

Managing from the *middle*
A labour process analysis of middle managers

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Rebecca Maria Gatt
School of Business
University of Leicester

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Abstract

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Rebecca Maria Gatt

This thesis examines the labour process (LP) of middle managers (MMs) in a large public sector organisation in Malta. The role of MMs, at least in Anglo-American countries, tends to stretch across management functions (controlling subordinate employees and coordinating work) and labour functions. In the case of Malta, however, the general management functions have not been separated from specialist expert functions which impacts upon the LP of MMs.

The MMs analysed in this study were specialist managers, performing a dual-role as managers and experts. As a consequence of the considerable specialised technical functions, professional expertise (PE) - a combination of knowledge, skills and experience - becomes significant and reshapes the terrain on which struggles over LP control takes place. The thesis argues that PE consolidates MMs' expert role and supports their managerial role. Leverage over the technical coordination of the LP within the organisation's specialised units is used in the social coordination and control of the LP. In order to investigate tensions between the roles of MMs, in-depth interviews were conducted in the case study organisation with MMs as well as their own managers and subordinate employees.

It is found that MMs are not deskilled but subject to a hybrid set of control practices, particularly aspects of professional control. MMs were able to use their PE to draw boundaries, uphold their standing and preserve their autonomy. This autonomy, gained through MMs' own professional resources, allows them to closely align with top managers' interests. Although MMs tended to be unionised, they preferred to oppose ('misbehave') individually and informally, without obstructing the operations they were managing. In line with previous research on MMs, this thesis emphasises their alignment with management; yet, it also contributes to this literature, highlighting how the non-separation of general management and specialist expert functions accord them much greater autonomy in the LP and tend to weaken managerialism.

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List of Abbreviations

EU	European Union
FLM/s	First-line manager/s
HPWS	High-performance work systems
HR	Human resources
HRM	Human resource management
ISCO	International Standard Classification of Occupations
LP	Labour process
LPT	Labour process theory
MM/MMs	Middle manager/s
NPM	New public management
NSO	National Statistics Office (Malta)
OB	Organisational behaviour
PE	Professional expertise
SM/SMs	Senior manager/s
UK	United Kingdom
USA	United States of America

Glossary

Experts	Personnel who possess specialised knowledge, skills and practical experience, usually coupled with tertiary qualifications.
Operational	The management and execution of the organisation unit's output (including technical elements) according to the organisational objectives.
Professional credentials / Credentials	Tertiary level qualifications awarded by accredited academic institutions.
Technical	Tasks and responsibilities, which require specialised knowledge and practical skills.
Warrant	Practicing certificate/licence to practise a profession. In Malta, these are generally awarded by boards that operate under the auspices of various government ministries.

Use of terms

For the purpose of this thesis, the following terms are used interchangeably:

- 'expert/s' - 'specialist/s' - 'professional/s'
- 'specialist expert functions' - 'specialised technical functions'
- 'middle managers executing an expert role' - 'specialist middle managers'

Middle management in Malta commonly concerns traditional professionals (e.g. accountants and engineers) and those carrying out new expert occupations (e.g. business, compliance, IT and risk specialists), who possess professional credentials and, in a number of cases, warrants. Some middle managers are generalist managers but these are not the typical ones. Indeed, specialist middle managers who perform both general management functions and specialised technical functions are the main focus of this thesis.

1. Introduction

1.1 Scope and setting of the thesis

The decision to conduct a study on middle managers (MMs) was inspired by the fact that they are the subject of numerous central conceptual questions, such as who they are, how they are different from managers or professionals, what they do, and how their roles are affected by organisational restructuring. This thesis builds upon the existing scholarship on these questions, in which the mainstream approach typically highlights common characteristics of their tasks (Koontz and O'Donnell, 1968; Kotter, 1982; Mintzberg, 1973; Steward, 1988; Torrington and Weightman, 1987) whereas radical scholars analyse their work in relation to the specific circumstances facing organisations, driven by the logic of capitalism (Armstrong, 1989; Braverman, 1974; Carchedi, 1977; Carter, 1985; Edwards, 1979; Thompson, 1989).

However, this scholarship has left a number of open questions. As it constructs its analysis in an Anglo-American context, where managers are typically generalist, existing research commonly focuses on managers executing a set of general duties not necessarily linked with the exercise of technical tasks. It defines management in terms of general, rather than technical competences (Armstrong, 1987; 1989; Grugulis, 2007; Thompson and McHugh, 2009). Therefore, deeper knowledge about specialist MMs, specifically their functions, the role of professionalism, the motives behind their resistance or non-resistance and all other components of their labour process (LP) constitutes the uncharted territory this thesis investigates through a LP analysis of the dual - manager and expert - role of MMs.

This thesis acknowledges the inherent indeterminacy of labour in the capitalist LP, the necessity of management, the relative autonomy of the work site and the existence of a structured antagonism and divergent interests between capital and labour (Edwards, 1986; 1990; Thompson, 1989; Thompson and Harley, 2007; Thompson and Newsome, 2004; Thompson and Smith, 2010). As a starting point, labour process theory (LPT) is considered capable of offering insights into specialist MMs' functions, distinctive interests, tensions, struggles and actions in the workplace, as shaped by the capitalist LP.

These issues need to be investigated because organisational restructuring and the growth of specialist functions in the workplace tend to result in broader, more sophisticated and highly complex MM work. Subsequently, MMs are increasingly

subject to overwork, stress and anxiety (Hassard *et al.* 2009; Osterman, 2008; Reed 1989). Hence, a central aim of this LP analysis is to discover the specific terrain that specialist MMs commonly use and to investigate what they do with it and how they do it so as to execute their functions, to navigate through control struggles, to handle tension and to defend their interests in the modern workplace.

The scope of this research consists of an in-depth case study of a large public sector organisation operating in Malta, which was in the process of restructuring, driven by nationwide liberalisation and privatisation programmes. The societal, social and organisational context in which the MMs execute their role is important, as it offers a better understanding of the challenges and differences in MMs' roles, while it underpins practical limitations. Differing from Anglo-American countries, general and specialist expert functions are not separated in the middle management role in Malta. In the US and the UK, which are the cradle of research informed by the LPT and the point of reference for this thesis, the MMs' roles tend to be more generalist and separated (Armstrong, 1987; 1989; Grugulis, 2007; Thompson and McHugh, 2009). Contrastingly, MMs' roles in Malta are inclined to be more specialist and combined. MMs in Malta perform similar roles to those in Germany and Italy, rather than those in the UK (Delmestri and Walgenbach, 2005).

This study contributes to arguments regarding MMs, specifically those adhering to the LP analysis and those that consider the impact of organisational restructuring on the MMs. There are different approaches to MMs' dual-role, but by engaging the LPT for questions of the sociology of professions (e.g. autonomy, power, self-regulation), this thesis examines the specific role of professional expertise (PE) in the middle managerial LP, within the context of organisational restructuring. Hence, the LP analysis offered by this thesis also has the potential to enter into theoretical discussions with the sociology of professions, and with debates concerning expert labour, knowledge and skills, as they relate to MMs.

1.2 Middle managers: 'who are they?'

MMs as a category does not fit into the mainstream or the traditional understanding of the industrial workforce, who typically are managed in all aspects of their work. MMs

do not form part of the tier of executive managers who within the organisation occupy the most powerful and best paid positions. Although MMs are evidently positioned in the middle of an organisation, it remains somewhat challenging to answer the question 'who are they?'. Middle management is a term, which "is used widely but has no precise definition" (Kay, 1974, p.106), and which Mintzberg (2011) warns as being "an awfully broad term" and "the subject of much confusion" (p.110). MMs do not form a distinct homogenous group. There is a heterogeneous situation whereby hierarchical grades should be considered as filling the middle managerial positions (Heckscher, 1995; Horne and Lupton, 1965; Huy, 2001; Kay, 1974) and a similar situation when it comes to their jobs' designations (Hales, 2005), functions and roles (Carchedi, 1977; Carter, 1985; Koontz and O'Donnell, 1968; Kotter, 1982; Mintzberg, 1973; Steward, 1988; Torrington and Weightman, 1987).

Such a state of affairs is the result of the fact that middle management is a social construct. To a certain extent, it means something different for each country and work organisation. Consequently, MMs as a category remains a 'controversial subject' (Dopson *et al.* 1997) and therefore difficult to define. This study sees the absence of universal agreement as presenting an opportunity to examine several avenues. Subsequently, various insights have been made. Such nuanced understanding indicates that MMs are defined by fluid, pervading, frequently overlapping boundaries.

In these circumstances, while it is acknowledged that the middle of work organisations consists of a 'very mixed bag of occupations', two major groups are identified: managers and professionals (Marks and Baldry, 2009). These two groups have caught the attention of scholars of sociology and management alike (Braverman, 1974; Carter, 1985; Edwards, 1979; Ehrenreich and Ehrenreich, 1979; Friedman, 1977a; Kanter and Stein, 1979; Livian, 1997). The latter do not construe their analysis in class terms, but attempt to capture the expansion of organisations' mid-levels. According to management analysts, the 'middleness' of organisations consists of an array of positions ranging from employees with very little supervisory responsibilities to those just below the top policymakers. With such a broad spectrum, scholars have categorised the middle into two groups: (i) the 'field' or 'line' managers - those who are in charge of the work of others, whilst at the same time enjoy some level of authority resulting from their position in the hierarchy; and (ii) the 'professionals' - those who enjoy a level of control over their own work, which is usually technical in nature, and, as a result of their expertise, they have influence over the work of others (Kanter and Stein, 1979;

Livian, 1997). Notably, the middle management category has widened significantly with the inclusion of professionals such as accountants, engineers and marketers (cf. Grugulis, 2007, p.136). Here, Davis and Fisher (2002) claim that amongst MMs “some consider[ing] themselves primarily professionals rather than primarily managers” (p. 406).

This thesis’s analysis focuses particularly on the second category, the professionals, because in Malta it is prevalent for specialist personnel to perform middle managerial functions. Thus, by and large, the middleness of MMs in Malta lies both in their organisational hierarchical position *and* their professional competence.

1.3 Middle managers: ‘what do they do?’

Even though it remains rather problematic to explain the exact role of MMs, two approaches about management can generally be used to define what they do: the mainstream and the radical. The inclination of the mainstream approach is not to distinguish specifically between the different levels of managers and their responsibilities (Livian, 1997), but radical theorists do focus on MMs’ functions.

The mainstream analysts of managerial work seek to single-out the common roles of the manager as an individual unit of analysis, aiming to answer ‘what do managers do?’ (Hales, 1986), distinct from the social relationships they govern at work. Such a position led some management writers to draw up classifications based on how managers spend their time (Steward, 1988) or by categorising elements that constitute their role (Koontz and O’Donnell, 1968; Kotter, 1982; Mintzberg, 1973; Torrington and Weightman, 1987). This analysis points out that managers perform both specialist/technical and general/administrative work (Hales, 1986).

Eventually, for the mainstream approach, the fundamental nature of management can be narrowed down to a number of duties that can be observed, and which are carried out in any formal organisation. This approach does not offer an analysis of the broader ‘industrial structure’ (Tsoukas, 2000) that would have shed light on the complexity and contradictions embedded in the managerial LP, emphasising (middle) managers as being controllers and controlled simultaneously.

Contrastingly, scholars applying the radical approach take into account the wider socio-economic context, arguing that it is by virtue of the broader structural context that management is possible. These theorists claim that in a capitalist economy, management exists specifically to maintain a dominating influence over employees under the premise of competition and the pursuit of capital accumulation. Thus, the production of surplus value requires certain functions. Carchedi (1977) calls these: the ‘global functions of capital’, originally carried out by the bourgeoisie (capitalist/owner-manager) to surveil and control the LP for the purpose of exploitation; and the ‘collective labour functions’, carried out by the proletariat (workers) to generate the surplus value. In this context, MMs perform *both* functions on behalf of capital.

Carter (1985) maintains that it is difficult to neatly separate the dual-function (capital function and labour function) of MMs, but claims that amongst those in the middle “an increasing number of people perform jobs the composition of which is made up of part function of capital, part function of labour” (p.65). Nevertheless, for the radical approach, the dual-function distinguishes MMs from other employees on at least two counts, namely their managerial functions and social class.

Besides, for radical scholars the nature of management is two-pronged: surveillance and control; and unity and coordination (Carchedi, 1977; Carter, 1985; Edwards, 1979; Thompson, 1989). Under the capitalist system, the function of management is required to ‘control and surveil’ the labour force for the maximum value to be extracted from it. Meanwhile, the LP requires a kind of direction and necessary organisation, so the management’s function is also essential to ‘coordinate and unite’ diverse activities, responsibilities and orders. Hence, management is not just concerned with the control of subordinates, but is also about the technical coordination of work (Edwards, 2010).

In the modern workplace, MMs establish themselves between first-line supervisors and top executives, executing operational control, technical expertise and offering specialist support, all of which is required for organisations to continue functioning properly (Reed, 1989). Yet, the role of the technical/specialist aspect in relation to the complex role of MMs and vis-à-vis the social relationships they establish at work has not been completely developed by the radical approach.

The growth of specialist functions within the technical element of middle management such as accountancy, design engineering, marketing and operational research (Reed, 1989) in Malta led to a situation in which MMs (considered below senior managers (SMs) but above first-line managers (FLMs) (supervisors)) usually emerge from traditional professions and new expert occupations. MMs perform both general management functions and specialised technical functions.

This reality of MMs in Malta shares some similarities with their counterparts in Germany and Italy. In their role, MMs in Malta make use of their technical/specialist expertise. Besides managing subordinate employees, other responsibilities integrated into the managerial role include being *directly* involved in: leading technical tasks and handling exceptions; providing specialist support; and seeking solutions to technical problems. This is in stark contrast with MMs in the UK, who typically “distance themselves from technical involvement” and instead “play the roles of brokers of technical specialized competences but do not get involved in technical details” (Delmestri and Walgenbach, 2005, pp.209, 214).

The state of affairs for MMs in Germany, Italy and Malta produces new problems. These specialist MMs have a dual-role (managers-and-experts), with their specific expertise playing a key role in their work and management functions, in controlling and coordinating, and in the struggles that they lead when carrying out these functions.

1.4 Middle managers and the Maltese labour market

The national institutional frameworks of France and Germany (Delmestri and Walgenbach, 2005; Maurice *et al.* 1986) support to varying degrees, professional credentials as a prominent feature of recruitment, particularly for technical, professional and managerial positions. A similar situation is noted in Malta, where professional credentials are used as ‘screening or filtering devices’ in recruitment for these positions (Baldacchino, 1997).

In the Maltese labour market, the widespread rise in university qualifications influenced entry to managerial jobs as opposed to recruitment of lower scale ones (Mallia 1994). According to a tracer survey of the University of Malta’s¹ graduates, it has been

¹ The highest and largest teaching institution in Malta (University of Malta, 2016).

recorded that since the late 1990s there has been an increasing trend of graduates occupying administrative/managerial posts in the private or public sector (Baldacchino, 1997). Consequently, supervisors, who lack tertiary-level qualifications, such as traditional foremen are far less likely to be promoted to middle managerial positions (Carter, 1985). In the modern organisation, sophisticated work operational processes pave the way for ‘professional experts’ to occupy middle managerial positions (Reed, 1989).

As the number of university graduates in Malta is increasing annually (NSO, 2014c), and with the number of mature-applicants for tertiary courses also on the rise (Debono, 2004), there is a considerable pool of tertiary-qualified personnel attractive to employers/SMs. The tertiary-qualified personnel are expected to fill middle managerial vacancies within growingly sophisticated and technically complex workplaces. These circumstances make professional credentials a significant prerequisite for the recruitment of middle management positions (Interview, Council member, Malta Employers’ Association; Interview, Industrial entrepreneur and ex-council official of the Malta Chamber of Commerce, Enterprise and Industry).

Since there is no formal qualification for a middle managerial position, employers/SMs in Malta consider a university qualification in a specific field to equate to having an area of specialisation. A university qualification is also considered to be the foundation upon which MMs are able to manage advanced operational systems and the growing complexity of data, in an era of constant technical advancement. However, they simultaneously acknowledge that qualifications are not the only prerequisite for a managerial job, pointing out also criteria such as practical experience and skills (e.g. people management skills) (Baldacchino, 1997; Interview, Council member, Malta Employers’ Association; Interview, Industrial entrepreneur and ex-council official of the Malta Chamber of Commerce, Enterprise and Industry).

Nonetheless, hiring practices strongly value formal graduate credentials, bringing tension to entry-level MMs insofar as they must not only assume technical knowledge and skills, but should also serve as proxies for management skills. Thus, MMs as specialist managers have to cope with both generic responsibilities, such as supervision of human resources (HR), and specific responsibilities, such as detailed technical coordination of work activities. The coordination they carry out is of a specialist technical, rather than general, nature consisting of in-depth involvement in the

process of planning, organising resources, monitoring and leading technical tasks. MMs provide solutions to technical problems in order to produce specialised deliverables in the most effective and efficient way.

The MM's ability to deal with specific responsibilities lies mainly in his/her abstract and theoretical knowledge, coupled with other skills acquired through practical experience. The generic responsibilities are often something that the MM nurtures on the job and masters through practice, though at times these are refined by attending specialised management courses. Both employers *and* graduates request more management content in undergraduate academic courses given "the likely mobility into managerial posts *many* graduates undergo within working lives" [emphasis not in the original] (Baldacchino, 1997, p.11).

Therefore, in Malta, professional credentials are generally key for entry to middle managerial positions. However, in order for MMs to carry out their roles, they have to develop other skills and abilities on the basis of practical experience. What starts off as a labour market prerequisite of professional qualifications and, in a number of cases warrants, develops into something more complex: PE, as elaborated in the next subsection.

1.5 Middle managers and professional expertise

The concept of PE refers to a combination of factors that the MMs examined in this study, irrespective of their backgrounds, have in common. PE begins with the attainment of professional qualifications, demonstrating that a 'body of theory' (Abbott, 1988) has been constructed. Theoretical know-what, or abstract and specialised knowledge expressed in formal qualifications, is an important ingredient for a candidate, but this is not the only prerequisite (Adler and Kwon, 2008; Warhurst and Thompson, 2006) for an MM's role.

Knowledge should be complemented by the gaining of skills, for practical know-how to be acquired through experience. For specialist MMs, experience supports them to deepen their specialised knowledge, as well as to improve, develop and integrate their skills. There are various skills that these managers require to carry out in their role, the most prominent of which are: technical (related to an area of specialisation); problem-

solving; dexterity; tact; and other management skills (e.g. people management skills). Usually, skills are learned and/or reinforced through experience, and/or through training that MMs undergo later on in their careers. Hence, *PE is a combination of knowledge, skills and experience.*

MMs develop and protect their PE, which means more than the attainment of credentials and/or the acquisition of skills alone. PE is something that they mature and consolidate throughout their career. The blending of knowledge, skills and experience gives MMs the capacity, responsibility and discretion to handle various important issues first-hand. Such issues may include exceptions to the work-routine, anomalies and creative demanding matters, concerning the way they manage and work.

When MMs are continuously finding themselves subject to management practices, intended to closely monitor their performance to attain increased output and greater accountability, the appropriation of PE is less likely to occur, since this result from a combination of specialised knowledge, skills and experience. MMs can be given layers of protection when access to middle managerial positions is restricted to personnel with specific requisites and when MMs succeed to maintain exclusivity over a set of specialist work activities. Furthermore, in the Maltese context, most of the professionals executing a middle managerial role are legally established and highly regulated, with the state and social partners playing a predominate role. The regulatory bodies governing the professionals from outside the work organisation issue the necessary warrants, monitor their conduct, register continuous professional development, and establish ethical standards.

MMs' PE is worthy of analysis and research because, in a post-industrial economy, organisations are increasingly relying upon highly technically complex and sophisticated work processes that require specialist MMs to manage them. In spite of this, when work organisations carry out restructuring (including downsizing, de-layering and outsourcing), in order to survive and possibly thrive, research shows that MMs are significantly affected (Carter and Fairbrother, 1995; Dopson and Steward, 1990; Hassard *et al.* 2009; Kunda and Ailon-Souday, 2005; Osterman, 2008). Consequently, during restructuring, organisations tend to fail to maintain the knowledge and experience of middle management, that often in hindsight is considered as an

organisation's most valuable asset (Hull, 2000). So, MMs who overcome restructuring and continue to occupy managerial positions, protect their employability, status and social prestige through their PE, given that more than ever, high degree of competence is required in the middle management of work organisations (Reed, 1989).

Considering the importance of PE in countries where MMs are specialist managers, this thesis aims to investigate the role PE performs in the LP of MMs. Thus, this study seeks to decipher how specialist MMs draw upon PE in their management and work functions, and in dealing with control, conflict and consent. The specific attention to the social dynamics of the MMs' PE forms the basis of this study's theoretical argument. While MMs continue to perform according to their dual-function and class character (Carchedi, 1977; Carter, 1985; Edwards, 1979), concurrently their PE shapes their behaviour and the employment relationship that they develop.

1.6 Middle managers: managers - the managed - experts

MMs' jobs are different from those of direct producers because the former perform both functions of capital and labour. As a result, MMs are entangled in a complex struggle for autonomy against control. On one hand, autonomy is a basic advantage of managerial work (Hassard *et al.* 2011). On the other hand, managers as 'agents of capital' (Storey 1985; Watson, 2001) in the private sector, or part of the chain of command in the public sector, must perform their role within particular institutional, market and workplace boundaries (Thompson and Harley, 2007). Radical scholars interpret these realities in terms of the conflict between acting for capital, while increasingly assuming the characteristics of employees (Braverman, 1974; Ehrenreich and Ehrenreich, 1979).

Once MMs, as agents, carry out functions on behalf of capital, they become part (to some degree) of a collective LP at the workplace level. Indeed, their subordinate position in the organisational hierarchy increasingly exposes them to forces of rationalisation and work intensification (Hassard *et al.* 2009). In these circumstances, the core propositions of the LPT (Thompson and Harley, 2007), which were initially adopted to examine the experience of the collective workers at the point of production, become applicable to staff in middle managerial positions. When dealing with MMs, a

conscious effort is made by their superiors to reduce the indeterminacy gap between their potential input and actual output. Indeed, specific management systems are utilised to narrow this gap. In this context, since MMs are not passive recipients, they either oppose or consent to strategies of control. The LPT proposes that, collectively, these aspects of the capitalist LP imply that the workplace and the employment relationships are characterised by ‘structured antagonism’ (Edwards, 1986; 1990). This means that capital and labour are trapped in a relationship that is as much cooperative as it is antagonistic, with outcomes shaped by the tension between control strategies and MMs’ responses.

The dynamics of structured antagonism become more complicated when those under scrutiny are MMs executing an expert role. Historically, professionals with employed status enjoyed considerable autonomy and control compared to less skilled/unskilled employees (Edwards, 1979; Friedman, 1977a). Yet, in the contemporary workplace, their autonomy is often diminished, due to pressure for marketable outcomes, tightening of targets, standardisation of processes, increasing scrutiny and regulation of activities, and strategic decisions being made on business terms by senior management, amongst other factors (Muzio *et al.* 2008; Smith and Thompson, 1998). Nonetheless, the distinctiveness of the professionals lies in their specialised expertise (Savage, 1994), the social relationships of coordination and control that steer their activity, and the values that shape their normative inclination and subjective identity (Adler and Kwon, 2008).

When considering the above assertions, the LPT is preferred in this thesis. In contrast with management mainstream theory, it has the tools to explore the social relationships in which MMs get entangled, keeping in context the structural properties of the capitalist LP that shape control and skills (expertise) (Thompson, 1990). In this thesis, it is acknowledged that the LPT has certain limitations when it comes to explaining the realities of MMs in Malta, but solutions are sought from within the neo-Marxist thinking rather than by embarking on completely different theories. Indeed, the sociology of professions and the mainstream knowledge workers’ debate were not included in the thesis’s conceptual framework for reasons detailed in section 2.2.

Other theoretical tools used to complement the LPT include the ‘agency relationship’ framework (Armstrong, 1989). Armstrong argues that managerial work carried out by

professional groups, on the basis of their specialist knowledge and activities, is based on an agency relationship rather than being an LP as claimed by Braverman (1974). However, Armstrong simultaneously acknowledges that tensions characterise this relationship. Thus, as a theoretical tool, the agency relationship also highlights contradictions surrounding MMs' degree of control and autonomy.

Additionally, the 'organisational misbehaviour' approach, as adopted by the industrial sociology discipline, is taken on board to map MMs' agency. On account of the dual-function, particularly the capital function, the MMs encounter difficulty when resisting management (a group they form part of). However, that does not mean that their behaviour is completely in accordance to rule. In fact, the organisational misbehaviour approach is applied in this study because when MMs deviate from the rule (or what is expected from them) they mostly do it in an informal manner,

1.7 Research questions

MMs in Malta are constructed in such a way that they do not tend to be general managers and employees, but rather specialist managers and employees. In this context, this thesis seeks to explore the following: *'what role does PE perform in the LP of MMs and what difference does PE make to the LPT framework, built on three core pillars of control, conflict and consent'*. In order to answer these theoretical questions, three broad research questions are put forward which seek to capture MMs' behaviour and the social relationships they lead in the workplace:

- *What role does PE play in the management functions of MMs?*

This research question investigates PE in relation to MMs' management functions: control and coordination. These functions rest at the abstract level, but this question seeks to investigate at the concrete level, by looking particularly at what MMs are capable of doing in their role as both managers and experts. It also considers MMs as 'the managed' to demonstrate how their role is changing, mainly with regard to the intensification of work and performance pressure. Hence, this question seeks to show whether the developed PE gravitates power to: prevent the shift of MMs towards the labour function (proletarianisation) (Braverman, 1974); preserve some capital function; and/or nudges them to become complicit in their own exploitation.

- *How do the dynamics of control operate in the case of MMs?*

The second question focuses on the control imperative. Since the inherent tensions produced by the indeterminacy of labour (the conversion of labour power into profitable work) are central to the LP debate (Thompson, 1989; Thompson and Harley, 2007), this question seeks to explain how forms of control function in the case of MMs. In the workplace, even though MMs form part of the managerial regime as managers in the ‘middle’, they are subject to top managerial practices intended to restrain their behaviour and closely monitor their performance (Carter, 1985; Carter and Fairbrother, 1995; Hassard *et al.* 2009). They are not only controlled by managerial practices, but as professionals their behaviour is also contained by external regulatory bodies, through the process of socialisation (Crain, 2004; Friedman, 1977b, Smith and Thompson, 1998), and by means of self-control (Ainsworth and Harley, 2014; Thompson, 1989). Within this context, this question will not only examine how different forms of control operate vis-à-vis MMs, but it will also explore the terrain upon which these managers lead their struggles to defend their autonomy and overcome tensions that characterise their vertical relationships.

- *How do MMs respond to control?*

- *What are the motives behind MMs’ unruly behaviour?*
- *Why do MMs embrace what they do at work?*

This broad research question and its related subsidiary enquiries aim to examine the continuum of possible, situationally driven and convergent MMs’ responses to relationships of control in the workplace: from resistance/misbehaviour to accommodation, compliance, and consent (Thompson and Harley, 2007; Thompson and Newsome, 2004). On one hand, since MMs have distinct interests from those of SMs and subordinate employees, a specific focus is devoted to their unruly behaviour. On the other hand, notwithstanding that the social relationships in the workplace between MMs and their superiors are antagonistic in nature, some level of creativity and cooperation is always present. Hence, the second subsidiary question seeks to identify why MMs embrace what they do at work, even though they are subject to a more intensive LP.

1.8 Research design

This thesis is a realist-informed research. This means that the objective of the overall strategy (research design) is to connect the idea behind this study, based on a radical framework, to the ‘*empirical*’ results (experiences relayed by interviewees) and the ‘*actual*’ happening (observable events) within a context, as affected by ‘*causal*’ mechanisms. These mechanisms consist of entities, processes or structures that generate outcomes, linking cause to effect, and in this case study they are connected to empirical analysis to offer explanations for particular outcomes.

For critical-realist researchers, a case study based research is “*the basic design*” [emphasis added in the original] (Ackroyd and Karlsson, 2014, p.23) and has been adopted in this thesis. Besides, the LP tradition provides ample grounds for case-based analysis (Vincent and Wapshott, 2014) offering a pivotal understanding of the observed behaviour and practices at work (Thompson and Newsome, 2004).

The research method used is face-to-face in-depth semi-structured interviews. The organisation chosen is large in size and has recently implemented a number of changes as part of a restructuring exercise. A large organisation with an extensive hierarchical management structure is preferable for examining the MM’s role. An organisation that is undergoing restructuring is favoured because it provides a dynamic background against which the investigation can be carried out.

The interviews were mainly carried out with MMs, who were the most qualified experts in the unit operating under their responsibility and who also managed the employees within that unit. In order to attain a more complete picture of the tensions and struggles faced by MMs at work, a number of SMs and FLMS (who report to MMs) were also interviewed. In addition, meetings were held with field experts and public officers in order to collect data regarding MMs in Malta.

1.9 The thesis’s layout, main findings, conclusions and contribution

This thesis is divided into nine chapters. Following this introduction, which outlines the research agenda, chapter 2 mainly looks at how the LP analysis has developed into a control-resistance-misbehaviour-consent model and maps out how MMs fit within the

LPT's core pillars. It also evaluates the meaning of PE in relation to MMs, to build a theoretical framework. Chapter 3 offers an overview of particular contextual aspects, namely the Maltese public sector, the state of privatisation and the process of liberalisation in Malta. It records how MMs are identified overseas, in Malta, and in the case study organisation. In this chapter, an overview of the case study organisation is presented. In chapter 4, the methodology and research methods selected for this study are explained. The primary data, which was collected and analysed for this thesis, is then presented in four subsequent empirical chapters. Chapter 5 looks at how MMs carry out their management functions and how their role has changed, while chapter 6 explores how multiple forms of control affect MMs. Chapter 7 maps out MMs' opposing behaviour and chapter 8 detects why MMs embrace what they do at work. In each empirical chapter, a specific focus is given to PE to uncover the role it plays in the middle managerial LP. The conclusion (chapter 9) will contribute to the radical debate dealing with MMs' functions. The LPT will benefit from the critical contribution made by this case study's empirical findings.

The main findings and conclusions of this LP analysis are that in countries where MMs perform both specialist expert functions and general management functions, PE plays a significant role. It consolidates MMs' expert role and supports their managerial role. Specifically, PE is central for MMs to direct the technical coordination of the LP within the organisation's units. In turn, these managers use their power to influence the technical coordination of work as leverage in the social coordination and control of the LP.

In the workplace, different forms of control bind MMs, mostly in the form of professional control, which subjects them to a series of constraints regarding their actions, but allows them to assert influence. Eventually, the blend of professionalism and expertise enables MMs to work without direct controls, affording them some leeway, but concurrently securing their compliance, as they have to work harder, for longer hours and to a high standard. In any case, MMs use PE as the terrain for leading their control struggles, to demarcate boundaries and to resist deskilling, while it also accords them considerable autonomy. Ultimately, specialist MMs give importance to the preservation of professional autonomy more than opposition to the extraction of their work effort by their superiors.

MMs are unionised, but they are not keen to pursue organised collective action, believing that this puts them in a conflicting position in relation to their dual-role. Instead, they prefer to resist individually to challenge the power structure, and mostly misbehave informally (though not necessarily completely lacking a collective dimension) to preserve their autonomy and to disengage forcefully from top management decisions. In doing so they avoid the creation of major obstacles for the operations they are responsible for managing.

There are a number of implications arising from MMs using their PE to support the coordination function. First, PE supports the capital function, with MMs aligning closely with the interests of SMs. Second, anything that happens in MMs' LP, from work intensification to increased stress and excessive work pressure, ought to be interpreted in this context. Third, since MMs perform capital functions, questions arise as to their responses to control relationships in the workplace.

Further to this thesis's potential contribution as per section 1.1, this study contributes to research on MMs by inferring that the fusion of general management and specialist expert functions: (i) accords MMs exceptional autonomy in the LP (arising from their expert role); and (ii) tends to undermine managerialism. Specialist MMs are not primarily trained in managerialism and, due to their specialist background, their values and main focus are on their specialism rather than general management.

2. In search of control, conflict and consent in relation to middle managers

2.1 Introduction

Initially, this chapter presents key arguments offered by the sociology of professions and the knowledge workers' debate, which, although capable of being used to advance the study of MMs, are not used as part of this thesis's conceptual framework for reasons explained in section 2.2. Thereafter, a discussion of skills in relation to expertise and expert labour is presented. Skill has always occupied a crucial role in the LPT (Grugulis and Lloyd, 2010; Thompson and Smith, 2010; Warhurst *et al.* 2004) and since the MM's role in this study is characterised by PE and given that MMs undertake expert labour, such a discussion is essential. This chapter then briefly outlines major reworks within the LPT to highlight that strand of the theory on which this thesis is based. Following on from this, the core concepts of the LPT, namely control, resistance (later misbehaviour) and consent, are examined in order to evaluate how they have evolved in the workplace and how they work in the case of MMs. In doing so, a strong argument about the MMs is developed. Towards the end of this chapter, an analysis of PE is carried out within the radical framework to establish its theoretical contribution within the debate on MMs.

Traditionally, the LPT was developed following the recognition that industrial production is divided into different tasks which needed to be coordinated into the overall production process. Within this context, managers (initially the owners) are not just responsible for the extraction of labour (actual labour) from the labour power (potential labour) available, but also the coordination function of tasks. Therefore, among the categories of the LPT there is a 'coordination' problem and a 'value extraction' problem. Hence, within the capitalist mode of production, the LP is the part whereby labour's productive capacity is deployed to generate a use-value and a surplus value. Over the years, the conceptual focus of the LPT has extended to also concentrate on the managerial regime, considering notions of management as an LP, highlighting managers as 'controllers' and 'controlled'. The fact that managers (particularly those in the middle) perform delegated functions of capital within established parameters means that they are part of a collective LP. Thus, their role is characterised by complexities and is subject to constraints imposed on them by their superiors.

While this study adopts an LPT-informed analysis, it must be noted here, at the onset of this study that the coverage of Braverman (1974), one of the pioneering LP theorists, is not particularly extensive when it comes to MMs (Teulings, 1986). Later, the LPT advocates sought to expand analytical insight into non-manual/white-collar work (Ackroyd, 2009a; Smith *et al.* 1991; Thompson and Smith, 2009), with radical theorists highlighting the ambivalent and contradictory status of MMs accentuating their dual-function (Carchedi, 1977; Carter, 1985; Edwards, 1979). However, the coverage of MMs continues to be limited. The public sector's managerial LP also remains relatively narrow (Carter, 1997; Carter and Fairbrother, 1995; Carter *et al.* 2002). Furthermore, with respect to the realities of MMs in Malta, the impact of organisational restructuring and work organisation reforms on their role, and their actions within this context, are not apparently well documented, especially within the academic literature.

Notwithstanding that an LP inquiry on MMs is limited compared to that of non-managerial employees, MMs' behaviour at work continues to merit attention from an LP angle, on at least three counts. First, their position in the 'middle' of the hierarchy entails that they concurrently contribute to, and are subjects of, the control of the work organisation. The fact that they are concurrently 'managers' and 'the managed' in the hierarchy presents them with a contradictory status. In cases such as the one examined in this study, they also hold a complex dual-role as 'managers' and 'experts'.

Second, due to workplace restructuring, MMs' struggles have intensified. Here, this chapter reviews recent studies that have looked at how private and public sector restructuring has the tendency to target MMs' role (Carter and Fairbrother, 1995; Carter *et al.* 2002; Hassard *et al.* 2009; 2011; McCann *et al.* 2004; 2008; 2010).

Third, in light of the fact that work, as a human activity, keeps on developing into a sophisticated pursuit concurrent with more complex managerial structures and functions, an increasing number of professionals struggle to form part of the managerial regime *and* carry out (middle) managerial functions (Armstrong, 1986; 1987; 1989; Reed, 1989).

Against this backdrop, and in order to investigate the realities of MMs under the forces of capitalism as experienced by specialist MMs, this study builds on the radical framework that breaks down and categorises MMs' functions. At the abstract level, the radical conceptual framework rests on MMs' dual-function, encompassing capital and

labour, with the capital (management) function subdivided into control and coordination, and with the MMs performing both these functions to a varying degree (Carchedi, 1977; Carter, 1985, 1995; Edwards, 1979). The broader theoretical point is that MMs are agents of capital (or part of the chain of command) allowing them to be nearer to their superiors but distance themselves if their role as agents can be accomplished in some other way (Edwards, 2010).

Meanwhile, modern industry has expanded the level of expertise required at work and as a result the MM's function is not only to supervise but also to specifically coordinate and unify the LP (Carchedi, 1977), leading to growing levels of expertise within the middle managerial ranks (Reed, 1989). Nonetheless, for the radical theorists, MMs' managerial authority is diminishing (Braverman, 1974; Carchedi, 1977; Carter and Fairbrother, 1995; Mills, 1956). More recently, organisational analysts substantiate that MMs have limited or no influence on decisions that cascade from above, but simultaneously reveal that these managers' work has become more advanced and complex, and that they are being entrusted with wider responsibilities (Hassard *et al.* 2009; McCann *et al.* 2004; 2008; 2010). These studies demonstrate that the role of the MMs is demanding an increase in skill and responsibility, that their function is still crucial for the organisation, but that the real authority resides with the top management (Hassard, 2009, p.46).

Under these circumstances, specific questions emerge: if, at work, MMs' exercise of authority is not considerable, why is their role still important and on which grounds do they lead their struggles? With the intention of answering these questions, this study proposes the adoption of a radical conceptual framework, which highlights that MMs fulfil aspects of the dual-function (capital: control and coordination - and - labour). Moreover, this study sets out to investigate the role of PE in these functions. It is understood that PE: (i) shapes MMs' functions; (ii) serves as a terrain upon which these managers lead their struggles to protect their autonomy; (iii) and influences their opposing and/or consensual behaviour.

2.2 The sociology of professions and the knowledge workers debate

This section highlights key arguments presented by the sociology of professions and the knowledge workers' debate. Both can be used to develop studies on MMs, especially regarding the relationship between expertise and management. However, since both

scholarships come from different starting points and have different underlying theoretical questions from those in which this thesis is interested, the LPT was preferred instead. At the end of this section, reasons behind making this decision are clearly stated.

Until the late 1960s, sociologists (Durkheim, 1957; Parsons, 1951) celebrated the role undertaken by professions as entities that, in their view, saved modern society from a collapse in moral authority, owing to their ability to put fairness, knowledge and altruism at the heart of society. These studies inspired others to encapsulate traits that distinguish professions from other occupations (Goode 1957). Although these studies were inconclusive, core characteristics (e.g. an esoteric and systematic knowledge base and a formal training programme) were traced (Muzio *et al.* 2013).

From the 1970s, the functionalist tradition was criticised for advancing the claims and interests of professionals at the expense of overlooking issues of power and privilege. An alternative power framework was developed and its key argument is that professionals' self-interested practice of social closure preserves their occupational autonomy to enhance their incomes and keep competitors out (Freidson, 1970; Johnson, 1972; Larson, 1977). This perspective focuses on professional power, autonomy and self-regulation, but by analysing only a few 'showcase' professions, namely traditional and social types (Muzio *et al.* 2013). Indeed, professions active in business rarely figure prominently in the sociology of professions (Thompson and McHugh, 2009) and the dominant paradigms on professions fail to explain how the majority of 'new' professional occupations are originated directly from organisational contexts (Fincham, 2012; Muzio *et al.* 2008a; Reed, 1996).

Traditional approaches within the sociology of professions struggle to deal with the shift of professional activity, from professionals as solo/autonomous practitioners to direct contributors enclosed within the boundaries of increasingly large and complex organisations (Brock *et al.* 2007; Hinings, 2005). Yet, this shift has prompted radical scholars to question the conflict between acting in the interests of capital and concurrently assuming the characteristics of an employee (Ehrenreich and Ehrenreich, 1979; Braverman, 1974). It is argued that due to advanced capitalism, the organisational work context subjects professionals to managerial pressure so, like factory-workers, their autonomy is diminishing rapidly (McKinlay, 1982).

Overall, attention on the specific role of the professions in the managerial LP is overlooked by the sociology of professions. One reason for this neglect is that the sociology of professions is mostly concerned with the social division of labour in society, rather than the detailed analysis of the technical division of labour in the workplace (Russell *et al.* 2015; 2016).

With respect to the knowledge workers' debate, according to some observers work is becoming more complex and demanding more knowledge, with an increasing number of workers manipulating ideas, symbols and people instead of physical products (Bell, 1973). Subsequently, for business scholars, the workplace's competitive advantage no longer depends on land, labour or capital, but rather its capacity to create, transfer, utilise and protect knowledge assets (Drucker, 1993). In fact, these scholars focus their attention on the management's task to capture, codify and capitalise the knowledge of knowledge workers (*ibid*; Drucker, 1991; Ichijo *et al.* 1998).

As there are different ways of defining 'knowledge work' and 'knowledge workers', knowledge easily becomes everything and nothing (Alvesson, 1992; Alvesson and Kärreman, 2001). For LP proponents it is a failure that mainstream academics have not been able to provide conceptual definitions and distinctions (Warhurst and Thompson, 2006). The former argue that since everyone's work involves some form and level of knowledge, everyone ends up as a knowledge worker, even those whose work is highly routinised, of a low skill level and with very little discretion (*ibid*; Thompson *et al.* 2001). Moreover, Darr and Warhurst (2008) claimed that business literature on knowledge workers is weak because it is not truly sensitive towards 'what knowledge workers do', 'how they do it' and 'what is required for them to do it'.

To avoid overestimating or underestimating the knowledge activities of various occupations, LP scholars distinguish between 'knowledge work' and 'knowledgeability in work'. In their opinion, such a distinction is required because, while knowledge work proponents (Blackler *et al.* 1998; Frenkel, *et al.* 1995) emphasise the increased centrality of theoretical knowledge, at work individuals use many types of knowledge with varied workplace usages and purposes (Thompson *et al.* 2001; Warhurst and Thompson, 1998; 2006).

Knowledge-intensive work necessitates high levels of autonomy, but LP scholars also question the extent of knowledge workers' operational autonomy to determine the techniques and timings of their work. Such scholars claim that the scope

of such autonomy can be exaggerated, because, actually knowledge labour is characterised by management interventions and forms of control. Whereas, SMs want knowledge workers to be creative, profitable and competitive, working practices and bureaucratic parameters move directly against knowledge workers' initiatives and ingenuity, thereby intensifying their work and curbing their autonomy (Warhurst and Thompson, 1998; 2006).

The sociology of professions and knowledge workers' approaches address issues (autonomy, power, self-regulation, knowledge), which are useful to develop further study on MMs. However, the former still assumes that autonomy and self-management are defining moments of professional experience even when professionals are employed by large and complex organisations (Russell *et al.* 2015; 2016). The sociology of professions does not acknowledge the massive economic forces of capitalism to the extent that it misses or takes for granted the problem of management. Additionally, it is characterised by marked theoretical and empirical divergences, with contemporary research split across several sociological and interdisciplinary fields, and still with little focus on new occupations based on expert knowledge and those active in business (Adams, 2015; Gorman and Sandefur, 2011; McDonald, 1995; Muzio *et al.* 2013).

Furthermore, the mainstream knowledge workers' debate neglects to analyse knowledge workers' actual labour and assumes rather than empirically examines (Darr and Warhurst, 2008). Besides, the knowledge workers' debate is inclined to focus on the individual workplace actors, giving the impression that the operation of knowledge depends only on their individual motives and commitments. It tends to overlook wider contextual issues, such as the broader institutional processes including the variation of capitalism within which the workplace is entrenched and the pressures on management to reduce cost (Warhurst and Thompson, 2006).

Considering that this thesis is concerned with the conflicts and contradictions embedded in MMs' work relationships, shaped by capitalist social relations and institutions, it preferred to build its conceptual framework on grounds of the LPT. The LPT does not speak with one voice, but there is a core theory and there are core propositions (Thompson, 1989; Thompson and Harley, 2007). Moreover, in contrast to these two approaches, the LPT conceptualises capitalism as setting structural limits and acknowledges that several changes in the workplace are increasing the importance of how management in professional/managerial LPs is realised. The LPT also theorises

about how management paradigms and practices strive to standardise work, even of the middle-layers, giving rise to heightened tension (Braverman, 1974; Ackroyd, 2013; Smith, 1991; Hassard *et al.* 2009; Smith and Thompson, 1998; Warhurst and Thompson 1998; 2006).

2.3 Discussion on skill: expertise, expert labour and middle managers

As outlined in section 2.2, the sociology of professions remains highly focused on traditional professions with practitioners largely working in solo/autonomous professional organisations, preserving considerable control over the content and economic circumstances of their work (Gorman and Sandefur, 2011; Larson, 1977). Furthermore, the knowledge workers' debate shares some characteristics with the sociology of professions, as its attention is on individual knowledge and on the crucial task of professional firms to harness it (Grugulis, 2007). Contrastingly, as outlined in this section, the expert labour debate is concerned with experts' knowledge base, power strategy and organisational form, as well as of those engaged within large bureaucracies (Muzio *et al.* 2008b; Reed, 1996). Therefore, it manages to take the discussion beyond the boundaries of the sociology of professions (Hull, 2000) and the knowledge workers' debate (Fincham, 2012). Against this backdrop, this section engages in a discussion on skill in relation to expertise and expert labour, eventually applying it to MMs.

In response to competitive pressures, work organisations and their environments are becoming more complex and sophisticated, seeking to equip themselves to face economic, technical, social and political demands. These demands necessitate growing bodies of expertise, such as technical and administrative bodies, facilitating the growth in the number and role of experts in the workplace (Adler and Kwon, 2008; Reed, 1989; 1996). In turn, experts' specialised knowledge and skills, relevant to the organisation and its management, are key elements of achieving economic competitiveness and serve as foundations of organisational strategies (Del Bono and Mayhew, 2001; Grugulis, 2007; Reed, 1996; Streeck, 1992).

Whilst recognising that occupational boundaries are not always clear, the inference is that as an expert group, the organisational professionals (e.g. accountants and engineers), are those who provide the techniques that can deliver the effective responses required by SMs. The organisational professionals' position in the expert

division of labour is determined by the existence and utilisation of their specialist expertise. They constitute this expertise through educational and bureaucratic credentials; consequently credentialism is crucial for them to build up their expert power. Meanwhile, through degrees and licences, they control employment and acquire fairly powerful and privileged positions within the bureaucracies (Crompton, 1992; Fincham *et al.* 1994; Muzio *et al.* 2008b; Reed, 1996).

In order to solve specialist/technical problems, organisational professionals' knowledge/skill base expands beyond the technical aspect to incorporate tacit, local (organisation-specific) and political aspects (cf. Muzio *et al.* 2008a; Reed, 1996). Actually, for expert labour to be undertaken, technical knowledge and skills are not enough, since tacit understanding and social/soft skills including interpersonal skills (e.g. leadership, teambuilding and negotiating) are needed (Adler and Kwon, 2008; Darr, 2004; McKinlay, 2000).

In this context, differing from Braverman's (1974) implication that skill as a 'craft mastery' comprises only technical components that can be objectively observed and evaluated, contemporary LP analysts of skill acknowledge that skill is also socially constructed (Cockburn, 1993; Grugulis and Lloyd, 2010; Grugulis *et al.* 2004). Braverman's key argument was that with the expansion of the capitalist system, the skill levels (technical degree) of the workers would gradually erode as tasks become fragmented and tightly controlled, leading to persistent deskilling of labour. Braverman's 'deskilling thesis' has been extensively criticised (Cockburn, 1993; Friedman, 1977a; Thompson, 1989), though it is undeniable that it has been extremely influential (Grugulis and Lloyd, 2010).

Contemporary LP analysts argue that skill is an elusive, difficult and highly contested concept to define (ibid. Grugulis *et al.* 2004; Lafer, 2004; Westwood, 2004). With this in mind, they generally find it beneficial to start the discussion on skills by considering Cockburn's (1983) interplay between skill's three dimensions: (i) the worker's skill - obtained through formal education system/training courses/experience; (ii) the job's skill - the job's execution necessitate autonomy, decision-making, technical know-how and responsibility; and (iii) the social construction of skill - the skill is part of a complex social system.

When it comes to managerial jobs, professional groups compete on grounds of their specialist knowledge and skills (Armstrong, 1989). For example, when it comes to managerial competence, the British prefer accounting expertise to engineering expertise (Armstrong, 1987; Mulholland, 1998). In cases such as the one studied in this thesis, gaining middle managerial positions, and advancing in the hierarchy, commonly necessitates expertise and experience related to the activity being managed.

The composition of managerial skills is complex. At first, managers' skills are articulated in relation to their specialist functional expertise (e.g. accounting, HR, marketing), through which they acquire technical skills (hard skills). They need these to deal with highly technical duties within the organisation's specialised units. However, for MMs to get directly involved in problem-solving (soft skill), they have to make interventions and judgments based not just on their technical know-how, but also on their tacit skills, often obtained through direct experience. Moreover, differing from knowledge workers, MMs are commonly responsible for a group of employees and for maintaining a positive work environment, so they also have to deal with contextual and relational issues, which go beyond the combination of specialised knowledge and technical skills (Darr, 2004; Delmestri and Walgenbach, 2005; Fincham, 2012).

