**The Efficacy of Middle Managers in Performing Their Leadership Roles in Driving Digital Transformation: A Case Study of a Malaysian Manufacturing Organization**

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# Abstract

Manufacturing organizations in Malaysia have been compelled to shift towards technology-driven operations to survive the disruption caused by the compounding effect of the Industrial Revolution (IR4.0) and the covid pandemic. Despite efforts to achieve the desired digital maturity and drive digital transformation, they were unable to compete globally which indirectly hinder the industry’s GDP (Gross Domestic Profit) contribution. Literature has identified people-related concerns, such as user resistance, ineffective leadership, and an unproductive organizational culture, as some of the failure-causing elements. Using Yukl’s Leadership Behaviour Taxonomy (2012) and Leader-Member Exchange Theory as the theoretical framework, this study seeks to investigate the leadership roles that middle managers take on in their attempts to bring about digital transformation and also their effectiveness in executing their roles and confronting challenges. The study utilizes a qualitative approach. The primary data were collected from a premium gift Malaysian manufacturing company during their ERP (Enterprise Resource Planning) modernization. Five Middle Managers and five operational employees who worked under them were interviewed. The findings revealed two groups of managers, one more successful and adaptive than the other. The more successful middle managers who were more relationship and change-oriented were able to establish better relationships with their staff members and played a critical role in being key intermediaries between the top and bottom management. The findings succeeded in identifying challenges faced by the middle managers and would facilitate successful implementation, adoption, and adaptation of digital transformation.

***Keywords****:* efficacy, middle managers, leadership roles, digital transformation, manufacturing organizations

# Introduction

## Overview

The recent digital revolution around the world has changed how businesses operate globally. These changes are so rapid that many industries, including the manufacturing industry, which is the focus of this study, find it challenging to keep pace with events and respond to fundamental, evolving factors such as shifting business models, technological disruptions, and people’s volatile expectations (Hartmann et al., 2015; Jones et al. 2021).

Digital transformation has become more crucial as it has the potential to facilitate greater collaboration, heighten customer engagement, improve process efficiency, and increase business performance, and the economic standing of an organization (Gobble, 2018). Hence organizations are adapting digital advancement to promote and create appropriate incentives and financial performance progression (Verhoef & Bijmolt, 2019).

The urgency to undergo digital transformation became more urgent because of the Industrial Revolution 4.0 (IR4) and the pandemic, which set an unprecedented disruption to the global supply chain, catapulting manufacturing organizations to innovate and diversify their operations using digital technology, to be more nimble, adaptive, and resilient (Ambrogio et al., 2022). This goal towards resilience forced organizations to transform their growth strategies towards technology-driven manufacturing operations such as smart factories, the Internet of Things (IoT), Artificial Intelligence (AI), and Robotics (Soori et al., 2023 a. & b.) Although digital technologies have been prevalent for a long-time, integrating these technologies into existing business models, reengineering the processes, and streamlining the workforce proved to be a bigger challenge than anticipated (Jones et al., 2021).

Challenges faced can be categorized into Technical and Non-technical. Organizations found it easier to address technical or infrastructure-related challenges regarding the availability and affordability of hardware, software, networks, and tech support due to higher affinity to technology, increasing demands for products, and rising digital maturity (Santarius et al., 2022). The more daunting challenge is non-technical, or people-related issues that include user resistance, vision alignment, large power distance, ineffective leadership, team conflicts, unproductive organizational culture, and unfulfilled expectations (Shinde & Cormican, 2023).

According to Mielli & Bulanda (2019), 70% of digital transformations failed due to human factors. The failed digital transformation could lead to higher cost incurrence, higher turnover rate, and reduced organizational performance which could impact the financial bottom line of the organization (Ramesh & Delen, 2018). Given the compounding effect of people-related issues, organizations have undertaken various measures to overcome them such as the establishment of a sound digital strategy, change of leadership mindset and approach, employee engagement from the start of digital transformation planning to garner better buy-in, and using external change management team to assess and assist with the change process (Caputo et. al, 2023). However, although some changes such as upskilling employees, or establishing systematic transformation processes, have proven to help address some of the problems, challenges such as demotivated, uncommitted, and disengaged employees were found to be tough to address. (Kohnke, 2016).

Recently many western regions are headed toward a flatter and more agile organization. However, in the Asian context, the hierarchical structure seems to remain the most trusted mode of operation of an organization (Giri & Ramakrishnan, 2019). In addition to that in many Asian manufacturing organizations, the turnaround rate among their employees is usually merger. Although this may be depicted as loyalty, it has led to chaos amongst the employees during digital transformation as they viewed the need to take on different job roles to assimilate the changes as a threat and hence were reluctant to engage, learn, and experiment (Kretschmer & Khashabi, 2020). In addition to that, the departmental silo culture evident in many of these organizations was unconducive for digital transformation as it demanded a complete integration of technology, processes, and data flows across all departments (Mohapeloa, 2017; Buchholtz, 2021). To complicate matters, a lack of transparency and fragmented communication on top management digital priorities accentuated disengagement and pushback from demotivated employees, stifling the progress of the organizational effort (Xiao et al., 2023).

Since, middle managers, who typically consist of the head of departments (HoD) or senior managers, have been viewed as shepherds of change with the capability of being grassroots leaders to ensure the success of a digital transformation project in many studies (Aflaki & Lindh, 2021; Gupta, 2017), it is pertinent for this study to investigate the involvement of a group of middle managers in the digital transformation of a Malaysian manufacturing organization to obtain insights into their roles and their efficacy in discharging their responsibilities. This study is also crucial since most leadership literature focuses on the direct supervisor-subordinate relationship, with very limited studies on second-level superior influence on the performance and commitment of lower-level employees (Yang et al. 2010). In addition to that most research undertaken was based on American, European, and Middle Eastern contexts. This makes the current study particularly crucial and timely.

**The Journey towards Digital Transformation**

This study was undertaken on one of the oldest local brands recognized globally as a premium gifting manufacturer which is named RS in this study for confidentiality reasons. Although the product designs and materials used by RS have changed through the years, the business processes of the company have not changed until recently. In 2017, RS embarked on a multi-million-ringgit project to upgrade its Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) system by integrating various systems with the ERP, reengineering the related business processes, and retraining the teams within the organization. The RM2-million-ringgit project was supposed to be completed within nine months; however, it took four more years before it was launched, and it went over the budget by RM1.3 million.

