variables is constant.

In the above table, the correlation among middle management roles of championing alternatives, synthesizing information, facilitating adaptability, and implementing deliberate strategy and strategy implementation was calculated for comparison across two independent groups, i.e., public and private sector universities. The results found that though there is a strong correlation between independent and dependent variables. For public sector .302**,.180*,.349**,.257**with significance values of .000 for all correlation values and private sector, .397**,.505**, .392** and .433** with significance values of .000 for each variable. However, correlation matrix values for both sectors are significant, with no significant differences in correlations values across sectors. It implies that middle management roles have similar positive correlations in the process of implementations of strategic plant implementation irrespective of sector differences of universities.

Table 4.5.7 shows the results of the assessment of the structural model and MGA using both nonparametric methods:

The permutation test and Henseler's MGA (Henseler, Ringle, & Sinkovics, 2009). These are the most conservative PLS-SEM strategies for determining path coefficient

Table 7: Multi-Group Analysis (MGA): Public vs Private Sector Universities

Path Coefficient (One tailed)		Significance				
	Relation-ships	Public Sector Universities Path Coef-ficients	Private Sector Universities Path Coef-ficients	Path Coefficient Difference	t-Value(|-Public_Sec-tor(1.0) vsPri-vate_Sec-tor(2.0)|)	p-Value (Public_Sector(1.0) vsPrivate_Sector(2.0))
Hypothe-sis 1	Ch_Alt → SI	0.346	0.128	0.218	1.06	0.292
Hypothe-sis 2	Synt_Inf→ SI	0.323	0.228	0.095	0.69	0.492
Hypothe-sis 3	Facil → SI	0.084	0.236	0.32	2.414	0.018
Hypothe-sis 4	Del_St →SI	0.279	0.425	0.146	0.856	0.394

Note: In Hemseler's MGA method, the p-value lower than 0.05 or higher than 0.95 indicates at the 5% level a significant difference between specific path coefficients across two groups.

P<0.05,**p<0.01.

differences between two groups (Ringle, Sarstedt, & Zimmermann, 2011). Henseler's MGA compares the group-specific bootstrap estimates of each bootstrap sample direct-ly. According to this method, a p-value of differences between path coefficients less than 0.05 or larger than 0.95 indicates a 5% level of significant differences between individual path coefficients across two groups (Sarstedt, Henseler, & Ringle, 2011). The permutation test likewise produces a p-value; however, if the p-value is less than 0.05, differences are only significant at the 5% significance level. The results of MGA show no significant differences in the middle management role of championing alter-natives, synthesizing information, and implementing deliberate strategy implemen-tation across both public and private sectors of universities of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, using both Henseler's MGA and the permutation approach. As a result, the findings support hypotheses 1, 2, and 4, but not the other Hypothesis in this study (for ex-ample, hypothesis 3),i.e., the path coefficients difference were significantly found to facilitate adaptability and strategy implementation across both sectors, which signifies that middle management role of facilitating adaptability for strategy implementation in private sector universities is more relative to public sector universities. It implies more flexibility and relaxation in rules and regulations for strategy implementation followed by middle management in private sector universities than in public sector universities. The significance/non-significance of the results for differences between

public and private universities was validated using both MGA analysis approaches used in this study, strengthening the reliability of our findings.

Discussion

Championing alternatives and strategy implementation

This study hypothesized the relationship and impact of middle management's role in championing alternatives on strategy implementation (H1). The middle management role of Championing alternatives was operationalized by constantly communicating suggestions to top management to develop new or running programs in the academic university setting. Championing alternative roles included supporting, persuading, influencing, and conversing. These practices were used to engage others positively, selling the strategic choices and reconciling tensions in discussions. The championing alternative's role allows middle managers to influence top management's strategic thinking by selling them strategic initiatives that differ from their existing plan. The empirical shreds of evidence of the study supported H1, i.e., Championing alternatives -> Strategy implementation, with path coefficient of 0.234, t value of 2.950, and p-value of 0.000 Critical value for T-Test = 1.96, Sig P<0.05, validated the findings of past research studies (e.g Floyd & Wooldridge, 1996; Burgelman, 1983a; Dutton *et al*, 1997; Huy, 2001; Ahearne, Lam & Kraus, 2014; Jaoua, 2018; Mack & Szulanski, 2017; Kealy, 2015; Elliott, Day, & Lichtenstein, 2020; Kihara, Bwisa, & Kihoro, 2016).

