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PROFESSIONAL NETWORKS OF MIDDLE MANAGERS: ACTING AS SOCIAL MOVEMENTS TO ACHIEVE UPWARDS ENGAGEMENT ABSTRACT

This paper is the first to apply social movement concepts to analyse processes by which middle managers (MMs) develop a common language (currency) to support their attempts to change organizational strategy. Conceptually, this paper extends literature on the strategic activities of MMs by concentrating on collective, rather than individual, activity. Empirically, we draw from a case study of UK public services to surface and illustrate how MMs try to promote changes in strategy concerning the delivery of integrated services to the elderly. This combination of social movement concepts and rich case data shows how MMs use professional networks to pursue strategic change through twin and reciprocal processes of: (1) framing issues *inwards*, towards movement members, and (2) issue selling *upwards*, to top managers.

Keywords: Middle managers, framing, top managers, issue selling, professional networks, social movements

INTRODUCTION

Studies of middle managers (MMs) operating in the public and private sectors have analysed the nature and implications of their dual responsibility for supervising subordinates, whilst being accountable to policy makers and senior managers (Dutton and Ashford, 1993; Currie and Proctor, 2005). Within many organizational hierarchies, it has been shown that MMs can skilfully combine working downwards, in supervising the work of junior colleagues, with

‘issue selling’ and ‘championing’ their desired strategic changes, upwards, to top managers (Floyd and Wooldridge, 1992; Dutton and Ashford, 1993). Whilst previous studies of the ‘upward’ work of MMs have concentrated on the agency (purposeful activity) of individuals, this paper extends a more recent line of inquiry into the potential for MMs to adopt collective approaches to promoting strategic change (Alt and Craig, 2016).

This study began with our recognition that a concern for the role of collectives in mobilising support in support of common causes of concern has long been the mainstay of social movement studies (Snow and Benford, 1988). Within that research tradition, growing attention has been given to elaborating foundational concepts, such as framing, within studies of formal organizational settings (Kaplan, 2008; Mena and Waeger, 2014). Early research in this vein has suggested that effective framing may help enable a coalition of motivated individuals to mobilise changes in organizational strategy (Cornelissen and Werner, 2014; Tello Rozas et al., 2015).

To combine and extend the literatures on middle managers and social movement studies, our paper considers the collective activities of MMs collaborating within inter-organizational professional networks. We concentrate on how a professional network of MMs, working across six UK public services organizations, developed a common language (currency) for promoting strategic change. We offer two main contributions. First, we provide an analytical framework comprising two stages. Stage one, draws from social movement studies, to direct attention towards how the collective activities of MMs, as a network, represents a process of inwards framing towards peers and subordinates. Stage two directs attention to how MMs work collectively to develop a strategy for upwards issue selling towards their top managers. We then apply this framework to our rich case data to show how MMs use professional networks to

pursue strategic change through the processes of: (1) framing issues *inwards*, towards peers and subordinates, and (2) issue selling *upwards*, to top managers.

The remainder of this paper is divided into the following sections. First, we review the literatures concerning ‘issue selling’ in middle management, and ‘framing’ from research into organizational social movements. Second, we explain our case study design with details of the data gathering techniques and data analysis. Third, we present our findings into how a professional network of MMs developed a common currency to frame their desired strategic change. We conclude with an assessment of the conceptual, empirical and policy implications of this study.

CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND

Early studies of how MMs achieve upwards engagement with top managers draw attention to the processes of championing ideas and synthesising information (Floyd and Wooldridge, 1992). The concept of ‘issue selling’ provides a commonly adopted basis for considering the upwards engagement of MMs (Dutton and Ashford, 1993). However, extant research has concentrated on MMs engaging with top managers individually (De Clercq et al., 2001; Detert and Treviño; Mair and Thurner, 2008). Recurring themes within studies considering the contribution of MMs to corporate strategy highlight how they tend to display a narrow functional perspective grounded in one area of organizational activity. This is often viewed as restricting the extent to which they can conceive of wider strategic objectives. Related studies typically identify MMs engaging with top managers to secure support and investment for projects within their professional work area (Rouleau and Balogun, 2011; Wooldridge et al, 2008). Strategic conversations have been highlighted as enabling an exchange of ideas within, and outside, the formality of TMT meetings (Hoon, 2007). Emphasis has also been placed on the

inclusion of MMs at TMT meetings, to enable the strategic decision makers to gauge likely responses from the lower part of the organization (Lines, 2005).

MMs are, therefore, able to contribute to strategic planning without the assignment of a formal role (Jarzabkowski et al., 2007; Balogun and Johnson, 2005, 2004). This is considered in research highlighting how MMs enact upwards engagement through issue selling (Dutton and Ashford, 1993). Associated studies also call attention to MMs proceeding to issue selling on an individual basis (Liang et al., 2002). This expectation becomes more onerous if there is a likelihood that the issue could meet with a negative response, causing a reluctance for the MM to proceed (Milliken et al., 2003). To test the likelihood of success, MMs usually have preliminary discussions with their top managers to assess how ideas are likely to be received (Rouleau, 2005). An example of this is MMs providing regular updates to TMTs on progress to reinforce the awareness of their activities (Raes et al., 2011; Dutton et al., 2001).

A few studies identify the benefits of MMs selling issues on a collaborative basis (Dutton and Ashford, 1993). For example, Dutton et al. (2002) provide a good illustration of a coalition of MMs engaging in issue selling activities towards TMTs. In that study, female MMs mobilise collectively to act on gender equality issues in their workplace. Subsequent studies identify MMs cultivating social networks to target TMTs with collaboratively developed issues (Ahearne et al., 2014). These studies have similarities with research into social movements, exploring the characteristics of collective activist groups, and which we consider more fully in the next section (Kaplan, 2008; Scully and Segal, 2002). We argue that the literature on social movements provides insights into how MMs can collectively sell issues and contribute to corporate strategy (Mena and Waeger, 2014).

