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**MIDDEL MANAGEMENT: LEADERS OR LED AND THEIR  
IMPORTANCE TO THE SCHOOL'S FUNCTION**

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***Abstract***

In various organizations there are in existence procedures which function lies in leading the teams under their respective charges, in order to perform the variety of the tasks and targets set with a full utilization of each individual. The appointment of managers is mostly done in accordance with the skills and attributes of the chosen individual, as well as those of applicable to the position. For the most part the chosen individuals are professionals who are experts in their respective fields, yet not necessarily ones possessing managerial skills as well. Thus, interim managers present a key link in the organization and are also the connecting one between the management and staff. At times they are required to make crucial decisions and face difficult dilemmas, such a variety of difficulties of the kind they do not always possess the abilities and/or tools to resolve. In situations such as these one can clearly observe interim managers who operate from their comfort zone, an action leading to an interim manager focusing on the execution rather than management of the situation arises. High schools form an organization In this organization there are some interim managers whose job is to lead the various teams under their charge to reach the set goal.. The article at hand will attempt to raise various questions interim managers are faced with, as well as suggestions as to how to resolve them.

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**Keywords:** Leader, interim managers, teaching/teachers' teams, veteran teacher, new teacher.



## 1. Introduction

This article will be concerned with the importance of various schools' middle management and the way their functioning affects the quality of their work. As a prototype for middle management I will be using the high school system in Israel. Israel's high schools have developed this management backbone as part of the system's constraints, one which purpose is to allow its managers to meet the goals of the many reforms aimed to improve the staff's teaching, as well as the learning, quality, consequently improving the students' academic achievements. In light of the fact that development of this said management backbone did not include an organized and well-defined progression of the job's definition, the following task was, thus, to consolidate the job description of middle management, which has, so far, been undefined (Barak, Medina, Avni et al. 2017.)

A school's operation is similar to that of an organization. And, likewise, its spearhead is its manager. The organization's manager is required to lead their employees. In order to execute this leadership in its optimal form it is recommended that the manager will be a leader who possesses management qualities. There are in existence numerous definitions to the term "leadership", and yet there is no single answer to the question what is a leader and what separates an actual leader from a non-leader (Kolan, 2017). Sharma claims that leadership does not necessarily refer to the leader and/or manager to influence the actions of others, and that is in order to allow for a possibility to reach a shared desired goal, one which would be the best for the organization with no need for coercion (Sharma, 2007). A different interpretation states that leadership refers to the ability of a person, or, conversely, a group of people, to head the organization and lead to the shared goal (Shoshan, 1990). It is recommended for the manager who is the leader of the organization to possess interpersonal qualities such as charisma and representativeness, which will assist them in both their management capacity and in reaching the set goals. A charismatic manager, that is, one able to impose authority as well as lead their team, is one who will lead their staff to their goal. The manager is the "face of the organization". Meaning, the way they display the organization is the way others will see it too. The manager is the person in possession of the information they wish to distribute amongst their staff and, externally, to the organization alike (Harris, 2003). The fundamentality of a good manager lies in their understanding of the task they are required to accomplish, a familiarity with managerial skills, professional expertise and a sense of capability (Schwartz, 2010). A manager of an organization should possess responsibility, commitment and the aptitude to work within a team framework (Sinai, 2011).

No organization operates on an individual basis. From its very basic name, "manager", it is clear that this person's undertaking is to bring others to perform and complete their tasks. As extended as their formal authorities will become, by the power vested in them by their "principal" status and through the usage of force, so will their employees' motivation dwindle and decrease in their goal achievement task (Popper, & Lifshits, 2000). The organization's goal execution is done by the working team. A connection with this team presents a factor which can significantly influence the organization's functioning. Thus, a manager with no actual connection to their employees can cause a situation in which functionality exists but is far from optimal. Most chances are that an organization such as this would not be able to reach any high achievements and required goals (Schwartz, 2010). Therefore, every organization necessitates a visionary manager, one who could lead their organization to the future and reach the goals initially set by the organization itself (Bar Sinai, 2011).

## 2. The middle manager

A manager should increase the sense of commitment amongst their employees. A sense of commitment amongst employees to their job can possibly raise their motivation, which will result in higher productivity. More often than not, a manager can instigate either commitment or its lack-thereof to the organization. When commitment exists it leads by default to an increase in motivation. When the situation is reversed, namely, when motivation and a sense of belonging are not in existence, it could lead to a situation in which productivity will considerably decrease, and, moreover, will trickle to the rest of the organization's staff, as a result of which the staff's dissatisfaction will increase and their productivity will accordingly decrease (Leizzer, 2015).