Thus, MMs blend hard, often codified, technical skills with soft, not so codified, interpersonal ones. The prominence of soft skills has increased (Payne, 2000), but they are harder to identify objectively. The lists of what constitutes such skills are extensive and can include desired behavioural patterns, along with personal traits, attitudes, qualities, virtues and predispositions (Brown and Hesketh, 2004; Grugulis, 2007; Grugulis *et al.* 2004). Hitherto, there is no broad consensus about whether and how to incorporate soft skills. As a way forward, Grugulis and Lloyd (2010) claimed that because "soft skills are not generic and may vary markedly in different environments" (p.100), they ought to be considered in the context of the technical skills involved and the jobholder's status. Actually, for specialist MMs, hard and soft skills are inseparably interlinked. Initially, MMs are technically trained, but skills such as problem-solving, team-working and communication are complementary to technical skills.

Considering that managers exert more influence than non-managerial staff (Storey, 1989), an assessment of MMs' competences is important because this has a disproportionate effect on organisational performance (Bosworth, 1999). Notwithstanding that managers are among an organisation's key staff (Grugulis, 2007),

they are still under pressure. For instance, given that specialist MMs require employment relationships and task structures to undertake expert labour, they encounter tensions. These arise between the high levels of autonomy and creativity that these managers require to execute their role and the control driven by processes of bureaucratic rationalisation and the material demands of the capitalist enterprise (Darr and Warhurst, 2008; Muzio *et al.* 2008b; Warhurst and Thompson, 1998; 2006).

2.4 Labour process analysis: major reworks

The purpose of this section is to demonstrate that this thesis takes a structuralist perspective of the LPT. Its focus is on the structural characteristics of the capitalist LP that shape and constrain workplace relationships, in this case of MMs, rather than on the dimensions of identity assumed by individuals.

The overview presented in this section shows how, despite the theoretical rift the LP community experienced around the late 1980s, the conceptual framework of the structuralists (consolidators of the LPT) remain aimed at traditional materialist concerns regarding work relationships (Thompson and Smith, 2010). Hence, even though post-structuralists (Knights and Willmott, 1989; 1990) seek new post-modern territories, the contributions of the consolidators/materialist LP scholars continue to focus exclusively on the concepts of control, in conjunction with conflict and consent, as structural imperatives that shape and constrain the boundaries of behaviour.

The LPT's outline sheds light on the dynamics of workplace relationships, as experienced not simply by workers, but also by MMs, given that the latter, like other employees in the firm, are subject to top-down labour control (Carchedi, 1977; Carter, 1985). In the case of MMs, control is infrequently expressed in 'direct supervision and outright authoritarianism' (Hassard *et al.* 2009); however, in practice it still attempts to restrict their autonomy at work.

Braverman's (1974) work is considered as an early but major contribution to the LPT. He directed his attention mainly towards the problem of control and argued that the impetus for the control of workers by management has systematically removed knowledge and skill acquisition from both manual and mental workers. After Braverman's study (1974), other academic pieces of note followed, known as the

‘second-wave of LPT’. These include the works of Friedman (1977a), Edwards (1979) and Burawoy (1979). Through their work, the second-wave theorists sought to emphasise not just the different classifications of control, but also the dynamics of resistance and consent at the point of production. The new notion that the second-wave brought to the table was that the dynamics of regulation in the workplace have ‘relative autonomy’ from the wider capitalist political economy and society (Edwards, 1990).

Despite the theory-build and the empirical insights that thrived during the second-wave, by the late 1980s post-structuralist theorists, influenced by Foucauldian thinking, took a critical position regarding orthodox LP analysis. This was also a time when new services and professional contexts, conveying ideas of discretionary effort, skills expansion and flexibility, were flourishing.

The post-structuralists’ main argument was that the mainstream LPT was unrefined, since those who devoted much attention to it from a Marxist perspective did not develop this theory to analyse ‘identity’ (what has been labelled as the ‘missing subject’). In their view, such an analysis was required to focus on the person’s sense of self and the existential insecurities that encircle the foundation of human existence. In an attempt to address the ‘missing subject’, Knight and Willmott (1989) applied the Foucauldian concepts of subjectivity, identity and power to understand how individuals are constituted by, and subject to, the discourses and disciplines of modern firms. In their view, corporate culture and the handling of commitment supplanted control and bureaucracy, and they looked into the processes of surveillance to offer explanations for this shift (Willmott, 1993).

Compared to the orthodox LPT, the post-structuralist perspective primarily focuses on the individual and identities, rather than on the collective and interests. The post-structuralist emphasis on the indeterminacy of human agency diminishes or simply ignores any focus on the indeterminacy of labour, agency and workplace relations highlighted by the materialist LP scholars (Thompson and Ackroyd, 1995, pp.622-6). The post-structuralists took this stand to the point that for them “identity rather than labour becomes the site of indeterminacy” (Thompson and Smith, 2009, p.921).

Against this background, Thompson (1989) sought to connect propositions from second-wave theory to establish the ‘core theory’ of LP analysis (pp.242-4). Nevertheless, as LP scholars continued to highlight different issues, Thompson and

Harley (2007) were stimulated to put forward what they refer to as the 'core propositions' of the LPT. The first such proposition concerns the indeterminacy of labour. The second is about how employers, or rather their agents (managers), seek to narrow the gap between the employees' potential and the real effort they put into their work. Thirdly, the LPT suggests that employees react to strategies of control because they are not passive recipients. As a result, there are instances when in the workplace the responses vary "from resistance to accommodation, compliance and consent" (p.150).

With respect to the latter proposition, although Braverman (1974) was accused of focusing solely on the objective conditions of production (Armstrong, 1989; Knights and Willmott, 1989; O'Doherty and Willmott, 2001), his work opened the way for other LP theorists to embrace the subjective dimension of labour. A case in point is Burawoy (1979, 1985), who shifted the focus to consent, as a way to explain how labour can be secured not as a result of management control or employees' resistance, but on the basis of the cooperative nature that characterises the workplace.

From the second-wave of the LPT onwards, it was acknowledged that the dynamics of control and exploitation embedded in the capitalist LP lead to fundamental tensions and contradictions. These trigger capital and labour to collide in a relationship of structured antagonism (Edwards, 1986; 1990). The relationship between capital and labour is in part cooperative, because both parties are in an interdependent position to secure the prosperity of the organisation that provides them with employment. Concurrently, this relationship is fundamentally antagonistic because to attain surplus value, management manoeuvres subject employees to exploitation and contradictions.

Nonetheless, it is assumed that capital does propose labour consensual and work humanisation strategies (Burawoy, 1979; Cressey and MacInnes, 1980; Edward, 1979). Capital, and its agents, support such strategies with the rationale that through them they manage to obtain employees' cooperation in necessary changes to the business. Therefore, as a result of its dynamism, capital cannot depend completely on control and coercion to ensure commitment of the labour force, but rather "[a]t some level, workers' co-operation, productive powers, and consent must be engaged and mobilised" (Thompson, 1989, p.244).

Accordingly, the frame of reference of the LPT developed into what is usually referred to as a 'control - resistance - consent' model. Essentially, it is acknowledged that workers do consent or resist depending on their interests (Knights and McCabe, 2000). Thus, at work, managers seek to ensure that employees view consent or, better still, commitment, instead of resistance, as being manifestly in their own interest. However, that does not mean that responses to managerial strategies do not involve elements of resistance, or what has lately been referred to as misbehaviour.

This short overview of the LPT's development prompts a number of questions for MMs' analysis. On the one hand, the dynamics of control, resistance and consent also apply to MMs, given that according to radical scholars, the middle-layers (Braverman, 1974) / professional-managerial class (Ehrenreich and Ehrenreich, 1979) are increasingly taking on the characteristics of employees. On the other hand, since MMs are part managers and are defined in terms of an agency relationship with capital (Armstrong, 1989), there are instances where they do not share the same interests as workers. Indeed, MMs as agents, are interested in reaching their own performance objectives by controlling the labour of the other employees (Watson, 2001). Ultimately, the relationship between MMs and capital remains contradictory because the antagonism inherent in workplace social relations urge capital to continue seeking different ways to multiply surplus value, affecting all levels including the middle.

2.5 The indispensability of control

The objective of this section and those that follow (2.6 – 2.9) is to prepare for an argument about MMs. As mentioned above, the coverage of MMs in LPT research is limited, but in these sections an effort is made to discuss the concepts of control, conflict and consent around MMs, and to initiate a discussion on PE through an LPT lens.

In this section, in order to examine how control is realised in the capitalist workplace with regard to managers, an initial review is devoted to classical elements of the LPT. These works identify various forms of management control that to this day characterise the workplace, and so a number of them influence the role of MMs. Following on from this discussion, the focus is devoted specifically to 'professional control' that influences the behaviour of specialist MMs. Secondly, this section looks at

how, since the late 1980s, organisations have been inclined to concentrate on normative interventions, through a combination of culture-led changes and the delegation of authority. Finally, this section covers the following: radical theorists that underline the two-pronged nature of management; the managerial LP (i.e. MMs subject to control) together with the agency relationship (i.e. MMs unlikely to be directly supervised and completely controlled); and the extent to which MMs' role has been influenced by recent organisational restructuring and work practices, such as high-performance work systems (HPWS)².

2.5.1 Management control and labour process analysis

As long as the employment relationship in the capitalist workplace remains asymmetric and antagonistic by its nature (Edwards, 1986; 1990), managerial systems will continue to be implemented across the board. The need for managerial systems is further highlighted by the fact that capital constantly revolutionises the LP so as to ensure optimum productivity and increased profit (Thompson, 1989). With the aid of technology, these systems are further innovated in order to control, at times in repressive ways, the workforce. In fact, the influence and effects of control on employees has long been on the LP agenda, and still lies at the centre of its analysis.

Within the LPT, the analysis of control was initiated by Marx's study of the capitalist LP, that is, the extraction of labour from labour power. However, as Thompson (1989, pp.123-4) claimed, Marx (1976) did not actually make it clear how management control labour and how that control is maintained. Marx relied on concepts such as 'factory despotism' and the 'transition to real subordination of labour' to emphasise specific points about the capitalist LP, predicting the advance of systematic management, principally in the form of scientific management (Taylorism).

Drawing on Marx (1976), Braverman (1974) claimed that managers secured control through the division of labour and mechanisation. For Braverman, in the twentieth century, the central managerial practice was scientific management. In his view,

² Usually defined as "a specific combination of HR practices, work structures, and processes that maximizes employee knowledge, skill, commitment, and flexibility" (Belcourt *et al.* 2010, p.16-2).

management has overtaken complete control of the science and skill so far integrated in employees' tasks. He held that management has succeeded to maintain their managerial authority by tightening control over the LP, circumstances which would eventually result in the 'degradation of work'. As well as being criticised for his limited analysis of agency and subjectivity, Braverman was also attacked for his insistence on class antagonism and deskilling thesis (Littler, 1982; Littler and Salaman, 1982; Penn and Scattergood, 1985).

Later, the LPT's second-wave theorists also kept the notion of managerial control at the centre of their analysis, but pointed out that Braverman (1974) oversimplified the notion of management control, by overestimating the dominance of scientific management. Although these theorists did acknowledge that scientific management obstructed workers' power, they also examined other strategies. Besides, they took into consideration the fact that employees offer varying degrees of resistance to forms and strategies of control.

A typical example of second-wave theorist is Friedman (1977a), who in his work delineated how SMs use two broad types of control strategies - 'responsible autonomy' and 'direct control' - as ways to reduce employees' resistance. The former, which offers some flexibility, is the privilege of white-collar personnel, skilled workers, professional and middle-managerial employees. These are less easy to replace and, by offering them preferential working conditions and a sense of discretion, their commitment is enticed. On the other hand, 'direct control' is meant to control through coercive threats, close supervision and reduced responsibility, the rest of the workers. Even though these two ideal-types of control are inevitably characterised by stiff parameters, the criterion over which they are based contrasts sharply with Taylorism, which notably emphasises the necessity for employees to be strictly controlled.

As a radical writer, Edwards (1979) strove to emphasise the persistent dialectical relationship between control and resistance by elaborating on three successive and overlapping forms of control. For capital, the objective of each control regime is to reduce the indeterminacy gap of labour. For labour, given that employees organise themselves ('self-organising' - Ackroyd and Thompson, 1999), each control practice makes alternative ways available for them to oppose.

The three forms of control as identified by Edwards (1979) are: the simple (using close supervision); the technical (accomplished via technology and the production process itself); and the bureaucratic (compliance to rules and administrative procedures). Besides identifying forms of control, Edwards (1979) linked these to segmentations in the labour market. Bureaucratic control is associated primarily with the 'independent primary market', whose upper tier is composed of managerial and professional occupations. Formal education, craft union membership or licensing is an 'absolute' requirement for employment in this segment and job holders identify closely with their particular occupation (ibid. p. 177). Edwards's deduction indicates that MMs' jobs, in contrast to those in the 'secondary labour market' (casual labour – associated with simple control) and the 'subordinate primary market' (repetitive and routines jobs – associated with technical control) demand high educational credentials. Additionally, creativity, problem-solving abilities, initiative and high professional standards are considered important aspects, which provide greater job control amongst the MMs.

The studies of Friedman (1977a) and Edwards (1979) shifted the focus on managerial-professional occupations, rather than remaining exclusively concentrated on direct producers. Moreover, professional credentials were being identified as features that present personnel with the chance to acquire (middle) managerial positions, which are characterised by heightened autonomy and job control, when compared to those of the rest of the workforce.

With respect to Burawoy (1979) and MMs, there is not a significant parallel. Yet, during the time labelled as 'Bravermania', he attempted to understand why in a capitalist system workers work hard, beyond Marx's assertion that they do so out of coercion and Braverman's claim that they do so as a result of tight managerial control. Indeed, in Burawoy's opinion what had been recorded to date did not truly portray the cooperation that in actual fact takes place regularly in many workplaces. As pointed out by Edwards (1986, p.46), Burawoy (1979) discarded the idea that management's central problem was to wrest labour's knowledge of the production process, but the chief challenge was to persuade employees to cooperate in their own exploitation.

Burawoy (1979) found that management controlled labour not just by means of 'piecework systems' (believed to give employees some satisfaction from their work), 'internal labour market' (including job selection and training) and 'internal state' (including collective bargaining and grievance procedure), but also through shop floor

‘games’. Whilst conducting his ethnography, he referred to the informal practices and social-relation activities that shop floor workers engaged into as ‘games’. The unintended effect of participating in LP ‘games’ is of concealing the exploitative nature of capitalist production and of “redistributing conflict from a hierarchical direction into a lateral direction” (ibid. p.81). These different control systems succeed in creating willingness and cooperation amongst workers, while at the same time harness management’s power to direct the LP. Such an insight meant that rather than viewing the workplace as a ‘contested terrain’ (Edwards, 1979), Burawoy’s work “offer[s] a plausible explanation for the failure of resistance by groups of workers” (Mahnkopf, 1986, p.40).

Although the implications of ‘games’ and other forms of consensual adaption of work are not without limitations (Thompson, 1989), Burawoy’s contribution shifted the LPT framework once again, from a ‘control-resistance’ to a ‘control-resistance-consent’ one. Besides, by tracing the concept of consent, Burawoy (1979, 1985) noted that workers, through various managerial strategies, end up supporting the very basics of capitalism, which in reality curb their own interests. Furthermore, through his analysis, based on material context, Burawoy anticipated the idea that control can be captured indirectly through normative practices.

2.5.2 Middle managers and professional control

Under the premise of the previous analysis, taking into account the MM’s dual-function, consent is more forthcoming in relation to the capital function. From this function, MMs are part-and-parcel of the managerial regime and so it is more probable that they accept, at least formally, most of top management’s decisions. Meanwhile, as regards the labour function, specialist MMs do not need to be overtly and tightly controlled because professionals ‘control’ themselves (Thompson, 1989) and are expected to exercise ‘self-monitoring, discipline and management’ (Ainsworth and Harley, 2014).

In their role, specialist MMs develop PE, which subjects them to professional control. Due to the characteristic of being specialist practitioners in employed middle managerial positions, three distinctive features of professional control - intrinsic, regulatory and vertical - affect MMs’ behaviour.

With respect to self-regulation over work (Ainsworth and Harley, 2014) and self-control (Thompson, 1989), a set of values, norms and standards arising from the professional role, shapes specialist MMs' behaviour. Together, these elements can be classified as the *intrinsic aspect* of professional control. These elements direct MMs' behaviour and instigate in them normative orientations. Such normative inclinations, embedded in MMs' ethos, guide their actions and urge them to direct their efforts to solve problems. In an employment relationship, this professional onus functions independently of other control mechanisms that seek to manage their behaviour, and from what is expected from them by superiors. A further internal element that governs their behaviour results from the processes of socialisation that they establish at educational institutions prior to their employment. These processes influence both their behaviour and activities (Ainsworth and Harley, 2014; Crain, 2004; Friedman, 1977b, Smith and Thompson, 1998).

Another aspect of professional control that supports MMs' normative orientation is the *regulatory aspect*. This emanates from external mechanisms, such as the professional credentials and warrants. Professional regulatory bodies regulate the professionals' conduct according to the technical and/or ethical standards of a profession.

Once in an employment relationship, the intrinsic and regulatory aspects, which are initiated outside the work organisation, shape MMs' behaviour inside it. Together, these aspects limit to some degree MMs' behaviour, yet they provide them with greater autonomy, higher standing and recognition, as well as the necessary space to be creative and flexible in their role.

An additional element of professional control is the *vertical aspect*, manifested when specialists are selectively recruited primarily on the basis of their credentials to be responsible for the running of specialised organisational units by utilising resources, including HR. Thus, this aspect is activated when specialist MMs are employed. The specific execution of specialist/technical activities and assumption of personal responsibilities for sensitive decisions are some of the demands made of these managers. The SMs are thereby reassured by the fact that the responsibility and risk, associated with specialist/technical decisions executed within the organisation, is delegated to managers who are expected to have the necessary requirements to contain

such risk and assume such responsibility. From the MMs' perspective, such delegation continuously puts them under pressure, but at the same time the PE that they develop supports them to impose authority and to exercise autonomy, which is recognised by their superiors and the subordinate employees they manage. Such support is imperative when the MMs' hierarchical authority, arising from the line of command, is weak (e.g. due to lack of power to act directly on generic (non-technical) management matters, such as HR issues concerning subordinate employees).

The intrinsic, regulatory and vertical aspects of professional control cannot be clearly separated because, more often than not, they work in combination. However, in this thesis, an effort is made to analyse the vertical aspect when analysing a hybrid set of forms of control aimed at restraining MMs' behaviour inside the work organisation (chapter 6). While the intrinsic and regulatory aspects, which are more intertwined and steered independently from the employing organisation, are mainly analysed when looking into MMs' sense of professionalism (chapter 8).

MMs are professionals because they develop a sense of professionalism through education, regulation and a sense of standing, while they enjoy some level of independence in their work. Yet, once in managerial positions, their behaviour is moulded not just by what they themselves strive to do but also on what others in the chain of command expect from them. Hence, in the case of specialist MMs, responses to relations of control derive not only through control interventions, such as those outlined in the previous subsection (2.5.1), or through a corporate culture ethos (reviewed in the next subsection), but also on account of aspects of professional control.

2.5.3 Management control and the normative aspect

As organisations' structures become more complex, work systems become progressively more sophisticated and coupled with an increase in the number of managerial and professional employees, different forms of control develop. This is evidenced by normative managerial practices, which in the modern workplace are meant to control work behaviour less coercively.

When corporate culture is seen to be shaping employees' behaviour, managers make every effort to control employees' actions via the control of culture (Ray, 1986).

Managers embark on normative (cultural) strategies (e.g. teamwork and the use of specific narratives), in an attempt to mobilise employees' emotions, identities and attitudes. The assumption is that such strategies will expand and intensify the employees' loyalty and commitment, while marginalising those who are neither loyal nor committed.

The post-structuralists in favour of the 'cultural turn' overlook the significance of diverging interests in the employment relationship. Contrastingly, the LPT's consolidators generally accept the LPT's core propositions, but recognise a move towards soft(er) and occasionally less direct forms of control (Thompson and Harley, 2007; Thompson and Smith, 2009). Instead of arguing about a paradigm break with the core features of traditional control regimes, LP consolidators acknowledge that forms of control have normative dimensions (Thompson and Smith, 2010; Thompson and van den Broek, 2010) and that modern organisations establish other forms of control: surveillance, cultural strategies and self-discipline. Yet, these rarely displace or limit well-established forms (Thompson and Harley, 2007), such as bureaucratic rationalisation, work intensification and features of scientific management (Warhurst and Thompson, 1998). Alternatively, the LPT advocates recognise that, for example, bureaucratic and cultural controls coexist and interact, and such a fusion in the nature of management control has become widely accepted (Sturdy *et al.* 2010). This assertion was consolidated by studies which found that, at work, new practices such as the customers' report are used in combination with established bureaucratic, simple and/or technical methods of control (Fuller and Smith, 1991).

In this thesis, what ought to be highlighted through the above analysis is that within the LPT tradition, different typologies of control coexist in the workplace, thus MMs are subject to multiple forms of control. Additionally, considering MMs' expert role, control is not just imposed as part of the capitalist LP, but also follows on grounds of the intrinsic and regulatory aspects of professional control that spur a normative orientation. The latter results from standards, norms and value systems, together with the regulatory framework, rather than through rigid and direct forms of management control. However, these aspects do not dispel the indeterminacy of labour, the structured antagonism and the divergent interests embedded in the capitalist workplace.

The next subsections examine management's dual-nature and consider views of management as an LP and an agency relationship. These analyses establish theoretical assertions that are central to this thesis, since they underline the contradictory and ambivalent state of MMs.

2.5.4 Middle management's dual-nature: 'control' and 'coordination'

Mainstream analysts (Koontz and O'Donnell, 1968; Kotter, 1982; Mintzberg, 1973; Stewart, 1988; Torrington and Weightman, 1987) identify common 'if not universal' (Hales, 1986) duties that managers carry out. The radical approach to management (Armstrong, 1989; Hales, 1986; Reed, 1989) criticises the mainstream perspective because the latter focus heavily on the "surface of managerial behaviour at the expense of elucidating the structural basis of managers' power in organisations" (Tsoukas, 2000, p.34).

Contrastingly, for radical advocates, management activity in the capitalist system starts from outside the organisation, given that its function within the workplace derives from the principle of competition and capital accumulation. Such an assertion leads radical scholars to analyse management, not in terms of an 'individualist, asocial, contextual view', but rather to concentrate on managerial activities meant to maintain control within the relations of production (Tsoukas, 2000). Thus, the radical approach analyses management with regard to its dominating functions on behalf of capital. It evaluates MMs' relations of power in the workplace and reveals the dual-nature of management: control and coordination. Contrarily, the mainstream approach treats these functions together (Carchedi, 1977; Carter, 1985, 1995; Edwards, 1979; Thompson, 1989).

Commencing from the idea that workers, manual and mental, sell their capacity to labour rather than their labour itself, Carchedi (1977) sustains that the 'global functions of capital', surveillance and control of the LP to secure exploitation, are essential roles of the capitalist. Since the capitalist withdrew from the workplace and relinquished supervision to hired employees, the control function, considered as an antagonistic activity because it implies exploitation, shifted from the individual capitalist to a managerial hierarchy. As a result, within the more complex workplace's social structure, managers have to ensure that the maximum value is being extracted from the labour of those employed. In order to do so, managers ought to deal with the conflict

embedded in the LP, stemming from the antagonism built into the employment relationship.

While, control in the LPT is considered as a key distinct function of management, Carchedi argues that in the case of MMs, the ‘global function of capital’ is not necessarily dominant. In his view, this is attributable to the development of modern industry which has seen the expertise level of work expand, with managers increasingly drawn in the LP, necessary to produce use-value through the ‘collective labour function’. The role of MMs here is not only to *surveil* but also to *coordinate* work (considered as a less antagonistic activity), by getting involved in the work itself, which is becoming more technically complex, requiring growing levels of expertise.

Such a state of affairs indicates not only that fewer occupations correspond to the capital function or the labour function in a pure way (Carter, 1985), but also that within the ranks of management (more so in the middle) there is a need for a growing level of expertise to carry out work coordination besides controlling the activities of subordinates. Similar to the control function (through surveillance and exploitation), the coordination function and the growing levels of expertise within the managerial ranks give rise to tensions, because MMs, as managers *and* experts, strive to preserve their own distinct interests in the LP.

Although Carchedi’s work has been criticised for its logic of abstraction, where he distinguished between certain functions of the collective worker on one side and the global functions of capital on the other, his contribution accentuates the dual-nature of management under capitalism (Carter, 1985). Actually, management of the work organisation has always been characterised by a dual-nature, since apart from ensuring the production of surplus value it has also performed unification and coordination roles, with the modern industry increasing the need to unify and coordinate the LP (ibid.).

In this setting, and considering the ongoing organisational restructuring within the contemporary business context and the advanced technological capacity to track performance, it becomes arguable whether or not the function of MMs has become an entirely LP similar to that of their subordinates (Braverman, 1974) or whether it is fundamentally based on an agency relationship (Armstrong, 1989).

2.5.5 Interplay between ‘labour process’ and ‘agency relationship’

Under the capitalist call for increased performance and higher profitability, the challenges faced by MMs are intricate because they are “simultaneously managers and the managed” (McCann *et al.* 2010, p.349). As ‘managers’ they are expected to execute the agenda of the employer/SMs by managing trustworthily the employees under their responsibility, utilising the autonomy and trust granted to them through a relationship established by a particular absence of direct control. At the same time, as ‘the managed’, they are themselves employees situated within the organisational hierarchy, subject to external forces brought about by competition and the drive for capital accumulation, which inevitably lessens their autonomy.

In classical works, such as Mills (1956), the role of MMs is rudimentarily assimilated with that of their subordinates: “[t]he pace and character of work in the middle management are coming increasingly to resemble those in the lower ranks of the management hierarchy” (p.87).

Braverman (1974) also developed his thesis to show that the humanisation process for white-collar and new skilled workers was withering in modern industrial society. In his view, this was happening because even their work was being tightly controlled, deskilled, and separated into minute parts: “management has become *administration, which is a labor process conducted for the purpose of control within the corporation*, and conducted moreover as a labor process exactly analogous to the process of production” [emphasis added in the original] (1974, p.267). However, Braverman (1974) failed to consider the dual-nature of management under capitalism and the contradictory social relations that result from it (Carter, 1995).

Despite Teulings’s (1986) remarks about the insufficient coverage of MMs in Braverman’s (1974) work, he used his few observations on management to conduct an analysis of managerial functions and levels. Through his study, Teulings (1986) concluded that while the administrative machinery within the organisation gains more power, the power of each manager diminishes due to rationalisation and routine tasks. When commenting on managerial work, Carter (1985) also noted that the degree of authority each manager enjoys is reduced or, as he puts it, the ‘creative’ aspect of management is taken away from managers in the restructured organisation. This happens when the managerial activities become more rational and routine-based, while managers’ behaviour is increasingly regulated and recorded.

Radical scholars, such as those cited above, indicate that with the development of capitalism, the managerial authority and autonomy of MMs are diminished at work, in such a way that their role is developing more like an LP. In their view, MMs' role has shifted towards the labour function (proletarianised). To complement the radical theoretical framework, Armstrong's theory of the agency relationship is considered next.

Armstrong (1989), who focused on professionals in managerial roles, criticised LP scholars, particularly Braverman (1974), because in his view it is too simplistic to present middle managerial work as an LP, subject to the same processes of degradation and rationalisation as those of direct producers. He concluded that managerial roles remain different, because owners/SMs inevitably depend on professionals to secure the organisational goals and policies. It is precisely because management is not simply a set of tasks, but involves a sense of acting on behalf of others (owners/SMs) to further higher corporate aims, that an agency relationship is established. Nonetheless, he also underlined the contradictions and tensions that characterise this relationship.

As this thesis is particularly interested in the tensions and struggles tackled by MMs as 'controllers' and 'controlled', the agency relationship is considered, but it is not sufficient to explain what is happening to MMs at work, hence its role in this study is to complement the LPT approach. It must also be clearly noted that Armstrong (1989) embarked on the British definition of the term 'management', which he claims is 'certainly' culture-bound. In this case, management is defined as a set of general functions and skills not necessarily linked with the exercise of technical tasks. Thus, he did not consider explicitly the dual-nature of management adopted by critical scholars.

As a way to bolster his claim that the organisation of managerial work is not the same as that of non-managerial work, Armstrong (1989) argued that because of the agency relationship, management activity should not be deskilled, even in cases when this is technically possible. This is an argument that may be regarded as weak, after all not all non-managerial work is deskilled (Edwards, 2010). A response more consistent with Armstrong's study, and one that arouses interest as to the nature of the agency relationship, was presented by Hales (2005). Hales provided evidence to show that, despite radical organisational change, management strengthens its core supervisory nature, since it continues to control subordinate employees, and consists of more than

the coordination of work. Meanwhile, Watson (2001) claimed that while managers recognise that they are withdrawn from the top corporate decision-making mechanism, they acknowledge that there is a gap between them and the shop floor employees. The theoretical assertion that followed was that: “managers cannot avoid the fact that their appointment establishes them as the agents of the interests who own or ultimately control the organisation in which they work” (ibid. p.209). Through agency, these managers gain when they advance towards the top, but lose if such a role can be performed in some other way.

For Armstrong (1989, 1987, 1986), within the capitalist enterprise ‘subordinate agents’ (professional groups) are engaged in an inter-professional competition to establish an agency relationship with capital. On the basis of their exclusive knowledge and activities, groups of professionals strive to present themselves as the most trustworthy to make decisions which are in the interests of ownership/top management, and in return aim to facilitate their entry into management. However, Armstrong underlined contradictions and tensions that characterise the agency relationship. One main contradiction results from the fact that, even though trust is indispensable within the agency relationship, owners/SMs may opt to substitute it with performance monitoring and control instead.

Tensions surrounding the agency relationship also surface because this relationship is directed towards other requirements, such as those arising from financial capitalism and specific cultural factors. Armstrong (1987) himself noted that the British understanding of management (which favours finance and marketing specialists) is inclined to put engineers at a disadvantage. Contrastingly, in Germany, engineers dominate management because of the historical significance of engineering techniques and technical education (Maurice *et al.* 1986; Thompson and McHugh, 2009). The requirements of financialised capitalism also have some influence with respect to which groups of professionals are more likely to establish an agency relationship and to what degree. For example, accountants and other financial specialists have risen in prominence due to capitalists’ continued need for cost-control techniques as the general grounds for control (Thompson, 1989; Thompson and McHugh, 2009). These examples indicate that professional groups are constantly struggling to carry out managerial work and the successful groups are those who manage to use the core of their specialist

knowledge and activity to maintain a level of indeterminacy thereby preventing fragmentation or routine (Thompson, 1989; Thompson and McHugh, 2009).

The analysis carried out in this subsection indicates that the situation for MMs is a complex one, both when explored from the LP angle and also when taking the agency relationship into consideration. Both sets of theories highlight tensions. Critical scholars are particularly interested in the tensions arising from the fact that agents increasingly seek to act on behalf of capital, while adopting features of other workers. Braverman (1974) referred to the proletarianisation thesis when referring to these ‘middle layers of employment’. Ehrenreich and Ehrenreich (1979) referred to these groups of workers as a new ‘professional-managerial class’, with “[t]he boundaries separating it from the ruling class above and the working class below are fuzzy” (p.13). Armstrong’s argument is based on the premise that the role of professionals, who are acting for capital in (middle) managerial positions, is not an LP. On the basis of their professional knowledge and activities, MMs establish a relationship with owners/SMs, rather than simply basing their work on tasks. However, it must be questioned how much the role of MMs is completely based on an agency relationship and how much this relationship succeeds to prevent fragmentation or routine and repetition in their role. Instead, as outlined in the following subsection, MMs are increasingly finding themselves subject to forces of rationalisation and work intensification, associated with the LPT, making it difficult for their role to be solely based on an agency relationship (Hassard *et al.* 2009).

2.5.6 Middle managers’ role in the context of restructuring

In the discussion regarding MMs’ chances of survival in the modern organisation, classical writers such as Mills (1956) and Whyte (1956) portray these managers either as vulnerable employees (Mills) or loyal slaves (Whyte). Along these lines, various management and organisation analysts accentuate what in their view is the ‘diluted’ role of MMs in the restructured organisation, caused by de-layering, downsizing, the implementation of advanced technology and the establishment of teamwork practices amongst other factors (Dopson and Steward, 1990, 1993; Gordon, 1996; Heckscher, 1995; Livian, 1997; Smith, 1990; Wheatley, 1992).

Contrastingly, Chandler (1977), a business historian, dismisses the idea of MMs being regarded as victims. Instead, he points out that they occupy a protagonist position as a ‘visible hand’, which actually drives the economy. Similarly, managerial advocates

highlight what in their opinion is the ‘enhanced’ role of MMs as a result of corporate regeneration due to the removal of top managerial layers (Thomas and Dunkerly, 1999). It is also argued that MMs’ increased participation in decision-making and problem-solving preserves their experiences and networks in the reformed organisation (Cascio, 2002). Furthermore, strategic management writers refer to MMs’ distinct contribution. They advocate the idea that it is what is happening in the ‘middle’ with respect to decision-making, rather than what is happening at the ‘top’, that considerably affects organisational performance (Dopson and Stewart, 1990; Floyd and Lane, 2000; Floyd and Wooldridge, 1992; 1994; 1997; Huy, 2001; 2002).

In any case, MMs are conditioned by the preferences of employers’/SMs’; their role depends on the prosperity of the organisation and there is a high probability that they will end up compressed between managerial rhetoric and what happens in practice. To shed light on these problems that impact directly upon MMs’ role, this subsection reviews three influential Anglo-American sets of studies: (i) Barley and Kunda (1992) and Kunda and Ailon-Souday (2005); (ii) Carter and Fairbrother (1995) and Carter *et al.* (2002); and (iii) Hassard *et al.* (2009; 2011) and McCann *et al.* (2004; 2008; 2010).

While it is acknowledged that these three sets of studies use different research methods, distinct theoretical frameworks and ask different questions, they are regarded as useful for this study since they shed light on the balance between MMs’ autonomy/authority and subjection/subordination at work. Furthermore, despite their differences, these studies reach similar conclusions: MMs’ degree of authority is limited; MMs’ job insecurity is high; and MMs are increasingly exposed to increased workload and performance pressure, which are not necessarily linked with deskilling.

In order to examine real-life outcomes of organisational life, Barley and Kunda (1992) developed a framework based on an analysis of American managerial discourse, which predicted that the rhetoric of culture and quality would establish the terms and parameters within which managerial discourse matures. However, economic and material forces instead prompted the rise of a new rhetoric surge in the USA, including labels such as reengineering, outsourcing and downsizing.

Subsequently, Kunda and Ailon-Souday (2005) claimed that the new corporate realities of competition have seriously impacted upon the agency traditionally enjoyed by MMs. MMs are portrayed as relics of a bureaucratic past, but although the market

rationalism logic pushes for the reduction of the managerial hierarchy, it does not do away with management in 'new' organisations. Indeed, Kunda and Ailon-Souday claimed that a new type of MM - the project manager - is filling the coordination gap between SMs and employees. Despite project managers being able to cope on the basis of their expertise, in contrast to traditional MMs, their position is characterised by a considerable power shortage: "they are expected to take initiative, to assume responsibility without authority, to live with uncertainty" (2005, p.206).

The public sector's managerial staff are also influenced by organisational restructuring (Carter and Fairbrother, 1995; Carter *et al.* 2002; Hassard *et al.* 2009; Morris *et al.* 2008). Carter and Fairbrother (1995) embarked explicitly on a radical framework of analysis, to demonstrate, that since the late 1970s, a number of reforms have been implemented in the British public sector, which have impacted upon the managerial regime. These changes involved: privatisation; de-layering; the marketisation of public services; the establishment of new auditing measures; and the individualisation of the employment relationship, particularly for managerial employees (Carter and Fairbrother, 1995; Smith *et al.* 1991). Subsequently, MMs' employment relationships have become characterised by a high level of insecurity (Smith *et al.* 1991) and subordination (Carter and Fairbrother, 1995; Carter *et al.* 2002). The latter is particularly manifested in the fact that managerial personnel are increasingly subject to: rising work intensification; routine tasks and functions; pressures to contain costs; heightened accountability; continuous monitoring from external auditors and government agents; close performance monitoring; and uncompetitive pay.

In line with Braverman's (1974) proletarianisation thesis and Carchedi's (1977) middle-class formation debate, Carter and Fairbrother (1995) argued that due to the intensification of their work and the withering of their managerial responsibilities, the role of MMs as managers is undermined, in favour of the role of collective employees in the LP. Such a situation is compounded further by the fact that flatter management formations across the public sector have obscured the distinction between managers and workers, stressing instead the common identities of both groups of 'workers' as service providers (Carter *et al.* 2002).

Contrary to Carter and Fairbrother (1995), Hassard *et al.* (2009; 2011) and McCann *et al.* (2004; 2008; 2010) did not conduct their research on MMs from a radical

perspective. Yet, like Carter and Fairbrother (1995), these researchers concluded that public sector reforms, intended to bring cost structures under control, do concern MMs in a way that the latter take on increased workloads and pressure. Furthermore, Hassard *et al.* (2009; 2011) and McCann *et al.* (2004; 2008; 2010) established that MMs, engaged in both public and private organisations operating in the United Kingdom (UK), the United States of America (USA) and Japan³, that have undergone restructuring, end up dealing with similar challenges, exasperations and struggles.

According to Hassard *et al.* (2009; 2011) and McCann *et al.* (2004; 2008; 2010) the combined logic of shareholder value, international competition and cost-cutting measures generally lead to flatter and leaner organisations, with serious implications for MMs' jobs. Surviving MMs have to incur substantial changes to their work tasks, considerable growth in their responsibilities and volume of work, and heightened performance pressure. As most organisations seek to operate along purely business lines, MMs fear losing their jobs due to the weakening of the traditional career structure and the diminished corporate loyalty and company's stability. Eventually, MMs are working longer hours at a more intensified pace, inevitably bringing about higher levels of stress. Such conditions negatively affect their quality of life, personal dignity, morale and willingness to work.

Accordingly, Hassard *et al.* (2009; 2011) raise doubts about the positive assertions put forward by proponents of HPWS when commenting on the implementation of these practices as part of a restructuring process. Advocates of HPWS (Appelbaum *et al.* 2000; Ashton and Sung, 2002; Macduffie, 1995; Macky and Boxall, 2007; Sparham and Sung, 2007) claim that they do not just increase organisational performance, but they also manage to elicit employees' discretion, empowerment and commitment amongst other positive aspects. For these scholars, these positive conditions would basically suppress forms of control and resistance highlighted in the LPT.

Contrastingly, Hassard *et al.* (2009; 2011) question the appropriateness and 'optimistic' effects promised by the HPWS. In their view, what are presented as 'humane and sophisticated' policies are barely followed by SMs. The persistent drive to characterise managerial work with heightened performance systems (even in the public

³ Although the researchers acknowledge international differences in corporate governance, employment relations and organisational practices, their data reveal considerable parallelism across the three countries (Hassard *et al.* 2009; 2011; McCann *et al.* 2010).

sector) is actually putting MMs under greater pressure to carry out more demanding work in a shorter time. This situation causes stress and anxiety amongst these managers, and it seems unlikely that organisations would consider reversing such a demanding culture. It is on the basis of such unfavourable outcomes for MMs' working lives, that Hassard *et al.* (2011) insist that the views expressed by proponents of HPWS are unrealistic (p.160). Such an argument is similar to the one put forward by LPT advocates (Danford, 2003; Danford *et al.* 2004; 2008; Ramsay *et al.* 2000), who have been sceptical of managerialist writers claims that employees reap certain benefits from such systems, particularly the alleged significant levels of employees' commitment (Leidner, 2006). Instead, the LPT supporters demonstrate that, for employees, increased work pressure, resulting from work intensification and heightened job insecurity, is the main HPWS outcome.

Hassard *et al.* (2009; 2011) and McCann *et al.* (2004; 2008; 2010) did not enter the research field with an explicit radical framework. However, once they discerned that organisational restructuring (including the implementation of HPWS) exposes MMs to several of the processes of rationalisation, similar to other employees, they utilised the LPT to explain the changes that are taking place in these managers' working lives. However, in their opinion 'deskilling' and 'degradation' are not the right terms to be used vis-à-vis managerial work in the modern organisation (McCann *et al.* 2010, p.364). If, on one hand, managerial work is becoming more intensified and stressful, on the other it is becoming more involved, requiring higher skills and demanding increased responsibilities (ibid. Hassard *et al.* 2009; 2011; McCann *et al.* 2004; 2008).

The above analysis looking at MMs in the context of restructuring reveals that they remain considerably subordinate to an organisational hierarchy, which increasingly exposes them to forces of rationalisation, work intensification, systems of control and reduced job security (Hassard *et al.* 2009). Besides, MMs are either left with limited managerial authority due to subordination (Fairbrother and Carter, 1995; Carter *et al.* 2002) or their influence over decisions taken by their seniors is insignificant (Hassard *et al.* 2009), indicating that their managerial prerogative is on the decline. Subsequently, their function of capital as the exploiters (value extractors), which brings them closer to their superiors, is undermined. This reality mirrors the arguments brought forward by

critical scholars (Braverman, 1974; Carchedi, 1977; Mills, 1956), who have argued that, eventually, MMs' role will become an LP similar to that of other employees.

However, at the same time, studies analysed in this section have indicated that MMs' work has become more advanced and complex necessitating higher skills, while there has been major growth in their responsibilities and they have experienced role expansion (Hassard *et al.* 2009; 2011; McCann *et al.* 2004; 2008; 2010). For this thesis, this means that MMs still hold an important role in the reformed workplace. If middle management's control function is dwindling, then there are other aspects of their role, namely the coordination function, which distinguish their role at work. For MMs to carry out the coordination of highly sophisticated work processes and specialist functions, it necessarily follows that they must have sufficient competence, and it is here that PE becomes significant.

Evidently, employers/SMs cannot perform management functions alone and unaided. Moreover, the growth in complexity of the modern organisation increases the necessity to unify and coordinate the LP, making MMs more important. Whereas, the rising expertise level of work requires, to a larger extent, MMs who are equipped with the necessary capabilities to facilitate operational continuity. Since MMs have an interest in continuing to seek ways to survive, if the 'control' aspect of managing is weakening, then they have a vested interest in boosting the management aspect of 'coordination' and their 'expert' role. These are vital for MMs to retain levels of autonomy and discretion, to resist deskilling and to protect their managerial position. Historically, it has been pointed out that expertise provides its holders with considerable autonomy, job control and a managerial position (Armstrong, 1989; Edwards, 1979; Friedman, 1977a).

The overview presented in this section (2.5) demonstrates that, from the LP perspective, managerial control, as a structural imperative of the capitalist LP, is a meaningful aspect of organisational life. Such a position stands in contrast with mainstream accounts that treat control as a failure of systems that are otherwise founded on consensus and commitment. When analysing control relations, the LP tradition brings to light the complexity of the management role. Such complication emanates from the fact that managerial work is not simply about the extraction of labour from labour power, which is objectively antagonistic by its nature, but it also involves the coordination of work. Work is becoming increasingly complex, requiring growing levels of expertise for the

effective management of operations. It is against this background that this thesis considers PE as another aspect of the role of MMs that ought to be investigated.

The next section aims to show that, in one form or another, labour agency remains active. As MMs form part of the managerial regime, and in the case of specialists they also hold an expert role, their opposing behaviour ought to be conceptualised differently from that of the rest of the workers. The MMs' dual-role (managers-and-experts) makes it difficult for them to resist in a similar way to the other workers, thus what they are left with is 'organisational misbehaviour'. It is within these parameters that the next section starts by pointing out the similarities and differences between 'resistance' and 'misbehaviour' and the interactions between them.

2.6 The inevitability of conflict

An overview of the organisational misbehaviour theoretical framework is necessary given that MMs find it problematic to embark on formal organised resistance against management within the industrial relations framework. Nonetheless, this does not mean that MMs' behaviour is absolutely conformist or that they do not engage in unruly behaviour to disapprove top managerial policies they disagree with. However, they usually do so informally. Hence, this section starts with an evaluation of the organisational misbehaviour theoretical framework (appertaining to the industrial sociology approach), which has undergone changes. Thereafter, it turns to studies that focus on MMs (Carter *et al.* 2002; Hassard *et al.* 2009; 2011) to detect how these managers oppose constraints arising from organisational restructuring.

2.6.1 Conflict in the workplace is ongoing

Over time, forms of control and managerial practices have changed whereby corporate culture and normative dimensions are more prominent. In turn, employees are increasingly conscious of their social and workplace identities, and their ability to sustain them at work. Nevertheless, their inclination to develop autonomy at work was, and still is, widespread even in the face of the many transformations that have taken place in the institutional sphere (Karlsson, 2012; Prasad and Prasad, 2000), because "the tendency to seek autonomy is endemic" (Ackroyd and Thompson, 1999, p.74).

On these grounds, LP advocates claim that even within the normative sphere (targeting workers' attitudes and emotions) labour agency persists because of the embedded conflicting relations between capital and labour in the workplace. Indeed, the LPT refutes the assertion put forward by Foucauldian perspectives and critical organisation studies that overestimate the leverage of new forms of cultural control and electronic surveillance, to the extent that they propose the 'end of resistance'.

Thompson and Ackroyd (1995), as advocates of the LPT, condemned those who sought "the virtual removal of labour as an active agency of resistance in a considerable portion of theory and research" (p.615). These theorists and others (Edwards and Scullion, 1982) have countered such an assertion on the basis of empirical qualitative evidence, which confirms that employees are not passive recipients of control. Rather, since employees are able to think for themselves, over time they adjust their actions in accordance with the changed context and conditions, and the control regimes that are in place. However, this does not mean that they give up opposing and/or dissenting. As long as control is structured into the employment relationship, the potential for some form of conflict, at some level, is always present in the workplace.

The LPT has developed further to respond to certain claims made from the organisational behaviour (OB) perspective, specifically as practiced in North America. Cases of workplace-related aggression and violence that occurred in the USA since the mid-1990s, led OB writers (Vardi and Wiener, 1996; Giacalone and Greenberg, 1997) to start showing some interest in organisational *misbehaviour*. Predominantly, OB academic interest in this topic is driven towards showing that workplace misbehaviour has negative, harmful and adverse consequences on the organisation. Basically OB advocates look at misbehaviour as the dark side of OB.

In the interim, from the industrial sociology discipline, Ackroyd and Thompson (1999) developed their earlier argument further. They used the label 'organisational *misbehaviour*' as an antonym for OB, to highlight what the OB approach neglects in their opinion. Specifically, they believe that the power employees have under any managerial practice of control has been overlooked. Additionally, they argue that OB misunderstands the conformity of employees' behaviour, because this is taken for granted as the norm. To disprove these claims, on the basis that they are misleading, Ackroyd and Thompson (1999) embarked on a review of research to bring to the forefront multiple forms and models of noncompliant workplace behaviour, occurring

outside the parameters of formal organisational policy and collectivist industrial relations, as elaborated upon in the next subsection.

2.6.2 Detecting misbehaviour

The theoretical point of departure of the industrial sociology perspective is that in the capitalist workplace, relationships are embedded in conflicts and contradictions between management and labour (Burawoy, 1979; Edwards, 1979; Edwards, 1986; Thompson, 1989). This stance is in line with the LPT, but stands in sharp contrast with the OB approach, which is mainly concerned with how organisations establish rationality and effectiveness by maintaining order.

As a result of the structured antagonistic relationship (Edwards, 1986; 1990), employees resist control practices. Hence, from the industrial sociological perspective, misbehaviour (similar to resistance) is the normal outcome for employees who actively challenge and negotiate workplace relations, with the result that absolute consent and/or compliance to the institution of management and organisational control does not materialise (Ackroyd and Thompson, 1999; Hodson, 1995; Thompson and Ackroyd, 1995).

On the understanding that the oppositional nature of resistance is fixed, arising from the dialectic of control-and-resistance, Ackroyd and Thompson (1999) developed the concept of organisational misbehaviour to include other noncompliant practices (e.g. sexual games) linked to varied motives (e.g. romance). The motives behind employees' misbehaviour are not necessarily the outcome of antagonism between capital and labour, and oppositional in nature. Misbehaviour does not implicitly replace resistance, but rather it is another dimension that marks workplace behaviour. These scholars mapped employees' actions across four domains of contestation: (i) time; (ii) work; (iii) product; and/or (iv) identity, which both managers and employees seek to 'appropriate' in order to keep or retrieve control (p.25).