Before proceeding any further it is necessary to understand the organizational culture of RS. From its inception to now, RS has always been a top-driven company with top leadership making all the decisions, and the operational ground following their instructions. It can be classified under the Hierarchy quadrant according to the Competing Values Framework (Cameron et al., 2006). This organization's culture could have been the cause for the exceptionally high employee resistance which led to slow growth in adoption and this situation was aggravated by the pandemic. Thus, it appeared that people-related issues could be the major factor hindering the progress of the transformation. Hence, this study was undertaken to investigate the efficacy of middle managers from RS in driving digital transformation. Yukl’s Leadership Behaviour Taxonomy Framework (2012) and Leader-Member Exchange Theory (LMX) (Chen & Lin, 2018) which focus on leadership behavior, communication, trust, organizational relationship, and commitment were used as the theoretical framework of this study. The research questions of this study are as follows:

1. What leadership role do the middle managers take on in their attempts to bring about digital transformation to the organization?
2. How effective have they been in executing their roles and what are the challenges they faced in meeting the desired goals?

## Theoretical Framework

Yukl's (2012) hierarchical taxonomy of leadership behaviour comprises four meta-categories – task-oriented practices, relations-oriented practices, change-oriented leadership behaviour, and external practices. These four independent categories specified 15 distinct leadership behaviors as shown in Fig. 1.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Meta category** | **Primary Objective** | **Leadership behaviour**  |
| Task-oriented practices | * Effective use of workforce.
* Efficient and reliable operations, products, and services.
 | Clarifying |
| Planning  |
| Monitoring operations |
| Problem-solving |
| Relationship- oriented practices | * Strong commitment to the team.
* High level of mutual trust and cooperation among team.
 | Supporting |
| Developing |
| Recognizing |
| Empowering |
| Change-oriented practices | * Increased innovation in all business processes, products, and services.
* Collective learning.
* Adaptation to the external atmosphere.
 | Advocating change |
| Envisioning change |
| Encouraging innovation |
| Facilitating collective learning |
| External practices | * Resourceful in promoting and defending the interests of the organization
 | Networking |
| External monitoring |
| Representing |

*Table 1**: Yukl's Behaviour Taxonomy*

The second theory adopted is the Leader-Member Theory (LMX) which is a subset of the Social Exchange Theory (SET). It would be used to study the organizational culture of the organization in the form of a middle manager relationship with operational employees. This study would expound on the dimensions involved with people including trust, relationship, communication, and commitment to building relationships and mutual vision through shared experience (Weick, 1995).



Figure 1: Leader-Member Exchange Theory

According to research, leader-member exchange refers to social exchange relations between managers (middle managers), and operational workers. It talks about the nature of the relationship based on a cost-benefit equation relative to a shared obligation of each party to get the most returns from that relationship. LMX would help to examine the “quality and stability” of the middle managers’ relationship with their employees that is to what extent they have managed to gain the loyalty, support, and trust of the employees to inculcate a positive and contributing organizational culture. LMX is unique because each leader tends to foster an emotional bond related to other intrinsic virtues of trust (Chen & Lin, 2018). In summary, LMX is all about building relationships and followers’ perceptions of leader behavior. Scholars believe that with high-quality and stable relationships, the initiation of dynamics and workflow processes between two parties can be quicker.

## Conceptual Framework

Below is the conceptual framework of this study:



Figure 2: Conceptual Framework

# Literature Review

## Overview

The last two decades saw a rise in research on information systems, digitalization, and digital transformation in a multitude of industries around the world. Ranging from the adoption of technology of business (Verhoef et al., 2021), implementation of the digital strategy drivers and barriers (Ghobakhloo & Iranmanesh, 2021; Liere-Netheler, 2018) impact of leadership on digital transformation (Sow & Aborbie, 2018), cultural change of digital transformation (Chedid & Teixeira, 2021).

However, the combined aspect of middle manager leadership behavior and digital transformation has been scarce. Literature on the influence of middle manager leadership behavior on the outcome of digital transformation focusing on the stable and high-quality relationship with the downline team and members has been under-explored. This study seeks to fill this gap in the landscape of a Malaysian manufacturing organization.

## Digital Transformation

Vial (2019) defined digital transformation as “a process that aims to improve an entity by triggering significant changes to its properties through combinations of information, computing, communication, and connectivity technologies”, like the context by Gobble (2018) who associated digital transformation as a continuous process.

Scholars agree that digital transformation is not only about technology but also about processes and people (Martinez, 2019). Zinder & Yunatova (2016) highlighted that it required the creation of a wide range of capabilities, starting with the effect on people's mindsets, leadership, and organizational culture on the ability to transform, which made it a rather complex journey.

Most research papers emphasized non-technical or human-related barriers as a significant hurdle to digital organizational transformation. However, the awareness of the importance of people-related issues has gained prominence. The findings of Galanti et al. (2023) illustrated that it is important for organizations to acknowledge the importance of the effect of rapid technology transformation on employees' well-being and job satisfaction. It is believed that changing the approach toward human factors in an organization could overcome significant organizational change and digital transformation barriers including employee resistance (Gupta, 2017), lack of adoption (Markus et al., 2003), and demotivated and dejected employees (Coghlan, 1993). Maniadakis et al., (2011) maintain this change is feasible with the creation of a supportive climate and shift of leadership from ego-centric to alto-centric to encourage teamwork and create motivated, collaborative, and high-performing teams. Kazim (2021) proposed that leaders must lead the digital transformation from within (alto-centric) to communicate the vision effectively and be inclusive in the transformation journey. While works of literature acknowledge that the buy-in that initiates transformational decisions from the top level is crucial for the execution of the strategy, it is not sufficient to ensure success without active participation at all levels, predominantly middle management (Tosti & Jackson, 2001).

## Middle Managers

Mintzberg (1989) defined middle management as a position in organizational hierarchies ‘between the operating core and the apex’ whose occupants are ‘responsible for a particular business unit at an intermediate level of the organizational hierarchy’. Similarly, Dopson and Stewart (1990) defined middle managers as ‘all those below the top-level strategic management and above first-level supervision’.

Literature on middle managers revealed three schools of thought – one that believes that middle managers make a valuable and strong impact in driving changes in organizations, becoming a strategic asset (Balogun, 2003), another that believes middle managers can hinder and resist changes, and become an obstacle themselves and finally the third group views them as a valuable contributor to organizational change (Osterman, 2008). In short, middle managers are not only seen as change agents but as the empowering force of front-line managers and their teams beneath.