Synthesizing information and strategy implementation

Hypothesis two (H2) of the study hypothesized the relationship and impact of the middle management role in synthesizing information on effective strategy implementation in the university context. Synthesizing information refers to collecting, interpreting, and communicating information within and across the organization, which may affect the top management's perception of the strategy implementation (Floyd & Wooldridge, 1992). Middle managers act as uncertainty absorbers and artful interpreters of the environment. He combines both macro-strategic information and hands-on micro information. Middle management more effectively eliminates chaos, fluctuations, and noise and clarifies doubts which serve as a starting point for decisions and actions taken by top management. About the middle management role of synthesizing information for strategy implementation in both the public and private sector universities of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, table 2.41 show that synthesizing information has the path coefficient value of 0.290, t value of 5.148, and significance value of 0.000 in relationship with and impact on the overall strategy implementation with critical values of t statistics 1.96 and p-value of < 0.05. This significantly impacts the

middle management's role in synthesizing information on strategy implementation. Hence H2 was accepted. These findings were congruent with the findings of earlier studies (e.g., Kodama, 2019; Floyd & Wooldridge, 1992; Hedman & Henningsson, 2016; Nonaka, Hirose, & Tekeda, 2016; Takala, 2002; Balogun & Johnson, 2004; Mantere, 2008; Cheong, Zhu, & Liao, 2018).

Facilitating adaptability and strategy implementation

Hypothesis H3 of the study predicted the impact of facilitating adaptability on strategy implementation. The facilitating adaptability is referred to as the downward influence of middle management to facilitate the routine activities in their areas of concern (Currie & Procter, 2005). This role is considered as the social craftsman, fostering flexible organizational arrangements. Workplace flexibility is placed on the middle management to deal with complexities and adapt to the changing environment. Middle management manages emotions for radical change phases (Floyd & Wooldridge, 1992). The empirical shreds of evidence of the study supported H3, i.e., Facilitating adaptability -> Strategy implementation with path coefficient of 0.045, t value of 0.643, and p-value of 0.507 with critical value for t value = 1.96, sig p<0.05. The study has evidenced that the managerial role of facilitating adaptability has an insignificant influence on strategy implementation and its components. Most respondents responded that they had tried their best to neutralize the stressful situations in departments by understanding their official needs and resources, encouraging informal information sharing, and developing multidisciplinary problems solving teams. The study thus had not validated the findings of past studies (e.g., Hermkens, 2021; Burgelman, 1983; Beatty & Lee, 1992; Floyd & Wooldridge, 1996; Mantere & Vaara, 2008; Floyd & Lane, 2000; Huy, 2001; Carney, 2003; Canales & Vila, 2004; Herzig & Jimmieson, 2006; Currie & Procter, 2005; Chia & Holt, 2006; Nordqvist & Melin, 2008) proposing the significant impact of middle management strategic role of facilitating adaptability on strategy implementation and its components.

Middle management role of implementing deliberate strategy and strategy implementation

Finally, the study hypothesized the relationship and impact of middle management's role in implementing deliberate strategy on strategy implementation (H4). The middle management role of deliberate strategy refers to the managerial intervention to align the organizational actions with the top management's long-term intention, i.e., vision and mission (Floyd & Wooldridge, 1992). Middle management implements strategies by translating the corporate organizational strategy into action plans and individual objectives (Currie & Procter, 2005).

The path coefficients, t-values, and p-values are calculated based on the academic middle managers' perceptions about their roles in implementing deliberate strategies. The results find that the middle management role in implementing deliberate strategy is mixed. This means that some of the components of the university strategic plan are positively correlated and significantly influenced while others are not. This means that middle management's role in implementing deliberate strategy (H4) is partially supported. The statistics for implementing deliberate strategy ->students' intake, path coefficients 0.131 and t-values 0.466, for implementing deliberate strategy -> market expansion path coefficient 0.131 and t value 3.124, for Implementing deliberate strategy -> students' Support the path coefficient is .108 and t values 2.029. The academic middle managers were responsible for monitoring activities to support top management objectives and translate goals into action plans in the university. On the other hand, middle managers were found least responsive to implementing top management initiatives that needed large resource allocations.