The discussion of the concept of resistance has mainly concentrated on formal and organised noncompliant behaviour, which is a feature of large companies, particularly those engaged in manufacturing. However, although organised labour has been marginalised and traditional manufacturing labour is less prevalent, webs of control and exploitation still dominate the different workplaces in one form or another. In these

circumstances, employees continue to look for ways to defend their distinct self-identities and self-interests, generally in an *informal* manner. To express informal organisation-supporting organisational misbehaviour, Ackroyd and Thompson proposed a new explanatory framework: 'self-organisation'. This is the tendency of groups of employees (including managerial) to develop a significant degree of self-determination to recover or advance autonomy and a sense of control over their situation, on account of their interests and identities.

Notably, since, on the basis of self-organisation, misbehaviour is difficult to control and given that it is not necessarily harmful for the organisation's operations (two industrial sociology assertions that stand in direct contrast to OB), under certain circumstances managers accommodate it. Indeed, they may even encourage it to protect their own interests, and when so doing they would be misbehaving themselves (Ackroyd and Thompson, 2015; Richards, 2008).

The fact that managers do not always regard misbehaviour as illegitimate, and do not always formally disapprove of it, differentiates it from resistance, which is universally disapproved by managers. This is another reason why Ackroyd and Thompson (1999) wanted to establish *another* sphere of workplace behaviour, which is different from resistance. Nonetheless, such a theoretical assertion raises questions because if managers allow certain misbehaviour, then it is unclear why it is still considered unruly. The fact that Ackroyd and Thompson (1999) put less emphasis on the motive at the expense of stressing the act (Shamsudin, 2006) may explain why such queries surface.

Nonetheless, through categorising various forms of misbehaviour, Ackroyd and Thompson (1999) achieved the following: (i) expanded the LPT's argument that workplace conflict is analytically distinct from a wider class struggle; (ii) broadened the classical conceptualisation of conflict at work; and (iii) demonstrated that workplace conflict continues to exist even though organised industrial action has declined, sophisticated technological practices have been implemented, and that management seek innovative ways to 'win the hearts and minds' (Barley and Kunda, 1992) of their employees. Once the concept of misbehaviour was unveiled, a broad range of workplace action that is covert, subtle, subjective and informal, and not necessarily collective, overt, formal and organised in nature, became perceptible as a manifestation of opposition taking place at work.

Subsequently, Ackroyd and Thompson (2015) refined the theoretical parameters through which they had defined resistance and misbehaviour. Recently, they have directed both concepts more explicitly towards the social relations of employment. Considering that this thesis is also interested in MMs' opposing behaviour, which is related directly to the employment relationship, the refined theoretical premise of the organisational misbehaviour approach is particularly considered, as outlined in the following subsection.

2.6.3 Defining misbehaviour

When comparing the different definitions of 'resistance' and 'misbehaviour' presented by Ackroyd and Thompson in 1999 and then in 2015, there is a refinement to note. Their interpretations became more focused and in line with the traditional LP work. Another modification can be noted with respect to what were and are now considered as the dimensions of misbehaviour.

In 1999, Ackroyd and Thompson defined resistance as acts of noncompliant behaviour that are formal and collective, and that their motive "assumes a dialectic with managerial control that is an outcome of antagonism between capital and labour within the capitalist labour process" (p.24). Resistance was considered as a dichotomy to forms of control. Meanwhile, they leaned on Sprouse's (1992) definition of sabotage to define misbehaviour: "anything you do at work which you are not supposed to do" (p.2). In this definition, 'anything' includes acts and motives that might not be relevant to an LP analysis and which managers may not necessarily regard as illegitimate.

Later, they seek to relate both concepts more explicitly to the LPT's notion of structured antagonism embedded in the employment relationship. Indeed, they argue that resistance should be considered "as an intentional, active, upwardly-directed response to threats of interests and identities", while "much of the remaining, largely informal and covert actions of work limitations, time-wasting and dissent are better conceptualized as misbehaviour" (Ackroyd and Thompson, 2015, p.194).

Their current definitions imply that the original distinction between resistance, being largely formal, and misbehaviour, being informal and not necessarily active, remains. However, misbehaviour's definition has now been streamlined to reflect the LP tradition. While before 'everything one is not supposed to do' could be deemed misbehaviour, now the implication is that misbehaviour refers to acts that arise over the struggle of the extraction of labour from labour power. Work limitations, time-wasting

and dissent do challenge the indeterminacy of labour, so the modified meaning is clearly within the LP approach.

Regarding the dimensions of misbehaviour, the framework presented in 1999 did not focus solely on workplace conflict that arises out of effort bargaining and structured antagonism. Rather, it shifted some of the terms of the oppositional debate by including 'identity' as an area of conflict. As the mapping of organisational misbehaviour was broader, including non-material practices, it received the praise of scholars sympathetic to the post-structuralist and Foucauldian perspectives (Fleming, 2001).

In their 2015 work, Ackroyd and Thompson did include the framework they had developed in 1999, but with some modification. The most striking change is that the latest framework completely misses out the 'appropriation of identity' (this is also left out in Ackroyd, 2012). This means that the only point that, to some extent, put the industrial sociologists in proximity with the post-structuralists has now been deserted. In contrast with 'identity', the appropriations of 'time', 'work' and 'product', which have a material context and arise out of the conflicts and contradictions embedded within the employment relationship, are kept in the updated version of the framework. Nonetheless, Ackroyd and Thompson (2015) acknowledge that 'identity', as a symbolic resource, is an important matter because managerial efforts that seek to mobilise employees' emotions and personalities can clash with the latter's distinct identities and interests. Thus, while LP advocates acknowledge that at work there are conflicts and concerns around 'identity', they also argue that these should not be interpreted exclusively on the basis of discourse, as post-structuralists do. Instead, the former claim that they ought to be analysed vis-à-vis: material conditions (interests) that characterise the employment relationship; the work context; and labour agency (Ackroyd and Thompson, 2015; Marks and Thompson, 2010).

In considering these theoretical refinements, the next subsection suggests new ways of looking at misbehaviour and 'new' types of misbehaviour, which seem more common when analysing the actions of MMs at the workplace.

2.6.4 Re-detecting misbehaviour

Shifts in the industrial landscape have changed the conditions necessary for the production of classical forms of misbehaviour (e.g. chronic absenteeism, utilitarian

sabotage and pilferage), identified in early studies. The significance of such forms of misbehaviour has diminished and so they are no longer regarded as major concerns for the managers. However, recent research shows that there has been a proliferation in the range and types of organisational misbehaviour and an increase in its subtlety, indicating that misbehaviour “is in a process of evolution and is far from being eliminated” (Ackroyd, 2012, p.3; Thompson, 2014).

Cynicism and dissent are two forms of organisational misbehaviour, which express disengagement from the employing organisation and its policies. These forms of misbehaviour are not novel but have recently received significant attention. For instance, the more insecure jobs become, the more likely it is for employees to become more cynical about the striking inconsistencies between official top managerial policies and what happens in reality at work (Ackroyd and Thompson, 2015; Collinson and Ackroyd, 2005; Thompson, 2014).

Cynicism, as a passive form of misbehaviour, allows individuals to morally detach themselves from the organisation due to a lack of accord, but usually does not materialise into motivating action. At the other extreme is dissent, an active form of misbehaviour. In the recent past, actions of this type were not deemed to be a pressing form of misbehaviour (Collinson and Ackroyd, 2005), but later thinking (Ackroyd and Thompson, 2015) has incorporated the view that dissenting ideas are essential for self-organisation, which is the bedrock of decisive action. When management neither accepts criticism nor is open to listen to alternatives vis-à-vis present policies, this is due to fear that turbulence may raise. But since in a democratic setting everyone expects to have the right to voice his/her views, such a failure and the neglect to address dissent tends to give rise to subversive action (Ackroyd, 2012; Ackroyd and Thompson, 2015; Thompson, 2014). Concurrently, LP scholars also consider employees’ actions, such as humour, as a form of cultural subversion and hence as an effective form of opposition (Taylor and Bain, 2003).

On the basis of such a theoretical development, humour, management misbehaviour and internet misbehaviour are amongst the ‘emergent themes of misbehaviour’ (Richards, 2008, pp.663-6). These, together with cynicism, dissent, work-limitation and time-wasting are presently on the agenda of industrial sociology/LP/industrial relations scholars (Ackroyd and Thompson, 2015; Bélanger and Thuderoz, 2010; Collinson and

Ackroyd, 2005; McDonald and Thompson, 2016; Noon *et al.* 2013; Taylor and Bain, 2003).

Overall, empirical evidence shows that through the years the forms of conflict have changed and the probability is that they will continue changing. When compared with resistance and the traditional forms of misbehaviour, the current acts of misbehaviour maybe considered as inconsequential. Yet, because the nature of employees' actions adapts to managerial regime change, it does not mean that such actions has necessarily become trivial. Considering management's normative initiatives, which are meant to mobilise employees' identities and emotions, "[e]mployee cynicism towards and dissent from such initiatives, as well as action to maintain dignity and positive identity at work, are in this context as much a form of resistance in its broadest sense as traditional effort bargain struggles" (Thompson, 2005, p.173).

While the industrial sociological perspective has filled the gap created by the fact that the informal and not essentially collective forms of action were ignored in workplace analysis, its proponents admit that research into managerial and professional misbehaviour is still limited (Ackroyd and Thompson, 2015). On this basis, the next subsection uses studies that focus exclusively on MMs' working lives and the impact of organisational restructuring, with the aim of bringing to the fore any form of action exercised by MMs.

2.6.5 Middle managers' actions in the restructured workplace

International competition and the stimulus for accumulation (in the private sector), and market-based direction (in the public sector) lead to organisational restructuring and work organisations' reforms, which affect MMs' working lives directly (Carter *et al.* 2002; Hassard *et al.* 2009; 2011; McCann *et al.* 2004; 2008; 2010). These managers are increasingly subject to growing intensification of labour, tight performance monitoring and deterioration in working conditions.

Faced with this discouraging scenario, MMs do not appear to be resorting to any particular form of resistance. Even when they are highly pessimistic about the prospects that radical corporate changes promise to bring about and/or are disappointed with the management style adopted, they usually do not offer direct resistance. Such action, or rather the lack of it, is not surprising given that MMs are either non-unionised or are

passive union members. Notably, even in companies where unions have a strong presence, the unions' involvement in large-scale restructuring is in the negotiations to protect employment, rather than to resist or mobilise against corporate changes and their negative implications (Hassard *et al.* 2009; 2011; McCann *et al.* 2004; 2008; 2010).

Therefore, when commenting on the effects of public sector restructuring on British industrial relations activity, Carter *et al.* (2002) observed that though trade union membership in this sector remained considerably high, trade unions were increasingly finding it difficult to impede or alter new demands imposed by the continuous process of reforms and modernisation. Nevertheless, in the view of these researchers, as long as managers remain under-valued and their work experience is similar to any other group of employees, these circumstances may instil in them the sentiments required to drive them to resist the market economics with which they have to work within in the public sector.

While the use of resistance by MMs in the future is possible, direct resistance does not appear in the studies that have focused particularly on middle managerial work, corroborating the notion that MMs' contradictory status renders them uneasy about resisting their own management position. Under these circumstances, as shown to some extent in the following literature, MMs' concerns may be expressed in organisational misbehaviour, but certainly not in collective resistance.

On a similar note, Hassard *et al.* (2009; 2011) and McCann *et al.* (2010) reported that, at times, MMs do express feelings of cynicism and detachment towards top management strategies, yet the researchers did not elaborate on these responses. Moreover, they briefly reported that while carrying out their research there was 'some' evidence of MMs refusing to get carried away into the overwork culture, but in such occurrences the common feeling was one of 'resigned compliance'. Hassard *et al.* (2009) argued that for greater value to be achieved, SMs' indoctrination about the inevitability of change led to a sense of 'resigned acceptance' of hard times amongst the middle management levels. This is further accentuated by severely increased competition, coupled with decreased job security in the reformed organisation (McCann *et al.* 2010).

The indications are that even though MMs are subordinated in an organisational hierarchy, they still see themselves as mostly 'managers' rather than as 'the managed'.

Accordingly, MMs feel uncomfortable about mobilising formal action against themselves, as managers. Indeed, according to Hassard *et al.* MMs see little advantage in organised collective resistance because: (i) they will benefit insignificantly or not at all if partaking in traditional forms of resistance; (ii) their relationship with trade unions is ambivalent; and (iii) the individualising pressures organisations put on them prevent them from thinking about themselves as a group. However, in their view MMs' lack of resistance is fundamentally "because of their ambivalent role as both managers and 'the managed'" (2011, p.163).

In this section (2.6), it has been noted that as long as the social relationships of employment are structured on conflicts, contradictions and antagonisms, employees will remain conscious of the management's aims and wants, and thus retain the means to partake in noncompliant behaviour to defend their own interests. However, with regard to MMs, studies indicate that although in the reformed workplace they have ended up with unfavourable conditions, they do not offer formal opposition. Those who form part of the managerial hierarchy have never been at the forefront of resistance (Hassard *et al.* 2011), but when one considers the extent to which their working lives have been subject to major disruptions, such scant evidence of opposition leaves the issue open to discussion. On the other hand, considering the insecurities that characterise their role at work, the fact that there was some evidence of cynicism and detachment should not be overlooked.

Certainly, MMs' managerial position makes it difficult for them to embark on absolute resistance. This explains why in the research on MMs reviewed above, indications of misbehaviour were unearthed but no collective resistance was uncovered. If at one point MMs strive to express the issues that they have at work as resistance, they soon run into problems due to their managerial role. Nevertheless, since workplace relations are embedded in conflict and contradictions, not all is 'quiet' at work (Thompson and Ackroyd, 1995). On account of these theoretical assertions, this thesis is interested in exposing: the terrain on which MMs base their opposition; what acts of opposition they prefer to embark on; and what their motives are for nonconforming behaviour.

As the counter action, characterising the employment relationship, has been reviewed, the next section will consider other elements that emanate from the social relations of

employment. This analysis is in line with the second-wave of the LPT, which, through research, confirmed that even though structured antagonism is embedded in the relations between capital and labour, the latter's actions to control regimes are not necessarily opposing ones (resistance and misbehaviour), but may be more consensual. Such an evaluation is particularly interesting when looking at MMs. Taking into account the fact that they are part managers, loyalty, commitment and compliance to top management is practically unquestioned. However, in terms of being managed themselves, given that following organisational restructuring their work 'got tougher and more demanding' (Hassard *et al.* 2009, p.24), the implication is that there are other factors that influence the dynamics of consent in the case of MMs.

2.7 The alternatives: compliance, consent and commitment

Although the working lives of MMs are characterised by unpleasant and taxing working conditions, their direct opposition appears limited and their efforts appear not to wane (Hassard *et al.* 2009). It is on these bases that Bozkurt (2013) claimed that it would be interesting to review how, even though managerial work is exposed to so many threats and pressures, MMs still manage to produce a kind of commitment to their work. Against this background, this section attempts to explore what inspires MMs' efforts according to empirical research. Before doing so, it infers how 'compliance' and 'consent' are defined by the LPT, and why commitment is in the limelight in the modern workplace.

2.7.1 Compliance and consent

Despite the fact that research has been carried out to illustrate how management 'manufacture' consent, this concept has remained rather ambiguous. It is problematic to identify employees' actions with respect to terms like consent and compliance. Even though such terms support the understanding that employees are disengaged from forms of conflict within the LP, they must not be understood as meaning one and the same thing. Since it is hard "to integrate an analysis of consent fully into a theory of the capitalist LP", Thompson drew a distinction between consent, which he defined as "some level of *agreement*...to a set of work relations" and compliance, which suggests that employees "*give way* to the structure of power and control" in the capitalist LP [emphasis added in the original] (1989, p.176).

When specialist MMs are under the LP lens, the dynamics of the employment relationship become even more complex. While conflict remains embedded in the workplace, MMs are amongst those categories of personnel who “effectively ‘control’ themselves” (Thompson, 1989, p.153). Professionals in particular are envisaged to exercise self-control, supported by a degree of subjectivity through which they are expected to be responsible for their actions and behaviour (Ainsworth and Harley, 2014). This subjectivity is captured in their forms of misbehaviour, creativity (tacit skills and knowledge), and consent (discretionary effort that binds these employees to the workplace arrangements) (Marks and Thompson, 2010).

Subsequently, for the LPT, consent and resistance (and lately also misbehaviour), as counter effects of control strategies (including self-control), do not necessarily counterbalance each other, but they may exist together at the same time or in the same place (Thompson and McHugh, 2009). This assertion was confirmed by the empirical research on MMs reviewed in this chapter (Hassard *et al.* 2009; 2011; McCann *et al.* 2008; 2010). This research traced feelings of cynicism and detachment amongst MMs towards high-level policies and revealed some evidence of refusal to get completely drawn into the overwork culture; yet, generally, MMs appeared highly committed to accomplishing personal and organisational goals (*ibid.*). Such research indicates that the behaviour of MMs is balanced between their (‘low’) unruly behaviour (‘misbehaviour’) and (‘high’) consensual conduct. However, it does not establish the terrain upon which MMs embrace what they do at work. While the notion that the capital function steers MMs’ behaviour towards conformity is not denied, this thesis attempts to investigate to what extent MMs’ PE moves into this direction (or otherwise) in cases where they are exposed to demanding performance measures and increased job insecurity.

2.7.2 Loyalty, commitment, compliance and the middle managers

Going back chronologically, one notes that the concept of corporate loyalty has been on the organisational scholars’ agenda for some decades. In a classical piece, Whyte (1956) offered a harsh critical attack on the ‘social ethic’ (loyalty towards the firm and the loyalty of the firm towards its members) that shaped the values of those who occupied the middle-ranks of large private corporations and public organisations. He referred to these managerial and professional employees as ‘the organization man’: “They are the ones of our middle class who have left home, spiritually as well as physically, to take

the vows of organization life, and it is they who are the mind and soul of our great self-perpetuating institutions” (Whyte, 1956, p.3). In his view the ‘social ethic’ eradicated the ‘American Dream’ which was founded on the attributes of individualism, entrepreneurship and self-reliance that the nation itself was supposedly being built on. For Whyte, the solution for the ‘organization man’, who within the large corporation “must not only accept control, he must accept it as if he liked it” (ibid. p.151), to overcome the ‘social ethic’ is to *fight* the organisational processes of socialisation and *resist* its demands of indoctrination.

The ‘organization man’ was again under the spotlight in the 1980s, business management theorists claimed that the traditional apparatus of control and coercion, forming around Taylorist principles and based on a low-commitment model or compliance, no longer matched the world of work. Work changes frequently and is increasingly based on expertise. These writers called for a heightened level of performance, considered attainable only through a shift in ways of organising work, from the ‘management of control’ to the management of commitment’ (Walton, 1985).

Thus, as noted earlier by Whyte (1956), it is the organisation that shapes ‘the organization man’, but rather than the ‘social ethic’, it is now the normative intervention including cultural regulations (embedded in the corporate culture and human resource management (HRM) policies) that seek to indoctrinate managerial and professional employees. These ‘indirect’ forms of control strive to generate a high level of *individual* commitment, discretionary effort and total dedication towards the organisation. The focus on corporate culture, and other value-led practices, led OB writers to become disproportionately interested in the ways in which organisations mobilise employees’ values, discourse, rituals and myths to obtain their commitment (Thompson and McHugh, 2009). However, the HRM goal of commitment stands at odds with the tensions that characterise MMs’ working lives, particularly since the 1990s when substantial changes started being carried out in the workplace motivated by pressure to cut costs (Carter and Fairbrother, 1995; Carter *et al.* 2002; Hassard *et al.* 2009; 2011; McCann *et al.* 2004; 2008; 2010).

As depicted so far, MMs who remained in employment after the implementation of organisational restructuring, experience considerable changes in their role, which is increasingly subject to managerial practices that, besides being individually oriented, continue to get more normatively rooted and technologically sophisticated. In addition,

the organisation's loyalty towards them is reduced drastically and the economic climate is such that MMs fear losing their jobs. These circumstances put MMs' interests at risk.

For MMs, work intensification is one major offshoot they experience following organisational restructuring, to which they comply without much opposition (Hassard *et al.* 2009). Accordingly, when McGovern *et al.* (2007) were looking at reasons why staff accept work intensification, they identified job insecurity, resulting from repeated downsizing and restructuring, as one practical reason as to why employees work intensively. Hence, when employees are confronted with insecure job conditions, market discipline, as an external mechanism, becomes the preferred approach for employers/SMs to manage the employment relationship, rather than internal managerial practices such as HR initiatives.

Remarkably, Hassard *et al.* (2009) reported that fear appeared to play a central part vis-à-vis MMs' 'work-addiction' and high levels of commitment. This was not only the fear of losing their jobs, but also a fear of obtaining a poor appraisal, a fear of being labelled as failures, a fear of an irreversible crisis developing when not reporting to work, and a fear that in the long term they would be completely overwhelmed with work. Apart from the fact that their effort at work depends on market discipline and fear, in the reformed organisation MMs find themselves working in a highly individualised environment where each MMs is individually loaded with the pressure to perform more whilst performance is monitored closely on an individual level.

For this reason, while in the modern workplace the assumption is that control is essentially based on the assumed or actual existence of employees' engagement and commitment-seeking practices, the reality is that it depends on market discipline and continuous performance monitoring. Although accounts of HPWS and commitment remain, the managerial concentration is on performance and this applies to both the private and the public sector. The former is highly characterised by goal-targets for cost control and performance measures such as key performance indicators (KPIs), supported by computerised systems (Hassard *et al.* 2009). Meanwhile, reinforced audit systems and accountability practices in professional work settings are the main drivers for enhanced performance within the public sector (McGovern *et al.* 2007).

In circumstances where the emphasis is not on the dependence of discretionary effort and responsible autonomy but largely on performance conduct and the survival of the organisation against all odds, the driving force is compliance with market conditions

rather than organisational commitment (Thompson, 2003; 2011; Thompson and McHugh, 2009). Moreover, recent studies on MMs have indicated that any expectation about mutual commitment between them and their superiors is unrealistic, particularly regarding career development and employment stability (Hassard *et al.* 2009). These findings correlate with others, which conclude that while managers are increasingly urged to identify with the organisation, it is not expected that they will receive secured employment and career progression in reciprocation for their loyalty (Thomas and Dunkerley, 1999). Given these conditions, MMs' level of 'commitment' is hindered each time they find themselves losing control over the amount and hours of work they perform, their opportunities for career advancement and their employment security, while powerful corporate culture pushes them towards higher individually-oriented performance.

In the modern organisation, although MMs do occasionally express cynicism towards, and distance themselves from, SMs' decisions, empirical evidence confirms that such behaviour does not prevent their compliance, even if it is of a 'resigned' nature (Hassard *et al.* 2009; 2011 and McCann *et al.* 2010). MMs may not be internalising the entire values of the modern organisation, and so what they are generating is not real commitment. However, such a state of affairs is of little concern to SMs if fear, market discipline and tightened individual performance monitoring are enough to obtain their effort. The likelihood is that those MMs who are reluctant to put in the time and effort required to survive in the restructured organisation, will either choose to leave or be forced to do so.

It should also be pointed out that MMs' attitudes towards their occupation is complex, and is contingent upon multiple grounds. Indeed, despite being faced with unpleasant conditions, such as stress and a distorted work-life balance, Hassard *et al.* (2009) and Osterman (2008) found that MMs still take pride in their work, feel loyal towards their colleagues and are ambitious about growing in their role. In the opinion of Hassard *et al.* (2009), what really worries MMs is redundancy as this instantaneously means losing their professional identity and being removed from esteemed work-based friendship networks. Such circumstances are traumatic for MMs given that they are particularly committed to their organisation, which however does not bind itself to reciprocate through job security and acknowledgment for personal sacrifices amongst others.

The above empirical review highlights a central theoretical premise concerning MMs, namely the ambivalence that characterises their role. Without embarking explicitly on MMs' dual-function, this evidence implies the contradictory role of MMs. The ambivalence that stands out arises from the fact that even though MMs are pressurised and stressed, they still want to keep their structural position. Indeed, they want to advance further in their careers. They are upset with the limited opportunities for promotions, even though they know that attaining a higher position would simply mean that they have to put more time and effort into their work.

As part of the MM's role is a capital function, it is not surprising that their behaviour is, on the whole, compliant. As already outlined in section 2.6, it is also on account of this specific aspect of their role that they do not appear to partake in resistance, but instead resort to misbehaviour. Furthermore, assertions made about MMs such as that in the modern organisation they ought to deal with fear of insecurity, market discipline and performance pressure (usually described in relation to lower-ranks of employees), also play a role regarding the dynamics of consent, or rather compliance. These dynamics become more complicated when MMs execute an expert role, which is characterised by greater autonomy but also binds them on a number of counts (e.g. self-control).

At this point, when the three core pillars of the LPT (control-conflict-consent) have been discussed in relation to MMs, a closer look is now given to PE from the LPT perspective.

2.8 Professional expertise from a labour process lens

PE provides MMs with the chance to participate in the LP. Through this expertise, similar to skill or talent, the capitalist prospects to accumulate more capital and ensures the expansion of the capitalist system, rendering the relationship between the two parties a contradictory one (Smith, 2015). However, PE is particular. First, this is because it is a combination of knowledge, skills and experience, with certain aspects of these factors established and backed up outside the work organisation. Such a composition of factors makes it harder for PE to be appropriated and, at the same time, difficult for the MM's role to be deskilled and/or devalued. Second, there is an important relationship between MMs' management functions and PE. Third, since it is

considered as an ability of high value, it provides MMs with power so these managers use it as the terrain upon which they lead their struggles to preserve their autonomy, authority and standing.

The dynamics of structured antagonism (Edwards, 1986; 1990) that characterise the employment relationship become more complex when MMs have a dual-role (managers-and-experts). The fact that professionals (similar to MMs) share the characteristics of both workers and managers in varying degrees, depending on their level of authority and technical expertise (Braverman, 1974), makes their reality a complicated one.

On account of their managerial characteristics, professionals carry out management functions on behalf of capital (Armstrong, 1987; 1989; Smith, 1991). They devise systems for employees and their contribution in the work process (e.g. engineers in job design, accountants in cost-control techniques) is to organise and control employees' work activities, thus increasing the chances of the work of other employees becoming deskilled (Smith, 1991). The objective of professionals is ultimately to increase control, which is in line with capital's goal (Noble, 1979).

Contrastingly, on the basis of their workers' characteristics, although professionals are at the top of the technical skills hierarchy, a position that provides them with considerable power, their interests are not by definition completely the same as those of the owners/SMs. The latter's primary interest is the short-term orientation to profitability (Smith, 1991). Meanwhile, professionals tend to explore the boundaries of their knowledge and skill (Ackroyd, 2013), which is not necessarily a capitalist objective. Inevitably, whenever professionals' interests do not coincide with those of the employer/SMs, friction arises.

In addition, the structured antagonism of professionals becomes even more ambivalent because: (i) their role is characterised by considerable autonomy and access to knowledge, in part external to the organisation's activities (Thompson, 1989); and (ii) professionals are regulated and develop a sense of professionalism outside the organisation (Crain, 2004; Friedman, 1977b; Smith and Thompson, 1998). Meanwhile, changing internal conditions of work and the introduction of new technology means that professionals have to deal with task fragmentation and the loss of autonomy normally associated with manual workers (Smith, 1991).

When writing in the early 1990s, Smith (1991) argued that, due to their expertise, professionals resisted deskilling and control pressures commonly imposed on other workers. However, some years later it was noted that, particularly with respect to control pressures, professionals engaged within work organisations were increasingly finding themselves subject to performance targets, greater pressure to be accountable and other output measures, all of which weakens their authority and autonomy (Ackroyd, 2013; Muzio *et al.* 2008). External regulation, through audit and assessments, standardisation of procedures, pressure on financial results, deadlines and outsourcing, are increasingly tightening professionals' work conditions, particularly in the public sector (Smith and Thompson, 1998). Such circumstances indicate that professionals are susceptible to control strategies, especially those concerning performance and accountability. In this context, professionals continue to struggle for greater professional autonomy and occupational control (Ackroyd, 2013; Muzio *et al.* 2008). Meanwhile, in addition to external market mechanisms and internal managerial practices, aspects of professional control guide professionals (see subsection 2.5.2).

The above overview implies that specialist MMs are struggling to protect their autonomy from control pressures, not only due to their employed status and hierarchical position, but also due to their expert role. Indeed, the issues surrounding, PE are to a certain extent similar to those the LPT has analysed for decades vis-à-vis workers' skills. Skills and their use have always been a crucial aspect of the LPT (Grugulis and Lloyd, 2010; Smith *et al.* 1991; Thompson and Harley, 2007; Warhurst *et al.* 2004). If skill is 'knowledgeable practice within elements of [job] control' (Thompson, 1989, p.92), then the LPT perceives control imperatives as placing limitations on skills.

Similar to skill, PE is important for its holders since it gives them a degree of autonomy in the LP and some control over what they do at work. Likewise, if owners/SMs are able to appropriate this expertise, it would result in a degree of devaluation. However, as already pointed out in this thesis, the fact that PE is a combination of factors, with aspects created and supported outside the workplace, it is difficult to be appropriated. As long as MMs hold a core of exclusive knowledge over a set of practices, and since the modern workplace is characterised by vast technical complexity and highly sophisticated work processes (required to be managed by experts), these specialist managers retain levels of autonomy, influence, and managerial

standing. Nonetheless, because these managers remain subject to control practices imposed by higher managers, some level of antagonism does persist.

On an empirical level, PE is different from skill since it is a combination of factors, including that its holders require tertiary-level knowledge (which is not associated with any particular workplace) and, in a number of cases, warrants as well. The regulatory architecture (including a legislative framework) that surrounds professionals in Malta is advanced when compared to the certifying process that regulates various trades.

On the theoretical level, PE is required for the execution of the specialist technical coordination of work within the specialised units that constitute the modern workplace. Hence, PE places its holders as part of the managerial regime, rendering their role part of the capital function. This infers that, when MMs meet obstacles presented by a low 'control function' (weak hierarchical authority), but provide operational control, solutions to technical problems and specialist support, they operate much more through the 'coordination function' (which they fulfil on the basis of their PE). Until MMs are guided by professional control (arising on grounds of PE) and as long as they remain in charge of operational decisions and high-level technical duties to manage the LP within the organisation's units, they will perform functions of capital (particularly the coordination function). Hence, it is harder for their role to be deskilled/devalued.

Consequently, in the case of specialist MMs, there is an important relationship between PE and their managerial functions. It is on the basis of the expert role that specialist personnel gain a managerial position and eventually develop and use PE, which supports them to manage. On the grounds of structured antagonism and divergent interests, MMs have an interest to amplify their PE vis-à-vis their dual-role as managers and experts, since doing so grants them authority, autonomy and discretion. In this scenario, Braverman's (1974) notion of deskilling, the proletarianisation thesis as in the shifting of middle-layers to the labour function, and Carchedi's (1977) prediction that MMs' global function of capital will eventually give way to the function of the collective workers, stand to be questioned.

In the case of specialist MMs, PE intertwines with their dual-function. The capital function and the labour function are on the same theoretical level because they deal with

MMs' indeterminacy of labour, while PE reflects these managers' actual capacity in terms of labour power from which labour is extracted.

2.9 Middle managers with developed professional expertise

Theory and empirical research confirm that the role of MMs is contradictory given that they hold a managerial position, but remain considerably subordinate in the organisation's hierarchy. Autonomy is one basic benefit of managerial work, yet concurrently MMs are subject to increased control and pressure in the reformed workplace. Moreover, MMs' situation becomes more intricate when, similar to the case in Malta, specialist personnel are engaged in middle managerial positions. In these cases, the PE that these managers develop is important to examine and evaluate since it plays a substantial role in the manner in which their effort-reward bargaining is settled.

In light of the above scenario and on the basis of the analysis carried out in this chapter, this thesis wants to integrate more explicitly the role PE plays in the case of MMs. The LPT offers theoretical premises regarding MMs' functions (Carchedi, 1977; Carter, 1985; Edwards, 1979), while it also sheds light on professional labour (Edwards, 1979; Friedman, 1977a; Smith, 1991). In this context, this thesis seeks to go beyond, by investigating the role PE (developed by professionals in management positions) plays in the LP of (specialist) MMs.

Through LP analysis, it has been realised that even MMs' employment relationships are subject to different forms of control. Besides, modifications in the structures of organisations have reduced their prospects of career development, while subjecting them to work intensification, routine tasks and functions, and tighter performance monitoring. Such circumstances are deteriorating their autonomy and a number of their working conditions (e.g. work-life balance and job security), while distancing them from the capital function, particularly the activity that puts them nearest their superiors, namely exploitation/value extraction (Braverman, 1974; Carter, 1985; Carter and Fairbrother, 1995; Hassard *et al.* 2009; 2011; McCann *et al.* 2004; 2008; 2010; Mills, 1956; Teulings, 1986).

Nevertheless, since the late 1970s, Carchedi has noted that MMs are increasingly getting immersed into the LP to coordinate more complex work processes. Later, Carter (1995) observed that the complex work organisation augmented, rather than narrowed,

the need to unify and coordinate the LP, requiring distinct operational expertise to be carried out. Furthermore, in the recently reformed organisations, the work of surviving MMs has become more central since they are entrusted with an increasing degree of responsibility (Hassard *et al.* 2009; 2011; McCann *et al.* 2004; 2008; 2010). However, given that the accounts examined in this chapter, which investigated the working lives of MMs in the modern organisations, did not differentiate between MMs' functions, it is difficult to determine exactly which of the MM's activities have been amplified significantly. Nevertheless, this empirical research does unearth the fact that MMs are increasingly asked to take on technical responsibilities in addition to general management, while these managers experience considerable role and skill expansion (Hassard *et al.* 2009). In this context, the indications are that the MM's function of coordination and expert role have, in particular, gained prominence and intensified in the workplace.

2.10 Conclusion

While this study keeps to the LPT's research programme, because it looks at the dynamics of control, conflict and consent vis-à-vis employment relationships, it does not proceed on a traditional LP analysis. Instead, it embarks on an LP research that deals with MMs, who are engaged in a public organisation that offers a service. Moreover, it adds another aspect to this analysis, the PE that characterise the MM's role.

The next chapter gives a brief overview of the public sector in Malta, and highlights to some extent external forces, namely the process of liberalisation and privatisation, that impact directly upon this sector. Such an analysis is carried out because when carrying out an LP analysis utilising a workplace-based case study, contextual framing is recommended (Thompson and Vincent, 2010). Subsequently, chapter 3 explores who MMs are in the international fora and specifically in Malta, mainly to draw out and move towards a more specific application of PE.

3. Exploring the Maltese context, identifying middle managers and the organisation selected for case study

3.1 Introduction

This chapter is divided into three parts. First, certain contextual aspects are discussed thus offering a background for this study. As the case study organisation selected for this thesis forms part of the public sector, initially, a brief overview is provided on public sector retrenchment and Malta's accession to the European Union (EU), given that EU legislation has stimulated liberalisation and privatisation schemes. As well as the EU's integration process, the general framework of new public management (NPM) influenced the structure of the public sector and subsequently impacted upon the roles of those who form part of it. However, it must be highlighted that this is not an in-depth analysis of the impact of neo-liberalism in Malta and the effects of Malta's EU membership.

Subsequently, this chapter explores how MMs are defined in Malta by taking into particular account the public sector context. Considering that, in Malta, MMs are not singled out from the general management occupation in any particular manner, with the exception of categorisation in the public service, it is difficult to define and quantify them.

In this chapter's final part, the case study organisation is presented, with particular focus on the restructuring exercise it initiated, following a liberalisation process that has steadily led to partial privatisation. Next, an overview of MMs engaged in the case study organisation is offered.

3.2 Privatisation and liberalisation in Malta

3.2.1 The public sector

The Maltese public sector incorporates: (i) the 'public service' which is constitutionally defined and consists mainly of government ministries and departments; and (ii) the 'new form of public service' (Warrington, 2002), comprising non-departmental bodies. These public entities include companies with public majority shareholdings, independent statutory bodies, regulatory authorities, agencies, foundations and a miscellaneous category including executive commissions or councils.

The public sector makes up 26.1 percent (Table 1) of the total national labour force. Even though between 2002 and 2012 around 7,000 jobs were lost from the public sector (NSO, 2012; 2014b), mainly as a result of attrition, privatisation and outsourcing (Eurofound, 2014), statistics from Eurostat indicate that Malta's public sector is the third largest in Europe in terms of proportion of the total population (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2014). Recent data show that the public sector is expanding again, particularly in the areas of public administration, education, health and social work (NSO 2012; 2013; 2016), though the peak reached in the early 1990s will be difficult to repeat. However, the proportion of the country's gainfully employed population working in the public sector did in fact decrease from 2012 to 2016 due to accelerated growth in private sector employment during the same period.

Table 1: Gainfully occupied population 1980-2015

	Public Sector		Private Sector		Gainfully Occupied	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
1980	39,720	34.0	76,978	66.0	116,698	100
1991	54,659	41.9	75,739	58.1	130,398	100
2002	47,893	34.7	90,109	65.3	138,002	100
2012	40,888	26.8	111,424	73.2	152,312	100
2016*	43,894	26.1	124,541	73.9	168,435	100

Source: von Brockdorff (1996); NSO (2012, 2013, 2016)

*February 2016

Notwithstanding that the EU does not essentially compel privatisation, the Maltese government often prefers to privatise to consolidate public finances and leave space for the private sector to take the initiative to fuel economic growth (Ministry of Finance, 1999). Consequently, the trend for the last three decades has been for the private sector to generate the majority of new jobs, albeit through direct and indirect state subsidies, grants and capital projects (Pirota, 2001).

3.2.2 The state of privatisation and liberalisation

The modernisation and reform efforts in the Maltese public sector are based on policies of NPM, which is often identified as an effort to bring private sector management style and techniques into government (Minogue, 1998). In Malta, a 'radical' reform was started in 1990, with the intention to apply private sector structures and procedures to the public sector to make the latter more cost-effective (Sammut, 2009). Meanwhile,

having applied for EU membership in 1990 (accession occurred in 2004), Malta had to address the public sector's dominance and simultaneously develop a strong private sector based economy (European Commission, 2000). This prompted two policy actions: privatisation and liberalisation.

The process of privatisation in Malta happened first through the transformation of government departments/boards of national strategic importance, mainly into statutory corporations, preparing them for partial privatisation. Second, public service departments of considerable importance were transformed into commercial companies, which were only partially privatised either through the floating of shares to the public on the Malta Stock Exchange or outright sale of a minority stake to a private investor. Third, there was a rise in the private shareholding of state-owned enterprises either through the sale of majority shareholdings to a private company or by the issue of the majority of shares to the public.

The individual legal personality given to each transformed government department/board was meant to provide them with greater operating autonomy than a government department, in return for a greater degree of accountability and efficiency (Pirota, 2001). Similar to what other developing countries were doing at the time, the Maltese government pursued the opportunities promised by the NPM. Polidano, on the subject of this development, noted: "the most common initiative apart from privatization and retrenchment – indeed, perhaps *the* most common, given the patchy implementation of these two elements – is that of corporatization (converting civil⁴ service departments into free-standing agencies or enterprises, whether within the civil service or outside it altogether)" [emphasis added in the original text] (2001, p.47).

The post-independence Labour governments (1971-1987) nationalised the major entities in Malta resulting in public monopolies and an absence of competitiveness and profit-maximisation objectives. Contrastingly, since 1987, the elected Nationalist government sought to undo the nationalisation policies and implemented a social market-based economic policy. A special government agency was established in 1988, the Malta Investment Management Company Limited (MIMCOL), to manage 80 government investments. Without much delay, half of these were dissolved, whilst another 22

⁴ In the Maltese context, the labels 'public service' and 'civil service' are used interchangeably; nevertheless the term 'public service' is the accurate one at law (Polidano, 2003).

entities, with better prospects, were hived off to the private sector either by means of direct sale or management buyout (MIMCOL, 2015; Ministry of Finance, 1999; Privatization Barometer, 2015).

State enterprises that were not privatised retained the monopoly status and relied heavily on state financing. Within this context, Warrington claimed that: “doubts have frequently been expressed about the accountability of these bodies and their directors, as well as the reliability of safeguards against patronage and financial impropriety” (2002, p.8). However, to address feasibility issues, particularly under strict aid regulations set by the EU, the Maltese government had to do more than subsidising. Evidentially, substantial reorganisation of such bodies became necessary to increase efficiency and reduce costs.

In 1999, the Maltese government reiterated that, since the remaining public enterprises were typically inefficient, cost ineffective, over-staffed and obstructed by obsolete management and work practices, it would commit to improve the competitiveness of the Maltese economy by following a divestment plan. The latter included the setting up of the ‘Privatisation Unit’ in 2000 (Ministry of Finance, 1999).

During an almost uninterrupted 25 years in power, the Nationalist government adhered to the process of privatisation. It was succeeded by a Labour government in 2013 which also followed these policies and sought to resolve the severe financial crises affecting state enterprises (Labour Party, 2013).

Malta’s EU membership has also accelerated the Government’s economic liberalisation policy to abide by the requirements laid down by the *acquis communautaire*⁵ (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2014). While the Maltese economy has evolved into a liberal and flexible one, it is still characterised by a solid regulatory framework, with statutory bodies responsible for the regulation of various sectors. The Maltese government’s role in the economy has changed from one of a direct participant in economic ventures, to that of a facilitator of economic development created by the private sector, whilst acting as the regulator. Since the late 1980s, the Maltese government has designed policies in order to stimulate national competitiveness through liberalisation, privatisation and regulatory measures, amongst other steps resulting in a

⁵ A body of EU law that takes precedence over national law.

more effective and efficient public sector with a skilful workforce (Ministry for Finance, 2014).

The NPM policies implemented within the public sector, together with the changes following the waves of privatisation and liberalisation, undoubtedly had an impact on the employees affected by these processes. Such changes normally include downsizing and de-layering of public organisations, and the implementation of initiatives undertaken as part of business process re-engineering, aimed at reducing operating and overhead costs.

In cases where the size of the entity undergoing reorganisation is not reduced through natural redundancies (retirees and resignations), the employees affected by downsizing are either offered voluntary redundancy compensations or early retirement schemes. Otherwise, they are either absorbed by other public entities or integrated into the public service, though not necessarily under the same terms and conditions of employment. Other direct commitments made by those affected include a wage freeze over a definite period, working in a more flexible manner and modifying work practices in order to increase efficiency and reduce costs. Outsourcing is also a key outcome of the restructuring process. In addition to staff reduction, there are also cases where management levels are reduced. In the face of such measures, it is difficult for the remaining managers to avoid work intensification or prevent an inevitable increase in stress (Bechert and Schytke, 2009).

While records on how MMs' working hours have changed following public sector restructuring are not available, data on working hours indicate that managers in Malta work long hours compared to their EU peers. A survey carried out in 2006 covering 165 managers engaged both within the public and private sectors, indicated that they work an average of 9.9 hours daily, second only to those in Germany who spend 10.7 hours daily at work (European Management Association, 2006). Meanwhile, data on the uptake of family-friendly measures within the public service indicate that MMs are not amongst those who benefit the most from such initiatives (Public Administration Human Resource Office, 2013). Taking into account the excessive working hours managers (across all levels) work and the low uptake of family-friendly measures amongst MMs in the Maltese public sector, there is a high probability of work-life balance problems arising for managers. This is particularly likely for female

managers, given that in Malta family responsibilities are still perceived as belonging to women (Times of Malta, 2011).

This section has shed light on a facet of restructuring that occurs within the public sector, operating in a social-market open economy. There are a number of macro flows that are directly and indirectly affecting entities and, consequently, the employees in this sector. Prominent amongst them are NPM policies, extensive liberalisation and privatisation programmes, as well as the EU's persistent demands regarding the sustainability of state-owned enterprises. These phenomena compel entities within the public sector, including the managerial structures to rationalise. As a result, these measures inevitably impact upon MMs' quality of working life and career.

3.3 Middle managers in Malta

As expected, a number of difficulties arise when one attempts to define MMs in Malta, mainly because there is no national-scale definition and locally published literature is limited. Nonetheless, the fluidity and ambiguity of the term offers rich and nuanced insights into the subtleties and intricacies of who MMs are, something which a quantitative approach would have simply missed.

The legislative framework does not provide a definition of MMs. Similarly, national statistics do not offer a description or specific measures of these managers. The fact that there is no official definition at EU level contributes to this dearth. Given such a shortcoming, separate official bodies at the regional level either retain such a vacuum (Eurostat⁶; Eurofound⁷) or define the category of MMs on the self-identification of the research subjects chosen for the study (Eurobarometer⁸). These definitions do not capture the social relations of MMs at work, though the probability is that they are not supposed to do so in the first place.

Regarding statistics, for the purpose of the 'labour force survey', EU member states (including Malta, and specifically its National Statistics Office (NSO)) must abide by

⁶ The statistics office of the EU.

⁷ The European foundation for the improvement of living and working conditions, a tripartite EU agency, which provides knowledge in the area of social and work-related policies.

⁸ The European body that conducts regularly public opinion surveys on behalf of the European Commission.

the International Standard Classification of Occupations (ISCO) to classify occupations including managerial staff. ISCO is also recognised by the International Labour Organisation (ILO). The latest ISCO version, ISCO-08 (International Labour Organisation, 2009), includes 10 main categories, with ‘managers’ belonging to one of these categories. Each of the 10 categories are further sub-categorised. In total, the ‘manager’ group is sub-classified into 46 classes, but none of these are specifically titled ‘middle manager’.

When considering the last three Maltese national censuses, to some extent a trend of an accelerated increase in the number of managers (not only MMs) can be traced when compared to the increase in the total working population. As outlined in Table 2 below, there was an increase of 46 percent in the number of managers from 2005 to 2011 compared to an increase of 12 percent in the total working population over the same period. The managerial grouping category for 2005 and 2011 is, by and large, comparable given that they are based on ISCO versions.

Table 2: Managers in Malta - censuses of 1995, 2005 and 2011

Malta Census	Census category that captures the managers	Total working population	Total number of managers	Percentage of managers from total working population
1995	Administrative and managerial	141,423	11,434	8.1
2005	Legislators, senior officials and managers (ISCO-88)	153,483	12,350	8.0
2011	Managers (ISCO-08)	171,855	18,000	10.5

Source: NSO (1998); NSO (2007), NSO (2014a)

ISCO-08 gives a broad definition of ‘manager’, which includes both the coordination of activities undertaken by the organisation, and the monitoring and evaluation of the staff reporting to them. This definition does not draw a distinction between the functions of top, middle and junior managers. As regards formal education, ‘managers’ correspond to the highest skill level (International Labour Organisation, 2012). This level is equivalent to a tertiary level of education, leading to the award of an undergraduate degree or an advanced research qualification.

The formula most popularly adopted internationally that was subsequently employed in the Maltese context to categorise managers, is problematic on a number of counts. The term ‘manager’ comprises all levels, from the most senior (those who formulate policy, budgets, and regulations of the organisations), to the most junior (those who work under the supervision of more experienced managers). It does not draw a distinction between MMs who have subordinate employees reporting to them, and those who occupy a middle managerial grade but are not directly responsible for staff. Furthermore, it does not specify whether these managers possess professional credentials. Hence, there is no way to gauge: (i) the number of MMs without a university degree who do not have subordinate employees reporting to them; (ii) the number of MMs with a particular university qualification but no subordinates; (iii) the number of MMs with subordinates but without a university degree; and (iv) the number of MMs with a university degree who also have subordinate employees reporting to them.

Since MMs are not singled out for any special treatment in the Maltese laws and national statistics, the Malta Institute of Management is a valuable source of information. Accordingly, representatives of the Institute were interviewed. During the interviews, these representatives claimed that MMs remain somewhat difficult to define, but they are mostly visible and identifiable in medium-sized and large enterprises. In such cases, MMs are considered to be those executives who report to SMs, are responsible for the running of an area/process/unit of the business on the basis of their professional competence, and are commonly responsible for the work of a group of subordinates (including supervisory positions). MMs generally possess professional credentials, which more often than not are related to the area for which they are responsible rather than to management. Indeed, given that in most cases MMs are employed on the basis of their specific professional credentials and technical competence, rather than their general managerial knowledge and skills, many MMs are those who follow a Master of Business Administration (MBA) degree or other courses in applied management, at times sponsored by the company.

3.4 Middle managers in the Maltese public sector

The Public Service Reform Commission (PSRC) report presented to Cabinet in 1989 made recommendations for effective reform of the public service. A new classification system was proposed to make up for the fragmentation of the administrative structure

and management, caused by departmentalism. The new classification placed middle management in Category B below top management (Category A) and above the supervisory personnel (Category C) and the industrial and clerical classes (Category D).

At the time, the Commission claimed that “Category B is intended to identify and promote the development of a highly competent middle management” (PSRC, 1989, p.37), in view of the fact that there was a particular lack of personnel in this category. Such a shortage had mainly arisen because, until then, internal seniority limited external intake at middle management levels (Polidano, 2003).

Following the Commission’s proposal, direct entry to Category B grades require a university degree or a recognised professional qualification, but no specific managerial experience or training. Employees at the upper end of category B are responsible for managing important unit(s) in a department or organisation. These grades include specialised professional personnel doing work in a specialised field or being responsible for professional/technical units utilising considerable resources, including HR. At the lower end of this category, the entry grades comprise employees with professional qualifications working under the supervision of more experienced officers.

