

**THE MIDDLE MANAGER'S ROLE AND
PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT NEEDS IN
LAO HIGHER EDUCATION**

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degree of Master of Educational Leadership and Management at
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DECLARATION



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This Thesis entitled: **“The middle manager’s role and professional development needs in Lao higher education”** is submitted in partial fulfilment for the requirements for the Unitec degree of Master of Educational Leadership and Management.

CANDIDATE’S DECLARATION

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- This Thesis/Dissertation/Research Project represents my own work;
- The contribution of supervisors and others to this work was consistent with the Unitec Regulations and Policies.
- Research for this work has been conducted in accordance with the Unitec Research Ethics Committee Policy and Procedures, and has fulfilled any requirements set for this project by the Unitec Research Ethics Committee.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines institutional middle managers in Lao higher education who are vital to the quality of teaching and learning as a large amount of responsibility for the leadership and management of institutional practice is delegated to the middle managers. They have also become a significant force in the higher education context as their expertise and knowledge are widely utilised as the key elements to improve staff and student performance. The middle manager's role is becoming increasingly important and more demanding because of the fact that today's higher education institutions are functioning in a more competitive environment than ever before. The literature on higher education seems to ignore the responsibilities of the role of middle managers. Consequently, the professional development activities which develop middle managers for their role are not recognised; although, middle managers not only are now being overloaded with the teaching and administrative tasks, but also lack clarity for their role and expectations.

This qualitative study investigated the perceptions of senior managers and middle managers in relation to the middle manager's role, the challenges and the professional development needs. Two data gathering methods were employed as six senior managers from three faculties in one Lao higher education institution were interviewed while at the same time thirty middle managers were surveyed with a questionnaire.

The findings of this research showed not only many of the difficulties that middle managers encountered, but also the demands and complexities of the middle manager's role. The findings of this research also indicated that the middle manager's role was not clearly defined in the participating faculties; even though, their contribution was becoming increasingly important. Consequently, this lack of clarity caused problems for middle managers in understanding and developing for the role. At the same time, a lack of time internally to provide development opportunities and limited provision by external providers were identified as issues for middle managers. The study highlighted that middle managers in higher education were ill-prepared and

required support in order to fulfill their dual role of teaching and managing. Hence, there was a need for an investment in professional development at the middle management level if higher education faculties wanted to survive in today's higher education competitive environment.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ADB:	Asian Development Bank
ASEAN:	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
CEO:	Chief Executive Officer
HE:	Higher Education
HODs:	Heads of Department
HRM:	Human Resources Management
MD:	Management Development
PD:	Professional Development
UREC:	Unitec Research Ethics Committee

Chapter One

INTRODUCTION

In a large higher education institution in Laos, middle managers are in a crucial position in the organisations because they have a direct role in improving teaching and learning within their departments and organisations. They also play a critical role in determining an organisation's success as they serve both the organisational and individual interests. In other words, these managers have a key role in mediating tensions and change and in filtering competing messages from above and below (Kallenberg, 2007; Shain & Gleeson, 1998). According to Cardno (1995), institutional middle managers work at the interface between teaching students and managing staff so that leading and managing employees, described by Rudman (2003) as assets that are also fundamental to the organisation to achieve competitive advantage. This is echoed by Bush and West-Burnham (1994) and Kallenberg (2007) who further state that to achieve a competitive advantage in today's global education environment, it is crucial for organisations to focus on their middle managers as intellectual assets who work with and through others to enrich the core work of organisations. Middle managers in higher education have a critical part to play in organisations, and it is very important for an organisation to have effective middle managers.

This chapter will firstly set out the background for the research. The research rationale will be then explained. The research aims and questions will be explored in the following section. Finally, the thesis will be outlined.

1.1 BACKGROUND

Middle managers in today's higher education environments are considered as an integral part in enhancing and sustaining organisational performance because they are vital to the quality of teaching and learning. A large body of recent studies have also shown that a large amount of responsibility for the leadership and management of learning practices have been delegated to

middle managers who are in the position of the heads of departments in higher education. The role of heads of departments in Lao higher education is now being held responsible for both teaching and managerial tasks. Consequently, middle managers often have difficulty adjusting to their dual role as an educational leader and manager (Bennett, Newton, Wise, Woods & Economou, 2003; Kerry, 2005). A wide range of literature on institutional middle managers also indicates that middle managers face not only the challenges of work overload but also possibly confusion surrounding what is expected of them by their senior managers (Clegg & McAuley, 2005).

Ministry of Education (2008) in Laos and Ogawa (2008) note that middle managers as heads of departments in the current situation of Lao higher education are facing massive challenges in relation to their dual role of teaching and managing tasks with a lack of professional development support after implementing the 1995 educational reforms in Lao higher education. Even though an essential key element of these reforms increases the Lao capacity building to respond to the rapid growth and restructure of its higher education system in order to catch up with other ASEAN countries educationally, economically and socially. However, more research is needed to investigate the middle manager's role, the challenges and the professional development needs as institutional middle managers in the higher education context.

Asian Development Bank (2000) and Ogawa (2008) state further that the rapid growth and change in Lao higher education are considered as the first priority and the most significant engine for Laos to achieve its Millennium Development Goals by 2015 in order to elevate the country from its current state of developing to well-developed by 2020. Nevertheless, this rapid growth in Lao higher education has brought many issues and challenges that need to be addressed such as a higher demand for qualified human resources according to Boupha (2008) and Ogawa (2008). Whereas there has been a critical shortage of qualified and experienced lecturers, managers and administrators in Lao higher education, appropriate professional development programmes and activities for those people have been rarely found in developing

countries (Asian Development Bank, 2000; Boupha, 2008; Ogawa, 2008). Chapman (2002) questions how the higher education institutions in developing countries could provide an adequate standard of education for the working class when there is little evidence of professional development for middle managers. For instance, the public expenditure in Lao higher education on professional development for lecturers and administrators especially, in the sphere of the management education and training for middle managers in higher education, is low when compared with the average expenditures for education in developing countries according to Ministry of Education in Laos (Ministry of Education, 2008). This reflects the reality that the vast majority of the middle managers in Lao higher education often come to the middle manager's role without prior managerial knowledge and skills.

My personal role as a middle manager in another Lao higher education institution prompted me to conduct this study. My personal experience showed there was no clear definition of the middle manager's dual role of teaching and managing; although, as an institutional middle manager, my role was becoming increasingly demanding with a large number of challenges. There was very little professional support to prepare me adequately for my role as a middle manager.

According to several educational researchers (Blandford, 1997; Clegg & McAuley, 2005; McLendon & Crowther, 1998), the middle manager's role in higher education is not widely understood due to a gap in the literature relating to the functions and roles of middle managers. Fitzgerald (2000) also reveals that institutional middle managers face greater challenges in regards to role clarity and professional development provision because there is no professional development offered for the middle manager's role. This confirms that failure to meet middle manager's expectations can have a direct impact on the quality of the middle manager's performance. This gap in the literature and awareness of what the middle manager's role is results in not only tensions for the middle managers but also a mismatch between the reasons for individuals applying for middle managers' positions and their expectations of the job. In addition, it is essential for organisations to investigate their existing middle management

functions and adjust them to suit the needs of the current higher educational context and the needs of the individual middle managers. Therefore, there was a need to investigate the middle manager's role, the challenges and professional development needs of middle managers in Lao higher education.

1.2 RATIONALE

Middle managers are key resources that promote school effectiveness. This is supported by Brown and Rutherford (1998) who assert that middle managers are the key to developing successful departments and institutions. As Blandford (1997) suggests, the key function of middle managers is to maintain and to develop conditions that enable effective learning to take place. Early and Fletcher-Campbell (1989) further identify the role of middle managers as the driving force that enhances the quality of the learning process. Bush and West-Burnham (1994) support this by explaining that an educational organisation relies largely for its success upon middle managers who work with and through others to achieve the common goals. This confirms that the way to strengthen their role would be to have a clear definition of this critical role which is significantly achieved through relevant ongoing professional development. According to Blandford (1997), the middle manager's role needs to be identified for the successful implementation of professional development. This means that there is a need within institutions to develop opportunities for middle managers to meet and to develop management skills and abilities in order to complete the teaching and managerial tasks (Adey & Jones, 1997; Blandford, 1997).

Middle managers in the school sectors are widely recognised as an integral part of leading and developing others to achieve their common goals. Nevertheless, there is little research in the higher education context on the institutional middle manager's role and responsibilities (Hannay & Ross, 1999). At the same time, literature on institutional leadership in the higher educational sector seems to ignore the role and responsibilities of middle managers (Fitzgerald, 2000; McLendon & Crowther, 1998; McMahon & Bolam, 1990). According to the few studies, little is

known about the work of middle managers and how they have an impact on teaching and learning in higher education as the middle manager's role is ill-defined and widely variable. Although the middle manager's role in higher education is inherently integrated with the quality of the institutional teaching and learning, the professional development for middle managers remains the forgotten tier in higher educational sectors (Blandford, 1997; Hannay & Ross, 1999). Thus, there is a need for research on role clarity and professional development needs of middle managers.

Previous research has further reported that whereas professional development is considered by Rudman (2002) as important for people appointed to new positions, a large number of literature points out that there is little evidence of provision of professional development for middle managers related to their new role in higher education (Blandford, 1997; Chapman, 2002; Fletcher-Campbell, 2003). This is reinforced by Adey's earlier research (2000) who further indicates that institutional middle managers in higher education are not frequently receiving the relevant support and training they require to fulfill their positions; even though, their positions are increasing in number as well as complexity. It can be argued that the professional development does not always address the management development needs of middle managers in the higher educational sector (Adey, 2000; Fletcher-Campbell, 2003). Consequently, the majority of middle managers are being appointed to the positions without the relevant support and training. That is why institutional middle managers who often come to the role without prior experience of leadership or management face significant issues adjusting to their role (Fletcher-Campbell, 2003). There is strong potential that a lack of awareness of the role of middle managers results in not only tensions for the middle managers but also a mismatch between the reasons for individuals applying for middle managers' positions and their expectations of the job. Hence, more research is needed to investigate the middle manager's role, the challenges and the professional development needs of middle managers in order to fulfill the middle manager's role.

There is also much agreement that the key obligation of the institutional middle manager's role in higher education institutions is to serve both the individual and organisational interests. This is supported by Leask and Terrell (1997) who describe this obligation as 'meat in the sandwich' while Cardno (2007) further explains that middle managers are confronted with situations where they may not be able to satisfy the conflicting needs of the individual and organisation as the demands of these two parties are never equally met. Despite the diversities and complexities of the middle manager's responsibilities, it is crucial to give institutional middle managers deep understandings of their role through the provision of professional development in order to enhance teaching and learning in higher education (Blandford, 1997). Cardno (1996) argues that it is the responsibility of institutions to identify the professional development needs and make an appropriate provision to meet them. She also explains that "the core function of educational leadership is the management of staff performance through an appraisal system capable of identifying individual developmental needs" (p. 31). Blandford (1997) further points to the fact that educational organisations need a framework of professional development to guide them into providing the appropriate training and support for middle managers. To do this effectively, the provision of professional development for middle management must be linked to a strategic plan and management of resources, of which effective human resources management (HRM) is the most important (Bolam, 2002; Cardno, 2005). Overall, investigating the challenges faced by institutional middle managers in Lao higher education, including the clarity of understanding the role and the way support and professional development are accessed, will inform future practice and research.

This study hopes to highlight the challenges that institutional middle managers face as well as the strategies they can apply to overcome problems. This research has a particular emphasis on analysing the institutional middle managers' expectations and experiences of their role and professional development. This study will hopefully contribute to a better understanding of the middle manager's role and the professional development needs in order to promote institute – wide professional development and to build a positive climate of teaching and learning in Lao higher education.

1.3 RESEARCH AIMS AND QUESTIONS

The overall objective of this research is to investigate the middle manager's role and professional development needs in Lao higher education.

This study aims to identify challenges by examining the role of the institutional middle managers and professional development needs. This research should provide information which will contribute to a better understanding of the middle manager's role and professional development needs in Lao higher education.

Research Aims:

- To investigate the role of middle managers in Lao higher education
- To investigate the challenges for middle managers in Lao higher education
- To investigate the professional development needs of middle managers in Lao higher education

Research Questions:

1. What are the perceptions of the middle manager's role in Lao higher education?
2. What are the challenges for middle managers while performing their role in Lao higher education?
3. What are the professional development needs for middle managers in Lao higher education?

1.4 THESIS OUTLINE

The thesis is organised into six chapters as follows:

Chapter one briefly provides the research background, the rationale and research aims and questions. The chapter also provides a thesis outline.

Chapter two critically reviews a wide range of literature with regards to the perceptions of the institutional middle manager's role, the challenges for middle managers and the professional development needs of middle managers.

Chapter three firstly provides an overview of methodology, the rationale for the selection of the research methodology and the sample selection. The research methods used for data gathering and the data analysis will be discussed in the following section. Finally, the reliability of results will be examined with the ethical considerations.

Chapter four provides the data results and findings gathered from interviews with faculty deans as senior managers and from questionnaires with heads of departments and associate heads of department as middle managers. The data results and findings are organised according to the themes identified.

Chapter five contains a discussion of findings and integrates these with references to the literature reviewed in chapter two.

Chapter six presents conclusions and lists further recommendations for practice. Limitations of the research process undertaken and possible future foci for research are addressed.

SUMMARY

This introductory chapter laid the foundation for the subsequent thesis. It introduced a research background and rationale on which the research aims and questions were outlined. The role of middle managers in higher education was described as a complex one in which they faced challenges and tensions within the current context as they strived to improve learning outcomes for students whilst working with others to achieve their goals. In the next chapter, the literature will be critically reviewed through a wide range of research with regards to the perceptions of the

institutional middle manager's role, the challenges for middle managers and the professional development needs of middle managers.

Chapter Two

LITERATURE REVIEW

INTRODUCTION

Research indicates that institutional middle managers are the key to developing successful departments and institutions because they occupy a vital position in relation to change and restructuring within their educational institutions. This chapter focuses on the literature base including the concept of middle management, the middle manager's role, the challenges and the professional development needs of middle managers. These will be widely reviewed through a range of educational contexts.

2.1 THE CONCEPT OF MIDDLE MANAGEMENT

Middle management is a concept that can be viewed through multiple perspectives. While middle management in the business context can be best thought of as “two levels below the CEO and one level above line workers and professionals” (Huy, 2001, p. 73), “middle managers in schools constitute a layer of management between the senior management team and those at the chalk face” (Fleming, 2000, p. 2). This is echoed by Kallenberg (2007) who states that middle managers are basically caught between several positions, processes and interests. According to Blandford (2006), these middle managers are required to “identify with different tasks and different people, acting variously as teacher, leader, team member” (p.5).

According to several previous studies Blandford (2006) and Fitzgerald and Gunter (2006), the new discourses about middle leadership in education that middle management is increasingly being called middle leadership. This is supported by Starratt (2003) who states that leadership can be also viewed as unique amongst types of administration and management so that middle managers or middle leaders are uniquely placed to have a major impact on an institution and the

quality of its teaching and learning. The research of Wise and Bennett (2003) reveals that one way of clarifying middle managers or middle leaders is to consider that the role of middle managers or middle leaders can be defined in the job description. To be more concise, the job description is described by Woodall and Winstanley (1998) as “a broad statement of the purpose, scope, duties and responsibilities of a particular job or position” (p. 106) while Cardno and Piggot-Irvine (1997) define it as a mechanism for on-going dialogue about accountability and it “acts as a keystone for all aspects of performance management” (p. 27).