Whilst early social movement research focused on the collective and organic nature of movements, thereby downplaying the role of leadership (Goodwin and Jasper, 2014), contemporary research suggests leaders are central to the formation and mobilization of movements, especially in framing the need for change, inspiring and motivating diverse stakeholders, and devising strategies for change (Ganz, 2013). For example, Zald et al., (2005) distinguishes between senior leaders who determine the ‘priorities’ for change, and middle-level leaders who identify ‘possibilities’ for change.

Our work is interested in how issue selling strategies are used collectively by middle managers to build ‘movements’ for organizational change improvement. Traditionally, social movement studies have explored the ways that activist groups support common causes within informal settings; that is, outside of formal organizations (McAdam et al., 1996). This strong research tradition has shown how social movements emerge when several individuals formulate ideas by negotiating through power struggles and tensions (Ryan, 1999). A collective identity for the social movement emerges through agreement on targets and tactics to guide the ideology and defining relational, cognitive, and environmental factors (Davis et al., 2005).

One notable recent development to this literature has seen the application of core concepts of social movements to study organizational reform (Soule, 2013). Organizational social movements are characterised by coalitions of individuals acting against its current values, structures and practices (Van Dyke and McCammon, 2010). Subsequent studies emphasise the value of social movements in identifying complexities associated with organizational reform and strategy (Dubuisson-Quellier, 2013; Kellogg, 2012). Research into social movements has recently identified their collective mobilisation across more than one large scale organization (Tello Rozas et al., 2015). This development highlights an interest in how combined efforts of

multiple stakeholders can alter organizational practice (Diani, 2013; van Stekelenburg and Roggeband, 2013).

Studies of social movements within formal and informal settings share a concern for ‘framing’ (Snow and Benford, 1988). Frames are social constructs that, when communicated, influence how actors interpret and make sense of a given situation (Goffman, 1974). The analysis of frames and framing examines how collective narratives are constructed to shape the meanings and motives of individuals, and in turn, align individual action with the aspirations of the collective movement (Oliver and Johnston, 2000; Snow, 2004). Central to organizational social movement theory is the notion of framing as a means of identifying the factors enabling coalitions to clarify the direction for inwards activities, of movement members (Cornellisen and Werner, 2014; Dewulf et al., 2009). Importantly, framing changes the existing activity of members and facilitates the introduction of new practices (Kaplan, 2008).

To aid the analysis of framing, Benford and Snow (2000) differentiate amongst three framing processes: ‘*diagnostic framing*’ – identifying the need for action, or the problem; ‘*prognostic framing*’ – defining the parameters of action and; ‘*motivational framing*’ – what drives engagement and sustained involvement. This framework is important to our study as it provides a basis for exploring how social movements may gain greater buy-in to their cause, inwardly; that is amongst participants (Oliver and Johnston, 2000; Reinecke and Ansari, 2015). Firstly, we recognise the diagnostic stage as the typical starting point for identifying the dilemma within organizations requiring attention (Benford and Snow, 2000) and the associated mobilisation activities encouraging actors to participate in the social movement (Benford and Snow, 2000). Mobilisation is typified by a proactive group of actors who are keen to muster their collective efforts towards an issue of concern requiring attention and the concept of the collective

action frame enables mobilisation around a cause (Cornelissen and Werner, 2014; Della Porta and Piazza, 2008; Poletta and Jasper, 2001). The value of mobilisation to our study is that it constitutes a “bottom-up” process enabling activists in social movements to influence outcomes (Markowitz, 2009; Tannen, 1985).

Secondly, the prognosis stage defines the boundaries of inwards activity (Benford and Snow, 2000). Prognosis is characterised by much lengthier debates allowing mobilised actors to resolve their differences and determine the best way for resolving problems (Carroll and Simpson, 2012). Prognosis also involves framing contests where actors engage in political struggles on the appropriate course of action to take (Cornelissen and Werner, 2014; Della Porta and Piazza, 2008). This often involves a series of framing contests leading to the emergence of a dominant way forward (Kaplan, 2008; Ryan, 1991). More importantly, prognosis activities are subject to continuous alteration as changing circumstances adjust the course of action that the social movement takes. Achieving a desired outcome, therefore, often requires additional negotiations between activists (Van Dyke and McCammon, 2010).

Later research has pointed towards the importance of linkages between framing activities within social movements, and their issue selling towards top managers (Alt and Craig, 2016). Within this context, issue selling identifies the value of change agents able to collectively exert upwards influence. This has commonalities with studies into issue selling where sellers engage in a period of reflection to enable them to carefully judge when to approach the target together with the likelihood of achieving success (Markman et al., 2016; Sonenshein, 2016; Dutton et al., 1997). The framing activity of prognosis within social movements, also informs activists when to adjust priorities in fighting for causes within their organizations (Alt and Craig, 2016). In responding to the dearth of similar research into this activity within organizations, we focus on

MMs who work within inter-organizational professional networks to upwardly influence strategy. We address this gap by considering how the inwards activity of framing interacts with the upwards activity of issue selling to top managers.

RESEARCH DESIGN

The analysis reported in this paper applied the framework described above to examine how MMs worked collectively within an inter-organisational professional network in pursuit of organizational change. Our focus, here, is not the content of the focal, Home Improvement Agency (HIA), change process designed to better coordinate the delivery of services to vulnerable adults (see below for outline, and Cooper 2016, for further details). Instead, we concentrate on the collective framing process used by MMs to sell their desired changes upwards to top managers, and inwards to subordinates and peers. Our empirical data were conducted through an intensive case study of a professional network of MMs responsible for delivering home adaptations within a UK region, comprising six local public services organizations. This collective partnership addressed the challenges of an increasingly aging population amid substantive reductions in funding causing a potential diminution to service delivery.