A study by Dopson & Stewart (1993) predicted that the number of middle managers would be reduced due to the introduction of technology. However, other studies stressed that despite the reduction in numbers, middle managers would play a more important role, with greater responsibility, and occupy a pivotal role in executing change and influencing the organization (Dopson & Stewart, 1993).

In recent times, middle managers have been seen as playing significant roles in multi-layer manufacturing organizations including planning, organizing, leasing, and controlling strategies implementation (Livijn, 2019), as well as advocacy, and operational practice improvement (Yang et al., 2010). The middle managers have also been described as taking on emotional, relational, and political roles (Huy, 2002), and acting as change intermediaries (Balogun, 2003) that enabled employees to understand and reframe the espoused change (Buick et al., 2018). Henderikx & Stoffers (2022) further expressed the need for them to be people-centric, and to focus on providing soft skills for those working under them. This aspect was supported by Alegbeleye & Kaufman (2020).

 Hence, in terms of digital transformation, middle managers can be described as the “linking pins” who manage the workflow of their teams to keep check of the set operational goals and objectives (Nadkarni & Prugl, 2020). In a nutshell, middle managers can be described as the ones who take on the initiative that can bring better sustainable growth over every region of the organization, as they bear the responsibility to align, manage & maintain the balance within the approaches and the decisions of top management. It potentially could drive an active and positive thrust over business processes leading to projected financial performance (Kaivo-Oja, 2017).

## Change Driving Leadership

Yukl (1989) defined leadership as “the process whereby one individual influence another group member towards the achievement of organizational goals”. Leadership behavior is the blend of a leader’s characteristics, competencies, and manners in interacting with their followers (Judge, et al., 2002). It depicts leaders' influence in fostering workplace enthusiasm, job fulfilment, and elevated employee performance to attain maximum organizational goals (Amah & Ogah, 2023).

Virgiawan & Riyanto (2020) further added that a leader inspires a team by earning their respect and trust, as well as motivating them to attain a mutual goal. This resonated with the argument of Bolden & O’Regan (2017), that leadership in the digital era demanded the practice of influence as opposed to extreme force. There was a paradigm shift in leaders leaning towards influencing, supporting, coaching, and facilitating from the usual charismatic and skilled leader traits (Nadkarni & Prugl, 2020).

Yukl (2008) stressed that leadership behavior, regardless of which style or theory, plays a key role in creating an organizational climate that positively influences employee attitude and commitment. Engaged and committed employees equate to employee motivation, satisfaction, confidence, empowerment, trust, loyalty, and quality organization-employee relationships (McCown et al., 2023). Oberer & Alptekin (2018) established that there is no single leadership style that is deemed the best. The authors explained, that in this age of Industry 4.0, the most feasible leadership style depends on the satisfaction and followership of employees with the leaders, organizational culture, and the organization’s maturity, which essentially focuses on the human. While this may sound straightforward, it is a rather complex feat for middle managers in organizations to choose one leadership style as there may be other compounding factors such as contradicting organizational culture and differing maturity and willingness of employees (Oberer & Alptekin, 2018). Hence, middle managers should understand and use appropriate leadership behavior to be versatile, bringing the best outcome out of operational employees, where digital transformation is concerned.

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# Research Methodology

## Research Design

This study is an exploratory case study, that employed the qualitative and inductive research approach, in line with interpretivism philosophy to gain in-depth and empathetic insight into the participants’ different beliefs, motivations, actions, and behaviors. (Flores, 2021; Sim et al., 2018). Since this is a study focusing on human behavior and relationships, the qualitative method was used to extract meaningful new data by interviewing participants to find out about their experiences, perceptions, and behaviors which would not be adequately achieved using the quantitative method (Sofaer, 2002).

## Data Collection

 The research obtained data from three main sources: A preliminary Survey on middle managers (Secondary Data Source), Middle Manager Interviews (Primary Data Source), and Operational employee Interviews (Primary Data Source). Observation was initially planned as an additional data source, but this was not possible due to difficulty in getting the required permissions from the top management of RS.

### ***Preliminary Survey***

The preliminary survey was sent to all middle managers to obtain basic personal details, their career history at RS, their involvement in digital transformation phases, and details on their staff members. This survey was used to sieve out potential participants according to pre-set criteria (McGuirk & O'Neill, 2016). It was also used as an instrument to set the stage between the researcher and middle managers for the next phase, the interview. Similarly, the second survey set was sent to operational employees (staff members) to understand their perspectives and team dynamics. The surveys provided an opportunity to verify and cross-check inputs from staff members against the responses from the middle managers, which increased the outcome validity of this study.

### ***Interviews***

For this study, two sets of interviews were conducted. One on the selected middle managers and the other on operational employees from the same departments as the middle managers. The interview questions were aligned with the theoretical framework and research questions of the study.

The main topics in the Interview Guide (see sample questions in Appendix A) were used to initiate and guide the conversation. However, the participants were given the freedom to convey their opinions and experiences liberally (Collis & Hussey, 2014). Each interview session lasted between 45 minutes to 100 minutes. With the interviewees' consent, they were audio recorded and later transcribed in text form for analysis. Transcribing was crucial for the analysis's simplicity and for assessing the reliability, validity, and generalizability (Pope, Ziebland & Mays, 2000).

## Sample population

Within RS, two groups of respondents were identified for this study:

* Middle managers (they are the Heads of Departments)
* Operational employees who report to each middle manager (Staff member)

For the middle managers, purposive sampling, also known as judgment sampling, was used to select the respondents of this study. Particularly a technique called Total Population Sampling was used where the entire population which fits a pre-set inclusion and exclusion criteria was included. Participants who fit the criteria were contacted via email and given a brief of the research and objective of the study, along with a digital consent request to participate in the interview sessions. For operational employees, purposive sampling was also used. A preliminary survey was sent to those who were under the selected middle managers. The selection was based on suitability, willingness to take part, and tenure within RS.

# Findings & Analysis

## Interviewees

***Middle Managers and Operational Employees***

Of a total of 16 potential middle managers (MMs), 14 took the survey. Although 7 qualified for the interview, only 5 agreed to participate in the interview. Concerning the operational employees (OEs), seven who took part in the survey agreed to take part. Table 1 gives the background information of the five managers interviewed.



