Middle managers strategizing practices and its effects on implementation: The moderating roles of relationship quality with top managers

Abstract

This study explores implementation performance that derives from the conjoined manifestation of two different set of practices which middle managers (MMs) employ while participating in strategy, namely, involving and influencing. It draws on the notion of strategy as being a system of social exchanges to suggest that relationship quality between top managers (TMs) and MMs has a twofold moderating effect on implementation performance, based on the type of strategizing practices that MMs exhibit. Empirical evidence from MMs in a large-size Telecommunications Company supports the hypotheses of having higher implementation performance when both MMs practices of involving and influencing exist. It also shows that the relationship quality between TMs and MMs has a moderating effect on implementation performance that is positive for MMs practices of involving, but negative for MMs practices of influencing. These findings contribute to the MMs perspective on strategy and to the stream of strategy-as-practice research focused on implementation, thus offering concrete implications for organizations and managers who want to leverage their impacts for strategy outcomes.

Keywords: Middle Managers; Implementation Performance; Strategy-as-practice; Top Managers; Relationship Quality.

Introduction

There is a growing interest on the relationships that exist between top managers (TMs) and middle managers (MMs) in terms of strategy (Castañer & Yu, 2017; Glaser, Fourné, & Elfring, 2015; Heyden, Fourné, Koene, Werkman, & Ansari, 2017; Vuori & Huy, 2016). Scholars have demonstrated so far that the consequences of these relationships can be positive (e.g., Ketokivi & Castañer, 2004; Raes, Heijltjes, Glunk, & Roe, 2011), or negative (e.g., Sillince & Mueller, 2007; Vuori & Huy, 2016). Based on these contradictory perspectives, it appears that studies have not yet explored in sufficient detail the inherent complexities associated with such relationships, which result from social exchanges based on reciprocal obligations TMs and MMs have with each other (Floyd & Lane, 2000). Relationship quality with TMs will possibly exert a dual effect on MMs practices, since the multiple roles that MMs play can be hindered or enacted by both the TMs expectations and their actions (Mantere, 2008).

Consequently, relationships can favor specific kinds of participation of MMs in strategy, while at the same time inhibiting others (Ahearne, Lam, & Kraus, 2014; Wooldridge & Floyd, 2017).

This study suggests that relationship quality between TMs and MMs has a moderating effect on implementation performance that is twofold, depending on the kind of strategizing practices undertaken by MMs. The concept of strategizing reflects the 'doing of strategy' (Johnson, Melin, & Whittington, 2003) and comprises those actions, interactions and negotiations of multiple actors as well as the situated practices that they draw upon in accomplishing activities (Jarzabkowski, 2005). Studying MMs strategizing practices therefore means highlighting what MMs actually do, and how they do it (Balogun & Rouleau, 2017; Rouleau, Balogun, & Floyd, 2015). Some studies have explored implementation through the lenses of MMs (e.g., Balogun & Johnson, 2004; Huy, 2011, 2014; Lê & Jarzabkowski, 2015), but these have comprehended implementation more as a context or process driven by MMs that leads to other strategy outcomes and not implementation performance. Thus, I am contributing to the literature by discussing "how the activities in which managers engage during strategizing are related to the ways strategy is actually implemented within their organizations" (Leonardi, 2015: S17-S18).

I am following here the argument that implementation performance is a reflection of how strategy materializes (Leonardi, 2015; Thomas & Ambrosini, 2015). Materiality expresses the combination of 'making' and 'using' and it is frequently explored at studies of technology in organizational action, relying on the idea that social and material components of a technology are constitutively entangled (Orlikowski, 2007). Based on this understanding, a blurry line also exist between 'formulating' and 'implementing' strategies, as "you don't really have a strategy if it only exists in your head and no one can execute it" (Leonardi, 2015: S20). This means that the effects of strategic decisions "depend on the success with which their content materializes in the organization—that is, on their implementation" (Raes, Heijltjes, Glunk, & Roe, 2011: 105). Implementation performance therefore is a good indicator for the materialization of strategy, as it relies on MMs interpretation of the strategy context, stemming from both emergent processes and planned rational design (Thomas & Ambrosini, 2015).

Considering this line of reasoning, I developed and tested two set of hypotheses. The first is associated to the effects of different MMs strategizing practices on implementation performance. On the other hand, the second relates to how these effects vary according to the relationship quality between TMs and MMs. My results confirm that the relationship quality between TMs and MMs can both hinder and empower implementation performance benefits that arise from different MMs strategizing practices.

MMs strategizing practices of involving and influencing

While the current literature acknowledges for multiple activities comprised by MMs thorough the strategy work (Rouleau, Balogun, & Floyd, 2015), previous studies do not recognize that there is an essential distinction for MMs strategizing practices. Such distinction is related to MMs practices of involving and to MMs practices of influencing, dimensions that are respectively associated with how much contribution MMs have for strategic decision-making and the extent of authority they demonstrate for new responsive initiatives, without asking for permission higher up in the organizational hierarchy (Andersen, 2004). It is important to observe the ambiguities in the way that previous studies reference both terms. For example, Floyd & Wooldridge (1992) first conceptualized their typology as "MMs involvement in strategy", but later they used the same model and refer to it as "MMs influence" (Floyd & Wooldridge, 1997). In both cases, such terms were employed interchangeably as synonyms, a pattern that is also found in other studies (e.g., Ahearne, Lam, & Kraus 2014; Watson & Wooldridge, 2005). This confusion regarding MMs practices reinforces a critique made by Wooldridge, Schmid and Floyd (2008: 1211), according to which "the lack of consistency in describing the roles has frustrated the development of cumulative research into the origins and consequences of middle manager strategic behavior".

