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The Hong Kong Polytechnic University
Department of Management and Marketing

**An examination of cognitive schemas of middle
managers' roles in organizational change**

Hanhua, Xu (Erica)

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of
Philosophy

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Abstract

Concurring with emerging research on middle managers' contributions in organizational change, this research intends to provide evidences on middle managers' roles in organizational change. It also taps into middle managers' cognitions of change process to further understand how middle managers make sense of and evaluate their roles in organizational change. Through examining middle managers' cognitive schemas of their role in organizational change, we seek to better understand middle managers' role in organizational change and what they can contribute and what facilitates their role in organizational change. Specifically, we intend to reveal middle managers' salient schemas and multiple idiosyncratic schemas on their roles in organizational change. We conducted two studies: in Study 1, we found that there is a role transition for middle managers in organizational change. Three role change patterns were identified, which are "deal with personal change", "deal with changes to departments" and "help others through change". In addition, we found that middle managers' role changes are based on the expectations from four different sources: top managers, subordinates, important outsiders, and themselves. In Study 2, we used repertory grid technique (Kelly, 1955) to examine middle managers' cognitive schemas. This method allows us to explore middle managers' meaningful schemas without imposing researchers' frame of references. Three salient schemas were identified, which include "controllability", "standards and requirements" and "familiarity". Moreover, a number of idiosyncratic schemas were also identified. In addition, we did an additional analysis of role grouping to examine how middle managers group their emergent roles in organizational change based on the identified evaluative schemas. Implications of the current findings were provided.

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the research

The hyper-competitive environment provides both threats and opportunities to all the organizations in the business. To survive and become leaders in the industry, firms have to become quickly responsive to the evolving circumstances and change accordingly (Huff, Huff, & Barr, 2000). Yet, organizations have recognized one of the very few truths about managing organizational change which is implementation is more easily said than done (Reger, Gustafson, DeMarie, & Mullane, 1994). Indeed, the problem of how to successfully implement organizational changes persists and endures despite the enormous attention from both academia and practice (Bartunek, 1984; Beer & Walton, 1987; Floyd & Wooldridge, 1992; Jones, Jimmieson & Griffiths, 2005; Kanter, Stein & Jick, 1993; Kotter, 2007; Miller, Wilson & Hickson, 2004; Nutt, 1987).

The mainstream research on organizational change tries to explore the underlying reason from behavioral, emotional and cognitive perspectives (Alexander, 1985; Balogun & Johnson, 1998; Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; Huy, 2002; Jones, Jimmieson & Griffiths, 2005; Kotter, 1996; Lau & Woodman, 1995; Simons, 1994; Thomas, Clark & Gioia, 1993) and has made incremental contributions to this research domain. Recently, an evident tendency which merits attention is the recognition and exploration of middle managers' influences and roles in organizational change. Researchers have built an agenda on this line of seeking by investigating middle managers' potential contributions in the change process (Balogun, 2003; Balogun & Johnson, 1998, 2004; Floyd & Wooldridge, 1992, 1994, 2000; Floyd & Lane, 2000; Huy, 2001). Specifically, this line of research focuses on what are middle managers' influences in organizational change,

what contributions they can make for organizational change, and what can be done to help middle managers contribute to organizational change (Balogun, 2003, 2007; Balogun & Johnson, 2004; Floyd & Wooldridge, 1992, 1994, 1997).

This emerging research domain suggests that middle managers' roles in organizational change are covered in the traditional and emergent fashions (Balogun, 2003; Currie & Procter, 2005). The traditional roles of middle managers indicate their regular roles in everyday organizational life as middle managers. For example, planning and scheduling work and networking (Hales, 2001). The emergent roles are generated along with a change unfolding. For instance, they need to socially communicate with top managers to gain clear understanding of the change (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991), to help their subordinates to understand the meaning of the change (Balogun, 2003), and to communicate with their customers or key stakeholders about the new change (Rouleau, 2005). Middle managers are traditionally seen as either passive "change recipients" or "change implementers" who are brought into organizational change no matter whether they personally value the change or just because their boss says so (Kanter, Stein & Jick, 1992). More recently, middle managers have been termed as "change intermediaries" (Balogun, 2003), and their upward and downward influences in organizational change have been increasingly recognized. Yet, in the domain of emerging research, do we completely capture middle managers' roles in organizational change? What do they do differently when a change is introduced? Is there a role transition of middle managers involved in organizational change? How do they make sense of, evaluate and experience their roles and role transition in the change? These questions need more rigorous research for a fine-grained answer.

1.2 Problem statement

One critical research area in organizational change that we do not know much about and which needs more comprehensive study is roles of middle managers (Balogun, 2003; Balogun & Johnson, 1998, 2004; Floyd & Wooldridge, 1992, 1994, 2000; Floyd & Lane, 2000; Huy, 2001), specifically roles middle managers take during the organizational change and what they can contribute to and what can help them fulfill those roles (Balogun, 2003; Balogun & Johnson, 1998).

Middle managers are the core group that top managers rely on to realize the organizational change they initiate (Fulop, 1991; Huy, 2001, Rouleau, 2005). Middle managers are usually regarded as passive change recipients or change implementers dealing with traditional top-down changes initiated by top managers. They are traditionally seen as the linking pin (Likert, 1961) between top management, the operating core and external stakeholders. They provide information upwards and receive strategic decisions passed down from the top (Thompson, 1967). Thus, to implement top management's intentions is a widely recognized role for middle managers. As such, in organizational change, middle managers play an important role in the change process as change implementers (Kanter, Stein, & Jick, 1992). They are responsible for deploying existing resources effectively and efficiently (Floyd & Wooldridge, 1994) to act out top managers' orders and intentions.

In recent studies, however, there is an alternative view of middle managers' role in organizational change, which sees them as an active role player, a "change intermediary" (Balogun, 2003). This view recognizes middle managers' upward and downward influences in change (Balogun, 2003; Huy, 2001). Along these lines, a

growing body of research has built a foundation for a better understanding of middle managers' influence and roles in organization change (Floyd & Wooldridge, 1992, 1994, 2000; Floyd & Lane, 2000). For example, Balogun (2003) suggested that middle managers perform four inter-related roles during change implementation. These are emergent roles when a change takes place which include undertaking personal change, helping others through change, implementing changes to departments and keeping the business going. The planned organizational change requires a major personal change for middle managers to figure out their roles and responsibilities. Middle managers have to make sense of and interpret the meanings of the championed change in terms of the way how to carry out their work and how to realize change. In addition to managing their own personal transitions, middle managers also need to help their subordinates through their psychological, emotional and behavioral transitions. Another role for middle managers is to keep the business going alongside all the change taking place. When middle managers are responsible for implementing changes to departments, they also have the responsibility to direct and help their staff to keep their work going as usual through the change process. It is important and difficult to keep the business going and implement needed change simultaneously, because this could lead to an overload of work and confusion of priorities. Thus, there is a constant tension between keeping the business going and implementing needed changes.

Concurring, Huy (2001) listed four types of middle managers' underestimated roles. The first one is that they act as "entrepreneurs". It highlights middle managers' ability to envision change and create entrepreneurial ideas. The second type is that they act as the "communicators", meriting middle managers' social network to get people on

board. The third type is that they function as the “therapists” when they are needed for building a psychologically safe work environment to diminish the uncertainty, anxiety and depression when a radical change happens. In addition, they are also the “tightrope artists” who need to allocate considerable energy to find the balance between the change and continuity especially when an organizational change is imposed from the top. This is consistent with Balogun’s (2003) argument on the tension between “keep the business going” and “implement the needed change”. Moreover, the challenge could extend to how to stick to core values and capabilities while at the same time shifting the organization into new strategic directions (Huy, 2001). Research in this area helps us explore the neglected contributions of middle managers in organizational change process.

This line of research presents a picture of what middle managers do in the change process and what kind of roles they are involved in (Balogun, 2003; Huy, 2001; Herzig & Jimmieson, 2006; Currie, 1999; Currie & Procter, 2005), how they continuously manage their own emotions and those of their subordinates’ (Huy, 2002), and how middle managers conceptualize their understanding of the change vision through interactions with top managers (Gioia & Chettipeddi, 1991). In addition, previous research reveals how middle managers respond and react to change (Stensaker & Falkenberg, 2007). Yet, given the limited research attention on this domain, those contributions may not provide an adequate coverage of roles middle managers play in organizational changes (Huy, 2002; McKinley & Scherer, 2000). Moreover, although the research provides a description of how middle managers carry their role in the change process, these contributions do not provide an answer to why middle managers take these responsibilities, and why middle managers could encounter difficulties in taking certain

roles. Prior research offers scant insights into “the role they take during change implementation, and what helps or hinders them in fulfilling this role” (Balogun, 2003: 69). The current research is an attempt to fill this void.

Social cognition suggests that how people think and how they make sense and interpret serve as a springboard into action (Weick, 2005). In essence, in order to find the answers to what helps or impedes middle managers to realize their roles in organizational change, we need to know how middle managers themselves make sense and evaluate their roles in organizational change. In other words, middle managers’ own theories-in-use generated from their experiences might engender meaningful insights into understanding their roles in organizational change and also help us understand the facilitators and impediments to fulfill their roles.

In addition, according to role theory (Biddle, 1979, 1982), role is a combination of expectations of what people should do by themselves and other related groups. Middle managers’ role in organizational change is not only an ambiguous transition process caused by change but also it is framed by different sources of expectations which could come from themselves, their superiors, subordinates and outsider stakeholders. Middle managers need to figure out a way to deal with different expectations they are supposed to take in organizational change. Hence, a more complete understanding of what middle managers can contribute to organizational change will be provided by investigating how middle managers themselves evaluate their roles (Balogun, 2003) in organizational change and how they make sense of their own and other key related group members’ expectations on their roles.

This suggests that we need to pay more attention to middle managers' cognitions of the change process. As suggested, people's cognition has a central role in determining human behaviors (Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2005). The recognition of the importance of cognition to better understand people's behavior has directed academic attention to organization members' cognitive universe, especially how people make sense, interpret, construe the world around them (Daft & Weick, 1984; Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; Gioia, Thomas, Clark & Chittipeddi, 1994; Rouleau, 2005; Weick, 1995; Weick, Sutcliffe & Obstfeld, 2005).

In the field of organizational change, cognition orientated research has devoted enormously to better understanding organizational change *per se*, such as how people evolves their recognition of change by making sense of key strategic issues as change unfolds (Isabella, 1990), and the understanding of the emergent managerial roles of sensemaking and sensegiving when managers are facing organizational changes, specifically, how top and middle managers interact with each other to gain shared understanding of organizational change and build up a shared organizational vision (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991). These studies contribute to creating a foundation for understanding how interpretations evolve as a change unfolds and delineating the unique different interpretive tasks, the primary frames of references managers adopt and, construed realities associated with different change stages (Isabella, 1990).

However, research on members' cognitions in organizational change is within the scope of how the interpretation about change *per se* is built. When a change is initiated, managers not only need to understand change *per se*, they also need to respond and react to the change immediately which concerns their details of everyday work and the

emergent changes of what they need to cope with (Stensaker & Falkenberg, 2007). To know the “end” is important as well as the “means” to achieve that. According to social cognition, individuals’ cognition influences their subsequent response and action (Weick, 1995; Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2005). How middle managers make sense of and evaluate the “means” to achieve the “end” is largely we do not know yet. Thus, it is important for researchers to examine managers’ sensemaking and evaluation of their emergent roles they play in organizational change. By tapping middle managers’ cognitive world about what helps or hinders them to realize their emergent roles in organizational change, we believe it can eventually have implications to guide top managers and organizations to maximize middle managers’ contributions to organizational change.

A fundamental assumption of social cognitive theories is that individuals actively construe the environment through their existing knowledge structure, or schemas (Fiske & Taylor, 1984; Prahalad & Bettis, 1986; Schwenk, 1984). Fiske and Taylor (1984, p. 98) coined schema as a “cognitive structure that represents knowledge about a concept or type of stimulus, including its attributes and the relations among those attributes.” This means the content and structure of schemas are conceptually entwined (Walsh, 1995). Schema content refers to the evaluative dimensions used by individuals to make sense of their role in the change. Schema structure refers to the nature of the relationship between these dimensions (Fiske & Taylor, 1984; Walsh, 1995). Schemas have also been referred to as knowledge structures, frames of reference, dominant logics, templates, issue categories, perceptual filters, belief structures, cognitive frameworks, cognitive maps, and implicit theories (Axelrod, 1976; Brief & Downey, 1983; Dunn & Ginsberg, 1986;

Jackson & Dutton, 1988; Prahalad & Bettis, 1986; Starbuck & Milliken, 1988; Walsh, 1988). In a social cognitive perspective, everything can be schematized (Lau & Woodman, 1995; Walsh, 1995). A schema is “a mental template that individuals impose on an information environment to give it form and meaning” (Walsh, 1995, p. 281). In other words, people construe, perceive and see the world via schema. In the managerial cognitive perspective, managers are assumed to be “information workers” (McCall & Kaplan, 1985, p.14) and thus, managers are involved in an ongoing process of schematizing emergent information in organizations in order to enable subsequent interpretations and actions (Walsh, 1995). Hence, to better understand managers’ responses and actions, it is important to investigate their schemas.

Schemas have twofold effects when individuals unconsciously use them. On the one hand, schemas help individuals make sense of what has happened, what is happening and what is going to happen. People rely on these highly structured, pre-existing frameworks to simplify and effectively manage the information (Lord & Foti, 1986). On the other hand, these pre-existing knowledge structures could also blind individuals when they interpret a new information domain (Nystrom & Starbuck, 1984; Reger & Palmer, 1996). Weick pointed out that the inevitable byproduct that accompanies simplifying the information processing is that individuals sometimes act on “impoverished views of the world” (1979, p. 68). Thus, the paradox is that schematic information processing can be at once both enabling and crippling (Schwenk, 1984; Reger et al, 1994; Walsh, 1995).

On the basis of previous research on managers’ schemas about organizational change which is termed as “change schema” (Lau & Woodman, 1995). It means “a sense-making framework containing organized knowledge of change attributes” (Lau &

Woodman, 1995, p. 538). We have gained a fundamental understanding of how managers absorb, process and disseminate information about change itself and how change schemas are applied and evolved (Lau & Woodman, 1995; Labianca, Gray & Brass, 2000; Reger & Palmen, 1986). However, how middle managers generate understandings of their roles in the change process and how they evaluate their emergent role obligations through certain pre-existing schemas is what we largely do not know yet. It is important for us to take a look by standing in middle managers' shoes to know their evaluative schemas for assessing their roles in organizational change. Middle managers' evaluative schemas may engender important insights into what enables or cripples middle managers to fulfill their roles in organizational change. Thus, investigating middle managers' evaluative schemas may also allow us to better understand why change implementation often produces less than the desired outcomes.

It is also important to understand the extent to which middle managers make sense of and evaluate their roles in the change in a similar fashion because a certain degree of shared understanding is implicit to account for both their concerted responses and actions in the change process (Simpson & Wilson, 1999). In other words, the similar way middle managers evaluate their roles, which later we call it salient schemas, may serve as evaluative standards for middle managers to assess their current experiences of dealing with emergent roles in organizational change and so to predict the outcomes of their role fulfillment. Understanding their salient schemas may provide insights into an important question: what can help middle managers contribute to organizational change. Moreover, of equal importance is to explore the idiosyncrasy of middle managers' schemas. There is considerable evidence to suggest that organizational members construe the similar

“reality” differently (Simpson & Wilson, 1999). The idiosyncrasy of managers’ schemas can account for why middle managers respond to their roles in different ways. Hence, a full study of salient schemas and idiosyncratic schemas of middle managers’ sensemaking and evaluation of their roles in change is employed in this study.

Therefore, this study is intended to look at change in a different way. We first attempt to investigate what emergent roles middle managers take in organizational change in order to provide evidences on middle managers’ contributions to organizational change and add efforts to complete a relatively fuller picture of middle managers in organizational change. We then intend to explore how middle managers make sense of and evaluate their roles in organizational change by gaining access to their cognitive processes. Specifically, we intend to investigate the content of middle managers’ schemas about their roles in organizational change and reveal middle managers’ salient schemas and multiple idiosyncratic schemas on their roles in change as well. Moreover, we also investigate how middle managers interpret their emergent roles based on their own evaluative schemas. This study is specifically focused on radical organizational change, usually imposed from the top, such as merger and acquisition, organization restructure and organizational culture change. This is because radical change usually brings a great deal of psychological and emotional earthquakes to employees and also results in fundamental changes in their daily work. Radical changes are usually hard to achieve or turn out to have unintended consequences (Balogun, 2006). Compared to incremental change, middle managers have more imperative and demanding task of how to implement organizational change. Thus, radical change provides better opportunity to reveal insights on middle managers’ roles in organizational change.

1.3 Research objectives

Concurring with the new tendency in the research on organizational change, this research intends to add evidences to understand middle managers' contributions and influences to organizational change by investigating what emergent roles they take in organizational change. This research also examines middle managers' schemas of their roles in organizational change as evaluative standards to assess their roles by drawing on sensemaking theory (Weick, 1995), personal construct theory (Kelly, 1955), role theory (Biddle, 1979, 1982), and the growing body of literature on middle managers' influence and roles (Balogun, 2003; Balogun & Johnson, 1998, 2004; Boyett & Currie, 2004; Currie, 1999; Floyd & Wooldridge, 1992, 1994, 2000; Floyd & Lane, 2000; Huy, 2001).

The current study investigates middle managers' roles in organizational change, specifically, their emergent roles as organizational change unfolds. We intend to know whether there is a role transition for middle managers and how middle managers respond to the demanding and complex mission of change implementation. We also investigate middle managers' schemas concerning their roles in organizational change. The schemas serve as evaluative standards for middle managers to make sense of and assess the feasibility and difficulty in fulfilling their emergent roles in organizational change. The schemas function as "if-then" scripts (Huang, Wright, Chiu, & Wang, 2008) for middle managers so that they develop their own theories-in-use of what helps or hinders them to fulfill their roles in organizational change, in turn, influences the outcomes of change implementation. Thus, this study aims to explore middle managers' salient evaluative schemas of their roles in organizational change and the diversity of their cognitions concerning their roles.

1.4 Justification for this research

There is a tendency that middle managers' contributions to organizational change are detected and recognized (Balogun, 2003; Balogun & Johnson, 1998, 2004; Boyett & Currie, 2004; Currie, 1999; Floyd & Wooldridge, 1992, 1994, 2000; Floyd & Lane, 2000; Huy, 2001). It is important to promote middle managers' positive input and reduce negative effects such as "resistant" or even "saboteur" (Guth & MacMillan, 1986) of them to the change (Huy, 2001). Yet, critical attention to middle managers' contributions in organizational change is still insufficient. It is conceivable that researchers are hard to draw a conclusion on middle managers' contributions to organizational change given the limited research in this area.

Based on the existing research on middle managers' influence in organizational change, current research attempts to add evidences to complement a full picture of middle managers' roles and contributions in organizational change. By investigating their emergent roles taken in organizational change, we provide evidences on middle managers' positive inputs and contributions to organizational change. This study is also intended to take a step forward by exploring their cognitive world about how they make sense, interpret and evaluate their roles in organizational change. First, this study extends the extant literature on organizational change by examining sensemaking frameworks of middle managers in organizations showing how they understand and evaluate their roles in organizational change. Second, this study adds to the literature by verifying salient and idiosyncratic schemas of middle managers in organizations which provide insights into their shared perceived facilitators and impediments to fulfill their roles. Third, it enhances our understanding of middle managers' difficulties in performing their roles in

organizational change. This early identification will have more positive action-oriented effects for top managers to facilitate middle managers to realize their roles in organizational change.

This research contributes to the practice of organizational change in general, and to efforts to identify middle managers' perceived facilitators and impediments to organizational change. The findings may help organizations better evaluate middle managers' roles in realizing organizational change and also help middle managers resolve their difficulties in realizing their roles in order to successfully implement change.

1.5 Methodology

This research is composed of two studies. Study 1 is based on a semi-structured interview intended to explore what roles middle managers take in organizational change and whether there is a role transition for middle managers in organizational change. In addition, Study 1 is also aimed to locate the elements used in repertory grid interview (Kelly, 1955) in Study 2. Study 2 is focused on using repertory grid technique to investigate middle managers' evaluative schemas of how they make sense, interpret and construe their roles in organizational change. Repertory Grid applied in this study overcomes the researcher-bias problem by eliciting the language of the respondents themselves rather than the researchers' own pre-conceptions (Brown, 1992; Kelly, 1955; Stewart & Stewart, 1981).