Table 1: Background information of five interviewed managers Thematic Analysis of Findings

The findings derived from the interviews with the managers were analyzed in line with the themes and subthemes derived from Yukl’s Leadership Behaviour Taxonomy (Yukl et al., 2002) and Leader-Member Exchange Theory. Six themes were discovered as part of the analysis.

***Theme 1: Practice of managers as intermediaries between the top and bottom levels.***

MM1, MM2, and MM3 showcased this type of behavior which was witnessed by their staff members.

MM1 played the intermediary role in syncing the priorities and expectations of top and bottom levels, by practicing task-oriented leadership to ensure alignment across the entire department so the staff members understood their roles and responsibilities within the ERP project. OE1 elaborated on this:

*“MM1 would come to the factory floor and explain to each group what we need to do and by when. It helped us understand the project better.”*

Similarly, MM2 practiced the intermediary role by diffusing the required information to the team, in a manner essential to ensure buy-in from the team. She said, *“It's important that my role is like the filter in the middle and also the translator that. With the lower level that we translate exactly what they want and future whatever the challenges. Unnecessary things. Just report the importance updates and. And the translate to the top management that they understand exactly what the problem is.”* She devised a delegation strategy that helped the team cope better with the tasks for the project. According to OE2b, this effort by MM2 was a turning point for the team, who began believing in the need for the new ERP (buy-in).

To create a homogenous team, MM3 explained each task and the roles to his team helping them digest the tasks better. Initially, to the team (as claimed by OE3), the project was unwelcome as it was deemed a hindrance to their daily operation. However, with the clear and constant communication by MM3, the team realized that it brought efficiency and higher productivity.

MM1, MM2, and MM3 projected this role well which according to their staff members, made the team trust their managers more, leading to better motivation and commitment within the team. For instance, OE2 shared, *“Even if we did something wrong, she(MM2) never points finger”, while* OE3 in a similar context said, *“Sometimes, my manager (MM3) even has one-on-one, to understand our problem, even if personal, so he can see how to help”.*

However, this type of behavior was less evident in MM4 and MM5. MM4 demanded a full commitment to the ERP project, as he viewed it as the unspoken responsibility of each staff member. As MM5 was new to the team, OE5 viewed MM5 as rigid, where she was perceived to be a disruption than a positive drive.

All managers claimed to have invested to learn new business workflows, new roles, technical system processes, and industry best practices, to provide a plausible solution where required. For example, MM1 had effective team interactions as he highlighted “*Even during the implementation, they were sticking to the schedule and if they had issues. Can’t do it or can’t finish they come and tell me. So, we communicate better.”*

MM2 invested time and energy to upskill herself to coach rather than administer tasks and she recalls *“I keep asking prompting questions to understand team problems to go into detail to come up with a more conclusive solution, rather than fixing issues as they come.”* OE2a highlighted the involvement of MM2 helped ease the burden of the team, whilst empowering them. He also said, *“the knowledge and the inside that my manager has given was very good and was very insightful, very helpful.”*

Similarly, understanding the department workflow also led MM3 to relate to the team when they required guidance and direction.

Although MM4 claimed that he always provided new ideas and removed team roadblocks, OE4b felt that MM4 did not provide adequate guidance which resulted in the staff members resorting to one another rather than their manager for advice. OE4b highlighted*, “He liked to kind of throw you into the deep end and expects you to swim in all directions, so he does not give you a trajectory. He does not give you guidance. He just tells you I want this. So, you must try and figure out how you can achieve that.”* Likewise, the commendable behavior of MM5 toward wanting to help the team did not come through to its true intention as her abilities were not trusted or micromanaging.

To play the role of intermediary, all managers claimed that they practiced relationship building with top management to be able to be more transparent, and expressive and establish trust in their staff members. They did this to garner the support of top management in expediting important decision-making, whilst having a heroic ability to stand up for their team in the event of a failure, helping to articulate the essence of accountability. MM1 highlighted, *“Whatever failure my team have is my failure. Right. I'm not going to point fingers... Who's not doing whatever. That’s basically my job.”*

Despite the hierarchical culture, MM1 and MM2 showcased their ability to drive their team to be more efficient, which top management saw as trustable credibility.

However, managers appeared to be pressured by top management which led to recurring gatekeeping. Nevertheless, OE2a and OE2b both agreed that MM2 was able to negotiate or justify the inefficiencies of the team to the top management, to avoid penalties for the team. OE2a states, *“Even if we did something wrong, she never points finger”*. Similarly, MM1 constantly supports his team. MM1 said, *“Most of the time, mistakes happen, it's not because of their incompetency. It is because we don't provide them the right tools or the right structure in the right tools or the right infrastructure to allow them to do things right.*”

On the contrary, while MM4 and MM5 claimed that they have a good relationship with the top management, their staff members felt that the relationship did not positively impact the team. *“Must follow the chain of command”,* OE4a said. OE4a also added referring to MM4, *“So I would call his management style very traditional.”*

***Theme 2: Practice of relationship-oriented leadership practices***

Overall, all managers appeared to acknowledge the importance of relationship-building within their teams. Evidence shows that all managers showcased relationship-building practices toward their team to varying extents.

All managers believed that team empowerment was crucial and practiced the same, especially given the situation of remote working during the pandemic. For instance, MM1 said, *“Most of the time, mistakes happen, it's not because of their incompetency. It is because we don't provide them the right tools or the right structure in the right tools or the right infrastructure to allow them to do things right.*” He made it known to his team that he trusted their ability to perform without constantly second-guessing their output, whereas MM2 encouraged independence through delegation to reduce micromanagement. MM3 provided the required flexibility and autonomy to selected staff members and stressed, *“The way I deal with millennials is very different because I know they do not like to be told what to do. So, I normally encourage new ideas.”*. On the other hand, MM4 extended autonomy to his team leaders. The type of empowerment and autonomy provided depended on the characteristics, role, age, maturity, and seniority of the staff members.

The staff members all collectively agreed that though various managers displayed empowerment differently and to varying extents, each of their managers did empower their teams, especially toward the later stages of the project. OE1 celebrated the efforts of MM1 to educate the entire team on their contributions, while OE2a found the constant encouragement and optimism of MM2 helped him believe in his work. Similarly, OE3 realized by attempting to achieve smaller, more manageable tasks, prepared by MM3 pushed the team toward better progress. OE4a was aware that MM4 valued empowering the team but it was apparent that most times he was in a dilemma of fulfilling his superior expectation as he was deemed to have a *“management style that’s very traditional.”* Nevertheless, OE4a and OE4b did see a more empowering manager toward the later stages of the project, as OE5 witnessed with MM5.