It is possible then to organize the current research in two groups. The first is related to MMs strategizing practices of influencing (e.g., Ahearne, Lam, & Kraus 2014; Andersen, 2000; Balogun & Johnson, 2005; Burgelman, 1991, 1994; Dutton & Ashford, 1993; Dutton, Ashford, O'Neil, Hayes, & Wierba, 1997; Floyd & Wooldridge, 1992, 1997; Huy, 2011; Rouleau, 2005; Rouleau & Balogun, 2011; Pappas & Wooldridge, 2007; Shi, Markoczy, & Dess, 2009; Watson & Wooldridge, 2005). While the second is connected to MMs strategizing practices of involving (e.g., Canales, 2013; Collier, Fishwick and Floyd, 2004; Currie& Procter, 2005; Hodgkinson, Whittington, Johnson, & Schwarz, 2006; Ketokivi & Castaner, 2004; Mack & Szulanski, 2017; Vila & Canales, 2008; Wooldridge & Floyd, 1990; Westley, 1990).

Following the general description used by the first group of studies concerning MMs strategizing practices of influencing, I conceptualize these practices as "MMs autonomous and reflexive practices affecting the demands of continuity and change expressed by themselves, their groups or the organization". The "autonomous" aspect of this practice reinforces the fact that influencing result from local problem solving and is usually initiated by MMs outside the top management group (Burgelman, 1983; Mirabeau & Maguire, 2014). Having reflexivity likewise suggests that influencing expresses the knowledgeability possessed by MMs about their own role-set (Giddens, 1984). Therefore, strategizing practices of influencing reflects that

MMs are agents and through their agency, they are capable of transforming cognitive and structural conditions happening in different levels (Mantere, 2008).

Influencing practices employed by MMs can represent perceptible support for implementation performance. This adaptive strategy implementation behavior helps MMs to propose, accommodate, and embrace adjustments to planned strategies so they fit the operational situations (Ahearne, Lam, & Kraus, 2014). In doing so, MMs act as translators of strategies, adjusting them to actual local contexts (Balogun & Johnson, 2004) and negotiating personal interests (Jarzabkowski & Balogun, 2009; Huy, 2011). It is additionally a channel that MM's can use to help people make sense of and cope with change, thus fostering smoother implementation (Huy, 2002). As a source of the MMs voice, influencing has a positive relationship to role performance, creativity and the implementation of new ideas (Ng & Feldman, 2012). It also guides the performance of strategic initiatives (Lechner & Floyd, 2012) and overall organization performance (Ahearne, Lam, & Kraus, 2014; Floyd & Wooldridge, 1997). All together, this influencing relies on MMs directing the amount of time and attention that TMs devote to new issues (Dutton & Ashford, 1993), thereby helping autonomous initiatives to gain impetus and consequently guiding the evolution of strategy (Burgelman, 1991).

In a different manner, synthetizing the description applied by the second group of studies to analyze MMs strategizing practices of involving, these can be conceptualized as "MMs enabled practices of delivering integration through strategic planning". Such practices are "enabled" because they can be constrained or allowed depending on role expectations placed by TMs on MMs (Mantere, 2008). Additionally, "delivering integration through strategic planning" means that MMs engage in active negotiations and compromises with TMs (and other organizational members) while participating in formal decision-making (Jarzabkowski & Balogun, 2009).

Involving practices of MMs in strategizing has similarly already been associated with many aspects that relate to implementation performance. For instance, early involvement in strategy allows MMs to anticipate possible gaps and adjustments that usually take place during implementation (Noble, 1999). By being part of such decision-making processes, MMs can help build consensus, which leads to commitment and ultimately favors the quality of implementation (Dooley, Fryxell, & Judge, 2000). This MMs consensus and acceptability was already found to be significantly correlated to the achievement of strategic goals (Miller, Wilson, & Hickson, 2004). Accordingly, managers who are more involved in strategy not only see the process in a more favorable light (Collier, Fishwick & Floyd, 2004), but also pursue

organizational goals (Ketokivi & Castañer, 2004), develop a shared framework, and gain awareness of key principles (Vila & Canales, 2008). Asking MMs to be involved in strategy likewise engenders a shift in the strategic issues that will receive higher priority during implementation (Canales, 2013). Along the same lines, this involvement in strategy increases information availability, which further positively shapes MMs perceptions about implementation performance (Thomas & Ambrosini, 2015).

Apart from their main individual effects, the results from studies investigating MMs practices of involving and MMs practices of influencing frequently do share positive consequences for strategy. Thus, it is reasonable to suppose that implementation performance will be higher when both types of MMs strategizing practices coexist. For example, Noble (1999) indicates there are two key factors that determine potential implementation performance, namely, early involvement in strategy and a fluid ability to adapt to changing environmental conditions. Greater involvement facilitates the activation of strategic context determination processes (Burgelman, 1991), wherein MMs exert influence by convincing TMs that the concept of strategy needs to accommodate successful initiatives that were bottom-up championed through the organization hierarchy (e.g., Ahearne, Lam, & Kraus, 2014; De Clercq, Castañer, & Belausteguigoitia, 2011; Tarakci, Ates, Floyd, Ahn, & Wooldridge, 2018). This reminds one that TMs empower MMs influencing by inviting and expecting MMs to participate in planning (Mantere, 2008). In doing so, MMs tend to engage in shaping behaviors at the planning process, actively negotiating and influencing the rules of the game (Wolf, 2017). Commitment is, therefore, established when individuals are able to be involved in decisions and at the same time raise and receive attention on their issues (Mohrman, 1979).