Background to the integrated HIA partnership: Between 2009 and 2015, a professional network of MMs developed a model to integrate the provision of home adaptations for older vulnerable adults across a UK region. The partnership devised and agreed methods to minimise inconsistent and duplicated working practices to reduce excessively long waiting times for service users. This resulted in the establishment of a HIA Project Board. Key tasks comprised initiating an integrated HIA delivery model to resolve a fundamental conflict in the delivery of integrated home improvement services to support older people living in their home, and

addressing organizational and occupational boundaries including unproductive ingrained working practices. A key achievement was the creation of a new hybrid role of Housing Assessment Officer combining the skills of an Occupational Therapy Assistant and Technical Housing Assistants. As at June 2015 (the end of data collection on this project), the professional network was working towards wholly integrating the HIA service across a UK region. A major challenge for MMs was gaining the consensus of top managers (political and chief executives) from the six local public services organizations delivering health, housing and social care to agree working procedures accommodating each participating public services organization. This included securing agreement to share financial risk, as well as any benefits associated with this arrangement.

Data collection: We collected three sources of data between August 2012 and June 2015: (a) semi-structured interviews, (b) meeting observations, and (c) archival documentary analysis. Interviews and meeting observations constituted the primary sets of data with archival data being used to provide further validity and to identify macro-level indicators (Reay et al, 2006). A first phase of ten interviews, conducted between August 2012 and February 2013, explored a range of issues relating to the strategic activities of MMs and their interactions with top managers. These informed a second phase of twelve interviews with top managers, conducted during May 2013 to April 2014. A further ten follow up interviews with the HIA project team were then undertaken during April 2014 to July 2014. Interviews lasted for about an hours' duration and were conducted at the interviewee's workplace. Specific issues were probed in greater detail, including requesting specific examples from MMs of how they had engaged with top managers. Topics were explored through broad questions and probing replies that warranted further investigation. Over thirty hours of field observations reported how MMs discussed strategic

decisions. Detailed observation notes, averaging nine pages per meeting, were written up as a record. A story board, action plan, and HIA business case produced by the HIA project team provided a further rich source of information. A documented summary of the day-to-day activities comprised twelve project team agendas; eleven sets of minutes of meetings, six quarterly performance management reports, eight budget sheets, five risk registers and five progress reports. These data sources, summarised in table 1, combined to help provide a deep understanding of the research area, and the issues reported in this paper (Bryman and Bell, 2003; Gephart, 1993).

Insert table 1 about here

Data analysis: Our data analysis commenced with an exploration into the broad concepts associated with the activities of the professional network of MMs as they attempted to create a common currency to foster upwards engagement and sell issues (Dutton and Ashford, 1993). Initial coding of data began by assembling the documents, field notes and interview transcripts into a single data file. Data were then integrated into NVivo software for initial coding, Further coding of the data followed the principles of progressive focussing (Stake, 1995) towards the professional network of MMs. This activity coded data to identify examples of collective issue selling. The next stage consolidated codes in an iterative fashion (Grbich, 2007). These sought meaning and developed interpretive explanations and subjecting this to critically determine what was going on and building up a picture of the emerging data (Pratt et al., 2006)

We also used inductive and deductive reasoning by travelling to and from data and theory (Locke, 2001) to determine categories and themes on activities associated with MMs utilizing the framing components of diagnosis and prognosis and mobilisation to explore their collective approach to issue selling (Strauss and Corbin, 1990; Benford and Snow, 2000; Dutton and

Ashford, 1993). The subsequent analysis of the data explored specific examples of framing and issue selling outlined in the focal academic literatures. Examples were not, therefore, always explicitly discussed during the interviews. Instead some emerged by analyzing the data in an iterative and systematic fashion (Pratt, 2006 et al., Corley and Gioia, 2004). Analysis of the qualitative data subsequently identified nine aggregate activities associated with the components of diagnosis, mobilisation, prognosis and honing enabling MMs to develop a common currency. These activities associated with creating a common currency within a social movement for upwards engagement are summarised in table 2.

Insert table 2 about here

DEVELOPING A COMMON CURRENCY FOR UPWARDS ENGAGEMENT

This section provides an analysis of the empirical data focusing on how the professional network of MMs developed a common currency to engage upwards towards top managers. Firstly, the professional network utilised the aggregate inwards activities of defining and verifying to undertake an initial diagnosis of the problem area concerning how the delivery of home adaptations to older and disabled adults could operate more effectively. The aggregate inwards activities of enlisting and coordinating enabled MMs to mobilise their collective activities to deliver services more effectively on an integrated basis. Secondly the professional network of MMs performed an ongoing inwards prognosis of the effectivities of their activities through the aggregate activities of adapting and shaping in response to current and future political and organizational changes. Thirdly, the professional network proceeded to the upwards aggregate activity of honing issues through the aggregate activities of cultivating, demonstrating and positioning. The next subsections provide a detailed consideration of the specific stages for developing a currency within a social movement.

(1) Diagnosing the problem and mobilising the workforce: An early task for the professional network of MMs was to define the key priorities for improving the HIA service. Inwards activities included integrating its delivery across all six local public sector organizations, redesigning job roles and focusing on initiatives that would reduce costs. A key task was to tackle expectations of organizational cultures that were heavily entrenched in measuring performance frustrating endeavours to achieve improvements to service delivery. The following example demonstrates how service users had their waiting time increased by firstly, registering with the local public-sector organization delivering social care before having their case referred to the local public-sector organization delivering housing for action.

