Perspectives and Practices of Middle Managers of Their Competencies: Basis for a Sustainable Competency Building Program

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Abstract

The recurring theme of higher educational institutions in the Philippines is to compete in a competitive global and international market of higher education. To accord with the challenges and demands in higher educational institutions, the role of middle managers is deemed important. This study aimed to determine the relationship between the perspectives and practices of middle managers' competencies. The total population sampling and stratified sampling methods were employed in the selection of middle managers and subordinates as respondents and participants in this study. In this study integration of Quan-Qual results was made through the use of the joint display method, a researcher made questionnaire was developed and a Convergent Parallel model was utilized. The results provided insights to develop a sustainable competency-building program for middle managers in higher educational institutions.

Keywords: Middle Managers, Perspectives, Practices, Competencies, Higher Education

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1. Introduction

Management is about ideas, people and resources. It is about making the best of the resources one has and maximizing staff potential, equipment, time, money and space. The organization in the academe consists of three levels of managers; these are top managers, middle managers, and first line managers and non-management who work together aimed towards the achievement of a goal.

Middle management is a vital position with a distinctive role. They are entrusted with important work that no one else can do. They think about the bigger picture and work in accordance to achieve optimal productivity. However, not all middle managers possess all the aforementioned capabilities, perspectives and practices to effectively carry out their responsibilities in the organizations they belong to because of lack of experience in decision-making as well as in planning and organization. In view of the aforementioned, many of the said ideas about the problems of academic middle managers' that is highly emphasized on the significance of middle managers' managerial competencies, abilities, leadership, management role and responsibilities and leadership training programs which are meant to help middle managers' address their professional shortcomings and concerns.

This study is premised on Management Competency Theory of Silva (2016) about competencies in management. According to Silva (2016) one must look ahead on the impact it may take on the organization while various aspects of management and leadership behaviour termed competencies in organization are contemporarily needed to bring optimum work performance. Guided by the theory, the researcher sensed the necessity to look into the competencies and relation practices of the middle managers in the academe. It explains that to make a standard work, it is important to possess the right skills and performance of middle managers that align with the organization's strategic direction, provide an impact and affect everyone in the organization. It helps the organization achieve good results and maintain its desired culture. The executive or top managers must understand how they will contribute to the organization's strategic positions and goals of what is expected from the middle managers, and how they are doing as it focuses on the growth and development of both organization and their subordinate.

The Independent Variable-Dependent Variable model was used as the conceptual framework of this study. The IV-DV model was deemed suitable for the purpose of the study since it aims to determine the relationship between the perspectives and practices of middle managers' competencies. The study considered also the Intervening Variables which consists the demographic criteria of the respondents such as age, sex, academic rank, designation/appointed position, number of years of teaching experience and highest educational attainment. The results would be the basis to undertake a development process which requires an analysis of the organization's needs as well as the design and development of a sustainable competency-building program to address the identified needs.

Independent Variable

Perspectives of Middle
Managers' Competencies

- Advocacy
- Communication skills
- Financial skills
- Self-leadership
- Problem management
  and resolution