There are also some contradictory discussions about the key roles of middle managers or middle leaders as the improvement of institutional teaching and learning are now conceptualised as ‘leadership’ roles rather than management due to a shift using the term leader to replace the term middle manager in some countries (Earley & Weindling, 2004). This is not a case to say that leadership is previously unimportant rather it is more a matter of emphasis. This shift in terminology reflects the dominant discourse which is now about leadership not management where anyone in an organisation can function as a leader outside their formal position (Earley & Weindling, 2004).

2.2 THE MIDDLE MANAGER’S ROLE

2.2.1 Definitions of the Middle Manager’s Role

Institutional middle managers in higher education could be best thought of as lecturers who manage students, resources and the learning process (Earley & Weindling, 2004). This is supported by Cardno (2005) who states that middle managers in the educational sector have two key roles that middle managers “work at the interface between teaching and managing the resources of teaching” (p.17). This is also reinforced by Bush and West-Burnham (1994) who state that the middle management level involves basically working with and through other people and consists of a number of activities such as planning, organising, resourcing,

monitoring, controlling and evaluating as well as leading. Therefore, middle managers who are leaders in specific subject areas have both leadership and management responsibilities.

According to Fitzgerald (2000), the professional standards offer an opportunity for middle managers to define and clarify their own roles, responsibilities and expectations. Outlined also in this document is a “generalised” role of the middle manager and what is missing, is the “notion of team development and leadership” that are “integral aspects of the middle manager’s role” (Fitzgerald, 2000, p. 72). A key role of middle managers is “leadership of a subject” and the use of the nomenclature of “leaders” and “leadership” rather than “managers” and “management” has raised discussions about the leadership and management roles (Smith, 2005, p. 74). Earley and Weindling (2004) comment that while the term “leader” carries with it connotations of vision, direction and inspiration and the term “manager” suggests concepts of maintenance and implementation of policies devised by others, this separation of functions is not clear in a higher education context. Bush and West-Burnham (1994) conclude that a middle manager in higher education is simultaneously a leader, a manager and an administrator who works with and through other people to achieve key tasks and activities. Thus, middle managers in higher education have a complex role where they have both teaching and managing tasks.

2.2.2 The Diversity and Complexity of the Middle Manager’s Role

The nature of the middle manager’s role in the context of higher education institutions is diverse and complex (Clegg & McAuley, 2005). Whereas a large number of studies describe middle management in the higher education context as curriculum specialists only, Fitzgerald (2000) argues that “just who these middle managers were and what their role and responsibilities are have, to a large extent, been ignored by the literature on school leadership” (p. 71). As Fitzgerald (2000) and Gunter and Rutherford (2000) suggest, the activities that define middle managers include managing the work of a team or colleagues such as staff appraisal, the development of quality assurance mechanism and the evaluation of teaching programmes. These middle managers who are required to participate in school planning and policy development are also

essentially acting as the agent of senior management (Clegg & McAuley, 2005; Fitzgerald, 2000).

According to the earlier research of Kemp and Nathan (1989), “the school's middle managers are those people whose role places them between the senior management team and those colleagues whose job description does not extend beyond the normal teaching and pastoral functions” (p. 7). In other words, middle managers in higher education are frequently in a situation where they are the meat in the sandwich. This confirms the fact that middle managers in higher education have a diverse and complex role because institutional middle managers are neither part of the senior management team nor are they solely teachers (Fitzgerald, 2000). This is reinforced by Kallenberg (2007) who describes this position of middle managers as ‘top-down versus bottom-up’. This means middle managers must work in a situation where contrasting forces are pulling them in opposite directions while an important force in this respect is the sometimes opposing expectations of top management on the one hand and on the work floor on the other hand (Kallenberg, 2007).

There is a range of literature on the middle manager’s role and practice in the school sector and less in the higher education sector. Kallenberg (2007) states that research on what middle managers actually do, have in higher education institutions been minimal. Several previous studies also point out that the role of middle managers in higher education is not widely understood due to a gap in the literature relating to the functions and roles of middle managers (Blandford, 1997; Clegg & McAuley, 2005; McLendon & Crowther, 1998). Middle managers have an administrative role within the school as well as a teaching responsibility. For instance, they often engage in a range of school tasks such as classroom teaching; curriculum planning; co-ordinating assessment activities and staff appraisal. This exhaustive list indicates that the roles of middle managers have become multi-faceted, complex and more demanding (Blandford, 1997; Clegg & McAuley, 2005). This is reinforced by Fitzgerald (2000) who states that the

“middle manager has a wide range of responsibilities for both staff and students across a number of levels in a school and directly influences the teaching process” (p. 71).

Busher and Harris (1999) and Clegg and McAuley (2005) further point to the fact that multi-faceted roles and expectations of middle managers are to create and manage the culture of a department whereas Cardno (1996) describes it as the evaluation of teachers and programmes of learning, and O’Neil (2000) refers to it as the building and maintaining of relationships within the department and supporting specific needs of individual colleagues. Many researchers also support this view and describe institutional middle managers as leaders who have not only a complex role, but also the greatest influence (Dixon, 1995; Huy, 2001). In other words, middle managers are “leaders in their specialist field” (Cardno, 1995, p. 17) because the task of managing learners and managing other teachers becomes a middle management function (Blandford, 1997; Cardno, 1995). It appears that the middle managers’ role can be seen as a ‘hybrid’-somewhere in between that of a systematic practitioner and that of a leader within their sphere of influence (Cardno, 1996; Kemp & Nathan, 1989; Piggot-Irvine & Locke, 1999). In other words, middle managers bridge the gap between the visionary ideas of the top and the frequently chaotic reality of the research and teaching staff due to being in a position in which they must find a balance between the temporary hierarchy of their administrative position and the on-going collegiality with their peers (Kallenberg, 2007). Therefore, institutional middle managers are in a critical situation where their role is very diverse and complex.

2.2.3 The Effectiveness of Middle Managers

According to Kallenberg (2007), middle managers in higher education are in a position to be a major advocate of innovations that enhance the quality of teaching and learning. Glover, Gleeson, Gough, and Johnson (1998) support this by stating that “effective teaching and learning depends upon the ability of middle managers to motivate, inspire and support teams of staff” (p. 285) so that the effectiveness of the middle manager’s role and practice is clearly directly affected by the middle managers understanding of their particular role and responsibility.

Central to effective middle management is the ability of the middle manager to identify his/her role at any given moment in the school day. An 'effective manager' would, in practice, differentiate between each management role as required. It is therefore essential that a middle manager understands the nature of his/her job. (Blandford, 1997, p. 4)

In addition, effective middle management is described by Piggot-Irvine and Locke (1999) where they articulate that successful middle management leadership involves the characteristics such as shared vision developed by the team, good modelling by middle managers and staff and delegation of responsibility. The effective middle manager understands the core values and competencies of the organisation to innovate and implement strategy while seeing the vision in reality (Huy, 2001). Samson and Daft (2003) assert that building the managerial knowledge, capabilities and skills of middle managers in higher education is vital because the effectiveness of middle managers could affect the viability and growth of an organisation. Therefore, understanding the essential role that middle managers play in higher education may illuminate those challenges that impact on their working lives. The literature reviewed represents the compulsory school sector and has revealed a gap in the literature available in higher education. The researcher is now becoming aware of the need to investigate the role of middle managers in higher education.

2.3 THE CHALLENGES FOR MIDDLE MANAGERS

2.3.1 Lack of Time and Workload

Time is considered a key tension and challenge to the institutional middle manager's role of managing teams and enhancing the quality of teaching and learning. A large number of studies have shown that a lack of time is indicated as a negative aspect to the middle manager's role (Brown & Rutherford, 1998; Collier, Dinham, Brennan, Deece, & Mulford, 2002; Cranston, 2006; Fullan, 2007; Harris, 2000) because there are just too many demands on the middle management time to do any more (Cranston, 2006). This is supported by Collier et al (2002) who reveal that there is "too little time available to deal with the multiplicity of demands of the position" (p.24). For instance, Hoy and Miskel (2008) explain that time is often a critical

component when working in and making decisions within the team or department, “time is one of two strong constraints” facing middle managers (p. 367).

Middle managers in higher education are expected to carry out a major teaching load as well as managing their team. It appears that work and time pressures culminate into role overload as termed by Glover et al (1998). Several authors also argue that most middle managers attempt to exhibit best practice in the classroom and in managing their own team. It is due to their dual role that the associated work and time pressure negatively affect their attempt at best practice in management and teaching (Cardno, 1995; Glover et al., 1998; Gunter, 2001). In addition, Cardno (1995) argues that there is no time for middle management in schools in that “the time and effort used in administration and management is time taken from teaching and learning” (p. 280). Cardno (1995) further states that “the meshing of two substantial functions: teaching and managing the team, present the most critical challenge for middle managers” (p. 17). Thus, it is difficult for middle managers to place more emphasis on one without the other being affected.

2.3.2 Challenges of the Dual Role and Expectations

Institutional middle managers in higher education have dual roles and different expectations. Busher and Harris (1999) state that the challenge for middle managers lies in the positioning of their role closer to the senior management team which in turn refocuses their role on administrative tasks and management processes. In addition, managing their teaching staff and the expectations of the senior team is a difficult task for the middle manager which is described by Leask and Terrell (1997 cited in Wise, 2002):

At the centre of the management sandwich is the middle manager, working with the practical difficulties and pressures from below, and the higher aspirations from above. While the logic, aspirations and value judgements of senior management may be clear, practitioners living with the daily reality of classroom life may have a difficult view. (p. 337)

Busher and Harris (1999) further state that most middle managers retain the curriculum leadership of the HOD role, but also face the additional role of recognising and supporting the needs of often very diverse subject departments within a faculty. This creates greater leadership demands and may contain tensions and lack of role clarity. As a consequence, a greater number of associated management tasks are delegated downwards to middle managers (Adey, 2000; Brown & Rutherford, 1999; Fitzgerald, 2000; Glover et al., 1998). According to these authors, several factors contribute to the experience of role stress: role ambiguity, role insufficiency, role overload, role conflict, and role responsibility for other people. These dimensions have been associated with various undesirable outcomes, such as, lowered job satisfaction and performance. This may lead to a sense of frustration and feelings of powerlessness by middle managers who feel they are unable to carry out their roles effectively. This role conflict, in turn, can lead to dissatisfaction and disappointment on the part of middle managers because it remains difficult for middle managers to fulfill the new expectations so that middle managers require professional development to enable them to lead change (Macky & Johnson, 2003).

Middle managers in higher education are also called upon by their senior managers to do their work as well as the core work of teaching and managing so that there is an increasing challenge placed on them to perform at even higher levels (Harris, 2000). Fitzgerald et al (2006) point out that middle managers frequently work with and through others which can be seen as a complex and messy role when people are involved. It is more generally the case that the most difficult problems tend to be generated by people who have different experience. Nevertheless, problems often arise without being dealt with effectively and they recur and become “crucial long-term problems that mitigate effectiveness” (Cardno, 2007, p.33).

2.3.3 Challenges of Dilemma Management

There are many dilemmas facing institutional middle managers in higher education when their dealings with colleagues on the one hand and with senior executives and externally driven audit agendas on the other hand (Cardno, 2007; Clegg, & McAuley, 2005; Kallenberg, 2007;

Hellawell & Hancock, 2001). This is echoed by Cardno (2007) who states that dilemmas are “complex, tension-fraught problems that arise when a leader is challenged to achieve more than one objective” (p.33). Most managers find dilemmas exist when there is a tension between a concern for the needs of an organisation and a concern for the relationship between the manager and the individual (Bush & Middlewood, 2005; Cardno, 2007). In other words, the demands of the organisation and individual are never equally met. At the same time, middle managers often see themselves as bridging this gap (Bush & Middlewood, 2005; Cardno, 2007; Fitzgerald, 2000; Kallenberg, 2007). As Cardno (2007) asserts, dilemmas can often put middle managers between a rock and a hard place because many people “believe dilemmas are irresolvable, consequently they avoid having to deal with them” (Cardno, 2007, p.33). Fullan (2007) supports Cardno’s research by suggesting avoidance is one of the most dangerous ways of dealing with conflict.

Another major challenge that middle managers face within the concept of dilemma management is that management dilemmas must be solved. As mentioned earlier, tensions between organisational goals and individual goals can manifest “as tensions between a leader’s concerns to do what is best for the organisation whilst at the same time maintaining a positive working relationship with a colleague” (Cardno, 2007, p.34). Middle managers must first recognise the problem as a dilemma and confront it; even though, people are concerned that they might upset others. They must make a “conscious choice to deal with both the organisational and relational horns of the dilemma simultaneously” (Cardno, 2007, p.34). Otherwise, the dilemma will continue to persist, resurface and the attempts that trying to resolve them, will exacerbate the tension. This is common according to Cardno (2007) because if middle managers attend to only one aspect of the problem they are sacrificing another and not surprisingly the dilemma is avoided.

2.3.4 Lack of Professional Development

Even though middle managers make a vital contribution to institutional improvement, there is a lack of professional development for middle managers in this important role. Fitzgerald et al (2006) assert that the professional development of middle managers is critical to continued

innovation and change. However, the lack of professional development given for middle managers is a challenge signaled by several authors (Adey, 2000; Blandford, 1997; Brown, Boyle & Boyle, 2002). The process whereby lecturers become middle managers is unclear according to Blandford (1997), yet many teachers find themselves in this vital role. Lack of recognised training for middle managers is emphasised in the research by Adey (2000) who indicates there is little surprise that middle managers “are likely to receive no training to prepare them for promotion” (p. 422). This can add further tension to their role as they learn to grapple with the complexities of their job (Adey, 2000; Brown et al., 2002). Hence, this review of literature has shown that there is a need to investigate the challenges for middle managers in higher education.

2.4 THE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT NEEDS OF MIDDLE MANAGERS

2.4.1 Concepts of Professional Development

Professional development can be best thought of as a process that benefits both individual middle managers and their organisations to which they belong. O'Neill (1994) supports this by explaining that professional development is a process by which an individual's career is developed to meet the changes in circumstances and responsibilities within the organisation whereas Brown et al (2002) and Macky and Johnson (2003) believe that individual middle managers must take personal responsibility for the learning they engage in to develop their knowledge, capabilities and skills to effectively manage their professional development and career. This is emphasised in the research by Bush and Middlewood (2005) and Rudman (2003) who argue that professional development is not just the organisation's responsibility it is also that of the individual. The development of individual middle managers plays a critical role in an organisation's survival and success as professional development for an individual is valuable when it fits the context in which they work and addresses the objectives of their performance appraisal (Bolam, 2002; Huy, 2001). In other words, professional development is one of the tools whereby the development requirements of employees and the organisation can be aligned so that “mutuality” or the common cause is promoted. Cardno (2005) asserts that “when professional development is a constant and paramount concern” (p. 293) for professionals then those involved

become professionalised. Therefore, if educational institutions want their middle managers to perform their tasks effectively, there must be some levels of an investment in the middle management development (Rudman, 2003).