1.6 Organization of subsequent chapters

Following this introductory chapter, the thesis is organized as follows. Chapter two includes a review of the existing literature on social cognition and middle managers' roles in organizational change. It concludes by setting out the theoretical framework used in this research and putting forth the research questions in this study. Chapter three describes the research design and methodology for this study. The research sample, procedures and data collection and analysis are presented. Chapter four presents the results of the data analysis. Finally, Chapter five discusses the implications of the results, identifies the contribution and the limitations of the study, and implications for future research.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter is organized mainly into three sections. The first section begins with a review of the literature on middle managers' roles in organizational change and sensemaking in organizations. It draws on sensemaking theory (Weick, 1995), personal construct theory (Kelly, 1955) and literature on schema (e.g. Bartunek, 1984; Isabella, 1990; Walsh, 1988) to develop the theoretical framework and research questions which guide this study. The second section restates the major objectives of this study and the research questions it addresses. The third section provides a summary of this whole chapter.

2.1 Middle managers' roles in organizational change

What do managers do generally?

Research on managers has shown us a consistent body of evidence on what managers do generally despite differences of terminology (Hales, 1986). Sayles (1964) describes managers by exploring their managerial activities. He found that managers are engaged in participating in external work-flows via relationships, monitoring performance and leading teams. Mintzberg (1973) categorized managerial roles as interpersonal, informational and decisional roles. The interpersonal roles include managers as figurehead, leader and liaison. Managers' informational roles are as monitor, disseminator and spokesman involving gathering and disseminating information, making managers a nexus for information flows within the organization (1973: 56). The decisional roles of managers include working as entrepreneur, disturbance handler, resource allocator and negotiator. Kotter (1982) found out there are similarities in

managerial behavior, such as setting agendas, network building and implementing agendas.

Beneath the differences of terminology, there is a great agreement on what managers do generally. As stated by Hales (1986), managers are the leaders of organizational units who engage in developing and maintaining their contacts within and outside organizations. They monitor, filter and disseminate information. They make plans and allocate resources effectively and efficiently to implement those plans. They need to negotiate with different people, tackle disturbances and maintain work flows. They need to be innovative to deal with constantly occurring problems and fickle situations. As unit headers, managers are required to control and direct subordinates providing with instructions, training and support.

Gloomy versus optimistic view of middle managers

Middle managers can be defined as managers holding positions between the level of top management and the level of operational executives (Frohman & Johnson, 1992), usually operating two or three levels below the CEOs and one level above line workers and professionals (Huy, 2001). Middle managers had a hard time during the 1980s. They were seen as a gradually obsolete group due to the flattening of hierarchical organizational structures (Dopson & Stewart, 1990). In the 1990s, delayering involved with downsizing caused many middle managers lose their jobs (Wai-Kwong, Friem & Cocyota, 2001). Middle managers are portrayed as a group of frustrated and disillusioned people who are stuck in the middle of a corporate hierarchy, and their role is described as routine, uninteresting and unimportant (Dopson & Stewart, 1990). In organizational

change, middle managers are traditionally viewed to hold negative attitudes towards change if their self-interest is compromised (Guth & MacMillan, 1986). They are inclined to be coined as change “resistant” who can hinder change implementation, deteriorate the quality of its implementation, even can sabotage organizational change to some extent.

Compared to the above gloomy perspective on middle managers, a growing body of research since 1980s has found a different, more optimistic portrait of middle managers. Polakoff (1987), Nonaka (1988), Buchanan and McCalman (1988), Weiss (1988), Millman and Hardwick (1987) and Kanter (1982) argued that organizational change, particularly information technology in their research, has led to a reshaping of middle management role. They suggested that middle managers’ work becomes more demanding and takes on new challenge when an organizational change is carried out. Organizational change releases middle managers from their traditional coordinating functions to deal with new emergent challenges (Polakoff, 1987). Middle managers need to be inventive to cope with different situations and combine different ideas together from the top and the bottom and from the inside and the outside. They need to be good at managing uncertainty, which is to overcome their own uncertainty about the best course of action to follow since traditionally change is planned by senior management, on the other hand, they have the responsibility to help subordinates to tackle their cognitive disorders about the change vision and the potential outcomes following on them. They also need to act as “change agent” (Nonaka, 1988) to make change vision into concrete concepts and feasible plans and meanwhile solve the contradictory gaps between what exist at the moment and what top management hopes to realize (Dopson & Stewart,

1990). In this sense, middle managers are not dwindling, rather they take more important roles in organizational change.

The two contrary points of view provide different pictures of middle managers. The former views middle managers as an obstacle to change progress adding little value, whereas the latter sees middle managers as a proactive group making significant contributions to organizational change by doing their best in difficult times. As a matter of fact, there is still insufficient evidence representing either the gloomy or the optimistic view and in addition, the according findings may be context dependent, given the limited research into the role of middle managers during change (Dopson & Stewart, 1990; Thomas & Dunkerley, 1999; Westley, 1990).

Middle managers' roles in organizational change

A group of researchers have started to build a research agenda on the roles of middle managers (Burgelman, 1983a; 1983b; Dopson & Steward, 1990; Floyd & Lane, 2000; Floyd & Wooldridge, 1992, 1994, 2000; Frohman & Johnson, 1993; Huy, 2001, 2002; Nonaka, 1988, 1991, 1994; Wooldridge & Floyd, 1990). This blooming literature suggests that rather than the top, what happens in the middle of the organization heavily influences organization performance. Because with middle managers' fingers on the pulse of organizations (Kanter, 1982), their inputs have significant meaning by conceiving ideas that top managers are too faraway to see and line managers are too close to incorporate a big picture for organizations (Floyd & Wooldridge, 2000; Kanter, 1982). It also suggests that the more middle managers are involved in the early stage of strategy formulation progress, the better organization performance will be (Floyd & Wooldridge,

2000). However, many of these researchers' hypotheses or propositions have not been empirically tested.

Floyd and Wooldridge (1992) developed a systematic and comprehensive theoretical typology of middle management influence upon strategic change. They argued that middle managers have upward and downward influences in organizations embodying four types of strategic involvement: championing alternatives, synthesizing information, facilitating adaptability and implementing deliberate strategy. The former two represents middle management's upward influence. Championing alternatives means middle managers adopt persuasive communication to convince senior managers with innovative ideas and business opportunities. Synthesizing information means middle managers use their particular positions within the organization and their external contacts to assemble and synthesize different sources of information to influence upper management perceptions. The latter two represents middle management's downward influence. Facilitating adaptability means middle managers inspire fledgling plans or schemes within their own departments to help promote adaptability with the organization. And the fourth kind of strategic involvement of middle managers is implementing intended strategy. This is usually considered the key strategic role of middle management, defined as "managerial interventions that align organizational action with strategic intentions" (Floyd & Wooldridge, 1992, p. 155). And also this strategic role is what we focus in current study.

The most commonly recognized strategic role of middle managers is the implementation of top managers' intentions by deploying existing resources efficiently and effectively (Floyd & Wooldridge, 1994). Typically, middle managers translate

strategies devised at upper level into action plans and individual objects at operating levels. They are involved with developing tactics and ways for achieving a strategy, supervising their subordinates and divisions of their units' performance and taking ongoing corrective actions to make strategy on track (Floyd & Wooldridge, 1994). In addition, others also suggest that middle managers make contributions to implementing deliberate strategy by translating broad strategic objectives into shorter-term operational aims (Hrebiniak & Joyce, 1984), or mediating between operational 'reality' and executives' vision (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995).

Implementation is traditionally perceived to be a mechanical process for which top managers conceive a master strategy and succeeding action plans are easily deduced which subordinates just need to adhere to. As a matter of fact, implementation change is more complex. Sharyn, Herzig, Nerina and Jimmieson (2006) suggested that implementation is best characterized as an ongoing process of interventions which are only partly predicted in top management's plans because emergent information unfolds and conditions evolves constantly. Thus, priorities must be revised accordingly and strategic directions must be adjusted to suit emergent situations.

Huy (2001) delineated middle managers' contributions to realization of change as 'the entrepreneur', 'the communicator', 'the therapist' and 'the tightrope artist'. Specifically, the contributions from middle managers occur in four major areas. First, middle managers have value-adding ideas that they are able and willing to submit to top management. Second, middle managers are uniquely suited to communicating deliberate changes across an organization because they usually have the best social networks in organizations and they are capable of customizing information for different audiences

and get important individuals and groups on board. Third, middle managers pay attention to employees' moods and emotional needs in circumstances of deflated morale and anxiety triggered by change, in addition, they do a host of things to create a psychologically safe work environment, such as tailoring individual conversations to individual needs. And finally, middle managers balance between change and continuity. They constrain from extreme inertia caused by too little change happened too slowly and also from extreme chaos caused by too much change happened too fast. More complex is that they need to figure out how to stick to core values and capabilities while simultaneously changing routines and shifting the organization to new directions.

Balogun (2003) argued that middle managers are best characterized as 'change intermediary', rather than 'change implementor' or 'change recipient' by Kanter, Stein and Jick (1992). It does not mean that middle managers are not 'change implementor' or 'change recipient'. Actually, they are part of the implementation chain, and they can act as implementors and meanwhile they can be both the target and agents of change (Fenton-O'Creevy, 1998). The reason Balogun (2003) placed middle managers in a 'change intermediary' position is because middle managers engage in a host of sensemaking activities to aid their interpretations of the change intent and also middle managers contribute to binding top management's change vision with the operational level's feasible action plans. The actual change outcomes depend heavily on how middle managers interpret what organizational change is, what is required, and what they can personally do, and the actions that they take as a response to these interpretations. This interpretation activity then informs middle managers to fulfill four inter-related roles during implementation. First, what change intent is interpreted by middle managers tells

them to undertake personal change accordingly in terms of their roles and responsibilities. Second, middle managers also help their staff through change transition by making them realize the existence, necessity and meaning of change. Middle managers are also responsible for providing coaching, training and support as needed. Third, middle managers need to keep the business going alongside all the changes taking place. It is a challenge for middle managers to prioritize where they should focus their attention and effort. And finally, middle managers have a complex and demanding task of implementing changes as intended. Hence, the sensemaking and interpretation middle managers engage in are crucial, and may account for what Floyd and Wooldridge (1994) term as the “implementation gap” between senior manager intent and what actually happens (Balogun, 2006).

Though this line of research paints a different picture of middle managers in organizational change, a broader conception of the role of middle managers is highly needed (Currie, 1999). And since adequate coverage has not been given to roles that middle managers play in organizational change (Huy, 2002; McKinley & Scherer, 2000), and given the frequency with which organizations need to undertake change to keep competitive, there is a need for a greater understanding of what middle managers can contribute and what can help them fulfill their roles. This is important to understand what can help middle managers fulfill their roles in organizational change despite the fact that the prior research provides evidences to demonstrate that middle managers can have positive attitudes and make contributions. It is because the prior research also painted middle managers as negative actor holding negative attitudes, playing resistant role in organizational change (Guth & MacMillan, 1986). The opposite views of middle

managers' role in organizational change at least show that we do not fully understand what is going on with middle managers when they are required to implement organizational change. Before we quickly jump to a conclusion to acknowledge or negate middle managers' influences in organizational change, we need know more about what is going on with middle managers when they implement change, what difficulties they might encounter and what can help them to fulfill their roles. It may be more meaningful rather than simply arguing whether middle managers are contributor or burden to organizational change.

Role theory

The four inter-related roles middle managers undertake in implementing organizational change revealed by Balogun (2003) could be broadly sorted into two types of activities: one is the emergent activity, sensemaking; the other is their routine activity, coordination and management. It indicated that middle managers experience a role transition in organizational change. In addition, evidence suggests that there are considerable problems of role conflict and role ambiguity associated with role transition which are closely related to under-performance (Currie & Procter, 2005).

In role theory, 'roles are induced through the sharing of expectations for role behavior' (Biddle, 1979. p. 5). Role is explained by presuming that people hold expectations for their own behaviors and those of other people as they are members of social positions (Biddle, 1986). Thus, expectations are perceived to be the major generators of roles in role theory (Biddle, 1986). Moreover, the shared expectations are recognized as important because behavioral uniformity is likely to occur when more

people share expectations for their joint behavior (Biddle, 1979). Role theorists also term this agreement of expectations held by various individuals as ‘consensus’. Role theorists argue that a minimal degree of consensus is either necessary for social stability or at least conducive of social order (Biddle, 1979). On the contrary, dissensus occurs when a person and others hold distinct and incompatible expectations for this person’s behavior (Floyd & Lane, 2000; Biddle, 1979, 1982) which will cause subsequent role conflicts. In addition, when there are incomplete or insufficient expectations to guide individuals’ behavior, role ambiguity is likely to occur. Under circumstances of role conflict and role ambiguity, people are subjected to pressures and anxiety, low individual effectiveness (Schuler, 1975).

In a radical organizational change, middle managers experience a role transition associated with which there are potential problems of role conflict and role ambiguity (Currie & Procter, 2005). Role conflict and role ambiguity might cause middle managers to respond as ‘disillusionment’ and ‘disaffection’ (Johnson & Frohman, 1989), ‘reluctance’ (Goffee & Scase, 1992; Scase & Goffee, 1989) or ‘paralysis’ (Westley, 1990) by only paying lip service, which may inhibit middle managers’ role transition in organizational change ultimately (Currie & Procter, 2005). In this case, how to fulfill their roles is important, critical and at the same time difficult. How to help middle managers overcome the above difficulties in performing their role in organizational change is not thorough known yet, especially based on middle managers’ own experiences. How middle managers themselves make sense of and evaluate their roles in organizational change helps us to better understand what can help middle managers to fulfill their roles, in turn make contributions to change implementation.

2.2 Sensemaking in organizations

The world is not just objectively revealed to us, rather it is subjectively revealed to us by the means of our own sensemaking. The conception of sensemaking, literally and simply, is “the making of sense” (Weick, 1995, p. 4). “Sensemaking is about such things as placement of items into frameworks, comprehending, redressing surprise, constructing meaning, interacting in pursuit of mutual understanding, and patterning” (p. 6).

Sensemaking is driven by something unusual, unanticipated, and also ambiguous (Gioia & Mehra, 1996; Weick, 1995; Weick, Sutcliffe & Obstfeld, 2005). When an organizational change is introduced, sensemaking is pervasive in all structural levels in organizations. Organizational change provides a ‘trigger’ for organization-wide sensemaking because it represents an interruption, and usually characterized by inconsistency in the ‘ongoing flow’ of everyday organizational activity (Gioia, Thomas, Clark, & Chittipeddi, 1994; Greenberg, 1995; Isabella, 1990; Rouleau, 2005; Vaara, 2003).

Sensemaking is undertaken by people to make sense of events around them in that way they are able to understand what is going on, what is going to influence them and then lead them to consider what they should do. The close link between “thought” and “action” suggests that how people make sense of events is closely related to how they respond to them (e.g. Sims & Gioia, 1986). Thus, under the circumstance of organizational change, to better understand how people respond to the change we need to take a close look at how they make sense of it. Understanding how organizational members make sense of organizational change requires understanding their interpretations and the interpretive schemes they use (Isabella, 1990). Interpretive

schemes serve to brace experience by leading individuals to attend to some aspects of their experiences while disregarding others which will lead to both positive and negative effects. We will explicate this point in schema literature.

The concept of the organization as a cognitive entity is not new (e.g., Sandelands & Stablein, 1987; Sims & Gioia, 1986), but the application of cognitive theory to organizational practice is a relatively recent development (Stubbart, 1989; Walsh, 1995). It extends to the research on organizational change by adopting a sensemaking perspective. In the context of organizational change, sensemaking can be termed as “the meaning construction and reconstruction by the involved parties as they attempt to develop a meaningful framework for understanding the nature or the intended change” (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991, p. 442). Sensemaking plays a central role in cognitive reorientations with the coming of organizational change (Gioia & Mehra, 1996; Isabella, 1990).

Sensemaking is a critical organizational activity for different managerial levels. For top managers, sensemaking activities such as environmental scanning and interpretation are key tasks that significantly influence organizational decision-making and organizational change (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; Thomas et al, 1993). Top managers need to develop a sense of the organization’s internal and external environment and define a revised conception of the organization via the process labeled as sensemaking. In Thomas, Clark and Gioia’s (1993) paper, this process of sensemaking specifically involves scanning, interpretation and action. Thomas et al. (2003) established an empirical basis for exploring and understanding linkages among cognition, action and outcomes. It also provided insights into sensemaking process that contributes to

variations in organizational performance. For middle managers and other organizational members, sensemaking activities are key means to probe and figure out the meaning of organizational change and the potential outcomes to them (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; Rouleau, 2005). Moreover, there exists a mutual cognitive interaction between top and middle managers via sensemaking and sensegiving to achieve a cognitive consensus on change itself (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991). It highlights that the top and middle managers both make sense of the strategic change, however in a different angle. At the initiation of strategic change, top managers are usually more inclined to make sense of the external and internal environments in which change takes place, while middle managers are more inclined to figure out the meaning of the proposed change and the implications for them. In addition, studies also linked the individuals' interpretive processes with the evolving processes of organizational change. Isabella (1990) explained how individuals make sense and interpret the key organizational events evolved from the change, and how individual interpretations impel managers to move from one stage of organizational change to another.

In summary, the vast majority of literature on organizational change in a sensemaking perspective is focused on how organizational members make sense and interpret organizational change itself. However, this work can be upgraded to another level in making sense of how we can deal with the change. Rouleau (2005) explored how managers help realize the change by reframing the change and selling it in their own language in their own way to their customers and stakeholders. Essentially, organizational sensemaking is first and foremost about the question: What is going on here? And then people ask "now what do I do next?" The answer to the latter question is

equally important to the first question, because answers to “now what?” has fundamental action-oriented implications. Thus, research on how critical organizational members make sense of and evaluate their roles in organizational change has potentials to move the field forward. It is because their own theories-in-use of performing their roles deriving from their own experiences have implications on what facilitate or hinder them from effectively function as implementers of organizational change.

2.3 Personal construct theory

This study is also based on Kelly (1955)’s personal construct theory. Kelly’s personal construct theory provides a systematic foundation of man as an active construer of the world around him. The backbone of his entire personal construct theory is formulated in his fundamental postulate: “A person’s processes are psychologically channeled by the ways in which he/she anticipates events” (Kelly, 1955, p.32). Kelly viewed people as scientists in a constant state of flux, always involving with interpreting and redefining the world (Huff, 1997; Kelly, 1955). The essence of personal construct theory is that people create their own ways of seeing the world in which they live and continuous testing hypotheses and redefining them.

According to personal construct theory, the world does not reveal itself to us, instead, we construe it. Kelly built from a philosophical position of constructive alternativism, which acknowledges human capacity to construe events from different perspectives. According to this perspective, events such as organizational change do not reveal their meanings to us in a direct way, but rather, are imposed different alternative meanings as we construe them. And, as suggested by this theory, sensemaking occurs

through individuals' personal constructs, which provide a framework for simplifying the storage and processing of complex information and for assessing events as they occur. These constructs take the form of bipolar dimensions. Kelly used the word "construct" to mean people's network of interpretation systems. In Kelly's views, people develop their own set of mental spectacles "constructs" (e.g. "lazy-diligent") to help them make sense of the world. A person's view of the world is comprised of a multitude of varied possible constructs (Kelly, 1955; Stewart & Stewart, 1981). In essence, constructs are the way people perceive, interpret and make sense of the world around them. Kelly further theorized that a person's system of constructs is not unalterable but will change with the accumulated learning from experiences.

Individuals rely on bipolar-dimension constructs to make sense of people and events. They use constructs to develop their own "theories" (schemas) about the world around them. Constructs are imposed on events when people make sense of them and thus, serve to convey cognitions in pre-determined directions. In this vein, these theories (schemas) in turn guide people's actions, just as Kelly (1955, p. 32) said that "each individual erects for himself a representational model of the world which allows him to make some sense out of it and which enables him to chart a course of behavior in relation to it."

Prior applications of personal construct theory in the organizational studies literature include: cognitive inertia (Hodgkinson, 1997), organizational change (Reger et al., 1994), competitive positioning (Reger & Palmer, 1996), business portfolio (Ginsberg, 1989), managerial effectiveness (Cammock, NiLakant & Dakin, 1995); performance appraisal system (Wright, 2004). The Personal construct theory explicates both the

content (constructs) and structure (relations among the constructs) of members' cognitive schemas which makes it especially appropriate for understanding how individuals make sense of organizational change.