Remarkably, the pattern of combining technical expertise and hierarchical managerial authority had already been established in the large specialised departments of the Maltese public service in 1937. For example, in the health service, since that date, expect for some years in the late 1970s and 1980s, professionals associated with health and medicine usually held key posts. The situation was similar in the teaching profession, coming to fruition in the 1990s when the profession claimed an important say in the appointment of key managerial positions in the education department. This means that the trend towards conflating professional and managerial roles is not only the result of systemic changes in the public service, as within this body claims and pretensions of various professionals may also be strongly influential (Interview, Academic, University of Malta).

Such circumstances led the PSRC to conclude, in a follow-up report (1990), that traditional professionals (e.g. medical, education and legal) within the public service were given a role in the management of large and increasingly complex organisations on the basis of legislation, administrative tradition and the claims made by their professional associations, which reserve the management of several departments for

members of these professions. According to the PSRC, such terms may neither be in the best interests of management, nor promote value for money in the use of resources. To address such concerns, the Commission recommended that, in the case of traditional professionals already engaged in the public service, management positions should be given to those who have undergone management training (PSRC, 1990). The PSRC did not specify the type of management training required and to which level of management such a recommendation was being made. The PSRC wound up after its 1990 report.

Since the classification structure in the public service consists of multiple career streams, each of which is organised in a series of grades (entry grades; promotion grades; grades which are both entry and promotion; and stand-alone positions which are not part of any career stream) it is not easy to generalise. However, the main change with respect to MMs in the public service is that external recruits in Category B ought to have a university degree. Initially this category had been open to any discipline, but in 2016 a modification came into effect. For instance, the middle management grade of ‘principal’ has been narrowed down to graduates in specific areas of study (e.g. public and social policy, management, finance, EU affairs, ICT, environmental and energy studies). Despite the fact that management training/experience is not a specific requirement, those engaged have to carry out managerial responsibilities. These include the heading of a section with the responsibility for its management, the development of the section’s plans to attain established targets and the development of HR, in addition to tasks such as writing reports, performing research and conducting analysis. Meanwhile, promotions to middle managerial grades for serving staff are rigorously based on merit (Polidano, 2003; Post of Principal in the Malta Public Service, 2016; Representative, Office of the Prime Minister).

These changes brought about a significant change in the public service’s *modus operandi*, since recruitment and promotions to middle managerial positions are now based on professional credentials and merit-based practices rather than a seniority-based promotion path. Furthermore, in the mid-1990s an objective-based system of performance appraisal was introduced and remains in use as a selection mechanism for internal promotion decisions, including managerial ones (Polidano, 2003; Thake, 2003).

Each organisation (non-departmental) in the public sector, similar to the case study organisation, has the autonomy to decide how to categorise its grading structure

according to its size and exigencies. Nevertheless, usually, these entities take the public service's classification as a benchmark, whilst they remain sensitive to their particularities. Regarding middle managerial positions within public sector organisations, these are normally given to employees who possess the relevant professional credentials. These personnel are responsible for operational activities and usually have subordinate employees reporting to them. Once in a middle managerial grade, these employees ought to find the right balance between their technical/specialist responsibilities and their general managerial duties, so one area of responsibility does not exclude the other. Therefore, even within the public sector, qualifications are generally a key component for managerial grades, due to more transparency and the need for substantial evidence if a decision with respect to recruitment is challenged (Representatives, Office of the Prime Minister).

This overview (which builds on section 1.3) shows that in the Maltese context, the tendency is for organisations to recruit specialist personnel, normally in possession of professional credentials, in middle managerial posts. Hence, it is generally difficult for non-tertiary qualified employees to be promoted into these positions. Those engaged in middle managerial positions have to take on general management functions, in addition to executing technical/specialist duties. Evidentially, at the first instance, since in the majority of cases the qualification is not in management, the value of professional credentials vis-à-vis the management aspect of their role depends mostly on their work experience. In the case of graduates, it is probable that, during the early stages of their career, such experience would be nonexistent or insignificant. Indeed, given that many graduates in Malta end up in managerial roles (Baldacchino, 1997, Polidano, 2003, PSRC 1989; 1990), the shortage of management content in most under-graduate courses is a concern amongst most graduates, who then find themselves in managerial jobs. Such a state of affairs led both employers and graduates to request the introduction of a “stronger management component in *all* undergraduate courses” at the University of Malta [emphasis not in the original] (Baldacchino, 1997, p.137).

3.5 Regulation of professions in Malta

On the grounds that MMs in Malta are often professionals, with a number of them having a warrant attached to their occupation, it is apposite to shed some light on how

professions are regulated in Malta. The State plays a central role vis-à-vis the regulation of the professions and the provision of warrants. First, it enacts various laws covering most professions in Malta (e.g. Chapter 281 - Accountancy Profession Act; Chapter 321 - Engineering Profession Act; Chapter 390 - “Periti” [architecture and civil and structural engineering] Act). Second, under the jurisdiction of the relevant ministries, a board is set up for each profession as a governing body (e.g. the accountancy board functions under the Ministry of Finance). There are variations as to the composition of the board; however, very often it is composed of senior officials from the ministry involved, members from the University of Malta and members of the relevant professional association/trade union.

Generally, the professional associations/trade unions are not involved in defining the content of the courses provided by licensed institutions, mainly the University of Malta, but are highly involved in the regulation of professions, both in the process of drafting and revising laws as well as in the running of the board. The role of the board is to regulate the profession and is, amongst other matters, entrusted with the issuing of warrants (after making its recommendations to the relevant ministry). Warrants are issued to those who successfully complete courses leading to the award of a professional degree by the relevant licensed institution. It is the duty of the board to keep a register of warranted professionals and to deal with cases leading to the suspension or withdrawal of warrants. Thus, the board can withhold or withdraw a warrant, or conduct disciplinary procedures on a member of the profession following evaluation of a formal complaint. The board is also expected to take various initiatives such as the formulation of a code of ethics, the setting up of a system of quality assurance and to monitor the continuous professional development of the active professionals (Interview, Academic, University of Malta; Interview Representative, Accountancy Board).

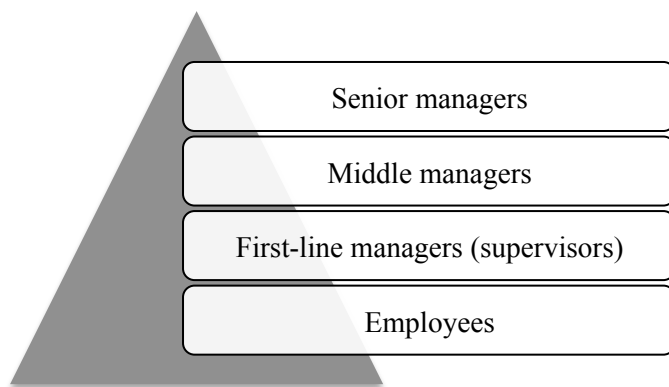
3.6 The case study organisation: restructuring and middle managers

The case study organisation, hereafter referred to as PublicOrg, is a public entity. While PublicOrg enjoys autonomy from the rest of the public service and operates in a capital-intensive business, it is still characterised by partisan political intervention and it has been highly subsidised by the Maltese government. Generally, the term 'autonomy' for PublicOrg means that its SMs have autonomy from the operating procedures on finance,

procurement and HR that govern the rest of the public service. Hence, these managers use this autonomy to, for example, raise salary levels above those prevailing in the public service and to run a separate recruitment and selection process from that of the public service. Importantly, this autonomy plays a central role in restructuring initiatives in the wake of the liberalisation and privatisation processes directly affecting PublicOrg.

Following the liberalisation policy imposed by the EU, a whole division of PublicOrg was privatised and, later the remaining operations were partial privatised. The Government announced that such a strategic move was meant to reduce considerably the large debts that this entity had accumulated. The entity, which operates a number of plants in Malta, was employing around 1,500 employees at the time of the research, and was considered a large work organisation in the Maltese context. However, following the partial privatisation, the plan is to continue downsizing, particularly from the bottom, through natural redundancies and by offering alternative jobs within the public service and public sector at large. Figure 1 outlines the structure of PublicOrg.

Figure 1: The case study organisation's structure



During discussions the researcher had with an SM (SM-1), conducted on three separate meetings over a period of three months, an intensive account of the customised restructuring process was given by referring to internal policy documents. The restructuring programme consisted of:

- Headcount freeze as a result of natural redundancies;
- Flattening of managerial hierarchy;

- Diminishing of the sub-contracting practice related to activities linked directly with the operations of the entity;
- Outsourcing of ancillary services;
- Introduction of stricter procedures in line with the legislative framework to govern the health and safety of staff and environmental regulations, amongst others;
- HR development initiatives, particularly aimed at MMs (including management training); and
- Implementation of a bundle of practices aimed at increasing performance and accountability, and ‘to do more with less’:
 - Initiatives targeted at *MMs’* and the *employees’* grades:
 - Higher demands on multi-skilling and multi-tasking.
 - Initiatives targeted at *middle managerial* grades:
 - A revised wage structure;
 - Introduction of an annual performance appraisal; and
 - Introduction of a performance bonus.
 - Initiatives intended for the *first-line managers (supervisors)* and *employees*:
 - Upgrades in the salary range and hierarchical levels linked with the acquisition of skills. Before these were given on the basis of seniority, but now they are linked with a performance appraisal carried out by MMs; and
 - The introduction of an annual appraisal for employees not linked with a monetary reward, performed by MMs.

As regards the MMs at PublicOrg, to mark off a defined group, this study identifies MMs on the basis that they were:

- *Managers*: responsible technically and administratively for a team of subordinate employees, including supervisory grades;
- *Managed*: positioned below SMs, who are responsible for setting the policy and developing the strategy of the organisation and who authorise the use of material and financial resources to implement policies and programmes;

- *Experts*: to be found within a unit that operates under their direction based on the professional credentials that they possess. They are the most qualified personnel within this area and they are the ones SMs consult on the basis of their competences.

The MM's distinct occupational post with regard to social relations at work is backed and reflected in their professional credentials, terms and conditions of employment, separate career ladders, remuneration and benefits. These managers' primary entry point in their respective positions is their tertiary-level qualification and, in a number of cases, a warrant. Indeed, MMs are not promoted through rank-and-file, thus their appointments mark the start rather than the end of their career. When MMs are working in the field of their expertise, SMs do not closely monitor them. Their conditions of employment are covered by collective bargaining and they occupy salaried positions with no direct ownership in the organisation's assets.

3.7 Conclusion

In this chapter, some key aspects of Malta were explored to offer a background for this study. It looked into who MMs are in Malta by building on the analysis set in motion in chapter 1. In the end, it also identified MMs within the case study organisation and detailed the restructuring exercise that was carried out.

This study shows that in Malta the middle managerial positions, within private companies, public sector enterprises and public service departments, tend to involve a combination of managerial and professional responsibilities. Professional credentials are considered as the foundation for the engagement of MMs, however representatives of employers (including those of the public sector) and the management institute approached for this study claimed that there are at least two other main prerequisites. These prerequisites, which specialist personnel need in order to fulfil successfully the middle managerial role are practical experience and general management skills. Such assertions point to the qualities identified in this study that comprise PE. The role PE plays in MMs' LP will be further analysed in the empirical chapters, while the next chapter will discuss the methodology and research methods applied in this thesis.

4. Methodology

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the methodological strategy deemed appropriate for this research. To begin with, the critical realist philosophy adopted is discussed and then the rationale behind the case study research design is presented. Subsequently, the discussion shifts to more practical aspects of the research, such as the decision to use semi-structured in-depth interviews as the primary method of data collection, along with documentary data. Details are then provided of access, sampling, interviewing arrangements and conduct, recording, and data analysis of interview transcripts and documentary data. Thereafter, the discussion turns to the limitations of the research design and process, including a reflection on the researcher's experience, role and impact during the research process. The chapter concludes with some thoughts on ethical issues surrounding this study.

This study sought to reach beneath the simple dichotomy between objectivist and subjectivist approaches. It was not interested in quantitative methods that limit themselves to empirical 'facts' (all that is observable, quantified and correlated in an effort to generate universal statements/laws about the world) (O'Mahoney and Vincent, 2014, pp.3-6). Likewise, it did not seek to conduct a qualitative analysis of managerial rhetoric and/or prevailing language and discourse. This is an analysis commonly adopted by subjectivists, which takes narratives, stories and discourses at face value, rejecting any claims of natural or social science to offer a 'better' understanding of the world, and claiming that all theories are equal and that 'reality' is what people say it is (ibid.).

Instead, this thesis's chosen ontology is 'critical realism' which holds that "there is a world which exists largely independently of the researcher's knowledge of it" (Sayer, 2004, p.6). As a result, there was a "changing tack in the kinds of observations made and the data collected as knowledge in [the] field develop[ed]" (Ackroyd, 2009b, p.533), due to causal mechanisms (which generate a cause and effect within an identified context). In this thesis, this meant that the focus was devoted to MMs' PE. Indeed, while organisational restructuring is happening in PublicOrg, the theoretical research question posed by this study seeks to answer the question 'what role does PE perform in the LP of MMs and what difference does PE make to the LPT framework?'

4.2 Philosophy and theory

The realist philosophy of science offers a way for objects (e.g. MMs) to be conceptualised through a fundamental distinction between ‘abstract’ and ‘concrete’ concepts. The abstract concept (an abstraction) does not mean ‘vague’ or ‘removed from reality’, but instead refers to a partial aspect of an object isolated in thought; these aspects together constitute concrete objects. Meanwhile, the concrete not only concerns ‘whatever exists’, but underlines the fact that objects are typically composed of a combination of diverse elements or forces (Sayer, 1984, p.80). According to Sayer (1984), understanding concrete objects “involves a double movement: concrete \Rightarrow abstract, abstract \Rightarrow concrete” (p.81).

There are different levels of abstraction when dealing with MMs that outline their causal powers (abilities and tendencies which trigger an effect) located in the realm of the real. These abstractions include the capital function and the labour function, with the former subdivided into control and coordination functions. While a separation between the different functions is possible at the abstract level (Carchedi, 1977), it might be more difficult at the concrete level (Carter, 1985; 1995). This thesis sought to discern the ‘abstract’, even though data was gathered at the empirical level, because critical realism as a meta-theoretical system makes this possible (Sayer, 1984). The abstract was attainable by exploring what MMs are *capable* of doing in a set of circumstances rather than simply recording observable tasks (Tsoukas, 2000).

While positivist ontology connects reality with recordable events and the constructionist position disintegrates ontology to discourse, critical realism adheres to a stratified ontology, which makes a distinction between different realms: ‘empirical’, ‘actual’ and ‘real’ or ‘deep’ (Bhaskar, 1989; Ackroyd and Fleetwood, 2000). The ‘empirical’ consists of what people perceive to be the case, based on their experiences and perceptions. The ‘actual’ are events that take place in time and space, which may be different from what people perceive to be the case. Meanwhile, the ‘real’ are the mechanisms and structures which make the actual world, together with the empirical (O’Mahoney and Vincent, 2014).

Against this backdrop, this thesis sought to attain “knowledge of what causes what in the realm of the real” (Ackroyd, 2009b, p.533), by being guided a priori by the LPT. This theoretical framework is based on core propositions (Harley *et al.* 2010;

Thompson and Newman, 2004, p.135; Thompson and Harley, 2007), which in this study were applied to MMs. The LPT propositions make assertions about human conditions and capital activity, to inform particular tendencies (e.g. structured antagonism (Edwards, 1986, 1990)). Together with these theoretical propositions, the researcher used abstractions about the nature of MMs (e.g. control and coordination functions (Carchedi, 1977; Carter, 1985; Edwards, 1979; Thompson, 1989)), which make assertions about particular tendencies of these managers (e.g. proletarianisation thesis (Braverman, 1974)).

Subsequently, through the collection of data utilizing in-depth interviews and their investigation, an account of events was constructed, in terms of the particular context in which they worked themselves out and the causal mechanisms that were in place (Ackroyd, 2004; 2009b).

The context in this study was a public organisation undergoing restructuring. Regarding the analysis of the causal mechanisms, this was extracted because, once in the field, the researcher discovered that what seemed like a typical case carried a crucial phenomenon that had to be explored to understand the behaviour of MMs. New behavioural patterns emerged when looking thoroughly at, and beyond, the interviewees' accounts and when considering trends in Maltese society with respect to the category of MMs and professionals. The causal mechanisms identified were: specific requirements for entry to MMs' positions; the manner in which MMs are tertiary-level educated, ranked and regulated; and values, norms and standards MMs employ when executing their role.

These causal mechanisms imply effects, which, when placed within knowledge of existing theory, indicate that MMs are experiencing a shift towards the labour function (proletarianisation) (Braverman, 1974). Contrastingly, recent research concludes that while MMs are increasingly being cut-off from the tier where the real power lies, their responsibilities and skill levels are rising within the more complex organisational systems (Hassard *et al.* 2009).

Regarding professionals, classical theories that considered the middle layers claimed that managers and professionals are privileged vis-à-vis aspects such as responsible autonomy (Friedman, 1977a) and have considerable job control (Edwards, 1979). However, later analysis has indicated that professionals are increasingly subject to control mechanisms (Smith and Thompson, 1998), though as long as professionals

secure a monopoly over core practice (Thompson and McHugh, 2009), they maintain a degree of autonomy and discretion.

In this context, the hypothesised effect of the causal mechanisms, which revolve around PE, are that PE makes a difference to the MM's role. If on one hand, the MMs' 'control function' is diluted, because they do not influence top-level decisions, their hierarchical authority is limited and parts of their work are increasingly subject to control pressures. On the other hand, in an increasingly sophisticated workplace, MMs are required to execute technical duties, provide specialist support and assume operational responsibilities. Hence, the supposition is that PE plays an important role in the 'coordination function' of capital and so it is vital for MMs to protect their managerial position, play up their expert role and safeguard (at least partially) a degree of autonomy. Consequently, the way PE is organised and functions in Malta boosts MMs' role and serves as a terrain upon which these managers conduct struggles over control, coordination and autonomy.

Critical realism claims that organised social life is complicated, but that does not make it impossible to research (Ackroyd and Karlsson, 2014). In this thesis, a case study research design was adopted as the overall strategy to explore and analyse the study's idea, on grounds of the LPT's framework, in the context of organisational restructuring, and by factoring in causal mechanisms. This design was favoured given that it has "become a methodological mainstay" within LPT research (Vincent and Wapshott, 2014, p.156). However, it must be noted that while every effort has been made to apply critical realism, this is "still a relatively new movement" and so this thesis ought to be seen as another contribution into "what has recently been uncharted territory" (O'Mahoney and Vincent, 2014, p.20).

4.3 The research design

4.3.1 Case study approach

Along the lines of critical realism, this study put 'ontology' questions first ('what kind of things exist?'; 'what do MMs do?') (Ackroyd and Karlsson, 2014). Having made this commitment, as outlined in the preceding sections, the rest of the chapter will not only explain the steps taken for this research to be carried out, but will also show how this

research affects epistemological concerns (how whatever exists can be studied; how MMs can be studied) (O'Mahoney and Vincent, 2014). While critical realists prioritise ontology, this "does not mean matters of epistemology are ignored" (Ackroyd and Fleetwood, 2000, p.6). Thus, ultimately, the research design transformed the researcher's initial ideas into a convincing analytical argument (Hancké, 2009).

As previously mentioned, the researcher started this study by discovering ideas and theoretical assertions established in LP analyses and by reviewing literature about MMs. The next step was to collect data (research activity). Critical realists are usually inclusive regarding methods for data collection (O'Mahoney and Vincent, 2014), but certain research designs are more popular (Ackroyd and Karlsson, 2014; Ackroyd, 2009b).

At this stage, an initial choice had to be made between two explanatory logics of discovery (as opposed to induction or deduction) that move the empirical to the 'real', namely 'abduction' or 'retroduction'. The goal of this thesis is not to advance novel forms of understanding through identifying patterns over periods of time and in different contexts, by asking 'what could have happened?' or 'what has not happened?' (retroduction) (O'Mahoney and Vincent, 2014; Ryan *et al.* 2012). Instead, this study's aim is to combine data provided by MMs with theory identified in the literature, to offer the most plausible explanation of the mechanisms that caused the events in a given context (abduction), and subsequently develop new forms of understanding. Thus, in this study, the logic of abduction was chosen.

Once this choice was made, the researcher could select from distinctive research designs, with the 'case study' being one of the two designs that critical realist researchers usually use (the other being the comparative case study) (Ackroyd and Karlsson, 2014; Ackroyd, 2009b). Eventually, this thesis resorted to a single case study not just because it is a basic design for realist research (*ibid.*), but also because it has been used extensively within the LP tradition (Thompson and Newsome, 2004).

Two other aspects adopted by this case study are the 'intensive' dimension as opposed to the 'extensive' one - related to the scope and purpose of research, and the 'detachment' dimension rather than the 'involvement' dimension - applied to the intervention undertaken by the researcher. The rationale behind these choices is presented hereunder.

This thesis's research design is focused on studying the middle managerial LP and in so doing does not direct its effort towards investigating the broad characteristics of whole populations of MMs (extensive study). Rather, it considered in-depth the LP of MMs within a particular organisation, but not separate from the wider social processes taking place in society (intensive research). In other words, the interest in PublicOrg as the 'context' for this study emerged from the fact that it is "a place in which the effects of wider economic and social connections have effects" (Ackroyd, 2009b, p.536), with a bearing on MMs' LP. PublicOrg is a large public bureaucracy on a national scale. It is undergoing significant organisational restructuring as part of a larger programme that aims to rationalise the public sector in the face of privatisation and liberalisation, prompted by wider economic and political structures (see chapter 3).

Regarding the dimension of detachment versus involvement, critical realists claim that it is impossible for the researcher to be completely detached from the research subject. Yet, the case study is considered less likely to intervene in participants' social relationships or to induce change through interventions, when compared to, for instance, 'action research' (Ackroyd, 2009b; Ackroyd and Karlsson, 2014). Thus, the case study in this thesis is intensive where the role of the researcher is detached but implicitly active (as elaborated upon later in this chapter).

4.3.2 Semi-structured in-depth interviews

In this study, the face-to-face interview technique was selected as it gave the researcher a direct means to obtain the interviewees' views. The selection of the semi-structured interview was motivated by the fact that it provided the researcher with an appropriate degree of flexibility (Bryman and Bell, 2015). This flexibility was useful since although the researcher recognised the importance of retaining the research focus, critical realism offered her the chance to remain open to explore any particular situation or phenomenon that arose during the course of data collection. Thus, the semi-structured interview gave her scope for elaboration if she decided to add questions to explore something new or further to the interview guide (Appendix I).

Meanwhile, although the interviewer's role was detached in relation to the informants, this did not mean that she did not take an active role during the interview process (Pawson and Tilley, 1997; Smith and Elger, 2014). The adaptability of the semi-

structured interview gave the researcher the opportunity to probe for details and to encourage respondents to be specific in their replies (Berg, 2007). The researcher also asked questions about delicate matters, such as difficulties managers face at home due to long working hours, by using an 'active follow-up strategy' (Wengraf, 2001, p.159).

Regarding the interviewees, the semi-structured interview gave them the chance to elaborate on points, which the researcher might not have included but which they wanted to add. The participants were allowed sufficient time to express their opinion and at the end of the interview session, each was given the opportunity to bring up anything that had not been discussed. However, the researcher made sure that the interviewees evolved the discussion instinctively around the topics/themes in which she had particular interest, without discouraging them from including information that they regarded as important. Such a rigorous mental groundwork and continuous attention confirms that semi-structured interviews are not easy to prepare and conduct. On the contrary, they are probably the most difficult research method to accomplish adequately and efficiently (Fetterman, 1998; Mason, 2002; Wengraf, 2001).

During the interviewing process, the researcher was interested in gathering knowledge about MMs' thoughts and experiences, a stance that even the interpretative approach to interviewing embrace. Yet, while the narrative accounts collected were given considerable attention, in order to obtain a whole picture they were considered within the social context and structures within which they took place (Smith and Elger, 2014), and in relation to other accounts collected.

Since it was challenging for the researcher to see beyond the MMs' perspectives, theoretically she relied on knowledge obtained through analytical literature, whilst methodologically she also considered the accounts provided by other informants (other than the MMs) and collected documented data (Pawson and Tilley, 1997). This in no way implies that the researcher was not interested in the MMs' accounts, but she wanted to enhance the insight they offered by systematically pulling in other informants from the same organisation (MMs' superiors and subordinates). The researcher aimed to develop a more adequate insight into work relations and social structures and processes in place at PublicOrg. In this way, she sought to capture the specific social relations in which MMs are embedded in order to better interpret their behaviour.

4.4 The research process

4.4.1 Access to the case study organisation

On the basis of the research question advanced by this thesis, a work organisation with a hierarchical management structure was selected to conduct the LP analysis of MMs. Even though organisations of the required size are rare in Malta, gaining access to one such organisation was fairly unproblematic because of the researcher's previous work relationship with an SM at PublicOrg.

Access was first obtained informally, but later it was requested and obtained also in writing from the gatekeeper (the SM known by the researcher). 'Polite persistence' (Healey and Rawlinson, 1993) to obtain written permission for the interviewing process was crucial for the researcher to underpin the importance of the case study's organisational access. Access to PublicOrg was granted on the basis of strict confidentiality. The name of the organisation and of the participants had to be kept hidden at all stages of the research.

4.4.2 Establishing a protocol

Once the researcher obtained access, she first held a meeting with an SM (the gatekeeper) to explain in detail the purpose of her study. During this meeting a protocol was established, which served as a useful guide during the data collection process. The protocol included: the profiling of prospective interviewees; methods to contact selected interviewees; places to conduct the interviews; and the formulation of ethical principles that the interviewer had to follow. The details of this arrangement are explored in the following sections/subsections. In general, the development of this protocol was important given that it is "a major way of increasing reliability of case study research" (Yin, 2009, p.79).

4.4.3 Sampling

During the abovementioned initial meeting, the researcher explained that her plan was to interview SMs, MMs and FLMS⁹, and she made specific requests in order to gain a broad picture of the variety of contexts in which MMs work at PublicOrg. These requests included: (i) to have two or three MMs who are also trade union officials; (ii)

⁹ The researcher contacted personally the full-time trade union official representing the FLMS and the grades thereunder, who accepted to be interviewed.

to include female MMs; and (iii) for the interviewees to stem from different areas of specialisations and to have varied years of service. This implies that, in accordance with the qualitative research approach, the sample was not selected randomly, but a purposive (non-probability) sampling method was employed to recruit participants. Purposive sampling should not be mistaken for a convenience sample. The latter is generally derived by simple chance and not through any specific goals set by the researcher (Bryman, 2004).

Regarding sample size, this tends to pose a dilemma vis-à-vis qualitative interviewing because there is not a universal criterion for an adequate size (Creswell, 2013). Therefore, the researcher took a pragmatic approach (Baker and Edwards, 2012). She was primarily guided by the research objectives, the availability of resources and the time allotted (Patton, 1990). Nonetheless, her aim was to ensure that a representative sample from the population of MMs was selected¹⁰ and that it was sufficiently broad in terms of their function, area of specialisation, gender and years of service. Accordingly, a comprehensive picture of variations vis-à-vis MMs was obtained, which concurrently prevented interview selection bias. Meanwhile, the researcher was also concerned with the structure of the sample, in the sense that she ascertained that representatives of SMs and FLMs were included too.

Table 3 depicts the interviewees' categorisations and a number of their characteristics.

Table 3: Profile of the interviewees

		Senior Managers (SMs)	Middle managers (MMs)	First-line managers (FLMs)
Gender	Male	6	17	8
	Female	-	5	-
Area of specialisation	Architecture	-	2	-
	Engineering	4	11	8
	Finance	-	5	-
	Corporate	2	4	-
Qualifications	Tertiary level	6	22	-
	Vocational	-	-	8
Years of service	Less than 10	2	12	-
	Over 10 but less than 25	-	7	3
	Over 25	4	3	5
	TOTAL	6	22	8

¹⁰ Details about the percentage of MMs interviewed and the organisational divisions where they were engaged are kept hidden so not to expose the organisation.

As outlined in Table 3 above, 36 personnel from PublicOrg were interviewed. A total of 42 interviewing hours were collected through these interviews, of which 26 hours were generated by MMs.

4.4.4 Interview arrangements and conduct

During the initial meeting the researcher held with the gatekeeper, s/he provided her with a detailed overview of the organisational changes undertaken in recent years and those planned for the future. The middle managerial grades were at the centre of this discussion (Interview, SM-1). This discussion informed the researcher about the context of the organisation. During this meeting, she was also provided with documentation such as annual reports and policies. Three separate meetings were held with this SM, over a period of three months, one at the beginning, one at the mid-way stage and one at the end of the data collection process. This enabled the researcher to raise queries about perplexing issues that emerged when conducting the interviews.

The HR department provided the researcher with a list of names from the three categories (SMs, MMs, FLMs) on the basis of the knowledge that the gatekeeper had of the topic under investigation and according to requests that the researcher made (see subsection 4.4.3). The HR department contacted the prospective interviewees, whose participation was voluntary. Only one participant, an SM, who originally agreed to participate in this study, did not attend the arranged interview.

The researcher prepared a project brief for the HR representative who was designated to contact the prospective interviewees, to explain the purpose of calling them and to provide clarifications if requested. The brief stated that: (i) the interest of the researcher was purely academic; (ii) she was interested in speaking with staff about their working lives and would appreciate hearing their views on work-related topics; and (iii) that all interviews and personal information would remain strictly confidential with participants' names anonymised.

The interviews were carried out during 2012-2013 over a period of three months, during working hours and on company premises. The duration of interviews varied, but most lasted 60 minutes. They typically took place either in the participants' work offices, in cases where the latter had an office of their own, or in a private meeting room reserved

by the HR department for the researcher's use. The participants were not provided with the list of questions before the interview.

4.4.5 Interview guide and pilot study

Before conducting the interviews, the researcher developed an interview schedule containing a list of questions (see subsection 4.5.2). The schedule also served as a checklist for the discussion with the interviewees (Bryman, 2004). One interview schedule was devised, because even when SMs and FLMS were interviewed, the researcher's interest was in the same topics as those raised with the MMs, and the MMs were in all cases kept at the centre of the discussion.

The interview guide was pilot-tested in another organisation on three MMs, who also occupied expert roles. This entity, which operates in the private sector, has a flatter hierarchical management structure, but has also undergone thorough corporate restructuring. After conducting the pilot study minor changes to the interview questions were carried out, mainly in order to simplify the questions and to avoid any possibility of leading questions.

4.4.6 Capturing the data and transcribing the interviews

With the participants' approval, each interview was audio-recorded using a digital recorder. The recordings were saved in the researcher's personal computer. Owing to previous experience, the researcher had had with other research projects, she preferred to use audio-recording because it provides a more accurate rendition of the interviews than any other method (Yin, 2009). Moreover, this technique allowed her to stay focused during the interview session, as she was not distracted by having to take extensive notes. However, the researcher did take notes when any of the interviewees mentioned a point or points on which she wanted to elaborate further. Besides, at the end of each interview, she made notes about the extent to which the interviewees had been open and frank.

The researcher transcribed the interviews herself, but was aware of the difficulty of capturing the entire interaction through recording (Davidson, 2009). Often transcription can either take a 'naturalist' approach in which 'stutters, pauses, nonverbal and involuntary vocalisations' are detailed, or a 'denaturalised' approach in which 'stutters,

pauses, nonverbal and involuntary vocalisations' are removed (Oliver *et al.* 2005). The researcher opted for the latter approach as her focus was on the substance of the interview (the meanings and perceptions generated and shared during the interview conversation) in the first instance and less on the textual and discursive aspects of the interviews.

The researcher translated the transcripts into English, given that all but one of the interviews were carried out in Maltese. Translation raises questions, including who should carry out the translation, whether the translation process should be identified or not in the research report, and the extent to which the translator should be involved in the analysis (Temple and Young, 2004). In this study, the researcher did not conceal the translation process because she favoured transparency, and she carried out both the translation and the analysis of the data herself. However, translating the transcripts was challenging because the researcher had to be faithful both to the original text and to the readers. This meticulous process added another layer of complication to transcription thereby elongating the process (Pirjo, 2008) (subsection 4.6.2 deals further with the translation process). Yet, the researcher agreed to the interviewees' choice of language, realising that the language used would influence the quality of data generated from the interview process. Once transcribed and translated, the interviews were exported in NVivo software program.

4.4.7 Other data collection

In addition to interviews conducted with PublicOrg's personnel, the researcher conducted meetings or engaged in formal communication with other individuals listed in Table 4 below. These individuals either held public office or were experts in an area related to the study. The main objective behind these exchanges was to identify who MMs are, how professions are regulated and to comprehend how the public sector operates in Malta. The researcher contacted each of these informants personally. These exchanges, which in the case of meetings were not audio-recorded, were carried out between 2014 and 2016.

Table 4: Exchanges with public officers and experts

The entity	
Accountancy Board (Malta)	1 Representative
Malta Chamber of Commerce, Enterprise and Industry	1 Representative (ex-council member)
Malta Employers Association	1 Representative
Malta Institute of Management	2 Representatives
National Statistics Office	1 Representative
Office of the Prime Minister	3 Representatives
Privatisation Unit, Ministry of Economy, Investment and Small Business	1 Representative
University of Malta	3 Academics

Secondary data in the form of company documents such as annual reports, HR policies and appraisal forms were considered. In addition, published government documents, laws and white papers were also utilised. Documentary data is a key part of case study research (Bush, 2002; Stroud and Hopkins, 2016; Yin, 2009) and for realists, reviewing such documents counts as empirical research, although there is no fieldwork component (Olsen, 2009). These documents, which are by definition written texts, did not constitute the main method of data collection and none of these documents (or parts of them) were incorporated in NVivo.

4.5 The data analysis process

4.5.1 Using NVivo 10

Unlike quantitative data analysis, the use of computer software is not widely embraced amongst qualitative analysts (Bryman, 2004). Nevertheless, Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis (CAQDA), such as NVivo, has been developed to assist researchers in collating qualitative data by managing it more comprehensively and in a rigorous way (Bazeley and Jackson, 2013; Richards, 1999). In this study, NVivo 10 was used to combine in one central database the data collected through interviews. Accordingly, large amounts of fieldwork data were organised systematically and navigated efficiently.

The researcher was aware that software programs such as NVivo are typically associated with grounded theory, given that coding, performed on three levels ('open', 'axial' and 'selective') (Bryman, 2004, p.402), is this theory's central process. Even though, this study is based on an established theoretical framework, this software was still used since it allowed the researcher to immediately embark on the 'selective' type of coding based on theoretically derived codes built on a thorough literature review. At the same time, this did not preclude her from developing new 'nodes' (as referred to in NVivo).

4.5.2 Data analysis of the interview transcripts and the documentary data

The theories and ideas discovered by engaging with LP literature and MMs' debates, guided the researcher to develop a schedule of interview questions. This was intended to improve understanding of the MMs' LP and their negotiations of control, conflict and consent. When the data was systematically constructed and collected using this schedule, this provided a framework for analysis, organised across the following concepts: autonomy; commitment; control; resistance; pressure, stress and tension; training; and work-life balance.

During the data analysis process, whilst reading the transcripts, the researcher coded the data against the abovementioned concepts. Through this exercise, she became immersed in the data and reflected upon the research questions and the formulation of conclusions. This task clarified and simplified the fieldwork data, and structured the perception of the researcher about MMs, but not to the extent that her conceptions could not be modified. Indeed, her understanding of MMs was improved in the research process. The data analysis took place in an iterative process whereby specific findings and their interpretations were evaluated against existing theoretical explanations. In particular, the researcher's use of concepts such as compliance, misbehaviour and expertise were developed and refined further in this process.

Through the data analysis process, the researcher realised that some theoretical explanations are more adequate than others to explain MMs' behaviours and tendencies. For example, when considering MMs' unruly behaviour, she started her research on the grounds of the concept of 'resistance', but found that 'misbehaviour' as spelled out by industrial sociology (Ackroyd and Thompson, 1999; 2015) is more appropriate to explain their actions. As detailed in chapter 7, the MMs preferred to oppose informally

and individually without obstructing the operations they were managing, despite being unionised, hence the MMs' actions are mostly framed as misbehaviour.

Additionally, when analysing the finding, the researcher made propositions based on empirical evidence to explain the MMs' tendencies. One such proposition that this thesis put forward is that, due to structural and sociological reasons, the tendency of structured antagonism embedded in the employment relationship (Edwards, 1986; 1990) takes a different form in the case of specialist MMs. The fact that they are concurrently managers and experts, and in the majority of the cases their direct superiors are professionals (often hailing from the same area of expertise as the MMs), gives rise to an ambiguous form of structured antagonism.

The emphasis put upon in-depth interviewing did not mean that documentary analysis was ignored. The researcher collected and examined official documents sourced from PublicOrg (HR policies and annual reports) and official documents from the State (reports, laws and white papers). The researcher was interested in the substance of these documents, hence her focus was on 'what they said' and 'what that meant', while also considering the context in which they took place (Cortazzi, 2002). Besides, she took into account Scott's (1990) advice not to regard these documents as objective accounts. Indeed, she considered the four key criteria he presented, pertaining to the validity of documentary sources: (i) authenticity - whether they are original and genuine; (ii) credibility - whether they are accurate; (iii) representativeness - how typical or otherwise the documents being sourced are; and (iv) meaning - what they are intended to say. In return, these documents offered her with insight and evidence on past and current realities and/or future plans (Fitzgerald, 2012), concerning both PublicOrg and the public sector at large.

Whilst examining these documents, the researcher took notes and highlighted parts that in her opinion expressed something interesting and relevant to her overall research. The documentary analysis was deemed useful because the HR policies assisted the researcher to identify further parameters of the MMs' employment relationship. Whereas, through annual reports, she could explore further PublicOrg's activities and its general performance, at a time when nationwide liberalisation and privatisation programmes were being implemented. The significance of these programmes and their goals, together with the implementation of NPM principles, were further understood in light of the Maltese government's official reports and white

papers reviewed by the researcher. The analysis of these reports gave insight into how and why restructuring has permeated PublicOrg. Additionally, particular laws, in the areas of accountancy, civil architecture and engineering, were considered in order to comprehend the way in which professions in Malta are regulated through a legislative framework.

The case study's distinctive strength lies in its ability to deal with different sources of evidence (Yin, 2009). In this study, the interviews represented a significant element of data collection, which were complemented by documentation. Eventually, the data analysis process was carried out in one stage, after all the transcripts were translated and the relevant documents were collected. During this process, the researcher selected quotations from the transcripts, which highlighted important points, to be added to this thesis's text, when presenting the findings in the empirical chapters (chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8).

4.6 Limitations of the research design and process

This chapter indicates the choices that the researcher made and the implications thereof. In this section, a number of limitations related to the chosen methodological approach emerge. Specifically, the implication concerning the research design and process is discussed. It is important to acknowledge that some methodological limitations may have impacted upon the results obtained by this research. At the end of this section, a reflexive account of the researcher's experience during the research process is presented.

4.6.1 Limitations: case study design

The case study constitutes a key research design for realist researchers, though less so for those influenced by positivism (cf. Yin 2009). The latter's argument typically revolves around the case study's lack of generalisability (Kennedy, 1976) and failure to contribute to theory construction and verification (Fitzgerald and Dopson, 2009). Notwithstanding such criticism, realist research on single-organisational cases has been influential, such as the celebrated studies of Beynon (1973) and Burawoy (1979).

Realist supporters claim that it is the analysis of a cautiously chosen and well-made case study, dissimilar to statistical deduction, which is "often crucial in the

development of scientific knowledge” (Ackroyd and Karlsson, 2014, p.24). Ackroyd and Karlsson (2014) suggested that cases do not have to be ‘narrowly drawn’ (as in a case study of a single organisation), but they can be more ‘broadly conceived’ (as in an investigation of a bureaucracy - such as the one selected for this thesis). Subsequently, this thesis’s analysis of one case study, a public sector organisation in Malta, makes a valid contribution to building a theoretical argument through ‘explanatory generalisations’ (theoretical generalisation) (Ackroyd, 2004; Ackroyd and Karlsson, 2014), rather than ‘statistical generalisation’ (Yin, 2009).

Nonetheless, the researcher acknowledges that the scope and purpose of her study are intensive. This study focused on the discovery of causal mechanisms concerning a particular occupational category (MMs) within a single organisation (PublicOrg). The context was carefully considered, mainly by comparing MMs in the context of different divisions within PublicOrg and by taking into account documentation such as HR policies and annual reports, alongside State documents. More systematically comparative or generative institutional analysis would have provided a fuller understanding of the interaction between context and mechanisms over a range of places and time periods, and of how context and mechanisms actually interact to generate unique, historically specific outcomes (Ackroyd, 2009b). Comparative case studies and generative institutional analysis require more time and resources than the researcher had available for this study. However, the intensive research design adopted in this thesis can be developed by taking on a more extensive dimension.

Considering what was more under the researcher’s control, she acknowledges that it would have been useful to have interviewed more FLMS stemming from other divisions or the same number of FLMS from more diverse divisions. Meanwhile, for a more relational perspective, at least one other organisation operating in the private sector could have been studied.

4.6.2 Limitations: research process

This subsection outlines four limitations of the research process. The first of these concerns the selection of interviewees. During the initial meeting the researcher held with the gatekeeper, she made certain requests regarding the interviewees to be selected (mix of: MMs, SMs and FLMS; males and females; personnel from different sites;

personnel performing different functions; and personnel of varying levels of experience). Although these requests were accommodated, the researcher was unable to make precise demands as to whom she interviewed.

The second limitation concerns translation of interviews. Although during the translation process (from Maltese to English), which was carried out by the researcher herself, every effort was made to be faithful to the original expression, some of the original meaning may have been lost. Having said that, the translation process was not overly complicated because the interviewer and interviewees were from the same cultural background (Van Nes *et al.* 2010). The researcher and all but one of her informants were Maltese and spoke the same language, while the only expatriate interviewed had been residing in Malta for a considerable time. In addition, translation was less challenging because this thesis did not carry out a discourse/textual analysis of the interviews.

The third limitation involves access to the organisation's documents. The researcher did obtain some documents, but was not granted access to specific documents that were requested during the meetings with SMs. These documents were withheld because they were considered 'very sensitive' given that PublicOrg is a public entity and the fieldwork was carried out at a time when a general election was imminent (Interview, SM-1).

The fourth limitation was the unavailability of publications on MMs and management in general in Malta, in various forms including academic literature, research reports by relevant organisations and official data. Such a dearth of publications made it very difficult for the researcher to construct a picture of who the MMs are in Malta, and to obtain any related information about them, such as their challenges and expectations in the Maltese context.

4.6.3 A reflexive account of the experience, role and impact of the researcher

As previously noted, the interviewer's role was mainly detached but implicitly active, thus rendering her a 'key instrument' (Creswell, 2013). The interviewer fulfilled most of the components that, according to Smith and Elger (2014), make a critical realist interviewer 'active, investigative and analytically informed' (p.130). She kept the focus

of the informants on particular events and examples, encouraged them to compare their experiences of different settings and events, probed for details, brought up questions about quandaries and inconsistencies found in other data sources, and observed the 'position' from which the interviewees chose to speak.

An essential part of the research process is reflexivity, which concerns the critical self-reflection of researchers about their values, interests, experiences, beliefs and commitments that may have influenced the investigation (Willig, 2013). In this study, the researcher felt it instinctive to ask 'how' and to 'what extent' the fact that she was an ex-full-time trade union official and a female researcher in a male-dominated environment might have impacted upon the research process. She felt it was necessary for her to assume a self-reflexive position, from which she sought to provide some insight into some of the concerns and questions raised by this research.

The researcher previously served as a full-time trade union official, dealing daily with various managers and employees engaged with different entities. Accordingly, for a number of years the researcher was in direct contact with managers and so became quite familiar with their behaviour, views and tendencies.

Naturally, her previous experience as a trade union official may raise doubts regarding a potential conflict of interest. This could have influenced certain participants when answering questions and building arguments. Their responses may have been different to another researcher with no such background, so there may have been a possible impact on the reliability of the findings. Yet, there are a number of points that mitigate this issue. The extent to which the background of the researcher can be generalised on the subjects under investigation is questionable (Shaw, 2013) in this case, for the following reasons. First, as a trade unionist, the researcher was mostly in contact with HR managers and SMs, and rarely with MMs directly. Second, specifically with respect to PublicOrg, in her capacity as a trade union official, she did not discuss matters with the MMs or their union. Third, PublicOrg's MMs did not form part of the union where she was engaged and so neither she nor her colleagues dealt with their issues as employees. Fourth, more than six years had passed since she left this position. Fifth, she was not necessarily recognised as an ex-union official.

In some ways, the researcher saw herself as an insider in the field of work and employment, but at the same time she considered herself as an outsider, to some extent, with respect to MMs. In her earlier union role, she did not represent MMs as 'employees' and in an everyday context she did not perceive MMs as 'managers' because as a trade unionist they were not her counterparts representing management. Analytically, she *did* perceive them as 'managers', but it was precisely her lack of understanding of MMs' role, behaviour and tendencies that drove her to analyse them in such depth.

Against this backdrop, although the researcher approached her research from the standpoint of someone who had direct experience of and interest in the field of employment, her inside, as well as outside, position was not discussed with her informants. She always introduced, presented and conducted herself as a post-graduate student doing research on MMs, believing that this was the best position to avoid creating obstacles and inviting bias.

Another important question that emerges upon reflecting on the dynamics between the researcher and the interviewees, is whether the fact that the former was a female could have affected the research specifically as the majority of the participants were male. The issue of females interviewing males or vice-versa has not received significant attention, indeed literature about qualitative research often overlooks this matter. However, there are some grounds to suggest that when the interviewer and the interviewees are of a different sex the dynamics are affected. It has been found that interviewees' responses commonly emerge within a gendered context and so are affected by the interviewer's orientations and opinions (Williams and Heikes, 1993).

Here, although the male informants worked in a male-dominated environment, the thesis did not explore issues of gender and masculinity explicitly. Yet, it does remain questionable whether the fact that the researcher was female had driven the male participants to feign interest in issues such as work-life balance, to impress the researcher. This phenomenon is called 'social desirability bias' and it refers to the tendency of interviewees to 'adjust the truth' so that they appear good and more desirable to the researcher (ibid.). Contrastingly, Arendell (1997) claimed that there are benefits to be gleaned when the researcher is a female interviewing male, given that men generally have fewer reservations in expressing their vulnerabilities and problems openly with women, but feel uncomfortable to do so with men, who they assume would

be more critical. In this thesis, the male interviewees did mention work-life balance issues that they were facing, but the researcher did not sense any particular desire on their part to open up with her on work-life conflicts. Contrarily, they appeared keen to refer to measures that they were taking to, as much as possible, keep both their work and personal life under their control.

For feminist research advocates, the researcher's experiences, positions and standpoints, rather than being rejected, should be recognised and valued, as long as they remain responsible and accountable for their actions (Shaw, 2013). In this study, at no time did the researcher seek to influence her interviewees, and at the start of each interview besides introducing herself as a student she made it clear that her interests were purely academic. Nevertheless, her experience and previous position placed her in a privileged situation to gather data from her respondents. The fact that, through her previous union role, she was acquainted with different workplace environments and processes, she could speak honestly and openly about her research, and did manage to build a rapport with her respondents. The development of such a rapport was important given that by putting her respondents at ease, she won their trust. The respondents' trust and straightforwardness could be deduced from the fact that they were extremely forthcoming, outspoken and gave considered opinions, making the interviews more valuable. The fact that none of the interviewees asked her for a copy of the transcript, even though she offered to provide one, was another indicator of their trust in her role.

At the end of the interview session, a considerable number of interviewees asserted that this was the first time that they had had the chance to reflect on their working life in a structured way and to offload issues and preoccupations related to their job. Some even handed her their business card in case she needed further clarifications. Such feedback indicates that the interviewing exercise was beneficial both for the interviewer (as expected) and the interviewees (perhaps much more than expected). This confirms the potential of an interview to develop as a two-way process (Bryman and Bell, 2015).

4.7 Ethical Considerations

When conducting social research, ethical considerations arise and they should not be ignored if researchers want their work to be considered important (Bryman, 2004). To avoid encountering any problems with regard to ethics, the researcher identified a

number of key ethical principles which she followed closely. Details of these ethical principles are given in the next subsections. Additionally, prior to starting her fieldwork the researcher obtained formal ethical approval from the University of Leicester.

4.7.1 Confidentiality and privacy

Besides concealing the name of the case study organisation and of the interviewees, in order to further protect the latter's identity and privacy, their gender, years of service and actual area of specialisation were not specified in the referencing of direct quotes included in the thesis's text. In these instances, only their respective category (SM, MM, FLM) was included, with each interviewee given a unique number on a random basis. Therefore, their anonymity and confidentiality were not compromised. Such steps were particularly important given that the country's small size made it more likely for the case study organisation to be identifiable. Besides, the SMs and the MMs in particular had access to confidential information so the researcher wanted to reassure them that referring to any such details in the thesis, would not result in negative personal consequences.