A manager will not be able to succeed in their work if they fail to comprehend both the meaning of management and the managing of a staff. If a manager lacks people they can trust, people who will perform their given tasks, this means that those tasks will remain unfulfilled. This job is implemented by the middle managers, who pose a crucial and significant link which is inseparable from any organization (Mintzberg, 2009).

Middle managers serve as junior managers such as department managers, section managers and heads of teams. Middle managers form the linking unit between staff and management, without whom the organization will find its existence difficult. Middle managers are leaders whose job is to perform tasks given to them by managers who are at a higher rank than themselves, as well as pass the actual task implementation to the lower ranks. In many cases the organization's workers are better-acquainted with the middle manager than they are with the senior manager. Given that the connection between the middle manager and the worker is a good one the worker will have a higher motivation to perform their tasks in a more enhanced way (Harris, 2003).

Estyn, who, in 2004, studied the phenomenon of middle managers in a number of schools in Wales, discovered that when the middle managers functioned in an optimal manner, and with good connection to the school's teaching staff, the school was considered to be a "strong" school. On the other hand, in schools where the middle managers were "weak", that is to say, not maintaining good connection with the teaching staff and where they were not a part of the leading team – the school was considered a "weak" one.

As we learn from Estyn (2004), study that an accurate functioning of the middle manager's task affects the way in which the school functions on the whole. When the functioning of the middle manager is not optimal it affects their influence on their evaluation as a middle manager. When there is no evaluation of the middle manager's job, the entire school's functioning, with the school being a body employing numerous employees, may be damaged. The damage can be expressed either in the short or the long term. An example to a damage in the short term would be a disturbance in the daily routine. In the long term it can be expressed in low registration to the said school as a result of low achievements.

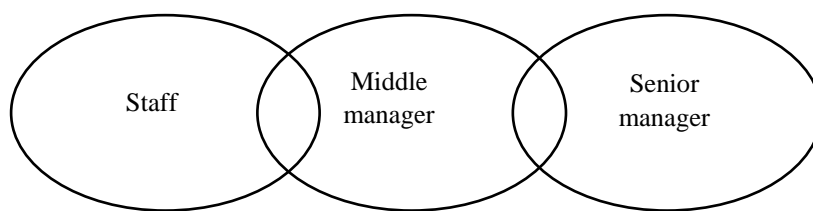
From an overview of the relevant literature one can gather that a great significance is bestowed upon the role of middle management. In practice, however, there is quite a considerable gap between the organization's strategic and professional consideration for middle managers and their actual function as such. The existence of this said gap does not bode well with the organization and is also harmful to it operatively. In any organization in which such a gap exists a great deal of importance is dedicated to overcome it (Bodoan & Pragman, 2010). The development and grooming of middle management is of high

importance. It is through this middle management development that the set goals could be strived to be achieved, and that this step will take place in conjunction with the organization's excellence and prosperity. The development of middle managers should, thus, be built into the organizational strategy which is, in itself, striving to grow and thrive (Leizzer, 2015). Consequently, it is crucial for managers to comprehend the importance of middle management and will, hence, allow the operation of the middle manager in order to support an optimal goal achievement (Barak et al, 2017).

There are situations in which a manager fears that the middle managers will be further professional and skilled than themselves. In such situations the manager attempts to push the middle manager aside. Noticeably, a manager who fears having skilled people around them will not necessarily achieve the scope of goals and targets set by themselves. A manager of this kind is one who fails to grasp the meaning of management as it has been defined earlier. A manager surrounded by unskilled people is not necessarily a leader, thus the chances of leading the teaching team to success is slight. In this case the achievements are reached either in a non-optimal manner, or not at all. By acting in the way described here a manager sets obstacles for themselves and, most chances are, will consequently fail in their management role. Conversely, a manager surrounded by skilled people who are well-versed in their job, is beneficial to the whole school and the set goals and targets are then reached. The manager is credited for these achievements, a step by which they are empowered (Popper, Lifshits, 2000).

From an observation of Israeli high schools' functioning one can see that a school principal cannot possibly perform every single task by themselves, let alone the entire inter-school system. The school system, which consists of students, administrative team, community and supervision, sets long-term challenges which cannot possibly be managed by a single person, be they as skilled as they come. Thus, there exists a need for an assisting element who will undertake some of the managerial duties upon themselves, which will, in turn, assist the school principal. This said assisting element is, indeed, those middle managers. In most cases the middle managers present the linking unit between the various school elements and operate mostly within the breadth of the school, consisting of students and teachers alike. In the course of the day middle managers perform a myriad of tasks. For instance: a consecutive students' grades' follow-up, caring for students with special needs, meetings with parents and/or students. When a problem forms, a report to that effect is handed to the principal. By assisting with those kinds of issues the middle managers contribute to a decrease of the pressure put on the principal (Popper & Lifshits, 2000).