Dependent Variable

Practices of Middle
Managers' Competencies
Communication

- Communication
- Decision making
- Negotiations
- Task management

Intervening Variable

Profile of Respondents

- Age
- Sex
- Academic rank
- Designation/Appointed
  position
- Number of years of
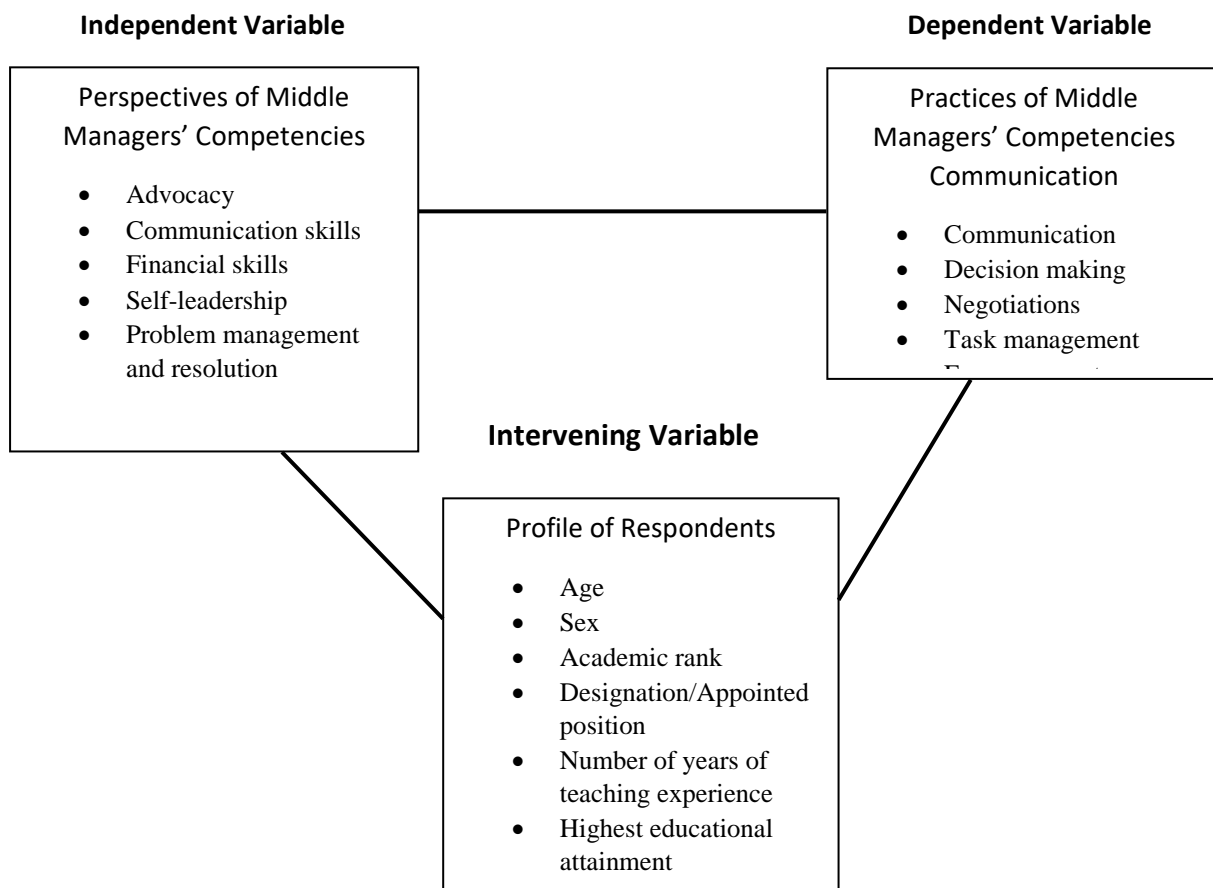 teaching experience
- Highest educational
  attainment

Figure 1: The Conceptual Model of the Study

The main concern of the study was to determine the relationship between the perspectives and practices of middle manager's competencies. In particular, the first statement of the problem is (1) What is the profile of the middle managers' based on the following criteria: Age; Sex; Academic Rank; Designated position; Number of years of teaching experience; and Educational qualification? (2) How may the perspectives of middle managers' and their subordinate on their competencies be determined in terms of the following domains such as: 1) advocacy; 2) communication skills; 3) financial skills; 4) self-leadership; and 5) problem management and resolution? (3) What are the practices of the middle managers' competencies in terms of the following indicators: 1) communication; 2) decision making; 3) negotiations; 4) task management; and 5) empowerment? (4) Is there a significant difference between the perspectives and practices of the middle managers' competencies? and (5) What are the perspectives of the middle managers' and subordinates on their competencies as extracted from focus group discussions in terms of the following domain: 1) advocacy; 2) communication skills; 3) financial skills; 4) self-leadership; and 5) problem management and resolution?