4.7.2 Avoiding harm to participants

It is unacceptable for researchers to cause harm to their participants, and specifically their self-esteem, career development or future employment prospects (Bryman and Bell, 2015). The interviewer was aware that when she was speaking to the three groups of informants (SMs, MMs, FLMS) who functioned in a hierarchical setting, she was directly dealing with power relations. These are sensitive, especially in an organisation like PublicOrg where everyone knows almost everyone else. She took great care to avoid embarrassing any of the participants. For example, when she wanted to cross-check something or to obtain more insight, she never mentioned any of her interviewees' names with any of the other interviewees, and spoke in the plural to uphold confidentiality and anonymity.

4.7.3 Informed consent

Although the researcher obtained written consent from an SM to conduct the interviews, and even though the prospective interviewees could decline the interview invitation, before the start of each interview the researcher still asked each participant to give

his/her informed consent to participate in the study. Each time the researcher explained the objectives of her research, that the whole interview would be treated with strict confidentiality and that the data collected was intended for research purposes. She also made them aware of their rights, specifically that they were free not to answer any of the questions and, more importantly, that they had the opportunity to stop the interview session at any time. In order to tangibly convey the protection of the participants' ethical rights, the participants were asked to read and sign a consent form, which included information about the researcher. This form was available both in English (see Appendix II) and Maltese.

4.7.4 Deception

Deception takes place when the researcher is not entirely honest about the aims of the research and presents it as something other than what it is (Bryman, 2004). However, in this study the researcher was honest about her research's aims. As stated above, she explained the aim of her research to all participants so they could understand the rationale behind the study.

Whilst keeping in mind the advice that "common sense and courtesy will go a long way to establishing good practice" in order to address ethical problems (Bell, 1999, p.45), the most basic question that the researcher kept asking herself was whether she treated her interviewees as she would have wanted to be treated in return. This might not have satisfactorily answered all the ethical dilemmas, but was useful and practical guidance nonetheless.

4.8 Conclusion

This chapter discussed the critical realist ontology adopted by this study, which subsequently affected the epistemological matters taken on. Following this discussion, the case study research design was presented, explaining the rationale behind various choices that the researcher made along the way, surrounding the logic of discovery (abduction), the research's scope and purpose (intensive), and the researcher's involvement (detached but implicitly active). It then outlined practical and administrative aspects concerning data collection and organisation, and offered justification for the method employed. At the data analysis stage, the data offered by the participants was located within a developed theoretical framework and NVivo 10 was

used to organise this data through a number of analytical concepts. This chapter then delineated limitations pertaining to the research design and process, including some thoughts on the researcher's role in the field. Additionally, attention was devoted to how the researcher handled potential ethically issues associated with this thesis.

The following four chapters present the empirical findings. These chapters are organised around an LP analysis, with chapter 5 looking at the middle managerial LP, then chapter 6 examines the dynamics of control, while chapters 7 and 8 analyse the overlapping MMs' responses to the shifting forms of control.

5. The changing role of middle managers

5.1 Introduction

This chapter explores the changing role of MMs subsequent to policies instigated by Maltese governments elected on a neo-liberal platform. As a state monopoly, PublicOrg is engaged in nationwide liberalisation and privatisation programmes, and the on-going de-regulation of the markets. These policies have led to extensive rationalisation, caused by downsizing and budget restrictions, affecting the structures of the work organisation and, consequently, the roles of those who form part of it.

The first two sections (5.2 and 5.3) observe MMs as *managers* and *the managed*. This analysis was carried out when a restructuring programme, driven by pressure to reduce costs and simultaneously increase performance, was implemented at the case study organisation. At PublicOrg, the organisational reform included the following steps: downsizing across all grades; delayering of managerial grades; significant reduction of subcontracting services related to technical and operational activities; outsourcing of ancillary services; an extensive exercise meant to multi-skill and multi-task HR from top to bottom; and the introduction of an annual individual-based performance system (see section 3.5). Meanwhile, PublicOrg's operations were extensively being revised to meet escalating customer demands, rapid changes in technology and intensified regulations mainly imposed by the State and EU directives. Therefore, MMs had to adhere to new work practices and processes.

Such changes had implications on the role of MMs including work intensification, increased pressure, reduced chances for career progression, job insecurity, and fragmented managerial discretion. Up to this point, this study has yielded similar results and contributes to the existing research conducted within much larger Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) economies (Carter and Fairbrother, 1995; Carter *et al.* 2002; Hassard *et al.* 2009; 2011; McCann *et al.* 2004; 2008; 2010).

However, in section 5.4 this study elaborates further, given that the state of affairs for a considerable number of MMs in Malta, including those engaged at PublicOrg, is complex. Such complication emanates from the fact that MMs execute an expert role. MMs as *experts* are particularly explored here, since the PE that these managers develop is a key issue in this research. This implies that the middleness of

MMs is not only based on their organisational hierarchical position, but rests also on their PE, that is, their actual labour capacity.

Considering the specific way in which specialist personnel execute middle managerial functions and the manner in which the role of professionals is regulated in Malta, this study investigates how PublicOrg's MMs use their expert role as the terrain upon which to pursue struggles over their managerial and labour functions. For MMs, their expert role was the bedrock, the resource, and the power that they could use to compensate for the shortages they were experiencing from their managerial role (as value extractors). It was due to the development of their PE, which is activated through their expert role, that MMs acquired considerable autonomy and discretion.

The focus upon MMs' expert role unearths an important ambivalence. This study concludes that, for these managers, the changes in the reformed organisation had an adverse impact on their working lives (Carter and Fairbrother, 1995; Carter *et al.* 2002; Hassard *et al.* 2009; 2011; McCann *et al.* 2004; 2008; 2010). More specifically, it shows that MMs wilfully accepted more technical and operational responsibility and workload to strengthen their leading role in the LP and to protect their hierarchical position. However, as managers, they did not have sufficient resources, while, as the managed, they ended up working under increased pressure and for longer hours.

5.2 Middle managers as 'managers'

Studies that have focused particularly on the impact of public sector restructuring, have asserted that the flattening of management hierarchy leads to the removal of managerial authority from the role of MMs (Carter and Fairbrother, 1995). Consequently, MMs' capital function is reduced and these managers experience a shift towards the labour function (Braverman, 1974; Carchedi, 1977; Carter and Fairbrother, 1995). Additionally, studies that did not initiate their research on the basis of a radical framework have also concluded that in the restructured organisation, MMs hardly influence top management decisions and strategies (Hassard *et al.* 2009). The literature highlights the considerably subordinate position of MMs in the organisation's hierarchy, and thus their rather weak capital function. Nonetheless, studies show that in

the ‘modern’ organisation, MMs are required to have an increasing level of skill while their responsibilities are also growing (Hassard *et al.* 2009).

Against this backdrop and because PublicOrg’s MMs were granted a managerial position primarily on the basis of their professional credentials, this study seeks to find out to what extent their developed PE leverages power to: avoid shifting towards the labour function; adhere to some functions of capital; and/or push them to become complicit in their own exploitation. Classical LP studies (Edwards, 1979; Friedman, 1977a) identified the professional occupation as a resource through which its holders secure considerable autonomy. Therefore, the question that follows is: to what extent is this still the case with regard to MMs in the context of the changes that happened at PublicOrg?

Considering the role of ‘management’ within the radical theoretical framework (Carchedi, 1977; Carter, 1985; Edwards, 1979; Thompson, 1989) implies that MMs at PublicOrg were meant to fulfil two main functions: ‘control’ for the purpose of exploitation; and the technical ‘coordination’ of work for the purposes of effectiveness and efficiency. These functions of management are simpler to separate at the abstract level, rather than at the empirical level. Nevertheless, by exploring what MMs are *capable* of doing, this study seeks to demonstrate how these managers carry out their managerial functions.

Regarding the function of coordination of the LP, which is ultimately a means to attain control and secure maximum output, at PublicOrg MMs’ degree of operational decision-making and autonomy, as well as technical planning for unit performance, was high. In order to ensure the smooth running of the unit for which they had responsibility, MMs became directly involved and took a leading role in solving technical problems. Owing to the approach of how management and expert functions were amalgamated at the mid-level of the organisation, MMs’ PE was an indispensable means to coordinate and unify diverse activities at the LP level. Indeed, at PublicOrg, this management function was fulfilled by MMs in the forms of experts, rather than as managers (see section 5.4).

Contrastingly, while MMs did carry out supervisory functions, their exercise of hierarchical authority had limitations, implying that the control function was

incomplete. Two major reasons for this incomplete control function were identified. First, MMs' involvement in HR was found wanting, even though they had employees reporting to them. Particular HR decisions were left, to a significant extent, with SMs and, to a certain extent, with the external political authority. Such a situation left MMs disappointed, as while their level of responsibility was high and their workload increased significantly, they had insufficient resources to meet the rising expectations.

Second, strategic decisions vis-à-vis their respective divisions took place higher up the hierarchy, suggesting that MMs played a relatively limited part in strategic decision-making. While this finding echoes the conclusions drawn by some others (Carter *et al.* 2002; Hassard *et al.* 2009), it stands in contrast to research that investigated the distinct input of MMs in strategic management (Balogun, 2003; Dopson and Stewart, 1990; Dutton and Ashford, 1993; Dutton *et al.* 1997; Floyd and Lane, 2000; Floyd and Wooldridge, 1992; 1994; 1997; Huy, 2001; 2002). Therefore, despite being in a managerial position, MMs had limited influence over strategic decision-making, implying that the real authority was at the top.

As outlined by Hassard *et al.* (2009), when commenting on the impact organisational restructuring has on MMs, it would be naive to conclude that such a division of power is class-based (in line with Braverman's analysis). Nevertheless, this separation does partly echo the division of labour upon which Braverman constructed his conceptualisation.

Hence, this study proposes that, on one hand, MMs' subordinate position in the organisational hierarchy is distancing them from where the strategic decisions take place and increasingly exposing them to forces of rationalisation and work intensification (Carter and Fairbrother, 1995; Carter *et al.* 2002; Hassard *et al.* 2009; 2011; McCann *et al.* 2004; 2008; 2010), realities that LP scholars usually attribute to the 'collective worker'. On the other hand, the role of the MMs at PublicOrg cannot be classified as a tight LP, according to the criteria laid out by classical theorists (Braverman, 1974; Mills, 1956; Teulings, 1986). PublicOrg's MMs did retain control at the shop-floor level on a daily basis, even if they did not have sufficient managerial prerogative on certain matters. Besides, on account of their expert role, MMs enjoyed operational autonomy to coordinate work within the units that operated under their responsibility. Such actualities confirm Hassard *et al.*'s (2009) assertion that, in the 'modern' organisation, MMs' role is not an LP in the strict sense (Braverman, 1974),

nor is it completely an agency relationship with SMs (Armstrong, 1989). This thesis asserts that this is also the case for specialist MMs.

5.2.1 Incomplete line management authority

During interviews with MMs, it became evident that their managerial prerogative arising from their hierarchical position over specific HR matters did not match the degree of amplified responsibility, wider span of control and increased workloads that they had to bear. This was particularly noticeable at a time when their work practices and procedures were becoming more sophisticated and complex. To stress this point, MMs made statements similar to the one below, not only putting MMs' dual-role (managers-and-experts) in the spotlight, but also immediately unearthing tensions between these roles:

The problem is that as professionals we have increased responsibilities, but as managers we don't have sufficient authority. [...] Our superiors purposely limit our leeway when it comes to certain HR matters. They were in our position before they were promoted to top management, so they know about this imbalance, but they want to retain certain control when it comes to the management of our staff.

MM-18

MMs complained that they were not provided with sufficient HR resources to meet the rising work demands. On numerous occasions, these managers pointed out that they were disappointed by the following: the inadequate amount of subordinate employees that they had; the low level of knowledge some of these employees had; the level of disciplinary action that they could take on subordinate employees; the way the selection and recruitment process was carried out at the lower levels and the way internal transfers were executed.

For MMs, such as the one quoted directly below, an inadequate amount of personnel to run the area under their responsibility simply meant that they had to fill the gaps themselves:

I surely don't have enough staff. Can you imagine a finance manager who at times ends up issuing invoices himself because there is no one to carry out this task? So we're meant to cope with the always increasing workload, reporting and the deadlines involved, not to mention that [SMs] are always harping on the quality of the reporting etc. but then even if personally I've made a number of claims and explained in detail the need for more staff, I'm still short of staff.

MM-25

One other shortcoming that a number of MMs referred to was the level of competence of some of their subordinate employees. MMs who claimed that they did not have suitably knowledgeable employees gave two main reasons for this problem. The first reason is the existence of partisan political intervention at the lower levels aimed at interfering in HR practices, such as recruitment and promotion. This state of affairs confirms that although PublicOrg is a public entity with an individual legal personality, political parties still consider such entities as assets that they could use to satisfy their loyal voters (Pirotta, 2005). Such intervention is reported to occur to the extent that “ministers and their secretariats are known to interfere in [such] mundane areas of administration as who should do overtime or who should be selected for a vacancy or promotion” (Pirotta, 2001, p.43). One of the respondents, speaking on this issue, noted:

In my team, I have people who are illiterate. These are the ones who would have been engaged because they exercised pressure on some politician to give them a job. [...] On a daily basis one of my foremen patiently draws up a plan for these illiterate workers. However, the question is: why should we go through all this trouble when we can use our time in a much better way?

MM-17

The second reason given is that problems arise as a result of previous seniority-based promotion paths, which were particularly common for clerical streams. Through this system, staff was granted the capacity to progress (promotion to the next grade) after a number of years, even though they did not necessarily have the qualifications needed for the work carried out in these higher positions. An MM made this point sharply:

It doesn't make sense to have people who aren't competent, because ultimately it backfires on us. Not so long ago, the people working in the finance department were promoted along the clerical stream, so in their great majority they aren't qualified in accounts or in related areas, but they are just clerks. [...] Considering the complexity that we have to work with today, there are limits of how much these people are able to bear.

MM-7

Besides not having the right quantity or quality of staff, MMs stressed that the unrelenting attitude of the top management not to completely surrender the management of people at the lower level, actually weakened their authority as managers in real terms. An MM explained that while they were responsible for core supervision, as managers they did not have the authority to proceed fully with ‘written’ disciplinary charges, unless they refer to their superiors:

So our superiors insist that we make the best use of our people; that we instruct them; that we restrain their actions etc. but then we don't have the complete authority to sanction them officially. If I want to issue a written warning to one of my employees I have to consult my superior first.

MM-18

Regarding the process of recruitment and selection, some of the MMs, including the one quoted next, claimed that they had little or no influence in decisions regarding staffing in their area:

Personally what upsets me most is the fact that there are certain things over which you imagine that you should have full control, given your managerial position, but then you find yourself lacking it. I realise this whenever a new person is recruited in my team, since each time I won't even be consulted, despite the fact that given my position I should be part of the selection board.

MM-7

Furthermore, a number of MMs pointed out that they had no say over when their superiors decided to transfer any of their subordinate employees to a completely different area, or when they send personnel to start working in the area that they managed. The views of these two MMs were typical of others:

When [SMs] decided to transfer one of the workers from the area under my responsibility, they didn't consult me but just informed me that Mr X isn't going to report to me anymore. This is something that bothered me a lot since it's symptomatic of the level of authority that I have vis-à-vis the management of my people.

MM-9

Very rarely did you receive a call from the HR department to tell you: 'as from this morning such and such is going to start reporting to you'.

MM-17

In a separate account, another MM, quoted directly below hinted as to why this practice, which undermined MMs' influence, was taking place. In his explanation, there was a reference to partisan political interference:

Unfortunately, at [PublicOrg] there are a lot of intrigues. So if you're one of those workers who wishes to be transferred and knows somebody who has the political clout, then there is a high probability that you will succeed to get transferred. Therefore, this transfer happens at the expense of my running of the unit; weakening the staff I am assigned to manage.

MM-27

Statements, such as the one quoted above, indicate that, as Boissevain (1974) had pointed out, in Malta channels of intermediation were generally short due to the country's small size and density. In any case, decades later, "doing business through the 'networks'" remained an "unsavoury feature of the national way of life" (Public Service Reform Commission, 1989, p.9).

If, on the other hand, MMs did have the authority to execute internal transfers within the area under their responsibility, they were aware that their power to make such transfers could also be subject to the partisan political backing some of their subordinate employees had. As one MM put it:

If I want to transfer a person, I should not need permission from my superior to act, as long as it's within my own area. But obviously if some sensitive issue is linked to this, or some partisan political matters are involved, then I might need to go to my senior before I proceed.

MM-13

Even though at PublicOrg MMs were in charge of the day-to-day office/floor management and had a number of employees reporting to them, they did not have complete control over certain HR decisions. Instances such as those illustrated above demonstrate that although MMs had to ensure control and extraction of surplus value from their subordinate employees, they did not have adequate resources and authority to properly execute generic managerial responsibilities. Such circumstances created tension for MMs, as while their critical operational responsibilities were increasing, they had inadequate line management authority to decide on specific non-technical issues.

5.2.2 Restricted strategic decision-making

MMs explained that they were not specifically involved in the process of strategic decision-making concerning their respective division. This situation stands in contrast to the argument put forward in strategic management literature claiming that MMs can and should influence strategy formation (Balogun, 2003; Dopson and Stewart, 1990; Dutton and Ashford, 1993; Dutton *et al.* 1997; Floyd and Lane, 2000; Floyd and Wooldridge, 1992; 1994; 1997; Huy, 2001; 2002). Although the MMs at PublicOrg were practically excluded from strategy development, SMs urged them to think beyond the area that they managed. MMs were expected to be acquainted with the concerns of

the entity in its totality. However, as an MM explained during the interview, in the majority of cases, decisions that affected their units took place at the top, demonstrating the former's rather limited influence in top policy-making:

The people at the top continue telling us that we should think beyond our area, and that we should be aware of the business of [PublicOrg] as a whole. But the inconsistency is palpable; they don't involve us in the real strategic decisions concerning our area. And secondly we get to know about the real next major turn [PublicOrg] is going to take, at the last minute or worse, through the media or the shop stewards [of the employees' union].

MM-25

Apart from complaints about not being involved in strategic decision-making, MMs were also irritated about the fact that their direct superiors had a tendency to conceal from them the whole plan related to the work for which they would be most responsible. One MM expressed this situation rather vividly:

My superior is always raising pressure with deadlines etc. but generally he doesn't tell me what's going on with respect to high-level plans to which the specific work would be linked. That's kind of annoying because they expect a lot from you, but at the same time they keep you in the dark with respect to what plan, what strategy, they are envisaging vis-à-vis your area of work.

MM-7

The evidence suggests that MMs' influence on top management strategy was scarce, that they were not informed punctually of important decisions, and, while they were in charge of managing a group of subordinate employees, specific decisions related to people management were not completely under their control. Such conditions created a situation of uneasiness amongst MMs, because they had to cope with the challenges that derived from inadequate resources, coupled with political meddling. In this context, MMs' control function to execute their 'manager' role as value extractors was to some extent incomplete and conditional upon the discretion of top management and the relevant political forces.

5.3 Middle managers as 'the managed'

Various studies have observed that MMs are particularly affected by organisational restructuring; when these managers survive layoffs, they typically end up with increased work pressure resulting from work intensification and heightened job insecurity (Carter and Fairbrother, 1995; Dopson and Steward, 1990, 1993; Hassard *et al.* 2009; 2011;

McCann *et al.* 2004; 2008; 2010; Smith, 1990). These circumstances led McCann *et al.* (2008) to note that within organisations that face competition and restructuring, an intensified middle managerial LP has become 'normalized', while job security is reduced. Meanwhile, Hassard *et al.* (2009) argued that although MMs' LP does not mirror Braverman's (1974) deskilling and degradation of labour, perpetual rationalisation is increasingly being associated with managerial labour.

At PublicOrg, a chief policy initiative based on cost-cutting and downsizing was being executed, so outcomes similar to those outlined in the abovementioned studies were identified. The working conditions of PublicOrg's MMs degenerated the moment the LP tightened around their activities. There were three main factors that contributed to this deteriorating trend.

First, as the managerial hierarchy flattened and contracted, MMs' span of control and areas of responsibility increased, entailing an expansion of their role. Besides, new work procedures (including audits and assessments) were formulated. These had to be carried out by MMs, which inevitably led to work intensification. Such circumstances caused more stress in the workplace and aroused tension at home as well. Studies have demonstrated that time-squeeze and an intense workload have a direct impact on personal life (Burchell *et al.* 1999; Nolan, 2002).

Second, PublicOrg's MMs not only experienced a denser workload, but also faced obstacles with regard to the career ladder. The traditional internal labour market, which was gradually stalling, came to a standstill as a result of the privatisation uncertainty around the organisation. MMs had some opportunities to move horizontally, but seldom vertically.

Third, MMs faced a breakdown of the implicit contract. Under the new regime, they had certain expectations of receiving rewards to reflect their growing responsibility and for working harder and longer. Instead, they encountered greater job insecurity. Moreover, MMs were upset with the attitude of those in the most powerful organisational positions, because in their view the latter did not properly appreciate their increased efforts.

5.3.1 Work intensification

During formal discussions the researcher held with an SM (SM-1), the latter explained in detail how large subsidies used to be paid by the Government. Such financial aid, to some extent, made it possible for PublicOrg to be somewhat indifferent with regard to

its financial performance, workforce size and its attributes, as well as the actual organisational output. But, following the neo-liberal national policies and especially the EU's strict regulations on state financial support, PublicOrg's SMs were constrained to implement a number of strategies and methods. These were aimed at attaining immediate results with respect to: overall headcount drop; cost reduction; improved budgetary workings; increased quality and quantity of work performance; advanced performance monitoring; responsiveness to customers; and to handle competitive pressure. These requirements necessitated reforms, which shifted towards costs controls, efficiency savings and performance management. Regarding MMs, an interviewed SM was quick to point out that more work was demanded from them and, to this effect, a detailed performance appraisal was put in place to closely monitor their performance individually, with the aim of increasing their output:

As part of the restructuring programme we have up-skilled and multi-tasked the MMs' role, for instance by orienting them towards other areas and by entrusting them with new tasks. Thus, if before they had this amount of responsibility now we have given them other responsibilities. We felt pretty sure that they could handle more and as a result the entity would become more efficient; at the same time by loading them further we secured the jobs of those remaining. Meanwhile, we monitor all of this through the performance appraisal that has been also put into practice. We want our entity to be driven more and more on the lines of a private business. [...] The direct impact that this had on the MMs was that we have increased their responsibilities. If before they could somehow drag their feet or hide behind the actions of others, today that is not possible.

SM-1

MMs were not only subject to a new mechanism meant to record their performance directly and individually, but they also had to carry a heavier workload, resulting from delegated responsibilities by superiors and/or an amplification of increased standards. An MM explained how the latter often resulted from a combination of legislation, identified best practices and concerns about litigation, for instance dealing with occupational health-and-safety issues:

Today new things are brought on board, which we have to carry out. For example, now we're expected to look, with much more detail, into the health-and-safety of our people, now we have to carry out detailed risk assessments, we have to issue more detailed work permits etc. All of these do make our lives stressful.

MM-16

As part of the restructuring programme, new systems of work from those related to HR, to those more technical in nature including those related to IT, have been introduced at the level of middle managerial work. This is something that an interviewed SM made reference to and acknowledged that, overall, these new practices increased MMs' responsibilities, given that the latter have to adapt to and operate these new systems:

The scope of our business has remained the same; it is the processes that have changed. These new processes are much more sophisticated and the MMs have to be the first to learn how these new systems work, and to familiarise themselves with them, because they have to manage them.

SM-6

The growth in responsibilities and volume of work has led to increased levels of personal pressure that could possibly give rise to damaging effects on MMs' wellbeing, assuming that this pressure leads to stress and anxiety (Hassard *et al.* 2009). On a similar note, Osterman (2008) declared: "any assessment of how middle managers feel about their work is to recognise that stress has ratcheted up considerably" (p.75). One of the MMs at PublicOrg explained how an increased workload did result in a stressful working life:

Tension and stress increased because of increased demands; the regulations we have to work with have gone up; the deadlines have increased and so on. There is always something more going on, even if we don't have enough staff to work with.

MM-19

The fact that MMs were both subject to an increasing number of deadlines, and that they would be responsible for any failure to meet such deadlines, was also a source of pressure. One MM shared the following opinion on this issue:

At the end of the day, if we [as a team] don't keep to the deadlines, the top management would approach me as the head of the team. They won't approach anyone else, so I need to have sufficient and suitable answers. This reality puts a lot of stress on me.

MM-17

The growing size of MMs' workloads and the tighter timeframes for their completion, for which they were held accountable, necessitated them to spend more hours at work, even if they were not directly forced to do so. This particular MM declared:

I'm spending more time at work. I always remain here for a long time. I can't cope with my work within the normal working hours.

MM-8

A number of MMs also claimed that, as much as possible, they avoided taking sick leave because that would mean ending up with a massive backlog when they reported back to work. Coincidentally, one MM, was at the time of the interview facing such a dilemma:

Those piles behind you [referring to a pile of files behind the interviewer] are all pending files that are waiting for me just because I had two days of sick leave. When I reported back to work I found those files waiting for me. Each file means a new case, so you can understand the backlog that I found waiting for me.

MM-17

Others explained that when they had no choice but to take sick leave, they did their utmost to continue working through webmail and by phone. MMs claimed that they 'chose' to work long hours or to spend time working when sick. However, consistent with Hassard *et al.*'s (2009) findings, when analysing their interpretation one may conclude that 'personal choice' was only partly responsible. The other reason they worked longer and when sick, was the sharp increase in their volume of work. As the MM quoted hereunder revealed, their workload compelled them to work for longer hours, which in return had a direct effect on their work-life balance:

I stay here until late not for the sake of managing my people but to purely manage tasks that are my responsibility. My superior doesn't force me to remain here but I prefer staying here rather than losing track of my work once and for all. For example lately I've reported for work for six consecutive weekends.

MM-27

In addition to work intensification, proliferation of deadlines and longer working hours, the function of new communication technologies influenced MMs' role. Expanded accessibility contributed to augmented stress levels and a distorted work-life balance. Traditionally, technological surveillance has been associated with routine work. However, studies have shown that technology has a dual purpose, given that even managers may be controlled by it (Thompson and McHugh, 2009). It remains somewhat difficult to establish the actual impact of technology on MMs' work, but it can be deduced that the advancement in communication technology, expressed for example by means of mobile/smart phones and webmail access, have allowed for the extension of

working time and made personnel contactable when they are not at work (Fuchs Epstein and Kalleberg, 2001). An MM expressed the following view on this issue:

Recently I've been provided with access to a paid mobile phone. [...] Although I coordinate all the work in my unit to the very last detail, there are instances when my superior or my people on the late shifts call me to ask me questions, to clarify issues etc. Anyway, so at some point I go home, but that doesn't mean that people stop talking to me. [...] I don't get paid for this extra hassle.

MM-10

Consequently, the application of technology has left its mark on MMs' quality of life. Whereas "tales of managers and professionals being available round-the-clock by email and mobile phone may be exaggerated", this case study, like others, has demonstrated that "electronic surveillance can create new expectations of managerial time and effort" (Thompson and McHugh, 2009, p.97). The MMs made various references to the impact of technology on their life. For example the following MM confessed:

If during the weekend or when I'm on holiday I check my webmail and realise that I've received a lot of emails I grow concerned and I start checking who's chasing me on what. I grow concerned because my worry is that I might lose control of my own work. So I prefer dealing with them as quickly as possible. I do my utmost to keep my work under control.

MM-25

Inside and outside the workplace, MMs did encounter pressure resulting from the use of technology. Indeed, as outlined later in chapter 7, a number of MMs were looking for ways to limit the extent to which technology controlled their life outside office hours. In any case, this study has demonstrated that advances in communication technology did not make MMs redundant, as a number of popular management works have claimed (Dopson and Steward, 1993). In fact, rather than threaten MMs' existence, it has intensified their role. This proves that their role was never simply about passing over information upwards and downwards. However, technology has blurred their work-life boundaries.

The realities surrounding the MMs' work-life balance were not perceived as favourable because they were undoubtedly overworked and stressed (see also Bunting, 2004). The increased workload and heightened responsibility led to the "growing elasticity of [the] work" phenomenon (Thompson, 2013, p.479). This meant that MMs' work spilled over

into their homes and private lives, consequently as an MM claimed, it affected their close family members:

The fact that I have email access on my mobile [phone] means that the chances of me continuing to work from home are higher...In the evening when I'm in front of the television I frequently answer work-related emails from my mobile [phone]... Often, at some point, my wife starts grumbling about this. In a way, I don't blame her considering that frequently I come home late.

MM-13

One of the SMs, when asked about the work-life balance of MMs, responded:

We don't stress them to the point that they can't cope or we don't give them so much work that they can't find time with their families. Nevertheless, we do expect them to continue checking emails, and to continue following them if they receive an alert. For example yesterday, Sunday, we had a case where we had a whole section without internet connection, so I contacted one of my team managers and he answered me and gave me feedback. Mind you, they have paid mobile phone access so in a way they can't refuse such calls.

SM-2

While MMs were expected to be available round the clock to give timely answers, even outside office hours, and they were not discouraged from working casually from home, they did meet resistance when they officially sought to shift part of their work as tele-working. This stands in contrast to what is happening in the UK, where tele-working and other flexi-time measures are becoming widespread (White *et al.* 2004). At PublicOrg, the granting of tele-working was left at the discretion of the MMs' superiors, who as the MM quoted directly below claimed, they did not seem particularly eager to permit this for their subordinates, even if only a few managers, usually women, sought to make use of such a policy:

When I asked my superior to permit me to use tele-working, because I have a four-year-old daughter so I need some flexibility because of after-school activities, he told me: 'you'll be granted tele-working in your dreams'. Such answers hurt especially since he knows that I already carry out work from home and he has no issue with that.

MM-11

Bearing in mind the intensity and quantity of working hours being completed by PublicOrg's MMs, this research delves into a direction pursued by other studies, that, on the basis of empirical research, have disproved the claims of the 'death of middle management' (Hassard *et al.* 2009; McCann *et al.* 2008). Instead, these studies and this

thesis assert that in the restructured organisation there has been “progressive extraction of even more labour from the middle management employees”, in such a way that their “roles have increased massively in scope and scale” (Hassard *et al.* 2009, p.193, p.6). However, these studies (ibid. McCann *et al.* 2008) do not support Braverman’s (1974) notion of deskilling, instead they claim that the role of MMs in the modern organisation is characterised by increased levels of skill and responsibility.

Carter and Fairbrother (1995), who explicitly embarked on a Marxist framework when analysing the impact of organisational restructuring on the public sector, also found that managerial work has been intensified, but that this coincided with the removal of managerial responsibilities. Their theoretical interpretation was that this was in line with the process of proletarianisation (Braverman, 1974; Carchedi, 1977).

In the case of Malta, evidence from PublicOrg indicates that more output was extracted from MMs following organisation restructuring, but as outlined in section 5.2 their managerial prerogative in relation to certain HR matters was not completely under their control and they had limited influence, or none at all, on strategic decisions. However, although MMs’ degree of generic managerial authority arising from their hierarchical position was fragmented, they still held on to the capital function and their role was not deskilled. MMs retained general management functions, such as supervision, as well as monitoring and evaluation of subordinate employees’ work tasks. Furthermore, as presented in section 5.4, they were the most competent in the area for which they had responsibility and completely responsible for the technical coordination of work within this area.

5.3.2 Broken career ladder

As a consequence of the delayering and downsizing of managerial grades, motivated by the need to reduce costs and accelerate performance, MMs’ work intensified, their range of tasks broadened and spans of control increased, while prospects of promotion declined. MMs emphasised that the flatter managerial structure had impacted upon the long-established internal labour market, given that there were fewer senior managerial positions to which they could aspire. Such a situation had a direct effect on morale of MMs, one of whom noted the following:

The way the structure has been modified has automatically reduced upward opportunities for us. They’ve abolished certain senior managerial posts that were

specifically open for people who are in our grades...Sadly I'd say my chances to get promoted are not just nil, but if possible less than that.

MM-22

If, on one hand, the majority of MMs expressed feelings of resentment with respect to their reduced career opportunities, on the other hand there were some who raised doubts about moving to more senior positions, if given the chance. Similar situations were reported by Hassard *et al.* (2009). An MM made it clear that they were already dealing with tough work expectations, and an upward move would not reduce such expectations:

Personally it doesn't make sense for me to move to a higher managerial position, because when you consider the decisions, load and time that I currently carry and the decisions, load and time that my boss has, there is a difference between the two that should not go unnoticed.

MM-27

Despite accounts expressing anxiety about any possible promotion, such as the one above, overall MMs expressed clear exasperation about the considerable shrinking of promotion prospects caused by organisational change. The measures being taken by those at the top to press as much as possible the managerial grades made it difficult for the majority of MMs to make any considerable inroads career-wise, if they wished to do so. More worrying for MMs was the nonbinding commitment they had to face, particularly manifested in the absence of job security, and to a lesser degree in the expectation of recognition for hard work, as outlined in the following subsection.

5.3.3 Collapsed implicit contract

MMs at PublicOrg, similar to others employed across the USA, the UK and Japan (Hassard *et al.* 2009; 2011; McCann *et al.* 2004; 2008; 2010), have not only had to cope with difficulties arising from reduced opportunities of upward mobility and an intensified working life, but they have also had to face job insecurity. Besides, at times MMs did not feel adequately appreciated for their efforts, not necessarily by their direct superiors, but by those who held the most senior positions. Such circumstances meant that MMs had to deal with a collapsed implicit contract, as while their efforts increased, their job security diminished. This indicates that the 'special relationship' that MMs previously had where they enjoyed greater job security than their colleagues at a lower level (Carter, 1985), was gradually withering. As one MM put it:

Our quality of life is tainted with the insecurities that we're experiencing at the moment with respect to the future of our jobs. We don't know where we're going to end up [in the immediate future], and our questions remain unanswered. Even if it hasn't been officially announced, the indications are that now one and all jobs are at risk.

MM-12

In their accounts, MMs claimed that today the normative expectation of a job-for-life could no longer be maintained. The main reasons they gave for the reduction in job security included: the fact that a critical service offered by PublicOrg had been liberalised; plans were in place for other parts of the organisation to be privatised; and, after decades in which PublicOrg's main services were exclusive, it now faced competition on the market. Thus, the probability of early retirement, voluntary redundancies, or a transfer to another job within the public sector, possibly on lesser terms and conditions, were all increasing.

A sense of insecurity amongst MMs also emanated from the fact that a number of them were being transferred to new sites in an unsystematic way, at the sole discretion of those at the top of PublicOrg, or, even more worryingly for MMs, at the whim of politicians. Given that partisan politics in Malta can be quite parochial, politicians through their entourages intervene in administrative decisions, in a way that they seem to micro-regulate their constituencies (Pirotta, 2001; 2005; Warrington, 1997). Indeed, considering the various references that MMs made to the role of political patronage, such as the one quoted hereunder, it looks as though things have not changed much since Boissevain (1974) noted that in Malta, politicians and political parties had developed themselves into "new and surer channels of influence and source of patronage" (p.217):

Now that people are being transferred to the new sites there's a lot of political interference. Such interference is something, which we've never managed to get rid of.

MM-16

MMs' concerns about their insecure work environment were actively brought up during the interviews. These managers knew that external forces, both political and economic, could end their employment at PublicOrg. Such an imminent probability created tension, particularly amongst long-serving MMs. Meanwhile, to make matters worse, MMs indicated that they did not necessarily receive what may be considered

appropriate recognition for their escalated effort, particularly from those at the very top of the organisation. The view of this MM on this issue was a typical response:

More work doesn't bother me, but I do expect that it would be appreciated, and here recognition is lacking. To be fair my immediate superior does appreciate my input, but then the chief officer, who holds the most powerful position, doesn't.

MM-19

Ultimately, as 'the managed', PublicOrg's MMs were loaded with more responsibility and were spending more time at work. Their work-life balance had been distorted and they did not always receive appropriate appreciation for their hard work while they were exposed to an increased level of stress, tension and job insecurity. This supports an LPT interpretation in the sense that escalated forces of rationalisation and role intensification are tightening around MMs' activities. However, this thesis concurs with the assertion that "[m]iddle management work was not being 'degraded' as such" (Hassard *et al.* 2009, p.47), because, as presented in the next section, on the basis of their expert role, MMs maintained considerable power, autonomy and discretion.

5.4 Middle managers as 'experts'

Hitherto evidence from PublicOrg has demonstrated that, following workplace restructuring, MMs' generic managerial authority in relation to HR did not substantially increase. Additionally, the power over strategy and policy remained centralised at the top of the organisational hierarchy. Concurrently, the contracted managerial structure and the introduction of new work practices and processes meant that MMs became increasingly subject to an intensive LP.

On the basis of these realities, up to this point, this study has been moving in the same direction as other analyses (Hassard *et al.* 2009) that question the extent to which the relationship between MMs and their superiors is solely based on an agency relationship, as claimed by Armstrong (1989). Also, at this stage, this study echoes others (Carter *et al.* 2002) that question whether the public sector's management reform challenges professional discretion. Basically, this means that professionals either end up manoeuvring within a bureaucratic framework of financial and budgetary controls, or the distinction between professionals' role as 'managers' of the LP and as 'participants' within it, becomes blurred.

As a result of the way in which professionals are commonly organised in managerial roles in Malta, even if PublicOrg's MMs continue dealing with bureaucratic boundaries and increased rationalisation, their contribution at work remained distinct. In each respective unit of the case study organisation, MMs possess the highest level of competence and specialised skills that PublicOrg needed to deliver diverse services. Owing to their PE, MMs were responsible for planning, organising and consolidating activities (including high-level specialised activities), within units under their responsibility to operate efficiently and effectively. They provided operational control and specialist support; by getting directly involved, they were able to make decisions quickly to solve specialised technical problems.

As highlighted in the following subsections, the coordination function was the solid management process that these managers accomplished. This managerial function, which MMs at PublicOrg fulfilled from their expert role, stood in contrast to their rather incomplete control function and secured their managerial position. It was also the coordination function that granted them operational autonomy, discretion and power (elements that they actually lacked as value extractors) based upon which they established to some degree an agency relationship with their superiors.

5.4.1 Coordinating and directing the labour process

On account of their PE, MMs were the most qualified and competent in the area that they managed. On this basis, MMs accomplished distinct coordination activities that required high-level specialist decisions, and eventually obtained satisfactory behaviour and the requested output from the subordinate employees reporting to them, as outlined by this MM:

I'm the most qualified in the unit that runs under my responsibility. This means that I'm the one who evaluates and acts on high-level technical decisions. I'm in charge of all the people who work in this unit. Basically I'm in charge of running the unit as a whole...When it comes to the operations, the real planning, the real decisions and more importantly when it comes to who is going to shoulder the responsibilities for the decisions taken, who must answer if something goes wrong, in that case they will revert to me and to no one else from my team; no matter how much experience I have in this position and how many up-scales [in the pay] my subordinates have got, I alone have to answer.

MM-18

Due to their PE, MMs were not only assigned to take effective and efficient high-level coordination decisions but they were also expected to identify first-hand inventive operational solutions to complex work-related problems connected to the area under their responsibility. A description of how MMs' reality was tough because they had to carry out the technical coordination of work by directly handling problem-solving and exceptions, whilst dealing with general management functions, such as supervision, was provided by this MM:

I'm the first person who ought to take decisions to make sure that the area under my responsibility doesn't constitute any problem for the overall running of the entity...The nature of our work is becoming more challenging because it requires us to be even more flexible in order to act in an efficient and effective way, to offer practical [and] affordable technical solutions; besides all this, the people can be tough to handle.

MM-21

One of the interviewed MMs stressed that at a time when the work practices and processes were being revised, it was the technical aspect of their work that was becoming more complex and sophisticated, thus more demanding. Basically, this MM made it clear that they are the specialists' job-related duties that require most of their effort:

It is the workload vis-à-vis the technical aspect of my work that has increased considerably. To the extent that at present it's very intensive and needs a lot of thinking. Today this area of my work is much more specialised. Today I need to delve deeper to get it done.

MM-12

MMs repeatedly stated that, as the experts, they were identified as the ones most accountable for work that was carried out in an area that operated under their responsibility. This meant that they could not hide behind others' actions. An MM asserted that they as MMs were expected to ensure an uninterrupted service to the customers by securing the best output, even from subordinate employees:

Let's qualify what accountability means in our case. It means that if something goes wrong with respect to the technical running of the section, if deadlines are not kept, if a complaint is received, if accidents occur, if parts of the plant get damaged, if people are caught misbehaving, the first person accountable will be me.

MM-13

MMs' individual accountability, particularly vis-à-vis the technical coordination of work, was something that even their immediate subordinate employees, who were highly skilled but did not possess a university qualification or warrant, made excessive reference to. As one FLM interviewed claimed, even if they themselves were very competent, it was reassuring that MMs had greater accountability:

Even if after so many years of experience we know our work inside out, they [MMs] remain the ones most accountable. The buck stops with them, and that's something that we agree with, because they have the qualifications, the degrees and they are the ones warranted, so that's how things should be. [...] Automatically everything that we do falls under their responsibility, so ultimately they're trapped.

FLM-31

According to the MMs who participated in this study, a drawback in their work was constituted by the fact that it has become more demanding, while their responsibilities increased. Yet, as this particular MM expressed it, the upside (at least from their expert role position) was that they dealt with more interesting, challenging and engaging work:

New responsibility brings with it new challenges and we like that, as that means that every day's work is not exactly the same. So even though it's tough to handle because we don't have enough people to work with etc., overall our work is very absorbing and as professionals we do our utmost to perform it in the best way.

MM-27

Despite the growing intensity, exigency, accountability and challenges in the role of MMs, these managers acknowledged that their role not only provided them with an interesting, engaging and ambitious job, but it also supported their standing as managers, both in relation to top management, and their subordinate employees. One of the interviewed MMs emphasised that having the necessary specialist/technical capacity was crucial for them to maintain their legitimacy, credibility and effectiveness as managers:

People here, I mean both those above and below, would respect your authority and would abide by what you say only when you show them your competence with regard to the technical, professional side of your role. Once that through your decisions you prove that you have sufficient ability to keep the system, process, unit, department, etc. running against all odds, and that you really know the details of how things function, people would respect you and then you would be in an excellent position to deal with any of them, irrelevant of which position they hold or how long they have been working here.

MM-10

MMs lamented about being overloaded with work, exhaustion and increased pressure. However, as the expert role played a significant part in their daily activities, it was in their interest to nevertheless emphasise this in some way. The MMs were aware of this and this particular MM indicated that:

If I'm not competent to solve technical problems, irrelevant of how complicated they are, then I can renounce my career. As an expert I'm meant to solve problems, to seek solutions that work, and I don't blame those who expect answers from us.

MM-16

For MMs, an effective way to counterbalance the limitations they encountered as managers (value extractors) was to emphasise their expert role. As a way to bolster this role, a number of MMs, such as the one directly quoted below, took personal initiative to seek opportunities that provided them with new and higher responsibilities thus widening their span of control. On account of such a personal drive, MMs at PublicOrg were neither 'disillusioned' (Torrington and Weightman, 1987) nor 'reluctant' managers (Scase and Goffee, 1989); instead they looked for extensive responsibilities that enhanced their role as managers:

On the basis of my profession I do my best to familiarise and take on new areas of work, even if this means more work and responsibility.

MM-20

PublicOrg's MMs were not only the most responsible, but also the most competent within the specialised units. In this context, their PE was instrumental in coordinating the LP in these units. Such a managerial process made their role at work indispensable, absorbing and, more importantly, powerful. Besides, as the following subsection demonstrates, PE in particular has preserved MMs' autonomy and discretion.

5.4.2 Operational autonomy and decision-making

The fact that PublicOrg was part of the public sector meant that the MMs had to deal with a significant number of constraints on their professional autonomy (Carter *et al.* 2002; Warhurst and Thompson, 2006). Such constraints were derived from a mix of the following components: bureaucratic regulations; managerial control; internal markets and associated forms of competition. However, some of the interviewed MMs explicitly claimed that they did avail themselves of levels of operational autonomy with regard to their role as experts. As illustrated earlier, this stood in contrast to their incomplete

managerial authority and autonomy, which they experienced due to their limited involvement in strategic decision-making, and, more importantly in relation to certain HR decisions regarding their subordinate employees. When during the interviews, the MMs were specifically asked: ‘do you have the autonomy to implement initiatives your way?’, a typical reply was:

If the initiatives are technical then I can go ahead. It's not the same if they are HR-related. In this case, I have to channel such initiatives through my superior and then it's up to him to take them forward or otherwise.

MM-12

Even though a number of changes took place at the case study organisation, from their role as experts, MMs continued to see themselves as active and influential decision-makers in the work process. An MM commenting on this point claimed:

I do have the flexibility and the discretion to decide on work-related matters. My boss doesn't micro-monitor me. He acknowledges that I seek very hard to address issues on my own, through the people who report to me. He knows that if he gives me the space I won't drag my feet. So I can say that I do have the space to work independently, to take technical decisions, and to influence the way in which my area operates.

MM-13

Evidence from PublicOrg demonstrates that autonomy is one major advantage of managerial work (Hassard *et al.* 2011), and it was also able to show that, in the case of specialist MMs, their real source of autonomy is their expert role. Although, as ‘experts’, MMs were being exposed to rising accountability, associated with a heavier workload and longer working hours, through their expert role they did gain greater operational autonomy, control and discretion, and a more challenging and interesting job.

5.5 Conclusion

The organisational restructuring measures carried out at PublicOrg did leave their marks on the role of MMs, who established themselves as expert personnel responsible for the performance and results of specialised units by managing resources. In the accounts given by MMs, it turned out that, as managers, their control function was undermined. The interviewed MMs were not necessarily equipped with sufficient and adequate resources to conduct generic managerial functions. Their involvement in the HR aspect of the employees who reported to them continued to be incomplete because SMs

purposely retained control over issues related to people management. Concurrently, following the organisational restructuring, certain boundaries created by bureaucracy, including the centralisation of strategic decision-making, continue to persist (Alvesson and Thompson, 2005; Hales, 2002). Besides, there were occasions where partisan political interference further undermined MMs' exercise of authority. Hence, at PublicOrg, MMs' control function is not completely under their control.

Contrastingly, at a time when the organisation was becoming more complex, the MMs were responsible for the effective running of unit operations and output. They were held accountable for the detailed planning, monitoring and execution of technical and operational activities, which they handled directly by managing subordinate employees. These responsibilities, which MMs execute on account of their PE, are key because they are the means by which they establish and maintain a particular relationship with their superiors and thereby safeguard their managerial position. Indeed, MMs use their advantageous position over the technical coordination of the LP to gain influence in the social coordination and control of the LP.

Hence, MMs do retain specific functions of capital, mostly the coordination function, and it is also on the basis of this function (which they carry out mainly as experts) that they preserve a degree of autonomy and discretion as managers. Subsequently, their PE prevents the role of MMs shifting excessively towards the labour function. However, while PE does assist MMs to preserve a degree of autonomy and job control (Edwards, 1979; Friedman, 1977b), their control function continues to be somewhat limited. In these circumstances, MMs have a particular interest in reinforcing the duties they carry out on the basis of their expert role, even though this leads to a central paradox.

MMs accept and seek more responsibilities that arise from the decentralisation of operational decision-making and new work processes, which assign them to coordinate and direct the LP; since in this way, they defend their managerial position and professional identity. Yet, concurrently, it also contributes to their increasingly stressful state, as it comes with work intensification, amplified accountability and inadequate resources. MMs accept this adverse trade-off since in the reformed organisation it is largely through the coordination function rather than the control function that they acquire power, autonomy, and discretion, while supporting their managerial standing.

Motivated by Armstrong's (1989) assertion that a "true labour process approach to management needs to place the agency relationship at the centre of the analysis" (p.320), this study, along with others (Hassard *et al.* 2009), claims that the role of MMs' is not completely based on an agency relationship.

At PublicOrg, MMs' relationship with SMs was primarily guided on the former's PE. It was on this basis that MMs were SMs' preferred agents mostly vis-à-vis one specific managerial aspect, namely the function of coordination of the LP. On account of their expert role, MMs were increasingly given space to take intricate, operational, and technical decisions, and as a result their subjectivity as professionals gained standing. This subjectivity emerged in the tacit knowledge and the technical creativity they had to develop in order to deal with sophisticated and complex work.

Concurrently, however, MMs were not widely trusted with the control function. Their hierarchical authority was incomplete and they remained considerably subordinate within the organisational hierarchy, which increasingly exposed them to increased rationalisation. This meant that they were not completely in an agency relationship. Indeed, MMs were struggling to improve their managerial standing (as value extractors) and to re-balance their work-life.

On the whole, the role of MMs has changed. As 'the managed' they were getting more pressurised. but as the 'managers' their control function vis-à-vis HR matters was not sufficient and they were not adequately involved in strategic decisions. However, at a time when new advanced work processes were being implemented, MMs' coordination function gained more prominence. As 'experts' in middle managerial positions, on grounds of their PE, MMs provide operational control, expert support and technical expertise, through the subordinate employees reporting to them.