While empowering, managers tried to build a relationship by understanding individual working styles to identify strengths and weaknesses within the team. MM1, MM2, and MM3 practiced constant and continuous communication to better direct tasks, and target and extend adequate support for their respective teams. MM3 said, *“The corporation the motivation factor will start to depreciate with less interest, you know. So that was something that keeping the motivation up was exceptionally important. And that keeps the readiness of the individual to contribute to making it a success. I think that is a very big, important fact.”* In doing so, efficiency and team morale increased.

On the other hand, MM4 and MM5 did put effort into understanding their team’s working style however, it was limited. For instance, although MM4 claimed to be empowering, contrarily, his staff members found that he was quick to reprimand rather than understand the situation especially when an issue happens, which demotivates, as highlighted by OE4b*, “He liked to kind of throw you into the deep end and expects you to swim in all directions, so he does not give you a trajectory. He does not give you guidance. He just tells you I want this. So, you must try and figure out how you can achieve that.”*

MM1, MM3, and MM4 appeared to focus on building trust and respect among the staff members using empathy. For example, OE1 said that the team was willing to go beyond their comfort zone to work more if it meant achieving the goal set by MM1. MM3 focused on cohesive department spirits by reaching out to the team on a slightly more personal level, which was something highly appreciated by OE3. In the case of MM4, trust was not completely in place as the team felt that he was not able to completely trust everyone and, in some instances, appeared disrespectful. The team members added, *“Umm, he was not easy to approach. He was not very communicative, and it was very difficult to understand what exactly he wanted, and even when I used to seek him out, find out. Our conversation would not be very fruitful.”*

Despite the different ways of the top management, middle managers used their discretion and approach that work with their teams. Believing in their people and creating trust was crucial for managers mobilizing their teams. By building trust and respect, managers achieve collectivity as “it's not a directive pose, it is a collective decision made by a group of individuals”

Constant engagement and high-quality communication were crucial to engage most staff members. MM1 said, referring to engaging his team *“For me, I enjoy explaining things to people and making them understand why they need to do it, because that way it's good for me and them, because sometimes as I explained to them, I explained to myself.”* MM1, MM2, and MM3 continuously engaged and motivated their team which is reflected in the responses from respective staff members, displaying the correlation of their commitment to their connection with their managers. These managers also supported their team for instance when MM1 extended emotional support, cleared roadblocks, or adequately rewarded members, and when MM3 practiced rewarding and recognizing his team even if it meant words of encouragement or an hour off work. OE3 felt that being called out at the morning meetings for achieving daily targets made a big difference and pushed her to do better the next day. She added, *“Every day we had a meeting, short one to discuss our goal and problems for the day.”*

***Theme 3: Practice team growth over daily operations***

MM1 made his team believe that they cannot depend on the older way the operations worked but there must be room for constant improvement.

“*, this is not forcing it through, but to explain, but sometimes after explaining you have to …make them see, and once they try …they tend to get used to it. Once they get used to it..then they see the value. Basically, we need to make them believe.”*

He believed in garnering the buy-in from his team by envisioning and driving change advocating practices, such as having staff members drive their own goals. Similarly, MM3 through careful planning and relationship building understood the stretch and weaknesses of his team to focus more on the growth of the individual rather than achieving daily KPIs alone. When faced with an issue, MM2 did not allow her team to blame the system for any inefficiencies but seek for a better solution. She claimed that she encouraged innovation and always reminded her team that, *“with this new system, it's time to change the way that you work previously.”* Her mantra to her team is *“Don't tell me system cannot do. Give me a work around. Don't tell me it's standard process. Give me the workaround.”*

Likewise, when a mistake or delay occurred, MM3 urged the team to find a better way to resolve the issue. OE3 also highlighted how these practices encouraged creativity and collaboration within the team. On the other hand, MM4 prioritized seamless operations before creativity. He said, *“But even when they(users) resist, very frankly, it is not their call. If it is a company-wide effort that must be done for the benefit of the company. I don't think that any level of employee can resist the change. Again, I might sound bit hard, but in theory that's what it is, isn't it? We're running a business.”*

He preferred to adhere to proven processes compared to new untested ways, which frustrated OE4b as there would be more efficient methods that could be implemented, MM4 was always skeptical as he ‘feared’ disruption to operations.

Upon going live (implementation) of the new ERP, MM1 realized that it was essential to focus on continuous learning, innovation, and team growth. OE1 recalled working on a single manufacturing process 8 times, just to make it more efficient, with the guidance of MM1. MM2 and MM3 both, made the team believe that changing the system does not mean business processes don’t change. MM2 constantly reminded the team, reminded her team that, *“with this new system, it's time to change the way that you worked previously.”*

MM3 leveraged the skills of the younger generation of his team for process innovation. It helped to address the limited workforce and make multitasking more effective. MM5, being a new manager, turned it to be an advantage, whereby she worked with her team to automate as many processes as possible. Although it may not have been wholly accepted by the team, OE5 did credit MM5 for the review which made them question the need for some process steps. According to OE5, *“There are lots of processes in place at the same time. Little bit of downturn in that process and the tool and the method was that it can be quite rigid. So sometimes you need a bit of fluidity. So, they(management) are trying to work on that, which is good.”*

Believing in the digital transformation project was crucial. In line with this, MM1 and MM2 strongly advocated the importance of understanding the goal and value of the entire digital transformation. MM3 focused on upskilling his team to address the shortage of workforce as well as to establish a growth mindset. This way, OE3 felt important for being able to contribute to not just the department but reflective to the monthly sales of the organization.

MM4 also practiced this behavior to curate ownership among his team, though he did so in a more coercive manner. He also believes that the team is adapting well to the new system which was reflected in the annual financial returns. OE4a highlighted how at first MM4 himself appeared not to believe in the need for the new system, however as he learned of the system and processes, the team began believing in it as well. He valued the collectivity of the team, *“I think when there is collectivity, much more can be achieved compared than when there isn't collectivity. When we make a collective decision, then everybody is in favor of it. So, you move towards that.”*

***Theme 4: Facing challenges from top-driven culture & top management expectations.***

The ERP upgrade at RS greatly impacted almost everyone in the organization. The extent of the digital transformation project was considered complex and even ambitious by many employees.