This study employs Kelly's personal construct theory and repertory grid technique which is derived from personal construct theory to elicit the cognitive perceptions of the way real people make sense of the existing reality in their organizations. The technique generated from Personal Construct Theory, will rigorously and systematically elicit the cognitive perceptions of the way managers construe the real organizational experiences in the language of the natives which promises a high degree free from the observer-bias (Fournier, 1996; Stewart & Stewart, 1981; Wright, 2006). The cognitive maps generated from the grid interview will serve as both powerful reflective psychological mirrors and effective tools for improvements as well (Stewart & Stewart, 1981).

2.4 Schema

What is a schema?

The imperative task of individuals in organizations is to figure out what is going on here and how they can deal with it. They try to understand current circumstances in a meaningful way. Although we know that sensemaking processes sometimes employ active cognition, for the most part people make sense of events based on their tacit and unconscious knowledge by using schematized knowledge (Gioia, 1986). This schematized knowledge is also known as a schema.

Bartlett (1932) first defined schema as hypothetical mental structures which control people's attention and subsequently reconstruct memory. Fiske and Taylor

described schema as ‘a cognitive structure that represents organized knowledge about a given concept or type of stimulus. A schema contains both the attributes of the concept and the relationships among the attributes’ (1984. p. 140). Schemas are important for individuals’ sensemaking and interpretations because individual perceptions and interpretations of events are shaped by schemas applied to them (Taylor & Crocker, 1981). Schemas give meaning to people’s experience and contain general knowledge about an information domain, and later serve as a guide for the interpretation of information, actions, and expectations (Gioia & Poole, 1984).

Schemas have received a great deal of attention and have been recognized as basic components in information processing (Fiske & Taylor, 1984; Taylor & Crocker, 1981; Walsh, 1995). Research has made great contributions by assessing schemas and information processing consequences linkage. Schema-based approaches to the study of organizational behavior have also received a great amount of attention (Daft & Weick, 1984; Feldman, 1981; Labianca, Gray & Brass, 2000; Poole, Gioia & Gray, 1989; Gioia & Poole, 1984) and they provide a useful alternative approach to traditional views. According to schema theory, people in organizations can maintain a large repertoire of organizationally relevant knowledge structures, gained from their experiences. These knowledge structures, also known as schemas, in turn can guide people’s behaviors. Thus, the study of schemas in organizational settings would appear to be very useful in understanding organizational behavior (Thomas & Griffin, 1983; Walsh, 1995).

Schema’s two-fold effects

Meaning is not objectively out there. Rather, meaning is created by imposing existing interpretive schemas by sensemakers. People rely on highly structured and pre-existing schemas to understand and make sense of external events and generate according behaviors. Essentially, schemas reserve a basic knowledge foundation for interpretations of information, actions and expectations. Schemas help people effectively and efficiently manage the complex, munificent and ambiguous environments. Cognitive tasks are simplified and speeded up by using ready-made knowledge systems to sort different stimuli into appropriate categories (Fiske & Taylor, 1984; Lord & Foti, 1986; Walsh, 1995).

Schemas facilitate information processing by giving access for specific example to fall into the pre-existing general category, however, this kind of generic schema tends to preserve and resist to change, even in the case of contrary evidences (Taylor & Crocker, 1981; Gioia & Poole, 1984; Lord & Foti, 1989; Poole et al., 1989). There is also a concern that the reliance on schema can reduce the accuracy of information processing and tolerate with a highly abstracted view by ignoring discrepant, but possibly important information. As Weick (1979, p. 68) pointed out the organizational managers sometimes act on “impoverished views of the world”.

In essence, schemas help people interpret their experiences by allocating attention, facilitate encoding and retrieval from memory, provide a repertoire for anticipation and speed information processing and problem solving. Meanwhile the use of schema may fill cognitive void with typical but perhaps inaccurate information especially when the environments are changing; prompt individual to ignore discrepant but possibly important information especially when discrepancy is not favored and impede the disconfirmation

of existing schemas (Walsh, 1995). In this case, schematic information processing can be both “enabling and crippling” (p. 282).

Salient schemas and idiosyncratic schemas

Research suggests that whereas individuals possess different unique schemas, some schemas of members of certain group in organizations may overlap to some extent (Daft & Weick, 1984; Dutton & Dukerich, 1991; Langfield-Smith, 1992; Prahalad & Bettis, 1986). Salient schemas can serve as guides to individuals’ concerted actions by enabling them to understand the means and ends of certain events. Theoretical support can be found in Kelly’s commonality corollary of his personal construct theory (1955) which states ‘to the extent that one person employs a construction of experience which is similar to that employed by another, his psychological processes are similar’ (p. 90). Thus, it is suggested that the content of schemas can be compared across different individuals (Reger, 1990; Simpson, 1997). For example, in Lau and Woodman’s (1995) paper of investigating organizational change schema, the authors discovered five empirically derived dimensions from a student sample (salience, significance, meaning, impact and control) and moreover they also found close parallels between the empirically derived dimensions with three theoretical dimensions suggested in the literature (causality, valence and inferences).

In addition to people’s salient schemas, of equal importance is to identify multiple idiosyncratic schemas between individuals or groups and within individuals and groups as well. Research suggested that organizational members are capable of holding multiple distinct schemas simultaneously (Bartunek, 1993; Mock & Bartunek, 1990). The

interactions between distinct idiosyncratic schemas also have a significant influence on the process and outcomes of cognitions.

Schemas as evaluative criteria

The attributes of a schema are composed of content and structure, moreover, a schema's content and structure are conceptually entwined (Walsh, 1995). Any schema is specific about a particular information domain. To investigate schemas one need to identify the information environment it represents at first. Previous research suggested that individuals make evaluative judgments within the parameters set by their schemas (Lord & Foti, 1986; Lurigio & Carroll, 1985; Sternberg, 1985). A recent study on relational schemas on leader-member exchanges regards schemas as evaluative standards that dyad members employ consciously or unconsciously to assess the quality of supervisor and subordinate's exchange relationships (Huang, Wright, Chiu, and Wang, 2008). Relational schemas in this article function as "if-then" scripts so that people form expectations of their dyad relationship based on their experiences of the interactions with their members. The schemas should be able to predict the quality of leader-member relationship if their expectations on the relationship fit in their schemas. In this vein, supervisors and subordinates evaluate their dyad relationship based on their tacit knowledge of their schemas. Schemas function more as evaluative criteria to gauge the quality of dyad relationships. In this vein, people's existing schemas are more like evaluative standards to help them assess the current information environment and make quick judgments. It is important for us to investigate the content of a schema so as to

better know how they make sense of and evaluate the particular information domain, which in turn will guide their subsequent attitudes and actions.

Middle managers' schemas of their roles in organizational change

This study investigates one particular type of schema, middle managers' schema about their roles in organizational change. As Kanter, Stein and Jick (1992) argued that middle managers are more likely to emphasize means over ends particular when they are in the interim of a role transition imposed by organizational change. We can conjecture that middle managers perceive and make sense of their roles in organizational change via schemas specifically about how to get things done here. As indicated in the above, schemas can function as evaluative standards. In the case of middle managers in organizational change, they might rely on their schemas to make sense of and evaluate their emergent roles in organizational change. These evaluative schemas are middle managers' tacit criteria to gauge how to perform their emergent roles in organizational change. Middle managers' criteria to gauge their roles might provide important insights into their subsequent attitudes and actions. For example, if their existing schemas take stock of performing the roles as difficult to achieve, this not only can potentially explain why middle managers could hold negative attitudes and responses, but also they can add meaningful insights into how to help middle managers to overcome the difficulties so as to make contributions to organizational change.

2.5 Research gap and research questions

To date, research on middle managers' role in organizational change has not come to a conclusion given the limited research in this domain. We need to better understand what roles middle managers take in organizational change. Thus, more research is needed to explore middle managers' influences and contributions in organizational change. A blooming research approach to organizational change is from a cognitive perspective which has revealed how organizational members make sense of change *per se*, and how different groups give sense to each other about what the change is in their own perception. It is quite important for organizational members to gain a shared understanding of what the change is by sensemaking and sensegiving (Gioia & Chettipeddi, 1991). To know what the change is certainly is an important step, and meanwhile it is also a preliminary step of the long process of realizing organizational change. With organizational change unfolds, there are some changes along with middle managers' tasks and priorities. Also there are changes in expectations on middle managers' roles held by different groups. Middle managers need to deal with the potential chaos arising from changes in responsibilities, expectations, and priorities. How middle managers make sense of those changes and how they evaluate the emergent changes in their roles by their tacit schemas is hardly known yet. Their schemas as their evaluative standards to gauge and predict the possible outcomes of performing the roles can provide important insights into explaining their subsequent attitudes and actions. Moreover, they also can point out the way to help middle managers overcome the difficulties and make contributions to organizational change. We seek to fill this void by examining middle managers role schemas in organizational change. Thus, the research questions in this study are:

1. What roles do middle managers take in a radical organizational change? Is there a role transition for middle managers when an organizational change is initiated?
2. How do middle managers make sense of and evaluate their roles in a radical organizational change?
3. What are the salient schemas and multiple idiosyncratic schemas used by middle managers as criteria to evaluate their roles in a radical organizational change?

2.6 Conclusion

This chapter outlined and discussed the theoretical framework and research questions addressed by this study. This study intends to add more evidences on middle managers' influences and contributions to organizational change by investigating their emergent roles accompanied with change unfolding. Meanwhile we intend to examine middle managers' cognitions guiding their behaviors in change implementation, particularly how middle managers make sense of and evaluate their roles pertinent to organizational change in light of their schemas. By resting primary concerns on identifying and describing middle managers' salient schemas and their idiosyncratic schemas, and their attributes (content) of their schemas, this study intends to add the literature from a schematic perspective.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research is composed of two studies which are interconnected on purpose. Study 1 is aimed at investigating middle managers' emergent roles in organizational change. Study 2 aims to find out how middle managers make sense of and evaluate their roles in organizational change by examining their schemas. In particular, the findings of Study 1 answer our first research question which is "what roles do middle managers take in a radical organizational change? Is there a role transition for middle managers when an organizational change is initiated?" And also it provides some inputs into the design of the elements to be used in the repertory grid interview (Kelly, 1955) in Study 2, which explores middle managers' evaluative schemas of their roles in organizational change, in particular, their evaluative schemas they use to make sense of and assess the extent of difficulty in performing their role obligations in organizational change.

3.1 Study 1

Aims

The purpose of Study 1 is to find out what middle managers do differently during a radical organizational change compared to their regular duties in their companies. We intend to explore what changes has happened to their jobs as they deal with organizational change. We investigate what is emerging around and what they have to deal with accompanying the organizational change so as to find out what they do differently compared to what they usually do before change is initiated, moreover, to further investigate the patterns of role expectation changes caused by the organizational changes. According to role theory (Biddle, 1979, 1982), role is a combination of

expectations about what the individual should do, held by various related groups and the individuals themselves. By the same token, middle managers' emergent roles in organizational change can also be interpreted as a combination of emergent expectations held by different groups, such as their top managers. So we also intend to identify the sources of held expectations on middle managers roles in organizational change from different groups. By locating the sources of role expectations, we design the elements for the repertory grid interview in Study 2. Therefore, Study 1 is designed also as a preliminary study to help design elements used in repertory grid interview in Study 2 which concentrates on examining middle managers' evaluative schemas on role expectations in organizational change on the basis of Study 1's partial findings.

Sample

We selected the sample for Study 1 according to the following requirements. First, to suit our research focus on investigating middle managers' role in organizational change, the sample for Study 1 must be middle managers in their companies. Second, the sample's current company must be currently experiencing or have recently been through a radical organizational change. A radical organizational change is regarded as the one which can fundamentally influence individuals' routine responsibilities in light of its magnitude and scope, which generally makes it difficult to implement, such as mergers and acquisitions. Third, those samples must have experienced the change process from the very beginning, so as to ensure that they have experienced the full impact of the radical organizational change on their role obligations. We selected the sample randomly according to the above requirements through a head hunter company which is a

professional company with access to a great number of middle managers in different companies in various industries. We first targeted 20 middle managers through the client dataset of this headhunter company. We then sent out emails to concisely explain the research purpose and importance of this research to seek their permissions of interviews on their personal experiences with organizational change. In addition, we did not confine our sample to one specific company or industry because our purpose in Study 1 is to generate a general conceptual understanding of changes related to middle managers' roles in a radical organizational change. The potential effects on middle managers' perceptions and cognitions caused by the attributes of one particular company or industry are largely precluded on purpose. Moreover, it may also maximize personal experiences with organizational change as diverse as possible within limited sample to capture a more general framework of role change patterns.

We asked 20 middle managers to participate in interviews and 15 of them agreed to our request. The final sample for Study 1 was comprised of 15 middle managers who had recently experienced radical organizational change. The different types of organizational change experienced by these managers are shown in Table 1. The sample of Study 1 was from different industries in Nanjing City, Jiangsu Province in China such as real estate, telecommunication, manufacturing, and financial service industry. The average full-time work experience of the sample was 10.54 years. The mean experience at middle management level was 4.68 years. They had worked for an average of 3.21 years in their current organizations. The sample worked in various functions, including 4 respondents from sales & marketing, 3 respondents from human resources, 2 respondents from finance, 4 respondents from customer service and 2 respondents from technology

support. The 15 respondents are from different companies in Nanjing and each respondent is one of the middle managers in each company. As the sample, they represent the middle management team with the range from 7 to 16 managers in each company. Respondents ranged in age from 28 to 46 with a mean age of 34.67 years. The sample was composed of 12 male and 3 female managers.

Method

Study 1 focused on using a semi-structured interview to reveal middle managers' role transitions during organizational change. Generally speaking, semi-structured interviews have an overarching topic with a predetermined sequence of specific questions and targeted issues to generate general themes. Unlike unstructured interviews and structured interviews, semi-structured interviews maintain a balance of both free-flow and directed conversation (Lee, 1999). The attributes of semi-structured interviews suit our research purposes in that they allow the researchers to retain some control of the interview and yet allow respondents' relevant experiences to emerge in a relatively open-ended way, without fixed response options. During the semi-structured interviews in current research, the respondents were asked to describe their routine job as managers in their firms. Then they were asked to describe what kind of organizational change it was and what happened to their jobs when the organizational change was initiated, and what needed them to do for implementing the organizational change. Then they were also asked to describe how these changes concerning to their job emerged, in particular, we made the participants focus their answers on who expected them to take responsibilities for those emergent role obligations.

Table 1. Types of organizational change in Study 1

Types of organizational change	Number of respondents
Mergers & acquisitions	6
Implementation of new information system	3
Organizational structure change	3
Top management replacement	2
Organizational culture change	1

Data analysis

The goal of the coding scheme of Study 1 was twofold: one was to capture the major patterns of the role changes during a radical organizational change in contrast to middle managers' routine roles; the other was to capture where these emergent changes to their regular job come from, in other words, to determine on who's expectations the transitional role is based on (Biddle, 1986). We employed standard practices for qualitative data analysis, outlined by Miles and Huberman (1984). We developed a list of codes inductively, adding new codes as the interviewees mentioned new types of changes to their regular work caused by the radical organizational change. In this way, our final set of codes was comprehensive, yielding 12 codes concerning middle managers' emergent role change. At the same time we coded the source of these changes, in other words who's expectations the changes were responding to in order to locate the elements for repertory grid interview in Study 2. For any mentioned new emergent role changes we had a series of questions to locate the sources of those emergent changes of role obligations. For instance, when the interviewee mentioned that s/he made new actions plans to implement change, we coded this phrase "make new action plans to implement change" and meanwhile we documented the sources of role expectations, whether it was based on the expectations of their supervisors, their subordinates, their important

outsiders, or themselves. Since the second coding of the sources of role expectations was based on the recognition of emergent roles, there is a possibility that we did not immediately recognize what the interviewee mentioned was actually an emergent role obligation. Consequently we did not ask the following question to locate the source of role change. We later found out that the vast majority of emergent roles were followed with questions to secure the sources (who's expectations), however, there were only a small number of emergent roles missed out, without coding of the sources (5 out of 88). We decided not to include the five mentions since the sources of role change were not documented.

We performed two analyses on the coded interview data. The first analysis involved a simple frequency count of coded categories, showing the number of times each code was found in the interview transcripts. We used this count to gauge the salience and variety of different types of role changes for middle managers to cope with organizational change. The second analysis was to classify the different categories of middle managers transitional roles according to the different sources of expectations. For certain transitional roles, which interviewees mentioned from more than one source, we counted them as multiple sources (see Table 4).

Considering the indispensable connection of results of Study 1 with subsequent design of elements used in repertory grid interview in Study 2, we were required to present part of the findings of Study 1 here. We present the findings on “sources of role changes” here to explain the elements used in the repertory grid interview employed in Study 2. As for the first objective of Study 1, middle managers' role change patterns, we leave it to the results chapter. However, it seems awkward and abrupt to jump into

“sources of role changes” without mentioning anything about patterns of “role changes”.

Thus, we decide to discuss briefly about middle managers’ patterns of role changes in organizational change, then we move on to discuss the sources of those role changes.

Findings

The findings of Study 1 answer our first research question which is “what roles do middle managers take in a radical organizational change? Is there a role transition for middle managers when an organizational change is initiated?” The findings of Study 1 also help design the elements used in repertory grid interviews employed in Study 2.

(a) Middle managers role change patterns:

Three major patterns of middle managers role change were found from Study 1, which were “deal with personal change”, “deal with changes to departments” and “help others through change”. Comparing to their regular responsibilities as middle managers in their companies, the following categories of emergent role change demonstrate that there is a role transition accompanied with organizational change.

Deal with personal change

The first pattern “deal with personal change” has to do with changes affecting middle managers themselves and how they personally respond to changes. This indicates how the participants (middle managers) make themselves clear about what the organizational change is and what they need do to help themselves deal with the change. Middle managers make great efforts in sensemaking and interpretation activity. They engage in an ongoing communication with top managers and also their peers to achieve a

shared understanding of what the changes are about (Isabella, 1990; Gioia & Chettipeddi, 1991; Maitlis, 2005, Weick, 1995). This process of sensemaking is beyond only making sense of what the espoused changes are, rather it extends to making sense of what are the senior management's intentions for initiating the changes and also probing into others' expectations on their roles in the change. For example, participants said that:

"We didn't really understand what they (top managers) want us to do at the beginning. We didn't even understand the meaning of the change. They kind of kept it (the change) like a big secret.... So, we had to find ways to understand what's going on and what they want. You know, if they could make it more transparent, like holding some meetings and discussions, I think the outcomes might be better. We were like hidden in the dark.... We had no choice..... this is where the rumors and gossips came from. We had figured it out in our own way." [a male marketing department manager of a real estate company under the change of a merger with another real estate company]

"I think the workshops really helped us. The vision, mission and even the different processes were very clear to us. After we took a few rounds of workshops and also some training in some particulars, we understood it (the new system) quite well." [a male technical maintenance department manager of a manufacturing company under the change of implementing a new system]

"Suddenly there were some unexpected expectations on you. I understand that, just as I suddenly had some new expectations on other people. We were in a mess.... We hadn't drawn a line between what's your business and what's mine." [a female manager of

customer service department in a real estate company under the change of a merger with another real estate company]

This type of change (“deal with personal change”) had an accumulated frequency of 18 mentions in the interviews (22 percent of all the mentioned role changes). Of these, 10 specifically had to do with communicating with top managers to clarify personal duties and responsibilities (e.g., ‘we had rounds of meetings and workshops which give us chances to discuss what we need to do during the process’), 5 of them concerned the need to communicate with other members to determine each other’s expectations (e.g., ‘our department needed other departments’ help and cooperation, we had to make sure what the others wanted us to do’), and 3 concerned that they sometimes needed to increase their political sensitivity (e.g., ‘at this moment, we didn’t know what’s going to happen, especially who was going to take charge here. We had to be more sensitive and careful. We were afraid that we might heedlessly offend someone because of not paying attention to details.’)

Two aspects of this kind of role change merit attention. One is middle managers’ sensemaking process and the other is their lateral interactions with their colleagues. The findings suggest that to understand organizational change and their roles in the change requires a great deal of middle managers’ sensemaking activities, especially for those changes imposed by top managers when middle managers do not engage in the formulation process. This might take middle managers a great amount of time and energy. Formal communications with senior managers are very important to help middle managers understand the meaning and vision of the change.

Lateral interactions with their coworkers are also very prevalent, especially when formal communications are not provided sufficiently by senior managers. At this time, rumors and gossips become the major avenue for middle managers to understand the change and deal with their uncertainty. However, lateral interactions are also an important way to help middle managers to clarify each others' responsibilities in organizational changes.