The next chapter focuses exclusively on how control manifests itself in the case of specialised MMs. The MMs are subject to a hybrid set of control practices, confirming that when dealing with MMs, there is also a coordination problem and a value extraction problem, and that the workplace remains a contested terrain.

6. The control of middle managers

6.1 Introduction

This chapter investigates how the dynamics of control operated in the case of PublicOrg's MMs. In view of their contradictory status, MMs contribute to the control of the work organisation, but concurrently they are subjected to control as well (Carter, 1985; Hassard *et al.* 2009; Thompson and McHugh, 2009). While managerial and professional work is less likely to be susceptible to direct supervision and an authoritarian approach (Causer and Jones, 1996; Hassard *et al.* 2009), data presented in this chapter reveal that MMs are subject to a combination of other control strategies and practices. This supports a key proposition of the LPT, concerning the coexistence of multiple forms of control in the workplace (Thompson and Harley, 2007; Thompson and van den Broek, 2010).

SMs rely on the initiative, creativity and flexibility of MMs to solve problems, handle exceptions and reach objectives (Delmestri and Walgenbach, 2005), but marketable outcomes, performance pressure and bureaucratic regulation work directly against these elements, intensifying MMs' work and limiting their autonomy. Up to this point, this study has generated similar results of other studies, showing that, in the restructured workplace, MMs are increasingly subject to management control and work intensification (Carter *et al.* 2002; Carter and Fairbrother, 1995; Hassard *et al.* 2009; 2011). However, this study actually goes further than that as outlined below.

This chapter expands the analysis on MMs and control on three counts. First, it explores how specialist MMs are influenced by *professional control* arising due to their PE, which contains a *normative dimension*. Second, it examines how traditional forms of control, namely *bureaucratic control* and *work intensification*, function to reduce the indeterminacy of managerial-expert labour in a large organisation, which is bureaucratic in nature. Such an analysis indicates that control in the form of monitoring, measurement and audit has become a constant element of working life (Thompson and van den Broek, 2010), even for MMs executing expert labour. Yet, this chapter also investigates how MMs specifically use their PE to set boundaries, consolidate their standing, resist deskilling and preserve their autonomy. Third, it considers the friction generated in connection with the upward and downward relationships in which these managers are involved at work.

In order to carry out this analysis, two inferences advanced by the radical approach are adopted. First, based on the LP agenda, the focus of this chapter is to examine the influence and effects of control on MMs, rather than to specify the capacity of a particular control strategy (Sturdy *et al.* 2010; Thompson, 1989; Thompson and Harley, 2007; Thompson and O'Doherty, 2009). Second, by considering the expert labour debate, the analysis in this chapter seeks to highlight tensions met by MMs at work due to a clash between their interests based on their PE and the senior management's objectives to enhance financial and operational accountability (Darr and Warhurst, 2008; Warhurst and Thompson, 1998; 2006).

Evidence from PublicOrg sheds light on the distinct complex relationship that is established between different forms of control, PE and autonomy. As expected, the multiple forms of control give rise to tensions and, to some extent, limit MMs' actions within the employing organisation. Nevertheless, because of their PE, certain aspects of professional control and its normative dimension are actually useful for MMs to *support* their autonomy and standing. At times, where the latter does not materialise vis-à-vis work intensification (in some cases) and bureaucratic control (in most cases), MMs call upon their PE to *protect* their autonomy and standing. While, in virtue of their PE, MMs are subject to control, they simultaneously activate it to preserve their autonomy (particularly the autonomy that emanates from their expert role) and to resist deskilling. This study's evidence does not support Braverman's (1974) notion of deskilling, but the tentacles of exploitation, control and work intensity captured, do correspond to his broad thesis when applied to MMs instead of to blue-collar workers.

6.2 Professional control

The distinctive features of professional control that influence MMs' behaviour are the intrinsic, regulatory and vertical aspects (see subsection 2.5.2). These aspects work in combination, yet this section focuses specifically on the vertical aspect. Subsection 6.2.3 deals, to some extent, with the intrinsic and regulatory aspects, but these are covered more extensively in chapter 8.

The vertical aspect was activated when MMs were recruited from outside PublicOrg, on the basis of credentials suitable to the areas that the organisation operated in and (in most cases) a warrant. Evidentially, what starts off as the engagement of

specialist personnel in middle managerial positions, develops into an LP problem (extraction of labour from labour power), such as in the form of professional control. Professional control's vertical aspect exposes MMs to pressures to execute specialist technical duties, to deal with operational activities, to offer practical solutions and to assume personal responsibilities for sensitive decisions, in order to run specialised units by utilising resources, including HR.

These challenging duties do not only bother MMs at the start of their job - although both they and their superiors referred to this period as 'the baptism of fire' - but these continue to put pressure on them throughout their career. At PublicOrg, MMs' responsibilities continued to increase, while unexpected and diverse issues arose, especially as they were working on new and more advanced work systems because the operations were being heavily revised.

Notwithstanding such challenges, by solving high-level technical problems on the basis of their PE, PublicOrg's MMs succeeded in occupying specialised units and privileged positions (Armstrong, 1985; Reed, 1996). Thus, it transpired that professional control did furnish them with a relatively high standing and operational autonomy. In the end, professional control allowed them to defend their structural position within the managerial realm and empowered them to direct the LP of subordinate employees, while it reduced the chances of their work being deskilled.

6.2.1 Challenging obligations

For MMs to carry out their role, they need more than qualifications. They also need practical experience and skills, in other words the PE required for the particular job in question. These need time and familiarity to develop. Indeed, such circumstances give rise to specific tension amongst MMs, particularly those who have little or no work and managerial experience. This tension arises because when MMs are employed, they are more or less immediately expected to have the ability to deal with technical and managerial duties, arising in the area of work functioning under their responsibility. An SM remarked:

We assume the MM's ability the moment we employ him. The MM presents a CV, with certificates etc. [...] As soon as we recruit an engineer, an accountant, or whatever we assume that technically they are competent, we can continue training them, updating their knowledge etc. but what matters then is how they're going to organise the work and direct the people who report to them. They have to see the day-to-day operations.

SM-1

Selective recruitment does not automatically mean that MMs have all that is required to be an ‘expert’ and a ‘manager’. Even qualified and experienced MMs require time to become acquainted with the particular work processes and procedures. These issues were frequently brought up by the interviewed MMs, many of whom indicated that professional control did put these managers, particularly at the start of their career/job, in a difficult position with subordinate employees, who usually had longer work experience. However, as one of the MMs at PublicOrg explained, from the outset MMs mitigate such tensions by eventually relying on their theoretical-technical knowledge, whilst taking into consideration the longer on-the-job experience of the employees:

In the beginning you start by relating the stuff that [the subordinate employees] tell you, typically without even knowing the actual rationale it is based on, with the technical and academic background that you have. And so this way you would be confident in the decisions that you take because at the end the last word is yours.

MM-14

In order to execute specialist technical duties and operational activities within the organisation’s units, MMs had to manage a group of employees. This brings into question the assertions of some radical scholars that MMs are simply drawn in an LP similar to that of blue-collar workers (Braverman, 1974; Mills, 1956). Instead, this study corroborates the postulations of others that management has retained its ‘core supervisory nature’ (Edwards, 2010), and so it is also about managing people besides the technical coordination of work (Hales, 2005; Watson, 2001). However, this study unveils that, generally, it takes longer for specialist MMs to deal with people management, than to develop on-the-job-competence to handle the management of the technical aspect of their work. An SM expressed this point rather vividly:

It takes some time for the newly recruited professionals to find their feet. Here they have to control, they have to manage all the people under their responsibility. The truth is that the senior workers in the team, very often look sceptical towards them...That's a barrier not easy to bypass.

SM-5

SMs stressed that since MMs’ tension was more emphatic regarding social management rather than technical management, as part of the restructuring programme, specialised training focusing on people management and leadership skills was specifically organised for MMs. This training conveyed valuable information and skills, and was

also an expression of support (Grugulis, 2007). PublicOrg's MMs received such support from superiors who generally, like them, were not primarily trained in managerialism. Thus, SMs could certainly recognise tensions experienced by MMs due to being managers and experts at the same time. According to this thesis's evidence, specialist MMs' tension starts from the fact that on one side they are primarily technical experts, who function as a 'neutral' force in the employment relationship (Storey, 1980). Yet, on the other side, they are 'agents' of SMs (Armstrong, 1989). Therefore, their role is only in part based on rational, objective and logical grounds (Grugulis, 2007). One of the interviewed SM shared the following opinion on this issue:

Since our aim is to improve the performance from top to bottom, we intensified our training provision. And in the case of the MMs it was pretty easy to realise that what we had to focus upon were their people management skills, team-building skills, communication skills, since in these areas there is room for improvement.

SM-1

This training not only confirms that a myriad of skills are expected of MMs, but it also reinforces their dual-role (managers-and-experts). Furthermore, it shows that the priority of SMs upon recruitment of MMs is technical, rather than managerial, competence.

Ultimately, for MMs to fulfil their role, they require more than the acquisition of theoretical and technical knowledge; they also have to learn the practical aspects of their work, including people management. Actually, MMs' degree and warrant are more of a labour market signal of their ability and an indication of the type and extent of responsibilities they can assume rather than the only requisites for their work (Warhurst and Thompson, 2006). In reality, MMs are constrained to develop PE because they are expected to bridge theoretical know-what and practical know-how to solve daily operational issues. Their superiors rely on their theoretical knowledge, technical creativity and tacit skills to deal with sophisticated and complex work. Accordingly, SMs can safely presume that the risks involved in the operations are limited and contained by MMs' theoretical and technical knowledge, myriad of skills and functional capabilities. As one SM put it:

I always encourage [the MMs] to continue enhancing their knowledge, to continue updating what they know, to continue finding ways to solve problems, because this way I would be more confident in the operational decisions that they

take. I always tell them not to waste time on petty tasks [but to] leave those to the other workers who report to them. I want them always to be 'hands-on'.

SM-5

Despite years of occupying middle managerial positions, during which PE evolves, dealing with technical and non-routine tasks, as well as operational activities, can be challenging for MMs. This is particularly the case when revised processes and procedures are implemented. Indeed, as an MM explained during the interview they were aware that their operational responsibilities, what they usually referred to as 'hands-on' responsibilities, were continuous, unavoidable and evident, whilst becoming more challenging:

If you're in charge of managing something, you're responsible for ensuring that it functions well. [...] You're going to be the one they will point their fingers at if something goes wrong, so our responsibilities are very clear. And now that we're working with new systems of work, which are more advanced, more complex, it's not easy to absorb the new details, but we have to, because everyone from top to bottom expects answers from us.

MM-14

The reality for MMs was further complicated by virtue of the fact that their superiors expected specialised tasks to be completed by them, on account of their credentials. This regulatory element (another aspect of professional control) essentially meant that MMs had to personally perform the sensitive tasks and assume risk and responsibility for the benefit of their superiors:

The reality is that our manager prefers to leave the delicate and critical duties completely to us [...] our immediate superior bluntly tells us, 'I want professionals doing the bulk of the work' We have a warrant so we cover his back. This way he has less to worry about because we're here to worry for him.

MM-28

The fact that particular duties were specifically requested from MMs, in spite of other responsibilities that they had to look after and the number of shortages they had to address, exposed these managers to heightened pressure. Yet, they also sounded apprehensive about the fact that each time a problem emerged, they would be discredited if they were unable to solve it in an efficient and effective way. An MM made this point sharply:

Our responsibilities are many here and they are tested at critical instances...The fact that the operations of the entity are being heavily revised means that we have

to work on innovative processes and on new sites that operate in a completely different way to what we are used to. So all this means that we ought to be super flexible, super knowledgeable and super good to manage, because if not our superiors would look down on us.

MM-18

In the case of PublicOrg, similar to the situation amongst many MMs in Germany and Italy, MMs had to get directly involved in the solution of technical problems (Delmestri and Walgenbach, 2005). Therefore, to carry out problem-solving (soft skill) MMs required technical know-how (hard skill). The implication of this is that both sets of skills are interdependent (Darr, 2004; Grugulis and Lloyd, 2010) and so MMs encounter problems if they are short of either or both.

Besides dealing with pressure and anxiety deriving from their responsibilities, PublicOrg's MMs had to handle tensions that arose from the workplace relationships in which they were involved. Regarding the upward relationships, since other managers (who were also professionals) recruited MMs, the tendency was for SMs to select MMs who were socially similar to them, a phenomenon which Moore (1951) labelled as 'homosocial reproduction' (Grugulis, 2007). Employing these MMs then became not only an exercise of trust to mitigate the risks involved in the operations, but it also served as an 'indirect' form of control (Blau and Schoenherr, 1971), making it less difficult for SMs to put pressure on middle-counterparts to reach a degree of reliable performance. As one MM remarked, such demands typically were not just in relation to 'what' the MMs were 'able to do', but also 'how much' they could handle:

We encounter a lot of peer pressure from our superiors. In my case my superior is an accountant just like I am. He exerts a lot of pressure on me.

MM-7

Regarding MMs' downward relationships, subordinate employees claimed that even if their superiors had the necessary qualifications, many believed that they *pretended* to have knowledge of practical matters. As the subordinate employees usually had long practical 'hands-on' experience, they were keen to emphasise during the interviews that it was one thing for MMs to possess credentials, but quite another to have the necessary practical skills for the job. At this point, considering what senior management list as job requirements and what subordinate employees believe are the requisites for an MM's

job, there is an aggregation of the critical components of PE: knowledge, skills and experience.

The clash between MMs and subordinate employees about the degree of competence led to a struggle over power that created tension. However, although the highly skilled employees considered themselves to possess the most practical know-how, they admitted that they still sought support from MMs, particularly when faced with critical work situations that did not form part of the daily routine. Such circumstances indicate that, despite the view of employees as to who was the most skilful, the latter recognised and appreciated the significance of MMs' PE. One of the FLM at PublicOrg revealed that:

We acknowledge that our manager has more qualifications than us, but then he doesn't know the plant as much as we do...we know the machinery inside out... Though I must say that when a machine starts acting funnily we require the engineer [manager] to be here because we feel better that we have someone more senior involved in the matter and who is authorised to take the final decision.
FLM-36

The testimony above indicates that PE fulfils a number of functions. It is necessary for MMs to reconcile theoretical and practical operational aspects. Also, considering that management is a social and political activity (Reed, 1984), making a show of strength through PE is a pivotal contributor for specialist MMs to survive and prosper. After all, they are concerned about the prosperity of the organisation in its totality, as well as their own career and the performance of the units running under their responsibility (Grugulis, 2007). Meanwhile, for SMs, PE serves as a guarantee that problems are being tackled and risks are being mitigated by MMs. In the case of subordinate employees, as much as these consider PE as a misleading measure in relation to practical skills, they explicitly revert to it to shield their own position. This indicates that they may have actually experienced the power of PE in particular circumstances. In any case, although there is tension along the hierarchy and MMs are subject to professional control, their role is not devalued, as outlined in the next subsection.

6.2.2 Distinctive returns

If MMs do not develop PE, they face problems fulfilling their role. While they initially have the theoretical know-what, they have to combine this with skills and experience for practical know-how to be acquired. When they do equip themselves with practical competence, they continue being pressurised by SMs to manage technical tasks and

changing work processes, which are increasingly becoming increasingly specialised, requiring more of their time and effort. Thus, PE, within the context of professional control, does subject MMs to a number of challenging obligations. However, it is difficult for the standing of MMs to deteriorate (Braverman, 1974; Mills, 1956), given that they exert operational control, and provide expert support and technical expertise (Reed, 1989). As a result, MMs have considerable autonomy and discretion as to how to conduct and deal with technical/specialist matters. Thus, certain aspects of professional control supported the MMs' autonomy. The view of this MM was typical:

When it comes to work in the technical field I have a lot of space; my manager gives me space in this sphere. He acknowledges that I'm reliable to take effective technical decisions and find timely and practical solutions to technical problems. In fact, he doesn't even question me in this regard.

MM-24

In order to support their managerial position, MMs turn to professional control's vertical aspect at least on two sequential counts. First, they turn to the vertical aspect with the intention of consolidating their structural position. Although there was intense rivalry between MMs and subordinate employees, based on who was the most practically competent, the selective recruitment (based on PE) did not threaten MMs' structural position. Indeed, on the contrary, it secured it. Recruitment conducted by managers, who were also professionals and reliant on credentialism, served MMs as a power strategy (Reed, 1996). Actually, interviewed FLMs, such as the one quoted next, repeatedly stressed that although they had more on-the-job experience than most MMs, they were not considered for such higher managerial positions unless they pursued a university degree:

Although I've been working at [PublicOrg] for over twenty years my only possibility to move forward is that of pursuing a [university] degree.

FLM-30

Such revelations by FLMs themselves affirm that a lack of formal qualifications and accredited expertise are making it increasingly difficult for these 'managers' to proceed to higher (middle) ranks. For operational continuity to be facilitated in the modern workplace exclusive reliance on 'tacit knowledge' is not enough. Consequently, 'professional experts' are preferred in middle managerial positions (Reed, 1989).

Indeed, and more importantly, professional control's vertical aspect supports MMs to preserve a degree of authority. MMs exert their influence on other employees, on the

basis that they are most responsible for the performance of specialised units (as managers), and also possess the most competence (as experts). Since both SMs and the other employees call upon MMs' PE in order to ensure the effective and efficient operation of these units, MMs exercise control over the LP in direct relation to specific tasks. Thus, specialist MMs preserve authority and execute control not only, or rather not mainly, on the basis of their managerial standing, but rather on the basis of their PE.

The second reason that MMs rely upon the vertical aspect of professional control is that they already experienced difficulty due to their incomplete managerial authority (chapter 5), and had to overcome another subject of tension, namely the way in which subordinate employees perceived seniority¹¹. From the elements that make up PE, experience takes the most time to acquire. Furthermore, through experience, knowledge and skills are optimised. Since most of the subordinate employees had more years of service than MMs, the former attempted to undermine the latter's authority on account of their longer work experience. As an MM remarked, seniority was the subordinate employees' most effective ploy in protecting their own interests:

Seniority here is a central feature; in the sense that employees who have been here for a long time expect that unquestionably they have a say on a number of decisions. [...] They always base any of their arguments on the basis of how many years they have been here.

MM-25

In these circumstances, and given that MMs' managerial authority was somewhat fragmented, these managers sought to direct the LP and exercise effective control on account of their PE, rather than on the basis of their hierarchical authority. For MMs, such as the one quoted directly below, PE serves as a power device for them to deal with the social dynamics surrounding the relationship they have with their employees:

Here you succeed to manage the people under your responsibility when they realise that you're really competent. You will win their respect when they realise that you're not at their mercy when it comes to taking critical technical decisions. Once you show them that you're competent and skilful, they respect you. They realise that I'm not just highly qualified, something that they can never achieve unless they follow a degree, but also that I do have the proper know-how. Moreover, they recognise the fact that they are good at certain tasks, while my approach is broader. Then it becomes less of a hassle to manage them.

MM-16

¹¹ Years of service.

Therefore, on one hand, professional control puts pressure on MMs, exposing them to tensions and making their work more demanding. On the other hand, having specialised expertise, and therefore exclusivity, over a set of activities means that they are able to protect their professional autonomy and managerial standing. Indeed, since their hierarchical authority was incomplete and seniority was also an issue, MMs directed the LP primarily on account of their PE (through professional control) as the ‘experts’. Indeed, MMs actually leverage the technical coordination of the LP to deal with the social coordination and control of the LP.

Consequently, within the parameters of professional control, it is on account of PE that MMs enjoy considerable authority, autonomy and discretion to determine technical, operational and certain managerial actions. Thus, although, MMs are facing increased rationalisation and an increased workload (Hassard *et al.* 2009), the evidence from this case study proves that it is difficult for MMs’ work to be deskilled in the Taylorist sense (Braverman, 1974). It is on this basis that this study casts doubt on Braverman’s (1974) thesis of progressive deskilling of managerial work. Rather than MMs’ work being deskilled, they require PE to execute their role. Moreover, given that their credentials are recognised within an institutional and legal framework, their superiors have no influence over them.

6.2.3 Normative dimension

A closer look at the application of professional control supports the discussion initiated in subsection 2.5.2, that is, in addition to the vertical aspect there are two other distinctive features of professional control that influence MMs’ behaviour. To be specific, these are the intrinsic and regulatory aspects, which work in combination with the vertical aspect. In contrast to the vertical aspect, these two aspects are triggered outside the workplace, but eventually shape MMs’ behaviour inside it and they lead to the establishment of a normative dimension. This comes as no surprise considering that ‘all’ forms of control have normative dimensions (Thompson and van den Broek, 2010). Therefore, at PublicOrg, normative orientations were not captured in practices such as corporate culture, but were instead derived from aspects attached to expert role of MMs. At work, MMs acted according to values, norms and standards that they internalised on the basis of their expert role. In fact, although MMs were overrun with work and their superiors did not micro-manage them, for them it was extremely important to attend to

the quality and value of their work. To do so, they were willing to make an extra effort if necessary, as outlined by one of the interviewed MMs below:

On the whole, the great majority of the professionals feel that they ought to give as much as possible, in the best way possible, irrelevant of what this entails, and that - - because if they don't act this way then they feel that they're weakening their own professional standard, professional level. I mean you can't behave in the same way as any other worker does.

MM-24

The fact that PublicOrg's MMs exerted extra effort even if they were not tightly monitored, complements the findings of Hassard *et al.* (2009) who concluded that, in the modern corporation, MMs devoted a great deal of effort to their jobs. This thesis argues that one reason for this is a certain ethos that develops around MMs and their profession. This ethos establishes what qualities, expectations and standards they must internalise in order to be considered 'good' professionals and it primarily urges them to deliver good quality work irrespective of what this entails.

Predominantly, when referring to their responsibilities, the interviewed MMs argued that, as professionals in an employment relationship, they did not stick to the bare legal minimum as constituted in contracts of employment. Instead, they embarked on patterns of action which, as professionals, they considered appropriate. An MM remarked:

Professionals are not able to work strictly according to a job description, a contract, or whatever. The knowledge, the ability and the commitment that the professionals possess make them flexible and eager to move things on. It's the profession itself that moulds us this way. In fact, we feel irritated each time we feel trapped in a structure because the profession itself already controls us. We don't want to put our reputation at risk; so in the first place we're controlled by the fact that all the time we want to carry out a correct piece of work based on knowledgeable decisions.

MM-25

MMs also made various references to the fact that even though mechanisms, such as the individual performance management programme, subjected them to extra burdens in terms of work and pressure. Nevertheless, they committed themselves to the extra work to avoid poor performance appraisals. One MM speaking on the performance appraisal claimed that, safeguarding the professional reputation, as seen in the light of the reporting lines within the hierarchy, was of primary importance:

For me what's more challenging is the fact that I don't want my [performance appraisal] document to carry for example a 60 percent mark. One's reputation means a lot. [...] Personally it would be embarrassing to have a professional who scores such a mark. If I scored such a low mark, I wouldn't even have the guts to step in here again and face the superiors who would have assessed me.

MM-27

Without challenging the assertion that MMs are concerned about obtaining a poor appraisal for 'fear' of losing bonus pay (Hassard *et al.* 2009), this thesis argues that, with respect to specialist MMs, this is certainly not the only reason, and possibly not even the main reason. During the interviews, even SMs emphasised that MMs made an effort to register their competence and achievement through the performance appraisal, believing that poor evaluations endangered their standing as professionals. Hence, fear of being 'labelled a failure' (ibid.) seems more likely to be the chief reason why specialist MMs make an effort to obtain 'good' appraisals.

Meanwhile, owing to the regulatory aspect, boundaries of what MMs' rights and duties are, arising from their expert role, are drawn. Most MMs, as warrant holders, ought to comply with relevant rules, laws and regulations, and should avoid any actions that discredit the profession (Volti, 2008). To ensure this, specific regulatory bodies operating under the various ministers are established in Maltese law. These bodies have the power to deal with cases leading to the suspension or withdrawal of warrants.

For specialist MMs, desirable behaviour is attained by means of informal processes and, in many cases, regulatory parameters that they internalise on the basis of their PE, rather than as a result of organisational rules and requirements that seek to control their behaviour. MMs' drive to embark on what, in their view, is work of high standing, indicates that, contrary to other forms of control, such as those which concentrate on fixed targets or outputs and operate on grounds of compliance (Thompson and van den Broek, 2010), the normative orientation within the context of professional control does not necessarily function on the basis of compliance without commitment.

The analysis offered so far complements, to some extent, the sociology of professions and the knowledge workers debate (presented in section 2.2). Yet, since this thesis conducted an LP analysis, concurrently it uncovered issues that were either ignored by these scholarships, or issues that contrast against these scholarships. Some reflections

are offered in this chapter, but a detailed discussion is presented in chapter 9 (subsections 9.5.1 and 9.5.3).

Conforming to the knowledge workers' debate, this thesis's evidence indicates that workers' knowledge (in this case that of MMs) is an important resource to address organisational problems (Blackler, 1995). On the basis of their expertise (e.g. accounting, engineering, and marketing functions), MMs solve high-level technical problems, which otherwise would cause disruptions to the organisation's operations. However, this thesis went further because a close analysis of professional control underlined tensions that MMs face in anticipating, handling and solving problems. Moreover, it established that for MMs to execute their role, they not only require theoretical knowledge, but also need to develop and master contextual, tacit and social knowledge. These forms of knowledge are regarded as lesser according to knowledge workers' proponents (Blackler *et al.* 1998; Frenkel *et al.* 1995), but this thesis refutes this assertion, since without these forms of knowledge MMs face difficulties and obstacles in carrying out their managerial function. The fact that, during the restructuring exercise, MMs were specifically trained only on these areas, supports this inference.

Regarding the sociology of professions, so far this thesis has reached similar conclusions to this scholarship in determining that MMs' high-level expertise and knowledge were instrumental in solving complex problems (Abbott, 1988; Freidson, 1970; 1994; Larson, 1977). However, on the basis of its data (detailed further in the next two sections), this thesis not only highlights the considerable autonomy and discretion that specialist MMs enjoy on the basis of their expertise. In addition, it has also focused on tensions and pressures that professionals in middle managerial positions, within large and complex organisations, experience at work. These issues tend to be put aside or be downplayed by the sociology of professions.

6.3 Bureaucratic control

As part of the restructuring exercise, PublicOrg streamlined its bureaucratic structure and systems. These changes were intended to make the organisation more responsive to the needs of customers, more accountable to taxpayers and to take more effective control of the workforce. Nevertheless, traditional mechanisms of bureaucratic rationalisation still characterised the organisation and its practices (Alvesson and

Thompson, 2005), given that hierarchy and rules were maintained in one form or another (Hales, 2002; Hassard *et al.* 2009). Evidently, the ‘old-style’ command and control management was not removed (Warhurst and Thompson, 1998).

In this context, although MMs retained autonomy (operational and professional), they had to assume more responsibilities and vertical accountability, while they remained concerned with routine administration. Due to the impact of the quasi-marketisation of PublicOrg and increased bureaucratic regulation through a variety of (quality) audit systems, MMs were subject to tighter work specification, work intensification and vertical line management (Alvesson and Thompson, 2005). As a result, MMs encountered tension caused by the fact that the ‘creativity’ to undertake expert labour and the desire of SMs to increase ‘control’, worked against each other. Actually, this tension has always been central to the expert labour debate (Thompson and McHugh, 2009; Warhurst and Thompson, 1998; 2006), with this section considering this from the middle-managerial angle.

At PublicOrg, aspects of bureaucratic control, which emanate from the formal structure of the organisation and are embedded in its social and organisational arrangements (Edwards, 1979), were expressed in the formalising of detailed job descriptions, the establishment of an individual performance management programme, and the implementation of intense documentation related to audits. These management tools intended to regulate MMs’ functions and activities, monitor their performance and measure their output, are typical for managers and professionals engaged within a public sector that assumes a market-based direction (Alvesson and Thompson, 2005; Carter *et al.* 2002; Carter and Fairbrother, 1995; Hassard *et al.* 2009; McGovern *et al.* 2007; Smith *et al.* 1991). Similar to other studies (*ibid.*), evidence from PublicOrg shows that these formal mechanisms put pressure on MMs and increased their workload. However, this study also demonstrates that, on those occasions when MMs feel that bureaucratic features are restricting their autonomy, they simply follow the parameters entrenched in their PE. Such a course of action does not mean that these MMs abdicate their responsibilities and duties, but rather that they choose to accomplish their role on account of their PE rather than on boundaries imposed by bureaucratic systems.

6.3.1 Explicit demarcations

As a result of the restructuring programme, MMs' job descriptions were heavily rationalised. In the view of SMs, MMs' job descriptions were re-articulated specifically: to create standardisation; to explicitly define tasks and responsibilities that the latter carried out on the basis of their cooperative attitude; and to consolidate multi-tasking. Thus, senior management's aim after such a revision was to widen and deepen the terrain of bureaucratic control to bring about stability and predictability (Edwards, 1979). As one MM put it:

My job description has been widened to a very broad extent. Now it's almost telling me that I don't have the right to say 'no' to anything.
MM-16

As part of the organisational reform, a performance appraisal was also put in place to "integrate, monitor and control" (Carter, 1985, p.98) the MMs' role down to the personal level. One of the interviewed SM indicated that the formulation of additional performance targets, together with the monitoring and evaluation functions, subjected MMs to further control:

We felt the need to have a new system in place, something practical in place, so that there will be on-going monitoring on the MMs. In this case we have a document, which is divided into three parts, so there's a high percentage that is devoted to objectives that they are expected to reach. Then you have a considerable portion, which is dedicated to their skills, their knowledge, ability, flexibility etc. In this section we consider also how well they get on with the people who report to them. Then there is another smaller section, which is linked to the corporate goals of the entity. [...] Overall, I would say that it was the performance appraisal, which in reality has left the major impact on their performance, because it's the most controllable mechanism that can be directed towards an increase in their performance.
SM-1

In addition to formally regulating MMs' behaviour, MMs' superiors stated that the annual performance appraisal was designed to send a forthright message to those whose input could be considerably improved. Another SM quoted below stressed that this new system allowed them to assign further specific tasks to MMs:

The performance appraisal has offered me a systematic tool to put on paper extra objectives that I officially request from my managers.
SM-3

Remarkably, when an SM was asked whether senior management was satisfied with how the performance appraisal was functioning, he replied as follows:

No we're not completely satisfied. Mainly, we aren't satisfied with the way some of [the SMs] are setting the objectives. There are the ones who are still incapable of distinguishing between routine duties and something extra. Now that something extra could not be specifically a tangible thing but it could be finishing a job in a shorter time...Having said this, we do acknowledge that setting a manager's appraisal needs more time and thinking.

SM-1

In line with LP analysis, rather than considering how the performance appraisal operates, what is particularly significant is the impact this managerial initiative has on the role of MMs. In the interviews, MMs referred to negative effects due to, for example, a number of shortages, which placed additional challenges on them, such as the fact that the yearly targets were not given on time and were not always discussed and agreed with them beforehand. The data gathered from PublicOrg supports other studies conducted in OECD economies (Hassard *et al.* 2009; 2011; McCann *et al.* 2004; 2008; 2010), which also unveil that performance management systems increase both the workload and pressure level on MMs. The views of this MM were typical:

The targets [of the performance appraisal] do put you under pressure, because the moment you reach one of the targets you soon realise that you're far behind on other targets.

MM-9

PublicOrg's MMs claimed that this programme loaded them with more work, and an MM explained that they were also annoyed by the specific strict rules that characterised it, which clearly worked against their interests:

Basically you would be given a number of objectives at the beginning of the year [...] but during the year the requirements change and so automatically my tasks change also. However, when it's time for my review to take place, I usually end up arguing with my manager because I always end up wanting to know which tasks he is going to consider when reviewing my performance. [...] It's ridiculous that they want more from us, but then they give the impression that they are only the appraisal's original goals and tasks that count.

MM-11

The increased bureaucratic regulation intended to rationalise, standardise and formalise processes meant that MMs had to deal with more demanding and rigorous documentation. One of the State's primary targets for the establishment of entities, like

PublicOrg, is for the latter to be administered by competent management, which gives rise to improved overall performance amid escalated transparency. For this target to be reached, there must be an increase in output controls such as centralised auditing and monitoring. In fact, the interviewed MMs referred to the fact that their employer - the State - demanded intensive and thorough reporting, specifically auditing reports, on a regular basis. Additionally, increased standards arising from the legislative framework, recognised best practices and considerations of possible lawsuits increased the demand for evaluations specifically requested of MMs.

The documentation delegated to MMs was meant: to record, in detail, work linked with targets; to carry out regulatory audits; to safeguard provisions in the laws; and to serve as a preventive measure for potential parliamentary questions, litigation or adverse media exposure. While such procedures did not completely eliminate MMs' autonomy, at times they did correspond to ineffective internal control processes and duties (red tape), which impacted negatively upon their role because these increased their workload without adding extra value to the organisation. During the interviews it became noticeable that MMs were not particularly troubled by the fact that they had to carry out evaluations. Instead, their concerns derived mainly from their discretionary power and implicit judgements being weakened through rationalisation of functions, and standardisation of reporting and procedures of management. As a result, unnecessary difficulties were created for MMs, as this particular MM pointed out:

Before, we used to carry out risk assessments and other work permits. We've always carried these out on the basis of our expertise. But now they've officialised and complicated these procedures, with which we ought to comply otherwise we wouldn't be authorized. Today, they've really tightened and formalised the procedures and now what's happening is that on occasions we find ourselves constrained from conducting work [because] we're bound to follow strict procedures in all cases. And you know who is the most troubled in cases like these? Us. Because, in such cases we have to change our plan of work, alter priorities for the day, think fast about other work to allocate to the workers etc.

MM-21

Accounts such as the above indicate that although MMs had acquired the necessary PE and associated autonomy, the formalisation and standardisation of work practices and procedures did put restrictions on them and increased their workload. This situation did not necessarily result in any particular value added to the organisational processes, when compared to how things were carried out before. To a certain extent, such work practices and procedures support an LPT interpretation, in terms of a restless process of

rationalisation, which seeks to attain rule-governed behaviour. Meanwhile, such evidence shows that managerial and professional work is moving steadily in the direction of bureaucratic control, a reality that commentators on professions and knowledge workers seems to overlook (Warhurst and Thompson, 1998).

While it proves difficult for MMs' work to be deskilled, the establishment of new auditing measures and accountability practices, are becoming 'ever present' aspects of their working life (Thompson and van den Broek, 2010). The implication is that MMs' autonomy is giving way in part to the organisation's formal risk management as well as emphasising the dutifulness of autonomy or personal responsibility (part of professional control).

The politics of restructuring pushing for heightened bureaucratic regulation constrains the behaviour of MMs. These constraints create tensions between 'management' driven from above and MMs' 'expert labour' (Warhurst and Thompson, 1998). However, as elaborated in subsection 6.3.2, since MMs have the autonomy to make decisions on the basis of their PE, there are instances when they simply ignore the explicit boundaries established by bureaucratic procedures. Yet, evidence suggests that MMs do not discard risk management procedures to reduce personal responsibility in the event of mishaps.

6.3.2 Boundaries thrown overboard

It is difficult for MMs to envisage what theoretical and/or practical matters they have to deal with on a daily basis; their role is characterised by a considerable degree of uncertainty and ambiguity that requires them to initiate expert problem-solving (Delmestri and Walgenbach, 2005). These circumstances make it particularly difficult for their role to be fitted within the parameters of bureaucratic control. Nevertheless, SMs still seek to standardise procedures and implement processes, aiming to achieve MMs' predictability as much as possible. In reality, however, MMs mainly mould their own role on account of their PE and, indeed, they do not feel uneasy about, at times, bending rules (such as bureaucratic ones) as they deem suitable according to the circumstances.

Many of PublicOrg's MMs claimed that even though their job descriptions were heavily modified, they simply did not follow them. Their goal was to maintain the flexibility they required to smoothly operate the unit functioning under their responsibility, rather than to work within the boundaries of their job description. They

felt that they had to do what was necessary within their power to deal with daily operational issues, which tend to be unpredictable. As one MM explained, they wanted to remain creative rather than being held down by principles of bureaucratic control:

As professionals we carry out what ought to be carried out, no matter what is written down. We work according to the exigencies of the work that we have at hand...For us it's irrelevant what is written down because we want to find a solution in any case.

MM-16

For MMs, what is important, in the midst of the growing internal demands and external pressures, is not to follow rigid boundaries established by bureaucratic procedures such as job descriptions. Instead, it is their PE, expressed in competence, responsibility, commitment and dedication, that maps out their job's spans and boundaries.

Notably, while MMs gave the impression that, for them, their job descriptions were meaningless, when the revision of the subordinate employees' job descriptions was carried out, MMs did play a role in their design. MMs explained that this was a thorough exercise, since the explicit content of the job descriptions was not just instrumental for them to control employees when other modes collapsed or when faced with difficult ones, but was also a means for them to uphold their leverage as managers. This was particularly important for MMs whose managerial authority was incomplete with respect to other aspects of HR. One of the MMs, speaking on subordinate employees' job descriptions noted:

Now [that the employees' job descriptions have been revised] if a worker refuses to carry out a piece of work, we can straight away let him know that such duty is included in black and white in his new job description. Hence, now we have a stronger basis on which to take action.

MM-17

The way in which MMs consider their own job description stands in direct contrast to how they use the job descriptions of their subordinate employees. MMs seek to avail of explicit boundaries (employees' job descriptions) to impose control and exercise their authority as managers, but reject others (their own job descriptions) to protect their autonomy as managers-and-experts. Ultimately, the data show that, for MMs, their labour extraction does not derive chiefly from formal and official mechanisms that seek to regulate their LP similar to the other employees, but results mainly from their PE. For

MMs, the latter is the true basis of control, which translates their potential output into a concrete output. An MM emphasised that there were instances when they even discarded the boundaries set by the individual performance appraisal that covered their role:

If we had to work literally by the book, with respect to the appraisal, then rest assured we'd never manage to move forward. We don't, because it's impressive how much unplanned work gets in the way every year. One tries to follow the yearly goals set, but it's our expertise that guides us most of the time. Irrespective of written parameters, we set our priorities on the basis of the issues that we have at hand.

MM-21

The appraisal mechanism to some extent enhances SMs' capacity to load, monitor and evaluate closely MMs' work (Carter, 1985). However, the unpredictability, deriving from unanticipated events that distinguish the role of MMs, drives them to primarily direct their action on the basis of PE. This implies that the appraisal does not completely stifle their autonomy.

Overall, for MMs, the organising principle that chiefly guided their actions was their PE and not the bureaucratic procedures. This does not mean that they did not internalise certain elements of bureaucratic control, which, as elaborated in the next section, intensified their work. However, as soon as they suspected that bureaucratic elements attempted to suffocate their autonomy, they relied upon their PE to defend it.

The forms of control looked at so far, namely professional control (with its normative dimension) and bureaucratic control, interact in the sense that their objective is to reduce the indeterminacy gap between MMs' potential input and actual output. However, these forms of control give rise to different tensions. The former arises from the expert role of MMs, while the latter is directly imposed, given that they are subordinate to an organisational hierarchy.

Professional control creates tension for MMs, but they have a basic interest to maintain the role they perform on the basis of their PE, within the context of professional control. An increase in professional control means greater operational autonomy and technical discretion, a key part in the LP, and a decreased in the likelihood of their role being devalued. Additionally, the more MMs strive to follow top-level standards and aim for a high-level reputation, the more they protect their role against devaluation.

Contrastingly, the formalisation and standardisation of work practices and processes found in bureaucratic control, directly contradict the extent, creativity and flexibility of the role of MMs. Therefore, an increase in bureaucratic control leads to a reduction in MMs' autonomy, with the exception of its use by MMs for risk management. Indeed, as presented in the next section, even if the increased reporting and assessments did load MMs with additional work, they appreciated the aspect of these practices that could be used to guard their interests.

6.4 Work intensification

PublicOrg's MMs, similar to others engaged in public organisations undergoing restructuring, ended up working under substantial work pressure due to work intensification (Carter and Fairbrother, 1995; Carter *et al.* 2002; Hassard *et al.* 2009; 2011; McCann *et al.* 2008; 2010). They incurred increased responsibility and faced a larger workload due to a flatter and contracted managerial structure, inadequate resources and new work systems. Furthermore, the performance appraisal mechanism and intensive documentation led to work intensification, while technology and the growing number of deadlines also increased their stress levels. MMs were working for longer, often outside office hours, in order to keep their workload under control.

This study goes further than simply supporting other studies (*ibid.*) in demonstrating how the working lives of MMs are increasingly subject to work intensification (subsection 6.4.1). In subsection 6.4.2, it argues that there are aspects of work intensification, which support MMs because they give them the opportunity to explicitly exhibit their abilities and efforts, and to defend their decisions (Cooke, 2006). Thus, at a time when MMs are concerned about losing their job (Hassard *et al.* 2011; McGovern *et al.* 2007), at least the intensification of their work is instrumental in protecting their position.

6.4.1 Work intensification's adverse symptoms

The focus here is devoted to the following three factors that led to the intensification of MM work: individualised performance appraisal that was implemented specifically for them; reporting that was requested of them and the usage of a management software programme, which was recently implemented and which MMs were duty bound to use.

MMs discarded the strict boundaries of their job descriptions (at all times) and appraisal goals (at times), due to the unpredictability of work demands, management by crises and on the basis of their PE. Nevertheless, overall MMs wanted to preserve their reputation by exerting effort to achieve expected annual performance goals. Indeed, although not explicitly admitted, MMs did not completely discard the performance appraisal mechanism and were apprehensive about the consequences they would face for poor performance (Hassard *et al.* 2009), which had a direct effect on their track record. Ultimately, as an MM put it this situation led to a steady and constant increase in performance pressure and work intensification, generally lengthening their working days and weeks, causing more anxiety:

What is really annoying is the fact that once I reach an annual target as part of the performance appraisal, then come next year that target will remain as part of my work.

MM-19

While evidence from PublicOrg echoes the conclusions drawn by other studies that focus exclusively on MMs (Hassard *et al.* 2009; 2011), it doubts the assertions drawn by scholars who have claimed that the implementation of performance management systems foster positive outcomes for those subject to them (Appelbaum *et al.* 2000; Ashton and Sung, 2002; Macduffie, 1995; Macky and Boxall, 2007; Sparham and Sung, 2007). On the basis of its empirical evidence, this thesis claims that the latter overlook realities, such as the overwork culture and the incessant demands, which have negative effects, in this case on MMs.

MMs emphasised that, besides increased operational workload and performance targets, demanding documentation was increasingly requested of them. Their superiors and external authorities expected them to document activities and decisions that previously did not have to be detailed officially. In this case, as two MMs pointed out during the interviews, their distress was mainly two-fold. First, they were very eager to prevent documentation from deviating their attention from what they considered as their primary concern:

Yes, [reporting] has increased a lot. It has now become part of our daily work. I make sure that this reporting won't hinder my technical focus, which is an integral focal point in my role.

MM-14

Second, since these reports carried their name, and on some occasions they were not aware where they might end up, they had no choice but to find time to do them as professionally and punctually as possible:

The reporting we're expected to carry out has increased drastically because now we have to carry out weekly reports, monthly reports, yearly reports and special reports. In reality it develops into an issue because you need time to complete good reporting, if anything let's not forget that it's going to bear our signature.

MM-23

During the interviews, all MMs made reference to a management software programme, which had recently been implemented. This completely changed the way in which they used to carry out reporting and it also gave their superiors the opportunity to monitor closely their activities. Indeed, one SM confided: 'I have to say that this program has really loaded the MMs' (SM-5). On their part, MMs did not just refer to the fact that this software programme made it easier for their superiors to monitor their work, but discredited it also on the basis that it was 'complex and heavy', thus requiring more of their time and effort:

The [new management software programme] takes a lot of our time because it's very complex. It's not adequate for the specific necessities that we have here and it isn't user-friendly. It's absolutely not user-friendly. Now you might ask me: 'but aren't you all computer literate?' That's true. At my level we're all computer literate, but this program requires more than this for us to use it...Anyway we're bound to use it for our reporting, and this has also increased.

MM-27

MMs encountered conflicting pressures, since they experienced tensions between the autonomy they needed to carry out their role and the constraints to which management practices gave rise. MMs are expected to, and to a degree they want to, support management practices specifically because they are part of the managerial regime and as professionals they want to safeguard their reputation, but at the cost of working longer hours and more intensely, thus 'making our life more difficult' (MM-22). However, as highlighted in the next subsection there are aspects of bureaucratic control and work intensification, which actually work in their favour.

6.4.2 Work intensification effects

Typically, systems that lead to work intensification are regarded as adverse manifestations, but in the case of MMs there appear to be some worthwhile outcomes. In principle, while SMs sought to extract more effort from MMs through intensifying their work, the latter managed to gain not just financial incentives, but also non-financial benefits (McGovern *et al.* 2007). Indeed, when looking beneath the surface of procedures such as written documentation and the individualised performance programmes, and the way the MMs handle them, it turns out that these procedures carry aspects which actually support their actions and subsequently their autonomy.

As noted previously, MMs insisted that there were occasions when they were somewhat reluctant to carry out the required written documentation, not because they did not acknowledge its importance, but because their '[our] priority is the operations' (MM-14). Thus, since they were more prepared to dedicate time and effort to the practical aspect of their role, they often considered reporting as something that used up the time they would otherwise spend on 'hands-on responsibilities'. Concurrently, various MMs, such as the one quoted directly below, realised that some aspects of documentation served to shield them, thus leading to what Cooke (2006) refers to as a 'defensive culture':

Recently the big bosses were carrying out an inquest on an installation that was carried out some years ago, a project in which I was extremely involved. I managed to get out clean from this inquest because I had documented all the details and kept good records, otherwise I wouldn't have remembered the details. I'm definitely one of those in favour of record keeping, even if it gives me more work. [...] Since [the management software programme] has been introduced, almost three years ago, it has helped us even further to systematise better the reporting.

MM-21

The above quote shows that although MMs heavily criticised the new management software programme, at the same time several of them realised its potential to defend their decisions and position. Accordingly MMs strove to acquire the necessary skills, such as those associated with adaptability, to use it in the most effective and efficient way. An MM explained that, contrary to other employees, MMs generally adopted the appropriate attitude to make the best use of this programme, realising that some of its features had practical advantages for them:

There are a number of my employees who are refusing to use [the new management software programme] even if they are asked to use a very small section of it. Now mind you, it's true that this system isn't so user-friendly, but then the data that you can extract from it is vast, so that makes this program very useful.

MM-17

One of the interviewed MMs revealed that, eventually, they did carry out the increased documentation to the best of their ability, not just to protect their own decisions and be able to mitigate personal responsibilities in case of mishaps, but also because it was a way to exhibit their output quantity and level of competence:

[Reporting] is important because through it you are giving a picture of what you did, of what you're capable of doing, of what is going on in your unit.

MM-15

Another MM was keen to point out that particular aspects of reporting were actually useful and instrumental because they offered them an opportunity to reflect upon their own work:

We learn when carrying out reporting because we go through a certain process in order to carry out a report. It helps us to rationalise our thinking and it also serves us to reflect on our decisions, so it works out also as a learning curve.

MM-24

Meanwhile, although MMs were highly pessimistic about the extra performance pressure imposed on them by the individual performance management system and the subsequent restrictions, they did consider the annual performance appraisal document as a 'certificate' of their competence, effort and degree of work carried out:

What has really boosted me is the fact that at least once a year, a [performance appraisal] document on my individual competence, performance and effort is being generated, and for me that's something very positive, something that keeps me on my toes. My superior presents this report to the chief HR and to the chief technical officer. So I consider this as a certificate of my work which is then stored as part of my history.

MM-27

Overall, PublicOrg's MMs did enjoy considerable autonomy on the basis of their PE and managerial standing. Nevertheless, their behaviour was contained not only by external regulatory bodies and on grounds of self-control (Ainsworth and Harley, 2014; Thompson, 1989; Volti, 2008), but also by means of management instruments (intensive reporting and assessments, individual performance appraisals, software

programming, etc.). These managerial practices were steered by pressures for accountability, efficiency and cost containment driven from above and they were used to control, induce performance pressure, rationalise and intensify the role of MMs.

Hence, in contrast to the sociology of professions, this thesis does not assume that autonomy and self-control are the turning points of the professionals even when their work is undertaken in bureaucratic organisations (Russell *et al.* 2015; 2016). Rather, it challenges this assertion on grounds of empirical evidence. The data show that specialist MMs had to execute their role amid increased constraints on their professional and operational autonomy, due to a fusion of bureaucratic control and performance management. These features curb their behaviour and intensify their work. Nonetheless, this thesis was able to show that such managerial initiatives served as a by-product for MMs to showcase their abilities and boost their competence, defend their decisions, and ultimately protect their position. These outcomes indicate that such control systems did more than intensify MMs' role or limit their autonomy outright.

