

Competency Model of Corporate Middle Managers: An Embeddedness Theory Perspective

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Abstract

Middle managers act as critical links between senior executives and frontline employees. Insufficient competence among middle managers often leads to weak execution of corporate strategies. Although numerous scholars have examined the competencies required of middle managers, much of the existing research remains focused on complex, fragmented factor analyses, lacking the development of a concise and practical competence model. Grounded in embeddedness theory, this study classifies the factors influencing middle managers' competence into six key capability dimensions. Based on the analysis of 532 valid survey responses from enterprises across a range of industries, the findings indicate that middle managers who demonstrate the following six competencies—adherence to management systems and corporate culture, proficiency in management skills, effective communication with both superiors and subordinates, harmonious family and professional networks, execution of management procedures, and mastery of technical work processes—are capable of performing effectively in their roles.

Keywords: Middle Managers, Scaled Enterprises, Embeddedness Theory, Capability Dimensions, Competency Model

Introduction

The global economy is currently undergoing one of the most significant transformations in a century. Various risk factors are continuously challenging economic stability, and the risk of economic downturns is increasingly prominent. In response to this economic "winter," enterprises have begun to deeply restructure and optimize their human resources—particularly those centered around middle and lower-level management. This period, often referred to as "human resource deflation," sees companies striving to strike a balance between reducing labor costs and enhancing organizational efficiency. During times of economic downturn, the competency demands placed on managers become even more stringent. Middle managers serve as the critical link between top executives who formulate strategy and frontline employees who implement it (Floyd et al., 2021). Their ability to competently navigate periods of transition directly impacts their work effectiveness (Caldwell et al., 2020).

According to observations and research conducted by corporate management consultants, more than two-thirds of middle managers frequently experience high levels of work-related stress. Despite their dedication, they often fail to fully meet performance expectations. From the enterprise perspective, a perceived lack of competency among middle managers has led to high rates of voluntary resignations or terminations once more suitable replacements are found (Yang, et al., 2024; Zhou, 2025).

In scaled enterprises, most middle managers appear to be "seemingly qualified," but in reality, their competencies are insufficient, making it difficult for them to effectively fulfill their roles or maintain job security. This often results in cases of discontented resignations among middle managers (Chen, S., 2018). Weak competency among middle managers has also contributed to the failure of many enterprises to grow or strengthen their operations and, in some cases, has caused senior executives to question the soundness of their strategic decisions due to poor execution outcomes. The *White Paper on the Competency of Middle and Front-line Managers in China* Europe International Business School (CEIBS) (2018), based on survey data across 13 industries, 6 enterprise types, and 6 company sizes, revealed that as middle managers' authority increases, so do their responsibilities. However, during strategic execution, they often lack the necessary efficiency and effectiveness.

As key intermediaries within the organizational hierarchy, middle managers who possess competencies can become highly effective executors. They are better equipped to lead frontline employees in completing tasks and achieving objectives, thereby satisfying upper management. Additionally, such competencies help them succeed in and secure their current roles, while also paving the way for upward mobility. Managers with high levels of competency not only enhance their individual job performance but also contribute significantly to overall organizational performance (Yanli et al., 2023).

Research across various sectors—including vocational college instructors, commercial bank management, and middle managers in manufacturing and IT enterprises—has demonstrated a positive correlation between managerial competencies and both financial and non-financial performance indicators (Yunhai, 2010; Gang et al., 2011; Yueping et al., 2014).

Competence not only has a significant impact on individual and organizational performance, but also serves as an important foundation for trust. It can be used to reduce the complexity and uncertainty of social interactions (Luhmann, N., 1979). Competent middle managers are more likely to gain the trust of both their superiors and subordinates, which contributes to the stability of their positions and the improvement of organizational performance. Therefore, having competent middle managers is crucial for both personal and organizational development.

According to the *Research Report on the Competency of Middle and Frontline Managers in CEIBS* (Chen Shaohui, 2017), middle managers perform less effectively than frontline managers in the dimension of communication and feedback. Their behavior is characterized by relatively easy information relay up and down the hierarchy, yet they tend to have limited persuasive and communication abilities. Furthermore, middle managers exhibit several key weaknesses in execution. These competency gaps significantly hinder organizational efficiency and the smooth progress of operations (Chen Shaohui, Ji Liting, & Lei Lei, 2019). During corporate restructuring or layoffs, middle managers often account for the highest proportion of employee turnover. The China Europe International Business School suggests that enterprises should first align middle management roles with the organization's strategic goals, then identify gaps between the required competencies and the actual abilities of middle managers, and finally make necessary organizational adjustments and provide targeted training (Yijun, 2018).