Deal with changes to departments

The second pattern of middle managers role transition was about dealing with changes to departments. This pattern described how middle managers lead their departments to implement the organizational changes. As some participants said that:

"It is a load of tough work for us. Before the change took place, we already had a lot of work to do, not finished yet, now we had extra missions. What need to do first? Could we just put aside that project (previous task before the change) and begin what they (top managers) asked us to do? Actually we couldn't, if we did (put aside the previous task), we would suffer at last, because when this (the change) is over, they (top managers) must turn back asking what's going on with that project. I need to balance the priorities here. It's not easy and we were really short of hands." [a male HR manager in a financial service company under the change of organizational restructuring]

"One of the urgent things we need to do is we had to figure out what were our department' responsibilities and what were others', because the change (merger) made the departmental responsibilities very fuzzy. So sometimes we had to talk to them (other

department managers) and make a mark there.” [a male sale manager in a real estate company under the change of top management replacement]

This pattern of middle managers’ role transition has a total of 28 mentions by participants (34 percent). Of these 28 mentions, 9 of them had to do with translating organizational change into concrete action plans (e.g., ‘according to the purpose of the change, we had to make plans to make the change realized’), 8 mentioned that as department head, they needed to monitor the implementation process (e.g., ‘once you arranged the plans to the department, you had to monitor it on track and prepared to solve potential problems’), 7 of them had to do with rearranging department priorities (e.g., ‘some of the tasks were urgent and important at the time being, we had to rearrange what we should do first and put more efforts on that), and the remaining 4 were concerned with negotiating with peers on departmental delimitation of responsibilities in change implementation (e.g., ‘we had to discuss with other departments what was their responsibility and what was ours, since there are no clear instructions.’)

Help others through change

The third pattern of role transition had to do with helping others through the change, specifically middle managers’ subordinates and their important outsiders such as important customers. This category of role change was mainly about the two-way interactions between middle managers and their subordinates or important outsiders to achieve a shared understanding of what the change is and what the change means to them.

Sensegiving (Gioia & Chettipeddi, 1991) is the important means middle managers take to help others make sense of change:

“They (subordinates) knew there is something going on here....they just not sure what’s that....They counted on you at this moment. As their manager, I had the responsibility to tell them what’s going on here and what’re my expectations on them. I made my promise to them that we’d work it through together” [a male marketing department manager in a manufacturing company under the change of organizational restructure]

“At the beginning, I had to instill the concept to them again and again....they were also very curious... they raised a lot of questions... I cleared out their misunderstandings and also negative attitudes.....we discussed a lot to reach a consensus on how to do it...My door was always open to them....at last it demonstrated it’s right. Our department did perform better than others...I think that’s because they knew what’s going on and they new we were in the same boat.” [from the interview with a female customer service manager in a real estate company under the change of a merger]

Meanwhile as supervisors of their subordinates, they also needed to provide necessary training and assistance. Moreover, as a possible consequence of a radical organizational change, subordinates might have negative emotions and feelings and the important outsiders, for example, key customers, might intend to quit from their cooperation relationship. At this time, middle managers worked as firemen whenever there pervaded negative atmosphere or portents in the working environments.

“I mean, you had to hold some training workshops, not only workshops, sometimes you needed to give some people extra supports, you know, not only limited in technical aspect, you had to appease their emotions. At this critical moment, people were easy to get upset especially we had an overload of work to do....They (senior managers) may not care, but we care.” [a male manager of finance department in a financial service company under the change of a merger]

This pattern of role change has the highest frequency of mentions (37) by participants (45 percent). Of these 37 mentions, 12 dealt with communicating change vision to subordinates (e.g., ‘we organized meetings to our departmental subordinates to help them get the idea of what the organizational change was and what the goals we wanted to achieve’), 8 were about providing training, assistance and support to subordinates (e.g., ‘as request we needed to provide workshops and some kind of training program to get them familiarized with the new system’), 7 had to do with translating the change vision into subordinates’ individual objectives (e.g., ‘we broke down the change goal to every subordinates’ objectives), 6 were about handling subordinates’ negative emotions and feelings (e.g., ‘we could feel our staff felt a little blue about the uncertainty here and we had to deal with their depression’), and 4 had to do with communicating change vision to outsiders (e.g., ‘we had to tell our customers that why we had this organizational change and promised not to affect our good relationship’).

To sum up, the three patterns of middle managers’ role transition in organizational change were consistent with the findings of Balogun (2003) and Floyd and Wooldridge

(1992). Balogun (2003) identified four types of activities middle managers took during organizational change which are “undertaking personal change”, “helping others through change”, “keeping the business going” and “implementing changes to departments”. Our findings in Study 1 overlapped with Balogun’s to a great extent. Moreover, in Study 1, we also identified a number of sub-categories for each of the three patterns (see Table 4) for which some sub-categories were also consistent with some part of findings in Floyd and Wooldridge (1992,1994) such as “translate goals into action plans”, or “translate goals into individual objectives”. One thing that merits attention is that the discovery of three patterns of role transition does not mean middle managers do not engage in their routine duties. On the contrary, one of the difficulties for middle managers is that they have to struggle to keep a balance between things they do usually and things that are emergent and urgent caused by the change (Huy, 2001). These findings answered our research question of what role middle managers take in a radical organizational change and whether there is a role transition involved.

(b) Sources of role expectation change:

In addition to exploring middle managers’ roles in organizational change, the purpose of Study 1 is also to identify the sources of these emergent role transitions in order to design elements to be used in repertory grid interview conducted in Study 2. We found four major sources for middle managers’ role change: supervisors, subordinates, outsiders, and themselves. Put in another way, middle managers’ role changes happened because either they were asked to do so by their supervisors, or expected by their subordinates or important outsiders, or just by themselves. For certain role changes, they stemmed from

more than one source. For instance, the source of “rearrange department priorities” came from both supervisors and middle managers themselves. In other words, “rearrange department priorities” was not only a request from the top managers but also a self-initiative based on middle managers’ willingness to get work done.

In table 4, for each of the three categories of middle managers’ role change, there are sub-categories of more specific contents of role change. “Deal with personal change” has 3 sub-categories, “deal with changes to departments” has 4 sub-categories, and “help others through change” has 5 sub-categories. We used “√” to indicate the sources of each change for each of the sub-categories. We found that for almost all the 12 sub-categories of role change patterns, they shared a common source, which is “middle managers themselves”. This means that whatever dealing with personal change, or dealing with changes to departments or helping others through change, the three emergent role change patterns are not just in answer to the expectations from their supervisors, subordinates or outsiders. More importantly, middle managers themselves may not only passively respond to organizational change, rather they might engage in all the activities based on their own willingness.

“It was understandable there were some negative words around us...I can feel them (subordinates) depressed... I think the most efficient way to help them is let them do the job, make them feel they were involved in the change.” [a male manager of finance department in a financial service company under the change of a merger]

(Interviewee): “To me, this is a huge change too. It concerns everyone’s interests in this company. Some of my people got really upset about whether they might be the next to

leave. I must do something to keep them calm down, do their job... I had to keep talking, talking,... . helped them overcome their blue moods”

(researcher): “how did this ‘dealing with your people’s blue moods’ happen?”

(interviewee): “...Gradually you found that some of them were not really into their job. I am their head. When they had this kind of difficulty time, I had to deal with it.”

(researcher): “did you do it because you were asked to do by your boss or someone else?”

(Interviewee): “Of course my boss needed me to deal with any problems from my staff, but they did not need to point that out so obviously. They just assumed that you are supposed to be responsible for any problem coming from your department. So it’s not like your boss asked you to do that, it’s just that it’s something you needed to do at this position”

[a male marketing department manager in a manufacturing company under the change of organizational restructure]

(Interviewee): “It’s not an easy mission for us. At first, I had several meetings with my staff to discuss everyone’s objectives....The point is in this way everyone had something to do, we split the task, so nobody got too much or too little...I also needed to talk to other department managers ‘cause right now there wasn’t very clear lines on who’s responsible for what”

(Researcher): “did you do those things because you were asked to do by your boss or someone else?”

(Interviewee): “My boss only gave me an overall expectation, but the specific work you needed to figure it out by yourself. They didn’t give you specific instructions, that’s something I needed to do as a department manager.”

[a male technical maintenance department manager of a manufacturing company under the change of implementing a new system]

The findings suggest that middle managers actually engaged in a host of activities to make organizational change realized. This portrays a picture of middle managers as change agents who make tremendous efforts to implement the change possibly with positive attitudes as their senior managers’ (Fenton-O’Creevy, 2001). This finding provides an alternative perspective on evaluating middle managers attitudes, involvement and commitment to organizational change. Contrary to prior research blaming middle managers as “foot draggers”, “scapegoats”, “saboteurs” or “dinosaurs” (Dopson & Neumann, 1998; Dopson & Stewart, 1990; Fenton-O’Creevy, 1998, 2001; Floyd & Wooldridge, 1994; Guth & MacMillan, 1986), the findings of Study 1 provide evidence that middle managers can actually bring positive influences in organizational change.

In Study 1, we found three patterns of middle managers’ role changes in organizational change. They have to do with “deal with personal changes”, “deal with changes to departments”, and “help others through change”. “Deal with personal change” is mainly about middle managers’ communications with senior managers to gain a sensible understanding of the change vision and what they are required to do to make change realized. “Deal with changes to departments” is mainly about how middle managers make the change vision tangible to actions plans relating to responsibilities of

their employees and departments. And “helping others through the change” has to do with interactions between middle managers and the others, specifically their subordinates and important outsiders such as an important customer, to achieve a shared understanding of what the change is and what the change means to them. Moreover, we also found a variety of sub-categories attached to each of the three patterns of role changes to indicate more concrete behaviors of each pattern (see Table 4).

We found that the three major themes of middle managers’ role transition in organizational change come from four major sources: supervisors, subordinates, outsiders, and themselves. For certain role changes, they stemmed from more than one source. For instance, the source of “rearrange department priorities”, was both supervisors and middle managers themselves. The findings of sources of middle managers’ emergent role transition were applied in element design in repertory grid, the method used in Study 2 to capture middle managers’ evaluative schemas on their roles in organizational change. We will discuss locating elements in the research methodology chapter.

Table 2. Middle managers' role transition in organizational changes

Categories of middle managers' role respondents	Sources of role expectations				Total mentions by
	Supervisors	subordinates	outsiders	themselves	
behavior in organizational changes					
<i>Deal with personal change</i>					(18)
communicate with top managers to clarify personal duties & responsibilities	√			√	10
communicate with others to determine expectations				√	5
increase political sensitivity				√	3
<i>Deal with changes to departments</i>					(28)
translate change vision into action plans	√			√	9
monitor activities in implementation	√			√	8
rearrange department priorities	√			√	7
negotiate with peers on departmental delimitation of responsibilities in change implementation	√			√	4
<i>Help others through change</i>					(37)
communicate change vision to subordinates		√		√	12
provide training, assistance and support		√		√	8
translate change vision into individual objectives		√		√	7
handle subordinates' negative emotions and feelings		√		√	6
communicate change vision to outsiders (customers)	√		√	√	4
Total mentions:					83

3.2 Study 2

Aim

Study 2 is aimed to explore how middle managers make sense of and evaluate their emergent roles in organizational change. As we explained before, role is formed based on a combination of expectations from related groups and also the subjects themselves. Put in another way, middle managers' roles involve a combination of different related groups and the managers themselves holding expectations of what they should do. In organizational change, their emergent new role obligations for implementing change form their role transition. How they perceive and evaluate their role transition is the focus of Study 2. Thus, based on Study 1's findings we go further to explore middle managers' evaluative schemas concerning their emergent roles in organizational change by using the repertory grid technique (Kelly, 1955) in Study 2. We seek to understand how middle managers make sense of and evaluate their roles in organizational change by examining their schemas which they use as criteria to assess the extent of difficulty in performing those roles.

Sample

We selected the sample for Study 2 according to the same requirements as those of Study 1. Sample in Study 2 was also selected through the head hunter company, although there was no overlap in membership of the two samples. We intended to reveal middle managers' general evaluative criteria for making sense of and assess their roles in organizational change. In other words, we attempted to rule out the possibility of attaching particular attributes to middle managers' evaluative schemas from one

particular organizational change or one particular industry. Thus, we chose different respondents from different organizations and industries, rather than focusing on one organization.

The objective of Study 2 is to reveal middle managers' schemas on how they make sense of and evaluate their roles in organizational change. The aim of sampling is to find out sources from which concepts, categories, variables and its properties emerge (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The sampling approach is theory-driven, and the sample size is a function of the theoretical completeness. It is theoretical rather than purposeful sampling. Essentially, we expected that theoretical categories could be saturated, and the fullness of the understanding of the concept was achieved (Glaser, 1978). Therefore, at the outset, there was no necessity to set any limits on the number of participants. Thus, what we did first was to get confirmations from 20 middle managers who agreed to participate in Study 2, but we also notified them there was a possibility that they might not be interviewed depending on the interview progress. Once we received their agreements on participation, we sent out a more detailed interview protocol (see Appendix) to have them mentally prepared for the interviews which included a statement on research purpose, a simple explanation of interview procedures, and an initial data collection on their backgrounds. We did not describe the repertory grid interviews in more details, except delineating it as an interesting psychological technique, to prevent scaring off our respondents by the seeming complexity and ambiguity which may cause by literally explaining. We decided to maintain respondents' enthusiasm and curiosity to the repertory grid interview and made them more easily to understand the procedures by

face-to-face interactions of doing real interviews accompanied with explanations and simple demonstrations.

The procedure was that we conducted the interview by using the repertory grid technique and we instantly captured the constructs emerging from the interview. Then we continued with additional repertory grid interviews instantly comparing the new emergent constructs with the previous elicited constructs. Every repertory grid interview would generate 6 constructs following the designed sequences of asking questions. Once we did the second repertory grid interview, we compared the new 6 elicited constructs with the six from the previous interview. We found some constructs were similar and sorted them to a category. We kept this procedure of eliciting and comparing going on until we found that the elicited constructs were kept repeating the previous ones. At this moment, we still decided to conduct a few more repertory grid interviews to test whether the elicited constructs were genuinely theoretically full. One thing for sure, is that almost every repertory grid interview would generate one or two distinct constructs that might never occur in other respondents' interviews which we later would put them into a "Miscellaneous" category. However, this did not influence collecting the meaningful constructs and would not influence our judgment on when the theoretical completeness was achieved. Thus when elicited dimensions (constructs) kept repeating and no more new meaningful constructs were yielded, we decided to stop the repertory grid interviews. In total, we completed 17 interviews by using the repertory grid technique.

The sample of Study 2 included 17 middle managers who had recently experienced radical organizational changes. The types of organizational change experienced by these respondents are show in Table 2. The sample of Study 2 was drawn

from different industries in Nanjing, Jiangsu Province in China. The average full-time work experience of the respondents was 12.76 years. The mean experience at middle management level was 5.24 years. They had worked for average 6.35 years in their current organizations. The sample worked in various functions, including 4 respondents from human resources, 4 respondents from administration, 3 respondents from sales, 3 respondents from production, 2 respondents from IT and 1 from customer service. The 17 respondents are from different companies in Nanjing and each respondent is one of the middle managers in each company. As the sample, they represent the middle management team with the range from 5 to 14 managers in each company. The age of respondents ranged from 29 to 49 with a mean age of 33.26 years. The sample was composed of 10 male and 7 female managers.

Table 3. Types of organizational change in Study 2

Types of organizational change	Number of respondents
Mergers & acquisitions	5
Organizational structure change	4
Implementation of new system	4
Top management replacement	2
Major products change	1
Downsizing	1

Method

Study 2 adopted the repertory grid technique (Kelly, 1955) to explore middle managers' evaluative schemas on their roles in radical organizational changes.

Repertory grid is a research and clinical psychology method derived from Personal construct theory and proposed by Kelly (1955). The aim of repertory grid is to elicit and analyze the cognitive thought processes of individuals through a structured interview.

Repertory Grid is known to be a powerful, systematic and rigorous interviewing approach to discover how people construe and make sense of their worlds (Brown, 1992; Kelly, 1955; Stewart & Stewart, 1981). The advantages in using repertory grid are numerous. The most evident strength of analyzing the self-concept is that it minimizes research bias (Langa-Fox & Tan, 1997; Stewart & Stewart, 1981). It allows the subjects to construe themselves and their world in terms of their own self-perceived, relevant and meaningful dimensions, using their own words and language (Fournier, 1996; Stewart & Stewart, 1981).

Repertory grid has been used in the strategy and management literature. Fournier (1996) applied the repertory grid method to study psychological adjustment following work transition. It is found that grid technique has considerable potentials in eliciting people's interpretations about self-construction and the construction of others. Langan-Fox and Tan (1997) employed repertory grid method to investigate the organizational culture transition from a public service orientation towards a customer service orientation. In this research, we seek to understand how middle managers make sense of and evaluate their role transition during organizational change. Repertory grid suits our research purposes by eliciting middle managers' evaluative criteria used to assess their roles in their own words.

The grid itself is just an empty matrix/grid form that is used to record the interview conversation. Four essential components of a grid are elements, constructs, rating the grid and forced choice (Stewart & Stewart, 1981).

(a) Identify elements

Elements in a repertory grid interview define the research domain to be investigated (Stewart & Stewart, 1981). The characteristics of any grid elements should be “homogeneous”, “discrete and representative”, “as short as possible”, “previously experienced” (Stewart & Stewart, 1981). First, “homogeneous” means that elements used in repertory grid interview should be drawn from the same category. For example, a research project interested in investigating people’s sensemaking of organizational identity could select the following elements: company today, company ten years ago, company toughest competitor, your ideal company, etc. In the current research, our focus is middle managers’ schemas on role transition accompanying organizational change. Thus, the elements used in this research should relate to the role itself. Second, elements should be “discrete and representative” of the area being investigated (Fransella & Bannister, 1977). For example, a grid about “organizational culture” that does not include “organizational members’ shared value” would not be representative. Third, “as short as possible” is to ensure that the elements in a grid are easy for respondents to compare. And “previously experienced” is important in a grid technique because repertory grid is based on Kelly’s personal construct theory (1955) which underscores that people’s real experiences are the sources for their sensemaking and anticipation. It is hard for participants to compare elements if they never have any experiences with those elements.

In this study, the research focus is on middle managers’ evaluative schemas of their roles in organizational change. And as stated before, people’s role is defined by different related groups’ expectations and also their own expectations on what they should do in this position. Based on Study 1’s findings, we can conclude that compared to their routine obligations, there is a role transition involved for middle managers as

organizational change evolves. Generally, this particular role transition originates from different groups' expectations of what middle managers need to do to facilitate change implementation. Table 4 lists four major sources of role expectations: middle managers' supervisors, their subordinates, important outsiders and themselves. Thus, middle managers need to deal with those four major groups' expectations on what should be done in their position during the change process. Moreover, middle managers also need to deal with their regular duties during the change process. The four sources of role expectation pertinent to organizational change and their routine obligations cover the research area of middle managers' role in organizational change. Thus, to investigate middle managers' evaluative schemas of their roles in change, the elements used in this study should cover the above five aspects.

More specifically, elements were composed of their routine responsibilities in their managerial positions and role transitions from four sources, which were supervisors' role expectations on you as change unfolds, subordinates' role expectations on you as change unfolds, your own role expectations on yourself and the important outsiders'. The reason we included routine responsibilities as elements is twofold. First, elements used in repertory grid should cover the research domain as large as possible. Second, considering that it is an examination on evaluating lens on middle managers' role transition along with organizational change, it would be interesting and insightful if we can compare what they do everyday with what they do under this particular circumstance.

There are generally four ways to design elements for repertory grid. The first way is that elements are supplied by investigators. This means investigators choose the elements based on their background knowledge. Investigators should know how best to

represent the research domain by means of elements. The weakness of this approach is that it may risk of omitting elements which are important to interviewees. The second way is to allow interviewees to choose elements. This will ensure that the elements are represented from the interviewee's point of view. However, it may not include issues the investigator is interested in. The third approach is that elements are chosen by negotiation between investigator and interviewee. The investigator shares the reasons for the investigation of the topic with the interviewee, and identifies a set of elements jointly by discussion and negotiation. This sounds reasonable, however it is time-consuming. The fourth approach is to elicit elements. This is done by providing general categories, which cover the range of the topic, and let the interviewee responds to each category specifically. For example, if the investigator is interested in how people make sense of "employee effectiveness", the investigator can provide the categories like "a reliable employee", "a well-trained employee" or "an ineffective employee", then the interviewee provides the according people to each category. In this way, the final elements generate. The investigator must have a strong rationale of using the particular categories based on theory or previous work on the issue (Jankowicz, 2004).