6.5 Conclusion

In line with post-Braverman contributions (Friedman, 1977a; Edwards, 1979; Burawoy, 1979, 1985), this study indicates that while there is a control imperative in MMs' LP, the forms of control in place are more complex and varied when compared to the claims put forward through Taylorism. Additionally, tensions surrounding the MMs are sharper. MMs are trapped in a role that controls and coordinates, they undertake expert labour (encouraging creativity and innovation) but are increasingly subject to performance monitoring, greater workloads, longer hours and decreased job security. These features curb their actions and lead to pressure and stress (Edwards *et al.* 1996; Hassard *et al.* 2009; Warhurst and Thompson, 1998).

Undoubtedly, it is the difficult task of LP analysis to determine "how to reconcile management *as* control with (parts of) management as subject *to* controls" [emphasis in the original] (Thompson and van den Broek, 2010, p.3). The analysis carried out in this chapter suggests that specialist MMs as 'subject *to* controls' use PE to offset restrictive elements of traditional forms of control (bureaucratic control and work intensification) aimed at them. Consequently, they reconcile, as much as possible, their 'controlled' position with the autonomy to manage and to undertake expert labour from their position as 'controllers-specialists'. Concurrently, MMs '*as* control', when faced

with incomplete line management authority, capitalise on PE (through professional control's vertical aspect) to be able to manage.

The hybrid set of control practices (professional control with its normative dimension, bureaucratic control and work intensification) surrounding MMs, work in combination to address the indeterminacy gap of MMs' managerial-expert labour (Thompson and Harley, 2007; Thompson and van den Broek, 2010). These forms of control are actually interlinked because they strive, in different ways, to extract labour from MMs' labour power (their PE) and to restrict their autonomy to manage. However, once the limiting aspects of such control practices, particularly bureaucratic control and work intensification, do not overcome the autonomy and standing that MMs defend on the basis of their PE, it becomes difficult for these managers' roles to be degraded. Rather, this study shows that MMs use PE to preserve (at least partially) their autonomy, hence it becomes difficult for their role to be deskilled and/or devalued.

Professional control with its normative orientation gives rise to different tensions from those arising from bureaucratic control and work intensification. Its vertical aspect puts MMs under considerable pressure, leading to anxiety. On account of their credentials (regulated by the State), MMs obtain a managerial position from which they execute specialised technical duties and operational activities to coordinate and integrate the LP within specialised units. The execution of such technical duties and managerial activities, along with the assumption of personal responsibilities and risks for sensitive decisions, subjects MMs to professional control.

However, given that professional control comprises aspects, which are not imposed on MMs by their superiors (intrinsic and regulatory), it is more advantageous for MMs to be governed by professional control rather than with other forms of control. Additionally, since within the context of professional control MMs are responsible for providing technical expertise, expert support and operational control (Reed, 1989), they inevitably enjoy a considerable degree of authority and discretion to execute their role. These features position them closer to senior management and in a powerful position with subordinate employees (Armstrong, 1989; Hales, 2005; Watson, 2001).

Indeed, in those cases in which MMs' managerial authority is incomplete, they exercise effective control and coordinate the LP on account of their PE. Hence, within the context of professional control, it is on grounds of PE that MMs avail themselves of

significant authority, autonomy and discretion to decide and act on technical, operational and particular generic managerial aspects. Moreover, the normative dimension, driven by the intrinsic and regulatory aspects of professional control, compels MMs to perform work to a high quality and not to be restricted by boundaries established by managerial systems.

These circumstances stand in contrast to Braverman's (1974) accentuation on progressive deskilling and work degradation even of the 'middle layers', and the proletarianisation thesis. Instead, this study shows that the role of MMs necessitates different forms of knowledge, a multitude of skills and the actual development of PE, which accords a greater role to aspects of professional control. An increase in professional control and the normative dimension reduces the chances of deskilling and devaluation, while it shifts the MM's role towards management, mostly the coordination function.

Besides manifesting how the dynamics of professional control (which is not based on command and coercion) work, this study marks the presence and centrality of traditional forms of control. These operate alongside professional control, to restrict the middle managerial regime. Thus, this study runs counter to assertions made by HRM scholars and several poststructuralist writers regarding the contraction or disappearance and lack of extent and effectiveness of traditional forms of control in the modern workplace (Thompson and Harley, 2007; Thompson and O'Doherty, 2009). Instead, this study shows that although MMs' behaviour is controlled through aspects of professional control, bureaucratic rationalisation and work intensification, are two traditional control mechanisms that, by and large, function particularly to control these managers' behaviour in ways similar to those that operate in the case of other workers.

These forms of control are put in place with the objective of making MMs' behaviour more predictable and stable (Edwards, 1979), by formalising and standardising work practices and procedures. As a result they seek to directly restrict MMs' autonomy and increase their workload, thus compromising the creativity and flexibility that these managers need to carry out their role. However, on grounds of their PE, these managers discard boundaries imposed by bureaucratic systems, except in those cases in which they use them for risk management and to mitigate personal responsibility in the event of mishaps. Regarding work intensification, MMs adhere only to certain aspects, which end up supporting their standing, at a time when

uncertainties in the workplace are considerably high. Amid work intensification, MMs use the same management initiatives that are meant to curb their behaviour, to protect their actions and position, while explicitly exhibiting their competence and efforts.

Against this background, it may be concluded that, on the basis of their PE, professional control with its normative orientation *supports* MMs' autonomy and standing. Meanwhile, in the case of bureaucratic control and work intensification, MMs draw on their PE to *defend* their autonomy from boundaries explicitly imposed from above. Nonetheless, MMs do comply with particular aspects of bureaucratic control and work intensification that are beneficial for their expert role and managerial standing. Hence, this study's data suggest that the struggles led by MMs both upwards and downwards and with respect to their role, are framed on the terrain of PE. While it remains difficult to deduct a priori the functions PE actually absorbs, MMs used it as a source to: preserve to some degree their autonomy; protect their managerial standing in relation to SMs; to acquire a degree of authority with respect to subordinate employees; and to resist deskilling.

When engaging the findings presented in this chapter with major scholarly debates, it turns out that the LP analysis offered by this thesis complements the expert labour debate. Contrastingly, despite sharing some common ground with the sociology of professions and knowledge workers approaches regarding the centrality of expertise and theoretical knowledge, overall this thesis's analysis challenges these debates.

Owing to their competence, based on accredited qualification, MMs settled into PublicOrg's specialised unit and occupied reasonable privileged positions, from which they managed to reduce uncertainties and addressed organisational problems (Armstrong, 1985; Reed, 1996). However, since the high level of creativity that they require to execute their role (Delmestri and Walgenbach, 2005) ran contrary to (top) managerial practices and impositions, they did experience tension. Such tension is at the core of expert labour (Thompson and McHugh, 2009).

Meanwhile, this analysis questions the sociology of professions and knowledge workers' debate, because these schools of thought devote their focus to the knowledge of the individual actor (Grugulis, 2007) and to knowledge management (Drucker, 1991; 1993; Ichijo *et al.* 1998), to the detriment of actually dealing with the problem of management. These approaches overlook broad contextual issues that have a direct

influence on the maintenance of control over workers (including managerial, professional and knowledge ones) in the pursuit of capital accumulation (Warhurst and Thompson, 1998; 2006; Thompson and McHugh, 2009) (see section 9.5 for more discussion).

Considering that PE makes it difficult for the role of MMs to be deskilled and/or degraded, and through which they maintain considerable autonomy, the next chapter outlines how, on various occasions, these managers take action to defend their identity and interests as professionals positioned within the managerial realm.

7. Mapping middle managers' agency

7.1 Introduction

MMs at PublicOrg had to deal with various tensions that characterised their relationships with both their superiors and subordinate employees. This chapter explores how they embarked on specific *acts* of behaviour in the pursuit of particular *motives*. At PublicOrg, these tensions in the LP that MMs experienced were expressed as: *official trade union action* - although MMs were unionised, generally they were unwilling to pursue collective action through their union; *formal individual grievance* - this occurred each time MMs directly targeted the hierarchy in the employment relationship; *complicity in rule breaking* - this took place on occasions when MMs deliberately sanctioned subordinate employees' rule bending or MMs themselves embarked on unruly behaviour which had a collective aspect; and *cynical attitude* - grounded in MMs' pessimistic and suspicious forms of action towards certain senior managerial decisions.

Before looking into the different categories of MMs' behaviour, it must be noted that these managers' expressions of tension could not be considered from the OB perspective. The latter's academic interest is to highlight misbehaviour as negative and harmful within organisations (Vardi and Wiener, 1996 and Giacalone and Greenberg, 1997). These assertions stand in contrast to MMs' rationale behind their unruly actions, at least on two counts. Initially, MMs' primary intention is not to bring about irrationality and/or inefficiency, but to protect their autonomy and position in the LP, or to challenge higher authority on objective grounds. MMs' interest-base in the employment relationship is fundamental, to the point that each time they feel that this is going to be endangered, they retaliate. Although the consequences of such retaliation are not detrimental to the operations of the work organisation, these expressions are forms of oppositional practices emerging from the workplace relations, which could not go unnoticed as they do have meaning and distinct rationales (Bélanger and Thuderoz, 2010). Secondly, it would not be fitting to consider MMs' opposing behaviour, designed to defend their standing and esteem, as behaviour that causes damage to the organisation (Vardi and Wiener, 1996).

PublicOrg's MMs embarked on particular behaviour patterns mainly to preserve their autonomy and standing as professionals in managerial positions. However, while MMs

did embark on unruly behaviour to safeguard their own interests, they were unenthusiastic about mobilising collective action through their union. Instead, they preferred the more individual and informal type of action. Such a state of affairs reflects a change in balance of forms of actions, from the traditional, that are collective and formal, to those generally individual and informal in nature.

Although MMs at the case study organisation were unionised, their actions were significantly affected by the ever-rising influence of professional forms of organisations (certificates, warrants, professional bodies, etc.) and the increased focus upon their individual accountability and achievement. These elements accentuated MMs' individuality to the extent that these managers preferred to avoid collective action through their trade union, believing that this would jeopardise their distinct identity and interests. The highlighted emphasis on professional identity, as well as individual conduct, performance and monitoring, have affected the conditions necessary for the production of collective, overt, formal, organised action amongst MMs.

Once this chapter has mapped MMs' opposing behaviour (sections 7.2 - 7.5), the last section (7.6) attempts to route MMs' opposing practices and noncompliant behaviour within a theoretical framework developed from the industrial sociological perspective (see section 2.4). This framework regards unruly behaviour in the workplace either as 'resistance' or 'misbehaviour'. Resistance is considered as "an outcome of antagonism between capital and labour" (Ackroyd and Thompson, 1999, p.24), with connotations of being "overt, principled, and perhaps formally organized" (Collinson and Ackroyd, 2005, p.306) and "intentional, active, upwardly-directed" (Ackroyd and Thompson, 2015, p.194). On the other hand, misbehaviour is held to constitute "anything you do at work you are not supposed to do" (Ackroyd and Thompson, 1999, p.2) to "largely informal and covert actions of work limitations, time-wasting and dissent" (Ackroyd and Thompson, 2015, p.194).

7.2 Official trade union action

Before considering the mechanics of how official trade union action functions in the case of MMs, this section looks at the role trade union membership played at the case study organisation. Such a review is appropriate given that PublicOrg's MMs had been unionised before the major organisational restructuring actually commenced and

subsequently remained members even though, in a neo-liberal national context, trade unionism is less likely to influence restructuring initiatives at organisational level (Ackers, 2015). In fact, this review is essential given that studies which have focused exclusively on how organisational restructuring affects MMs' working lives (who are mostly not unionised) (Hassard *et al.* 2009) foresee 'union resistance' as one possible means of adjusting the intensive LP these managers are facing in the modern corporation.

When there were strong indications that PublicOrg was about to enter into liberalisation and privatisation processes, instigating organisational restructuring, MMs unionised in a house union¹² that they set up¹³ to establish a collective voice. Through the establishment of the house union, MMs clearly distinguished themselves from the other employees working at the case study organisation, who were represented by a general union. This suggests that the occupational reality was an imperative prerequisite for unionisation amongst the MMs, meaning that the employment relationship, though a necessary condition, was not the only necessary condition (Ackers, 2015).

All of the interviewed MMs, with the exception of one¹⁴, were trade union members. Most claimed that they became members because they felt the need to organise themselves collectively, particularly at a time when their employment was still at risk. On this matter, one interviewed MM noted the following:

I've joined the union because it's a question of collectiveness. At the end of the day the more members, the stronger the union is, at least that's the hope.

MM-11

Some MMs gave reasons for their membership, which were more individual in nature, such as to seek advice about one's rights. However, the main reasons given by MMs for becoming trade union members were not individualistic in nature. Notably, none of those interviewed said that they joined so that, through an active membership, they

¹² In the literature also referred to as company union. Within the Maltese scenario, the house union or company union is an independent union registered with the State's Department of Employment and Industrial Relations, whose members are employed at a particular public or private entity.

¹³ Details about the MMs' unionisation are kept to a minimum for reasons of confidentiality of the case study organisation.

¹⁴ During the interview this MM claimed that his intention was to join so his lack of membership at the time of the interview was not one of principle.

could mobilise militant collective action against those who manage the organisation from the very top. Over half of the MMs interviewed confessed that they were passive union members.

When MMs were questioned about the effectiveness of their union, three MMs argued that their union could do little amid a wave of restructuring on a national scale, particularly as their union was not affiliated with any of Malta's general trade unions. However, the majority of MMs approved of the way their colleagues on the house union committee dealt with top management. From the accounts given by MMs with respect to their union, it was perceptible that because of their employment relationship, role and position they did not really consider its potential of destabilising the operations of PublicOrg through organised collective action. An MM made this point sharply:

For example, direct confrontation, naming-and-shaming [PublicOrg] and those at the top on the media, are not the ways we [MMs' union] tackle issues with our superiors. And I share this feeling with the majority of my colleagues. We tend to arrive at these conclusions especially in light of the fact that we hold a particular status as regards our occupation, and it's precisely this status that doesn't allow us to react in this way.

MM-27

Rather, as one union official claimed, MMs were keen to preserve its function as a collective voice on the basis of their managerial-professional identity, thereby confirming that "collective identity exists and that collective identity is a necessary precursor for employee voice" (Marks and Chillias, 2014, p.109). However, the data from PublicOrg indicates that having a collective voice does not necessarily increase the likelihood of it being heard at all times. Indeed, MMs on the house union's committee admitted that although they had an established 'voice', which they sought to cultivate, this was not regularly taken into account, particularly by those at the very top of the organisation. This meant that those who held most power at PublicOrg did not always listen to MMs' views and complaints put forward by their union, and did not regularly divulge to the union the plans made at the top level. An MM who was also a trade union official confessed:

We're not satisfied with the amount of information and consultation that takes place with us as a union.

MM-24

During the interviews, one MM who is also an official of the MMs' union, claimed that instead of establishing their own body they could have merged with the subordinate workers' union, a general union. He argued that such a move could have possibly provided them with greater clout, particularly at a national level, but at the same time the probability is that it would have diminished their autonomy. Hence, although MMs were upset that they were not consulted and given important information on a regular basis, they still preferred carrying on with a body which was completely their own. This particular official explained that had their union failed to satisfy their needs, they would have either sought to change its *modus operandi* or to affiliate with a general trade union. These were choices which MMs at PublicOrg did not adopt and, as transpired upon further questioning, they had not even considering. Moreover, even the few managers who were somewhat critical of the functions of the union retained their membership. Subsequently, such circumstances substantiate the assertion that the union was not meant to serve as a body for officially organised action, which is often adversarial in nature. Instead, MMs who were also committee members, such as the one quoted below, wanted their union to resemble a staff association instead of a fully-fledged (confrontational) trade union, whereby the emphasis was on cooperation:

When a new chairman is appointed we ask for a meeting to introduce ourselves and make our presence felt as a union. We explain that our intention is to work together with him and the top management team, and that as a union we're always very supportive in the way we operate, but that we expect to be respected.

MM-18

Such revelations of one union official support the assertion that trade unions seeking to mobilise personnel with a 'powerful professional identity' tend to present themselves as a 'professionals' forum' rather than stress the role of traditional unionism (Taylor and Bain, 2008). Accordingly, while in their accounts MMs made multiple references to the collectively organised trade union actions carried out by subordinate employees, the interviewed MMs' trade union officials explained that they did not contemplate strike action. They explained that they also avoided reverting to other forms of industrial action, as much as possible, even though they had the legal mechanism to do so, given that their union was a registered one. One MM who was also a trade union official noted the following on this issue:

We rarely use industrial action and when we do it's often in the form of restrictions in the means of communication, such as the use of email and telephone.

MM-14

Consistent with this testimony, there were some MMs who during the interviews confessed that they felt uneasy about participating in industrial actions led by their union. So regardless of the fact that the industrial directives called by the house union were legitimate, of a mild nature and infrequently triggered, there were members who self-consciously and intentionally did not fully follow collective action or simply ignored it. As one MM put it, MMs acted this way because, in their opinion, official trade union action compromised their managerial responsibilities and professional role:

I don't follow industrial directives even if I know that this way I'll be just weakening my position...but...as a professional I cannot imagine myself creating obstacles for the operations that I'm managing.

MM-7

Another MM emphasised that, although he was a trade union member, he chose not to pursue formal industrial action as it jeopardised his position vis-à-vis the operations under his responsibility. Accordingly, he asserted his dutifulness and protected his operational decisions and structural position. When this MM was specifically asked: 'do you follow the industrial actions issued by your union?', the reply was:

No I don't. For example, industrial action that prohibits us from using means of communication, presents me with a problem, because in that case what should I do if there's an emergency? In these circumstances, how can I not call my superior and inform him that half the area under my responsibility is without service? During such an instance even I would need support and I'll do everything possible to get it, in spite of the directive that would be in place. I feel completely liable...I do what I think is right, no matter what directive there is in place.

MM-17

Such behaviour was beneficial to their superiors, but MMs did not appear to be bothered by this, confirming that their allegiances were in fact tilted towards the managerial aspect of their role. Indeed, even those MMs who did follow industrial directives sought some 'leeway', as this particular MM indicated:

We find it uncomfortable to obey [industrial] actions, knowing that these will hinder the operations. Saying this, personally, I'm one of those few who generally follow industrial actions, which occur once every blue moon...But to be honest, do you know what I do? I call my manager and tell him that my door is still open

if he wants to have a word on a one-to-one basis...On the basis of my position I feel it's my responsibility to have some leeway in such circumstances.

MM-22

Such statements confirm that MMs established a union to collectively represent them, but not necessarily to mobilise them for collective action, affirming that managerial unionism takes a different form to that of conventional blue-collar trade unionism (Reed, 1989). Despite the fact that MMs had set up a recognised trade union to defend their standing and the absolute majority of them were members, in the process of interviewing it became evident that realising the need for collective organisation was one thing, but active trade union participation and involvement in an organised expression of resistance was quite another. The probability is that in the case of MMs, even if they are unionised, there is an element where official organised action stands in conflict with their professional standards, norms, warrants and hierarchical position. Thus, when MMs at PublicOrg tried to express concerns through formal trade union action it was not effective, due to their dual-role (managers-and-experts), which positioned them as part of the chain of command. This supports the assertion that MMs' ambivalent role shapes the degree and form of opposition that they offer (Hassard *et al.* 2011).

The empirical evidence presented above reveals that, although formal trade union action did exist at PublicOrg, it was not on the whole utilised and when it was, it was not very effective, because of the moderate degree to which MMs apply it. Nonetheless, the MMs' independent collective organisation had an important function with regard to the shaping of their identity and the establishment of an in-house community. The house union led to the collective provision of standardised terms and conditions of employment, which otherwise would have been individualised or possibly categorised in relation to MMs' different expertise or areas of work. Hence, through the trade union, even if it actually operated as a staff association, the MMs maintained a collective identity. Additionally, the union was instrumental in cultivating a professional community amongst MMs.

Overall, this research indicates that MMs are not keen to pursue effective collective actions but this does not mean that they do not offer opposition or use other forms of action. Indeed, notwithstanding the infrequent and mild official trade union action,

some indications from this research refute the assertions and arguments put forward by post-structuralists and Foucauldian writers who substantively claim that conflict no longer exists in the contemporary workplace (Knights and Willmott, 1989). Instead, it supports those who sustain that even though the industrial landscape has gone through a number of changes (Ackroyd, 2012; Ackroyd and Thompson, 2015; Thompson 2014), top management increasingly seek to conquer the ‘hearts and minds’ of the employees (Warhurst and Thompson, 1998) and forms of collective action have become less popular (Ackroyd and Thompson, 1999; Thompson, 2014), however employees continue to have agency avenues at their disposal. This confirms that, ‘not all is quiet on the workplace front’ (Thompson and Ackroyd, 1995), even in the case of MMs.

As will be shown in the next three sections, in the restructured workplace, MMs pursued other routes to challenge senior managerial intentions and/or in order to defend their autonomy. Such a course of action indicates that it is not only employees lacking formal collective organisation who tend to embark on actions other than official trade union action (van den Broek and Dundon, 2012), but specialist MMs who are unionised also prefer this option.

7.3 Formal individual grievances

MMs at PublicOrg had the opportunity to make an official grievance about matters with which they were not satisfied. After an MM initiated a grievance procedure, attempts would be first made to discuss the grievance with the immediate superior. In the event of an unsatisfactory outcome for an MM, the latter had the option of escalating the matter to the most senior management. At this stage, the head of the HR department would also become involved in the matter, and a formal meeting would be held. The decision taken by PublicOrg at this stage is communicated to the MM in writing within a stipulated timeframe. Although MMs could revert to their union to raise grievances, when they felt the need, they preferred to complain officially on an individual basis.

During the interviews, MMs repeatedly stated that, on the basis of their managerial position, they generally preferred to address specific issues that they had with their superiors in a formal manner but on a one-to-one basis. Thus, even though MMs at PublicOrg were unionised, they avoided addressing such problems through the trade union’s official channels. As outlined by two of the interviewed MMs below, MMs

preferred to embark on personal ploys believing that the latter were more effective and incited less resentment:

Some years ago I did put forward a complaint to my superior because I felt I was suffering an injustice, which was affecting me in my work.

Q: Did you consider channelling your complaint through the union?

Considering my position I preferred to seek a solution on an individual basis. I felt that this way it's more likely for matters to be addressed effectively without causing permanent friction. Had I involved the union the probability is that tension would have escalated, and as I said due to my position I'd rather avoid that.

MM-15

When I felt the need to oppose something I did draw the attention of my superiors and the HR, and then I studied the reactions that I received. [...] There are ways to draw their attention. There are workers who, through their union, adopt a militant style, but I prefer to embark on another style. I prefer to draw their attention on a personal basis and in a decent way. This style also gives me the chance to take my own decisions accordingly. This is the way in which I prefer to proceed.

MM-25

For MMs, such an individual approach was believed to be the most effective, bearing in mind their distinct identities and interests as professionals in managerial positions. Therefore, whilst they relied on the house union to establish a common voice and to ensure fairness through collective bargaining, as this particular MM remarked, they did not use it to resolve issues they had at work, particularly personal work-related clashes with their superiors:

It's true that we have a union, but when you're at our level you feel that you're in a position to tackle matters out on an individual basis. Daily, we deal with very serious tasks and decisions, and we address very critical deals vis-à-vis our work, so I guess it's ingrained in us to thrash out issues at an individual level...In my view if you aren't able to deal on your own then you aren't suitable to be part of the managerial stream and also have weaknesses as a professional.

MM-25

One of the interviewed SM underlined that, generally, formal individual grievances raised by MMs were not taken lightly:

Even if they [MMs] don't channel individual grievances through their union one can't really ignore what they would be claiming, what they don't agree with, what they would be opposing, because I mean their role is too critical for the operations of [PublicOrg].

SM-5

Statements, such as the one above indicates that individual opposition or voices can also have power particularly when those in question perform a key role in the organisation.

So far, it has been determined that: (i) unionised MMs generally did not support official trade union action, believing that this put them in a conflicting position in relation to their dual-role; (ii) MMs preferred to act individually; and (iii) formal grievances that the MMs put forward were not overlooked by their superiors, presumably indicating their effectiveness considering the role of MMs in the workplace. One SM explained:

An MM who comes forward with an official complaint would have tried to address such an objection with his immediate superior, but for some reason they were unable to settle the matter, this on its own pushes us to tackle such cases with a certain caution.

SM-1

Next, an attempt is made to identify what motivates MMs when they contest SMs orders and the grounds on which MMs generally base their counter-arguments, because they may be doing so for a variety of reasons (Thompson and Findlay, 1999). During the process of interviewing, it became apparent that MMs mainly raised formal individual grievances to challenge top management's decisions, when they felt that their superiors sought to infringe on their operational autonomy. The latter was imperative for MMs to carry out their coordination function of management. In such cases, MMs intentionally based their contestations regarding high-ranking orders on their PE required to carry out their daily role, which was considered a strong and safe basis upon which to state their resistance. One of the interviewed MM expressed this view vividly:

If I realise that what my superior is saying doesn't make sense technically, and after I've done my homework I confirm that it's me who's on the right track, then in that case I will resist and put forward a formal objection to my seniors...So, yes we do stand firmly in cases like these, until we get it our way, or almost [...] Our vast expertise and experience are the grounds upon which we base our arguments, mind you we have to do our homework. Otherwise if the way we insisted on working fails, we'd face a lot of hassle; indeed I'd say our position in such cases would be at stake.

MM-18

MMs asserted how they did not ignore technical procedures and/or any technicalities that they felt were the most appropriate to follow on the basis of their expertise and experience. MMs identified high procedural standards, which they were proud to

support (Hodson, 1995). Therefore, the data show that MMs executing an expert role tend to base their arguments on a specific terrain, namely their PE. When raising their official grievances, MMs specifically embarked on technically driven arguments based on their know-how, know-what and on a line of reasoning which promoted the maintenance of standards. MMs, such as the one quoted below, recognised that these offered them the strongest basis upon which to resist on objective grounds and, at the same time, defend their position and autonomy:

Personally when I don't agree with orders coming from above, I base my counter-arguments on technicalities. Due to my role here, I'm hands-on in the field so I'm familiar with the details, with the requirements, etc. Therefore, when faced with such a situation I'd soon remind my manager that there are these procedures, parameters, regulations, rules, risks etc. etc. Believe me I don't give him the chance to rebut my arguments; I use one argument after another.

MM-8

However, in those circumstances, when MMs did not have a strong technical and/or practical argument on which to base their opposition, or their superiors kept insisting on getting things done their way, postponement was the opposing strategy that MMs applied to attain some degree of control. MMs explained how they usually reverted to this tactic until their superiors decided to give them such orders in writing. Accordingly, SMs specifically stated that they were taking full responsibility for the way such work was going to be conducted. In cases like this, MMs insisted on getting such orders in writing, in order to protect themselves and their professional standing. As one of the MMs remarked, during the interview, they were careful not to do anything that could put their expert role, and in a number of cases the warrant attached to it, in danger:

If there's an order which I don't agree with, but over which I don't have a convincing [counter] argument, rather than offering resistance in the conventional way, I'll ask for instructions to be given to me in writing...If [the SMs] want something their way and I can't stop them, then let them have it their way, but not at the expense of my reputation. I would never do anything to risk losing my warrant.

MM-25

As illustrated in the previous chapter (chapter 6), on the basis of their PE MMs also challenged their superiors when they simply ignored the new job descriptions the latter had designed for them. By refusing to work within the parameters of their new job descriptions, MMs were directly contesting senior managerial attempts to extract more

labour from their capacity to work, as well as to restrict their autonomy to manage. However, even here such an agency response did not necessarily bring about damaging results. MMs behaved in this way because they wanted to preserve their autonomy and discretion, but this did not result in a loss of output. In fact, even though SMs were aware that MMs ignored the boundaries set by such policies, they did not take further action, realising that the work was still done. However, top management remain inclined to implement such policies given that they are also interested in protecting themselves as chief participants in the chain of command.

The above data show that even though PublicOrg's MMs were unionised and they did not hesitate to put forward formal grievances when they felt it was needed, they were not eager to express their opposition in formal, outright, and organised resistance. Instead, when MMs wanted to challenge top management decisions they preferred to do so formally but individually, without involving their trade union. Still, the end result was that absolute consent to the decision of top management did not materialise (Ackroyd and Thompson, 1999; Hodson, 1995; Thompson and Ackroyd, 1995).

Although MMs usually did not embark on collective resistance, they still used their power, emanating from their PE, to contest the authority of their superiors. Their inclination to oppose did not derive from an urge to break the rules or avoid work. On the contrary, their behaviour had a positive drive to secure their autonomy (Ackroyd, 2012) and standing. Indeed, MMs objected both to safeguard their autonomy and maintain their influence at stable and meaningful levels, or to defend their own interest, that is, their status and esteem.

In the sections that follow, MMs' agency takes on more of a subtle, subjective, informal, yet not necessarily individual form. Once again, such action demonstrates that the social relationship of employment between MMs and their superiors, particularly those at the very top, are embedded in some degree of conflict and contradiction. However, owing to their dual-role, MMs not only prefer to embark on 'individual' action, but also, most of the time, on 'informal' action to oppose high-level decisions or voice their criticism. In any case, they avoid taking the route of the union, which is inclined to amplify the matter and make it more confrontational. Indeed, as will be outlined below, MMs often choose forms of action, such as 'managerial complicity in rule breaking' and 'cynicism', which are not novel but acquired a higher standing in the

contemporary workplace, especially when compared to classical unruly behaviour such as pilferage and sabotage (Ackroyd and Thompson, 2015; Collinson and Ackroyd, 2005; Richards, 2008).

7.4 Complicity in rule breaking

This study has captured occasions when MMs themselves sanctioned, to some degree, noncompliant behaviour carried out by their subordinate employees (Ackroyd and Thompson, 1999). There were instances of rule breaches that were ignored, mainly with respect to the time the subordinate employees spent working, because the latter took unofficial breaks, did not start work on time, and/or stopped working before the officially stipulated time. These are explicit forms of rule breaking. Since MMs were aware of subordinate employees' misappropriation of working time, but did not initiate any disciplinary action in this regard, they rendered themselves participants in the rule breach. That is, they participated in the informal organisation of time-wasting to the extent that they were complicit.

In such occurrences, MMs and employees who reported to them held different intentions about it, but in any case both parties were to some extent bending or breaking PublicOrg's rules. The probability is that employees sought to overcome fatigue, but the aim of MMs was two-fold. Firstly, they allowed such concessions because it represented a form of social support (Hodson, 1995) realised by a degree of 'work-group self-organisation' (Ackroyd, 2012). In other words, even though employees appeared to have some autonomy over working time, yet it was not complete. MMs made it clear that they tolerated what they referred to as 'concessions', because they were within certain limits and, when they demanded it, the employees worked during their official breaks. Indeed, subordinate employees' noncompliant behaviour neither impacted upon MMs' position as managers, nor did it threaten the overall work-performance of the area that operated under the responsibility of these managers, because the latter kept the situation under relative control. On the contrary, in return for these concessions, MMs sought to get more labour from the subordinate employees when required. Secondly, MMs tolerated such systematic time-wasting to overcome their superiors' attempts to control, or rather limit, their autonomy as managers. From a detailed account given by an MM quoted below, it was evident that their superiors were

in a direct struggle with them over who had most power to control the LP of the subordinate employees:

I allow concessions to my people but they know that I have the power to stop such wrongdoing...I'm very flexible with them, once they are giving me what I'm asking for as their manager. [...] However, even if the job gets done, my boss makes every attempt to interfere in how I manage them. Whenever my boss acts this way and calls me to his office to tell me that some of my people were seen taking a snack at a time when they were supposed to be working...During one of these instances he also showed me photos someone took of my people to sustain his claim...Do you know what I reply when he seeks to get in the way? I reply: 'of course I know that my people do at times stop for unofficial breaks and I don't have a problem with that because they give me the work I request from them in time, and for me that's the most important thing'...I remind him that as a manager I should be allowed the necessary space in order to manage...There was also an instance when he wanted to initiate disciplinary proceedings against me because I tolerate such concessions, but I challenged him, and he dropped the idea.

MM-18

MMs tolerated subordinate employees' deviation from the rules in order to remain in control and to look after their own interests, but again this did not necessarily generate damaging results. Their complicity with regard to workers' unruly behaviour rather assisted them as managers to defend their authority, to 'oil' the LP of their subordinate employees and to reach their own performance targets. Besides, even though it may seem paradoxical, every time MMs allowed misbehaviour and concurrently threatened their subordinate employees that they would reverse such concessions, this means that the adjustment of misbehaviour is a "powerful and effective control device, which can be periodically used" (Ackroyd and Thompson, 1999, p.78). On this matter, one MM noted the following during the interview:

I'm aware of certain systematic breaks that [my subordinate employees] have established and which aren't regulated...I've never stopped them from taking unofficial breaks, but I keep these under my belt just in case they resist collaborating further with me. So when one of my subordinates resists something on the basis that this task isn't in his definition of duties I will tell him: 'but your break is not at 9am' So sometimes I do not legitimise myself using the HR policies, but when I deviate I always do so with one aim, to gain better performance from my people.

MM-13

The fact that the authority of MMs (as the exploiters) was not complete, given that their superiors kept interfering in people management matters concerning their subordinates, drove MMs to allow such concessions, as this way they felt in control. Ultimately, such

rule breaking served MMs' own interest of safeguarding their managerial authority, which was already somewhat fragmented. Such a response resonates to some extent with Barnes and Taksa's (2012) argument that what may be viewed as misbehaviour by one party (e.g. employer/SM), might be considered as an action taken 'to right a perceived wrong' by another party (in this case MMs).

In the case of PublicOrg, SMs considered MMs' concessions to be wrong. Yet, for MMs such rule breaking was, in reality, instrumental to boost their hierarchical managerial authority in a way to control and improve their employees and thus maximise performance. Actually, the intention of MMs was not to abstain from the responsibility and the work associated with their role, but their complicity emerged from the fact that they sought to control as much as possible the LP of the subordinate employees, thus retaining their managerial authority. In fact, the moment SMs attempted to stop subordinate employees' rule breaking, MMs stoutly defended these unruly actions on the basis that such decisions pertained to the parameters of their discretion as managers. MMs wanted to protect their managerial standing, which was already limited with respect to people management (see chapter 5).

Basically, MMs' concessions to subordinate employees did not contest the extraction of labour from labour power. Rather, through such subversive strategies MMs made sure their employees worked harder. So, in that respect, while MMs may at surface level be seen as contradicting some rules that top management have set, in reality they acted in their superiors' interest. MMs acted in a different way, whereby they used a method that preserved their own authority and position in the LP. The probability is that if MMs were to strictly enforce the rules that the top management expect them to comply with, the employees might react in a different way and challenge the rules, or the MMs, or both. In fact, ultimately, even SMs gave up, probably for any of the following contingent, yet key, issues: (i) the need to maintain a degree of cooperation; (ii) the degree to which the behaviour is functional; (iii) suppressing such action would expend more time and resources than tolerance and accommodation; and (iv) the extent of moral legitimacy to challenge unwanted behaviour (Ackroyd and Thompson, 1999, p.81). Otherwise, SMs gave up because they recognised that "some misbehaviour at work is not actually dysfunctional for organizations, and may in some circumstances contribute to their effectiveness" (Ackroyd, 2012, p.24).

One other aspect of ‘complicity in rule breaking’ was tracked down to the fact that there were instances where, although MMs acted unofficially and on an individual basis, they did compare their actions with one another. Such a course of action indicates that individual informal behaviour might still be characterised by a collective dimension, in which case MMs are complicit in rule breaking because they ascertain that other MMs ‘act either in collusion or in complicity’ (Ackroyd, 2012, p.4).

At face value, MMs appeared trapped to some degree in the expectations placed on them by their superiors, however upon analysis it turned out that there were occasions on which managers did embark on informal action to control how much they were involved in work. MMs found ways to reconcile some of the contradictions imposed on them. The motivation behind behaving this way was mainly to deflect what they, at times, considered abusive or, on other occasions, illogical behaviour, on the part of their superiors. Generally, this involved action to attain some autonomy by reducing, at least to some extent, the pressure and fatigue that were increasingly characterising their role.

In this regard, one MM explained how they did not agree with changes their superiors expected them to follow in relation to the documentation of projects for which they were responsible. In the view of MMs, the documentation requested from them was already rigorous and regimental in nature, and so accepting new changes would simply mean that they were agreeing to contaminate independent action on their part. In such a case, MMs did not embark on an ‘open battle’ but simply established boundaries of what is and is not acceptable to them, while they made sure that at least some of them were acting similarly. This particular MM argued:

My superior continues to return files because the documentation wasn’t carried out using the new format that they’ve decided to implement. This change, even though it may sound simple, means more work, so what am I doing? [...] I don’t react by not accepting them, I just take them back and leave them on my desk. I don’t feel guilty because, for the sake of documentation and data recording, I’m doing it and distributing it with all those involved. Now if someone else wants to change it in a format that is suitable for him to upload on his system, then that’s up to him, I mean how much more should I continue taking on? I do so much work on each project that I don’t accept the fact that my superior comes and insists about the format...Lately, I’ve raised this issue with my colleagues to find out what they’re doing, and they told me that they’re taking a similar stand to mine.
MM-9

A number of MMs also explained how they were taking ‘decisions’ to address their work-life balance by limiting the extent to which work interferes in their private life. They explained that in their role it was already difficult to unwind after work. Indeed, they were actually expected to continue working, such as answering mobile phone calls or answering emails, beyond working hours making their private life more difficult. The initiatives taken by MMs were ‘personal’, but at the same time ‘collective’. They were aware that a number of their colleagues took similar decisions and unofficially tried to limit their accessibility and availability after they left the workplace as outlined by one of the interviewed MM:

When I’m in charge of work which isn’t part of the routine or I’m carrying out critical operations, I’ll continue talking to my people and making follow-ups myself even after leaving [work]...But I think...during normal periods we’ve learned to draw a line...I don’t switch off my mobile [phone] as soon as I leave, or desert my emails, and sometimes I do carry out work on my laptop [from home], but during such periods most of us are learning to draw a line on how much we continue working after office hours.

MM-14

Instances such as the one depicted above show that MMs tend to embark on informal action. However, this does not necessarily imply that it does not have a collective dimension. Although not every MM was an active participant in the instances mentioned above, some MMs were conscious of what was happening and either acted in collusion or in support (Ackroyd, 2012). Such outcomes confirm that autonomy ought to be achieved by a group of employees on the basis of their identities and interests, rather than coming as a result of managerial activity, such as ‘responsible autonomy’ (Ackroyd and Thompson, 1999). In any case, these MMs’ actions and those discussed in the next section were not damaging to the organisation, but were means by which these managers expressed their tensions and, in return, sought to preserve their autonomy and standing.

7.5 Cynical attitude

The situations MMs have found themselves facing, and their reactions, were expressed in ways whereby, even through trade union action, they were still on the whole loyal to their superiors. However, when faced with imposed restructuring related directly to their subordinate employees (which again reflected their partial involvement in HR

matters), MMs resorted to cynicism. This attitude, to some extent, contaminated MMs' loyalty towards their superiors, in particular the very few at the top.

Although MMs established a house union specifically with the primary aim of not being overlooked as a group, there were occasions where its role as a collective phenomenon was belittled, specifically by those at the very top of the organisation. In the particular instances when the MMs' union was intentionally sidelined, MMs collectively developed a cynical attitude, even though they themselves formed part of the managerial apparatus. They were highly pessimistic and suspicious, and expressed critical detachment from senior managerial decisions taken without their input, but they did not take further action to refute such decisions. MMs embarked on such a cynical attitude to undermine their superiors' actions (Taylor and Bain, 2003) and to distance themselves from the changes implemented (Collinson, 1994) without their involvement.

A case in point was the implementation of a series of reforms meant to enable the subordinate employees (including supervisors) to multi-task and multi-skill for moderate upgrades in the pay scale. The upgrades were intended for those personnel who attained the new grade. According to a PublicOrg SM (SM-1), the objective of this exercise was to reduce costs and increase the performance of the subordinate employees on a long-term basis. These reforms were agreed between PublicOrg and the relevant trade union that represented the employees. Although MMs through their union had officially requested to become part of this exercise, they were not properly and officially consulted; rather their union was excluded and so their interests were not represented.

As elaborated later in this chapter, MMs raised doubt about the real aims behind this reform exercise and were pessimistic about its promised outcomes. Furthermore, they were concerned by the fact that these upgrades distorted the relativity in the pay scales. In the end, MMs were mostly upset not by the fact that in due course, the subordinate employees were upgraded, but such a cynical attitude emerged mainly because they (or rather their representatives on the union's committee) were excluded from the whole exercise. Such a situation indicates that, at times, it is one thing to establish a collective voice, but quite another to be given the space to express it and to be heard (Marks and Chillias, 2014). An MM made this point sharply:

Those responsible for the reform exercise should have started off by calling all the parties involved, including us, but they didn't. Our seniors were involved, as far as we know, but even if they were, the truth is that they spend long hours in their

offices and hence they are cut off from the realities that we face daily. We're the people who know what the real needs are and what our employees are competent at. So it wasn't well planned and their real intentions are not clear...The end result is that the employees, their union, those few at the very top [of the organisation] and the politicians have looked after their own various interests at the expense of the rest.

MM-14

Persistently, MMs referred to these reforms as a: 'flop'; 'time-bomb'; 'gaffe'; and an 'explosion', amongst other labels. Their suspicion emerged for various reasons, some of which are depicted below by two MMs:

The fact that we were not properly involved is already indicative of something.

MM-17

They have strategically left us out of this. It was strategy and not an oversight that our representative didn't form part of the negotiation team.

MM-22

Once MMs were precluded from actively participating in the discussions and negotiations of these reforms, they identified inconsistencies between official top management policies and actual practices (Collinson and Ackroyd, 2005). MMs focused particularly upon the contradiction between the highly insecure future of PublicOrg, provoked by the waves of liberalisation and privatisation pushed by the State which placed questions on every job and its viability, and the considerable pay upgrades the subordinate employees were granted under the 'labels' of multi-skilling and multi-tasking. Moreover, for MMs, such as the one quoted hereunder, such a cynical approach served as a defence mechanism against the anomalies that emerged and the uncertainty about what would happen next:

At this stage when we don't even know what the immediate future holds it wasn't wise to go for such reforms. We don't understand the rationale behind such decisions. We're not stupid, that's why we choose to remain not just sceptical, but also openly negative about these reforms...Since they didn't have the decency to involve us properly and from the beginning we simply washed our hands...Now it's up to them to see how they're going to address the resulting anomalies.

MM-16

MMs' cynicism was further stimulated when they reflected upon gaps that existed between actual practices the top management had put in place under the 'slogan' of cost reduction, and the reform policies that granted substantial pay increases to subordinate

employees. MMs mentioned, for example, how the financial support they were given to participate in seminars and conferences related directly to their work had been drastically reduced, and in some sections rendered almost insignificant. Yet, during the same period, the subordinate employees managed to obtain significant pay increases through the reforms implemented. An MM noted:

Considering the cost-cutting drive, the main question is: 'to which detail a cost-exercise has been carried out'. [...] We're doubtful vis-à-vis the [employees'] reforms because the chiefs continue talking about cost-cutting here and there, which is fine as long as it's justified, but then all of a sudden they approve such huge sums of money. Also we still don't know how much added performance is going to be attained by means of these reforms, compared to the increases the workers have got. But then, for example, they've reduced drastically our sponsorships to attend conferences and seminars related to our role, not because these are no longer important to us but on the basis of the cost-cutting exercise.

MM-25

MMs' cynicism developed because having been cut off from the reform exercise's design, they were highly doubtful about how much it was actually going to reduce costs and were dubious about the expected rise in performance. Furthermore, they were also partly disappointed due to the resulting distortion in the pay scales' relativity. These reforms granted a number of pay upgrades to the employees even if the original plan was to give an increase only to those who made it to the higher grade. Subsequently, the pay relativity that existed between the upgraded employees and MMs was distorted. This point was emphasised by one of the MMs during the interviews:

If I consider these reforms from a humanistic perspective then I can tell you that my conclusion would be that I'm working for peanuts. Because if you consider these reforms you realise that the higher you go up the hierarchy, therefore the higher your responsibilities are, the less worthwhile it is given what you are paid. It's not worth it. If you take into consideration what they got in such a short time and how much I earn, and if you consider the responsibilities that they have compared to mine, then you get really frustrated.

MM-7

The fact that MMs were not formally and properly involved in the reform exercise that concerned their own standing and affected subordinate employees, who reported directly to them, led MMs to develop a cynical approach and to completely detach themselves from such a reform programme. MMs overtly expressed unreserved criticism towards SMs' official policies attached to these reforms and what in their view was actually happening, whilst they questioned why the reforms had taken place in the

first instance and why they were left out from this exercise. MMs tracked inconsistencies between what the corporate restructuring was meant to bring about, with its emphasis on reducing costs while increasing performance, and the money which in a short time was actually spent on the pay upgrades awarded to a wider spectrum of employees. Remarkably, one of the interviewed SMs also commented on the heavy cynicism that MMs generated with respect to these reforms, indicating that it was far from ignored:

At our level, we have to look on a long-term basis, so you can't just consider what is going to happen tomorrow, it's our duty to look beyond. Now, everybody here knows, including our MMs, that the reforms that we've carried out on the employees have cost money, but we sincerely believe that these reforms are going to increase these workers' performance, even if [the MMs] choose to remain sceptical...The MMs know that such reforms need time to get the desired results and they should trust our plan of action. We went into a lot of detail but they chose to remain pessimistic with respect to these reforms.

SM-1

Additionally, cynical attitudes were unearthed during the interviewing process when MMs were questioned about work intensification, and they all brought up a recently implemented management software programme. On their part, MMs discredited this IT programme not just because in their view it was 'complex and heavy', thus requiring more of their time and effort, but once again they claimed that they were not consulted before this programme was implemented, even if they would end up using it most. MMs argued that top management rushed into this programme to make it seem that they are taking serious measures to direct operations on the latest corporate lines, without considering the repercussions.

Moreover, they criticised SMs for contradicting themselves on two counts when getting hold of this software, which the former referred to as 'state of the art'. First, while SMs were insisting about the benefits of having such a programme, MMs highlighted the inconsistency between measures SMs were taking to save money, particularly in relation to their (MMs') grades and the costly decisions they were approving during such a critical time. In the opinion of MMs, the purchase of such software was one such decision. Second, MMs flagged another discrepancy, emanating from the fact that while their superiors insisted that such software was indispensable for their role, which has intensified, the training provided was insufficient and hastily conducted. The views of this MM were typical:

Now we have [acronym for management software programme], which honestly I don't know what the letters stand for, but I can tell you that we have many versions for it, when you switch off the recorder [referring to the interviewer] I'd tell you how we refer to it over here. To cut a long story short, let me just tell you that in one of the most popular versions 's' stands for 'sex' and I'll stop there. Basically, we didn't see the point of spending so much on [this software], when we should be embarking on cost-reduction measures...To upset us even further when this programme has been launched, the only training that we were given consisted of three sessions of around one hour or two hours each. During this short time we were expected to learn how to use it [...] Even on this one, the chiefs didn't hold discussions with us before they purchased this programme intended mainly for our use.

MM-21

On occasions when MMs wanted to show their disagreement and a sense of detachment from the organisational policies and at the same time voice criticism, doubt and pessimism towards top-level decisions, an attitude of cynicism seemed to be the preferred (collective) response. MMs' cynicism reflected their lack of agreement on policies implemented by high-ranking managers, who did not consider consulting them, but evidently it also originated from a high level of commitment the MMs had to other values (Ackroyd and Thompson, 2015). In this case, cynicism emanated from MMs' devotion to their role at work. In fact, they were careful not to create disruptions to the operations by using such an approach but, concurrently, by being cynical they emphasised a forceful lack of agreement.

For MMs, the fact that they (or rather their union) were intentionally excluded from decisions that had direct consequences on their daily operational responsibilities and affected them negatively with regard to the principles of pay and recognition, meant that their standing was being compromised from above. Hence, to strike back at such top managerial action, MMs embarked on a cynical attitude. On one hand, this attitude led to their antagonism to be suppressed and diluted, rather than mobilised, confirming that cynicism is a passive form of action but an active form of rhetoric (Ackroyd and Thompson, 2015). On the other hand, accounts such as that offered by a one of the SMs (SM-1) indicate that such responses of MMs were not ignored.

7.6 Conclusion

Similar to research that focuses exclusively on the working lives of MMs engaged in organisations that underwent restructuring (Hassard *et al.* 2009; 2011; McCann *et al.*

2008; 2010), this study did not identify organised struggles undertaken by the MMs. Regardless of the fact that MMs at PublicOrg were unionised, they did not pursue effective collective action through their trade union to resist pressures put upon them by SMs, in view of the prevailing restructuring or to oppose collective policies imposed by SMs.

On the one hand, such findings are puzzling. MMs were faced with a tougher managerial LP and were sidelined vis-à-vis policies that influenced the operations under their responsibility, once again confirming their rather weak managerial authority. However, as a unionised group, they still did not utilise the traditional mechanisms of industrial relations they had available to redress their situation. Instead, the attitude taken by the MMs' trade union confirmed its extremely moderate status, which was important in the establishment and maintenance of these managers' collective identity.