To define the competencies required of corporate middle managers and to support enterprises in building a robust middle management talent pool, this study constructs six key competence dimensions based on embeddedness theory. An empirical research approach is employed, utilizing a multiple logistic regression model, with the six competence characteristics serving as independent variables and middle manager competence as the dependent variable, to examine the relationships between these characteristics and managerial competence. The objective is to establish a concise competence model that can guide enterprises and employees in implementing targeted training and development initiatives.

Literature Review and Theoretical Hypotheses

Middle managers occupy a central position within the organizational structure of enterprises and serve as the elite core and backbone force of companies. In this study, all technical and managerial personnel positioned between frontline supervisors and senior vice presidents are defined as middle managers (Li, W., Gao et al., 2022). The issue of middle managers' competency has long received significant attention. The concept of "competency" was first proposed by David McClelland in 1973, who introduced two widely cited competency models: the Iceberg Model and the Onion Model (David McClelland, 1973). The competence theory helps employees' career development, thereby enhancing the company's competitiveness (Saxton J., 2016). Competency models can help individuals improve through self-management and mitigate negative impacts in human resource management (Muninger M. I. et al., 2019). Competency has been described as the ability to effectively transform knowledge into action (Roegiers, 2017). Bhardwaj and Punia (2013) summarized a set of widely emphasized competencies by researchers, including communication, teamwork, initiative, vision, self-management, result orientation, strategic orientation, ambition,

persistence, decision-making, risk-taking, and creativity. Other scholars suggest that competencies can be grouped into six broad categories encompassing twenty elements: action and achievement, service and support, influence and impact, management, cognition, and personal attributes (Chouhan, V. S. et al., 2014). Some studies also divide competencies into three dimensions: interpersonal skills, managerial ability, and professional expertise (Montree Prajugit et al., 2020).

Chinese scholars have also conducted extensive research on the competency characteristics of middle managers, identifying anywhere from a few to over twenty competency traits. A summary of these studies indicates that the most frequently cited characteristics include personal integrity, interpersonal communication, strategic thinking, influence, team leadership, delegation skills, managerial competence, professional expertise, innovation ability, execution capability, and decision-making skills (Xiaoying, 2022).

Currently, although a large number of studies have explored middle management competency traits, the results often remain at the level of fragmented descriptors and lack a concise, practical, and effective structural model of competencies.

Competent middle managers have a significant impact on both personal development and enterprise performance. When frontline managers are promoted to middle management, they must quickly adapt to their new roles, build trust with subordinates, communicate effectively, and achieve advancement across various dimensions such as institutional culture, technical processes, and managerial skills. Trust is the foundation for successfully managing responsibilities and achieving breakthroughs. To earn sufficient trust, middle managers must possess a certain level of personal influence, which can be enhanced through the development of personal soft skills. Personal soft skills include moral character, innovative spirit, resilience, communication ability, teamwork, planning, and problem-solving skills (Zhang Yanhua, 2022). Middle managers can improve their soft skills through competency-based training, thereby earning trust from both superiors and subordinates, securing their positions, and becoming deeply embedded within the enterprise.

The embeddedness theory proposed by economic sociology suggests that the development of an industry is closely linked to the social relationships of the region, with strong connections in terms of economics, social institutions, politics, and other aspects (POLANYI K et al., 1968). Research on corporate embeddedness generally covers five areas: relationships, structure, cognition, culture, and politics. Except during periods of upheaval, the political environment and economic-social structure are generally stable (Yunxia et al., 2013).

This paper assumes that the political environment and economic-social structure remain stable, and embeddedness refers to the strong link between middle managers' competence and the enterprise. The paper analyzes the embeddedness of middle managers' competence from three dimensions: culture, relationships, and cognition.

Cultural embeddedness refers to the role of shared collective understandings, ideological frameworks, and systems of rules in shaping strategies and objectives (Zukin S et al., 1990). In this paper, cultural embeddedness is primarily reflected in middle managers' adherence to management systems, their promotion and implementation of corporate culture, and their possession of job-related management skills.