According to Brown and Rutherford (1998) and Bush and Middlewood (2005), the way in which a professional development process is implemented impacts on its effectiveness to meet its objectives because of the management skills, abilities, knowledge and understanding that are needed by middle managers to perform their role. Bolam (2002) supports this view by further suggesting that this process is highly likely associated with the organisation's strategic plan and the professional employee's acceptance of the objectives because their knowledge and experience is sought for any strategy change process. In addition, Samson and Daft (2003) describe these professionals as the "powerful strategic weapon" (p. 406) that human resource management (HRM) must develop and retain for the organisation and middle managers are part of this group. Cardno (2005) also believes that a culture of learning needs to be established in order to achieve the effectiveness of professional development within organisation.

2.4.2 Holistic Professional Development

Cardno (2005) proposes a model of holistic professional development, and she states that the driving elements of this model which guide the planning of the professional development programme are educational leadership, performance appraisal and strategic management and review. In addition, effective educational leadership practices linked to the model are to not only create a culture of learning which encourages professional growth, but also to delegate to others so that professional development support is readily available. Furthermore, central to an effective professional development programme is performance appraisal because it is about being able to evaluate and make judgements about performance and demonstrating accountability. According to Bolam (2002) and O'Neill (1994), for professionals this is achieved through the performance appraisal process and effective professional development which develops ownership of the strategy and individual's skills so that the strategy can be achieved. Bolam (2002) supports this

view by further stating that professional development with an individual is valuable when it fits the context in which they work and addresses the objectives of their performance appraisal. There is a strong link between appraisal and professional development as it is through the appraisal process that professional development needs are identified (Cardno, 2005; Brown et al., 2002). The model concludes strategic management and review which requires those in the leadership role to consider the direction of staff professional development and to plan for it. Therefore, when these three elements are considered there is a strong emphasis placed on providing professional development that is “comprehensive and holistic with potential to impact on strategic improvement” (Cardno, 2005, p. 299).

2.4.3 Management Development

Management development is an integral part of the process of organisational development, which is concerned not only with the effectiveness of individuals but also with an improvement in management performance as a whole. Management development enables an organisation to develop its leadership skills within the ranks of its managers and in doing so, enabling itself to spread the leadership responsibilities and manage itself more effectively (Bush & Middlewood, 2005; Cardno, 2005). Management development is a broad concept that identifies that development of the individual occurs through a process of formal and informal work experience (Cardno, 2005; Rudman, 2003). Rudman (2002) supports this by revealing that management development is a specialised form of professional development, as a personal responsibility and institutional obligation. On the one hand, managers receive support and training in gaining skills and abilities needed to manage themselves and others. On the other hand, they are supported by the organisation, a process that extends from induction to expectations for self-development (Bush & Middlewood, 2005; Rudman, 2002).

Management development that is based around improvement for both individual and the management teams within the institution enables the organisation to learn and grow. Many educational researchers point to the fact that middle management development is a central factor

in determining whether a middle manager can perform their role effectively (Blandford, 1997; Fitzgerald, 2000; Harris, 2000). What is needed then is a strategy for management development that places a priority on the professional development of middle managers in an organisation (Fitzgerald, 2000). Fitzgerald (2000) further argues that there is a need for schools “to provide (planned) professional development in the form of management development” (p. 71). McMahon and Bolam (1990, as cited in Cardno, 1995, p. 16) contend that management development is “a process whereby the management function of an organisation is performed with increased effectiveness”. McMahon and Bolam (1990) also suggest that there are three categories of management development activities; namely, management education; management training, and management support despite the fact that the professional development model has to be relevant, planned and integrated into the institutional tasks. Cardno (1995) suggests that it is through middle managers actually experiencing the management development’s three components that they can improve their management practice.

Management education can be best thought of as the education or off-the-job activities achieved through structured, formal, institutional framework and leads to a qualification (Rudman, 2003). This education equips managers with the knowledge they need for managing and is achieved through formal programmes at universities and other providers (Cardno, 2005; Fitzgerald, 2000). These activities are usually courses, seminars, workshops, lectures and like and aim to expose the employee to a wider range of ideas and teachers (Rudman, 2003). Cardno (2005) identified formal qualifications such as university degrees and diplomas as a result of these activities. These types of activity are individually oriented but are generally supported in some way by their organisation.

Management training is described as the process by which managers gain the skills related to their work requirements through practice. The training is specific to the job tasks and to the organisation. This training is achieved through a combination of formal education activities, practical training or guided support. It is vital that middle managers receive training in management development to carry out their role effectively (Bush & Middlewood, 2005). There

is some evidence that training which creates a form of learning community would be most popular, particularly where this involves senior staff within the school to provide support (Brown et al., 2002). In a formalised approach training is linked to human resource needs through appraisal and training systems. However, while Adey (2000) and Brown et al (2000) confirm the notion that middle managers are likely to receive very little training to prepare them for their role, the current literature supports the lack of recognised training for middle managers (Adey, 2000; Blandford, 1997; Brown et al., 2000). Therefore, positions in middle management are increasing in number as well as complexity, yet middle managers are being appointed to the positions without the relevant support or training.

Management support can be defined as the activities given to middle managers that lead to their professional growth (Cardno, 2005). The most effective form of management support is the reflection undertaken in one-to-one coaching and mentoring with senior and experienced managers who are able to facilitate this type of learning (Cardno, 2005; Rudman, 2003). Woodall and Winstanley (1998) state that membership of professional organisations, attendance at professional conferences and subscriptions to relevant publications are also deemed as support for on-going education and provide the opportunities for reflection on practice and the stimulation of new ideas and methods. The review of literature on professional development is restricted to the school sector. Therefore, the researcher has identified a need to investigate the professional development needs for middle managers in higher education.

CONCLUSION

Institutional middle managers are vital to the quality of the teaching and learning within their institution as they have a critical role to play in their organisation. However, a large number of studies have shown that the nature of the middle manager's role in higher education is widely diverse and more demanding as they somehow lack recognition for their contributions and competence, and have limited opportunity for career growth and advancement opportunities. If a higher education institution wants to survive in the highly competitive environment, there needs to be recognition of professional development at the middle management level within their

institution. As Adey and Jones (1998) state, middle managers will benefit hugely if they are prepared for the role and if they receive ongoing professional development. This review of literature has confirmed a gap in the literature available on middle management in higher education. Therefore, more research is needed in the higher education sector on the middle manager's role, the challenges and the professional development needs.

Chapter Three

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

INTRODUCTION

The qualitative methodology is the most appropriate approach for this research study in order to investigate the perceptions of the middle manager's role, the challenges and the professional development needs in Lao higher education. This chapter will firstly provide an overview of methodology, the rationale for the selection of the research methodology and the sample selection. The research methods used for data gathering and the data analysis will be discussed in the following section. Finally, the reliability of results will be examined with the ethical considerations.

3.1 METHODOLOGY

3.1.1 Overview

The methodology determined the choice of tools to be used for collection of data. It refers to a process through which a researcher attempts “to achieve systematically and with the support of data the answer to a question, the resolution of a problem, or a greater understanding of a phenomenon” (Leedy, 1997, p.5). This is supported by Burns (1994) who defines research methodology as a systematic approach to problem solving that involves ongoing collection, analysis and interpretation of data while Davidson and Tolich (1999) identify that “when we talk about methodology, what we are really talking about is a certain order to of philosophical commitment” (p. 25). Bryman (2008) holds a similar idea and explains that educational research is a broader context of social research which is an academic approach to the study of problems of social significance that draws on the resources of the social sciences. According to Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007), educational research is ultimately concerned with not only improving educational practice but also extending knowledge within research traditions and approaches; even though, the issue of what counts as knowledge within a social science discipline, and what principles about knowledge building are appropriate, social research has

been a much debated matter because of having many traditions and approaches to research (Cohen et al., 2007).

As Bryman (2008) states, ontological issues in social science are considerations about “whether the social world is regarded as external to social actors or as something that people are in the process of fashioning” (p. 4). The term ontology as the theory of existence is concerned with social entities and the perceptions and actions of social actors and is linked with objectivism and constructivism (Davidson & Tolich, 2003). This leads to a discussion about whether the natural science process of research is suitable for the study of the social world and raises epistemological issues. Davidson and Tolich (2003) point to the fact that the central concern of epistemology is known as epistemological questions. Bryman (2008) further reveals that “an epistemological issue concerns the question of what is (or should be) regarded as acceptable knowledge in a discipline” (p.13). This is also supported by Keeves (1997) who states that educational research not only draws on many disciplines, but also involves “instruction in the processes by which knowledge is acquired, propagated and used to influence change in the thinking of individual persons as well as change in the structures of society through social action” (p. 277). Husen (1997) holds a similar view and asserts that the ultimate purpose of knowledge arrived at in educational research is “to provide a basis for action” (p. 20). Therefore, when knowledge and prevailing world view shape research behaviour, they form a research paradigm.

According to Cohen et al (2007) and Davidson and Tolich (2003), the term paradigm is used to determine how a researcher pursues the study of phenomenon in the scientific and social arenas. In addition, two classical research paradigms of normative and interpretive contain the researcher’s ontological, epistemological and methodological premises and are viewed as opposite and polarised anchors (Cohen et al., 2007; Davidson & Tolich, 2003). Whereas normative stems from the natural sciences with a deductive approach to research where a theory is generated and the research aims to prove it, interpretive uses an inductive approach on data gathered to analyse so that the researcher can grasp the subjective meaning of the social action (Bryman, 2004; Cohen et al., 2007). They are also likely to be mistakenly interpreted as being in

conflict with one another (quantitative versus qualitative) when this is not really the case at all (Davidson & Tolich, 2003; De Lansheere, 1997) whereas Bouma (1998) concludes that “the difference between quantitative and qualitative research is not one of better or worse but rather one of appropriateness to the question asked” (p. 172). It is crucial for an educational researcher to start with a clear idea of which methodology is going to be used. As Sekaran and Bougie (2010) state, this step helps researchers to design the research in a specific way so that the requisite data can be gathered and analysed in order to meet its purpose. Therefore, the researcher chose the interpretative paradigm because it was the most appropriate approach to investigate the perceptions of the middle manager’s role, the challenges and the professional development needs of middle managers.

The interpretative paradigm, which has its foundations in anthropology, sociology and psychology, is considered the more likely prospect to deliver broad, generalisable conclusions about education that can be used by practitioners (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Lincoln & Guba, 2000). It places an emphasis on gathering data to interpret and understand social interactions, social meaning and social context in which people act (Bryman, 2008). In other words, qualitative research methods focus primarily on the kind of evidence that people tell the researcher and what they do, and this enables the researcher to understand the meaning of what is going on (Sekaran & Bougie, 2010). Basically, qualitative researchers acknowledge the value of the data collection and analysis tools that originated from the scientific paradigm but apply them within a different philosophical framework. The methods of research such as case studies, observations, participant observation and different interview approaches enable these researchers to be part of the situation because they are involved with gathering the evidence and determining the processes of research (Bouma, 1998; Bryman, 2008). Therefore, there is a common belief that an interpretative paradigm focuses on problem insight, and that it provides a deeper understanding of social and environmental phenomena.

3.2 RATIONALE

This study draws on a qualitative methodology with an interpretative paradigm because the emphasis of the research is on understanding individuals' interpretations of their social realities. In other words, this qualitative research seeks to discover the perceptions held by individuals. This means that epistemologically, the creation of knowledge in this project relies on human participants sharing their perceptions and experiences with the researcher. Husen (1997) suggests that the focus for the qualitative research is on trying to understand human beings in their entirety and in their proper context. In addition, Bryman (2004) explains that a qualitative approach allows the tensions and complexities of these social worlds to emerge. Cohen et al (2007) support this by adding that a qualitative methodology allows the researcher to draw on a wide range of methods to understand complex issues and phenomena. It is important to note that the main focus of qualitative research is based on recognition of the importance of the subjective, experiential 'life-world' of human beings (Burns, 1994). Bouma (1998) also asserts that qualitative research allows more continuous reflection on the research in progress, more interaction with the participants in the research, and there is usually more room for ongoing alteration as the research proceeds.

From the discussion, qualitative research seeks to discover the perceptions held by individuals. This study is self-reported research, and it is subjective as it will rely on what the institutional middle managers are discussing about the way they perceive their roles, what challenges they face while performing their role, and what are their perceptions of professional development needs. Bryman (2008) maintains the main focus of qualitative research is studying people and viewing events and the social world through the eyes of the people in a study. Lincoln and Guba (2000) also mention that with qualitative research, the researcher is able to permit readers to hear the exact words of the research participants. In this study, it viewed the problem through the eyes of senior managers and middle managers in order to capture the perceptions of both groups of senior managers and middle managers as to how they interpreted the middle managers' roles, the challenges and professional development needs. Thus, the most appropriate approach for this

research study is a qualitative methodology through the method using interviews with the senior managers and a questionnaire with the middle managers.

3.3 SAMPLE SELECTION

The scope of this research focused on the middle manager's role, the challenges while performing the role and the professional development needs of middle managers in Lao higher education. The research obtained information in one Lao higher education institution located in the researcher's hometown. The criteria for the selection of participants for this study were respondents who were a senior manager or middle manager in Lao higher education. The majority of senior managers who were approached to participate in the interview were mainly faculty deans while middle managers who completed the questionnaire were largely considered as heads of departments. After several contacts with the Lao higher education institution, permission was given to conduct the interviews and to circulate the questionnaire in three different faculties. Three different faculties were located on different sites in order to ensure sufficient depth to the data obtained, and some means of participant validation or triangulation.

The primary data collection for this project was gathered in Laos, obviously a considerable distance from New Zealand, and a country in which not many local people speak English so both interviews and the questionnaire in this study were presented in two languages, Lao and English. The senior leaders and the heads of three faculties in a higher education institution in Laos were initially contacted by email and telephone in order to seek approval to participate in the study. The senior leaders of a Lao higher education institution and the middle managers in the different faculties agreed to participate. Six interviews were carried out, and thirty copies of the questionnaire were distributed in the faculties.

3.3.1 Interview Sample

Six senior managers were selected from three faculties within a Lao higher education institution for the semi-structured interview. In each of the three faculties, the Dean and Associate Dean were interviewed in July and August of 2011. The participants within each site were selected through semi-formal discussions and the most appropriate form of interviewing within this research was an individual face-to-face interview. The semi-structured interviews were an appropriate method in which to access this knowledge and were chosen as a means to achieve the aims of this study. Interviews were done faculty by faculty to ensure the characteristics of each were maintained. Interviews ranged from twenty minutes to thirty minutes in duration. Bryman (2008) suggests that the use of the interview topics is seen as allowing greater flexibility in the interview process. In this study, the interviews were conducted with topics rather than fixed questions, and the most appropriate form of interviewing within this research involved an individual face-to-face interview. The interviews were structured around three headings; namely, the middle managers' role, the challenges for middle managers and the aspects of professional development needs that help middle managers to enhance the quality of teaching and learning (see appendix 1, p. 91). Bouma (1998) and Bryman (2008) both agree that interviews should be recorded and transcribed. All interviews in this study were audio-taped and transcribed. Transcriptions were then translated from Lao into English and sent out to participants so that they had the opportunity to verify.

3.3.2 Questionnaire Sample

Three faculties were approached to participate in the questionnaire and thirty middle managers/heads of departments were selected. Bryman (2008) notes that the participants of the questionnaire are commonly selected through the simple random sample which is the most basic form of probability sample. The participants in this study were selected from each site through the simple random sample, and the questionnaires ranged from fifteen to twenty minutes in duration (see appendix 2, p. 93). Self-completion questionnaires described by Bryman (2008) as the useful tools for collecting data from a large number of respondents were an appropriate

method and were chosen as a means to achieve the aims of the study. Bryman (2008) further states that questionnaires that are completed by respondents themselves are one of the main instruments for gathering data using a social survey design, along with the structured interview.