2. Method

The Convergent Parallel model, a mixed method in triangulation design was utilized for this study. A convergent parallel design entails that the researcher concurrently conducts the quantitative and qualitative in the same phase of the research process. This design includes quantitative and qualitative research design in order to expand and strengthen the findings and conclusion of the researcher about middle manager's perspective and practices of their competencies. Furthermore, this convergence mixed method research involves collecting and

analyzing quantitative and qualitative data separately on the same phenomenon and then the different results are converged by means of comparing and contrasting during the interpretation. The researcher of this study want to validate and confirm quantitative results with qualitative findings on perspectives and practices of middle managers' of their managerial competencies of state universities and colleges because the researcher will rely on the quality of data gathered in preparing a sustainable competency-building program for middle managers' that will be used by the different HEIs to mentor and guide middle managers in preparation to become leader in the academe or be part of the executive officials of their respective institution.

Because of the nature of the study involved, total population sampling and stratified sampling methods were employed in the selection of middle managers and subordinates as respondents and participants in this study. Respondents will be identified during the pre-survey conducted by the researcher. Pre-survey was conducted in order to determine the number of middle managers' and subordinates as target participants/respondents of this study. The basis of selection criteria for respondents and participants has been identified by the researcher through the survey of the different CHED Memorandum Order for Policies, Standards and Guidelines of the program/ unit.

Table 1: Respondents of the Study

State Universities and Colleges	Middle Managers'		Subordinate	
	Total Population	Sample	Total Population	Sample
SUCs A.	42	42	210	81
SUCs B.	10	9	51	10
SUCs C.	10	10	49	10
SUCs D.	33	31	165	66
Total	**95**	**92**	**475**	**167**

The data-gathering procedure of this study will be conducted with utmost consideration to the privacy of the respondents. Permission to conduct the study in the SUCs will be sought through written correspondence with the university administrators. As for the respondents/participants, their participation will be oriented about the study and their consent sought before they take part in it. They will be asked to sign a written consent before they participate in the survey, interview and focus group discussion. In order to ensure the confidentiality and liabilities of the participants and respondents to this study, the following steps will be observed: (1) any information collected from you during your participation in this survey will be anonymous. You will not be identified as no name/s are required for participation in this study, and all identifying information will be de-identified in the recording and interpretation process. The data and information collected will only be accessed by the researcher. (2) Participation in this study is on a voluntary basis, even if you decided to participate in the survey, you may withdraw anytime. No adverse action will be taken against you for withdrawing your participation as respondents. Any information that you may not wish to reveal will be highly observed by the researcher. If you wish to terminate your participation in this study, please inform the researcher immediately, so that your responses can be separated and destroyed right at that point. During the data gathering, the respondents/participants are given the prerogative to refrain from answering questions

and their request for this will be granted and respected. All the data that will be gathered from the informants will be treated with the utmost confidentiality. Furthermore, the researcher will ensure the protection of the participants' identities and rights in accordance with the Data Privacy Act of 2012.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Statement of the Problem 1
More than half of the respondents were 40 – 49 years old; almost two-thirds are male respondents. And the academics ranks of the respondents were almost equally distributed from instructors, assistant professor to Associate Professor. Almost all of the respondents handling the position of department/program chair. Furthermore, more than half of the respondents have been teaching for more than ten (10) years.

3.2. Statement of the Problem 2
On the perspectives of the middle managers and their subordinates on the competencies of the former have the highest level of agreement in each of the domains:
- In terms of ADVOCACY – The middle managers advocate on behalf of individuals and support networks to address their needs, expectations and priorities.
- In terms of COMMUNICATION SKILLS – In giving feedback, the middle managers foster self-improvement and constructive criticism rather than defensiveness or anger.
- In terms of FINANCIAL SKILLS – The middle managers listen openly and attentively to others when they share ideas about financial parameters.
- In terms of SELF-LEADERSHIP – The middle manager fulfills his/her responsibilities and commitments and demonstrates professionalism and responsibility, and
- In terms of PROBLEM MANAGEMENT AND RESOLUTION – The middle manager practices proactiveness in both opportunities and problems.