It is also worth mentioning that MMs and TMs adopt different strategic activities because the two are respectively located at the organizational contexts of periphery and center (Regnér, 2003). MMs are situated in a different group with different flows of information (Burt, 2000), so involvement in strategy gives these individuals access to new sources of information that are valuable for their strategic influence, i.e., providing novel insights and collaboration (Choi, 2002; Krackhardt & Stern, 1988). Hence, mobilizing political support is indeed a central exercise for successful strategy implementation (Mintzberg, 1983), and for effectively driving action is necessary to have a fine-tuned balance of power and influence (Pfeffer, 1994).

After considering these possible effects on implementation performance that can come from MMs strategizing practices of influencing and involving, both isolated and jointly, the following hypotheses are proposed:

Hypothesis 1a: MMs strategizing practices of influencing relates positively to implementation performance.

Hypothesis 1b: MMs strategizing practices of involving relates positively to implementation performance.

Hypothesis 1c: MMs strategizing practices of influencing and involving complement one another to further improve implementation performance beyond their individual main effects.

Relationship quality between TMs and MMs

An aspect that is situated in the concepts of MMs practices of involving as well as MMs practices of influencing is the relationship between TMs and MMs (e.g., Canales, 2013; Ling, Floyd, & Baldridge, 2005), so this relationship may represent an interface where complexities arise (Raes, Heijltjes, Glunk, & Roe, 2011; Simsek, Heavey, & Fox, 2017).

Floyd & Lane (2000) applied social exchange theory to develop a conceptual model that incorporates contradictions and tensions that are associated with the relationships between TMs and MMs in strategizing, thereby understanding strategic renewal as a system of social exchanges. Their main application of social exchange theory was analyzing strategic renewal as a role-making system that defines a group's expectations and establishes possible sources of role conflict. Hence, MMs strategizing practices rests on cycles of social interactions with TMs, which then creates expectations regarding the actual roles each group has to demonstrate (Floyd & Lane, 2000).

Based on the principle of reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960), this perspective holds that each part of a relationship is obligated to compensate for any benefits received and likewise not over-benefiting from its socially supportive interactions (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). This exchanges stems from successive rounds of individual movements and reciprocal reactions that create self-reinforcing cycles and, subsequently, a pattern of interdependence between the parties involved in a relationship. This ongoing process reduces then the risks and encourages cooperation during social exchanges (Molm, 1994). However, it might exist some power dependence in these social exchanges connecting TMs and MMs over the practice of strategy, since the mutual dependence of actors provide the structural basis for their power over each other (Emerson, 1976). This structurally determined dependence sometimes is a source of power imbalance, which can make less dependent (more powerful) actors receive greater benefits, at lower costs, than more dependent actors (Molm, 2003). Actors that are more powerful can produce these inequalities in social exchanges by means of excluding less power actors from transactions (Molm, 1990). It follows that not rare TMs use their power base to

exclude or limit the MMs strategic roles (Currie & Procter, 2005; Laine & Vaara, 2007; Westley, 1990).

Building on these discussions from the social exchange theory, the relationship quality with TMs might interfere with the dynamics of MMs strategizing practices and its resulting level of contributions to implementation performance. Considering the complex nature of such social relationships, it is possible to find evidence supporting a twofold effect that is contingent on the kind of strategizing practice displayed by MMs. This aspect is especially true since MMs practices of involving and influencing are both based on different patterns of social interactions with TMs. The first is conjoint and aligned, while the second is relatively more isolated and divergent. Therefore, the relationship quality between TMs and MMs may indeed reinforce specific social exchanges to the detriment of others, thereby affecting the related implementation outcomes.

So how relationship quality between TMs and MMs does moderate the effects on implementation performance that derive MMs strategizing practices of involving and influencing? Involvement in strategy is a consequence of TMs including and inviting MMs to be part of the decision-making process (Canales, 2013; Currie & Procter, 2005; Raes, Heijltjes, Glunk, & Roe, 2011; Wooldridge & Floyd, 1990). In exchange, MMs tend to conciliate and seek mutual interests (Canales, 2013), prioritize organizational goals (Ketokivi & Castañer, 2004), exhibit commitment (Vila & Canales, 2008), feel energized about intended actions (Westley, 1990), and promote coordination between the different groups and units (Hodgkinson, Whittington, Johnson, & Schwarz, 2006). There exists then some agreement on the reciprocities of form and even content when the actors (e.g. TMs and MMs) engage in conversation (Goffman, 1967; Hochschild, 1979). Therefore, relationship quality can indeed reinforce the positive effects of MMs involving in implementation performance, by sustaining a pattern of social exchange between TMs and MMs that is based on mutual trust and joined support (Floyd & Lane, 2000).

To the contrary, however, MMs influencing relies mostly on individual interests (Guth & MacMillan, 1986), business unit goals (Ahearne, Lam, & Kraus 2014), flexibility and adaptation of plans (Floyd & Wooldridge, 1994), and an incentive to have individual experimentation (Nonaka, 1988), thus representing divergent strategic behaviors that usually are not formally encouraged by TMs (Floyd & Lane, 2000). Particularly when the relationship quality between TMs and MMs increases, their motivations will move from self-interest to mutual-interest (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995; Liden, Sparrowe, & Wayne, 1997). Consequently,

the pattern of social exchanges favors implementation performance that is related to MMs involving to the detriment of the MMs influencing.