We knew the performance indicator regime was actually working against us because working in local public sector housing organizations we were saying to ourselves when the case came to us we did it in 15 days aren't we fantastic? The fact that the poor devil had been waiting 6 months before that while he had been banging around in the local public sector social care organization was of no concern to us and that was wrong. *(Interview with local public-sector organization housing manager)*

This demonstrates how a partnership approach enabled MMs to diagnose what was wrong with current processes. It also enabled the partnership to define problems with working to different performance indicators stipulated by the two local public sector organizations (social care and housing), establishing that this combination provided a poorer service to the customer. Further evidence from our study observed the collective inward activities of the professional network of MMs discussing how to define a future operating model for integrated service

delivery. Interviews with top managers indicated support for the professional networks' adaptation of HIA services to deliver efficiencies.

The HIA project board, established by members of the professional network enabled MMs to formally organise their collective inwards activities. As such it had commonalities with motivational framing activities within social movements. There was collective agreement within the professional network that their inwards activities needed to be verified by progress reports to provide proof of their collective achievements. These activities were benchmarked against what had been achieved prior to a partnership approach to service delivery. This ensured that MMs could demonstrate that the integrated service delivered efficiencies to home adaptations. The following example demonstrates the necessity for documentary evidence to provide to top managers.

One of the things I struggle with is having that evidence on paper. That this is what it has achieved, the performance measures. That is something I've grumbled about constantly in recent months. Not because I don't believe it is not moving forward and it is achieving because it clearly is (*Interview with local public-sector organization housing manager*).

This demonstrates the efforts of the professional network of MMs to break down budgetary systems across local public services organizations to facilitate integration. Our subsequent interviews with top managers also confirmed that these activities had their full support, demonstrating the effectiveness of a collective approach to the upwards activity of issue selling. In producing concrete evidence, the professional network also created an environment where their inwards activities were rigorously monitored. This evidence could then be used as a lever to gain and sustain the upwards approval of top managers.

The professional network of MMs mobilised its activities through the HIA project board which defined the criteria for membership. It also established and monitored the expectations of the HIA project team. This was necessary to ensure that the concept of delivering the HIA project through an integrated service delivery model gained the support from TMTs. We observed discussions between MMs within the professional network at a HIA project board meeting discussing the implications of potential changes to the composition of TMTs arising from local elections. A change in overall political control would mean a corresponding change to the chief elected member (top manager) holding the political portfolio for delivery of their service. These conversations revealed how the partnership developed collective methods to ensure that the profile of the HIA project was maintained by bringing it to the attention of potentially newly elected members (top managers) to their local public-sector organization as soon as possible (*Field note Ref 179: 30/01/15*).

Mobilising activities jointly identified and tackled areas where duplication of activities had been recognised together with deciding methods to multi skill the workforce. This also provided the opportunity to accommodate the political tensions that arose across local public-sector organizations within the professional network. An observation at a HIA project board meeting provided confirmation of the need for MMs to provide a convincing argument to top (political) executives that the HIA project was being coordinated effectively. These discussions also revealed how MMs were conscious of the fact that current provisions for delivering the HIA project would only remain viable if they could provide convincing arguments that alternative provision through outsourcing would prove to be a costlier option (*Field note Ref 123: 28/03/14*).

(2) Prognosis of the effectiveness of activities: Key inwards tasks for the professional network were to specify the parameters of the project and define methods for engaging with the workforce. This also involved fitting collective partnership activities within the expectations of their individual organizations. In the initial phases of the project there was agreement to produce a business case to set out a proposal for improving and exploring the future delivery of housing adaptations and the range of services provided across the local public-sector organization delivering social care and local public-sector organizations delivering housing. This included justifying collaborative working on the basis that this would streamline access to the service and ensure a coordinated delivery to service users at the point of entry. It was further warranted on the basis that it made the best use of resources and promoted integrated service delivery. The organizational benefits identified included breaking down organizational and professional barriers that hindered shared working; establishing procedures and protocols to share benefits, resources and expertise; shared risk and greater understanding between organizations. The business case was subject to alteration to meet the requirements and expectations of subsequent major organizational or political changes.

A key inwards activity for the HIA project board was to allocate responsibilities for the work activities of MMs within the professional network. Upwards methods for apprising top managers of these work activities were also regularly discussed at project board meetings. The following example demonstrates how this involved a fine-tuned approach to maintain the buy-in of top managers towards the HIA project through regular one-to-one meetings:

I have obviously made sure that people are kept up-to-date on those things. I work with my portfolio holder [my top manager] very closely. I have a meeting with her every fortnight and I make sure that she understands the whole project. As we

have been going through this exercise it is important that the evolving narrative is understood and that [top manager] is able to give me a strategic steer (*Interview with local public-sector organization housing manager*).

This provides evidence that collective activities within the HIA partnership were complemented by MMs holding regular meetings with top managers. These built up a rich picture of the key activities of the integrated partnership. The fact that meetings took place regularly provides an indication of the attention paid by MMs to ensure top managers were regularly updated on project-activities. It also demonstrates how MMs utilised this regular contact time to guide the general direction of project activities to sustain its viability.

(3) Honing and issue selling: MMs used their professional network to develop a common currency by securing upwards engagement through issue selling. This was evidenced by their collective discussions to enlist top managers as allies in support of HIA project activities. Cultivating effective relationships with top managers involved the professional network developing terminology to secure engagement. One MM emphasised how the fact that the integrated HIA project was operating as a pilot cultivated an effective relationship. The following example demonstrates how a MM gained reassurances by making top managers feel comfortable with the idea that new activities fell within the auspices of a pilot.