The study found significant challenges include a lack of formal strategic plan development and awareness at department levels, lack of employees' commitment, lack of taking departmental responsibility, and top management support. These findings were congruent with earlier studies (Burgelman, 1983; Cândido & Santos, 2015; Heyden, Fourné, Koene, Werkman, & Ansari, 2017; Jarzabkowski, Kaplan, Seidl, & Whittington, 2016; Kopmann, Kock, Killen, & Gemünden, 2017; Mintzberg, 1978; Nilsen, 2020; Phillips & Moutinho, 2018; Reger, Gustafson, Demarie, & Mullane, 1994; Wolf & Floyd, 2017) which have concluded that deliberate strategies are implemented successfully in both public and private sector universities irrespective of their contextual differences.

Implications of the study

This study has extended Floyd and Wooldridge's model of middle management roles for strategy implementation in the local context. These roles include championing alternatives, facilitating adaptability, synthesizing information, and implementing deliberate strategy. The contextualized perspective was adopted to redefine these roles and factors associated with the university's strategic plan and implementation. Strategy as practice perspective was adopted to develop strategic plan dimensions in the university setting. This research has created awareness about the strategic roles that acknowledge Floyd and Wooldridge's (1996) middle management roles model by providing rich data in their strategizing behaviors during strategy implementation.

In addition to enriching the existing literature, this study has informed the practitioners based on the available data on where middle management plays their strategic roles effectively and where they are facing the challenges to implementing

university strategic plans effectively. It has been evidenced from the literature that top management mainly focuses on strategy formulation while lower management on day-to-day activities. Both extremes create gaps in implementing the formulated strategy successfully. In order to fill the existing gap, the practitioners have sensed the middle management strategic roles to bridge those gaps based on the data collected, analyzed, and drawn conclusions.

Conclusion

This study aimed to answer the research questions of how middle management plays the roles of championing alternatives (CA), facilitating adaptability (FA), synthesizing information (SI), and deliberate strategy implementation (DSI) in effective strategy implementation in both public and private sector universities of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan.

An integrated model of the impact of four different middle management roles in strategy implementation and its dimensions were theoretically proposed and empirically tested. The results indicated that the middle management's strategic roles of championing alternatives (CA), facilitating adaptability (FA), and synthesizing information (SI) have a significant positive impact on the strategy implementation dimension of research promotion, service quality, and market expansion and student facilities. The results also revealed that there is no significant relationship between the middle management's strategic roles of implementing deliberate strategy in strategy implementation.

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The findings of this study provide good and enough insights for both the man-

agement and policymakers to sense the importance of the middle management roles in academia ineffective strategy formulation and specifically in implementation in the university context of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. Thus the study has both theoretical and practical implications for management practitioners and researchers.

Limitations and suggestions for future research

Limitations are the standard features of any research study, including this one, but the researcher in this study tried his best to minimize those limitations.

The first limitation of the study is that the relationships tested in path models among middle management roles of championing alternatives, facilitating adaptability, and synthesizing information with strategy implementation and its dimensions are not absolute. These relationships are based on the individual perceptions of different social constructs, which may change their meaning for different respondents. Secondly, the data was collected at one point in time and in different contexts, which may change its meaning if either longitudinal study is conducted. Thus, the universality of the relationships is not advisable. Longitudinal or exploratory studies are suggested to validate these relationships and get complete information about their relationship.

Secondly, the data is collected based on a self-report questionnaire method which may cause social desirability bias on the part of individual respondents, which is very challenging to be controlled or eliminate. However, some researchers, including Spector and Jex, (1998) considered the self-report approach an ideal data collection method. For future research studies, in-depth interviews and observation methods are advised to cross-check and validate the research findings.

Third, common method bias may be the limitation of the stud, which the research has tried to minimize by distributing different sections of the questionnaire in different time phases of about 3-7 days of gaps. Other research studies of the exact nature should include different data collection methods and a longitudinal study design.

Finally, this study was restricted only to the higher education sector of Pakistan e.i, universities in both the public and private sectors. This choice of this sector was based on the need to bridge the gap between strategy formulation and implementation of universities by involving the middle management strategic role. Therefore, it is possible that the results of this study may not be replicated in other public and private sector organizations.

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