Trust is the basis of high quality relationships and rests on transparency (Schnackenberg & Tomlinson, 2016); however, MMs influencing sometimes relies on choices that concern hiding facts (Bower & Gilbert, 2007; Dutton, Asford, O'Neil, & Lawrence, 2001; Rouleau, 2005). Correspondingly, strategic influence represents a source of non-consensus and conflict that can weaken social exchanges and interpersonal trust, making people become worried about damaging relationships and thus remaining silent on certain issues (Milliken, Morrison, & Hewlin, 2003). MMs influencing is especially necessary when the organizational context is not suitable for the clear emergence of entrepreneurial initiatives that diverge from the current strategy (Burgelman, 1983, 1991; Mirabeau1 & Maguire, 2014). Still, trust that embedded in high quality relationships can lead to effective knowledge sharing (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998) and reflect an organizational context that is appropriate for the exploitation of entrepreneurial opportunities (De Clercq, Dimov, Thongpapanl, 2010; Kim & Mauborgne, 1998). When experiencing this level of trust and relationship quality with TMs, MMs involvement in strategic planning happens through a jointly development of ideas that concern adapting to changes and achieving goals (Wolf, 2017). Therefore, relationship quality with TMs can make MMs exert greater efforts on the strategizing practices of involving, thereby reducing the impacts of MMs influence attempts that occur before or after the planning processes.

These arguments indicate that the same pattern of relationship quality that strengthens implementation performance associated with MMs involving will diminish implementation performance associated with MMs influencing. As a result, the following hypothesis is offered:

H2: The moderation effect of TMs-MMs relationship quality on implementation performance will be positive for MMs involving (H2a), and negative for MMs influencing (H2b).

Method

I address the hypotheses by using survey data from MMs of "A-Telecom[1]", a large size telecommunications company operating in Brazil. A-Telecom had a tradition of making investments in autonomous projects bottom-up championed by MMs. However, this was until 2011 when a new group of hired TMs reoriented their strategy process, giving more emphasis to MMs involvement in the strategic decision-making. This organizational context seems

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[1]I use a fictitious name for this company for non-disclosure reasons.

consequently suitable for the purposes of the current study since it conciliates MMs practices of involving and influencing. Likewise, the focus here in the telecommunications industry is appropriate, considering the long tradition of strategy research related to MMs in this environment (e.g., Burgelman, 1994, 1996; Marginson, 2002; Mirabeau & Maguire, 2014; Vuori & Huy, 2016). To ensure positive comparability of my findings to this prior work, I secured privileged access to the company, indeed, a potentially valuable research site because A-Telecom is one of the fastest growing companies in its market, and thus offers a suitable context where successful strategy implementation has key relevance.

While the strategy-as-practice perspective tend to be conceptual or qualitative in nature, this study embrace the idea that researching strategizing practices quantitatively could also lead to the emergence of novel insights (Laamanen, Reuter, Schimmer, Ueberbacher, & Guerra, 2015). It is worth mentioning that I am investigating strategy at the business level and collecting data from one company, a process that is in line with recent research that analyzed MMs' practices of influencing (Ahearne, Lam, & Kraus, 2014; Tarakci, Ates, Floyd, Ahn, & Wooldridge, 2018). Similarly, I focus my analysis on MMs perceptions (Thomas & Ambrosini, 2015) as managers may have different interpretive schemes (Dutton & Ashford, 1993) and the salient features of each environment are only those that are "enacted" by the perceptions of its decision- makers (Weick, 1969).

To identify MMs for the sample, I gained assistance from the human resources area at A-Telecom, applying two main criteria. First, we analyzed job descriptions (Wooldridge & Floyd, 2017) and considered managerial positions that were operating at two or three levels below the CEO (Wooldridge & Floyd, 1990). This aspect is important because structure and formal positions are associated with certain factual or logical antecedents of MMs practices of influencing, such as boundary-spanning activities (e.g., Floyd & Wooldridge, 1997; Pappas & Wooldridge, 2007), awareness of strategic issues (e.g., Hambrick, 1981) and knowledge about the firm (e.g., Ireland, Hitt, Bettis, Porras, & Auld, 1987). Secondly, we asked senior managers to find MMs who have access to TMs, coupled with their knowledge of operations (Wooldridge, Schmid, & Floyd, 2008). Doing so allowed me to get deeper comprehension of certain other aspects related to MMs practices of influencing, such as informal structures (Shi, Markoczy, & Dess, 2009) along with social and informational capital (Ahearne, Lam, & Kraus, 2014). I thus identified 169 MMs from A-Telecom that fulfilled the selection criteria for this research.

Data Collection

Whereas I used standardized scales from prior research to measure my constructs of interest, I conducted pilot interviews with three TMs from A-Telecom to ensure that the questionnaire items were relevant for their specific context. The survey was pretested with five key MMs to make the questions more relevant and include language commonly used in the company. To detect any potential translation biases, the original items written in English were first translated into Portuguese and then translated back into English. The final Portuguese version considered these procedures.