Management systems refer to a set of rules, procedures, and standards established by an enterprise during its operation and development in order to achieve predefined goals (Zhang Chaofang, 2023). Corporate culture, on the other hand, is the collective set of cultural characteristics and spiritual outlook formed through long-term development in a specific organizational environment. It includes values, beliefs, behavioral norms, work attitudes, and team spirit (Li Yanyan, 2014). The management system is a rigid embodiment of corporate culture—it serves as a behavioral code and action guide for all employees. The corporate culture established by enterprise leaders represents the inner soul of the enterprise and plays an important role in corporate value management (Iyiola Comfort Olubukola et al., 2023). Management skills are also a key factor in enterprise performance and have a significant positive impact on outcomes (Fonkam Mongwa Nkam, 2021). Middle managers should comply with and implement the management system, firmly promote corporate culture, learn to think from a functional and holistic perspective, master job-related management skills, and perform their roles diligently. These practices contribute to improved performance and the realization of cultural embeddedness.

Effective implementation of management systems can provide middle managers with a clear understanding of their roles, well-defined goal orientation, and the necessary resource support. This enables them to clearly understand their responsibilities and expectations, identify the specific outcomes they need to achieve, and access the required human, financial, and material resources. Such support ensures that middle managers have sufficient means to accomplish their goals and enhances their competency (Congyang, 2013).

Corporate culture is a set of shared values, behavioral norms, and working styles developed over a long period through an enterprise's production and operational activities. A positive execution culture can create an atmosphere that encourages middle managers to take initiative, embrace innovation, and demonstrate perseverance when facing challenges. This kind of culture stimulates internal motivation and enables them to better achieve organizational goals (Yan, 2016).

Therefore, effective execution of management systems and a positive corporate culture can enhance the job competency of middle managers. Based on the above discussion, the following hypotheses are proposed.

H1: Compliance with and execution of management systems and corporate culture has a positive impact on the job competency of middle managers.

Management skills are a critical component of middle managers' competencies. Studies have shown that management skills are closely related to the overall performance of middle managers (Li Hongqu, 2014). By enhancing their management skills, middle managers can better adapt to organizational changes, achieve departmental success, and improve work efficiency and performance, thereby supporting the overall operation of the enterprise (Mustafa Aslan, 2017). Strengthening training in management skills for middle managers not only enhances their personal capabilities but also indirectly improves the overall performance of the enterprise (Huang Huiqiang, 2018). It is evident that middle managers' possession of relevant management skills plays a significant role in promoting their job competence. Based on the above discussion, the following hypotheses are proposed.

H2: Possessing management skills has a significant impact on the job competency of middle managers.

Relational embeddedness refers to the influence generated by direct interactions between actors, reflecting the strength of their relationships (Granovetter M et al., 2001). In this study, relational embeddedness primarily refers to middle managers' ability to communicate effectively with superiors and subordinates within the enterprise, as well as their capacity to maintain harmonious family and professional networks.

Smooth communication between superiors and subordinates within an organization directly affects work efficiency and performance. Middle managers need to understand the pressure faced by their superiors, learn how to report work upward effectively, delegate and guide work downward, possess the ability to communicate with senior management, and lead their teams in mutual growth. Communication between different hierarchical levels is significantly correlated with job satisfaction (Godfrey A et al., 2015), and smooth internal communication helps maintain stable performance.

Harmonious family relationships and stable professional networks are the foundation for middle managers to maintain a healthy working state. A harmonious family life contributes to a positive work–family relationship (Heras et al., 2021), enabling middle managers to devote themselves to work with more energy and fewer distractions. Expanding a network of professional elites and encouraging intellectual exchange among functional peers is also beneficial for enhancing workplace competency. Thus, possessing smooth communication skills with superiors and subordinates, as well as maintaining harmonious family and professional relationships, can help middle managers achieve **relational embeddedness**.

Interpersonal communication skills are one of the core competencies of middle managers. They need to build good relationships with suppliers, customers, and internal employees, and coordinate the interests of various parties through effective communication. Their communication ability is crucial for maintaining team harmony, advancing work progress, and achieving organizational goals. Middle managers must consistently maintain sharp interpersonal communication skills (Mustafa Aslan, 2017). Through effective communication, middle managers can better convey instructions, provide feedback, recognition, and rewards, thereby enhancing team cohesion and combat effectiveness (Chen Shaohui, 2017). Communication skills not only contribute to improving organizational performance but also help ensure a trustful relationship between senior and middle management (Denekamp, H. R., 2017). It is evident that possessing effective communication skills with both superiors and subordinates can enhance the competence of middle managers. Based on the above discussion, the following hypotheses are proposed.