Despite the fact that the research data collection was mainly in the forms of semi-structured interviews and the questionnaire, each faculty was also asked to supply copies of their middle managers' job description and professional development policies. According to Cohen et al (2007), the job description and the professional development policy can be used to identify the middle manager's role. This can enrich the triangulation of research.

3.4 RESEARCH METHODS

The qualitative research design was used because the aim of this study was to explore the perceptions of the middle managers' role, the challenges for middle managers and the professional development needs of middle managers. Two methods used in this study were interviews and questionnaires.

3.4.1 Pilot Study

A pilot study was conducted because it provided opportunities to examine the aspects of both the interview and questionnaire specifically focused on grammar, wording, and translation. De Vaus (2002) states that the wording in a questionnaire can have a big impact on the results of a study. Two heads of departments and five colleagues within the researcher's previous workplace were used to pilot both the interview and questionnaire. These participants who were involved in the pilot study of the interview and questionnaire had not seen this survey instrument before. These participants who gave constructive feedback on the interview and questionnaire focused on the amount of time taken to complete, clarity, spelling mistakes and general ideas on how the instructions could be enhanced. A questionnaire should be tested with an appropriate sample of

respondents who come from the target population or who are closely similar to the target population in order to get the wording of the questions clear and understandable.

After finishing the pilot, constructive feedback was received from the respondents for example, removing some complicated words and reducing some questions down because it took the respondents over twenty minutes to complete the questionnaire and answer the interview questions. Collis and Hussey (2009) suggest that a pilot study can impact on participant response rate and representation. Based on pilot respondents' feedback, some points were made in order to minimise problems, non-response bias and ambiguities and issues, such as a particular question in the questionnaire had a large number of non-responses.

3.4.2 Interviews

One research method in this study was interviews. Cardno (2003) recommends interviews are the richest resources of data. Anderson (1988, cited in Cardno, 2003) supports this view by commenting that "the interview is probably the most widely used method of data collection in educational research" (p. 32). An interview is a focused debate among two or more people and using the interview in research can assist the researcher to gather valid and reliable data pertinent to the research questions and objectives (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009). Interviews used in qualitative research are focused on investigating interviewees' perspectives. Bryman (2008) suggests that interviews support the research aim in a more useful way compared to using only a questionnaire. It is important to select an interview approach such as semi structured, structured, in-depth or group interviews for the research in order to effectively answer the research questions and objectives (Bryman, 2008; Saunders et al., 2009). The semi-structured interview was used in this study. Semi-structured interviews typically refer to a context in which the interview has a series of questions that are in the general form of an interview schedule but is able to vary the sequence of questions (Bryman, 2008). Overall, the interview of this study was designed for senior managers in a Lao higher education institution to give their perceptions on the middle

management role, the challenges and the professional development needs of middle managers in order to meet the primary objectives of the research (see appendix 1, p. 91).

3.4.3 Questionnaire

According to Creswell (2002), a research design is about providing a framework for the collection and analysis of data. A qualitative approach is adopted because the questionnaire as a data collection tool was suitable for this research study. Bryman (2008) points out questionnaires that are completed by respondents themselves are one of the main instruments for gathering data using a social survey design, along with the structured interview. According to several researchers Bryman (2008), Cardno (2003) and Hinds (2000), questionnaires are the most common means of surveying a population to arrive at a description of their views and allow the researcher to collect large amounts of data in a relatively short period of time. This confirms that the use of the questionnaire is to enable the researcher to seek individual comments from the respondents that provide rich qualitative data by using a form of questioning that would elicit 'deep' responses (Hinds, 2000). A well-designed questionnaire is significantly needed to encourage respondents to participate fully and honestly as well as for collecting accurate and useful data. To achieve that aim a questionnaire should be designed carefully by ensuring that barriers, for example, whether respondents interpret the questions as intended, are overcome before conducting the questionnaire (Rowley, 2003). The structure of the questionnaire should be carefully considered and laid out in a simple form, with use of clear and commonly understood language so that it can be understood by the target respondent (Sekaran & Bougie, 2010). Furthermore, the questionnaire should strongly connect to the research objectives and the questions should cover the issues in order to collect and analyse the data (Sekaran & Bougie, 2010). The questionnaire for this study was designed for middle managers in Lao higher education to express their perceptions of the middle manager's role, the challenges and the professional development needs of middle managers in Lao higher education in order to meet the primary objectives of the research (see appendix 2, p. 93).

3.5 DATA ANALYSIS

Data analysis of qualitative research requires a systematic and explicit approach. According to Lofland, Snow, Anderson and Lofland (2006), there are a variety of ways in which people can approach data analysis despite the fact that the researcher is the central agent in the analysis process which should be pursued in a persistent and methodical fashion. Bryman (2008) supports this view by revealing that data analysis occurs in tandem with data collection so that the process is recursive and dynamic. In addition, Miles and Huberman (1994) point out that data analysis, which occurs continuously through the life of any qualitative oriented project, can be broadly described pragmatically as containing three interrelated processes; namely, data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. Lofland et al (2006) further explain that data analysis involves a kind of transformative process in which the raw data are turned into “findings” or “results” while Bryman (2004) explains that qualitative content analysis comprises of “a searching out of underlying themes in the materials being analysed” (p. 392). This form of analysis enables the use of predefined categories in the process, but allows for refinement of those categories or new ones to be generated. Altheide (1996, cited in Bryman, 2004) refers to this approach as being: a recursive and reflexive movement between concept development – sampling-data, collection-data, coding-data, and analysis-interpretation (p.393).

3.5.1 Interview Analysis

The interview data which was collected from the six senior managers in the three faculties in one Lao higher education institution was audio recorded and transcribed before being identified and transformed into categories. According to Bryman (2008) and Lofland et al (2006), qualitative analysis essentially begins with a series of codes which the essence of coding is the process of sorting the data into various categories while Hannay and Ross (1999) state that the common elements are identified as the basis of the coding system and are applied to all interview data and questionnaire surveys so that they reflect the purpose of the research. The data from this study was formatted and coded which was used to analyse the main themes that address the research questions. The coding involved making decisions about how to classify or categorise particular

pieces of data, establishing coding reliability was a crucial part of the process therefore supervisors were consulted over such decisions to enhance the reliability of the coding.

3.5.2 Questionnaire Analysis

The questionnaire data with 30 middle managers was analysed through the use of a programme called Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) in order to present basic descriptive data and analyse the survey results. The researcher chose this programme because of its useful functions in analysing large amounts of data, and it also facilitated the researcher to carry out several statistical tests precisely and swiftly. Graphical presentation such as presenting graphs, tables and charts is a helpful technique for presenting basic descriptive statistical data that will help readers understand the entire survey more easily. The researcher used a descriptive method to analyse the survey results. In order to apply these methods in the field, reliability of results will be discussed.

3.6 RELIABILITY OF RESULTS

3.6.1 Validity

Validity is an important key to effective research. Validity can be best thought of as the extent to which a question or variable accurately reflects the concept the researcher is actually looking for (Davidson & Tolich, 2003). In addition, Cohen et al (2007) assert that validity is the touchstone of all types of educational research. Several writers further explain that validity is a complex issue and requires one to ask whether the questions used actually measure the concept being researched (Bryman, 2008; Cardno, 2003; Leedy, 1997). By ensuring the validity of both the data collection and data analysis, validity might be addressed through the trustworthiness, integrity and authenticity. Bryman (2008) and Cardno (2003) also state that the use of data triangulation can strengthen the credibility and validity of the research. It might also be improved through careful sampling, appropriate instrumentation and appropriate statistical treatments of

the data (Bryman, 2008). It appears that the researcher has to be confident in the elements of the research plan, data acquisition, data processing analysis, interpretation and its ensuing judgment.

3.6.2 Reliability

Bell (1993) states that “reliability is the extent to which a test or procedure produces similar results under constant conditions on all occasions” (p. 64). Reliability is concerned with not only the consistency of the measure of a concept but also the question of repeating the results (Bryman, 2008; Cardno, 2003; Cohen et al., 2007; Davidson & Tolich, 2003). In addition, reliability has been assured in this research by establishing a clear audit trail and stating the researcher’s position. This means that the processes and protocols of research have been clearly reported, including the methods of selecting participants, protocols for data collection and the data analysis techniques used. Cohen et al (2007) point out that qualitative research reliability can be regarded as a fit between what the researcher records as data and what actually occurs in the natural setting that is being researched so that the coding and intentions of participants are constantly checked to maintain the degree of consistency. For instance, the interviews within this research were taped and transcribed in order to provide participants with the opportunity to check for accuracy. It appears that this process can enhance the reliability or dependability of the research (Cohen et al., 2007). In short, validity and reliability are important evidence in establishing and assessing the quality of research for the qualitative research.

3.6.3 Triangulation

Triangulation is an important method of ensuring validity in qualitative research (Bryman, 2008; Cardno, 2003; Yin, 1994). The use of triangulation, which could involve the use of multiple methods or multiple sources of information to generate data as a validation procedure, is a sound way of strengthening the credibility of a study (Bryman, 2008; Cardno, 2003; Cohen et al., 2007). In other words, triangulation is intended as a check on data due to the careful use of multiple sources can lead to more valid data (Cohen et al., 2007). This is supported by Davidson

and Tolich (1999) who state that triangulation is to use multiple sources of data to collect evidence. In this research, the most significant methodological triangulation was to use multiple source of data collection such as semi-structured interviews, survey questionnaires and documentary sources from the different faculties.

3.7 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethical considerations are an integral part of the research process. Bryman (2008) supports this by explaining that “ethical issues cannot be ignored as they relate to the integrity of a piece of research and of the disciplines that are involved” (p. 133). Whilst the primacy of ethical conduct has driven the design and processes of the research, ethical approval for the project as meeting ethical principles is obtained from the Unitec Research Ethics’ Committee (UREC, 2009). Cardno (2003) points to the fact that the ethics of research focuses on the need to protect people taking part in a study from any possible harm-physical, mental, emotional or financial-in the research process. Davidson and Tolich (1999) further suggest that the five key principles of ethical considerations; namely, do no harm, voluntary participation, informed consent, avoid deceit, and ensure confidentiality and anonymity. Several writers also reveal that participants must be informed about the aims of the research and their role involved in the research (Bouma, 1998; Bryman, 2008; Cardno, 2003; Davidson & Tolich, 1999). This is agreed by Bouma (1998), Bryman (2008), and Cohen et al (2007) who state that participants should be voluntary and kept confidential. In this research, whereas all participants were voluntary and they could withdraw at any time, they were assured that the data and the identity of their institution and faculties were kept confidential. Privacy has been guaranteed by ensuring that all data is kept in a secure place and that access is limited to those who have been disclosed as having access (Bouma, 1998; Cohen et al., 2007). All this information was provided in an information letter attached to the questionnaire.

As a researcher conducting research in my home country Laos where there are many tribes and different minority ethnic groups, I am aware of the ongoing effects of ethnic status. According to

Bouma (1998), awareness that there are always ethical issues involved in doing research is essential. Ethics also plays an important part in educational research and the researcher has to ensure that the research is ethical in its design, its methods, its data analysis, its presentation and its conclusions (Wellington, 2000). I have a professional obligation to preserve their anonymity and to ensure that they were not harmed by my research. This means that while the focus of this research is not on any tribe or ethnic group, it did focus on the organisational structures in three faculties of a Lao higher education institution and could signal a need for further research.

A key ethical issue in my study was to gain entry into the faculties I planned to work with. Key people (deans) whose permission was needed to administer the questionnaire were contacted at the outset. The modes of communication included telephone, email, formal writing and a face-to-face meeting. There was no conflict of interest with the faculties participating in the study, as I had no links with the selected faculties beyond a professional association. I chose to use my own department in a Lao higher education institution for the pilot to pre-test the questionnaire. This is appropriate as I am on study leave and technically, not a staff member for the year, but rather, a scholar-practitioner. It was important that the careful planning of questions and effective co-ordination of the questionnaire dissemination and semi-structured interview are also important considerations from an ethical perspective. Overall, the research design was such that it minimised harm to participants while still achieving the research aims.

SUMMARY

This chapter has provided a discussion of the complex nature of research in the social science field. It provided an over view of the methodology. This research used a qualitative paradigm to gather data to investigate the perceptions of the middle manager' role, the challenges and the professional development needs. A semi-structured set of interviews with six senior managers and the questionnaire with thirty middle managers in Lao higher education institution were the chosen research methods while the data analysis related to each method were discussed. The

chapter concluded with discussion on reliability of results and ethical considerations and how each related to the study.

Chapter Four

DATA RESULTS AND FINDINGS

INTRODUCTION

This chapter will present the data findings being collected from the three faculties in a Lao higher education institution. The purpose of this study is to investigate and highlight the significant challenges of the middle manager's role and the professional development needs of middle managers in a Lao higher education institution. Data from both interviews and questionnaire surveys has identified and contributed to a better understanding of the middle manager's role, the challenges and the professional development needs of middle managers in Lao higher education. The findings will be discussed in terms of the senior managers perspectives and the middle managers perspectives respectively.

4.1 INTERVIEW RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Senior Managers Perspectives

This chapter presented the research findings of the study project based on in-depth interviews with the six senior managers (SM1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6) from three faculties (F1,2,3) in a higher education institution. The respondents were allocated letters with the number respectively in order to avoid identification. The interviews were concerned with middle management practices and namely, the middle managers' role, challenges and professional development needs of middle managers in Lao higher education. The interview questions (see appendix 1, p. 91) were designed for faculty deans as senior managers to express their perspectives of the institutional middle managers. These interviews with the senior managers not only helped the researcher to answer the sub-questions but also discovered their perspectives and attitudes concerning their faculties' middle management practices. Now, the interview findings from the senior managers perspectives will be discussed.

4.1.1 Research Question One: What are the perceptions of the middle manager's role in Lao higher education?

The majority of the senior managers described their institutional middle managers as being in a position where their role was widely diverse, more demanding and complex in today's Lao higher education. In addition, two senior managers (SM5, SM6) pointed out that middle managers had a lot of teaching tasks as well as high demands in administration. Four out of six senior managers further indicated that the role of middle managers was outlined in the responsibilities and duties described in the individual middle manager's job description. The findings from this study also described the role of middle managers as a key driving force developing Lao higher education faculties to enrich the quality of their teaching and learning. Interviewees also emphasised that middle managers carried the senior manager's dual role of teaching and management. This was very close to the senior manager's role because the senior manager's responsibilities were frequently passed on to the middle managers and the following comments were representative:

I think that the middle management role is located in the faculty where middle managers are involved in managing the work of others (SM1).

I realise that I cannot lead and manage all the work of the faculty and that's what middle managers are for...what I am trying to say is I sometimes delegate some parts of my duties to a head of department (SM3).

The middle managers are those who have both teaching responsibilities and administration tasks within their own department while co-operating with others (SM2).

The findings from this study showed that the middle managers' fields of practice in this study were sometimes described as interwoven and overlapping rather than separating from their senior managers.