Following the definition developed by Amason (1996), I am characterizing members of the top management team as those who make strategic decisions, the quality of which influences organizational performance. Since my interest here is to analyze business strategy, I am considering A-Telecom TMs as those who are at the same hierarchical level, or one level below the CEO. Some survey items explicitly mention A-Telecom TMs, so I used one picture with photos of the nine members from the top management team to make sure that MMs respondents were considering the right people and their positions inside the company.

I sent an e-mail invitation to all identified MMs. It included a link to the online survey and messages' reinforcing the point that participation in the research would be anonymous and voluntary. Two reminders were sent respectively 10 days and 20 days after the original invitation. Messages reinforcing the importance of the research for academic purposes assisted me in achieving a final data group of 104 MMs (a 62% response rate), 83% male and 81.3% with a Bachelor's degree or higher. On average, respondents were 40.15 years old, had 13.86 years of tenure with the industry (S.D. = 8.38), 10.85 years of tenure with the organization (S.D. = 8.06), and 3.42 years of tenure in their current positions (S.D. = 3.43).

To account for any possible non-response bias associated with early-late respondents, additional testing was performed using Fisher (Agresti, 2018) and Kruskal-Wallis (Hollander & Wolfe, 1999). These results reported no bias in this respect, as early-late respondents did not differ significantly in their answers.

Measures

Implementation performance. Implementation performance was measured using six items from previous studies (Menon, Bharadwaj, Adidam, & Edison, 1999; Miller, Wilson, & Hickson, 2004; Thomas & Ambrosini, 2015). These items consisted of MMs' perceptions on the overall success of strategy and embodying the enactment of deliberate plans and the emergence of strategic initiatives.

MMs practices of influencing (KS[2]=0.61; MW[3]=0.12; ICC1[4]=0.40; ICC2[5]=0.57; Rwg(mean)[6]=0.76). Divergent strategic behavior was considered to measure MMs practices of influencing (Ahearne, Lam, & Kraus, 2014; Tarakci, Ates, Floyd, Ahn, & Wooldridge, 2018; Pappas & Wooldridge, 2007), with a focus on facilitating adaptability for three reasons. First, MMs divergent strategic behavior challenge the "dominant logic" of the firm (Pappas & Wooldridge, 2007) that is usually sustained by TMs, representing, therefore, risks to the relationship between these two groups. Second, facilitating adaptability is downward in nature (Floyd & Wooldridge, 1992) and provides a smoother implementation, as it helps employees cope with emerging market trends not accounted for during the planning processes. Third, facilitating adaptability was found to have a monotonic and positive relationship with objective business unit performance, with calls to remain a priority for all MMs (Ahearne, Lam, & Kraus 2014).

I understand here facilitating adaptability as a kind of MMs divergent strategic behavior (Ahearne, Lam, & Kraus, 2014; Tarakci, Ates, Floyd, Ahn, & Wooldridge, 2018; Pappas & Wooldridge, 2007), and not as an example of MMs strategic role (Floyd & Wooldridge, 1992; 1994; Mantere, 2008; Wooldridge, Schmid and Floyd, 2008). In doing so, my objective is to relate facilitating adaptability to the embodied aspect of practices, defined by Reckwitz (2002) as routinized types of behavior.

I asked each respondent to rate their own facilitating adaptability efforts along with their ratings of two co-workers whose day-to-day job activities they are familiar with (Pappas & Wooldridge, 2007). I did this in an attempt to decrease possible effects of common method bias and improve overall data reliability. This process lead to 67 respondents being rated by at least one co-worker. I afterwards averaged peer ratings and compared then to the self-assessment values using the Kolmogorov Smirnov and Wilcoxon tests (Hollander & Wolfe, 1999). After considering the results of these tests, I was able to obtain the five items of facilitating adaptability construct by using the means of self-evaluation and peer evaluation answers.

MMs practices of involving. Strategizing practices of involving were measured through the MMs perceptions of TMs participative leadership. While participative leadership can be actually expressed by TMs, during periods of no contact with MMs (Raes, Heijltjes, Glunk, & Roe, 2011), I believe this specific construct captures the idea of MMs involving, for three

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[2] Kolmogorov–Smirnov.
[3] Mann-Whitney.
[4] Interclass correlation
[5] Inter-rater reliability
[6] Statistical significance for interrater agreement

reasons. First, participative leadership is associated with TMs' seeking MMs input on strategy making (Edmondson, Roberto, & Watkins, 2003) and also involving their subordinates in decisions (Lam, Huang, & Chan, 2015; Somech, 2006). Second, such invitation of TMs to include MMs in planning activities enables MMs strategic agency (Mantere, 2008). Third, recent evidence suggests that MMs involving is an aspect that is situated inside of the dimension of TMs participative leadership (Raes & van Vlijmen, 2017). Hence, three items of participative leadership were adapted from the subsequent concepts developed by Raes, Heijltjes, Glunk, and Roe (2011: 113): '*TMT puts a high value on MM information, seeks frequent interaction with MMs to obtain this information, and uses the MMs' information as a basis for strategy formulation*'.

Relationship quality between TMs and MMs. I measured the relationship quality between TMs and MMs using the six items developed by Ashford, Rothbard, Piderit, and Dutton (1998) in their study on MMs influencing through issue selling. Thus, each middle manager evaluated their relationship with TMs for several dimensions, such as "cordial," "friendly," and "close".