A special feature of the middle management in Israel is the one concerned with forming a communication between school management and the teaching staff. The role of middle managers is to lead the various teams under their jurisdiction to reach the goal set by the ministry of education, the school principal and/or the teaching team themselves. By the mere essence of their role as "managers" they, supposedly, possess leadership skills. In actuality, however, not all middle managers function as "managers" per se (Bodoan & Pregman, 2010). Drawing no. 1 displays the placement of the middle manager within the organization:



**Figure 01.** The connection between task holders and workers in various organizations (based on Barak-Medina, Avni et al, 2017)

The middle manager's appointment in a school is usually done in accordance with the skills of the chosen candidate and the role's demands alike. For the most part the chosen people are experts at their jobs. At times the appointment is done out of non-professional considerations. This latter point can result from a number of reasons. For instance, in the case of a school middle manager who does not possess a natural flair for management, or who lacks basic management skills in the absence of management training, (Bodoan & Pregman, 2010). Plato argued that "to be a leader is an inherent feature, yet it can be attributed to the course of a person's life to be trained to become a leader". Thus, becoming a manager is a skill which can be taught by an improvement of skills and communication of senior managers versus the working team under their jurisdiction. The teaching of leadership ability, the capability to lead assignments, resistance to pressures, etc. In order to contribute to the middle manager's role as a leader who will lead their team to successes it is highly recommended for them to possess certain qualities such as an ability to lead, long-term thinking and interpersonal communication skills (Amit & Popper et al, 2006).

Middle managers are required to undergo training for their role yet are not required to fulfil it. In addition, such training fails, for the most part, to fulfil field needs. In comparison with the kind of training a senior principal undergoes vs. that of the middle manager one can spot major differences in general and in the education system in particular. For instance, in order to become a school principal, one has to win a bid, undergo a year-long training at Avne Rosha Institute and, additionally, be escorting tutors in their first year. By contrast, middle managers are required to undergo a 30 or 60-hour training course (depending on the role they are supposed to fulfil) – by which they are being trained for their role (CEO memo 2014). From the above one can, thus, deduce that the importance of the middle manager has still not received an accreditation appropriate to the role's standing.

One of the problems of the middle managers' flawed training system is the inability of middle managers to distinguish between executing a task and managing it. Middle managers face numerous dilemmas in the course of fulfilling the role, dilemmas for which they do not always possess the tools to resolve. In such situations one can clearly observe those middle managers who operate from their safe and comforting spot, which leads to the middle manager's focus on the execution rather than management of the formed situation (Amit & Popper et al, 2006).

An additional element which may cause a problematic situation on the way to solving problems in school by the middle manager is a cutback in the budget at their disposal. This situation may, at times, force the middle manager to handle the execution of the task, as opposed to managing it. When cutbacks of resources in areas such as human resources, budget cuts, etc. occur, typically the goals remain the same,

yet the need to fulfil them in the most optimal manner still remains despite those said problems. More often than not the desire to be more efficient, which may result in cutbacks, can cause a goal which is opposite to the desired one. Would a current economizing step not damage the future? In most cases the middle managers are those who are hurt by such frugality the most, given they are the ones responsible of transferring the execution orders to the rest of the staff (Altman et al, 2004).

In the course of fulfilling the role various stressful situations arise, which put the main pressure on the middle manager at the school. Such situations can, for example, reach the principal or members of the team under the middle manager's jurisdiction. Thus, it is preferable that the middle manager will be a person who would be able to handle such a pressure while, simultaneously, activating the various team members. A middle manager who will not be able to handle such pressure will result in a job not optimally done and, moreover, cause damage in the running functioning process (Barak et al, 2017).

The majority of schools keep teams consisting of teachers of different rankings and age groups. At times a situation can be formed in which the middle manager is younger in both age and rank from some of the teachers. This fact is not always seen favorably by the "old timers". In a situation such as this it is up to the middle manager to prove their ability to lead the diverse teaching team and to overcome this said obstacle alongside knowing how to utilize it for the purpose of goal achievement. Young teachers, who have only recently completed their training, bring with them a novelty which may not always be acknowledged and recognized by the veteran teachers. Therefore, it is greatly up to the middle managers to make sure the veteran teachers do not feel threatened by the younger teachers and their ideas, which are, quite often, considerably different than those that the veteran teachers are familiar with. Hence, oftentimes novelty is charted by withdrawal. A good middle manager should be able to circumvent such withdrawal and, moreover, to harness this novelty to a better and more efficient use (Harris et al, 2003).