The findings from this study also indicated that middle managers were expected in contributing to all the work of their faculty while learning from their job and others' experience. The majority

of the participants also placed very high expectations on their middle managers to work with them and other colleagues co-operatively. More than half of the participants noted that middle managers were responsible for a greater number of staff and greater diversity of subjects. In other words, the middle managers' role was expected to include managing appraisal and fitted into the overall faculty structure. All commented that middle managers were in fact expected to lead learning and manage staff within their departments while two senior managers (SM1, SM2) suggested that the most important expectation of the middle managers' role was to ensure that the staff performed to the best of their ability and worked together as part of a team to enhance teaching and learning while one senior manager (SM6) stated that every single middle manager was expected to get their entire job done effectively:

Middle managers are expected to monitor staff's competence and quality of their teaching...they have to work collaboratively with the senior management team (SM 1).

They are expected to assist senior managers with their work of evaluating and reviewing the work of their departments...they are expected to supervise and monitor their team members in order to ensure that everyone is happy and has a commitment to the work (SM3).

These findings have showed that the middle managers in Lao higher education were in a position where their role was not only diverse, but also had a range of expectations to fulfill.

Management skills were identified by a large number of the respondents as being the most important to the middle management role in order to ensure the quality of the faculty teaching and learning it needed to be substantially lead and managed. Two senior managers (SM2, SM4) considered their middle management positions where they had a great deal of responsibility for their departmental teams so that the middle managers needed to have skills in team building and relationships. This was supported by another senior manager (SM1) who stated that middle managers required the effective time management due to a series of responsibilities for the wider

faculty while skills in the decision-making were raised by one other senior manager (SM2) as a critical part of the middle managers' role:

Skills in communication are essential for a middle management position. In order to work with their colleagues and other departments effectively, they need to be a good communicator (SM5).

Skills in consultation and facilitation can be identified as another important area because they are supposed to be a good consultant and facilitator in order to work with their team members effectively (SM1).

It was evident that middle managers in Lao higher education were in a position where they were involved in a great deal of work either in their own department or others. To do this effectively, they needed to develop their capacity in a number of skills identified in their dual role of teaching and management.

4.1.2 Research Question Two: What are the challenges for middle managers while performing their role in Lao higher education?

In this section faculty senior managers were asked to identify not only the challenges that their middle managers faced while performing their role, but also the professional development support that they offered their middle managers to cope with the challenges.

The essential issue of time and workload was raised by four senior managers (SM1, SM2, SM3, SM5) as one of the huge challenges for middle managers performing their role effectively. They further noted that their middle managers did not have enough quality time to complete their core tasks while another senior manager (SM2) commented that the middle managers seemed to have a lot of work to do so this was the most challenge to get all their work done on time and effectively:

Middle managers need sufficient time to complete teaching and administrative tasks (SM3).

Some middle managers face difficulty in terms of balancing their work in their own department with other work demanded from their senior managers (SM5).

Three senior managers (SM1, SM2, SM3) noted that their middle managers needed the appropriate professional development because of lacking in effective skills to deal with staff within their departmental teams. While two of these senior managers (SM1, SM3) indicated that the lacking of skills was a huge barrier to the middle manager's performance, one senior manager (SM2) explained that building a strong team relationship and creating an environment of team learning required a high level of management skills. This confirmed the reality that middle managers needed professional development to develop their role:

Problems seem to occur every day as a middle manager so it is important for middle managers to get their staff to share problem talks and to find solution. This is highly likely to be a major issue within many departments (SM1).

One senior manager (SM3) indicated a lack of support from senior managers whereas another senior manager (MS6) pointed out that the middle managers had difficulty in terms of motivating and encouraging their staff to work collaboratively. It was striking clear that the significant aspects of the middle managers' working challenge related to time management and lack of professional development support.

Many faculty senior managers had similar comments that modelling, giving clear guidance and induction would be normally utilised as one of the strategies that assisted middle managers to grapple with their difficulties. There were minimal responses from senior managers regarding the area of trust as a way of coping with the challenges that the middle managers face. Nevertheless, the essential element of collaborative team work was seen as crucial for middle managers to minimise their workload, solve problems and generate new resources with comments as:

We also have a range of expertise such as a technical advisor and trainer who work collaboratively with us (SM2).

All the problems which middle managers face can be effectively handled if they bring those problems to discuss at the meeting table because we are a department with enormous expertise and all staff are more than happy to work together (SM3).

The essential elements of the effective communication and regular meetings in terms of work discussion and evaluation were also considered by a large group of the senior managers as being imperative for middle managers to handle their problems particularly, dealing with staffing issues:

I often observe and have communication with all staff who I meet. This would be easier for them to share their problems and ask some recommendations. We also have a weekly meeting with all middle managers from the entire faculty in order to discuss and evaluate our work (SM6).

Small problems are often solved within their department teams through the senior managers' advice and guidance. If unexpected problems which they cannot manage or solve themselves, those problems are often brought into the faculty level as our regular meeting (SM4).

The majority of the senior managers pointed out that a series of external professional development supports seemed to be accessible, but middle managers themselves must persistently build their capacity, manage their work, and time to participate. The senior managers commented on how each faculty provided ready access to professional development opportunities and middle managers were encouraged to attend external professional development activities such as a moderator and best practice workshops, national conferences, subject association meetings, and annual conferences to develop their knowledge:

I also believe that the knowledge that they gain from workshops and training, along with degrees can be key components of handling many difficulties (SM5).

Three senior managers (SM1, SM2, SM5) commented on how internal professional development support was given to middle managers in the sphere of mentoring, providing advice and support from their senior managers, along with the faculty technical advisors and trainers. One other senior manager (SM4) indicated internal professional development and support was given when seen as necessary.

4.3.1 Research Question Three: What are the professional development needs for middle managers in Lao higher education?

Faculty senior managers were asked in this section to not only identify the benefits from various types of professional development that middle managers have recently undertaken, but also to identify the area of professional development needs of middle managers in order to fulfill their role effectively.

All senior managers from the three faculties indicated that both short and long terms courses were available and accessible to help their middle managers to develop their careers. Whereas, the short term courses, workshops and training sessions were organised during the year and everyone was encouraged to take part, the long term programmes such as a degree and an academic qualification were accessible at some levels. Two senior managers (SM1, SM3) further commented:

We sometimes invite some presenters from outside organisations to teach our teachers in particular fields (SM1).

Many programs and courses are available and accessible in the evening courses and our middle managers are consistently encouraged to take a degree through short term courses and long term programmes in the country after working hours (SM3).

The important points raised by three senior managers (SM1, SM2, SM6) were that the faculties worked collaboratively and co-operatively with many international organisations to develop new resources despite having a budget limitation from the Government. They stated that some middle managers who were funded by these organisations were sent to take a degree in an overseas university in specific fields if necessary. Overall, a variety of the professional development activities for the middle managers in Lao higher education seemed to be available and accessible but the middle managers needed to manage their work effectively.

A wide range of professional development was described by all senior managers in particular faculties (F1, F2, F3) as crucial in order for middle managers to develop their knowledge and skills. There were a large number of responses from senior managers that their middle managers should have sufficient knowledge and skills in their fields because the professional development of middle managers was a key element that enabled middle managers to perform their role effectively. Two senior managers (SM5, SM6) supported this view and further suggested that middle managers who had regular training and consultation would play a massive contribution to their departmental teams and the faculty's achievement. For instance, some benefits of professional development were often seen in the areas of administrative system, improving teaching practice, dealing with difficult staff members and building effective teams with comments as:

One of the many changes which I have recently seen is the improvement of working systems. I can see that our work seems to be more systematic and clearly planned (SM1).

Working with many experts can improve the standard of the faculty teaching and learning (SM5).

It was crucial that a large number of senior managers saw the importance of professional growth of their middle managers as a critical part in the faculty achievement.

The issue of middle managers to develop their management skills consistently through both short and long term courses was highlighted by all three faculty senior managers. While one senior manager (SM1) indicated that the faculty lacked in qualified staff particularly in the area of the middle management positions, two others (SM2, SM6) pointed out that the faculty middle managers needed to learn continuously as the work of the faculty was increasingly complex. The essential elements of more training and professional development programmes for middle managers were raised by two senior managers (SM1, SM5) in order to develop the necessary knowledge and skills for middle managers:

There is no doubt that more training is needed for middle managers in order to improve their skills (SM5).

Middle managers need skills in managing and leading their department and working with others, but there is a lack of professional development programmes and approach for middle managers (SM1).

The most significant area raised by the majority of the participants was self determination and motivation of the individual middle manager in relation to improve their careers:

It is important that more training is needed for middle managers in order to improve their skills but every individual middle manager has to be self determined and have motivation (SM1).

It is also important that they can manage their time to participate in the kinds of the professional improvement activities rather than complaining they do not have time (SM6).

Another important need noted by two senior managers (SM2, SM3) was that middle managers needed to be actively involved in role modelling:

Middle managers need to be more active and work as a good model for their team members in order to gain more respect (SM2).

The findings from these interviews have shown that the middle manager's role was described as the key driving force in the academic operation of the faculties. The senior managers also had a range of expectations on the middle manager's responsibilities so that the middle managers had a dual role of teaching and managing tasks, yet the middle managers needed management skills and professional development support to fulfil their role. Nevertheless, restricted time and workload issues were seen as challenges for the middle managers to participate on professional development programmes. Therefore, there was a need to investigate the perceptions of the senior managers on the middle manager's role, their challenges and their professional development needs.

4.2 QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Middle Managers Perspectives

The researcher investigated the perceptions of twenty seven middle managers/heads of departments from the three faculties in a Lao higher education institution. The designed questionnaire included thirteen questions that were divided into four sections; namely, demographic information, middle managers' role, challenge for middle managers and professional development needs of middle managers. This survey (see appendix 2, p. 93) was intended to provide information on how middle managers perceive their role, to identify their challenges and their professional development needs. A total thirty copies of the questionnaire were distributed in three faculties (ten copies per faculty), and there was a high return rate (90%).

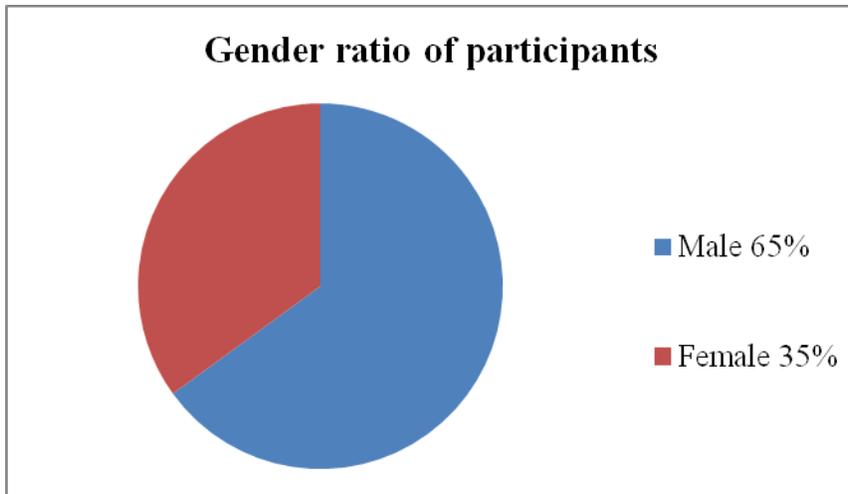
4.2.1 Demographic Information

In this section respondents were asked to identify their general demographic information and the position that they held in order to enable readers to get an overall picture of the respondents.

The Middle Managers Gender

The chart below indicated that the number of males who were employed as a middle manager in Lao higher education was higher than the number of the female middle managers. Whereas sixty-five percent of males were institutional middle managers, thirty-five percent of the respondents were females. The study showed that there were fewer female middle managers in Lao higher education (see figure 1).

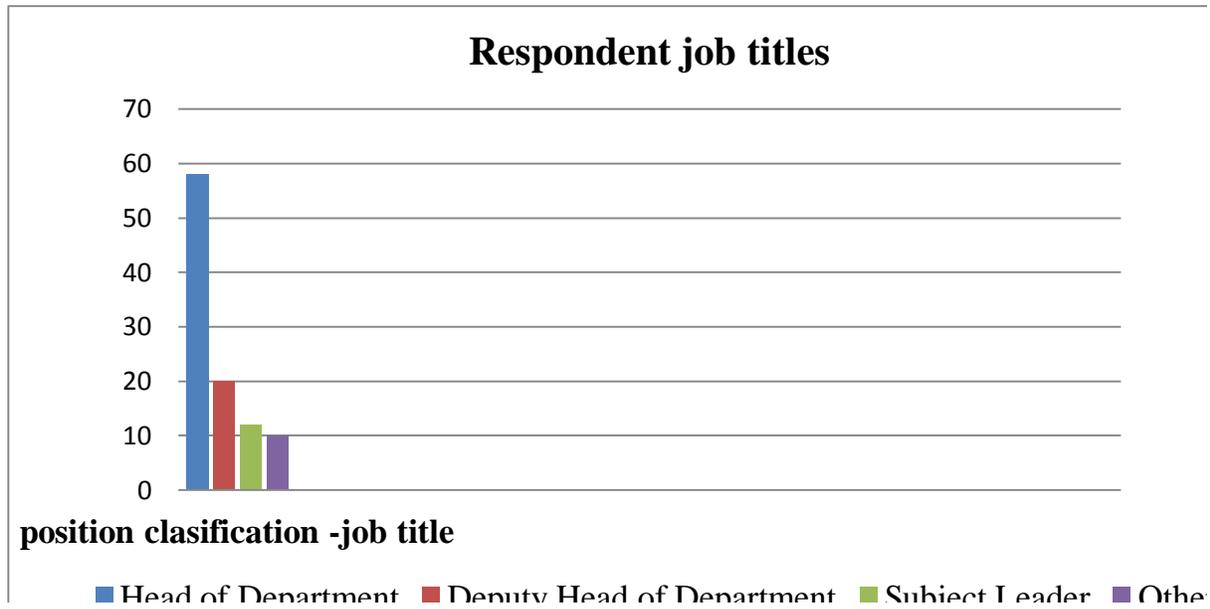
Figure 1: Gender ratio of participants



The Job Titles of Middle Managers

The respondents to this study who defined themselves to the questionnaires as a middle manager had both teaching and managerial tasks. Most of the middle managers, sixty percent, were holding a position as a head of department while twenty percent of the respondents were teachers-in-charge and acting heads of departments. Another important point to be noted was that twenty percent of the respondents were subject leaders (see figure 2).

Figure 2: Respondent job titles



Middle Managers' Experience

The majority of the respondents who were employed as a middle manager had largely more than ten years of experience. It was made strikingly clear that whereas there was more than fifty-five percent of the institutional middle managers who had experience of more than ten years in the middle management position, only thirty-four percent of middle managers had five to ten years experience, and eleven percent of the participants had less than five years experience in Lao higher education (see table 1).