MM1, MM2, and MM3 faced a huge challenge from top management. MM1 felt that top management initiated this project solely expecting their people to complete the ERP upgrade at a timeline that was deemed highly ambitious and unfeasible. However, OE1 appreciated the way MM1 protected the team and gave the team freedom rather than following the hierarchical ways of the top management. Whereas MM2 and MM4 felt that limited budget and human resource shortage worsened the pressure on their staff members to complete the project, especially during the pandemic. This is attested by OE4a who received minimal support, *“Management they set out the plan and everything but eventually… That was only at the beginning. So in between, when we had our issues on the timeline or maybe some budgetary issues, he(MM4) didn't really give much input.”*

MM3 and MM5 had to constantly battle expectations from the top management. MM3 claimed that the top-down structure limited accessible communication, and collaboration, causing conflicts and further delays. He said, “*Sometimes we feel certain things we don't want it to be a quarterly priority, but then they sort of feel it is the main thing you need to put it in there and thereby you need to drive it is for the company. So, is it empowering? It's not empowering. But is this more like a shove it down the throat and get it done.”*MM4 felt that he was not granted the autonomy to fully make team-related decisions which was demotivating. MM4 said, *“Although when things go wrong, I am told that you had the power to change it. You didn't do anything about it. But no, I could not have. Because I was not given full autonomy.”* MM5 though not directly impeded by the top management, still had to accept last-minute, unplanned changes from the top management which she had to direct to the team.

MM1 recalls the cost-cutting measure from the top management as an arduous and agonizing process. He had to work with 70% less workforce which negatively impacted his team’s motivation. MM3 felt the time crunch that was set in completing the project put immense pressure on managers and hard-pressed the team, as experienced by OE3, to push themselves more than the usual work scope. MM4 called the organization orthodox and wished that they were more financially supportive. He added, *“So in a nutshell, the biggest challenge is reluctancy by the company to be prepared to put in more CapEx (Capital expenditure) and more financial resources for digital transformation.”* He claims that the organization would direct the budget toward other commercial aspects such as marketing and advertising but failed to see the importance of investing in digitalization. Staff members were unhappy that despite being pushed to work on the project beyond the scope, they were not rewarded adequately or recognized for their efforts.

MM1 and MM2 faced retaliations from their respective teams because of the short project timeline, due to top management expectations. OE2a recalled how it was difficult and constantly voiced his frustration, *“I complain that time I was the only one working in that time. I was the only one doing everything.”*  MM3 highlighted how top management expected immediate improvements in the operations given the new system, which left him helpless in providing support to the team. MM4 described that when top management initiated the project with an abridged timeline, they misconceived that the learning curve would be short, as they assumed that all employees had been working on Baan 4 (old ERP system), which was the precursor to LN10 (new ERP system). This posed problems to MM4 as his team was not structured to perform beyond their usual capabilities.

***Theme 5: Facing operating employees’ resistance to change***

The fact that the project began due to an inevitability posed many issues across multiple phases of the project. Trailing from the hierarchical culture, MM1 had to address inefficient communication that resulted in delayed tasks and poor productivity, while MM2 worked hard to break the crippling silo culture as it was hindering accountability and ownership. She shared, *“The culture here is that …it's not my department. Uh, it's none of my business, but little did they know that, whatever actions being taken by that department affect others department as well.”* Before that, everyone only focused on their own goals. MM4 realized that his team felt forced into the project when he had to handle high user resistance and disengagement. He added, *“Because it's fixed in their mind, it is very difficult to change somebody's mindset, you know, because they have been drenched in it for years.”* OE4b even confronted MM4 when responsibilities were expanded and altered. Furthermore, without proper directions and additional costly training, OE4b did not see a point in striving for the organization. To add to the challenge, the lack of funding made having adequate resources an issue that further stressed the teams. MM4 said, *“Biggest challenge is having adequate human resources because again, it goes back to your challenge number one...Funding.”*

The low motivation level of her team was MM2’s most giant stumbling block, especially in the first phase. She noticed some staff members feared the stability of their jobs or a judgment of their credibility if they did not pick up the new system. OE2a and OE2b unanimously felt weary of the new system as it was unfamiliar and overwhelming. MM5 dealt with a team that was performing their bare minimum and uncommitted, especially where some staff members were uncomfortable with the new ways of remote working. She said, *“I find it quite challenging, and it involves a lot of checking on their ticket and then writing a comment on it saying what could have been done better, what should have been done instead and yeah, so that that's requiring a bit of work and I was just thinking like I think it's not as effective as I think it should be.”*

***Theme 6: Influence of high-quality relationship-driven leadership behaviors and their impact in driving digital transformation success.***

All interviewed managers contributed to mitigating the challenges to drive their team toward the successful implementation of the new ERP system.

MM1 managed to bring his team together by garnering buy-in and winning the team’s trust, while MM2 acknowledged that her team showcased loyalty and commitment with trust and avoided micromanagement. OE2a attested that with all the direction, planning, and meetings, *“she(MM2) was also very careful not to overstep the boundary”* to avoid making the team feel like they were micromanaged. Similarly, OE3 highlighted that MM3 made a difference by forming a bond beyond just working colleagues and valuing the human touch. Despite practicing the coercive way, MM4 managed to work closely with his team to churn out successful tasks that were instrumental to the success of the ERP. OE4b thinks that the forceful method, though debilitating at first, as MM4 softened toward the team and adopted a more cordial relationship began translating to better communication. *“There was definitely less micromanagement, and he didn’t keep count of everything”,* said OE4a.

It was evident that all managers practiced relationship-building with the team and saw a positive outcome, especially with emotional support, transparent communication, and trust. OE1 valued MM1’s accountability which encouraged him to commit and work harder. OE2a treasured the constant compassion, motivation, and support of MM2 whereas the open communication practiced by MM3 formed a strong relationship and collaboration with his team. He said, *“If I as the middle-level manager, myself am not familiar with the thing they (staff members) are going to deal with, I cannot cascade it down. So, I spent a lot of time trying to understand what I was supposed to know. That's why I think I took a lot of time interviewing, finding out about every module until I knew everything myself, before I could really cascade down*.”

MM4 appeared to have a rather stringent relationship with his team and while OE4a and OE4b felt micromanaged, they were aware of their contribution to the success of the new system. MM5 was surprised that OE5 along with other staff members were dedicated and committed as they willingly worked overtime including on weekends to complete project tasks. To that, MM5 believed that the flexibility of the team helped. She added, *“So certain things where they've been doing it for a very long time, I give them a lot of leeway to do it their way.”*

The support provided by the managers drove their staff members to accept, adopt, and adapt to the new system. With the support extended by MM1, by being a listener and obstacle remover, OE1 acknowledges that the team is focused on a quantifiable benefit of the new system.