H3: Possessing superior-subordinate communication skills has a positive impact on middle managers' job competence.

The impact of **family and professional social network relationships** on middle managers' job competence is complex and multidimensional. Conflicts between work and family have a significant effect on middle managers' job satisfaction and competence. Studies show that managers who sacrifice family for work tend to bring negative emotions into the workplace, which affects their execution, judgment, and organizational coordination capabilities, thereby

reducing organizational efficiency (Tan Lijuan, 2017). Furthermore, research on **work-family balance** indicates that a good balance can enhance employee job satisfaction and organizational performance (Huang Shiwu, 2016). Studies have found that **family-supportive supervisory behaviors** can significantly improve employees' task performance, innovative behaviors, and life satisfaction (Li Chaoping, 2023). By promoting **work-family enrichment** and **family-work enrichment**, employees are able to allocate more time and energy to their job responsibilities, which enhances their subjective well-being (Ode-Dusseau et al., 2016; Wang Yanzi, 2020).

Professional social networks not only help with the transmission of information and communication but also provide support during the decision-making process. Middle managers should expand their professional networks to gain timely access to valuable information and promote two-way orientation (Nahiyah Jaidi et al., 2021). However, such relationships can also have negative consequences—for instance, **nepotism** may undermine career development opportunities and managerial integrity (Zhu Jian'an, 2016). Based on the above discussion, the following hypothesis is proposed.

H4: Disharmonious family and professional network relationships have a negative impact on the job competence of middle managers.

Cognitive embeddedness refers to the way individuals define problems and choose how to address them—it is the process of building a shared mental map (Kennedy, M. T., 2008). In this paper, cognitive embeddedness is reflected in middle managers' adherence to corporate **management procedures** and their **proficiency in work-related technical processes**.

Enterprises communicate their beliefs and values through the implementation of management procedures and technical workflows across various positions, thereby forming a **shared cognitive framework**. Middle managers frequently encounter a variety of management challenges in their daily work; **management procedures** can help them address these challenges (Sun, 2021). By executing their tasks according to established procedures, engaging in deep reflection, summarizing experiences, and identifying issues during implementation, middle managers can learn how to write and update procedures, and lead their teams in fully applying them. While embracing corporate management systems and culture, middle managers must also become proficient in all relevant technical workflows. Through this process, a **shared set of beliefs, values, and problem-solving methodologies** among middle managers can be developed, thus achieving **cognitive embeddedness**.

Adhering to standardized procedures ensures that middle managers operate within established guidelines, thereby reducing the risk of inconsistencies in management practices. It allows them to focus on strategic objectives rather than constantly adjusting their methods, enabling deeper expertise in key areas (Hiltunen, E. et al., 2021). Management procedures typically incorporate best practices and proven strategies, providing middle managers with access to high-quality resources and methodologies. Research shows that following these procedures enables managers to develop skills that might otherwise require repeated trial and error to acquire (Smith & Lewis, 2020). In particular, compliance with prescribed procedures enhances abilities in planning, problem-solving, and team coordination. Procedure adherence reduces uncertainty and provides a clear roadmap for managers in complex situations. This clarity is associated with increased confidence and

decisiveness among middle managers, allowing them to focus on honing leadership and communication skills (Jones, 2022), which contributes to strengthening their job competency. Based on the above discussion, the following hypothesis is proposed.

H5: Compliance with and execution of management procedures has a positive impact on the job competency of middle managers.

Mastery of technical work processes can enhance the professional competence of middle managers. Possessing the relevant technical knowledge enables them to effectively manage and execute work processes. (Sudirman, I. et al., 2019). By becoming leaders in their respective technical domains, they can also establish collaborative relationships with suppliers, customers, and partners. This technical capability not only contributes to outstanding performance and improved efficiency within departments, but also plays a critical role in cross-functional collaboration, ensuring the smooth implementation and optimization of technical processes (Mustafa Aslan, 2017). Mastery of technical workflows helps middle managers better understand internal technical operations and external technological trends, thus enabling more informed and forward-looking decision-making. For instance, research shows that technical training and work motivation significantly impact decision-making accuracy; when both are enhanced, the performance of technical supervisors can be significantly improved (Riyanto, 2012). In the implementation of technical processes, the role of middle managers has gradually shifted from traditional supervision to support and coordination. They are expected to establish effective communication and collaboration mechanisms to promote information sharing and knowledge exchange among team members, thereby enhancing the technical capabilities and efficiency of the entire team.