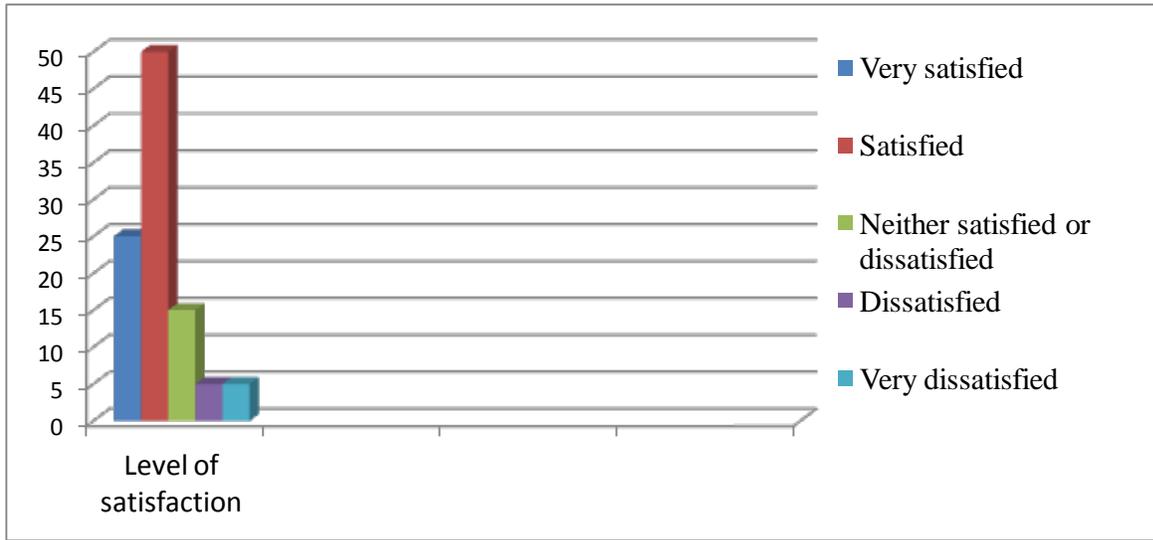
Table 1: Years of being employed as a middle manager

Years of being employed as a middle manager	
Number of years	Middle managers' response (%)
Less than 5 years	11 %
5-10 years	34 %
More than 10 years	55 %
Total	100%

4.2.2 Research Question One: What are the perceptions of the middle manager's role in Lao higher education?

The findings from this study showed that twenty-five percent of the respondents were very satisfied while fifty percent of the participants were satisfied in their role as a middle manager. The most significant factor was that five percent of the participants indicated that they were very dissatisfied and dissatisfied in their role. Another important point was that fifteen percent of respondents were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied in their role (see figure 3).

Figure 3: Level of satisfaction in the middle managers' role



Responsibilities / Tasks in the Middle Managers' Role

The findings illustrated that the majority of the twenty seven middle managers in a Lao higher education institution indicated that they spent the large amount of their time on the teaching and managerial or administrative tasks as the two top priorities of the middle management role. This reflected the reality that most of their timetabled time was spent with students and also relates to their background as classroom teachers while balancing their teaching tasks with other managerial or administrative tasks. To be more concise, the table showed that fifty-five percent of the middle managers indicated that they spent a great deal of time on teaching while twenty-seven percent of the participants spent some time on their teaching tasks. Another important point to note was that thirteen and five percent of the respondents pointed out that they spent little time and no time on their tasks respectively.

It can be also argued that managerial or administrative tasks are the second priority identified the middle management role. This was made outstandingly clear in the fact that whereas fifty-three percent of the middle managers revealed that they spent a great deal of time on the managerial or administrative tasks, twenty-eight percent of the respondents indicated that they spent some time

on them. While there were sixteen percent of the respondents who spent little time on the same tasks, only three percent stated that they had no time to do them.

Another important factor was that whereas forty-three percent of the respondents identified that they spent a great deal of time on managing staff, thirty-four percent of the middle managers acknowledged that they spent some time on managing staff. While thirteen and ten percent of the participants pointed that they spent little time and no time on this job respectively.

The most significant factor was that twenty percent of the respondents revealed that they spent a great deal of time, little time and no time on their faculty leadership. Unexpectedly, there were thirty-seven percent of the respondents who stated that they were some time involved in the faculty leadership.

It was also clear from the results that forty-one percent of the middle managers spent a great deal of time on their communication while thirty-six percent of the middle managers noted that they spent a great deal of time on the communication. It was important to note that fourteen and nine percent of the participants stated that they spent little time and no time on the communicative task respectively (see table 2).

Table 2: The amount of time and responsibilities/tasks related to middle managers' role

Responsibilities/ Tasks	A Great Deal Of Time	Some Time	Little Time	No Time
Teaching	55%	27%	13%	5%
Management/Administration	53%	28%	16%	3%
Staff Management	43%	34%	13%	10%
Faculty Leadership	22%	37%	21%	20%
Communication	41%	36%	14%	9%

4.2.3 Research Question Two: What are the challenges for middle managers while performing their role in Lao higher education?

Time Management

There was a unanimous indication that time was one of huge challenges for middle managers in the three faculties as several aspects were inherently tied in with the time issues particularly workload and unrealistic expectations. A large number of middle managers also indicated that the overlaps and lack of clarity of the middle management role were barriers for middle managers to complete the tasks expected by their faculty senior managers whose high expectations and demands left middle managers with very limited time to engage in their own professional development within their departments. Middle managers were already overburdened in that the expectations in terms of their workload far exceeded the time available to them.

Some middle managers further noted that there were too many tasks to do in short time frames and they needed more time to complete the tasks expected of them. Furthermore, they also felt that there were too many expectations to fulfill. This resulted in them not having sufficient time to spend enough quality time with people to really serve their needs, train staff and develop resources to meet student needs.

Other middle managers indicated that a huge challenge to them performing their role effectively was a lack of clear communication and appropriate feedback from senior management. When issues were brought up, middle managers felt that there was often little, if not, no follow-through and this was hindering them from performing their role effectively. The following concerns were raised: lack of support and recognition, poor communication and role overload.

Middle managers also experienced the tensions of being caught in the middle between the expectations of senior management and other experienced curriculum middle managers within

their faculties. Middle managers must also accept that these decisions could be overturned by the faculty senior management.

Some of the middle managers were working in situations outside of their fields of expertise. Thus, their roles required greater coordination across more subject departments and hence more reliance on management processes.

Other middle managers noted that they lacked the skills in their position as middle managers due to their faculties not having systematic professional development programmes for them to undertake.

Role Issues

The findings from this study illustrated that fifteen percent of the respondents revealed that their role clarity existed to a great extent while fifty-five percent of the respondents described that their role clarity existed to some extent. It was also important to note that whereas twenty-five percent of the middle managers identified that their role clarity existed to a minor extent, five percent of them stated that their role clarity did not exist at all.

The most significant feature was the role conflict of the middle management. While forty-three percent of the respondents stated their role conflict existed to a great extent, thirty-seven percent of them stated that their role conflict existed to some extent. Another important point to note was that seventeen and three percent of the respondents indicated that their role conflict existed to a minor extent and did not exist at all respectively.

It can be further argued that the role overload existed to a great extent which included fifty-four percent of the participants. While thirty-two percent of them showed that their role overload

existed to some extent, seven percent of the participants identified that their role overload existed to a minor extent and did not exist at all.

It can be concluded that middle managers in a Lao higher education institution were largely confronted with the issues of role clarity, role conflict, and role overload as the middle manager’s challenges while performing their role (see table 3).

Table 3: Challenges related to the middle managers’ role

Role Issue	Exists To A Great Extent	Exists To Some Extent	Exists To A Minor Extent	Does Not Exist At All
Role Clarity	15 %	55%	25 %	5%
Role Conflict	43 %	37 %	17 %	3 %
Role Overload	54 %	32 %	7 %	7 %

4.2.4 Research Question Three: What are the professional development needs for middle managers in Lao higher education?

There were six questions in this part of the questionnaire for middle managers. The questions in this section focused on the professional development of middle managers. The researcher focused on this aspect as management development which refers to specific professional development that enhances the middle manager’s performance in relation to the management role in the position as middle manager. Following are the findings from the six questions:

The first three questions in this section asked the participants to identify what forms of management support, management training and management education they received (see tables 4, 5, and 6).

The findings demonstrated that middle managers lacked management support in regards to their role. The most significant factor was that whereas fifty-four percent of middle managers identified that they had a clear job description, forty-nine percent of the respondents indicated they received management support by belonging to professional associations and fifty-one percent of the middle managers percent noted that they received appraisal that focused on the middle management role. The most areas of management support that were identified as lacking were, induction as middle manager (twenty-five percent) and rotating responsibilities as part of succession planning (thirty-two percent) and mentoring (twenty-three percent). These findings confirmed that middle managers were highly likely to need management support in order to perform their role sufficiently (see table 4).

Table 4: Management support offered to middle managers

Forms of management support	Middle managers' responses (%)
Induction as middle manager	25 %
Appraisal	51 %
Clear job description	54 %
Mentoring	23 %
Succession planning	32 %
Professional associations	49 %
Other	21 %

The findings illustrated that the percentage of the participants who had undertaken in-service courses, workshops and conferences which were offered by their faculties was higher than other forms of management training. Seventy-three percent of the middle managers indicated that they

received in-service courses/attended workshops and conferences while thirty-two percent of the middle managers indicated that they received other management training particularly school-based courses and short management courses (see table 5).

Table 5: Management training offered to middle managers

Forms of Management Training	Middle managers' responses (%)
In-service courses / Workshops / Conferences	73 %
Other	32 %

The findings in the table 6 showed that the percentage of the middle managers who participated in external study was significantly higher than the percentage of the respondents who participated in other forms of management education. Whereas sixty-five percent of the middle managers stated that they received management education through external study, with some being funded by kinds of nongovernment organisations and others funding their own studies, thirty-two percent of the middle managers noted that they received other management education (see table 6).

Table 6: Management education offered to middle managers

Management education	Middle managers' responses
External study	65 %
Other	32%

The respondents were also asked in the question four to identify five forms of management development they believed were essential for their effective performance as a middle manager. The tasks were chosen to represent the main areas of responsibility for institutional middle managers in the three faculties in Lao higher education. Whereas the forms of management education that lead to a degree and qualification including external study programmes were considered as the first priority for the effective performance as a middle manager, the second priority was the forms of management development as a job description and appraisal that focuses on the middle management role. The third area also related to the forms of management training was in-service courses/workshops/conferences while induction as a middle manager was mentioned as the fourth priority. A few of the respondents mentioned the following as essential such as proper recognition of the role and ongoing advice/guidance which was the last priority.

The findings also indicated that whereas some participants felt that ‘everything’ was lacking in the management development based on their current experience, the majority of the middle managers noted on the following summarises that they truly believed were lacking in their management development. These concerns which were acknowledged by the majority of middle managers in this study needed to be taken seriously to problem solving:

- Support staff to have a relevant degree and qualification is demanded as management development
- There is no specific management development programmes within the institutions.
- There is no clear guidance on appropriate courses.
- There is a need of regular management training.
- Requiring an articulate vision and direction from the senior management level.
- There needs to be some structure and time set aside to meet and discuss professional matters.
- Needing advancement opportunities to senior management positions.
- Needing activities of mentoring and assistance with appraisal.
- Needing a better understanding and clarity about the position of the middle management role as a middle manager.

- Induction into the middle management role needs to be properly and regularly done.
- There is a lack of progress in an individual development
- There is very little in financial support whether internal or external study.
- There is no appropriate professional development model for middle managers.

The findings also showed that the challenges of the time, workload, lack of recognition of the role and lack of appropriate professional development were the most significant areas needed to be handled and the following issues were identified by middle managers regarding their role:

- There is little recognition of the middle manager's role and their welfare seems unimportant.
- It is a widely diverse role and the middle manager's job is currently growing and more demanding.
- Middle managers skill-based competencies are not specified.
- The middle management role is critical in the quality of the institutional teaching and learning, yet middle managers largely seem to be less rewarded with time, money and appreciation.
- Middle managers feel that they have effectively completed their tasks but their work is never met up to the senior manager's expectation and requirement.
- Serving both organisational and individual interests is stressful work.
- I cannot compromise or balance my main duties which I am doing now with the senior manager's tasks and responsibilities which are largely passed to me.

There was a unanimous indication that time was another huge issue for middle managers. The following aspects were also tied in with the time issue: workload and unrealistic expectations. Following were some of the concerns that middle managers made in this regard:

- Need more time to complete the tasks expected of me.
- Need more time to train staff and develop resources

- Too many tasks to do in short time frames.
- Too many expectations to fulfil.
- I cannot often carry the department's work to do at home.

The findings indicated that a huge barrier to the middle manager's performing their role effectively was a lack of clear communication and appropriate feedback from senior managers while the majority of the middle managers did not feel supported and valued and there was no recognition of the role they played.

Middle managers further indicated that they required professional training and support in their role:

- It would be crucial if some relevant courses were offered prior to getting these roles.
- A large number of middle managers come to this position which is expected to learn on the job and others' experience.
- Need a specific professional development programmes
- The trouble is that the problem is exacerbated by untrained middle managers who become senior managers. As a result, senior managers do not know how to do their job-part of which is to nurture middle managers.

CONCLUSION

There was acknowledgement from both the middle and senior managers' perspectives that middle managers were in a position where their role was very diverse, complex and more demanding. While the middle managers role had grown considerably which had increased their workload and impinged on their time, both groups of managers had indicated that there was a lack of recognition of the middle manager's role. Some suggestions were that middle managers ought to be financially rewarded as well as allocated more time to complete the assigned tasks. Furthermore, there was a lack of support for middle managers. Middle managers acknowledged

that 'appropriate' professional development was required to fulfill this role effectively. This sentiment was further endorsed by senior managers who stated that middle managers should embark on educational management training.

Synthesizing through the research findings, both groups of the senior and middle managers in the three faculties have raised many challenges regarding to 'the middle manager's role and professional development needs in Lao higher education'. The common themes which have been surfaced by the two groups were the diverse and complexity of the middle manager's role, time constraints and workload issues, the need for adequate management skills in the middle management position and the lack of management support for middle managers. These will be explored and taken up for further discussion of the findings in relation to the literature review in Chapter five.

Chapter Five

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses the overall findings in relation to the literature reviewed in chapter two to develop a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by institutional middle managers in a Lao higher education institution. In this study, both groups of senior managers and middle managers identified several issues in relation to the middle manager's role, the challenges and the professional development needs. The main themes that emerged from the data findings were the middle manager's role, the challenges and the professional development needs of middle managers. These in turn showed the diversity and complexity of the role, time constraints, workload issues, the lack of adequate management knowledge and skills, and the lack of professional development for middle managers. As a result of these challenges, middle managers have indicated that they were not only unprepared for the role, but also felt inadequately supported. Now, these main findings will be discussed with reference to the literature reviewed.

5.1 DIVERSITY AND COMPLEXITY OF THE ROLE

One of the aims of this project was to investigate the perceptions of the middle manager's role in Lao higher education. Data from the interviews and questionnaire relating to the middle manager's current role was collected in a Lao higher education institution and related to the literature reviewed. Both groups of senior managers and middle managers agreed that middle managers were in a position where their role was widely diverse and becoming increasingly more complex. The findings also indicated that middle managers had a critical role to play in their faculties because the faculty teaching and management tasks were largely delegated down to middle managers:

I think that the middle management role is located in the faculty where middle managers are involved in managing the work of others (SM1).

The middle managers are those who have both teaching responsibilities and administration tasks within their own department while co-operating with others (SM2)

This thematic finding that has come from the empirical data is supported by several researchers Blandford (1997), Fitzgerald (2000) and Fitzgerald et al (2006) who note that the middle management role is critical for organisational development while Brown and Rutherford (1998) assert that middle managers are seen as a key driving force in the higher educational sector. Therefore, the middle manager's role is widely diverse and complex because middle managers play a vital part in enriching the quality of the institutional teaching and learning (Clegg & McAuley, 2005; Fletcher-Campbell, 2003).