In this study, elements were finally located by combining the first and the fourth approach. Based on Study 1, we narrowed down the categories and provided the role change patterns found in Study 1 in each category. As an alternative choice for the interviewee who had different experiences which cannot be covered in the supplied elements, we allowed the interviewee to supply their own elements. We did not supply all the elements to the respondents because they might have different experiences with the sources of role transition. Neither did we ask the respondents to supply all the elements,

in case in a limited interview period, respondents might not quickly come up with what they need to supply. Thus, we actually chose a middle course. We provided a list of role expectations according to different sources for them to choose, which comes directly from the findings on the sub-categories of the three patterns of role changes in Study 1, and we also gave them the choice to supply elements they wanted according to their personal experiences if they did not agree with the listed elements (role expectations). The final elements design was in Table 3.

(b) Elicit constructs

In the interview, the participants were supplied with 9 elements (printed on 4" x 3" cards) for construction elicitation. The participants' constructs on how they make sense of and evaluate the 9 elements were based on their actual experiences. The investigator presented the elements to the interviewees in group of three (called a triad), and asked the Kellyian question, "in what way are any two of these elements similar, but different from the third, in terms of the extent of difficulty of performing them?" Interviewees responded in the form of a construct such as, "have clear guidelines and procedures --- have uncertain factors". The constructs are listed along the rows from left to right (see Appendix for an example of a completed repertory grid interview form). It is also very important for investigators to take stock of when it is necessary to ladder up or ladder down the questions in order to elicit more reasonable and meaningful constructs by asking "why" questions and "what or how" questions respectively (Stewart & Stewart, 1981).

Table 4: List of elements in repertory grid interview

<u>Elements</u>
<p>E1 & E2: <i>expectations from your supervisors as change unfolds</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. communicating with top managers to clarify personal duties & responsibilities 2. rearranging department priorities 3. negotiating with peers on departmental delimitation of responsibilities in change implementation 4. translating change vision into action plans 5. monitoring activities in implementation 6. communicating change vision to outsiders 7. List one expectation from your supervisors as change unfolds: _____ 8. List another expectation from your supervisors as change unfolds: _____
<p>E3 & E4: <i>expectations from your subordinates as change unfolds</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. communicating the change vision to subordinates 2. translating the change vision into individual objectives 3. handling subordinates' negative emotions and feelings 4. providing training, assistance and support 5. list one expectation from your subordinates as change unfolds: _____ 6. list another expectation from your subordinates as change unfolds: _____
<p>E5 & E6: <i>expectations of your own as change unfolds</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. communicating with others to determine expectations 2. increasing political sensitivity 3. rearranging department priorities 4. negotiating with peers on departmental delimitation of responsibilities in change implementation 5. translating the change vision into action plans 6. monitoring activities in implementation 7. communicating change vision to outsiders 8. translating the change vision into individual objectives 9. list one expectation of your own as change unfolds: _____ 10. list another expectation of your own as change unfolds: _____
<p>E7: <i>expectations from your important outsiders as change unfolds</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. communicating the change vision to outsiders 2. list one expectation from your important outsiders as change unfolds: _____
<p>E8 & E9: <i>routine responsibilities</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. list one of your routine responsibilities as a manager: _____ 2. list another your routine responsibilities as a manager: _____

(c) Rate the grid

After eliciting constructs, another important procedure is to rate the grid. Each participant was asked to rate the 9 elements on a 1-5 scale according to the elicited their own constructs in which 1 represents that all elements are closest to the left pole and 5 means that elements are best described by the right pole. The participants were asked to rate all the 9 elements based on the two poles, in the range from 1 to 5 to find the most appropriate place for every element in every construct. If elements were not close to either of the two poles, they can be rated on 3 (see Appendix). For example (see Appendix), the first construct is “relatively routine, have experienced before --- more sensitive” elicited when E1, E2 and E3 are compared by asking “which two are similar but different from the third one in terms of whether it was easy or difficult to deal with?” Because E1 and E2 are similar, we record “1” to both E1 and E2, while E3 is different, we record “5” to E3. Then the investigator asked the participant, “in the scale of 1 to 5, in the range of ‘relatively routine, have experienced before’ all the way towards ‘more sensitive’, what would you rate E4?” and followed with rating of E5, E6, E7, E8 and E9. This procedure relates constructs to elements by indicating the meaning of the labels given to each pole.

(d) Forced choice

When all the elements were rated, the participants were then asked to choose between construct poles to indicate which pole is the one that made them feel able to deal with role transition in organizational change. Thus the description of the preferred pole indicates what kind of circumstances make middle managers feel more able to cope with

and realize organizational change. The insights from the forced choice of bi-polar constructs have practical implications for managers.

Data analysis

The repertory grid technique yields a geometric representation of a respondent's schema system which allows both quantitative and qualitative analysis to be performed (Reger, 1990). The resulting $m \times n$ matrix containing m elements and n dimensions can be analyzed by using a number of statistical analyses depending on the researchers' purposes, including content analysis, cluster analysis, and multidimensional scaling (Reger, 1990).

Based on the research purposes of Study 2, we examined two major aspects of middle managers' schemas on their role during organizational change. First, the content of middle managers' schemas on role transition in organizational change was examined. Content analysis of elicited constructs across interviewees was conducted to reveal their schema content, simply what their schemas are about. And we also coded the constructs according to the content similarity to generate middle managers' salient schemas and idiosyncratic schemas as well. Second, we also did an additional analysis on the structure of middle managers' schemas on role transition by cluster analysis to show how middle managers group their emergent roles according to their own evaluative schemas and what insights can be generated. We use a free software Rep IV to do the analysis.

Content analysis

The content analysis of the repertory grids in this study was mainly about evaluating similarities and differences of the contents of respondents' evaluative schemas. It involved coding all the emergent elicited constructs of the seventeen repertory grid interviews. We used two coders to independently sort the elicited constructs into categories based on construct similarity. Constructs that were coded identically in the first round of coding were put aside into a category. Then the two coders needed to discuss their categorization schemas and finally reached an agreement on the number of categories, the labels of categories, and what constructs should be put in what categories.

Cluster analysis

Cluster analysis was performed to assess schema structure. Cluster diagrams show how the elements were connected. The elements are respondents' roles in organizational change. Thus the cluster diagrams on how elements are connected reveal how respondents made sense of and evaluate the elements based on their own evaluative schemas. The more closely connected clusters of elements mean that the more significant matching between them (Fournier, 1996; Jankowicz, 2004; Stewart & Stewart, 1981), which means those closely connected elements are evaluated as similar to the extent of difficulty in performing them.

3.3 Summary

This chapter outlined the methods and procedures of Study 1 and Study 2. How the sample of these two studies was located and selected was presented. The chapter outlined the different types of analysis used in the two studies.

4. RESULTS

This chapter summarizes the findings of Study 2. We intend to investigate how middle managers make sense of their roles in organizational change. We examine middle managers' cognitive schemas employed as evaluative standards to assess the extent of difficulty of performing the roles found in Study 1. In this way, it allows us to understand how middle managers perceive their roles and how they define what is “easy” and “difficulty” to deal with their emergent roles in organizational change.

4.1 Findings

In Study 2, we conducted the repertory grid interviews in order to acquire answers to the remaining research questions, which are “how do middle managers make sense of and evaluate their roles in organizational change?” and “what are the salient schemas and multiple idiosyncratic schemas used by middle managers as criteria to evaluate their roles in organizational change?” The major purpose of Study 2 is to get to know middle managers' own evaluative schemas that they use to make sense of and assess their roles in organizational change.

In Study 2, we conducted content analysis on the data from the repertory grid interviews in response to the above two research questions. Recall that the elements in the repertory grid interviews were emergent role changes in organizational change. We put forth our repertory grid question as “in what way are any two of these elements similar, but different from the third, in terms of the extent of difficulty of performing them?” In this way, the interviewees generated bi-polar constructs of how they evaluated those emergent role changes in terms of the extent of difficulty in doing them. Thus, the

elicited constructs serve as the evaluative criteria in assessing their emergent roles in organizational change. We also conducted cluster analysis as an additional analysis to find out how middle managers categorize the discovered emergent role obligations in Study 1 into the groups as “easy to deal with” and “difficult to deal with” according to their evaluative schemas to assess the extent of difficulty of performing their roles in organizational change.

Content analysis: elicited dimensions and salient schemas

In the repertory grid interview, respondents were asked the way in which two of the elements were similar and the third was different in terms of feeling easy or difficult to deal with. In this way, bipolar constructs used by respondents to differentiate among the elements were elicited. A total of 100 bipolar constructs of middle managers’ roles in organizational change were elicited from the 17 respondents’ repertory grid interviews. The 100 bipolar constructs revealed how middle managers make sense of and evaluate their roles in organizational change in terms of the extent of difficulty of performing the roles and what kind of terms they use to assess their roles.

To assess the similarities and differences of middle managers’ evaluative schemas, a qualitative comparison of respondents’ 100 raw constructs elicited from repertory grid interviews was conducted. Although any measure of salient schemas could be arbitrary and subjective, a majority agreement (>50%) is acceptable to represent a substantial degree of consensus (Martin, Sitkin, & Boehm, 1985). Thus, the “salient” schemas as defined in this research require that a construct is cited by more than 50% of the respondents. This indicates that any schema regarded as “salient schema” must have

more than half of the respondents (>8 respondents) to mention it. The remaining schemas, without more than 50% respondents mentioning were considered as idiosyncratic schemas. For example, among 17 respondents, there were 9 of them mentioned the dimension “standards and requirements”. We then defined “standards and requirements” as a salient schema. In this way, we examined respondents’ salient and idiosyncratic schemas.

Two coders conducted the initial round of coding. One is the author and the other is a middle manager with more than 15 years working experiences from a big investment bank in HK. The reason for choosing a real manager from the business world is to make sure a greater consensus can be achieved between academic thoughts and practical thoughts. In the initial round of coding, the two coders independently coded the 100 dimensions elicited from 17 respondents into emergent categories on the judgment of dimension similarity. For example, we put the bipolar dimensions “we can control vs. unpredictable” and “under my control vs. environment factors have strong influences in the change process” under the same category because both of them talk about middle managers’ controllability in the organizational change. In the same fashion, coders sorted other bipolar dimensions to the different categories based on their evaluations on the similarity of dimension contents. Coder 1 sorted the dimensions into 13 categories plus a miscellaneous category. Coder 2 sorted the dimensions into 10 categories plus a miscellaneous category. Table 3 shows the initial category labels and number of dimensions in the various categories by the two coders. Following the initial round of coding, the two raters discussed categorization schemas and agreed on 11 categories plus a miscellaneous category as the final categorization. We also assessed reliability of the

two coders' content analysis based on Perreault and Leigh's (1989) proposed "index of reliability" (I_r):

$$I_r = \sqrt{(p_a - \frac{1}{c})(\frac{c}{c-1})}$$

where P_a is the proportion of agreed on judgments and c is the number of coding categories. The interrater reliability between Coder 1 and Coder 2 was .93, satisfying the generally accepted standards of reliability.

Recalling that salient schema content was defined as existing when similar content was shared by more than 50% respondents, the results from the content analysis provided evidence for the existence of salient schema among middle managers. This means that middle managers do rely on certain salient cognitive schemas in perceiving, interpreting and evaluating the same phenomena, their roles in organizational change. In table 6, we can see that three out of the eleven categories generated by the coders contained dimensions provided by more than 50% of the respondents. The three salient schemas, accounting for 46% (46/100) of the total dimensions provided, were "Controllability & Initiatives", "Standards & requirements" and "Familiarity". Table 6 summarizes the final category labels, number and percentage of respondents for each category, and number and percentage of dimensions for each category. The appendix provides further details on the specific dimensions in each of the categories.

Table 5 Content analysis: category labels – initial and final round

Rater 1 initial round categories	Rater 2 initial round categories	Both raters final categories
Controllability (16)	My control and initiative (21)	Controllability (23)
Standards & requirements (12)	Procedures & criteria (12)	Standards & requirements (12)
Familiarity (11)	Familiar with (12)	Familiarity (11)
Purposes (7)	Aims and needs (8)	Goals (7)
Kinds of relationships dealt with (7)	What kind of relationship (7)	Relatedness & relevance (7)
Independence & dependence (7)	Resources (8)	Clearness & simplicity (7)
Resources relying on (6)	Correlations (7)	Resources & data (6)
Connection (6)	Negotiation (5)	Kinds of relationship (6)
Evaluation (5)	Ability (3)	Feedback (5)
Communication (5)	Feedbacks (5)	Communication (5)
Ability (3)	Miscellaneous (12)	Ability (3)
Link (3)		Miscellaneous (8)
Explicitness & clearness (2)		
Miscellaneous (10)		

Note: numbers in the brackets indicate how many dimensions in this category.

Table 6 Middle managers' cognitive schemas

Category	Dimensions		Respondents	
	Number of dimensions	% of total dimensions	Number of respondents	% of total respondents
Controllability	23	23 %	15	88%
Standards & requirements	12	12%	9	53%
Familiarity	11	11%	9	53%
Goals	7	7%	7	41%
Clearness & simplicity	7	7%	7	41%
Relatedness & relevance	7	7%	6	35%
Resources & data	6	6%	6	35%
Kinds of relationships	6	6%	6	35%
Feedback	5	5%	5	29%
Communication	5	5%	5	29%
Ability	3	3%	3	18%
Miscellaneous	8	8%		
Total	100	100%		

Note: The dimension column shows how many dimensions were sorted to each category and what percentage is among the total elicited dimensions. The respondent column shows how many respondents mentioned each category and what percentage is among the total respondents.

Middle managers' salient schemas

Salient schema 1: If no controllability, then it is hard to deal with emergent roles in organizational change

This schema was most widely shared by the respondents in this research, with 23 dimensions provided by 15 respondents, representing 88% of the respondents and 23% of the total number of dimensions elicited. This category reflects middle managers' concerns regarding whether they possess the controllability of how things develop and how their emergent roles can be fulfilled.

From the elicited dimensions, we found that most of the respondents portrayed their controllability in organizational change in three major ways. The first is that when respondents depicted their controllability in terms of how it helps them deal with change implementation, they compared it with whether they need support from supervisors, other organizational members, other departments, and also outside supports. The more they depend on themselves, rather than others, the more they feel that they have controllability and initiatives:

“because when I dealt with things like rearranging departmental priorities, I felt I had the control...I can decide what should be done first, what needed more attention....however, things like negotiating with other departments on such issues as whose responsibilities or who should get more budgets, this was out my control...we all had our own standpoints, to get others' support was not easy...in the end, we only could count on our boss, at least they could decide.”

The second way respondents described their controllability is that they also compared their controllability with whether there was a conflict of interest involved within their departments or the company, or even between the instant future and a long-term relationship:

“I think these two [“translating change vision into action plans” and “providing support”] were similar...I felt easy doing them, because I had the control on these things. I only depended on myself for the judgments. However, this one [“translating change vision into individual objectives”] was different...it was relatively difficult, because you see things like breaking it (overall task) to everyone’s (subordinates) own objectives...things like that always caused a lot of contentions...everyone cared about their own interests...they thought why I should do this, why not others...this kind of interests conflicts are hard for me to control.”

The third way is that they may feel their controllability threatened when they found out they lacked of knowledge and resources relating to their emergent duties in change implementation:

“These two (elements) [“translating change into action plans” and “rearranging departmental priorities”] were similar to me. They were relatively easy to deal with. Because they were within the range of my adjustments, I had the control. But implementing the new system, I might feel a little bit of losing control because it needed more new knowledge and also needed plenty resources to support it, for that I even could not be sure what they are.”

Salient schema 2: If no standards and requirements, then it is hard to deal with emergent roles in organizational change

Standards & requirements represented the second largest schema, with 12 dimensions (12%) provided by 9 (53%) of the 17 respondents. This category concerns (1) the standards to evaluate their role performances by their senior managers and (2) the guidelines and procedures of how to perform their roles. Respondents preferred their emergent roles in the organizational change with basic, concrete and explicit standards and requirements in terms of performance evaluation and, method and procedure instructions:

“These two [“recruitment” and “arranging and providing training”] are similar to me because they both have clear standards to evaluate my performance. They are my basic responsibilities as a HR manager and we have specific criteria to assess my performance every year. But “handling your subordinates’ negative emotions” is differently. Because we do not have some standards to see how you are doing on this, actually nobody wants to evaluate your performance on that, to them, it’s only your problem. They only want to see the ultimate results.”

“These two [“dealing with kinds of problems with production” and “improving department systems and institutionalizing them”] both had concrete standards and specific requirements to guide my supervision...they looked similar to me in this way. However this one [“communicating with others to determine expectations”] didn’t have any guidelines, and also it couldn’t have any guidelines telling you how to do that, you

need figure out your own way to communicate with your colleagues effectively. It seemed uncertain for me to know what exactly I needed to do and when it was enough.”

Salient schema 3: If no familiarity, then it is hard to deal with emergent roles in organizational change

This schema represented the third largest one, with 11 dimensions (11%) provided by 9 (53%) of the 17 respondents. This category reflected respondents’ concerns with whether they were familiar with the emergent role expectations during a role transition in organizational change. Many respondents expressed familiarity in the way whether they had previous experiences. The attributes as “never met before”, “previous experiences possibly not useful”, “need more resources, more complex” or “a lot to learn” are opposite descriptions to familiarity defined by respondents. In addition to previous experiences, they also perceived mutable, dynamic and uncertain environmental situations with a broad range of responsibilities involved to be against their defined familiarity:

“This one [‘translating change vision into action plans’] was not something I was familiar with. I even never met before....even I had some experiences with making plans, however this was not some plan you make as usual. It might be that your previous experiences were not useful. But for the rest two [‘regular departmental meetings’ and ‘follow-ups’], I was very familiar with ‘cause I almost do it everyday.”

“I was familiar with these two roles [“staff training” and “rearranging departmental priorities”]. However, the third element [“being sensitive to the overall direction”] I felt

difficult to deal with because it suffered from environmental factors.... This kind of industry is very mutable. Changes happen all the time, so this 'being sensitive to the overall direction' actually requires a broad range of responsibilities and capabilities...sometimes you even are not sure how far you are from that."

Idiosyncratic schema 1: If no goals, then it is hard to deal with emergent roles in organizational change

This schema comprises 7 dimensions (7%) from 7 (41%) of 17 respondents. This category reflects respondents' concerns with whether what they were expected to do to realize organizational change had a clear goal. When the goal was "contentious" or "implicit", they might feel not easy to deal with their role in the change. In addition, the "inconsistency" of understandings between different groups might also make respondents feel not easy to handle:

"The ridiculous thing was they (senior managers) asked us to make it (the change) to an action plan without even articulating the goals of the change clearly. We didn't know why we needed this change and what we were expected to achieve. That's the reason made me feel difficult to deal with the change. But these two routine duties were different. I know exactly what goals they are."

"for these two elements, they looked similar to me because 'monitoring activities in implementation' and 'providing pertinent training' both had clear purposes, however, 'negotiating with peers on departmental responsibilities' was relatively different and was relatively difficult to deal with because there is always an inconsistency in the way

people think....We certainly could not have agreements on everything. You would stick to what you think is important for you and so would I. The inconsistency of understandings made it difficult.”

Idiosyncratic schema 2: If no clearness and simplicity, then it is hard to deal with emergent roles in organizational change

The constructs related to this schema were mentioned by 7 (41%) respondents. The 7 (7%) dimensions reflected the definition of “clearness & simplicity” in two themes. The first was based on the extent of shared understanding. When there was “lack of a shared understanding”, clearness and simplicity was hard to achieve and in turn respondents felt difficult to deal with their role. The other concerns the facets of the work (e.g. only concerning one side or point of the work vs. all-around). Some respondents felt when their emergent role in the change involved with many facets to deal with, the difficulty might arise accordingly:

“These two [“communicating change vision to subordinates” and “communicating change vision to outsiders”] were similar and relatively easy to achieve, because they were based on a shared understanding. But “rearranging departmental priorities” was different from those two because it was hard for you to gain a shared understanding on what should be done first and what we should put more energy on. Everyone had their own different understandings that made it difficult.”

Idiosyncratic schema 3: If no relatedness and relevance, then it is hard to deal with emergent roles in organizational change

Concerns with the level of relatedness and relevance in their role in change implementation are captured in this category which comprises 7 (7%) dimensions elicited from 6 (35%) respondents from the 17 respondents. This category reflects respondents concern with the inner relationships between their emergent role expectations with their traditional and previous ones. The major distinction embodied in (1) related to their current responsibilities (2) related to previous and regular responsibilities and duties. Respondents sensed that when their emergent role expectations in their role transition had connections to what they did before and what they are doing right now would facilitate to implement change:

“for me ‘providing instructions on method of thinking’ and ‘providing support’ were both related to my current responsibilities, that’s the reason they were similar...that’s also the reason I had to do them well, however, ‘training insider customers’ was different from them because it was only a temporary job and did not relate to my major responsibilities in the change process.”