Control variables. Finally, I controlled for different variables mentioned in previous studies as being associated with MMs contextual knowledge, strategic understanding, or perceived power inside the organization, all of them relevant for MMs strategizing practices. These variables were tenure with the industry (De Clercq, Castañer, & Belausteguigoitia, 2011; Dutton, Asford, O'Neil, & Lawrence, 2001), tenure with the organization (Ahearne, Lam, & Kraus, 2014; Tarakci, Ates, Floyd, Ahn, & Wooldridge, 2018), tenure in position (Floyd & Wooldridge, 1992), job title (Thomas & Ambrosini, 2015), and age (Pappas & Wooldridge, 2007).

Most of my measures were adapted from the published literature, using five-point Likert scales anchored by 1=strongly disagree and 5=strongly agree. Since collecting data from the same questionnaire and the same source potentially can lead to common method biases, I performed Harman's single-factor test measurement (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003). These analyses indicated that common method variance did not have any impact on my results.

I tested convergent and discriminant validity using the approach suggested by Fornell and Larcker (1981). Accordingly, I considered convergent validity for all variables with values for average variance extracted (AVE) higher than 0.5. As shown in Table 1, these values were in excess of the shared variances between constructs, thereby suggesting discriminant validity. I also applied the cross-factor loading method (Barclay, Higgins, & Thompson, 1995), which

indicates discriminant validity when the factorial load of the item is greater than all its cross-factor loads. To verify construct dimensionality, I used the criteria of parallel lines (Hoyle & Duval, 2004). Results from the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin tests (KMO) revealed adequate factor loadings for all the variables (higher than 0.50). Additionally, I used Cronbach's alpha (CA) and composite reliability (CC) to measure reliability (Chin, 1998), indeed finding all scores were higher than 0.7 (Tenenhaus, Vinzi, Chatelin, & Lauro, 2005).

Table 1. Reliability, convergent and discriminant validity of variables

Variables	Items	AVE	CA	CR	KMO	Dim.	SV
MMs practices of involving	3	0.78	0.85	0.85	0.71	1	0.48
Relationship quality	6	0.65	0.86	0.87	0.82	1	0.48
Implementation performance	6	0.67	0.93	0.91	0.87	1	0.40
MMs practices of influencing	5	0.69	0.88	0.87	0.80	1	0.30

AVE = Average variance extracted, CA = Cronbach's alpha; CR = Composite reliability; KMO = Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin; Dim = Dimensionality; SV = Shared variance

Table 2. Principal components analysis results and measures

Measures and sources	Description	Factor loading
MMs practices of involving (Raes, Heijltjes, Glunk, & Roe, 2011; Raes & van Vlijmen, 2017)	Directors puts a high value on information they receive from me and my peers	0,911
	Directors seeks frequent interaction with me and my peers to obtain information	0,850
	Directors use the information they receive from me and my peers as a basis for strategy formulation	0,889
Relationship quality between TMs and MMs (Ashford, Rothbard, Piderit, & Dutton, 1998)	My relationship with directors is cordial	0,882
	My relationship with directors is friendly	0,909
	My relationship with directors is distant	0,485
	My relationship with directors is open	0,889
	My relationship with directors is trusting	0,800
	My relationship with directors is close	0,798
MMs practices of influencing (Ahearne, Lam, & Kraus, 2014; Tarakci, Ates, Floyd, Ahn, & Wooldridge, 2018; Pappas & Wooldridge, 2007)	I (or this person) encourage informal discussion and information sharing	0,744
	I (or this person) relax regulations to get new projects started	0,846
	I (or this person) buy time for experimental programs	0,860
	I (or this person) locate and provide resources for trial projects	0,891
	I (or this person) provide a safe haven for experimental programs	0,818
Implementation performance (Menon, Bharadwaj, Adidam, & Edison, 1999;	Our strategies are examples of effective strategy implementation	0,791
	Strategy implementation efforts are generally considered a success in this firm	0,825

Miller, Wilson, & Hickson, 2004; Thomas & Ambrosini, 2015)	I personally think that the implementation of strategies have been a success in this firm	0,810
	The implementation of strategies is considered a success in my area	0,839
	The right kind of resources is allocated to strategy implementation efforts	0,847
	Adequate resources are allocated to strategy implementation efforts	0,828

Source: The Author

Analysis and results

The means, standard deviations, and correlations between the variables are presented in Table 3. Correlations between the independent variables of MMs practices of involving and influencing were slightly higher than the threshold value of 0.50. To mitigate any possibility of having a multicollinearity problem, I examined whether the variance inflation factors (VIFs) were higher than 10, and that was not the case.

My hypotheses were tested using multiple regression analysis. Applying the recommendations of Hair, Anderson, Tatham, and Black (1998), I centered all variables (excepting the dummies related to job title) and proceeded in a hierarchical approach. Table 4 contains the results for each model with the standardized β- coefficient estimates, adjusted coefficient of determination, F-values, as well as any changes in the R-squared.

Model 1 includes the controls (age, job title, tenure with the organization, tenure with the industry, and tenure in position). Age was the only significant predictor for perceived implementation performance. The addition of MMs influencing in Model 2 added 25.5% to the explained variance in Model 1 (F= 7.12, $p \leq 0.01$). So hypothesis 1a was supported ($\alpha = 0.55$, $p \leq 0.01$).

Accordingly, Model 3 presents the results for Hypotheses 1b and 1c. MMs practices of involving had a significant and positive relationship with implementation performance ($\alpha = 0.34$, $p \leq 0.01$), confirming Hypothesis 1b. The presence of MMs practices of involving also added 11.3% to the explained variance in Model 2 (F= 9.83, $p \leq 0.01$). Therefore, it complements MMs practices of influencing and further improves implementation performance beyond their individual main effects, thereby supporting Hypothesis 1c.