The findings also showed that middle managers were in a position where their role was increasingly more demanding and fulfilled the many different expectations of their senior managers. The study showed that the majority of the middle managers placed the teaching and managerial tasks as the two top priorities in their role. Middle managers in this study indicated that they spent a great deal of time on teaching (fifty-five percent) and managerial tasks (fifty-three percent) respectively (refer table 2, P. 53) while senior managers often expected their middle managers to be involved in the entire workload of the faculties. They also placed very high expectations on their middle managers to work with them and other colleagues co-operatively:

They are expected to assist senior managers with their work of evaluating and reviewing the work of their departments...they are expected to supervise and monitor their team members in order to ensure that everyone is happy and has a commitment to the work (SM3).

This is echoed by Leask and Terrell (1997) who highlight the role of middle managers in higher education as the 'meat in the sandwich'. This confirms the reality that middle managers are often caught in a difficult situation when trying to balance their time to serve the interests of both the institution and their individual needs (Cardno, 1996; Kemp & Nathan, 1989). In other words, middle managers must find a balance between the temporary hierarchy of their administrative position and the on-going collegiality with their departmental colleagues (Kallenberg, 2007) while Cardno (2007) describes this issue as the management dilemmas for middle managers which are never solved, so they are largely dragged "between a rock and a hard place" (p. 33). This is striking clear that there is the potential for middle managers in the higher educational context to be burnt out because they are in a position where their role is not only diverse, but also has different expectations to fulfill.

In the research, middle managers stated that there were too many responsibilities in the middle management role to complete, and this was seen as a huge barrier to performing their role effectively. The responsibilities of the middle manager's role were divided into leadership, teaching, management/administration, staff management, faculty leadership and communication (refer table 2, p. 53). This extensive and diverse list of responsibilities demonstrated how the job of the middle managers in the study was becoming more and more complex and multi-faceted. This is echoed by Bennett et al (2003) and Kallenberg (2007) who further suggest that the responsibilities / tasks that apply to the middle manager's role in higher education appear similar across all the middle managers in this study. Cardno (1995) and Fitzgerald and Gunter (2006) hold similar views and assert that middle managers in today's climate are faced with a series of teaching and administrative tasks including tasks and responsibilities that have been commonly accepted as part of the senior management domain. The research also indicated that middle managers felt frustration and stress because it was difficult for them to fulfill different expectations and perform their dual role effectively due to many responsibilities of the role and a lack of the role clarity particularly what was written in their job description. It is evident that just fifty percent of the middle managers in Lao higher education indicated that they had a clear job description (refer table 4, p. 57).

The research further indicated that a lack of the role clarity was seen to be the result of the diversity and complexity of the middle manager's role combined with a lack of recognition of the role. Whereas fifty-five percent of the middle managers indicated that their role clarity existed to some extent, only fifteen percent of the middle managers described that their role clarity existed to a great extent (refer table 3, p. 56). Fitzgerald (2000) and Kallenberg (2007) support these findings and further state that there is a lack of clear role definition for middle managers as well as little recognition of their roles in the higher educational context. This lack of role clarity, both in practice and in research is also noted by Bennett et al (2003) who note "some confusion as to what those expectations are" (p. 4).

Middle managers in the study pointed out that the lack of role clarity contributed to not only the role conflict but also the work overload. It is significant that forty-three percent of the middle managers stated their role conflict existed to a great extent while fifty-four percent of the middle managers noted that their role overload existed to a great extent (refer table 3, P. 56). It appears that middle managers were not clear about what their role involved and this limited their ability to fulfill the demands of the role effectively. This is confirmed by several researchers Adey (2000), Fitzgerald (2000) and Piggot-Irvine (1999) who state that as a consequence of self-management reforms, the workload of middle managers increased, which further complicated the issue that their role was not clearly defined and described. As a result of these issues, middle managers in a Lao higher education institution were in a position where they were not sure of what exactly their role was. This is confirmed by Blandford (1997) who mentions that knowing what is required of the middle manager's role is the key component for institutional achievement.

5.2 TIME CONSTRAINTS AND WORKLOAD ISSUES

The findings of this research indicated that time constraints and workloads were raised by both groups of senior managers and middle managers. Two senior managers commented:

The middle managers within our faculty seem to have a lot of work to do so this is the most critical challenge to get all their work done on time and effectively (SM2).

Middle managers need sufficient time to complete their teaching and administrative tasks (SM3)

Likewise the following were some of the concerns made by many of the middle managers in the survey:

- Need more time to complete the tasks expected of me.
- Need more time to train staff and develop resources
- Too many tasks to do and too many expectations to fulfil in short time frames.

The findings also showed that only forty-three percent of the middle managers identified that they spent a great deal of time on managing staff while thirty-seven percent of the respondents stated that they were some of the time involved in the faculty leadership (refer table 2, p. 53). This is supported by Earley and Fletcher-Campbell (1989) who propose that more time should be provided for middle managers to fulfil their management duties. Nevertheless, middle managers in this study complained that they had not only too many tasks to complete, but also different expectations to fulfill in short time frames. This has resulted in them not having sufficient time to deal with both teaching and management tasks. Even though senior managers highlighted and acknowledged that time constraints as well as workload issues were a huge challenge to middle managers performing their role effectively, there were minimal responses as to an appropriate way or model for middle managers to deal with these issues. Therefore, there was a need to investigate the middle manager's role.

The findings of the study also indicated that middle managers were unable to manage time effectively so that they needed professional development on time management. Four of six senior managers (SM1, SM2, SM5; SM6) acknowledged this and commented on how providing professional development for middle managers helped to develop the time management of middle managers:

More professional development activities are needed for middle managers in order to improve their time management (SM1).

It is also important that middle managers can manage their time to participate in any kinds of professional improvement rather than complaining that they don't have time (SM5).

This view is also strongly confirmed by the majority of the middle managers in the findings of the study and several researchers Adey (2000), Blandford (1997), Brown et al (2000) and Macky and Johnson (2003) who state that professional development is a central element of developing the middle managers' careers. This reflects the key elements of the holistic professional development in the New Zealand educational context suggested by Cardno (2005) while McMahon and Bolam (1990) comment on the quality of management development within the team and organisation as a way of not only minimising the workload but also developing the capacity of middle managers. According to Adey (2000), "only if the rhetoric becomes reality and there is a decrease in the amount of time spent on administration and teaching will there be any possibility of middle managers being able to fulfill expectations of their managerial yet alone their leadership responsibilities" (p. 430). Glover et al (1998) further comment that perhaps a solution to the issue with 'time' could be resolved if there is a "flatter, more participative profession, with its development linked to pedagogic rather than to managerial and administrative needs" (p. 291). Therefore, middle managers in higher education require appropriate professional development activities and models in order to overcome their workload issues and manage their time effectively.

5.3 LACK OF KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS

A further aim of this research study was to investigate the professional development needs of middle managers in Lao higher education. The findings of this study showed that the lack of adequate management knowledge and skills in the middle management position were raised by both groups of senior managers and middle managers:

Skills in building team spirit and team relationships seem to be a challenge for middle managers (SM3).

There is no doubt that more training is needed for middle managers in order to improve their skills (SM5).

Likewise middle managers also acknowledged that they lacked knowledge and skills in administration and management in the survey. The study also showed that seventy-five percent of the middle managers considered as a first priority management education that lead to a degree and qualification including external study programmes. Nevertheless, middle managers in this study commented that they had a lack of adequate and effective training prior to them taking up their roles. In the open ended section of the survey, several middle managers noted the following issues: inadequate support for professional development and professional qualifications. They also needed time set aside for professional matters.

Cardno (2005) echoes these findings of the study and notes that middle managers require access to management knowledge and skills that they can work with and through others to achieve organisational goals. This is supported by several researchers Cardno (2005) and Fitzgerald and Gunter (2006) who state that the personal development of management skills for middle managers is crucial because these managers support and enhance the performance of others.

The findings of this study also showed that middle managers lacked the skills in their position as middle managers because their faculties did not have systematic professional development programmes for them to undertake:

There is a lack of professional development programmes and approach for middle managers. It is important that more training is needed for middle managers in order to improve their skills (SM1).

According to Inman (2009) and Ramsden (1998), institutional leaders and senior managers play an integral part in the development of their middle manager's knowledge and skills through their leadership and management practice. The findings from this study showed that there were contradictory perceptions among two groups of the senior managers and middle managers in relation to the provision of professional development support for middle managers. Whereas four of six senior managers (SM1, SM2, SM4, SM6) stated that they frequently offered a wide range of professional development activities such as management training, education and support to their middle managers in order to develop their knowledge and skills, the majority of middle managers did not identify this opportunity as appropriate and adequate for the growth of their management knowledge and skills. It was evident that forty-nine percent of middle managers indicated they received management support by belonging to professional associations while other concerns were also made in the following areas:

- A lack of financial support for internal or external study.
- Induction into the middle management role needs to be properly and regularly done.
- There is no specific management development programmes within the institutions.
- There is no clear guidance on appropriate courses.

This is supported by Cardno (1996) who suggests that if some relevant courses for middle managers are offered prior to getting the role, effective middle managers will contribute massive outcomes to the development of their department teams and organisation. She further argues that it is the organisational responsibility to make an appropriate provision of professional development for middle managers because managing staff performance through an appraisal system is the key work of educational leadership (Cardno, 1996).

5.4 LACK OF MANAGEMENT DEVELOPMENT

In this study, middle managers stated that they lacked management development to carry out their role effectively. They indicated that their role was growing and increasing in complexity, so it was impossible to do the job without the necessary skills and training. It is evident that only fifty-one percent of the middle managers indicated that they received management support from

their senior managers in an appraisal that focused on the middle management role. Senior managers in this study acknowledged that middle managers lacked the necessary skills, yet there were minimal responses from the senior managers regarding the appropriate provision of management development for middle managers as a way of coping with the challenges that the middle managers face despite senior managers placing very high expectations on the middle manager's performance. This is echoed by Earley and Fletcher-Campbell (1989) who highlight the inadequate preparation for the middle manager's role. Recent research indicates that while there has been some improvement, there continues to be a lack of adequate and effective training for middle managers prior to them taking up their roles, including those aspiring to these positions (Adey, 2000; Brown et al., 2002).

Findings also showed that management development as appraisal performance for middle managers was important to develop the capacity of middle managers. Nevertheless, there was little evidence on the appraisal process for middle managers. It was evident that just fifty-one percent of the middle managers indicated that they received appraisal from their senior managers that focused on their role as middle managers. The study also pointed out that sixty percent of the middle managers considered the management development - an appraisal as the second priority that developed their careers. This is confirmed by Adey (2000) who reveals that middle managers require clearer guidelines about their role as well as training such as conducting staff appraisals and professional development for staff because the middle management positions in higher education are increasing in number as well as complexity.

The findings from this research also showed that even though middle managers stated that they lacked appropriate professional training, five of six senior managers (SM1, SM2, SM3, SM4, SM6) in this study acknowledged the accessibility of *external* subject-specific professional development through best practice workshops, national conferences and annual conferences as a contribution to the development for middle managers:

There are two professional improvement activities that our middle managers and other staff have been recently supported with short term training courses and long term educational degrees (SM2).

We offer a range of seminars, workshops and training session while a variety of courses and programmes are also available and accessible in the evening courses (SM3).

However, middle managers in this study identified this support as being distinct from management development because some did not know what support was available, or how to access the support because of the poor role clarity. The availability of time for accessing support was also a problem for the middle managers because middle managers indicated that they spent a great deal of time on teaching tasks (fifty-five percent) and managerial tasks (fifty-three percent) (refer table 2, p. 53) while their spare time was also used to complete other tasks being passed down from their senior managers. This is supported by Adey (2000), Blandford (1997) and Brown et al (2000) who reveal that there is a lack of recognised training for middle managers in higher education. Therefore, the significant aspects of the study highlighted that while middle managers are looking for management development opportunities, the external providers are not making opportunities available in a way that middle managers can access.

The findings of the research further showed the contrast between the perceptions of the senior managers and the perceptions of the middle managers about the middle professional support inside their faculties. While three of six senior managers (SM1, SM2, SM6) within the three faculties largely stated that middle managers were *internally* able to access their support for management development in terms of clear guidance, modeling, mentoring and communicating, some middle managers disagreed. According to the middle managers surveyed, the kinds of management development support were not appropriate and enough to help them to come to the middle manager's role. For instance, twenty-five percent of middle managers identified that they received management support by receiving induction as middle managers from their senior managers while mentoring was twenty-three percent (refer table 4, p. 57). This is supported by Adey (2000) and Brown et al (2000) who state that middle managers in higher education are

likely to receive very little training to prepare them for their role. As Brown et al (2002) note, management training for middle managers which creates a form of learning community would be most popular, particularly where this involves senior staff within the school to provide support. In this study, it appears that there were no comments from any of the participants about formal internal professional development. This confirms that the lack of appropriate professional development models and programmes in institutions will not only continue to detrimentally affect the way the role is performed, but also raise the tensions for middle managers in regards to their role and expectations.

The two concerns of not only time constraints but also management of workloads were indicated by both the research findings and literature as one of the key barriers of the middle managers performance and professional development. Three senior managers (SM1, SM2, SM6) stated that middle managers had a lot of teaching and managing tasks in short time frames while the findings from the surveys of the middle managers also indicated that more than fifty percent of middle managers stated that they spent a great deal of time on both teaching and administration. That is why the majority of middle managers in higher education are hindered from doing professional development. However, there is potential that middle managers in this study can deal with the intensification of workload and challenges of their role through the effectiveness of leading and managing people within their department.

CONCLUSION

The findings from this study and literature have indicated that the role of middle managers in a Lao higher education institution was vital to the quality of the institutional teaching and learning. The middle managers were central to lead and manage people within their department whilst helping their senior managers to get a job done. Consequently, middle managers were caught in a difficult situation while trying to balance their time to complete their job and the time to participate in professional development activities. Overall, middle managers in Lao higher education needed professional development support in order to fulfill their dual role of teaching

and managing in an environment where there were diversity and complexity of the role, time constraints and workload issues, a lack of knowledge and skills and a lack of management development. The next chapter will provide conclusions, recommendations and make suggestions for further research in the area of the middle managers' role and professional development needs in Lao higher education. It will also consider the strengths and limitations of the research.

Chapter Six

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

INTRODUCTION

This study investigated the middle manager's role, the challenges and the professional development needs of middle managers in a Lao higher education institution through the perceptions of the senior managers and middle managers. The three research questions investigated the middle manager's role, the challenges and the professional development needs of middle managers. The recommendations and strengths and limitations of the research are then discussed.

6.1 CONCLUSIONS

6.1.2 What are the perceptions of the middle manager's role in Lao higher education?

The research showed that the role of middle managers was widely diverse with teaching and management responsibilities. These findings were echoed by Cardno (1995) who noted that middle managers have both teaching and managerial tasks and play a critical role in the quality of their respective institution's teaching and learning. While Blandford (1997) and Brown et al (2002) noted the importance of professional development support for middle managers to fulfill this critical role, the results of the study showed little evidence of professional development support for middle managers in Lao higher education. Twenty-five percent of the middle managers in this study indicated that they were very satisfied while fifty percent of the middle managers stated that they were satisfied in their role. However, the majority of middle managers in Lao higher education indicated that they felt pressured in regards to the expectation of their senior managers as they were seen as a bridge between the academic staff on the ground and senior management.