It is evident that middle managers who are proficient in work-related technical processes are more likely to be competent in their roles. Based on the above discussion, the following hypothesis is proposed.

H6: Proficiency in work-related technical processes has a positive impact on the job competency of middle managers.

Based on the theoretical hypotheses above, a model has been constructed to illustrate the relationship between six competency characteristics of middle managers and their job competency, as shown in Figure 1.

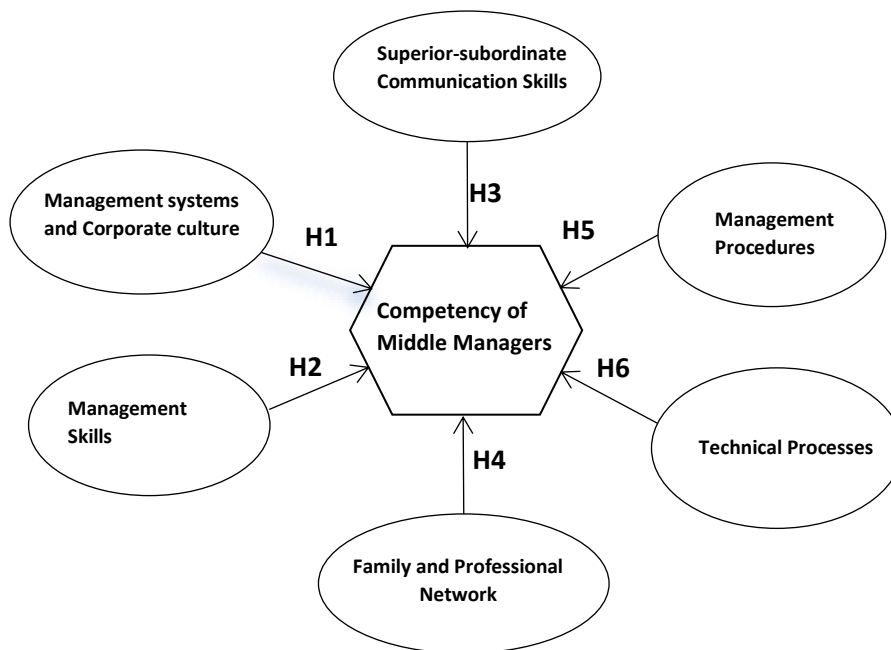


Figure 1. Competency Model of Middle Managers

Methodology

Data Collection and Sample Description: Data for this study were collected through a one-on-one questionnaire survey conducted via the Wenjuanxing platform, primarily leveraging social networks. Respondents included senior, middle, and junior-level employees from enterprises across 14 provinces in eastern, central, and western China. The broad geographic coverage enhances the validity of the findings. A total of 532 valid responses were obtained, as shown in the table below.

Table 1
Demographics

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage %
Gender	Male	298	56.0
	Female	234	44.0
Industry	Manufacturing	216	40.6
	Service Industry	278	52.3
	Other	38	7.1
Age	25 years or below	56	10.5
	26-30 years	91	17.1
	31-35 years	111	20.9
	36-40 years	106	19.9
	40-46 years	89	16.7
	Above 46 years	79	14.8
Years of Work Experience	4 years or below	106	19.9
	5-8 years	105	19.7
	9-12 years	98	18.4
	13-17 years	91	17.1
	Above 17 years	132	24.8

Education Level	Junior High School or below	25	4.7
	High School, Vocational School, or Technical High School	84	15.8
	Associate Degree	134	25.2
	Bachelor's Degree	232	43.6
	Master's Degree or above	57	10.7
Company Size	150 employees or below	135	25.4
	151-200 employees	61	11.5
	201-300 employees	47	8.8
	301-500 employees	45	8.5
	Above 500 employees	244	45.9
Job Level	Frontline Staff/Team Leader	197	37
	Middle Supervisor/Engineer	141	26.5
	Middle Manager/Department Head	111	20.9
	Middle Director	41	7.7
	Above Director	42	7.9
Total		532	100