*“Our manager always asks us to figure out an easier way to do something, to cut time so we can improve our efficiency KPI. Now with new system its much faster.”*

MM2 and MM3 inculcated collaboration and leveraging on one another for better performance, making their processes leaner and more efficient. The openness of the team to keep learning to improve the new system is due to the leadership of the managers in leveraging on the high-quality relationship, understanding the strengths and weaknesses of the team while extending adequate support to them. For instance, MM5 believes that the implementation of the new system would be a continuous effort and not end especially as the team had invested their time and effort. She said *“Some things have gotten a lot better. Some things haven't been as good as it should be, or has it hasn't improved as fast as it should.”* But she said that she never stops encouraging the team to learn and improve daily.

## Discussion

The data collected and analyzed for this study showed a natural progression of leadership behavior by all middle managers toward participative and consultative. There was an impetus within the middle management to reconsider their regular approach of managing the teams and tasks to overcome the lack of progress within the ERP upgrade and ensure success. This conscious or subconscious realization pressured the middle managers to transition toward people-centric and relationship-oriented leadership as it was apparent that the ERP upgrade was not just about a system upgrade but an involved change in the process, roles, mindsets, habits, and acceptance of people. However, it was apparent that they had difficulties acting on this transition but eventually, they did attempt to change, at varying degrees of speed and acceptance.

This case study reveals two categories of middle managers at RS: (a) MM1, MM2, and MM3 who embraced the need to improve their leadership behavior and, hence were more successful in pushing the ERP upgrade; and (b) MM4 and MM5 who were less effective as middle managers, as they found it challenging to change their leadership style. The first group who were more effective practiced relationship and change-oriented leadership (Yukl's Hierarchy Taxonomy) while exhibiting high-quality relationships (Leader-Member Exchange) with their staff members. They prioritized the morale and work satisfaction of their staff members, which enabled them to effectively influence, motivate, and earn the commitment of their team. In contrast, MM4 and MM5 were more task-oriented and projected a lower-quality relationship with their team, prioritizing job completion over the well-being of their staff members, which made it difficult to implement change internally.

Five overarching factors potentially affect the leadership behavior and efficacy of these managers. The factors are age, seniority, education, work experience, and organizational culture of RS.

The younger middle managers, MM1, MM2, and MM3 in their 30’s and 40’s were more people-centric, change driven, and effective. The fact that they are younger may have led to them choosing a more participative leadership approach that focused on factors such as problem-solving and team participation, creating mutuality (Yukl, 2012). On the other hand, the older managers (MM4 & MM5) used a more conservative leadership approach that focused on the expectation of compliance with higher authority without questioning (Kabacoff & Stoffey, 2001). Being creatures of habit, though they were aware of the need to be closer to their staff to drive any change initiative, it was tough to adopt this new perspective and mindset themselves.

Regarding hierarchical structure, it was observed that more junior managers were less bonded to the structure of RS. MM1, MM2, and MM3 saw that the rigid structure could impede the efficacy of the department. Hence, they devised means to educate their team on the importance of cross-collaboration and gave continuous feedback to their team. In contrast, the more senior MM4 and MM5 who joined the department at the beginning of their career were unable to make such changes as they were strongly accustomed to the hierarchical culture of RS. Hence it is evident that age and employment duration influenced the managers’ willingness to embrace the required leadership behavior change.

Education was another factor. MM1, MM2, and MM3 graduated from private universities in early 2000, a period where students were more exposed to pivoting digital technology and e-commerce innovation, while MM4 and MM5 graduated from public Malaysian universities between 1970 – 1980, where computer literacy was just being introduced (Lai & Yap, 2004). Private institutions are profit enterprises focused on innovative programs, to stay competitive, including collaborative scholarly activities and the use of the latest technology. This is reflected in the flexible, participative leadership behavior of MM1, MM2, and MM3 (Arokiasamy et al., 2011). Additionally, the strong hierarchy culture practiced at Malaysian public universities ingrained the superiority of hierarchy in MM4 and MM5, unintentionally suppressing creativity and innovativeness through blind loyalty (Nemeth, 1986). Hence it can be deduced that education and period of study, may have influenced the change in appetite and leadership behavior, especially in the era of industrial digitalization.

Lastly, the hierarchical culture and top management’s impractical expectations are compounding elements that impact the manager’s leadership, constraining even effective managers. Having worked for other organizations before RS, MM1, MM2, and MM3 had the advantage of being exposed to diverse organizational cultures and team management experience, whereas MM4 and MM5 were nurtured in conventional practices where they were stuck in overconfident managerial ways, which hindered their capacity for constant learning toward improvement.

In summary, the findings show that there was a high dilemma amidst the middle management as there was a strong need for the leadership of this layer to drive digital transformation efforts for the lower working groups at RS, despite the low focus on them by the organization, as mobilizers of the lower groups. The operational employees, before the direct involvement and hands-on leadership in the ERP upgrade, had to face many difficulties and were penalized for their lack of performance. However, given middle management’s involvement, operational employees were given the direction, guidance, and motivation they sought to perform during the ERP upgrade. The middle managers, although at varying extents, did achieve buy-in, increased job satisfaction, and commitment amongst the operational employees. This validates not just the efficacy but the significance and inherent need of the middle management’s leadership in driving successful digital transformation.

# Implications of Study and Recommendations

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This exploratory qualitative study focused on the experiences of middle managers and their corresponding staff members to understand the influence and drive of middle managers in digital transformation in a manufacturing organization, as well as the challenges that they faced, particularly in terms of people and organizational culture. Middle managers' actions in overcoming problems, as well as their successes and failures, demonstrated their efficacy in direct and indirect roles as well as their effects in bringing about digital transformation in an organization.

The study suggests that managers’ age and duration of employment may be influencing factors in determining their efficacy in performing their leadership roles. However, this is a qualitative study, hence it is not advisable to generalize this finding without further investigation using other research methods such as the quantitative method that involves a large sample population. It is however possible to surmise that this trend is evident in this context. Hence, it is recommended that RS considers this and leverages the innovative leadership abilities and participative management skills of the more successful and adaptive managers. Drawing upon these traits may help in training older managers in relationship building and understanding the value of human-centric leadership to steer their teams toward accomplishing successful implementation of future organizational changes (Gabriel et al., 2020).