The pilot is the only way that that is making any progress, because people are comfortable, because they feel reassured that they can bring it back in-house. They can deliver it themselves. Ultimately, they see this as an experiment and there is limited risk. The reality is there is a lot of risk because there is nothing else. (*Interview with local public-sector organization housing manager*).

This also illustrates that MMs were deliberately using methods to sustain their upwards relationship with top managers. In this example, a return to the old ways of working would mean rebuilding the entire team and was not a viable prospect. It also demonstrates the importance of cultivating effective relationships with top managers to sell innovative ideas and concepts. This activity is based upon adopting an approach that is likely to gain acceptance and meet with approval. Subsequent activities involved MMs finding opportune moments to engage with top managers to demonstrate how an integrated service delivery could yield financial effectiveness. This included providing positive examples that demonstrated value for money.

The collective network of MMs demonstrated the effectiveness of the HIA project to TMTs by articulating its benefits and branding the integrated service to raise its profile. The following example reveals the strength of selling the HIA project based on its integrated working arrangements by forming a partnership with other local authorities:

This is a good example of integrated working... which is the big political move at the moment. It is a good example of how organizations in the county are trying to stay together and deliver something and not walk away from the table even when it gets difficult. It has a good story to tell in terms of reducing crisis for the people that we are trying to support by making sure that the waiting lists are minimised and there is a timely response by the teams (*Interview with local public-sector organization social care manager*)

This example illustrates the political significance of delivering the integrated HIA service in partnership with other local public-sector organizations. It demonstrates the necessity of gaining buy-in from top managers to provide support for the initiative. The fact that MMs from several different local public-sector organizations were persevering with the concept of forming

a coalition to deliver home adaptations was perceived as being a key bargaining tool. It could be used to encourage TMTs to support the concept of integrated service delivery. The mechanisms that supported this were predicated on the basis that partnership working would produce efficiencies in reducing the length of time that vulnerable individuals remained on waiting lists.

The professional network of MMs sought collective ways to raise awareness of the service within the healthcare arena and align their activities to the strategic priorities of these public-sector agencies. A documentary analysis of The HIA business case demonstrated how MMs had jointly produced this for providing information to sustain and maintain the buy in from TMTs. This document emphasised their requirement of sustaining sufficient funding to complete the project through the continued support of top managers. Observations at a HIA Project Board meeting confirmed that the HIA Business Case was subject to strict regulation requiring sign-off by TMTs before it could be functional as a working document. A HIA project team meeting provided a detailed observation of MMs discussing protocols for obtaining sign-off for the business case within their respective public-sector organization (*Field note ref 6: 30/11/12*). Protocols for sign-off ranged from briefing the chief executive (top manager); gaining approval from the portfolio holder (top manager) and a possible referral to the scrutiny committee; seeking approval from housing subcommittee and approval or ultimately gaining sanction from the full cabinet (a TMT comprising the following top managers: leader of the council and senior elected members). The success in obtaining approval was contingent on the MMs ability to successfully champion the HIA project.

(4) Developing a common currency to frame and sell issues: We have sought to explore three stages utilised the professional network of MMs in developing a common currency as a means of achieving collective methods to change the delivery of their service and upwardly

engage with top managers. This enabled the inwards aligning of HIA project activities to secure its acceptance and sustain its long-term viability. Inwards activities involved firstly, defining and verifying activities enabled the professional network of MMs to form a diagnosis of the problem area and the aggregate activities of enlisting and coordinating enabled the mobilisation of integrated service delivery. Secondly, inwards activities associated with adapting and shaping enabled the professional network to undertake an ongoing prognosis of their endeavours. The upwards aggregate activities of cultivating, demonstrating and positioning provided the professional network with the opportunity to collectively hone methods for selling issues to top managers. Our focus on the prognosis stage of framing and the honing stage of issue selling also provides the opportunity to consider how both activities have been utilised by the professional network to make desired alterations by inducing feedback during their contact with top managers. These activities are summarised in Figure 1: Network of Middle Managers as a Social Movement.

Insert Figure 1 about here

Within Figure 1, the aggregate activities represent a summary of the collective inwards activities of framing (Kaplan, 2008; Benford and Snow, 2000) and the collective upwards activities of issue selling (Dutton et al., 1997; 2001) within the professional network of MMs.

DISCUSSION

Whilst previous studies have reported a reluctance for MMs to proceed to issue selling when there is a likelihood that issues would be received negatively (Milliken et al., 2003), our study reports a case of MMs overcoming individual apprehensions by operating collectively to frame their activities, prior to selling issues. By moving beyond the traditional focus on the

individual endeavours of middle managers (Detert and Trevino, 2010; Mantere, 2008), this paper has provided new insights into how MMs within a professional network can work across organisational boundaries to sell issues collectively.

Developing a common currency of inward activities: In common with the initial stage of framing in social movements, we identify how actors inwardly diagnosed the dilemma that they were attempting to address (Benford and Snow, 2000). We add to previous research by identifying how an internal collective approach enabled MMs to upwardly substantiate their activities with top managers (Grant and Ashford, 2008). By focusing our attention towards the inwards activities of MMs working in a professional network, we identified a commonality with activist groups that formed social movements within organizations (Mena and Waeger, 2014). We extend the literature on MMs by drawing from social movement studies to demonstrate how their inward activities enabled them to operate as a professional network. Our study of the inward activities of a network of professional MMs provides a contribution to the literature by drawing a clear association with their collective endeavours and framing activities across organizations (Dewulf et al., 2009).

Developing a common currency of upwards activities: Figure 2 provides a visual summary of the relationship between prognosis and honing activities as they relate to the inwards activity of framing and the upwards activity of issue selling.