3.3. Statement of the Problem 3
The following competencies of the middle managers have the highest level of practice in the following indicators:
- In terms of COMMUNICATION – the middle managers communicate effectively at all levels of university/college management.
- In terms of DECISION MAKING, the middle managers exercise flexibility.
- In terms of NEGOTIATIONS, the middle managers design programs with stakeholders to address the need of the institution.
- In terms of TASK MANAGEMENT, the middle managers have values and respect the contribution of all members to meeting the needs of the individual in the department/unit.
- In terms of EMPOWERMENT, the middle managers disseminate regular updates on different in-service training programs available for members of the academic community.

3.4. Statement of the Problem 4
The post analyses on the test of the relationship between the middle managers' perspectives and practices, the study found out that there is a significant relationship between advocacy and the communication practices of middle managers. Also between communication skills and each of the managerial practices such as communication, decision making, negotiations,

task management, and empowerment. Also between financial skills and communication practices.

On the other hand, there is no significant relationship between self-leadership and each of the managerial practices such as communication, decision making, negotiations, task management, and empowerment among the middle managers.

3.5. Statement of the Problem 5

During the focus group discussions, the following were observed: From the responses of the participants of focus group discussion, quality accomplishment and activities of empowerment was the theme developed for advocacy. For communication skills openness and fairness and activities of giving periodic feedback as theme developed from the responses of the participants. It can be also deduced from the data that only the middle manager has a direct involvement on financial skills domain and the subordinates have no participation. Likewise, the data construe that middle manager prepares the annual budget plan to meet the department/unit objectives and targets. Also, professionalism and authority with respect are the theme developed from the responses of participants. The middle manager demonstrates good leadership to his/her subordinates. Additionally, the middle manager addresses complaints especially on faculty loading as commonly faced by his/her unit.

4. Conclusion

Based on the significant findings of the study, the following were concluded:
1. Majority or most of the middle manager respondents were 40 – 49 years old, male, with the academic rank of Instructor handling the position of Department/Program Chair, and have been teaching for more than ten years.
2. The respondents agree on the middle managers' competencies in terms of communication skills and self-leadership, but they slightly agree in terms of advocacy, financial skills, and problem management and resolution competencies.
3. The middle managers assessed themselves that they moderately practiced the following competencies such as communication, decision-making, negotiation, task management, and empowerment.
4. It was found that the middle managers had the same views and assessments on their perspectives and practices when grouped according to the number of years in teaching experience, while the rest of the profile had shown significantly different.
5. It was found that the advocacy, communications skills, and financial skills of the middle managers were related with their managerial practices.
6. From the focus group discussion of middle managers and subordinates, the participants developed themes about on the perspectives of middle managers of their competencies. Middle managers produce quality accomplishment and exhibit good leadership through openness and fairness. It also enumerates the activities of middle managers in terms of empowerment and giving feedback of their performance. Furthermore, the focus group discussion also mentioned the common problems in the department are frequent complaint against the subordinates and uneven distribution of faculty loading.
7. The developed sustainable competency-building program for middle managers serve as a guide and template to conduct seminar and training for the middle managers and faculty to enhance their competencies on school governance and management.
8. This study is anchored on Management Competency Theory of Silva (2014) about competencies in management. The Management Competency Theory of Silva (2014)

states that in order "to provide standard work, it is necessary to possess the right skills and knowledge of the ground rules of the task at hand. Likewise, integrity and commitment and a sense of responsibility are essential for managers that this might help improve employee's performance in attaining all the outstanding goals" Based from the findings of the study middle managers' perspectives of their competencies agree in terms of communication skills and self-leadership, but they slightly agree in terms of advocacy, financial skills, and problem management and resolution competencies. Furthermore, the middle managers assessed themselves that they moderately practiced the following competencies such as communication, decision-making, negotiation, task management, and empowerment, these assessment is further supported by the findings of the focus group discussion. The theory of Management Competency Theory of Silva (2014) is proven by this present study that the communication skills, self-leadership, advocacy, financial skills, problem management and resolution, communication, decision-making, negotiation, task management, and empowerment are the right skills of the middle managers to attain the target goals of the institution.

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