The findings of the research also showed that the role of middle managers was not always clearly defined as only half of the middle managers in the three faculties indicated that they had a clear job description. It is clear that middle managers who were not clear about their job description

and what it involved were not only unable to perform their role effectively, but also had limited ability to fulfill the demands of the role effectively. According to Cardno and Piggot-Irvine (1991), the job description is a mechanism for on-going dialogue about accountability and it “acts as a keystone for all aspects of performance management” (p. 27). They explain further that a job description ought to be negotiated, to incorporate the professional standards and should contain specific and personally agreed performance expectations (Cardno & Piggot-Irvine, 1991).

6.1.2 What are the challenges for middle managers while performing their role in Lao higher education?

The study indicated that despite requiring more time on leading and managing their departmental teams, the middle managers in a Lao higher education institution were seeking help in relation to their role. The findings showed that there was a high percentage of the middle managers who were facing not only the role conflict but also the role overload because of the poor role clarity. This is evident in that fifteen percent of the middle managers in the research indicated that their role clarity existed to a great extent, forty-three percent indicated role conflict and fifty-four percent indicated role over load (refer table 3, p. 56). This indicated that the role issues of middle managers needed to be seriously addressed if the institution wanted middle managers to carry out their duties effectively. Adey (2000) supports this and further explains that middle managers require clearer guidelines about their role in order to manage and develop staff within their departments while several researchers Cardno (1995), Macky and Johnson (2003) and Rudman (2003) refer to the provision of appropriate professional development as the way to fulfill the middle management role effectively.

The findings from the study indicated that time constraints and workloads were considered as a barrier for middle managers to engage in professional development activities in order to develop their leadership and management capacities. This study showed that the majority of the middle managers identified their teaching and managerial tasks as the first priorities of their role which they frequently spent a great deal of time on. It is evident that fifty-five percent of the middle

managers in this study indicated they spent a great deal of time on teaching tasks while fifty-three of the middle managers indicated that they spent a great deal of time on managerial tasks and forty-three percent of the staff on management respectively. This reflects the reality that middle managers in higher education were facing a huge problem while trying to balance the time engaging in the core work of their role with the time required for their own professional development. It appears that the time allocation for professional development of middle managers needs to be addressed.

6.1.3 What are the professional development needs for middle managers in Lao higher education?

The findings of this research indicated that middle managers were lacking in management development particularly management knowledge and skills for the critical role as institutional middle managers in Lao higher education. This is supported by Bush and Middlewood (2005), Huy (2001) and Samson and Daft (2003) who state that the effectiveness of leadership to maintain the institutional viability and growth is largely dependent upon the effective middle managers who have the knowledge to lead and manage employees. The findings from this study showed that the vast majority of the senior managers had some capacity to provide professional development for their middle managers through both internal and external programmes. However, the overall professional development support was inadequate to meet the needs of the middle managers. As Cardno (2005) states, the management development can be seen as a “personal responsibility” as well as an “institutional obligation” because professional development has an impact on both parties (p. 318). Therefore, higher education institutions need to cater for organisational learning and team learning while individual middle managers themselves must persistently cultivate their skills through the forms of management education, training and support either internal or external in order to address the challenges that middle managers face.

The findings of the research also showed that there was a need for professional development for middle managers. Even though, the senior managers stated they frequently provided a range of

professional development support such as induction; mentoring; appraisal performance for middle managers, these types of professional development were not adequate, appropriate and relevant to the middle manager's role. The findings from the study supported this by identifying that middle managers lacked management support in regarding their role (refer table 4, p. 57). The evidence showed that middle managers in Lao higher education were highly likely to need management development in order to perform their role effectively. This is supported by Bush and Middlewood (2005) who recommend as management development a specific induction training to introduce the new middle manager. At the same time, provision should be made for mentoring and ongoing support and development in terms of management development. Some faculties from the study indicated that they have made some provision for funding staff to undertake management studies. It appears that professional development programmes which are offered by a range of higher education institutions need to improve the managerial skills of middle managers rather than simply providing opportunities for studying management from an abstract or theoretical point of view. Therefore, the higher education institutions in Laos need to have the appropriate agencies for professional development support in order to ensure that the specific needs of middle managers are addressed.

6.2 RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings from the research echoed a wide range of literature reviewed and confirmed that middle managers had a critical role to play in higher education. The study also showed that professional development for middle managers was essential to develop and improve their teaching skills and managerial capabilities. This reflected the complex reality that middle managers were facing because of the lack of clarity on the middle management role while there was little evidence of the professional development available for middle managers. This is supported by Adey (2000) who states that middle managers are often brought into this role without any real training and are largely expected to learn on the job and experience. The findings from the study supports this view by identifying that the majority of the respondents indicated that they largely had more than ten years experience employed as a middle manager (refer table 1, p. 51), yet they still lacked management support in the areas of induction (twenty-

five percent), succession planning (thirty-two percent) and mentoring (twenty-three percent). There was a need for the middle management role to be sufficiently addressed through ongoing professional development opportunities and on site management development. Any policies and agencies of professional development support that had the potential to generate improvements in practice were considered desirable because the professional development of middle managers was vital for a higher education institution operating in a faculty context.

The most significant factor is that it is timely for institutional senior managers in conjunction with the Department of Higher Education in the Ministry of Education in Laos to consider promoting professional development for middle managers and to take responsibility for the challenges faced by middle managers that was evident in the majority of the research findings (refer table 3, p. 56 and table 4, p. 57). Therefore, it is recommended that the Ministry of Education and the higher education institutions in Laos work together to create a professional development model with appropriate programmes to meet the needs of middle managers. This would enable middle managers not only to build the capacity for leadership and management, but also to gain a better understanding of their role and to handle the challenges.

6.3 FURTHER RESEARCH

The researcher of this study would like to recommend that further research should be carried out to gather a broader data collection from more faculties across the Lao higher education sectors. This would either endorse or challenge the findings of this study and contribute to a wider knowledge base of research on middle managers in Lao higher education. Also the higher educational institutions in Laos could use the findings to inform their practice and these will inform institutional leaders and managers about the middle management role and professional development needs of middle managers.

Another possibility for further research, as an adjunct to this research project, would be to investigate the perceptions of the senior manager's role and professional development needs of senior managers in Lao tertiary education. This study has investigated what the middle manager's role and the professional development needs of middle managers were and how they were addressed. This may provide only one viewpoint whereas having the other viewpoint from more faculties would be advantageous. The senior manager's perceptions would provide contrasts and comparisons to the findings presented in this research project. This study should inform tertiary education leaders of the challenges facing middle management leaders and allow middle managers a voice in educational research that has been missing in recent years.

6.4 STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH

6.4.1 The strengths of the research

One of the most significant strengths of this study was the validity, triangulation and reliability of the data collection because this study approached a wide range of methods of data collection arising from the interview, questionnaire survey and document analysis in the three different faculties. The multiple sources were used in order not only to measure or compare different views but also to check for accuracy and maintain the degree of consistency. This is supported by Cohen and Manion (1994) who state that triangulation is "the use of two or more methods of data collection in the study of some aspect of human behaviour" (p. 233) while Bryman (2008), Cardno (2003) and Cohen et al (2007) reveal that the use of data triangulation can strengthen the credibility and validity of the research. Bell (1993) holds a similar view by further explaining that "reliability is the extent to which a test or procedure produces similar results under constant conditions on all occasions" (p. 64). Reliability is concerned with not only the consistency of the measure of a concept but also the question of repeating the results (Bryman, 2008; Cardno, 2003; Cohen et al., 2007; Davidson & Tolich, 2003). Therefore, the strengths of the study were the reliability of results.

A further strength was that all participants who were senior managers and middle managers were willing to participate and express their views despite the time constraints they faced. This allowed for multiple voices to be heard and allowed for two contrasting viewpoints to be accessed. This is confirmed by Bryman (2008) who asserts that the main focus of qualitative research is studying people and viewing events and the social world through the eyes of the people in a study while Lincoln and Guba (2000) mentioned that with qualitative research, the researcher is able to permit readers to hear the exact words of the research participants.

6.4.2 The Limitations of the Research

There were some limitations on the nature of the research which must be borne in mind when reading this research. One of the most significant factors is that there was a gap in the literature available relating to the functions and roles of middle managers. Whereas the literature on middle managers in the school sectors is widely recognised as an integral part of leading and developing others to achieve their common goals, there is little research in the higher education context on the role and responsibilities of institutional middle managers. Even though this study focused on the higher education context, some of the research in secondary schools was transferable and raised important issues relevant to both sectors.

Another important point is that although the literature of the research has been mainly critiqued and undertaken in New Zealand, Australia, the United State of America and the United Kingdom, the assumption that what was occurring in a range of contexts was the same as a Lao higher education context was.

It is also important to note that teachers within department teams were not part of the study so their voices were missing from the data. These voices would have been an interesting and

informative perspective to look into in order to gain a better understanding of the middle management role and the professional development need of middle managers.

SUMMARY

This study investigated the middle manager's role, the challenge and professional development needs of middle managers in a Lao higher education institution. The findings from this study indicated that middle managers performed a widely diverse role which was increasingly complex and more demanding. This confirmed the reality that there was a need for middle managers to have the necessary professional development support and management training in order to carry out their role effectively and to grapple with the challenges they faced. Therefore, it is essential that this lack of support for middle managers in Lao higher education should be addressed if higher education institutions in Laos want to survive and compete within an international competitive environment.

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Appendix 1: Interview Schedule for Senior Managers

The Middle Managers Role and Professional Development Needs in Lao Higher Education

Thank You for participating in this interview and contributing to a better understanding of the middle manager's role and professional development needs in Lao higher education.

The survey is intended to provide information regarding the expectations that senior managers hold in relation to the role and professional development needs of middle managers.

I. Middle Managers Role

1. How would you describe the role of middle managers in your faculty?
2. What are the main expectations that you have of the middle management role in your faculty?
3. What skills and competencies do you identify as being the most important to this middle management role?

II. Challenges

1. What are the main challenges that middle managers face in your faculty?
2. How would you normally deal with some of the challenges for middle managers?
3. What professional development support is given to middle managers as they grapple with the increasing challenges they face on a daily basis?

III. Professional Development

1. What types of professional development have the faculty middle managers recently undertaken?
2. What are the benefits from these types of professional development?
3. What do you see as the professional development needs of your middle managers in the faculty?



The Middle Manager’s Role and Professional Development Needs in Lao Higher Education

Thank you for participating in this survey and contributing to a better understanding of the middle managers’ role and professional development needs in Lao higher education.

This survey is intended to provide information on how middle managers perceive their role and to identify the professional development needs of institutional middle managers.

I. Background Information

1. Gender: F / M

2. What is your position in this faculty?

3. How long have you been employed as a middle manager?

- < 5 years 5-10 years > 10 years

4. How would you rate your overall level of satisfaction in your role as a middle manager?

- Very satisfied Satisfied Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied Dissatisfied
- Very dissatisfied

II. Middle Manager's Role

1. Please indicate the following responsibilities / tasks that apply to your role as a middle manager and the amount of time that you spend weekly on these responsibilities / tasks

Responsibilities/ Tasks	A Great Deal Of Time	Some Time	Little Time	No Time
Teaching				
Management/Administration: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recording keeping • Assessments • Departmental budget • Teaching resource 				
Staff Management: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appraisal induction • Advice and guidance • Staff development • Meetings 				
Faculty Leadership: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Faculty planning and decision-making • Curriculum planning 				
Communication: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff in department • Parents/employers/industry • External moderators and assessors 				

alignment between what do and what the Dean of Faculty expects you to do)				
Role Overload (Too much teaching and management)				

IV. Professional Development

(MANAGEMENT DEVELOPMENT refers to a specialised form of PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT that enhances your performance in relation to the MANAGEMENT ROLE in your position as a middle manager).

Please tick it applicable or add to the following lists below

1. What forms of **MANAGEMENT SUPPORT** do you receive?

- Induction as a middle manager
- Appraisal that focuses on middle management role
- Clear job description
- Mentoring from another manager
- Rotating responsibilities as part of succession planning
- Belonging to professional associations
- Other (please specify).....

2. What forms of **MANAGEMENT TRAINING** do you receive?

- In-service courses/workshops/conferences
- Other (Please specify)

.....

3. What forms of **MANAGEMENT EDUCATION** do you receive?

- External study programmes

Example:

4. In your view, which 5 forms of management development do you believe are **ESSENTIAL** for your effective performance as a middle manager?

- | | | |
|--------|--------|--------|
| 1..... | 2..... | 3..... |
| 4..... | 5..... | |

5. What do you believe is **LACKING** in the **MANAGEMENT DEVELOPMENT** you are currently experiencing?

.....

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Appendix 3: Consent forms

CONSENT FORMS

DATE

TO:

FROM:

RE: Master of Educational Leadership and Management

THESIS TITLE: The Middle Manager's Role and Professional Development Needs in Lao Higher Education

I have been given and have understood an explanation of this research and I have had an opportunity to ask questions and have had them answered. I understand that neither my name nor the name of my organisation will be used in any public reports. I also understand that I will be provided with a transcript (or summary of findings if appropriate) for checking before data analysis is started and that I may withdraw myself or any information that has been provided for this project up to the stage when analysis of data has been completed.

I agree to take part in this project.

Signed: _____

Name: _____

Date: _____

UREC REGISTRATION NUMBER: (2011-1191)

This study has been approved by the Unitec Research Ethics Committee from 28.06.2011 to 28.06.2012. If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Committee through the UREC Secretary (ph: 09 815-4321 ext 6162). Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.

Appendix 4: Information sheet



INFORMATION SHEET

Title of Thesis: The Middle Manager's Role and Professional Development Needs in Lao Higher Education

My name is Saengaloun SYHARATH. I am currently enrolled in the Master of Educational Leadership and Management degree in the Department of Education at Unitec Institute of Technology and seek your help in meeting the requirements of research for a Thesis course which forms a substantial part of this degree.

The aim of my project is to investigate the middle managers' role and professional development needs in Lao higher education. I am particularly interested in how middle managers perceive their role; what the middle managers' perception of their roles is; and how they access support for their role and professional development that contribute to the aspects of teaching and learning.

I request your participation in the following way:

I will be collecting data using an interview and survey questionnaire with middle managers that will take about 20-30 minutes and 15-20 to complete respectively. I would appreciate being able to conduct these interviews and questionnaires in your institution at a time that is mutually suitable. I will also be collecting data by examining the faculty professional development policies and middle managers' job descriptions. I would appreciate having access to these documents from your organisation.

You have the rights to decline to take part. If you agree to participate, you will be asked to sign a consent form regarding this event. You can withdraw at any time until the complete of the interview and questionnaire process.

Neither you nor your organisation will be identified in the Thesis. I will be recording your contribution and will provide a transcript for you to check before data analysis is undertaken. I do hope that you will agree to take part and that you will find this participation of interest. If you have any queries about the project, you may contact my supervisor at Unitec Institute of Technology. Dr Jo Howse who may be contacted by phone: +64 9 8154321 ext 8348 or Email: jhowse@unitec.ac.nz

Yours sincerely

Saengaloun SYHARATH

UREC REGISTRATION NUMBER: (2011-1191)

This study has been approved by the Unitec Research Ethics Committee from 28.06. 2011 to 28.06. 2012. If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Committee through the UREC Secretary (ph: 09 815-4321 ext 6162). Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.