“I think ‘providing more technological support’ was different from the other two [‘marketing analysis’ and ‘arrangement and coordination of the whole process’]. It was more difficult for me because I was never in that area (technology) before. It so happened because of the change and suddenly I needed to be responsible for supplying technology support. It was a challenge for me too and I needed more training. But the other two they were related closely to my prior work...I felt easy for dealing with them.”

Idiosyncratic schema 4: If no resource and data, then it is hard to deal with emergent roles in organizational change

This schema includes 6 (6%) dimensions provided by 6 (35%) respondents. This category concerns the extent of richness of resource and data needed in change implementation.

The distinction was mainly focused in two aspects (1) whether company can provide resources and data they need (e.g. “company can provide resources and support vs. have attributes of complexity and diversity”); (2) whether their own department can provide the needed resources (e.g. “resources can be provided within department vs. concerning other departments, may need to convince other departments”):

“I think ‘handling subordinates’ negative emotions and feelings’ and ‘explaining the reasons for pending projects to other departments’ were similar to me and they both were relatively difficult. The reason is that they had some characteristics of complexity...the company could not provide enough resources... they were not like E3 (‘communicating change vision to subordinates’)...the company could provide rich resources and support that made me feel easier to deal with”

“E4 and E7 [“providing training, assistance and support” and “following the pace and good cooperation”] were similar to me...both were relatively easier to deal with. They were different from E1 [“negotiating with peers on departmental delimitation of responsibilities”]. Resources and support for E4 and E7 could both be provided within our department, however “negotiating with peers on departmental delimitation of responsibilities” concerned to other departments....we might need to convince other

departments...to some certain degree we counted on them to provide some resources we needed. That was the difficulty for E1.”

Idiosyncratic schema 5: If they deal with external relationship, then it is hard to deal with emergent roles in organizational change

The difference between dealing with internal organizational relationships and relationships outside the organization is captured in this category, which includes 6 (6%) dimensions provided by 6 (35%) respondents. It was generally held by respondents that they were more confident in dealing with internal relationships, especially in their own department for which they perceived to be with relative fewer conflicts:

“E1 [‘negotiating with peers on departmental delimitation of responsibilities] was different from E2 [‘translating change vision into action plans’] and E3 [‘translating change vision into individual objectives’]. E2 and E3 were both dealing relationships within the department. However E1 was to deal with relationships outside the department. You needed to be more sensitive, otherwise it might cause some conflicts.... For example, I remembered once I asked the HR department to hire some new employees for the new project, this had already supported and confirmed by our regular meetings with top management. However, it was really a long while they didn’t bring me any feedbacks, so I had to ask them for how things were going on...The HR manager was not happy when I asked her...I guessed maybe I was so direct or maybe she already had overload of work to do”

Idiosyncratic schema 6: If no feedback, then it is hard to deal with emergent roles in organizational change

This category comprises 5 (5%) dimensions representing 5 (29%) respondents. Evaluation category concerns with an evaluation process as to monitor their roles in change implementation. It concerns whether middle managers could get feedbacks from important individuals, such as their direct supervisors, to evaluate their performances and further monitor their behaviors in the change implementation process. Feedbacks as an evaluation process would facilitate middle managers to realize their roles (e.g. “quick feedback on what you have done vs. need a process to see the results”):

“I think these two [‘negotiating with peers on departmental responsibilities’ and ‘staff hiring and enrollment’] were similar to me while ‘translating change vision into action plans’ was different. Because those two could give you quick feedbacks... you could know whether you were doing them well or not.. But ‘translating change into action plans’ needed a process to see the results....you couldn’t have a sense until you saw the feedbacks.”

Idiosyncratic schema 7: If no good communication, then it is hard to deal with emergent roles in organizational change

This category includes 5 (5%) dimensions generated by 5 (29%) respondents. Good communication was perceived by respondents as an important factor for successful role taking. The difficulty of communication was attributed to different points of departure held by different people (e.g. “relatively easy to grasp vs. communication

difficulty caused by different starting points”) or factors such as “relatively lack of urgency”, “hard to control” or “depended on supervisors’ decision”.

Idiosyncratic schema 8: If no ability, then it is hard to deal with emergent roles in organizational change

The final category refers to middle managers’ personal capabilities in realizing their role in change implementation. Three respondents (18%) generated 3 dimensions (3%) concerning this category (e.g. “have ability to direct boss vs. uncertainty of future change”).

Miscellaneous. Elicited dimensions not suitable for the above 11 categories were placed in a miscellaneous category. This category includes 8 dimensions accounting for 8% of all the dimensions provided by the 17 respondents.

In summary, we found that “controllability”, “standards & requirements” and “familiarity” were the salient evaluative schemas that middle managers applied to assess the extent of difficulty in performing their emergent roles in organizational change. We also found eight idiosyncratic schemas such as “goals”, “feedback” and “relatedness & relevance”.

Additional findings from cluster analysis:

In Study 2, we also gathered some additional findings based on cluster analysis. Cluster analysis is a descriptive technique used to discover groups of observations that are similar to one another on a set of variables (constructs) (Everitt, Landau, & Leese,

2001). We employed cluster analysis to investigate how middle managers categorize their emergent roles in organizational changes into the group as “easy to deal with” and the group of “difficult to deal with” according to their own theories-in-use (their evaluative schemas). The appropriate cluster (grouping) solution is determined by using dendograms generated from Rep IV (visual representation of possible groupings). Dendograms can graphically and mathematically present the information concerning which participants’ perceptions are grouped together. We provided one representative cluster analysis results in the followings. The remaining cluster analysis results are provided in the appendix.

Cluster results for respondent No. 2

Figure 1 provides an illustration of respondent No. 2’s cluster history and dendrogram. As shown, Cluster 1 includes E1, E2, E4, E8, and E9 and Cluster 2 includes E7, E5, E3 and E6 for Cluster 2. It suggests that the respondent assigned the 9 elements into two broad groups according to the perceived similarity of the elements. Furthermore, we can see that the ratings for elements in Cluster 1 are mostly “1” or “2”, indicating they are close to the left side constructs. The left side constructs are attributes that this respondent perceived to be helpful in realizing the roles in organizational change (with asterisk to indicate the preferences polar of the bipolar constructs in terms of how it helps you realize the roles in organizational change). Thus, Cluster 1 represents the group of roles (elements) that respondent perceived to be easy to deal with because those roles possessing attributes that this respondent believed to help realize the roles. On the other hand, Cluster 2 represents the group of roles that the respondent perceived to be relatively more difficult to deal with in comparison with those in Cluster 1.

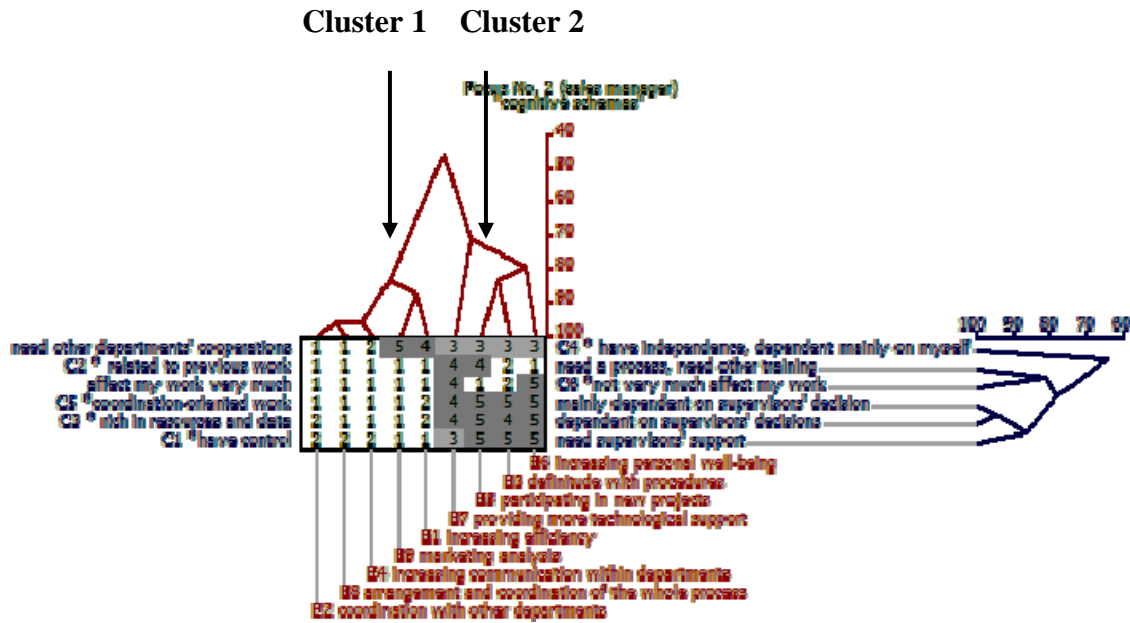


Figure 1: cluster results for respondent No. 2

Commonality across the informants

The above individual representative cluster analysis shows what kind of emergent roles they evaluate as easy in comparison to difficult to deal with according to their own evaluative standards generated from the content analysis. We then aggregated the individual cluster analysis to see the commonality across the informants on how they grouped their emergent roles in organizational change into two opposite groups with one representing the roles they felt easy to deal with whereas the other representing those seen as difficult to deal with based on their own evaluative schemas. Since one of the informants did not provide the complete ratings for every element, we ruled that out of the aggregation. Thus, the total number of informants taken into the aggregation was 16. As shown in Table 7, we can see some commonality of grouping different roles across respondents. Table 7 summarizes the number and percentage of informants who assigned their roles to the two clusters commonly observed in the data.

As explained in the individual cluster analysis, the two clusters (Cluster 1 and Cluster 2) indicate that the respondents grouped different elements (middle managers' emergent roles in organizational change) together based on whether they feel that they are easy or difficult to deal with, in terms of their own evaluative schemas. One of the poles with asterisk indicates the attributes that the participants felt them help to deal with their roles in organizational change. And the other pole indicates the opposite attributes which the participants felt not helpful for realize their roles. Thus, ratings on elements alongside the two poles of all the elicited constructs would suggest how the participants perceived these elements in light of the extent that they were easy to handle or not. Based on this principle, Cluster 1 is the group representing the roles that participants believed them relatively easy to realize while Cluster 2 is the group representing the roles that they perceived them relatively difficult to deal with.

As shown in Table 7, Cluster 1 and Cluster 2 both have a core group of roles assigned to the same cluster, highlighted in yellow and blue respectively. It shows that middle managers' routine responsibilities were grouped in Cluster 1, the group the participants felt easy to realize by all the informants. Comparing to other emergent roles in organizational change, middle managers do perceive the difference between their routine responsibilities, despite that some emergent roles they did feel relatively easy to deal with. However the high percentage (88%) of the informants in grouping routine responsibilities in Cluster 1 indicates that middle managers have more confidence in dealing with what they usually do. Put in another way, the emergent role changes do bring certain degree of difficulty comparing to what they do as routines. Thus, middle

managers may need more time and efforts in realizing their emergent roles in organizational change.

Furthermore, roles such as “rearrange departmental priorities”, “provide training, assistance and support”, “translate change vision into action plans” and “translate change vision into individual plans” were also grouped in the cluster 1 with more than 40% of the informants. In review of the content analysis above, we found that the reason that the participants found those roles were easy to deal with is based on some potential factors. Dealing with those roles, they may feel having the control, or there are explicit standards and requirements, or they are relatively familiar with those roles. Moreover, a deep look at those emergent roles, we found that the nature of those roles is very similar to their traditional functions as management and coordination. They might have certain new characteristics caused by organizational change, however, they do make plans, provide training, and arrange departmental priorities all the time. That might be an alternative explanation.

On the contrary, “negotiate with peers on departmental delimitation of responsibilities in change implementation”, “communicate with others to determine expectations” and “communicate change vision to outsiders” were grouped in Cluster 2 indicating they were the roles the participants perceived to be relatively difficult to realize. We found the three roles were all concerned with how to communicate with others. That is the commonality among the informants that whenever communication is needed there is difficulty in doing so, because as suggested in the content analysis, the communication was usually based on different standpoints, and misunderstandings can easily occur. The sensemaking and sensegiving activities involved with communications

in organizational change are very important for change implementation just as previous research suggests (Isabella, 1990; Gioia & Chettipeddi, 1991; Maitlis, 2005, 2007). More important, as suggested by current study, the sensemaking and sensegiving activities are also very difficult (Balogun, 2003). Middle managers' own evaluative schemas might shed some lights on why sensemaking and sensegiving is difficult to realize. The rest roles do not exhibit a high tendency to each of the two clusters, and cannot be meaningfully compared across the informants. For example, "handle subordinates' negative emotions and feelings" are assigned to both clusters, appearing to be more of a catch-all cluster (Reger & Huff, 1993).

4.3. Summary

In review of the research findings in current study, we decide to restate the research objectives at the beginning. Basically, there are two major research objectives in current study. The first objective is to explore middle managers' roles in a radical organizational change in order to understand their contributions to change implementation. The second objective is to explore the cognitive schemas used by middle managers to make sense of their roles in organizational change. These schemas are used as criteria to evaluate the extent of difficulty of performing their roles in organizational change. In so doing, we can better understand the difficulties faced by middle managers in organizational change and we can hope to move forward to understand how to help middle managers fulfill their roles in organizational change. Accordingly we conducted two studies in response to the two objectives respectively.

Table 7. Number and percentage of informants who assigned each role to each cluster

Roles	Cluster 1		Cluster 2	
	(easy to deal with)		(difficult to deal with)	
	No.	%	No.	%
Routine roles	16	100	0	
Rearrange departmental priorities	10	60	1	6
Provide training, assistance and support	9	53	2	12
translate change vision into action plans	8	47	1	6
translate change vision into individual plans	7	41	0	
negotiate with peers on departmental delimitation of responsibilities in change implementation	2	12	6	35
communicate with others to determine expectations	0		5	30
communicate change vision to outsiders	0		4	24
handle subordinates' negative emotions and feelings	4	24	3	18
communicate change vision to subordinates	2	12	3	18
communicate with top managers to clarify	0		1	6
increase political sensitivity	0		1	6

In Study 1, we found out that in a radical organizational change imposed by top management, middle manager take three emergent patterns of role behaviors in order to implement change which are: deal with personal change, deal with changes to departments and help others through change. The above three emergent role change patterns demonstrate there is a role transition occurred to middle managers in the

organizational change process. Furthermore, we also found that the three emergent role change patterns are not only triggered by expectations from important related individuals, such as top managers, they are also actuated by middle managers themselves. For example, some of the middle managers in our study felt duty-bound to handle subordinates' negative emotions and attitudes when they are under the uncertainty of their future interests caused by organizational change. If middle managers were like the previous research described as "resistant", "foot draggers" and "saboteurs" (Dopson & Neumann, 1998; Dopson & Stewart, 1990; Fenton-O'Creevy, 1998, 2001; Guth & MacMillan, 1986), they might simply ignore the phenomenon or even manipulated their subordinates' negative attitudes and emotions to really resist or sabotage the change. However, they tackled this kind of problem out of their own willingness. Moreover, middle managers actually contribute to shaping a consensus on the change vision for others, balancing the priorities of departmental obligations, handling subordinates' emergent anxiety and defensiveness (Huy, 2002) and so forth. Therefore, contrary to the portrayals as "resistant", "foot draggers" and "saboteurs", middle managers tackle the emergent responsibilities intrinsically associated with implementing organizational change. This further demonstrates that middle managers can make considerable contributions to organizational change.

In Study 2, we found out middle managers' three salient schemas as evaluating criteria to assess the extent of difficulty in performing their roles in organizational change which are "controllability", "standards and requirements" and "familiarity". The salient schema of "controllability" refers to whether middle managers possess control in decision-makings and operations in organizational change. The schema of "standards and

requirements” refers to whether there are clear and concrete standards to evaluate their performance and whether operational methods or procedures are provided to guide their behaviors. “Familiarity” concerns to whether middle managers’ repertoires of knowledge and experiences are applicable to deal with emergent roles. All in all, the three salient schemas are employed by middle managers as evaluative standards consciously or unconsciously to assess the extent of difficulty in performing their roles in organizational change. Middle managers might possibly encounter difficulties in fulfilling their roles in organizational change when the real situations do not fit their evaluative schemas. The evaluative schemas allude to middle managers’ perceived impediments to realize their roles, in a far-reaching sense, affect the change implementation. Hence, the evaluative schemas shed lights on how to help middle managers fulfill their roles in organizational change. In addition, some idiosyncratic schemas used as criteria are discovered as well. Considering the limit of space, we do not list them one by one. Nevertheless, this does not mean they are not as important as the salient schemas. They indicate individual insights through the idiosyncratic schemas. Moreover, some idiosyncratic schemas such as “goals” and “relevance and relatedness” are not defined as salient schemas according to the over 50% agreement standard mentioned before, however, they are highly shared by the participants to certain degree which indicate they are also very useful evaluative criteria.

We also conducted an additional analysis (cluster analysis) in order to use their own criteria to sort the emergent roles into two groups as easy to deal with and difficult to deal with. We found out those emergent roles such as “translate change into action plans” or “rearrange departmental priorities” are sorted into the group as “easy to deal

with”. By contrast, those emergent roles such as “communicate with others to determine expectations” or “communicate change vision to outsiders” are categorized into the group as “difficult to deal with”. It shows that some of the emergent roles evaluated by middle managers as difficult to deal with are mostly focused on communication, which centers on sensemaking and sensegiving activities to shape a shared understanding of organizational change itself or their personal and departmental responsibility delimitation in the change. Organizational change brings uncertainty on everything (Herzig & Jimmieson, 2006). This kind of communication activity is a tentative behavior to re-build the order from the chaos. The emergent roles which are evaluated as relatively easy to deal with are mostly about making plans and providing training and support, which may be imposed with new attributes by organizational change, however, they are fundamentally management and coordination traditional activities.

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

5.1 Introduction

What middle managers can contribute to realizing organizational change has obsessed the academics and business world for decades (Balogun, 2003, 2007; Currie & Procter, 2005; Fenton-O’Creedy, 2001; Floyd & Wooldridge, 1992, 1994, 2000; Hales, 1986; Huy, 2001, 2002; Johnson & Frohman, 1989). What roles do middle managers play in organizational change? Are they “foot draggers”, “saboteurs”, “dinosaurs” or “resistants”? (Dopson & Neumann, 1998; Dopson & Stewart, 1990; Fenton-O’Creedy, 1998; Floyd & Wooldridge, 1994; Guth & MacMillan, 1986) Or should they receive more positive evaluations on their contributions and influences in organizational change? This is the dividing ridge that separates the body of knowledge on middle managers’ roles in organizational change. It is hard to reconcile the two divergent portraits given the limited research into the role of middle managers during change (Balogun, 2003). In this line of seeking, the results of Study 1 add evidences on middle managers’ contributions in organizational change by revealing their three emergent role fashions accompanied with organizational change. The findings suggest that middle managers do need to meet the challenge of increased load of work during the role transition in implementing organizational change. Moreover, the fact that middle managers themselves are one of the prevalent and important sources of initiating role change so as to implement organizational change further demonstrates their positive contributions in organizational change. Rather than being portrayed as resistants or foot draggers, our results suggest that middle managers display great initiatives in exploring the way to fulfill their emergent roles, in turn, help change implemented.

Despite the fact that middle managers can make considerable contributions to organizational change, they are far from being omnipotent; rather they are constrained by different impediments. The impediments could originate from organizational constraints which hinder middle managers to realize their roles in organizational change, such as a “blame” culture or lack of support (Procter, Currie & Orme, 1999). There is evidence that middle managers’ apparent resistance to change may stem from organizational constraints that prevent them adopting new required behaviors, even though they might possess the same positive attitudes as senior managers (Balogun, 2003; Johnson & Frohman, 1989; Procter, Currie, & Orme, 1999). By the same token, is there a possibility that the perceived organizational constraints could make middle managers unable to perform their roles in organizational change? If so, what are the organizational constraints in the eyes of middle managers? What can help middle managers fulfill their roles and make contributions to organizational change? This is largely not known yet.