Variable Definitions and Model Selection: This study employs an empirical analysis approach by constructing a multinomial logistic regression model to analyze the characteristic factors influencing the competency of middle managers in enterprises. The competency of middle managers is used as the dependent variable and is measured by the duration of their current job level. Managers with less than one year in their current position are taken as the reference group; a longer duration in the current job level indicates higher competency for the position. Based on the hypotheses established earlier, the study disaggregates six characteristic factors influencing middle manager competency into seven independent variables: management systems, corporate culture, management skills, superior-subordinate communication, family and functional networks, management procedures, and work technical processes. The definitions and statistical results of these variables are shown in Table 2.

According to the survey results, 95 respondents (17.9%) had been in their current job level for less than one year, 126 (23.7%) for 1–2 years, 114 (21.4%) for 3–4 years, and 197 (37%) for five years or more. Since the duration at the current job level is a non-continuous, multi-category variable, a multinomial logistic regression model is used to construct the competency model for middle managers in enterprises.

$$P_i = \ln \left[\frac{P(Y = i / x)}{P(Y = 0 / x)} \right] = a_i + \sum_{j=1}^7 \beta_j x_j \quad (i=1,2,3)$$

In the equation, Y represents the dependent variable "competency," and the independent variables influencing Y are x_1, x_2, \dots, x_7 , α is the constant term, and the β_i are the regression coefficients of the influencing factors.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics of Dependent and Independent Variables

Variable name and code	minimum	maximum	mean	Variable description and assignment
Dependent variable Y	1	4	2.78	1 - The duration of the current job is less than 1 year, 2 - 1-2 years, 3- 3-4 years, 4- 5 years and above
Management Systems x1	1	5	2.81	
corporate culture x2	1	5	2.98	
Management skills x3	1	5	2.8	
Superior-subordinate Communication Skills x4	1	6	4.06	
Family and Professional Network x5	1	6	4.35	
Management procedures x6	1	6	4.06	
Technical Processes x7	1	6	3.1	

Data Analysis and Results

Chi-Square Test: In this study, there is no mutual interference or influence among the characteristic factors affecting the competency of middle managers in enterprises. The questionnaire options are unordered categorical variables, which meet the conditions for a chi-square test. The results of the chi-square test conducted using SPSS statistical software indicate that individuals with different durations in their current job level show significant differences in their responses to the factors of management systems, corporate culture, management skills, superior-subordinate communication, family and functional networks, management procedures, and work technical processes. The chi-square values are relatively high, and all p-values are less than 0.001. This indicates that all six characteristic factors are significant influencers of middle manager competency. The specific chi-square values are shown in Table 3.

Table 3

Chi-Square Test Results

Category	Management Systems	Corporate Culture	Management Skills	Superior-subordinate Communication Skills	Family and Professional Network	Management Procedures	Technical Processes
Chi-Square	738.008	702.079	580.401	462.234	246.236	587.454	494.273
p-value	< 0.001	< 0.001	< 0.001	< 0.001	< 0.001	< 0.001	< 0.001

Regression Analysis: This study uses SPSS statistical analysis software to conduct a multinomial logistic regression analysis on the competency of middle managers in enterprises. The empirical results passed the likelihood ratio test, with a significance p-value of 0, which is less than 0.05, indicating statistical significance. This confirms that the model is valid. The results are shown in Table 4.

Table 4

Likelihood Ratio Test of Multinomial Logistic Regression Model

model	-2 X Log-likelihood value	Chi-square value	df	p	AIC value	BIC value
Intercept only	1432.933508					
Final model	287.750373	1145.183134	21	0	335.750373	438.389817

This study measures the competency of middle managers in enterprises based on the duration of their current job level. Managers with less than one year in their current position are used as the reference group, and a longer duration indicates a higher level of competency for the position. Accordingly, three logistic regression models are constructed: Model I for a job level duration of 1–2 years, Model II for 3–4 years, and Model III for 5 years or more. The estimation results of the multinomial logistic regression models for each group are presented in Table 5.