Insert figure 2 about here

A good example of the way prognosis activities was guided by the upwards activity of issue selling was through feedback from top managers. An illustration of this was a requirement to seek innovative ways to achieve cost savings identifying how the professional network of MMs utilised principles of collective action framing to mobilise a course of action in response to

this (Pol Wry et al., 2011). Our study also demonstrates how a series of framing contests were enacted to determine the best course of action to take (Kaplan, 2008). Progress on these contests was determined by the extent to which the consensus of the professional network felt that their inwards activities would gain the upwards acceptance of top managers (Cornelissen and Werner, 2014; Kaplan, 2008). Our own feedback from top managers revealed that the professional network had not yet reached the stage of being able to adapt their activities to mainstream strategic priorities. During the prognosis stage, we found that, in common with social movement research, the professional network of MMs had embarked on inwards negotiations, following feedback from upwards exchanges with their top managers when engaging in issue selling activities (Van Dyke and McCammon, 2010). This was again substantiated from our interviews with top managers who provided us with positive feedback indicating their general satisfaction with the activities of the HIA project team in reducing waiting times for home adaptations with customers.

A major challenge faced by the professional network of MMs in our study was to develop individuals' skills to sell issues associated with benefits of jointly delivering home improvements through an integrated partnership. Honing involved a collective judgement of the situation, prior to upwardly selling this issue, enabling internal discussions to take place within the network to decide whether specific approaches would be received favourably or unfavourably by top managers (Dutton et al., 1997). This activity enabled members of the professional network of MMs to discuss the promotion of ideas using formal and informal methods relating to how integrated service delivery could add value by reducing areas of duplication (Barnett, 2008; Howell and Boies, 2008). Evidence from interviews with top managers indicated that these efforts were not always successful because attempts by the professional network of MMs to

upwardly cultivate and maintain relationships were not deemed to be totally effective. Top managers attributed this to the complexity of their role and the numerous activities that they were continuously involved in. We have considered the body of research identifying the ways that individual MMs sell issues as a means of facilitating upwards engagement with top managers (Raes et al, 2011). In doing, so we address a current weakness in the literature on issue selling which considers how individual attempts of MMs seek engagement (Barnett, 2008).

CONCLUSION

Our study has enabled us to extend understandings of how MMs influence organizational strategy by collectively developing an approach to sell issues (Ahearne et al., 2014). Specifically, we identify how the prognosis activities identified in previous studies of activist groups can be applied to a new context identifying how a professional networks of MMs inwardly framed ideas to assess when it would be conducive to proceed to issue selling (Mena and Waeger, 2014). This enables us to build upon previous literature by establishing how MMs strategically become involved in honing activities to upwardly call attention to issues and provide information to support this activity (Hoon, 2007). We contribute to recent research into MMs, by establishing the opportunity for a collective approach towards issue selling, directed towards top managers (Alt and Craig, 2016). We further establish how a professional network of middle managers can utilise the components of the inwards activity of framing from social movement studies to support their cause (Snow and Benford, 1988). This has enabled us to contribute to the concept of framing (Kaplan, 2008) by extending its application across a partnership of individuals motivated to organise their inwards activities across several organizations prior to upwardly selling issues to top managers (Cornelissen and Werner, 2014; Tello Rozas et al., 2015; Dutton et al., 1997).

These contributions have significant implications for theory and practice relating to the strategic role of MMs and the extent to which they can achieve upwards engagement, and strategic change. We highlight the importance of recognising the value of professional networks of MMs and, we shift our focus towards the activities of social movements across more than one organization. In common with social movement theory, we have identified that professional networks undertake the precursory inwards activity framing as an antecedent to the upwards activity of issue selling. In the case of our study, this process is enhanced through the development of a common currency to frame the internal activities of a professional network of MMs enabling them to proceed to the activities associated with selling issues upwards.

We point to further interesting avenues for research. Firstly, future studies could investigate whether social movement theory can be applied more widely, in other contexts including commercial fields, to the collective strategic activities of MMs. This would provide a greater understanding into the relationship between MMs, top managers and TMTs in effectively working together to develop corporate strategy. Secondly, by identifying the components of diagnosis, mobilisation, prognosis and honing performed by a professional network of MMs, we identify different combinations of micro activities that can provide further areas for more research into the concepts of framing and issue selling. For example, our study identifies how the components of prognosis and honing enable MMs to collectively contact top managers through issue selling. Further studies could explore the extent to which feedback from top managers enables social movements to tailor their activities to ensure that they remain relevant to current strategic priorities. Thirdly, as our study has concentrated on inwards framing activities and selling issues upwards to top managers with no consideration to the downwards implementation activities of MMs (Currie and Proctor, 2005; Floyd and Wooldridge, 1992). Further research

could be undertaken to investigate the extent to which professional networks of MMs are effective in applying changes to service delivery amongst their subordinate staff.

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Table 1: Summary of data collected

Activity	2012	2013	2014	2015
Documentary Analysis	4 scoping documents 3 minutes from meetings 2 Measures performance reports 1 budget sheet	4 Scoping documents 6 minutes from meetings 4 measures and performance reports 4 budget sheets 4 risk registers	4scoping documents 7 minutes from meetings 4 measures and performance reports 4 budget sheets 3 risk registers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 6 scoping documents • 5 minutes from meetings • 4 measures and performance reports • 1 risk register
Meetings observations (HIA Project team meeting)	July (Initial scoping meeting – 2 hours) September (2 hours) September (2 hours) November – (2 hours)	January (2 hours) February (2 hours) April (2 hours) May (2 hours) June (Workshop - 6 hours) July (2 hours) August (2 hours) October (2 hours)	January (2 hours) March (2 hours) August (2 hours) October (2 hours) November (2 hours)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • January (2 hours) • March (2 hours) • April (2hours) • May (2 hours) • June (2 hours)
Semi structured interviews (each lasting more than 1 hour's duration)	14 middle managers	4 middle managers 5 internal top managers 4 external top managers	8 middle managers 1 internal top manager 3 external top managers	