Promisingly middle managers’ own evaluative schemas elicited in the repertory grid interview in Study 2 clarify how they make sense of their roles in organizational change, and tap into their own theories-in-use of what conditions make them feel unable to realize their roles. The elicited schemas not only show how middle managers make sense of change, they also provide us with middle managers’ embraced evaluative criteria in gauging the extent of difficulty of doing certain roles in organizational change. In other words, middle managers’ evaluative criteria shed lights on their perceived impediments in fulfilling their roles in organizational change, which illuminates what can be done to help middle managers realize their emergent roles and make contributions to

organizational change. This point is developed in more detail below, when we discuss the implications of the study.

In addition, amid the variety of emergent role behaviors in organizational change, how do middle managers group their roles in terms of the extent of difficulty of realizing them? What insights can be generated in the way middle managers group roles together according to the extent of difficulty that these roles can be achieved? The results of Study 2 add to this body of knowledge by peeking through middle managers' evaluative schemas they use to assess their roles in terms of making them feel easy or difficult to realize their role transition in organizational change.

The content analysis of their schemas provides insights on middle managers' perceived impediments crippling them from performing their emergent roles in organizational change. The cluster analysis as an additional analysis provides some interesting findings on the way middle managers group their emergent roles according to their own evaluative criteria.

In summary, in response to the research questions we put forth in Chapter 2, the findings of Study 1 provide evidence of what are middle managers' roles in organizational change. The findings of Study 2 identify middle managers' evaluative schemas when they make sense of and assess the above roles found in Study 1. These findings shed lights on what middle managers can contribute to organizational change and what can help them realize their roles and contribute to the change.

5.2 Discussions of major findings

This section of discussing major findings is divided into two broad sub-sections according to the two studies involved in this research. The first sub-section identifies middle managers' roles in organizational change, in particular, what they can contribute to organizational change. In addition to that, the identified three emergent patterns of role changes demonstrate a role transition occurs when middle managers cope with organizational change. The second sub-section discusses middle managers' evaluative schemas they use to assess their emergent roles in organizational change. More specifically, discussions on content analysis of their schemas provide insights into their evaluative criteria in assessing the extent of difficulty of performing the roles in organizational change, in turn, imply their perceived impediments of performing their roles. Discussions on the results of cluster analysis as the additional analysis of their schemas show how middle managers evaluate their emergent roles according to their embraced criteria.

Findings in Study1

Study 1 serves a twofold purpose. On one hand, Study 1 is to investigate what roles middle managers take in organizational change. On the other hand, Study 1 is designed also as a preliminary study to develop elements used in the repertory grid interview in Study2 to examine middle managers' evaluative schemas which they use to assess their roles in organizational change. We gathered some interesting findings in Study 1. At first glance, results of Study 1 generally resonate with prior work on middle managers' influences and contributions in organizational change (Balogun, 2003; Floyd & Wooldridge, 1994). The findings of Study 1 suggest at least three patterns of role

change involved with middle managers' regular obligations, which are "deal with personal change", "deal with changes to departments" and "help others through change". The above findings are consistent with Balogun's (2003) and Floyd and Wooldridge's (1994) to some extent. These findings answer the research question about what roles middle managers take in a radical organizational change. The three patterns of emergent role obligations also demonstrate there is a role transition for middle managers when an organizational change is initiated. In addition to their regular responsibilities as middle managers, they also need spend extra energy to deal with their emergent roles. In so doing, the load of work will accrue to middle managers. It suggests that middle managers have a complex and demanding mission as change is introduced.

One fundamental part of the activities associated with the three emergent role patterns are about the interactions with others (top managers, subordinates, colleagues and outsiders) to share an understanding of what the change is, and to determine how to make the change vision into tangible action plans, and what their roles involved with the action plan. Sensemaking and sensegiving take a great amount of middle managers' efforts. In contrast with prior research focusing on making sense and giving sense of organizational change *per se* (Isabella, 1990; Gioia & Chettipeddi, 1991; Lau & Woodman, 1995), the revealed sensemaking and sensegiving activities in current study demonstrate that the scope of middle managers' interactions with other organizational members is beyond simply forming a consensus on what the change is, rather towards a redefinition of their roles involved with organizational change. In other words, they make sense of what they are expected to do in organizational change and give sense to others for shaping a cognitive orientation on how to make change vision into tangible action

plans and clarifying their responsibilities in the change. These sensemaking and sensegiving activities appear to be highly salient for our sample of middle managers, suggesting that they constitute a key role for middle managers in the implementation of organizational change.

To identify the elements used in Study 2 for examining middle managers' evaluative schemas about roles in change, we tried to identify the sources of the emergent role expectations on middle managers. We found that middle managers' role changes originate from four sources: top managers, their subordinates, important outsiders and themselves as well (see Table 4). Some of them are from multiple sources. The most interesting thing we found is that, different patterns of role changes could come from different sources, except that one source, middle managers themselves, can be seen as the common source shared by almost all the emergent roles middle managers take. In other words, when an organizational change is introduced or in this study, imposed by top management, middle managers still take initiatives in figuring out how to fulfill their emergent role obligations so as to implement organizational change.

Middle managers actively participate in finding the way to contribute to change implementation. Instead of being portrayed as “resistant”, “foot draggers” or “saboteurs” adding little value (Dopson & Neumann, 1998; Dopson & Stewart, 1990; Fenton-O'Creevy, 1998, 2001; Guth & MacMillan, 1986), middle managers actually contribute to helping to shape a shared understanding of the change vision for other organizational members and important outsiders, balancing the priorities of departmental responsibilities, dealing with subordinates' arising anxiety and defensiveness (Huy, 2002) and the like.

Without middle managers' initiatives in making change realized, senior managers' blueprint is only a vision.

So contrary to prior works implying middle managers being resistant to change, foot dragging, self seeking, saboteurs of change, sources of role change patterns in Study 1 shed light on middle managers' initiatives in working through the puzzles and difficulties to deal with organizational change. However, middle managers' roles and potential contributions remain undervalued (Balogun, 2007). There is a great need for understanding what middle managers can contribute and how they can contribute. Thus, in Study 2 we aimed to reveal middle managers' own criteria in evaluating the extent of difficulty in realizing their emergent role changes so as to find out what can be done to help them deal with their emergent roles in organizational change.

Findings in Study 2

Study 2 first identified the content of middle managers' schemas of their roles in organizational change. We examined middle managers' salient schemas and a number of idiosyncratic schemas in response to the research question about what are the salient schemas and idiosyncratic schemas used by middle managers as criteria to evaluate their roles in organizational change. The findings of middle managers' evaluative schemas which they used to assess the extent of difficulty in fulfilling their roles in organizational change suggest middle managers' perceived facilitators and impediments in performing their roles. In addition, the examination of structures of schemas by cluster analysis gives us an explicit picture of how middle managers group their roles in organizational change according to their own evaluative standards.

Middle managers' schemas

Recalling the definition of schema (Fiske & Taylor, 1984), schema is people's cognitive framework when they perceive things around them, representing knowledge about a concept or type of stimulus. Schema contents are the attributes delineating the concept or type of stimulus. In current research, middle managers' schemas are their cognitive frameworks they use to perceive and evaluate their role obligations in organizational change. The elicited constructs in the repertory grid interview in Study 2 are the attributes describing how they evaluate their role obligations in the change. Thus, the 100 elicited constructs in total richly delineate how middle managers make sense of and evaluate their emergent roles in organizational change.

According to the general standard on determining salient schemas, findings of Study 2 suggested three categories of schemas from a total of 11 categories are widely shared by respondents. Specifically, they were "controllability and initiatives" (88%), "standards and requirements" (53%) and "familiarity" (53%) (see Table 6). The percentages in the brackets indicate the percentage of the participants who mentioned the similar construct in this category. The three salient schemas are middle managers' shared criteria when they evaluate their roles in organizational change. In review the way we put forth our questions to elicit constructs from the participants, we restrict the answers with a precondition to orient the elicited constructs towards the way perceiving the extent of difficulty or easiness to deal with those roles (i.e. "In what way are any two of these similar, but different from the third, in terms of easy or difficulty to perform them?"). Thus, the three salient schemas could be also seen as the major factors that middle

managers perceive to affect how they can fulfill their roles in organizational change. In other words, whether they have controllability, whether there are clear and concrete standards and requirements, and whether they feel familiar with those emergent role obligations are perceived by middle managers as major factors influencing their fulfillment in emergent roles.

In addition, although not widely shared, an additional 7 categories “goals” (41%), “clearness & simplicity” (41%), “relatedness and relevance” (35%), “resources & data” (35%), “kinds of relationships dealing with” (35%), “feedback” (29%) and “communication” (29%) were identified as being shared to a certain degree by middle managers. Each of the above categories could spur meaningful insights into how middle managers evaluate their roles and also how to help middle managers to fulfill their roles in organizational change. To sum up, these findings demonstrated that salient schemas exist in middle managers’ sensemaking and evaluating their emergent role obligations in organizational change. They rely on a group of salient schemas to assess the extent of difficulty in performing their roles in organizational change. The schemas shape their perceptions on the impediments to fulfill their roles in organizational change.

The findings of content analysis also provide a rich portrayal of middle managers’ cognitions of their roles in organizational change which answer the call for a generative richness in a research design (Weick, 2007). By eliciting the bi-polar constructs, data collected from the repertory grid interviews reveal a great number of rich and meaningful descriptions of what they evaluate as easy or difficult for them to realize their role transition. In an alternative perspective, the portrayed factors which influence their role realization in organizational change can also be regarded as facilitators when they possess

them whereas as impediments when they are lack of. More importantly, there is little research exploring the facilitators and impediments in the eyes of middle managers in the change literature, notwithstanding their unique role in the organization during times of change (Herzig & Jimmieson, 2006). Discussions on salient schemas to allude to middle managers' perceived organizational impediments are provided.

Controllability

“Controllability” is a widely salient schema which middle managers consider as a major criterion for evaluating the difficulty in performing their roles. When they have controllability, they feel easy to perform their emergent role obligations, otherwise they feel difficult. Thus, having controllability is perceived to facilitate middle managers to fulfill their roles whereas not having controllability is perceived to impede them from fulfilling the roles. In a further sense, “controllability” is an important factor that affects middle managers to fulfill their emergent role obligations, in turn, the outcomes of change implementation.

In total, we elicited 23 dimensions concerning to “controllability” with bi-polars indicating their interpreted what is controllable and what is uncontrollable. For some respondents, having control means they do not need to “depend on others” to make decisions, instead they have the authority to make their own decisions. Some others perceive having control as being no “interest conflicts within department”, while for some others, having control means that your ideas consist with your supervisors' so that you do not receive conflicting ideas or information causing confusion and ambiguity. Thus, in this way controllability has a richer description under

examination by the bi-polar constructs elicited from the repertory grid technique.

Nonetheless, there definitely exist other descriptions on controllability that our data might not completely capture.

The concern on controllability in fulfilling their emergent roles in organizational change to some extent reflects the desire of middle managers to get empowered during the change implementation process. In previous literature on empowerment, a hitherto neglected issue is about the empowerment of middle managers (Procter, Currie, & Orme, 1999). Amidst Thomas and Velthouse's (1990) four criteria in empowerment definition (competence, self-determination, impact and meaning), self-determination and impact are captured in the category of "controllability" in our data. Self-determination refers to the organizational member having control over behaviors and processes at the workplace. And impact concerns the organizational member's level of influence over administrative and operating outcomes within the work unit. Both of them concern the empowerment beliefs of control (Logan & Ganster, 2007).

According to Ganster and Fusilier (1989), control in empowerment means that one is free to engage in behaviors that one chooses and has authority to make significant work-related decisions (Logan & Ganster, 2007). In the category of "controllability" in our data, we found the elicited constructs on "controllability" reflect middle managers' inclination to take ownership of decisions. Representative examples from the data are "dependent mainly on myself to make decisions --- need other departments' cooperation", "depend on myself to make decisions --- lack of resources and people". Furthermore, "controllability" is also deemed as an important factor that middle managers perceive to influence their performance in their roles in organizational change. In other words, only

when middle managers believe they possess certain degree of control, they feel easier to fulfill their roles, in turn, facilitate them to implement organizational change. The findings on controllability suggest middle managers' desire to be empowered to make relevant decisions by themselves might spur research on middle managers' empowerment in organizational change. This perspective adds to the body of knowledge of organizational change implementation by implying a concept of middle managers' empowerment in the change process. More rigorous research on the antecedents and consequences of middle managers' empowerment in change implementation process is needed.

Standards and requirements

“Standards and requirements” is another widely salient evaluative schema that middle managers perceive to be an important factor for dealing with their roles in organizational change. We gathered 12 dimensions about this schema mentioned by 9 out of 17 participants. The data suggests that middle managers prefer to have explicit and concrete standards and requirements to guide them to perform their roles in organizational change. The opposite side to having clear and concrete standards and requirements is uncertainty, which is most often mentioned as “have uncertain factors”, “implicit”, “have unknown and contingent factors” and etc in the elicited bi-polar constructs. This suggests that middle managers might trap in an uncertainty state without clear and concrete instructions on their roles with respect to the standards and requirements adhered to their emergent role obligations.

Uncertainty has never been unacquainted to employees during organizational change (Bordia, Hobman, Jones, Gallois, & Callan, 2004). Uncertainty occurs when the situation is unpredictable and when information is inconsistent or unavailable (Brashers, 2001). Research on uncertainty management suggests that interactional communication by sensemaking and sensegiving (Balogun, 2003; Gioia & Chettipeddi, 1991; Isabella, 1990) is helpful for reducing individuals' uncertainty. Moreover, informational support was also found to be an important factor (Herzig & Jimmieson, 2006). However, previous research on uncertainty in organizational change has only focused on the uncertainties around organizational change itself, specifically the change vision or the overall direction. Our findings suggest that uncertainty in organizational change is beyond the scope of the ambiguity of where we are going, rather it is oriented more towards an ambiguity of what I am supposed to do and how, especially for middle managers, the traditional change implementers. Put it differently, to middle managers, the typical change implementers, uncertainty management in organizational change is more than just reducing uncertainties around understanding what the change is, but also managing uncertainties about the roles and obligations involved in implementing organizational change. In this view, uncertainty occurs to middle managers when there are no clear and concrete standards and requirements. The current study extends the body of knowledge of uncertainty management in organizational change by tapping into middle managers' role uncertainty reduction.

A role, as we stated before, is the set of behaviors that others expect of individuals in a certain context (Friedman & Podolny, 1992; Katz & Kahn, 1978; Floyd & Lane, 2000). Role expectations may be described in terms of demands for and assessments of

specific behaviors (Biddle, 1979, 1986), which define the model behaviors of a role and form the foundations of individuals' unique role interpretations (Eisenstadt, 1965; Graen, 1976). The philosophy here is that the more clearly expectations are articulated, the more likely the individual performing a role will conform to those expectations (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975; Stein, 1982; Van de Vliert, 1981). Ambiguities in role expectations might entail role stress to middle managers (Stamper & Johlke, 2003). Research suggests that this kind of role stress is negatively related to a variety of important employee job outcomes such as performance and work attitudes such as job satisfaction (Jackson & Schuler, 1985; Caplan, Cobb, & French, 1975; Stamper & Johlke, 2003). Research also implies that role ambiguity could also entail middle managers' negative responses in the form of "reluctance" (Scase & Goffee, 1989) or "paralysis" (Westley, 1990).

The findings in Study 1 suggest that middle managers experience a role transition in organizational change and they have to face a load of emergent roles stemming from organizational change. Middle managers hence might be easily subject to role ambiguity associated with role transition, especially when the emergent role expectations are incomplete or insufficient to guide their behaviors.

A perusal of the literature suggests three specific types of role ambiguity. The dimensions in "Standards and requirements" category already embody two of the three types of role ambiguity which are performance criteria ambiguity and work method ambiguity (Dougherty & Pritchard, 1985; Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, Snoek & Rosenthal, 1964). Performance criteria ambiguity refers to employee uncertainty concerning the standards that are used for determining whether one's job performance is satisfactory (Breugh & Colihan, 1994). Work method ambiguity is employees' uncertainty with

regard to the operational methods or procedures they should use to accomplish their work (Kahn et al., 1964). Representative examples from the data are “have objective, concrete & quantified standards to evaluate performance --- have unknown, contingent factors”, “have bottom line to assess your performance (no negotiation space) --- relatively diverse and complicated” and “have clear guidelines and procedures --- have uncertain factors”.

The findings on “standards and requirements” schema suggest that middle managers might perceive role ambiguity as an impediment to fulfill their roles in organizational change, in turn influence the outcomes of change implementation. In this view, even though middle manager might possess the same positive attitudes as senior managers, they just genuinely confront some difficulties that they can not simply resolve by themselves. What’s more, middle managers’ role ambiguity with specific regard to performance criteria and work method ambiguities in a role transition stage has rarely studied in organizational change research. Research on middle managers’ role ambiguity might help us better understand middle managers’ contributions to organizational change.

All in all, the salient schemas of “controllability” and “standard and requirements” suggest two kinds of impediments or called by other researchers as “organizational constraints” (Johnson & Frohman, 1989; Procter, Currie & Orme, 1999), which are a paucity of middle managers’ empowerment, and role ambiguity. Middle managers should not simply be turned into scapegoats (Fenton-O’Creevy, 2001) if we do not really know what cripples middle managers to function in organizational change. There is a need for a greater understanding of how can help middle managers to contribute to organizational change.

Familiarity

Despite the fact that impediments to realize middle managers' roles could come from the organization, this does not exclude the possibility that impediments could come from middle managers themselves. Middle managers could be blinded by their own schemas even without their notice. For example, the third salient schema "familiarity" in evaluating the extent of difficulty of performing their roles indicates that when middle managers perceive the emergent role obligations as familiar and their previous knowledge and experiences can be applied in the new situations, they will perceive them to be easy to deal with, otherwise being as difficult to perform. It is well known that individuals' cognitions have impacts on their subsequent attitudes and responses (Walsh, 1995; Weick, 1995). In a further sense, when middle managers perceive their emergent role obligations as difficult to fulfill, they might respond in a negative way, such as previous research suggests as "resistant". In a radical organizational change, the probability of encountering unfamiliar new situations for middle managers is very high. When middle managers notice the emergent role obligations are something they are not familiar with, their evaluative schema "familiarity" will instantly judge them to be difficulty to deal with. Subsequently they will not respond in a positive way, rather in a negative way based on their cognitions. In this case, the difficulty to fulfilling their roles comes from middle managers themselves because their existing schemas cripple them from overcoming their own shortcomings.

Additional findings

The additional findings by cluster analysis show how middle managers evaluate their emergent role obligations in organizational change by their own criteria, the schemas in use. The results show that middle managers group the roles such as “rearrange departmental priorities”, “provide training, assistance and support”, “translate change vision into action plans” and “translate change vision into individual plans” in Cluster 1, the group perceived to be easy to perform, with more than 40% of the informants. Those emergent roles are perceived to be accord with middle managers’ evaluative schemas as controllable, familiar and with standards and requirements. Moreover, a deep look at those emergent roles, we found the nature of those roles is very similar to their traditional functions as management and coordination. They might be subject to certain new characteristics rendered by organizational change, however, they do make plans, provide training, and arrange departmental priorities all the time before organizational change is introduced. That might be an alternative explanation why middle managers evaluate certain emergent roles as easy to deal with.

On the contrary, “negotiate with peers on departmental delimitation of responsibilities in change implementation”, “communicate with others to determine expectations” and “communicate change vision to outsiders” were grouped in Cluster 2 indicating they were the roles the participants perceived to be relatively difficult to realize. We found the three roles were all concerned with how to communicate with others. That is the commonality among the informants that whenever communication is needed there is difficulty in doing so, because as suggested in the content analysis, the communication was usually based on different standpoints, and misunderstandings can easily occur. The sensemaking and sensegiving activities involved with communications

in organizational change are very important for change implementation just as previous research suggests (Isabella, 1990; Gioia & Chettipeddi, Maitlis, 2005, 2007). More importantly, as suggested by current study, the sensemaking and sensegiving activities are also very difficult (Balogun, 2003). Middle managers' own evaluative schemas might shed some lights on why sensemaking and sensegiving are difficult to realize.

5.3 Contributions

This study extends the literature mainly in two ways. First, concurring with the research tendency to address middle managers' positive inputs and reduce negative impressions (Dopson & Stewart, 1990; Kanter, 1982; Nonaka, 1988; Polakoff, 1987), current research adds evidence to the body of knowledge on middle managers' contributions to organizational change. The identified three emergent role patterns reveal that middle managers engage in a variety of activities to make themselves undertake personal changes, help others through the change and also implement the change to their departments. Thus, instead of being blamed as "resistants", "saboteurs", or "foot draggers" (Dopson & Neumann, 1998; Dopson & Stewart, 1990; Fenton-O'Creevy, 1998; Guth & MacMillan, 1986), middle managers in our study can make considerable contributions to organizational change. Rather than saying middle managers adding no value to organizational change, our study adds the evidences to reinforce the argument that middle managers have important roles and contributions to organizational change, and so to a more general positive perspective on middle managers.