Table 5

Estimation Results of the Multinomial Logistic Regression Models for Factors Influencing Middle Managers' Competency

Variance name	Model I coefficient	Standard error	model II coefficient	Standard error	model III coefficient	Standard error
Management Systems	2.707	1.41489	4.881**	1.474412	6.073**	1.508682
Corporate Culture	-1.239*	0.92977	2.458*	1.006509	6.458**	1.093455
Management Skills	6.904*	3.457388	8.494*	3.470324	8.354*	3.469935
Superior-subordinate Communication Skills	1.992*	0.836621	1.908*	0.839251	1.846*	0.840554
Family and Professional Network	-2.863*	1.432245	-3.666*	1.463678	-3.845**	1.472721
Management procedures	2.200*	0.921441	2.312*	0.937566	2.628**	0.947193
Technical Processes	3.491*	1.442232	3.580*	1.463441	3.871**	1.47694

Remark: *** and ** indicate that the variables are statistically significant at 1% and 5%, respectively.

According to the statistical results in Table 5, regarding management systems, the regression coefficient in Model I is positive but not statistically significant. This suggests that there is no significant difference in the impact of management systems on the competency of middle managers with 1–2 years versus less than 1 year in their current position. However, in Models II and III, the regression coefficients are both positive and statistically significant at the 0.01 level. This indicates that compliance with and implementation of management systems has a positive impact on the competency of middle managers who have held their current position for two years or more.

Regarding corporate culture, the regression coefficient in Model 1 is negative and shows significance at 0.05. From the statistical results, compared to middle managers with less than 1 year of tenure in their current position, those with 1-2 years of experience find that implementing corporate culture does not enhance their competence but rather weakens it. Observations and surveys of middle managers at this stage reveal that they focus more on practical execution abilities, prioritizing the understanding and acceptance of corporate culture rather than promoting and implementing it. In Models 2 and 3, the regression coefficients are both positive, showing significance at 0.05 and 0.01, respectively. This indicates that as the tenure in their position increases, middle managers who more effectively implement corporate culture are better able to fulfill their roles.

Regarding management skills and superior-subordinate communication, the regression coefficients in Models I, II, and III are all positive and statistically significant at the 0.05 level. This indicates that possessing management skills and effective communication abilities with superiors and subordinates has a significant positive impact on middle managers' competency, supporting Hypotheses 2 and 3.

Regarding family and professional networks, the regression coefficients in Models I, II, and III are all negative. Models I and II show statistical significance at the 0.05 level, while Model III is significant at the 0.01 level. This suggests that disharmonious family and professional network relationships have a negative impact on middle managers' competency, supporting Hypothesis 4.

Regarding management procedures and work technical processes, the regression coefficients in Models I, II, and III are all positive. Models I and II are significant at the 0.05 level, and Model III is significant at the 0.01 level. This demonstrates that adherence to management procedures and proficiency in work technical processes have a significant positive impact on the competency of middle managers, supporting Hypotheses 5 and 6.

Discussion

Based on existing research, this paper analyzes six key competence characteristics of corporate middle managers' competence from the perspective of embeddedness theory and constructs a multiple logistic regression model to test the hypotheses of the model. This study provides insights for enterprises to help middle managers better improve their job competence. Data analysis reveals that management systems have no significant impact on the competence of middle managers with less than two years of tenure in their current roles, but have a positive impact on those with two or more years of experience. Middle managers with shorter tenures may lack sufficient experience to effectively implement the requirements of management systems. They may still be in the learning phase, focusing on understanding and adapting to the system, and are still exploring how to apply it to their actual work. As a result, the impact of management systems on their competence enhancement is minimal (You Ming et al., 2018). As tenure increases, middle managers gain a deeper understanding of the management system and are better able to integrate its requirements into their daily work, thereby improving their competence. Longer tenure means more accumulated practical experience, which helps managers better understand and implement the management system, while also allowing them to adjust and optimize the

system based on feedback from their work, further enhancing their competence (Chen Shaohui et al., 2018).

The impact of corporate culture on middle managers' job competency is relatively complex. Compared to middle managers who have been in their current position for less than one year, those with 1–2 years of tenure do not see an improvement in competency through the implementation of corporate culture; instead, it tends to weaken. However, as the duration in the position increases, the more middle managers embrace and implement corporate culture, the more competent they become in fulfilling their middle management roles. For middle managers with 1–2 years of experience, their understanding and comprehension of the corporate culture's essence and requirements are still limited, which restricts their ability to translate cultural values into concrete actions. Additionally, a potential mismatch between their personal capabilities or traits and the corporate culture may lead to difficulties in executing and embodying the culture fully, thus negatively affecting their competency (Yang Xiangyi, 2008). The process of understanding, accepting, and fully implementing corporate culture is relatively long. It requires not only internal corporate training and the mutual influence of employees but also the personal insight and realization of the middle managers themselves. As their tenure increases, middle managers develop a deeper understanding of the corporate culture, gradually achieving a dynamic alignment and a virtuous cycle between their competency and the culture, thereby enhancing the enterprise's overall soft power (Han Haixia, 2018).