Table 2: Developing a Common Currency within a social movement for upwards engagement

Description	Aggregate Activity	Rating	Component	Examples
Integration of service delivery Job redesign Initiatives to reduce costs	Defining	Strong	Diagnosis / prognosis	<p>Professional Network: MMs were observed having discussions in a project board meeting on how an integrated approach to HIA service delivery could lead to a reduction on financial pressures (<i>Field note 21: 26/03/13</i>).</p> <p>Top Managers: So, our (MMs) role has been basically coordinating feeding information in reporting back to us on the progress attending project meetings all of that. (<i>Interview with District Council Top Executive</i>)</p>
Specifying parameters of project Engaging with workforce Meeting organizational expectations	Adapting	Low		<p>Professional Network: How we've done that is to have each of them shadowing each other. So, two people have become one person and so they've done visits together to try and do some skill exchange. And then we'll do formal training to underpin that. So that's been innovative in that sense and that is exciting (<i>Interview with County Council Social Care Manager</i>)</p> <p>Top Managers: We did have an annual awayday but it was such an intense day talking about all sorts of different models. The whole day was brilliant it was really good. However, I came away confused. I did not come away saying I want to buy that. (<i>Interview with County Council Social Care Top Executive</i>)</p>
Producing progress reports Benchmarking performance	Evidencing	Strong		<p>Professional Network: We observed discussions between MMs clarifying the accuracy of end to end times in order to measure the exact commencement and completion dates for recent home adaptations that had been installed (<i>Field note 87: 30/08/13</i>)</p> <p>Top Managers: It is providing certainty to our budgets because clearly if you are waiting such a length of time. And I forget off hand how long the average waiting time was before. It was nearly a year I believe ... for someone to get a housing adaptation completed (<i>Interview with District Council Top Executive</i>)</p>
Defining membership of professional network Managing expectations of project team	Enlisting	Moderate		<p>Professional Network: Strategically I think we are lacking the profile with the influencers. So, we are not visible with our elected members and maybe chief executives (top managers). I think the HIA board should take more responsibility for those discussions and involvement (<i>Interview with County Council Social Care Manager</i>)</p> <p>Top Managers: I would say I expect a lot and I think that my expectations are fulfilled more often than not. There is a big element of strategy in what they [middle managers] are doing....So I think [my role] is being the navigator and being willing to say "I didn't mean you to go there. I think we're heading for the rocks now" (<i>Interview with District Council Top Executive</i>)</p>
Defining responsibilities and work activities for MMs Establishing project board to govern activities	Shaping	Strong	Mobilising	<p>Professional Network: MMs were aware that they would need to develop their HIA project activities into a formalised service that could eventually operate legitimately in favour of its current project status. (<i>Field note 114: 30/03/14</i>)</p> <p>Top Managers: At the end of the day when they are dealing with a new system and they know that they have been instrumental in changing that system then their motivation levels increase and tremendously increase (<i>Interview with District Council Top Executive</i>)</p>
Accommodating political tensions across organizations Tackling identified duplication of activity Methods to multi-skill workforce	Coordinating	Strong		<p>Professional Network: We the district councils for instance may have managed the budgets for delivering adaptations, whereas the county council has specified what needs to be done. So immediately you have got one saying do this and one saying I ain't got the money I'm not going to do that. By bringing it together you are breaking that down and everyone is aware of those budgetary issues and what you can actually give. (<i>Interview with District Council Housing Manager</i>)</p> <p>Top Managers: It works because they are all local authorities and they are all like-minded and they all had a similar problem. They were running out of budget, by the time they had done the adaptation the person had either died, or the needs had changed. And there were massive queues waiting lists. And nobody really knew how to solve the problem. So, I think has been a really good vehicle of getting like-minded people together because they knew something new had to be done and no one person had the solution (<i>Interview with District Council Top Executive</i>)</p>

Description	Aggregate Activity	Rating	Component	Examples
Managing relationships with TMTs Networking with potential sponsors	Cultivating	Moderate	Issue selling	<p>Professional Network: MMs were observed at a HIA board meeting deciding how best to explain the strategic outline case for delivering home adaptations through an integrated service delivery model to political executives (<i>Field note 210: 27/03/ 15</i>)</p> <p>Top Managers: I don't know what they do in its entirety and it would be the same as if I asked them to come into my world and tried to share my world. It would take quite a long time for them to understand that because it is actually very difficult it is a very complex world (<i>Interview with County Council Top Executive</i>)</p>
Articulating benefits to potential funders Branding service to raise profile	Demonstrating	Strong		<p>Professional Network: A documentary analysis of The HIA business case demonstrated how MMs had produced a document for the purpose of providing information to sustain and maintain the support of TMTs. This emphasised the requirement to sustain sufficient funding to complete the project by maintaining the support of TMTs. Observations at HIA Project Board meetings subsequently confirmed that the HIA Business Case was subject to strict regulation requiring sign-off by TMTs before it could be functional as a working document. A HIA project team meeting provided a detailed observation of MMs discussing protocols for obtaining sign-off for the business case within their respective local authority (<i>Field note Ref 6: 30/11/12</i>). Protocols for sign-off ranged from briefing the chief executive (top manager); gaining approval from the portfolio holder (top manager) and a possible referral to the scrutiny committee; seeking approval from housing subcommittee and approval or ultimately gaining sanction from the full cabinet (a TMT comprising the following top managers: leader of the council and senior elected members). The success in obtaining approval was contingent on the MMs' ability to successfully champion the HIA project.</p> <p>Top Managers: It's a win". We'll improve the service for the customer but we'll save a lot of time and effort in everything else and in what we are doing. So, to me it is just another example of don't tell me why you can't do. And a positive example of even with the most complicated approaches involving a number of partners you can still make some really good progress. And you make success when you have people coming to you and saying you ought to be doing more of this (<i>Interview with District Council Top Executive</i>)</p>
Raising awareness of service within healthcare Aligning activity to local expectations	Positioning	Low		<p>Professional Network: I am back to my personal perspective which is let us be clear on what we are trying to do here. A one single system costed etc. Everyone knows what it is doing. So, it is clear in the Better Care Fund arrangements, and the supporting Health and Well Being strategy and as far as I can tell for the people and organizations around the table that is about as much as we can manage to do together. In doing anything else we are trying to bite off more than we can chew because we are having enough trouble with this. We have been doing it for 3 years we are still not done so that is why I think it is not a project in this traditional sense. It is more of an open-ended development (<i>Interview with County Council Social Care Manager</i>)</p> <p>Top Managers: It has not been commissioned they are just delivering it. We have not commissioned it if they had wanted us to have commissioned it they should have done stage one as the pilot. Done the business case and presented it to us as commissioners to say the cost benefits of this model is x, y and z it provides preventative etc. And focused on stage one as their business model and their business case. Presented that to us and say actually this is really good we really want to either test it further or implement it in an incremental way and let us learn lessons as we do that or shebang let us do the whole lot. They have not done that. They are implementing it already without the commissioner involved. So, they have commissioned it and procured it and implemented it and are delivering it all themselves and that is where we break down every time that is where integration won't work because that is not how you do integration (<i>Interview with County Council Social Care Top Executive</i>)</p>