Second, the emerging research has suggested more studies on cognitions associated with organizational change (Balogun & Johnson, 2004; Bartunek, 1984,

Isabella, 1990; Gioia & Chettipeddi, 1991; Maitlis, 2005, 2007), however, efforts are held still focusing on studying cognitions and understandings around organizational change *per se*. The current research extends the literature to understand middle managers' perceptions and evaluations of their roles in organizational change. Middle managers are important change implementers and their performances are crucial to the outcomes of change implementation. Thus their cognitions around how to realize their roles in organizational change have important implications. However, rarely any research intends to study how middle managers themselves make sense of and evaluate their roles in organizational change. The current study adds to the body of knowledge by identifying three salient evaluative schemas and a number of idiosyncratic schemas as criteria used by middle managers to evaluate their emergent roles obligations in organizational change. The revealed evaluative schemas are criteria that middle managers themselves use to assess the extent of difficulty in performing their roles in organizational change. In other words, the evaluative schemas revealed an unaddressed question that what middle managers themselves think as difficult or easy to fulfill their roles in organizational change. The discovered evaluative criteria to gauge the level of difficulty in performing their emergent roles in organizational change shed lights on how to help middle managers to fulfill their roles, in turn to contribute to change implementation. The current study makes contributions to the body of knowledge by revealing middle managers' own theories-in-use to suggest how organizations or top managers can help and facilitate middle managers to realize their emergent roles so as to realize organizational change.

5.4 Implications

Implications for theory

This research has implications for re-evaluate middle managers' values and contributions in organizational change. Results in Study 1 suggest that middle managers take three emergent patterns of role behaviors so as to implement organizational change which are "deal with personal change", "deal with changes to department", and "help others through change". This demonstrates that middle managers have a role transition in organizational change. In current research, middle managers actively undertake a heavy workload in the transition phase so as to implement change. These findings resonate with literature on middle managers' influences and contributions in organizational change (Balogun, 2003; Floyd & Wooldridge, 1992, 1994; Huy, 2001).

In contrast to previous research blaming middle managers as resistant to, foot dragging or undermining organizational change, adding little value (Dopson & Neumann, 1998; Dopson & Stewart, 1990; Fenton-O'Creevy, 1998, 2001; Guth & MacMillan, 1986), the findings in current research portray a more positive image of middle managers as an active group of change implementers who actively initiate a bunch of behaviors to get themselves prepared for organizational change, help others through the change process deal with their potential negative emotions and attitudes, and also make concrete plans to implement change to their departments. Middle managers actually undertake certain roles to make change realized, instead of doing nothing, resisting or sabotaging the change. Middle managers should not be simply accused of the unintended outcomes of a deliberate organizational change based on the assumed negative attitudes and responses (Guth & MacMillan, 1986; Westley, 1990). They could genuinely embrace the change just as their senior managers and also take the responsibility to figure out their

own way to implement change, however, there could exist some difficulties that they simply can not overcome all by themselves. Hence, an important research issue is to do with what constrains middle managers from effectively implementing organizational change (Balogun, 2003). The third schema suggests that the impediment could come from middle managers themselves even without their notice. Relying on their familiar knowledge of performing their role might cripple them from taking challenge of the new and emergent situations caused by organizational change. This suggests that mentally and knowledgeably help middle managers prepared for emergent roles is equally important as the above authorizing them in decision making and reducing role ambiguity.

In Study 2, we identified three salient schemas and a number of idiosyncratic schemas which middle managers use to evaluate the extent of difficulty in performing their roles in organizational change. The identified schemas shed lights on what enables and cripples them from fulfilling their roles through the eyes of middle managers themselves. The evaluative schemas have important implications to the emerging research agenda on identifying potential organizational constraints (Fenton O’Creevy, 2001; Balogun, 2003). We found three salient schemas as evaluative criteria used by middle managers to assess their roles in organizational change which are “controllability”, “standards and requirements” and “familiarity”. The first two schemas have implications to our knowledge of potential organizational constraints. As we discussed before, the two schemas imply two important organizational constraints which are a lack of middle managers’ empowerment and role ambiguity. Specifically, the schema of controllability suggests that middle managers desire to be empowered to make relevant decisions and possess certain degree of controllability in engaging in behaviors. The schema of

standards and requirements suggests that middle managers are likely to feel easier to undertake their emergent role obligations when there are clear and concrete standards and requirements to keep them from role ambiguity. The two perceived impediments are likely to cripple middle managers from effectively functioning in change implementation. This suggests that, rather than criticizing middle managers for adding little value to change implementation, we need more research focus on what constrains and enables middle managers to successfully implement organizational change.

The two studies in current research also have implications to role theory. A host of studies in role theory focus on studying constraints on role realization, such as role conflict, role overload, role ambiguity and role discontinuity (Biddle, 1986). Research in this area suggests that the constraints on role fulfillment may reinforce negative affects, or role strain (Goode, 1960) to individuals. The findings may not have implications to role strain in general, however, the findings have implications first to role ambiguity, which refers to the condition in which role expectations are incomplete or insufficient to guide individuals' behaviors (Biddle, 1986). As suggested by the current research, a variety of attributes indicated by middle managers' schemas may account for why role ambiguity happens and what can be done to facilitate managers to realize their roles. For example, a clearly stated "goal", a certain "concrete standards and requirements" and instant "feedback" might help managers overcome ambiguities which might occur particularly in a transition period, such as organizational change. Secondly, middle managers' emergent roles in organizational change create an overload of work and responsibilities. They need to wrestle with the emergent roles and their routine roles which might request more time and support than ever. A paucity of time and support will

exacerbate role performance, which may even lead to role conflict (Jackson & Schuler, 1985) between what priorities need to focus. Also as a matter of fact, lack of time and support might lead to role overload.

Implications for practice

The current research also has implications for practice. First of all, the identified three emergent role changes together with their routine obligations as managers in organizations demonstrate that middle managers do need to struggle to cope with a heavy workload. If middle managers' role continues to be conceived just as a conduit of change, the heavy burden they carry during change may make them feel their value and contributions are undervalued, which might possibly arouse negative emotions and attitudes. Moreover, the recognition of role transition for middle managers in an organizational change provides evidence that middle managers might need more time and support to struggle with the complexities and tensions brought by organizational change.

Second, the majority of middle managers' emergent role obligations have to do with communication through sensemaking and sensegiving. The scope and the objectives of communication have implications to practice. The scope of communication through sensemaking and sensegiving is beyond the previous research on shaping a consensus on organizational change per se (Isabella, 1990; Gioia & Chettipeddi, 1991; Maitlis, 2005). Particularly for middle managers, the communication activity extends to how to get things done. To make clear about different important groups' expectation on them is the major focus of middle managers' communication with their supervisors, subordinates and other important people inside or outside organizations. The findings also suggest that

middle managers need engage in a great amount of lateral communications with their colleagues to develop a common understanding on cooperation and divisions of labor among different departments. Top managers should help middle managers to build and bolster the lateral communication mechanism because usually top managers have more resources and power to facilitate the lateral communications among middle managers (Johnson & Frohman, 1989).

Third, the identified middle managers' evaluative schemas are middle managers evaluative criteria to assess the difficulty of performing their roles in organizational change. These insights have implications to what are facilitators and impediments to realize their roles, in turn to influence the outcomes of organizational change through middle managers' eyes, the typical change implementers. Top managers need to buy-in these perspectives and admit their crucial contributions to organizational change. Then they can begin to harness middle managers' potential, help them deliver, manage the way to support and facilitate them during change implementation.

Furthermore, current study also has implications to organizational change implementation. As prior studies suggest that implementation is more easily said than done. Floyd and Wooldridge (1994) termed this phenomenon as "implementation gap" which denotes that there is a chasm between senior management's intent and what actually happens. Balogun (2003) also echoed this point on that unintended consequences are highly likely to attach to intended changes. Current research provides an alternative perspective on implementation gap. Middle managers' schemas reveal insights on what factors facilitate them to realize their roles in the change and what impedes them. Implementation gap may be due to differences between middle managers' understandings

of what is required for realizing implementation task and what is possibly provided and facilitated by the organizations. When the awareness occurs that factors which middle managers perceive to be crucial for implementing organizational change do not exist, implementation gap might show up. Hence, the actual outcomes of change implementation depend on how middle managers make sense of the gap between what they need and what they have on hand.

5.4 Limitations and directions for future research

Limitations

This research is not without limitations. First, the small sample size of 15 middle managers in Study 1 representing a variety of organizations may arouse generalizability questions. Second, it is conceivable that the participants in current research who agreed to be interviewed are more likely to be open to organizational change, this may reduce their representativeness of middle managers in general (Herzig & Jimmieson, 2006). Third, in this study we selected the respondents not restricted to certain work functions or within one organization, which might compromise external validity of our findings. Fourth, although the repertory grid used in Study 2 allows a rich portrayal of individuals' cognitive world without researcher-imposed interview technique, however, considering the limited number of eliciting constructs per person (we only asked for 6 rounds of constructs with fixed sequences), there may exist other constructs that are not captured in current research. Fifth, though we adopted a theory-completeness driven way of conducting appropriate number of interviews, and we may rule out the possible effects from companies or industries by selecting sample across companies and industries, the

interviews were all geographically conducted in one place, there is a possibility that district or cultural characteristics might have some effects on managers' cognitions which we do not know at this stage. Last but not least, this research relied on a retrospective approach by spurring interviewees to recall the memory of their experiences performing their roles in organizational change. It is likely that interviews may not capture some of the real information on account of memory ambiguity or loss and hindsight bias (Isabella, 1990).

Directions for future research

Due to the small amount of research which has been conducted on the roles of middle managers in organizational change (Huy, 2002; McKinley & Scherer, 2000), there are a number of avenues for future research. First, we only focus on middle managers' evaluative schemas to generate perceptions of their roles along with factors which facilitate or inhibit their roles. It would be interesting and instructive to investigate the perceptions from different groups of people on middle managers' roles in organizational change for comparison, for example, top managers' or middle managers' subordinates'. The similarities and differences of perceptions between different highly binded groups might reveal interesting insights.

Second, we collected data in current study at one point in time, in particular, they are a retrospective approach. There might be likelihood that information might be missed out by retrospection. Thus, future research is required to document middle managers' experiences with multiple data collection points during a change event, in particular a real-time approach may generate a relatively more accurate and insightful information. A

longitudinal study on managers' schemas change during the different stages of change process such as before, during and after the change is needed to capture people's cognitive transitional process.

Third, a detailed case study might be helpful to add to our knowledge on how people's cognitions actually interact with the environments and situations in the organizations. Recall that individuals' schemas have twofold effects as both enabling and crippling, an in-depth case study might shed light on how individual's schemas enable them to process information and meanwhile cripple them in some respect to understand and realized the change.

5.5 Conclusion

This chapter outlines the major findings in this study, implications to theory and practice, contributions, limitations and directions for future research. The present research echoed with previous research by adding evidences on middle managers' positive roles and contributions to organizational change. It also embraced a cognitive approach to examine the content and structure of middle managers' evaluative schemas which they rely to make sense of and assess their roles in organizational change. The findings generated interesting and important insights into how can help middle managers to maximize their positive roles and facilitate them to contribute to organizational change.

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Appendices:

APPENDIX A: Content analysis: Final categories & dimensions

CONTROLABILITY (n=15, p=21)

- *relatively have more control---relatively lack of control
- *can control---service object is changeable
- *have control---need supervisors' support
- *within the range of my own adjustment---new territory, lack of knowledge
- *have control---interest conflicts within department
- *have control---extra requirements
- *have control---cannot control
- *controllable in the real operations---performance is a major factor, not the only factor
- *we can control---unpredictable
- *can control---may have conflicts and deviation
- *under my own control---environment factors have strong influences in the change
- *I have control and initiatives---depend on others more
- *initiated and controlled by the department head---from the perspective of the company's overall situation
- *I have control---depends on each other's understandings
- *dependent mainly on myself to make a call---need other departments' cooperation
- *supervisors relying on you---not very clear standards
mainly depend on myself to make decisions ---need to consider interests of immediate future
- depends on myself to make decisions---lack of resources and people
- depends on my existing idea---your idea may not consist with your supervisor's
- only depend on myself---need more outside support
- only depends on me---also depends on others
- have initiatives---less initiatives
- have initiatives---passive

STANDARDS & REQUIREMENTS (n=9, p=12)

- *have basic requirements for this job---extra requirements
- *have bottom line to assess your performance (no negotiation space)---relatively diverse and complicated
- *have objective, concrete & quantified standards to evaluate performance ---have unknown, contingent factors
- *have basic requirements---can be affected by exterior factors
- *have concrete standards and requirements---not specific standards
- *have clear guidelines and procedures---have uncertain factors
- *have steps---overall structure
- *have objective standards---subjective
- *have concrete requirements & standards---did less because of fear of making mistakes
- *have standards to follow---need pay more attention to sensitive issues
- *needs & requirements are obvious & explicit, willing to show---implicit, may not show the real needs & requirements
- *direct requirements from supervisors---relatively weak control

Note: * denotes agreement on dimensions by the 2 raters during the first round of coding
Total sample size (n=17); Total number of dimensions (p=100)

FAMILIARITY (n=9, p=11)

- *relatively familiar---more efforts on differentiating individual needs, interests and requirements
- *familiar & being sure---broad range
- *familiar---need other departments' or people's help
- *familiar---not have much right to make decisions
- *familiar---a lot to learn
- *familiar---two-way communication, concerning more factors
- *relatively more familiar---mutable, dynamic and uncertain
- *familiar with---need more resources, complex
- *familiar and predictable---unpredictable
- *do it everyday---never met before, previous experiences possibly not useful
- *relatively routine, have experiences---more sensitive, could bring morale issues

GOALS (n=7, p=7)

- *have a clear purpose---diverse requirements from boss and the outside environment
- *have purposes---have uncertain factors
- *have fixed aims---contentious, not explicit
- *have purposes---inconsistency in the way people think
- *fixed targets/aims, no elasticity---depends on communication
- *have purposes, more objective---could be blind without noticing
- *purposes & needs are very clear---my understanding may not consist with top managers'

CLEARNESS & SIMPLICITY (n=7, p=7)

- *explicit---complicated
- *clear---only satisfy certain specific individuals
 - relative objective activity---relatively uncertain, mutable
- *based on a shared understanding within the company---lack of a shared
- *understandingsingle link---concerning to many links in a process
- *just concerning arrangement and deployment---a more complex and all-around process
- *only concerning one side or point of the work---all-around

RELATEDNESS & RELEVANCE (n=6, p=7)

- *have connection to current responsibilities---temporary, may not relate to major responsibility
- *related to previous work---need a process, need other training
- *have connection---have contingency
- *related to regular duties---have contingent factors, not regular
- *have connection and relevance---result-oriented
- *concerning to other factors, except people---concerning mainly to people factor
- *easier to achieve consensus because of inner relationship---weak consensus because of dealing with exterior relationship

RESOURCES AND DATA (n=6, p=6)

- *rich in resources and data---dependent on supervisors' decisions

- *company can provide resources and support---have attributes of complexity and diversity
- *rich in resources and data---may not satisfy subordinates' personal strength and preference
- *can be provided within department---concerning other departments, may need convince other departments
- *relatively well-known---in a passive position
only concerning personal job range---need more resources, beyond personal job range

KINDS OF RELATIONSHIPS (n=6, p=6)

- *dealing with organization inner relationship---dealing with organization outside relationship
- *simple relationship---dealing with relationships beyond department, more complicated
- *dealing with company's inner relationship---outside relationship
- *dealing with inner department relationship---dealing with outside relationship
- *dealing with inner relationships within department---dealing with relationships beyond department
- *within department, less conflicts---conflicts between departments

FEEDBACK (n=5, p=5)

- *self-evaluation, more active---hard to unify multiple thoughts
- *underscoring results---no need to focus on results
- *quick feedback on what you have done---need a process to see the results
have finite breakthrough points---requirements are high and variable
- *results are able to predict---results depend on differences of people, not predictable

COMMUNICATION (n=5, p=5)

- *coordination-oriented work---mainly dependent on supervisors' decision
- *have good communication---relatively lack of urgency
- *negotiable---hard to control
- *relatively easy to grasp---communication difficulty caused by different starting points
decision-making based only on analysis---decision-making needs communication loop

ABILITY (n=3, p=3)

- *have ability to direct boss---uncertainty of future change
- *within personal capabilities---there is inconsistency and collision in communication
- *able to do by yourself---need to influence staff to do that

MISCELLANEOUS (n=6, p=8)

- *affect my work very much---not very much affect my work
- *acceptable---caused by industry characteristics
- *relatively low expectations from supervisors---cannot understand subordinates' thoughts
- *can be achieved gradually---endless aims
- *have personal desires---more complicated

- *have support from the top to the bottom in the company---relatively abstract and not concrete
- *have orders, compulsory---need to negotiate
- *about institutions---about managing people

APPENDIX B: Interview questions in Study 1

Background information. Tell me a little about yourself.

What is your present position in this company?

What are your major responsibilities?

How many years have you worked so far? How long have you served the current company?

How long have you worked as middle managers? How long have you held this position in this company?

Organizational change. Tell me something about the change happened in your company in your point of view.

What kind of change was it?

Help me understand what it was like to be in the organization when the change was initiated.

Did any changes happen to your work during that time? How did the change influence your work?

What did you do to implement or cope with the change? Why did you do that?

APPENDIX C: Interview questions in Study 1 (Chinese version)

背景资料. 请简单介绍一下您自己

请问您在公司担任什么职务？

您的主要工作职责是什么？

您工作了多少年？在目前这家公司任职了有多久？

您担任中层经理有多久了？您在目前这家工作任中层经理有多久了？

公司变革. 从您的视角谈一谈您对发生在你公司的变革的一些认识。

请问发生在你们公司的是什么样的公司变革？

请描述一下当变革发生时公司是什么样的状况。

在那段时间您的工作有发生变动吗？公司变革是如何影响您的工作呢？

您做了些什么来实践公司的变革或说应对变革？为什么您要做这些？

APPENDIX D: Interview protocol in Study 2

Interview on Your Personal Experience

Thank you for the opportunity to interview you on our research. This research is aimed to understand how middle managers realize their roles in organizational change. We adopt psychological method to better understand middle managers' cognitions so as to provide evidence to research in organizational change.

Section 1: Background information (Please complete BEFORE attending the interview) (estimate max. Of 15 minutes only)

Q1. Current Job Title: _____ Current department you are in : _____

How many levels from your current position to CEO : _____

Q2. Total number of years of work experience: _____ ;
Total number of years of work experience in current company: _____ ;
Total number of years in middle management role: _____

Q3. Please short-list the organizational changes happened or being happening in the recent two years in your company.

1.
2.

Section 2: Information about organizational change

1. What were your major responsibilities before the organizational change happened in your company?
2. What kind of changes happened to your position since the organizational change was initiated? Were there any changes to your responsibilities in your position?
3. What kind of difficulties you encountered when you coped with the above changes?

Section 3: Personal experience in organizational change

In this section, we will adopt psychological method (Repertory grid technique) to understand your experiences, feelings and understandings in organizational change.

APPENDIX E: Interview protocol in Study 2 (Chinese version)

个人经历、经验的访谈

非常感谢您百忙中参与我们的研究!该研究旨在了解作为公司骨干的中层经理在应对公司变革的过程中,是如何实现自身角色的转换,我们的研究运用心理学的方法试图更深入地了解中层经理的心理和取向,从而为公司变革的研究提供有力的理论和实践的依据.

第一部分: 基本资料 (请于访谈之前填好) (10-15 分钟)

Q1. 目前职位: _____ 目前所在部门: _____

距离 CEO 几层管理架构: _____

Q2. 全部工作年限: _____ 年; 目前所在公司工作年限: _____ 年; 在中层管理职位上的工作年限: _____ 年

Q3. 请列出贵公司近两年来发生的或正在发生的主要变革 / 变化

1.
2.

第二部分: 公司变革信息

4. 请问在公司变革前您的工作主要职责是什么?
5. 请问自公司开始实施变革以来, 您所在的职位发生了些什么变化?或您的职责有无变化?
6. 请问您在应付以上所述变化时遇到什么样的困难?

第三部分: 您在公司变革过程中的切身体验

在此部分, 我们会运用心理学的方法(凯利方格理论)来了解您在公司变革过程中的经验, 感受和认识。