Hypothesis 2 suggests there is a moderating effect of relationship quality between TMs and MMs on implementation performance, thus exerting a dual impact that is positive for MMs practices of involving (H2a) and negative for MMs practices of influencing (H2b). Before testing for this dual impact, I had to verify if such a pattern would also occur for these two independent variables separately. The results for Model 4 and Model 5 demonstrated no

Table 3. Means, standard deviations, and correlations

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1.MMs practices of involving	3.97	0.8	1.00							
2.Relationship quality	4.05	0.76	0.70**	1.00						
3.Implementation performance	4.19	0.6	0.63**	0.52**	1.00					
4.MMs practices of influencing	3.81	0.64	0.55**	0.42**	0.52**	1.00				
5.Age	40.15	7.65	0.20*	0.30**	0.19*	0.11	1.00			
6.Tenure with the organization	10.85	8.06	0.30**	0.17†	0.08	0.20*	0.13	1.00		
7.Tenure with the industry	13.86	8.38	0.20*	0.19†	0.03	0.18†	0.39**	0.38**	1.00	
8.Tenure with the position	3.42	3.43	-0.03	0.01	-0.05	0.00	0.22*	0.29**	0.21*	1.00

†$p \leq 0.1$; *$p \leq 0.05$; **$p \leq 0.01$.

Table 4. Results of regression analyses

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
Age	0.01*	0.01**	0.01*	0.01*	0.01*	0.01†
Tenure with the organization	0.00	0.00	-0.00	-0.00	-0.00	-0.00
Tenure with the industry	-0.01	-0.00	-0.00	-0.00	-0.00	-0.00
Job title 1	0.01	-0.11	-0.25*	-0.26*	-0.27*	-0.25*
Job title 2	0.22	-0.17	-0.31*	-0.36*	-0.38*	-0.36*
Tenure with the position	-0.00	-0.01	-0.00	-0.00	-0.00	-0.00
MMs practices of influencing		0.55**	0.35**	0.18	0.34**	1.01**
MMs practices of involving			0.34**	0.258*	0.00	-0.50†
MMs influencing x Relationship quality				0.04		-0.16*
MMs involving x Relationship quality					0.05†	0.20**
R²	9.7%	34.4%	45.5%	46.9%	48.6%	50.9%
Adjusted R²	4.1%	29.6%	40.9%	41.8%	43.6%	45.6%
F	1.72	7.12**	9.83**	9.13**	9.78**	9.55**
VIF	1.56	1.56	1.76	-	-	-

†$p \leq 0.1$; *$p \leq 0.05$; **$p \leq 0.01$

moderating effect in these particular circumstances. This is because the moderating effect of relationship quality between TMs and MMs on implementation performance is not present for MMs practices of influencing, and is only slightly present for MMs practices of involving (α = 0.05, p $\leq$ 0.1). On the contrary, Model 6 reveals that the presence of relationship quality jointly moderating implementation performance associated with MMs practices of involving and influencing added 5.4% to the explained variance in Model 3 (F=9.55,p $\leq$ 0.01). These results confirmed Hypothesis 2a because the moderating effect is positive for MMs practices of involving (α = 0.20, p $\leq$ 0.01). The result additionally support Hypothesis 2b since there is a negative moderating effect for MMs practices of influencing (α = -0.16, p $\leq$ 0.05).

Discussion, implications for practice and limitations

This study provides evidence of the stream of research that has investigated the role played by social relationships between TMs and MMs in strategy (e.g., Glaser, Fourné, & Elfring, 2015; Raes, Heijltjes, Glunk, & Roe, 2011; Vuori & Huy, 2016). I show that relationship quality between TMs and MMs positively moderate implementation performance associated with MMs practices of involving. In this respect, I provide further evidence that relationship quality promotes complementary interactions that are valuable to TMs and MMs engage in interlocking rationales about new attention structures (Canales, 2013). Relationship quality associated with TMs therefore allows MMs to have a certain further dominance in strategic conversations, making them feel more energized and capable of sustaining their energy over long periods of time (Westley, 1990), both essential aspects leading to implementation performance.

However, since this moderating effect on implementation performance was negative for MMs practices of influencing, I further show a side of relationship quality with TMs that is underdeveloped in the current literature. Previous studies actually suggest that relationship quality with TMs tends to be a contextual factor increasing MMs intentions of displaying strategic influence by using issue selling (e.g., Ashford, Rothbard, Piderit, & Dutton, 1998; Ling, Floyd, & Baldridge, 2005).

I discuss two possible explanations for this negative moderating effect of relationship quality between TMs and MMs on implementation performance coming from MMs practices of influencing. First, involving can represent a preferential practice employed by MMs while participating in strategy, mostly whenever they have good relationships with TMs. In contexts like these, raising issues may already be part of the designated and accepted formal strategic

practices, thereby making less prominent the implementation benefits that stream from MMs practices of influencing. Second, MMs practices of influencing represents a form of political behavior (Guo, Huy, & Xiao, 2017; Guth & MacMillan, 1986) which often appears in response to conflict (Pettigrew, 1977; March, 1962) and works as a mechanism of strategy implementation (Lê & Jarzabkowski, 2015). As MMs' perceptions of their good relationship quality with TMs may illustrate an organizational context that is facing less conflict, it is reasonable to expect less implementation performance coming from this source of MMs practice of influencing. Hence, finding this negative moderating effect reinforces the inherent complexities embedded in the TMs and MMs interface (Raes, Heijltjes, Glunk, & Roe, 2011; Simsek, Heavey, & Fox, 2017).