Figure 1: Network of Middle Managers Developing a Common Currency as a Social Movement

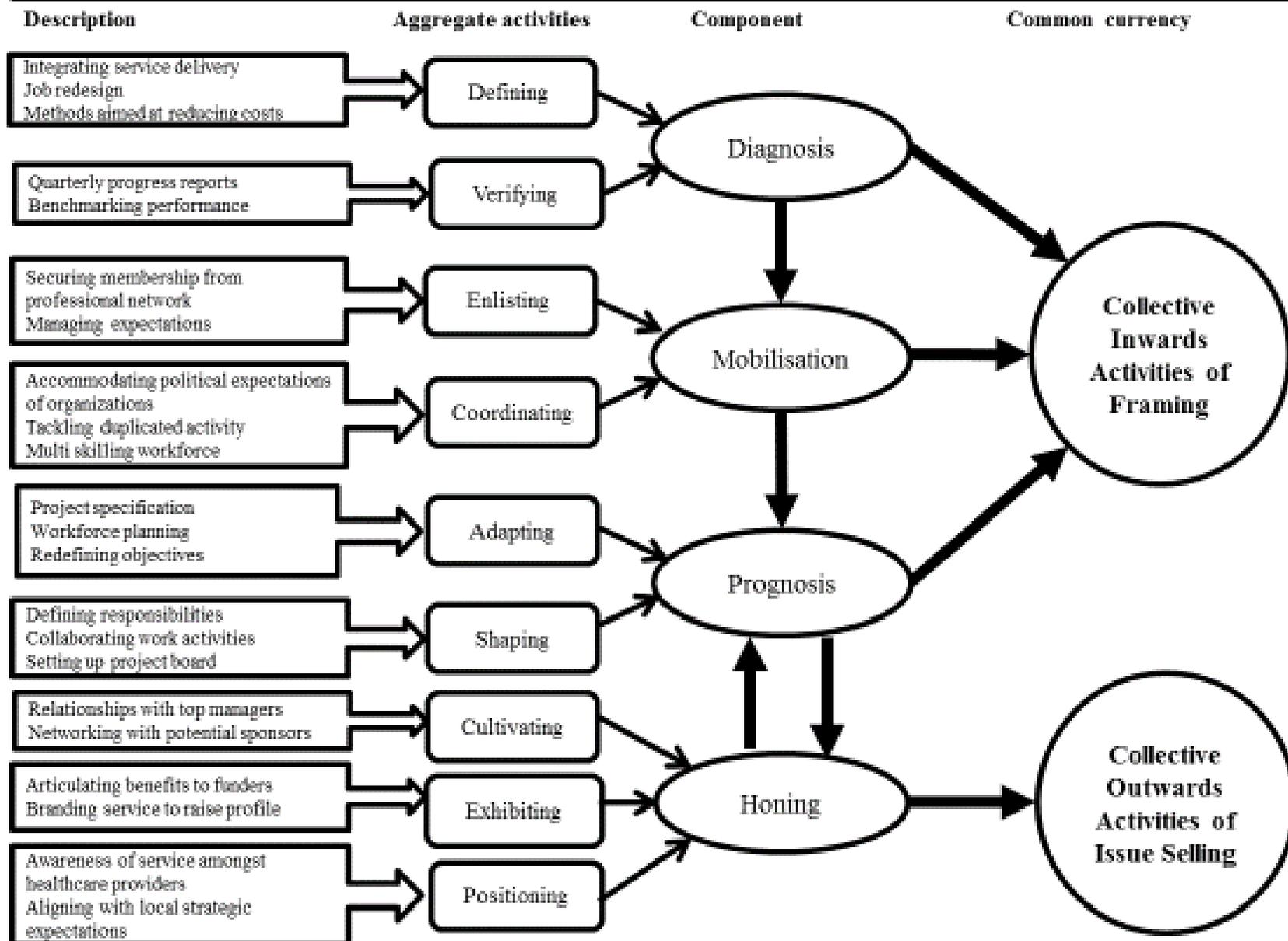


Figure 2: relationship between the collective inwards activities of framing and the outwards activities of issue selling