Variance may lead to difficulties, yet a good middle manager will know how to lead their team and work in collaboration (Harris, et al 2003). There are working teams in a school system in which the teachers are of different trainings. The professional variance assists in creating an advantage in the teamwork. It also creates a possibility in observing the students in a different light. For example: a special education teacher who is also a math teacher; a teacher with a college training as opposed to a teacher who arrived from the field of High Tech and switched to a career-retraining of teaching.

The principals are the ones in charge of the professional development of teachers' optimal teaching in the classrooms Following the reform the Israeli education underwent in 2011 it was ruled that school principals are considered educational leaders. Thus arose a demand from the Israeli ministry of education that school principals should observe all the teachers in their respective schools twice or three times a year. Such a task, however, is not viable. In calculating the number of hours required to fulfil such a task a school principal will need to dedicate, for this task alone, 600 work hours. If we calculate a work day as consisting of 7 hours, the principal will need an entirety of 86 days for this purpose. Hereinafter is the detailed task fulfilment: in a school with a staff of 100 teachers, for the principal to observe all of them will require 200 hours. At the end of the observation part the principal will need to compose a summary report. This report should include the spot they, the principals that is, are required to pay attention to. This latter step will require in an additional amount of 200 hours. Following this stage the principal will also need to meet with the teachers. Those meetings will require an additional 200 hours' chunk (a meeting should be scheduled

following each observation session). School principals displayed great objection to this task and have transferred part of the observation duties to the middle managers. The principals themselves tend, for the most part, to observe new teachers, or in such cases where teaching problems arise and it is specifically the school principal's decision that is required (CEO memo, 2014).

Middle management has a considerable significance in affecting the students' achievements. Schools are evaluated according to their students' achievements. There is a comparison as to which school holds the highest academic achievements. A school with high achievements will, naturally, draw a higher registration. An increase in the number of students will also result in an increase in the budgets granted by the Israeli ministry of education, as well as with occasional additional grants awarded for high achievements. A school principal cannot, nor is able to, fluently handle the communication with the students as well as pay close attention to their achievements. Hence, this is the role of the middle manager. Middle managers are supposed to dispatch a continuous report regarding the school's actions and activities via either orderly meetings with the principal or via reporting in a meeting which will be scheduled following a case requiring an informing or an intervention (Barak et al, 2017).

The middle managers serve as a "pipe" for information transferal within the school's jurisdictional grounds and the school principal, who is the person holding general responsibility for the whole school. A flawed or wrongful information transferal, or, conversely, failing to do so entirely, may result in mistakes in the school principal's decision-making process, a fact which can lead to a disruption in the general conduct of the school, a damage to its reputation, low grades and a financial impairment. Henceforth, the importance in choosing middle managers who are also leaders, who will assume responsibility and lead the school to an operational efficient functioning. Middle management leadership is not tied only to a standpoint but to actual doing (Sharma, 2007). Thus, the middle manager possesses the ability to promote the school's goals. The creation of interpersonal ties with team members will be instrumental in promoting the goals of the entire organization. One of Rohn's quotes on the subject of human interrelations of leaders is: "be strong but not crude; courteous but not weak; daring but not threatening; considerate but not lazy; modest but not bashful; proud but not conceited; of a sense of humor but not frivolous" (Rohn, 2017).

### **3. Conclusion**

As aforementioned, schools operate equally to business organizations. Same as a business organization the school is headed by a principal. As opposed to schools, the process of incorporating middle management in leading the business organization has been known for decades and has been widely researched (Harris et al, 2003). Therefore, it is not inconceivable that instead of the education system "reinventing the wheel", namely incorporate middle managers in the education system, the education system would, rather, examine the already-familiar process of incorporating middle managers from the business world. It is commonly known nowadays that a great significance is attributed to the role of the middle manager. A middle manager with a proper training, authorities and recognition on the part of the principal is perfectly capable of leading a school to achievements and successes. Conversely, a middle manager holding no authorities would be the "weakest link in the chain", which can result in a situation in which the school's goals and targets will not be met in the best-case scenario, and to a financial calamity in the worst-case scenario. Thus, it is of crucial importance to study in-depth the subject of middle

management in the education system for the benefit of all sides concerned, notably and most particularly, for the benefit and welfare of the students.

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