The research results show that management skills, communication with superiors and subordinates, family and functional networks, management procedures, and work technical processes all have a significant impact on middle managers' job competency. This indicates that these competency characteristics are critical factors influencing the ability of middle managers to perform their roles effectively. Although existing studies have analyzed the competency traits of middle managers, they have primarily focused on identifying whether candidates meet the requirements for middle management positions from the perspective of corporate recruitment and selection. Moreover, while many competency traits have been discussed, no previous research has comprehensively covered all aspects, including corporate systems, corporate culture, management skills, communication with superiors and subordinates, family and functional networks, management procedures, and work technical processes.

This study, from the perspective of both individual middle managers and corporate talent development, categorizes middle managers' competencies into six major areas based on embeddedness theory and confirms the correlation between each competency area and overall job competency. It is hoped that enterprises will use this model as a reference to conduct execution-oriented training for middle managers. Middle managers themselves can also use the model as a guide to diligently study and train in each competency area to improve their job competency, which in turn will help enhance the enterprise's economic performance.

Conclusion

This study constructs a competency model for corporate middle managers based on embeddedness theory and proposes six hypotheses corresponding to six key competence

characteristics. Using middle manager competence as the dependent variable, and management systems and corporate culture, management skills, superior-subordinate communication, family and professional networks, management procedures, and technical work processes as independent variables, the study employs a multiple logistic regression model for analysis.

By analyzing 532 valid survey responses collected from enterprises across various industries in China, the results show that adherence to management systems and corporate culture, possession of management skills, effective communication with superiors and subordinates, compliance with management procedures, and mastery of technical work processes have a positive impact on middle managers' competence. In contrast, disharmonious family and professional networks negatively affect middle managers' competence.

After applying this six-dimensional competency model across multiple industries, enterprises reported varying degrees of improvement in the competence of their middle managers, along with significant increases in management efficiency and economic performance, thereby validating the effectiveness of the six-dimensional middle manager competency model.

Theoretical Implications

This study expands the theoretical framework of competency models. Drawing on embeddedness theory, it categorizes the competencies of middle managers into six key dimensions, encompassing cultural embeddedness (management systems and corporate culture, management skills), relational embeddedness (superior-subordinate communication skills, family and professional networks), and cognitive embeddedness (management procedures, technical processes). This model not only breaks through the fragmented limitations of the traditional "element-stacking" approach to competency research, but also closely integrates organizational behavior, management systems, and individual competencies. It forms a logically coherent and structurally robust competency model for the execution capabilities of middle managers, enriching the application pathways of embeddedness theory in the field of organizational management and providing a systematic theoretical foundation and a replicable empirical model for future research.

Practical Implications

At the practical level, this study is based on 532 valid samples collected from enterprises across various industries and regions, offering strong representativeness and applicability. The findings indicate that middle managers with strong **management** skills, effective communication with superiors and subordinates, adherence to management procedures, and proficiency in technical **processes** tend to demonstrate higher job competency and greater career stability. In contrast, unharmonious family relationships and weak professional networks significantly undermine their competency. Additionally, the positive influence of corporate culture becomes increasingly evident as tenure increases.

Given that execution ability is the core value of middle managers and competency forms the foundation for high execution performance, this study constructs a stable competency model that provides a practical path for capacity building for both organizations and individuals. Enterprises can utilize the model to design targeted training programs, thereby enhancing middle managers' execution capabilities and promoting sustained improvements in

organizational performance. The application of the model also supports enterprises in developing a stable, professional, and high-performing core team of middle managers during periods of transformation and lean management. On an individual level, middle managers can follow the model's six core competencies to systematically enhance their job competency and execution ability, ultimately achieving career stability, advancement, income growth, and improved quality of life. Overall, this research offers a clear and actionable framework for building high-performance middle management teams and improving individual managerial performance.

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