It is worth mentioning that TMs' power plays a key role in strategy (Finkelstein, 1992) and that this power can be used to harm the strategic roles of MMs (Currie & Procter, 2005; Laine & Vaara, 2007; Westley, 1990). As a result, social exchanges between TMs and MMs taking place in the practice of strategy may perhaps be those that are strongly negotiated, in which actors "increase their chance of making a better agreement by bargaining harder and making fewer concessions" (Molm, Peterson, Takahashi, 1999: 881). These negotiations allow the most powerful actors to increase possible inequalities happening in social exchanges (Molm, 2003). Therefore, such inequalities could explain why the relationship quality between TMs and MMs only has a positive moderating effect on implementation performance as derived from MMs strategizing practices of involving, that are negotiated with TMs and enabled by them.

These results instigate the need for more debate on the strategy implementation contexts wherein the social exchanges that are based on good relationship quality may have some extent negative consequences on individual behavior. For example, according to the study by Anand, Vidyarthi, Liden and Rousseau (2010), individuals with enhanced employment arrangements demonstrate less citizenship behavior when they are face with a higher quality of workplace relationships with their supervisors, colleagues, and the organization. This happens because employment arrangements can act as substitutes for relationship quality, so they can be two alternative forms of support that compensate for the other's absence (Anand, Vidyarthi, Liden, & Rousseau, 2010). Along the same lines, by reinforcing the reciprocity norm (Gouldner, 196), high quality relationships may serve as a contingency mechanism that constrains the task performance benefits that arises from individuals' expressions of personality (Kamdar & Van Dyne, 2007). It is thus important to understand that relationship quality between TMs and MMs is as a resource which can complement, compete or even replace many others resources that

coexist and evolve during the course of strategy, either hindering or enacting actual implementation performance.

Such discussion does not mean that managers should avoid having a good quality of relationship with their superiors. Actually, is an understanding of tensions and contradictions that can exist in interactions between TMs and MMs. These paradoxical elements will possibly be more evident in organizational contexts that are facing change, such as turnaround (Tangpong, Abebe, & Li, 2015) and executive succession (Ma & Seidl, 2018), which have time constraints that limits an appropriate relationship building around TMs and MMs. In situations such as these, far from solving the possible problems and dilemmas derived from the relationship quality between people from different managerial levels, it might be more useful to develop "workable certainties" upon which TMs and MMs would be constantly making sense (Lüscher & Lewis, 2008).

This twofold product that encompasses relationship quality between TMs and MMs also suggests that patterns of social exchanges may produce and then orient specific interpersonal implementation routes, as distinguished by particular combinations of the ways that MMs participate in strategy efforts. Here I illustrate some of the valuable implications for actual practice. For example, organizations that are facing a great proximity between TMs and MMs will have higher implementation performance if they emphasize MMs' involvement in conjoined strategic planning. On the other hand, a balance of MMs practices of involving and influencing will be more suitable for those organizations whose social contexts have a moderate to lower closeness between TMs and MMs. Consequently, for these organizations, fostering the quality of the relationship between people from different managerial levels can further power the benefits of open and shared strategic-decision making.

Irrespective of such patterns of social exchanges between TMs and MMs, implementation performance is higher when MMs strategizing practices of involving and influencing coexist. Thus companies who want to be relatively successful over long periods of time have to build the quality of both forms of practices which MMs use while participating in actual strategy.

I believe these notions of involving and influencing can contribute to the development of research on middle management, for three reasons. First, the concepts helps to organize the different array of terms and definitions already presented in previous studies. Second, it indicates two viable avenues for cumulative investigations in this area that is somewhat fragmented (Wooldridge, Schmid, & Floyd, 2008). Third, it sheds further light on the dynamics

of inclusion and exclusion taking place in the interactions between TMs and MMs that have significant implications for managerial agency (e.g., Westley, 1990; Mantere, 2008).

My results also suggest opportunities for MMs who want to develop their strategizing practices and resulting contributions to implementation. For example, MMs have to be flexible and able to engage in involving and influencing strategic activities, and understand them as complementary channels to use to leverage implementation performance. The relationship quality with TMs likewise can be evaluated by MMs as a contextual factor that directs MMs choices of contributing to implementation through involving and / or influencing. These opportunities have the potential to become viable trajectories for the development of more strategic MMs.

Although this study can have many possible implications for both theory and practice, my results must be interpreted in light of its limitations. Since cross-sectional Data was used, it is not possible to be fully certain about causality. Still, this view has to be balanced with the evidence that all effects match with the theorized direction and passed the checks to display and confirm the robustness of my findings. These data additionally come from one company in a single industry. Whereas this approach was also used by previous studies (e.g., Ahearne, Lam, & Kraus, 2014; Tarakci, Ates, Floyd, Ahn, & Wooldridge, 2018), it compromises the generalizability of these results for other contexts. Having only MMs respondents is another limitation of this study. Subordinates at the operational management level and superiors from the top management team could increase the reliability of the variables. However, after applying Harman's single-factor test, it appears common method variance is not present. All reliability scores of the variables are also at acceptable levels. Finally, while my data comprise a representative sample of all MMs within this company, it is noticeably still a small sample, thereby making more difficult to identify the true effects that are hidden by soft statistical power.

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