In addition to that, senior managers should be given periodic formal management training based on industry best practices so they can communicate more effectively and engage their teams more efficiently. Human Resources (HR) at RS should also consider signing them up for innovative management programs that are targeted at retraining older managers. If this approach still fails then RS should give serious thought to replacing them with new managers who can offer new ideas, experience, and leadership behaviors to stimulate the growth of RS.

Even successful managers require periodic internal or external training. From the analysis, it was evident that the managers guided their teams according to what they perceived to be their team’s needs, through a time and labor-intensive process of trial and error. Thus, leadership courses should be incorporated into RS's Human Resources (HR) programs for managers to train them on how to handle diverse groups of people efficiently and effectively, in the shortest time possible. This includes setting, clear Key Performance Indicators (KPI) and identifying well-planned career paths for managers to keep them close to their goals of becoming transformational and impactful, better managers.

Additionally, since the setting of the KPI is instrumental in ensuring the growth of middle managers, the HR team should employ a solid appraisal program to evaluate the performance of the managers based on the newly designed career path. Instead of conventional appraisal programs, The HR team should deploy an integrative and inclusive multi-rate feedback tool such as an anonymous 360-Degree Review that takes into account the feedback of superiors, subordinates, and peers. This would help to assess the efficacy of each manager’s leadership and management style, promote self-awareness, and address required training gaps.

With regards to organizational culture, it is proposed that RS’s board of directors assess the current employees’ desired organizational culture, as well as its willingness to change. This examination can be performed using a variety of instruments and procedures, such as the Organizational Culture Assessment Instrument (OCAI) which identifies four forms of organizational culture: Clan, Adhocracy, Hierarchy, and Market. Performing a culture gap analysis would enable top management to evaluate the current culture efficacy and strategize toward an organizational restructure to break away from the constraining hierarchical culture, which would facilitate future digital transformation efforts by inculcating more relationship-based interaction.

The study revealed that operational employees’ ignorance of RS’s long-term digitalization objectives and strategy was one of the biggest challenges middle managers faced. To address this, RS should devise a digital transformation strategy for its future and share the same across all levels of the organization. Understanding their employees' opinions across all levels and integrating their input into the strategy will also be beneficial, to garner more buy-in. Kane et al. (2018) found that strategy, rather than technology, drives transformation. By ensuring the presence of a good digital transformation strategy, employee alignment can be achieved, resulting in a better reception of change, reduced resistance, and a simpler adoption and adaptation of the transformation. The Technology team of RS should assess the digital maturity of RS to determine the organization's preparedness to embrace digitalization, help employees prepare for cultural change, and achieve dynamic alignment on digitalization, which is accomplished through perceiving, seizing, and transforming employee capacities (Yeow et al. 2018). Despite the completed implementation of the ERP upgrade, additional initiatives must be taken to create a unified digital mentality to aid the constant growth and competitiveness of RS in line with Industry 4.0.

More generally, the patterns discovered in this study present a learning opportunity for middle managers, particularly in the Malaysian manufacturing setting. In summary, trained middle managers with people leadership abilities working closely in a well-aligned organization equipped with a strong digital transformation strategy can develop a solid digital culture for the future, leading to effective digital transformations.

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# Appendix A

**Sample Interview Questions for Middle Managers**

An Interview Guide was used as the core instrument to guide and facilitate the data collection process for the interviews.

**Opening**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **No** | **Purpose** | **Interview questions** | **Guiding questions** |
| RQ0 | To gain a good overview of MM experience. | Could you please describe your experience in the ERP upgrade project? | * When did your role start?
* What were your key responsibilities?

What initiatives did you undertake to fulfill your responsibilities?  |

**Research Question 1:**

**What roles do the middle managers take on in their attempts to bring about digital transformation to the organization?**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **No** | **Purpose** | **Interview questions** | **Guiding/Prompt questions** |
| RQ1-1 | To understand organizational culture & team dynamics | * Please describe how directives are generally given in your organization.
* How do you respond to the approach?
* Are you satisfied with this approach? Why?
* Are your staff satisfied with your use of this approach? Why?
 | Prompt Questions: * Do you have a say in the directives?
* Can you request for changes?
* Can you modify the directives?
* Do you follow the directives closely? Why?
* To what extent do you use this approach? Why?
* Under what circumstances do you divert from it? Why?
* Does this approach help you manage your team better? Why?
* Does it lead to higher efficiency? Why?
* Does it lead to better teamwork? Why?
 |
| RQ1-2 | To understand communication structure and working relationship | * How do you manage communication within your team?
* How do you handle inefficiency in your department? Has this been productive within your team? Please give examples
* How would you describe your relationship with the following? Please provide examples to illustrate the relationship.
* your immediate boss
* team leaders/supervisors working under you
* all your operators
* Please describe how flexible are you with the team with regard to communication, time, and tasks assigned. Do give examples.
 | Prompt Questions: * Do you meet your team regularly?
* Do you send regular emails?
* Do you have daily/weekly/monthly meetings with your team?
* Do you meet the entire team at once? If not, what do you do?
* Do you allow staff members to approach you directly for feedback or suggestions?
* What do they usually approach you for?
* Are you given autonomy by your boss? Please give examples.
* Do you wish you had more flexibility at work? What kind of flexibility do you require?
* Do you allow autonomy to your team to manage their goals? How do you do this?
* Are they more productive with autonomy? Why do you say so?
* Do you reprimand staff members for their mistakes? How do you address this?
* How do you ensure your expectations are aligned with your team?
* How do you ensure team expectations are aligned with the department goals?
 |
| RQ1-3 | To understand leadership behavior - initiatives during ERP upgrade & team support | * Please elaborate on how you laid out the plan and goals for your team to achieve out of the ERP upgrade.
* How did the team react to the initial plan and goal set out for them?
* How did you support them to achieve the goals?
* What type of support did you provide to your team?
* What were the reactions of your team towards the support?
* Did you find the support provided, being helpful toward a more productive team? Please elaborate.
 | Prompt Questions:* Did you have a separate session with your team to explain the vision and mission of the project prior to the project start?
* Were they aware of the entire timeline and their roles within the project?
* How did they manage their day-to-day operations together with the project work?
* Are they satisfied with the support you give them?
* If not, what else do they want?
 |