On the other hand, such findings substantiate the ambivalence that characterises MMs, which seems to become more ambiguous when these managers execute an expert role. Generally, managers are not regarded as rebellious and their relationships with unions tend to be equivocal. Therefore, when taking this into consideration, together with the fact that MMs could not really hide behind the actions of others, and given that the situation at PublicOrg was not a secure one, any expression of agency captured during formal interviewing did not go unnoticed and was not underestimated. Certainly, capturing and interpreting non-official (trade union) action is not an easy task (Ackroyd and Thompson, 1999).

Eventually, the data collected in this study is used as grounds to explain that MMs identify collectively, but act individually, though not necessarily without a collective dimension. When they act, they either do so formally to challenge the power structures, or, more commonly informally to preserve their autonomy and position in the LP, and/or to detach themselves from senior managerial decisions, with which they do not agree.

On the basis of the foregoing discussion and in line with the 'resistance' and 'misbehaviour' framework (presented by Ackroyd and Thompson 1999, 2015), this study attempts to draw a distinction between MMs' forms of action, depending on how these managers expressed agency and what they sought to achieve through it. While keeping in mind that what constitutes noncompliant and dutiful behaviour at work

remains blurry (Collinson and Ackroyd, 2005; Richards, 2008; van den Broek and Dundon, 2012), this research concludes that, when considered analytically, MMs' action is mostly framed as misbehaviour, but it also contains an element of resistance.

Resistance emerges each time MMs formally challenge the hierarchy in the employment relationship. The resistance delineated in the case of MMs does not occur at a collective level through organised industrial relations, rather it is expressed as a formal individual grievance carried out on objective grounds, that is, on account of their PE. Such a state of affairs continues to undermine the MMs' trade union's power to mobilise organised action, in favour of isolated/single official action, which nevertheless its primary intention is to target directly the established power relations.

Contrastingly, misbehaviour is tracked in more informal acts, such as when MMs: (i) implicate themselves in the production of misbehaviour assumed by the subordinate employees; (ii) seek ways to limit the adverse effects of work and, to some degree, feel in control of their situation; and/or (iii) detach themselves from top managerial decisions because they are not consulted and because of the inconsistencies that they detect once such decisions are implemented. The prime motive behind such actions of MMs is to defend their autonomy, whilst protecting their structural position, and disengaging themselves from SMs' decisions, but not necessarily to contest the power relations.

Overall, MMs' agency responses result from the tensions that characterise their workplace's social relationships, primarily driven by top management's attempts to limit their autonomy to manage and restrain their actions to extract more labour output. Hence, they are not just an expression of discontent, or of acts that they are not supposed to perform, and they are not primarily designed to avoid work. For MMs, the preservation of their authority and autonomy resulting from their managerial position and professional role are the primary motives that drive them to embark on such action.

Although that there were occasions when MMs at PublicOrg overtly disagreed with SMs, on the whole their action captured in this study emphasised their alignment with management. Such an outcome can be explained on the grounds that in the case of MMs, the structured antagonism that characterises the social relationships within the capitalist LP (Edwards, 1986; 1990) takes on an ambiguous form. For MMs, there are different levels of abstraction. At the concrete level, MMs fulfil aspects of capital

functions (management), making it difficult for them to embark on collective action through their union against 'management'; ultimately they form part of this group. Furthermore, the social relations of MMs become even more complicated when, similar to the case at PublicOrg, these managers and their immediate superiors are all professionals, possibly also hailing from the same profession; ultimately they share common values, standards and norms.

In addition, the degree of autonomy and discretion that MMs enjoy, particularly from their 'expert' role (but also to a certain degree from their managerial position), influences the degree of antagonism that characterises their employment relationship. In these circumstances MMs find it difficult to embark on resistance that is collective, formal and organised. Indeed, on occasions where MMs still attempt to embark on forms of industrial action to express some of their discontent as formally organised resistance, the probability is that they do so in a contradictory way and so it is likely that they will soon encounter difficulties due to their dual-role.

On a more abstract level, antagonism in the employment relationship persists because, the role of MMs has become more intensive and stressful. Besides, MMs' job is characterised by lack of promotions opportunities, job insecurity and a distorted work-life balance. Moreover, the primary aim of those at the helm of the organisation remains to rationalise more the work of employees, including MMs, and of further streamlining the operations of the entity, which may result in redundancies or transfers to other public entities, possibly on reduced terms of employment. Thus, a level of antagonism persists due to the conflicting interests all of them have in the workplace. However, in the case of specialist MMs the antagonistic relationship takes on an ambivalent form.

Considering that the interrelations at work are complex and generate not just control, resistance and misbehaviour, but also accommodation, compliance and consent (Collinson and Ackroyd, 2005; Thompson and Harley, 2007; Thompson and Newsome, 2004), the next empirical chapter looks at how MMs embrace what they do at work. Hence, besides confirming that the employment relationship is not only built on divergent interests, but also on interdependency between the parties (Cressey and MacInnes, 1980), the next chapter infers that this reality becomes more intricate when those under scrutiny are MMs who possess PE.

8. Detecting middle managers' assent

8.1 Introduction

This chapter explores how PublicOrg's MMs consented to the relevant performance requirements, at a time when they were coming under more pressure due to organisational restructuring. The focus of this chapter is appropriate, considering that post-Braverman LP writing has long recognised that one of the chief challenges in the workplace is to persuade employees to cooperate in their own 'exploitation' and that agency is not confined to recalcitrant behaviour only (Burawoy, 1979).

At the outset, it ought to be noted that conducting an analysis of 'consent' is difficult because it is a rather ambiguous concept to define (Edwards, 1986; 1990). Nonetheless, scholars have long emphasised that 'control' and 'consent' are two competing pressures that give rise to contradictions in the LP (Hyman, 1987). At PublicOrg, as much as SMs wanted to secure MMs' compliance to ensure that performance targets were met, they also wanted to enlist their knowledge, skills and active cooperation in meeting those targets.

This thesis, along with other research (Carter, 1985; Carter and Fairbrother, 1995; Hassard *et al.* 2009; McCann *et al.* 2004; 2008; 2010), found that in the restructured organisation, MMs are increasingly exposed to top-down control inevitably leading to increased pressure, giving rise to tensions. Furthermore, due to the challenging economic climate, the organisation's loyalty had been reduced drastically, leaving MMs fearing for their job (Hassard *et al.* 2009; McGovern *et al.* 2007; Thomas and Dunkerley, 1999). Despite such an unpleasant situation and taxing conditions, MMs remained committed, were proud of their work, took satisfaction from it and, on the whole, their action emphasised their alignment with management. As hinted by Bozkurt (2013), coverage of this 'puzzle' is largely absent in the literature about MMs and so this chapter seeks to address this shortage.

On the basis of empirical evidence, this chapter indicates that, to a certain extent, specialist MMs constitute a special case for two main reasons. First, while SMs do impose controls on MMs to ensure that objectives are complied with (Hassard *et al.* 2009), at the same time they ought to provide them with the space and freedom to take initiative and work creatively (Delmestri and Walgenbach, 2005). These are particularly essential in workplaces, such as that of PublicOrg, because MMs undertake expert

labour to perform the specialist technical coordination of work. Friedman (1977a) argued that when dealing with managerial/professional occupations, SMs can decide to apply 'responsible autonomy' rather than 'direct control'. Through this strategic choice, SMs delegate authority, and wider discretion over how work is completed, to personnel (e.g. MMs) in exchange for reliable performance. Responsible autonomy neither solves contradictions, nor guarantees absolutely compliant behaviour, but may lead to greater commitment.

Second, the structured antagonism (Edwards, 1986; 1990) embedded in MMs' employment relationship takes on a different form. It is modified not only due to structural reasons, because MMs are simultaneously managers and the managed (Carchedi, 1977; Carter, 1985; Edwards, 1979; Hassard *et al.* 2009), as well as experts, who may effectively control themselves (Thompson, 1989), but also on the basis of sociological reasons. The fact that MMs and their superiors both form part of the chain of command and are experts (often belonging to the same area of expertise) means that they share values, norms, experience and interests. On these grounds, both structural and sociological reasons influence the level of antagonism that characterises the MMs' employment relationship. Nevertheless, structured antagonism and divergent interests remain, since underlying structures, particularly in relations to political direction, economic trends and market forces, are very powerful.

Therefore, this research opens up specific questions as to how consensual behaviour is secured in the case of MMs. It argues that it is neither only organised and motivated *by* SMs, nor simply influenced by dynamics produced *inside* the workplace, driven by MMs' willingness to acquiesce to SMs' instructions to work harder (Burawoy, 1979). This study shows how MMs' consent (and compliance) derives from dimensions that emerge from dynamics both inside *and* outside the workplace and social relationships that reach beyond the workplace.

The analysis in this chapter is carried out by drawing on the following: the sense of *professionalism* the MMs are socialised into; the *intrinsic rewards* of work they receive; and the social relationships of *paternalism* and *collegiality* these managers participate in at work. These dimensions and relationships are linked because they succeed in: (i) not only eliciting MMs' consent, but securing their compliance with the fact that they have to work harder, for longer hours and to a high standard; (ii) containing potential conflict between MMs and their superiors; and (iii) absorbing MMs' further in their role as

‘specialist’ managers. These aspects tilt the balance more towards MMs’ function in terms of the technical coordination of work, to the detriment of the control function. Nonetheless, this does not mean that MMs are entirely losing their authoritative influence. The PE that MMs develop secures their managerial standing and professional autonomy, resisting a gravitational pull in the hierarchical ladder.

Ultimately, after carrying out an analysis around professionalism, intrinsic rewards, paternalism and collegiality, this chapter attempts to route MMs’ consensual behaviour within the LP analysis. LPT regards consensual behaviour in the workplace as ‘consent’ and ‘compliance’, which are easier to differentiate abstractedly than concretely (Thompson, 1989).

8.2 Sense of professionalism

The analysis tackled in this section builds on the analysis titled ‘professional control’ in chapter 6. It is indeed difficult to separate clearly the different aspects constituting professional control and the extent of their effect on MMs’ behaviour. However, as chapter 6 focused particularly on forms of control that are directly shaped within the organisation, the vertical aspect of professional control was tackled in that chapter. This aspect is activated when SMs demand specific responsibilities for important decisions from MMs on the basis of their PE, consequently exposing the latter to tension and pressure. In chapter 6, the normative orientation arising from professional control was also introduced. Complementarily, this section concentrates and elaborates specifically on professionalism - conduct, qualities and level of execution - expected from MMs on the basis of their expertise as it works through the intrinsic and regulatory aspects of professional control.

MMs’ sense of professionalism was created and supported by intrinsic elements and regulatory parameters expressed in a number of forms of organisations (certifications, warrants, professional bodies, etc.). The intrinsic and regulatory aspects were established, initiated and functioned outside the workplace, but they actually influenced MMs’ conduct inside it. In this context, professionalism is focused on to show how, from the outside, this dimension reaches into the inside of the work organisation, and finds out what constitutes willingness and commitment for MMs. However, upon deeper analysis, it transpired that actually what PublicOrg’s MMs referred to as willingness and commitment was marked by elements of compliance.

This arises from the expectations that professionalism brings and the regulatory framework upon which the profession is based.

Notably, the intrinsic and regulatory aspects are set forth by an *ethos*, a sense of *duty* and a *legal framework* that mould MMs' behaviour and accentuate their role as specialist managers. As analysed in the previous chapters, the way specialist MMs operate is more through the coordination function, as further emphasised by the intrinsic and regulatory aspects of professional control. Consequently, this leaves specialist MMs with little time in their work schedule to perform and enhance generalist management activities.

8.2.1 Middle managers' ethos

During the interviews, it turned out that MMs' behaviour and attitudes were primarily driven by values, norms and standards that they internalised on the basis of their expert role and which instilled in them a normative orientation embedded in their ethos. A distinctive ethos was highly perceptible and it took precedence over the workplace in which they were engaged, the requirements demanded from above, or other features that characterised their role. One of the interviewed MMs, when asked about this issue, offered the following view:

I'm committed to my work and the level of my work. It's this attitude that I have towards my work that drives me to give my best. It's not the salary or the grade, those aren't enough...I don't think that every worker has such an attitude, but I think, on the whole, the majority, the great majority, of the professionals feel highly committed not just to their work but also to the quality of their work. If they don't feel this way they would be weakening their own professional reputation.

MM-9

Ethos is influenced by reputation (Ihlen, 2013), with PublicOrg's MMs particularly underlining the necessity to safeguard their reputation as experts, surfacing regularly in their explanations for why they worked as hard as possible. As well as protecting their professional standing, the sense of professionalism possessed by these managers shaped their preferences in such a way that they were eager to take on new challenges. New challenges tested their high level of competence and prompted them to develop further their knowledge and skills (Ackroyd, 2013), even though they had to operate with a number of hindrances, namely incomplete managerial authority and limited resources (chapter 5). One MM made this point sharply:

I hate positions that don't offer me a challenge [...] I don't seek to carry out things that I know in order to feel secure, I rather prefer it the other way round. I prefer responsibilities that will keep me on the edge and that give me the opportunity to show off my capabilities and to learn new things.

MM-18

Apart from safeguarding their reputation in the eyes of others at work, MMs sought to take the initiative to continue updating their expertise by striving to experience and learn new methods and procedures. Such a state of affairs substantiates that for MMs to undertake expert labour, testing the boundaries of their knowledge is highly important (Ackroyd, 2013), because they realise that their ability to learn new competences is now essential in an ever-changing work environment (Dopson *et al.* 1992; Dopson and Steward, 1993). Ultimately, this course of action increased MMs' confidence in the specialist and operational decisions, which they based on their PE, and also served to reassure their superiors. The view of this MM was typical:

I do make an extra effort to learn more and to become more effective and efficient in my work. My motivation is to learn, that's my most important driver.

MM-16

Statements such as the one above support the assertion put forward in chapter 6, that although control systems are put in place inside the workplace to extract more labour from MMs and to closely monitor their performance, these forms of control do not primarily govern these managers' behaviour. Instead, MMs internalise professional values, norms and standards, and it is these elements that guide them most at work. The sense of professionalism that MMs are socialised into outside the workplace, on the basis of their expert role, largely explains why these managers inside the workplace accept working so hard, to a high standard, and aligning with the organisation's objectives. Thus, the relationship between the imposed internal control systems on one hand, and professionalism on the other, is such that they both function to optimise MMs' output for the benefit of the work organisation. This particular MM remarked:

As professionals we take ownership of our work rather than find a thousand excuses. In a way a professional would want to secure his reputation that he's diligent, efficient and a cooperative colleague and so on such a basis he would own the work he's entrusted with.

MM-19

However, in the long run it is professional values, norms and standards that impact these managers' behaviour most.

8.2.2 Middle managers' 'duty'

While a close reflection on MMs' conduct suggests that the ethos they embraced did guide them at work, it was also noted that a sense of duty too urged them to personally find solutions to problems irrespective of what this entailed. Although MMs repeatedly maintained that they were willing and committed to take 'ownership of their work', to take on 'new challenges' and/or to 'learn new stuff', simultaneously they made several references to duties that arise from their occupation. They claimed that their 'professional duty' actively pushed them to get directly involved to solve technical/specialist problems that occurred in the specialised units that ran under their responsibility. Thus, the intrinsic aspect of professional control drives MMs to comply with what they believe are their inbuilt obligations as professionals, as one of the interviewed MM indicated:

As a professional I'm duty-bound to offer practical, realistic and affordable solutions. My professional duty directs me to continue looking for a solution for every problem that crops up at work.

MM-16

MMs are not simply 'forced' by their superiors to take an active interest in technical details, but on account of their expert role, they feel it is 'their duty' to solve unexpected problems and handle exceptions successfully (Delmestri and Walgenbach, 2005), and to do so they are prepared to make 'certain types and degrees of effort' (Watson, 2001). In the interviews, several MMs repeatedly stressed that they did make 'an extra effort' and did 'go out of their way' in order to 'get things done against all odds' mostly without being pushed from above. Ultimately, professional duty, which is key to the intrinsic aspect of professional control, defines MMs' organisational position, given that it places them close to SMs and above the rest of the workforce.

8.2.3 The regulatory framework around middle managers

Furthermore, the regulatory framework on which the profession is based (in Malta's case, established by law) also plays a part in constraining specialist MMs' behaviour. Besides having an ingrained professional duty towards a hands-on approach to problem-

solving, MMs' compliance is further obtained by their warrants. Basically, having a warrant makes them liable to criminal action for the specialist tasks and the sensitive decisions that they embark upon on a constant basis as part of their work. The personal responsibilities, within the context of professional control, put MMs under considerable pressure and put emphasis on their professional duty. As one MM put it:

One ought to keep in mind that [the subordinate employees'] responsibility is not as critical as ours. At the end of the day it's my signature that counts, we have a warrant to safeguard...The warrant is everything; if I lose that I would lose my licence, which means that I will ruin my career.

MM-25

The regulatory boundaries of professions, expressed in warrants, act as a compelling influence on MMs (who, mainly, are warrant holders). The regulators have the power to evaluate the professionals' performance, all the way to being expelled from the profession (Volti, 2008). The implication is that these legal requirements (from the outside) solidify these managers' compliance (inside the workplace) meaning that one should not equate their behaviour with commitment and willingness, or where employees 'buy into' the system (Thompson and Smith, 2010). One MM expressed this view during the interview:

The fact that you know that if something goes wrong it may cost you the withdrawal of your warrant, puts you under a lot of pressure.

MM-28

Hence, professional control's regulatory aspect exposes MMs to considerable accountability to rules and legal requirements. In fact, on one side, this aspect along with the intrinsic aspect, gives rise to an ethos, duty and set of parameters that shape these managers' preferences and actions in such a way that they subject them to specific obligations and procedures. On the other side, these two aspects (intrinsic and regulatory) support MMs' autonomy and discretion because these are resources that MMs own outside of the employing organisation.

Essentially, MMs believe that the values, standards and norms arising from their expert role are impartial and technical in substance (Storey, 1980), and form part of their identity as professionals, irrespective of where they work. Consequently, although the professional context does not lend itself to direct control or, rather, it leaves them with

some leeway (Smith, 1991); their behaviour is still exposed to some constraints, which are more implicit in nature.

These constraints surface when MMs are selectively recruited from outside the work organisation on the strength of their credentials (Reed, 1996). Using such a selective type of recruitment, that Blau and Schoenherr (1971) conceptualised as ‘insidious control’, SMs appear to be utilising inconspicuous and impersonal means in the recruitment of MMs. However, such a managerial procedure is difficult to separate from the workplace social relationships, although it seems objective. Through such selective recruitment, SMs can relax with respect to the technical coordination of work, believing that the technical problems, the exceptions and the risks are contained by MMs, almost without the need for direct controls. This means that although specialist MMs do exercise considerable autonomy (professional and operational), they are subject to a number of implicit constraints regarding their work performance. Besides, as elaborated upon in chapter 6, they are also bound by other controls, given SMs’ preference for continuing intensification of control to increase output of personnel (Thompson and Harley, 2007), including that of MMs (Hassard *et al.* 2009).

When bearing in mind particular dispositions (ethos), obligations (duty) and regulatory (law) requirements that arise from MMs’ expert role, and the fact that these managers are increasingly subject to performance monitoring and reinforced accountability practices, it turns out that the commitment and willingness they express reveals only part of their situation. Indeed, elements of compliance do emerge.

Despite the fact that MMs retain to some extent an agency relationship with SMs (Armstrong, 1989) arising from their PE, they remain controlled not just by (direct) management practices imposed by SMs, but also as a result of the professionalism that they embrace. Professionalism has a peculiar and puzzling effect on MMs. On one hand, it absorbs them in their work. Hence, professionalism, what starts off and is backed from outside the work organisation, turns out to be another factor that inside the workplace immerses MMs further in their role. In particular, professionalism drives them to carry out the work under their responsibility in a timely and high-quality manner, as well as to solve ‘any’ problem that arises irrespective of the effort required. On the other hand, for MMs this simply seems to be the right thing to do, since they believe that professionalism preserves their distinct identity and interests,

irrespective of what this entails, where they carry out their role, or whether they are indeed in employment.

Next, the intrinsic returns for work that MMs claimed to receive are explored. These rewards, which MMs obtained from inside the organisation, and did not balance out their intensive LP, are inducements that engaged these managers further in their work, provoking them to work harder and for longer hours.

8.3 Intrinsic returns

Whilst there was compliance amongst MMs to the daily realities they faced at work, these managers also claimed that their work was interesting and meaningful, suggesting that it was intrinsically rewarding (Noon *et al.* 2003). PublicOrg's MMs, similar to others engaged in much larger economies (Hassard *et al.* 2009), asserted that the duties they were expected to fulfil were numerous, thus exposing them to more work and pressure. However, at the same time, they insisted that they 'like' their work, felt 'proud' of what they did at work, and were 'satisfied' about carrying out work of a high quality and of certain significance (ibid. Osterman, 2008; Watson, 2001). This implies that MMs' effort is induced through various forms of rewards, including prestige, personal satisfaction and development (Hodson, 2001).

Given that the "element of job rewards is absent from a lot of critical literature in the LPT tradition" (Hassard *et al.* 2009, p.51), this study seeks to identify a number of intrinsic returns that PublicOrg's MMs generated and the source of these returns. These intrinsic rewards are different from the "psychological rewards of making out on a tough job" (Burawoy, 1979, p.85). MMs acquired these rewards, not because they found ways to cope with unrewarding work or to pass their time. On the contrary, these managers derived such rewards because, through their role, they had the opportunity to apply their PE and subsequently took greater ownership of their work. As outlined in the following two subsections, the eventual outcome of the intrinsic content of the job of MMs was that it kept alive the hegemonic aspect of their PE.

8.3.1 Exposition of competence

For PublicOrg's MMs, similar to counterparts in other continental countries (e.g. Germany and Italy) where MMs tend to be specialist, it was of the utmost importance

not just to properly execute the duties under their responsibility, but also to demonstrate their specialist competences and to find solutions for high-level technical problems (Delmestri and Walgenbach, 2005). Indeed, MMs sought to be appreciated for their technical decisions and creativity, particularly from those in the upper part of the organisation. In fact, those MMs who were praised and recognised for their competence by their superiors did emphasise this during the interviews. However, MMs also sought to stand out and appear powerful with their subordinate employees, mostly with those who were highly skilled and had significant work experience. For MMs, such acknowledgement for their competences did not simply facilitate their superior's judgement about the competences they conveyed (Grugulis, 2007) and reinforced their reputation, but it was also a source of fulfilment to have both those at the top and at the bottom of the hierarchy thinking highly of their abilities. One of the interviewed MMs explained:

For us, recognition for a job well done, recognition for our efforts...for our ability of how we deal with the operations under our responsibility etc. is highly regarded.

MM-27

In their accounts, SMs also referred to how MMs usually went beyond what was expected of them, not just to manifest their competences, but also because they were proud of their achievements. Therefore, this indicates that, for MMs, pride was both a driver and a shield for their reputation as having an outstanding reputation was considered a reward in itself. An SM shared the following opinion on this issue:

For my team managers, the element of pride is important, in the sense that they feel proud that they've been instrumental to manage this project, or to implement a system which is working well, and which we couldn't afford not to implement.

SM-2

In the process of interviewing MMs, it also transpired that in the end these managers succeeded to take in their stride a more demanding and increasingly challenging role because it actually reflected the tertiary level preparation that they had undergone, which they described as long, exigent and stressful. However, what MMs certainly considered rewarding was the fact that, in their role at work, they had the opportunity to test their competences by linking and integrating the theoretical know-what and

practical know-how to solve daily technical problems and operational issues. One MM remarked:

The fact that what I've learned I can put into practice at work is really satisfactory. As professionals we have a passion for what we've learned and for what we've specialised in. We didn't follow a [university] degree just for the sake of getting a degree. And the fact that we've chosen to come and work here means that we really want to test our competences...everyone knows that here the challenges are numerous and the nature of work is tough.

MM-12

Predominantly, their PE pushed MMs to excel. The fact that MMs strive to put their competences into practice proficiently, in order to accomplish the smooth running of the unit and to address unexpected problems, serves as a way to depict their ability, thus protecting and promoting their standing. At the same time, such a state of affairs assists the accomplishment of the organisation's goals.

8.3.2 Pride and satisfaction

MMs claimed that, despite the increased responsibilities and struggles to protect their autonomy and work-life balance, they did take satisfaction from, and were proud of, their work, confirming that 'work can be stressful and enjoyable at the same time' (Bunting, 2004). Indeed, when MMs were specifically asked what drives them mostly to fulfil their role at work, regardless of the changes that were taking place at PublicOrg, they claimed that they enjoyed what they did at work, even though 'it comes with tension and pressure'. In the opinion of many MMs, the substantial effort required and the time they spent at work dealing with expectations, exceptions and problem-solving indicated that their role was challenging and interesting, rather than being based entirely on routine. They internalised this reality to the extent that, for these managers, not having a 'normal' job was a reward in itself because it generated satisfaction in their 'abnormal' work. This particular MM noted:

I have drive. I want challenges. My challenges are for example the IT problems that we had last week and like we have this week. In such situations I drive myself in order to find solutions and when I find the right solutions I feel my contribution has worth. I really feel happy.

Q: Even if that means that you have to spend more time at work?

At the end of the day I consider staying here to solve technical problems as part of my job. I know that working abnormal hours comes with not having what I call a normal job.

MM-10

Statements such as the one above confirm that specific elements that differentiate MMs' work from that of lower counterparts are, for many specialist MMs, a source of satisfaction and pride. Examples of such elements include the holding of non-routine jobs, the capability to handle directly high-level technical problems which otherwise would have created obstacles for the operations (Delmestri and Walgenbach, 2005), and the overall worth of their work. Regarding the latter, a number of MMs, such as the one quoted directly below, repeatedly emphasised that they took personal satisfaction from the fact that they were responsible for, and involved in, high-level projects, within an entity that had such a high profile nationwide:

We're involved in projects which are of a national scale and priority, so obviously when you're in charge of such a project or of parts of it you feel a sense of pride, you say: 'I did it' or 'that was my decision' or 'I was involved substantially in that project coming through'...It's more than just having a job and that's it.

MM-9

The evidence captured by this study indicates that, amongst specialist MMs, job satisfaction is not necessarily dwindling (Warhurst and Thompson, 1998). Instead, it appears that the nature of their job is such that it instils a sense of 'intrinsic satisfaction' (Noon *et al.* 2013). Some of the testimonies suggest that MMs' work is abnormal, it involves a hands-on approach in dealing with specialised technical responsibilities, and that the work is of a high level. The implication of the variety of elements which constitutes the MMs' role, actually, it is the central role that knowledge, skills and subsequently creativity (PE) play in their job that lead to the intrinsic returns for their work (Hodson, 2001).

On one hand, MMs struggled because they lacked adequate managerial prerogative over certain generic management matters and had to make an effort to work long hours, at times negatively impacting their work-life balance (Bunting, 2004; Hassard *et al.* 2009). On the other hand, the absolute majority of MMs claimed that they 'like' and feel 'proud' of their work. Such aspects in the role of MMs may sound conflicting. MMs are increasingly subject to an intensified LP, which has become normalised in the circumstances of ongoing restructuring (McCann *et al.* 2008), and their line management authority is fragmented, yet they receive intrinsic rewards.

When one considers MMs' levels of abstractions (Carchedi, 1977; Carter, 1985; Edwards, 1979), rather than concentrating entirely on the surface of managerial behaviour (as management mainstream analysts tend to do (Tsoukas, 2000)), explaining what seems a contradiction is more possible. Given that MMs' control function was not completely under their command, rewards are most likely to be gleaned from the technical/specialist aspect integrated into their managerial role, upon which they carry out the coordination function. This managerial function imposes on MMs some challenging work, but besides being the function that protects their distinct interests (professional autonomy, discretion and reputation, as well as managerial standing), it is also the function from which they receive intrinsic rewards.

The next two sections focus on paternalism and collegiality. These social relationships play a role inside the firm, but they are driven by characteristics that exist outside it, and they also attempt to reach beyond the workplace and into MMs' private lives.

8.4 Paternalism

A liberal and flexible economy, such as the evolving Maltese economy, does not operate in a way that safeguards extensive paternalism within the public sector, even if in the Maltese scenario paternalism has a traceable genealogy for strategic, economic and social reasons (Pirota, 2001; 2005). Nevertheless, data suggest that despite the fact that PublicOrg was increasingly operating in a neo-liberal context, its employment relationships continued to retain national institutional imprints (Thompson and Newsome, 2004). At PublicOrg, two such imprints were what Baldacchino (2003a) refers to as two national features of Maltese industrial relations, namely paternalism and loyalty (pp.5-6).

Within the context of a robust national welfare state and with PublicOrg being a public entity, the latter did not provide MMs with houses and/or the provision of other amenities, but it did provide comparatively good working conditions in order to attract and retain these personnel. Notwithstanding that the employment relationship was based on contractual terms and conditions of employment and that a new layer of senior management (with experience from the private sector) was recruited, while sophisticated management systems were being implemented, aspects of paternalism persist.

With paternalism considered as a 'loose descriptive term' (Ackers, 1998), the aspects identified in this study were presented in direct individual relationships and personal obligations. The paternalistic practices set forth by SMs in relation to MMs, were generally expressed in personal interaction, care and a gentle form of persuasion. On their part, MMs reciprocated by pledging loyalty towards their direct superiors. The emergence and existence of paternalism at PublicOrg can be ascribed to a number of factors, which can be categorised into two streams: those broadly and those specifically related to MMs' particular realities.

Regarding the broadly related factors, the first reality is that although job insecurity was increasing at PublicOrg, meaning that MMs could not expect guaranteed job security in return for loyalty (Thomas and Dunkerley, 1999), employment in the Maltese public sector is still considered more secure than the private sector (Zammit, 1994). Second, some companies' paternalistic concerns about their employees' wellbeing are based on the assumption of their loyalty and hard work (Thompson and McHugh, 2009). In Malta, small-scale mainly family-run firms, medium-sized private operations (Baldacchino, 1994; 2003b) and public enterprises (Pirotta, 2001) appear to be moving in this direction.

In relation to the more specifically related aspects, three factors were identified that led to the existence and continuation of paternalist relationships amongst MMs. First, at a time when the working life of these managers was being put under pressure, their superiors made sure that they gave their personal input to develop close and personal relationships with them. The establishment of such close and personal relationships is considered as a core feature within the typology of 'traditional' paternalism (Ackers and Black, 1991). These relationships lead to a form of support, sometimes even leading to the establishment of a dependable relationship.

A paternalistic relationship could, for example, be inferred when during the interviews some MMs made references to meetings that their superiors held with them. For MMs, who complained because their superiors neither involved them in strategic decisions related to their division nor informed them regularly about the entire plans for work they would be doing (chapter 5), valued the readiness of SMs to encourage open dialogue. This disposition to encourage frank communication, which is an element

attached to ‘traditional benevolent paternalism’ (Borg Bonello, 1994), made such meetings, in the opinion of MMs, such as the one quoted hereby, effective:

My superior makes a point to hold regular meetings...Personally, I do give them importance and I think even my superior does, because during these meetings we discuss many things, such as problems being faced at work. [...] So such meetings serve as occasions for me to keep direct contact with my manager.

MM-9

In their accounts, SMs claimed that they felt it necessary to hold regular meetings with MMs, even if the format of these meetings was not necessarily formal. Through such less formal practices, SMs sought to build a friendly relationship with MMs (Jackman, 1994), which was strengthened by the fact that they made themselves accessible via open channels of communication. One MM remarked:

His office is always open, so I don’t hesitate to go and seek his assistance or support if that’s what I need.

MM-21

SMs admitted that they used these meetings not just to allow MMs to discuss problems they faced at work and beyond, but also to get feedback on ideas and/or future considerations that they would be discussing at the upper level. It is evident that SMs did implicitly value MMs’ input, but without disclosing detailed plans and strategies (Hassard *et al.* 2009), thereby protecting their niche authority (Jackman, 1994). During the interview an SM confessed:

When I feel the need to do so, I do use the meetings I hold with the MMs as testing grounds for ideas that we would be discussing at the top level...This way I’ll get some sort of feedback, which even though indirect, can still assist me to give an opinion during the higher-level meetings that I participate in.

SM-6

From the point of view of MMs, the fact that their immediate superiors tried to understand personal issues they were encountering at work and, in some cases, even outside it, led largely to ‘good’ social relationships. Indeed, when MMs disengaged themselves from certain organisational decisions, such as those regarding reforms carried out on subordinate employees, they directed their cynical attitude mostly towards the very apex of PublicOrg and the politicians, rather than their immediate superiors. As a result, the cynical attitudes unearthed in this study did not compromise paternalist relationships.

Therefore, PublicOrg's MMs did participate in a traditional benevolent paternalist LP, whereby their superiors sought to adopt, as much as possible, a fatherly figure believing that this had a direct impact on MMs' attitudes and behaviour towards them. Moreover, through such an approach, SMs monitored MMs' behaviour and actions, to some extent including those taking place outside the workplace. One of the interviewed SM explained:

[...] my direct contact with the MMs is very important, because it brings about mutual respect and reduces the chances of disagreements. If they have an issue they know they have the chance to tackle it directly with me. [...] It's essential for me to get to know them on a personal basis and I follow them. I make a point of getting to know them on an individual basis and to some depth and I keep myself updated about their activities. I believe that only when you get to know their backgrounds, activities, etc. can you really establish a strong relationship...it's like with my children, I think I know them to a considerable extent, but I still continue discovering things about them. This helps me to understand them better under different circumstances, and it also affects the way they relate to me. If you show them that you're interested in their endeavours and care about them, they usually think twice or feel uncomfortable about doing something that could negatively affect this relationship or something that puts you off or, I'd say, that puts you in a bad light.

SM-5

On the basis of a paternalist relationship, SMs sought to build a close relationship with MMs for the following reasons: (i) to shield their position as they were answerable for whatever goes wrong at the middle-levels (Jackman, 1994); (ii) to reduce the chances of conflict arising (Black and McCabe, 1996); and (iii) since paternalism is a 'system of control' (Fox, 1985), they used it to control MMs in a benevolent way to obtain their cooperation. For example, through this relationship, SMs, such as the one quoted below, largely relied on persuasion (Grint, 1998) to introduce changes in work practices linked with the role of MMs, without the need to revert to direct control:

When I've first introduced a new software programme for my section, none of my managers wanted to use it. But I persisted and continued persuading them and finally they began to use it. Now it has become part-and-parcel of their work. The reality is that with my managers I reach an agreement without a lot of trouble.

SM-3

SMs confessed that, as much as possible, they even sought to keep close contact with their subordinate employees, who reported directly to MMs. Since SMs were promoted from the middle-ranks (rather than externally recruited) it was easier for them to keep such contact, as suggested by this particular SM:

Even though I occupy the highest position in this division, [subordinate employees] still feel comfortable to talk to me and I attribute this to the fact that every so often I go around the plant. [...] For example, yesterday I had an employee who came here to talk to me because at the moment he has a personal problem at home. [...] He contacted me and I gave him an appointment, and we've spent half an hour talking. We had a coffee and he let off steam. I didn't find him any solution but at least I offered to listen.

Q: Why didn't he approach his direct manager?

Most probably he came to talk to me because he knew he would feel more comfortable talking to me in the first place. Or it could be that I've given him more attention than his immediate superior has.

SM-5

SMs established, or rather preserved, such a paternalistic relationship even with subordinate employees, to reach their own objective, that is, to continue weakening MMs' line management authority. Through such personal contact, SMs presented themselves as the main providers of social management, at the expense of continuously portraying MMs as the managers who mainly dealt with technical management, even if the latter had the responsibility of managing a team of employees. Consequently, MMs kept on limiting their chances to develop social management skills, leaving them partially competent to deal with generic managerial aspects (Delmestri and Walgenbach, 2005). The fact that, at PublicOrg, subordinate employees bypassed MMs on social matters and went directly to SMs, reinforced this state of affairs.

The second factor that led paternalism at PublicOrg to persist was the fact that, although management techniques were in place, formal procedures were established and SMs reverted to persuasion or delegation as required, yet both tiers of management retained a two-way commitment that oscillated. This confirms that paternalism is a deeply underlying relationship of reciprocal duties and responsibilities (Ackers, 2001).

The fact that SMs were promoted from the middle-ranks, while MMs were recruited from outside PublicOrg, meant that generally the former had more seniority and therefore more insight and familiarity with the work environment and the internal politics than their middle-ranked counterparts. Meanwhile, given that the work processes and procedures were being updated, SMs relied on their middle-counterparts to make sure that these were being implemented and managed effectively. In these circumstances, while MMs were principally in charge at unit level, their direct superiors felt it their responsibility to guide them, especially if they were at the start of their career or when they met difficulties. Although, SMs did not involve themselves in

technical matters at unit level (Delmestri and Walgenbach, 2005), they knew that if they did not guide MMs (when requested), they would face repercussions up the hierarchical line. As one SM put it:

If they're not confident about a decision they're about to take then I prefer to guide them...I was in their position before so I know that it can be tough, especially when they are still unseasoned...Anyway if I don't guide them then I'll have to suffer consequences.

SM-4

Third, although trade union representation was common amongst MMs, paternalism still played a role. Such circumstances affirm that, though it may be paradoxical, paternalism is not necessarily incompatible within a unionised environment (Black and McCabe, 1996). The fact that the MMs' union was not a militant one and it presented itself as a 'forum' rather than stressing the role of traditional unionism (Taylor and Bain, 2008), could potentially be the reason why it was possible for paternalism and unionism to co-exist at PublicOrg. Nevertheless, SMs still preferred a situation when MMs bypassed their union to raise grievances, believing that this would be a sign of respect towards them as their superiors, rather than involvement through the union which would increase the chances of friction between the two parties. On this matter, one SM noted the following during the interview:

I enjoy a lot of respect from my managers...to the point that when there's something, which they want to complain about, they approach me directly. What I can say is that so far, even if we had work-related-clashes, they never reverted to the union, but we always discussed and addressed matters directly on a one-to-one basis. To this day, they've never gone to their union first, but it always crosses my mind whether one day they would involve the union.

SM-5

While views can differ about the driving force behind the form of paternalism captured at PublicOrg, SMs did revert to paternalism to protect their own position and to secure their superiority. Regardless of the reason(s) why, the fact remains that paternalism did inspire a personal form of loyalty (Edwards, 1986) amongst the MMs towards SMs. One of the SM interviewed, remarked:

The [MMs] respect me very much, for example they won't drag their feet if sometimes they feel like doing so, because they know that if they do so they would eventually put me in a bad light. The fact that I support them a lot has given rise to this mutually respectful relationship.

SM-3

This research's evidence indicates that while PublicOrg was implementing policies to cut costs and was extensively revising its operations, through paternalism, SMs managed to reduce the tensions that were mounting due to the uncertainties surrounding the future of the organisation. SMs established a moral climate, which impacted upon MMs' perceptions in terms of what is reasonable in an organisation whose impending future depended on market discipline. Finally, through paternalism, SMs protected their authority. This is not surprising given that "[a]t the heart of all forms of paternalism...is a[n] over-riding desire to perpetuate managerial authority" (Blyton and Turnbull, p.306).

Therefore, paternalism (and also collegiality which is addressed next) succeed in preventing clashes from developing, generating assent amongst MMs to the relevant performance requirements, whilst at the same time they render these managers more compliant to the tough demands they face at work. Moreover, these social relations work in a way that they particularly underscore MMs' balance between the functions of control and coordination.

Considering that "[p]aternalism is based on the affirmation and idealization of group differences" (Jackman, 1994, p.87), SMs succeeded in engaging in paternalism because of their high status and the lower status of their target groups (MMs and the rest). Through paternalism, SMs continue to submerge MMs in a subordinate position within the chain of command. This situation does not boost MMs' managerial authority (control function). When SMs adopt a paternalistic attitude, they establish themselves as having the highest 'managerial' status and the most generic management authority, at the expense of leaving MMs with fragmented authority to 'control' subordinate employees. Contrastingly, with respect to 'coordination', SMs do not get directly involved in the technical responsibilities of the specialised units for which MMs are responsible, but they simply give MMs the space to raise difficulties and they make themselves available for advice. Such circumstances imply that MMs' degree of operational control and technical planning of unit performance to carry out the coordination function is high.

Regarding collegiality, this particularly cements MMs' coordination function. MMs are treated as 'equal' colleagues to their superiors with respect to certain matters that are 'purely' technical in nature, even if these are still at the top level, but it is a different story when the matters are of 'non-technical' nature.

Overall, these outcomes work in favour of SMs, because MMs have the competence and the responsibility required to coordinate the LP in the specialised units, but do not have enough authority to undermine the former's power. In turn, even though MMs appear bothered by this imbalance, they comply without much objection because, on account of their PE, they still hold a key role in the workplace.

8.5 Collegiality

In addition to benevolent paternalistic practices, which continuously seek to balance coercion and cooperation within the workplace (Ackers, 1998), this study also detects collegiality drawn from professional practice. At PublicOrg, this form of coordination coexisted with, rather than eliminated bureaucratic procedures (Warhurst and Thompson, 1998). MMs found themselves operating in a situation where hierarchical and collegial forms of decision-making were combined.

The horizontal collegiality amongst MMs, supported by their union's preservation of a 'professional community', was extended in relation to their superiors. Considering that both tiers of management were experts, with the majority specialising in the same area, they respected each other on grounds of their intellectual ability. These elements have the tendency of promoting a "collegial" style of management emphasising a commonality of identity" (Causer and Jones, 1996, p.116), instead of a rigidly and tightly controlled type of leadership. Collegiality did not eliminate SMs' authority to control, but since MMs were not only part of the chain of command but also held an expert role, 'coordination' was spontaneous, as outlined by the MM quoted below:

My superior can in a way manage me by sending me an email on the basis that we're professional peers, and this way issues between us will be tackled virtually, silently and without a lot of hassle...The reality is that when you and your superior share the same profession, and have a similar level of knowledge and intellect, then that does make a difference. When my superior discusses something technical with me most of the time I understand him immediately, and I realise where he would like to go by going down this road.

MM-16

The horizontal coordination between SMs and their middle-counterparts did not replace control mechanisms, which were established to increasingly monitor the latter's performance and accountability (chapter 6). Indeed, on the contrary, it complemented them (Warhurst and Thompson, 1998). SMs were not interested in weakening the

vertical divisions of labour and command structures. Yet, due to having more complex tasks and functions, along with intensified financial and operational accountability, the fostering of collegiality for these managers meant the sharing of responsibility in an interdependent way. Since SMs did not get involved in the details of the technical aspect of work performed within the units (Delmestri and Walgenbach, 2005), when setting certain top plans and objectives, they had every interest to coordinate in some manner with MMs. In terms of both expertise and responsibility within an agreed set of values, SMs made MMs feel 'equal', rather than resort to authoritarian behaviour. Such a collegial relationship may also have the potential to develop into reciprocity between the two management tiers in a way that extra effort is exerted by each side to attain common organisational goals. This can expand further through networking, where the different managers within the network continuously facilitate common organisational problem-solving.

Where MMs and their direct superiors both share similar concerns emanating from their related expertise, it is less difficult for SMs to manage MMs. Generally, the latter agree to instructions deriving from above, without much opposition, on the basis that they are being made by 'colleagues' with whom they share common expertise (and possibly a network). Meanwhile, on account of collegiality SMs did share certain information, delegated responsibility and encouraged upward and horizontal communication (Despres and Hiltrop, 1995), which partly counter-balanced other areas where they did not involve MMs adequately. Such collegial practices, which took place inside the organisation, were made possible because outside it MMs and their superiors had similar values, training, socialisation and background, all of which were factors that led to collective solidarity. This compatibility contributed to social relationships grounded in collegiality rather than conflict and distrust. An SM during the interview argued:

My direct subordinates [MMs] are engineers like me, so we speak the same language. If they have doubts about something at work they can easily share them with me.

SM-5

In this study, collegiality was reinforced by the fact that several decisions on technical aspects of work were based on consensus rather than hierarchical power (Bush, 2003). SMs claimed that technical decisions were reached through discussion and collaboration rather than being imposed unilaterally on MMs from above. In return, such a state of

affairs afforded MMs' spontaneous creativity and input in the making of technical high-level decisions:

Personally, I make sure that they [the MMs] have their own space to express their views, because I believe that the organisation will benefit when they are given opportunities to give their opinion on technical matters, so yes, I do encourage them to give their input in this regard. [...] I believe that you can work with a person according to his nomenclature and the [organisational] structure, that shouldn't be completely ignored, but in my opinion...there's this relationship away from titles and structures, based on mutual abilities and competences, which one shouldn't overlook.

SM-4

However, while SMs made an effort to strike a balance between hierarchical and collegial types of decision-making concerning technical aspects with MMs, the situation was different regarding non-technical matters. Evidently, SMs deemed that MMs' technical creativity and tacit knowledge to deal with sophisticated and complex issues, worked in their favour. Contrastingly, MMs' superiors were far less collegial with respect to generic managerial aspects. It was clear that, as much as possible, SMs did not want to involve MMs in what they considered to be 'purely' managerial matters. On this matter, one SM noted the following during the interview:

Matters that are purely technical, I'll share them with my immediate subordinates [MMs], but matters, which are not purely technical, I might share them or I might not, on the basis of a judgement that I make. For example, when I say non-technical matters I'm referring to financial budgets.

SM-4

The fact that SMs were hesitated to share authority with MMs on aspects that were not technical in nature, indicates that collegiality is in fact "an idealistic aspiration which is not ipso facto carried over into practice by those who advocate it" (Jarvis, 2012, p.481). In line with this assertion, this case study revealed gaps in the collegial relationship between the two groups of managers. It seems that there was much more cooperation on the basis of expertise rather than on the basis of managerial functions. This proves that MMs and their superiors both struggled to maintain and reinforce meaningful authority vis-à-vis generic managerial aspects. On this matter, one interviewed SM noted:

I give a lot of leeway to my team managers when it comes to technical responsibilities. I think I almost trust them completely in this regard and I consult them regularly...but on other more general matters I prefer to be consulted at the outset.

SM-2

Such a fragmented collegial relationship and struggle for authority between the two groups of managers was also perceptible in the way MMs were at times excluded from the process of strategic decision-making, and how they were not fully informed about future plans by those at the helm (chapter 5). Thus, this research's data affirm that a more 'precise' definition of collegiality should include the notion of 'power and authority' and not just the idea of being cooperative and collaborative on the basis of expertise (Freedman, 2009). Such an inclusion is necessary, because, as this research's data suggest, SMs encouraged MMs' participation in technical decisions as they benefitted from the latter's expert contribution, discretion and judgment. Contrarily, SMs were very careful not to involve middle-counterparts in aspects that were 'purely' managerial, as they feared losing their superior standing.

Collegiality, similar to paternalism, was instrumental for SMs to defend their top position, to contain possible conflict and to steer MMs' behaviour. SMs knew that by treating MMs as 'colleagues' on the basis of their expert role, by providing them space to give their technical input and by encouraging a frank and open discussion on technical matters, it became more difficult for MMs to disagree and clash. Here, MMs felt a sense of mutual obligation to comply with the 'good' treatment they believed they were receiving from their superiors. Therefore, through paternalism and collegiality, SMs had every opportunity to openly draw the attention of the MMs towards matters related to their performance or conduct, and to informally influence their thoughts and requests.

8.6 Conclusion

The analysis carried out in this chapter, together with the preceding one, supports an LPT interpretation, given that MMs' responses to relations of control at PublicOrg ranged from resistance and misbehaviour to compliance and consent (Thompson and Harley, 2007; Thompson and Newsome, 2004). However, since the focus of this research was on MMs holding a complex dual-role (managers-and-experts) whose employment relationship is embedded in an ambiguous form of structured antagonism, specific questions were raised as to how consensual behaviour is secured in their case.

In contrast to Burawoy's (1979) analysis, here MMs' consensual behaviour does not emerge only from dimensions and relationships inside the workplace but also from

outside it, arising particularly on the basis of their expert role. Nonetheless, in line with Burawoy's argument, ultimately although MMs are not closely supervised, they are trapped in a situation in which they seldom refuse to put more effort into their work. These circumstances benefit those at the helm of the organisation, while they burden MMs with increased stress and pressure (Hassard *et al.* 2009). Yet, it ought to be pointed out that in the case of specialist MMs, there is a certain degree of commitment because aspects of their work are engaging and have intrinsic value.

The focus in this chapter has been on professionalism, intrinsic rewards, paternalism and collegiality, which emerge from dynamics existing externally as well as internally, uncovering complexities that characterise MMs' workplace relationships. These dimensions and relationships stimulate MMs' assent to: put a lot of effort into their role at work; support SMs' interests, despite the difficulties they face at work and; be primarily concerned with the technical coordination of work and only partly concerned with the control function.

The sense of professionalism into which MMs are socialised outside the workplace instils in them a distinctive ethos and a sense of duty that pushes them in a relentless effort to accomplish more inside the workplace. This stimulation is supported by the intrinsic rewards that they receive from their work. Aspects integrated into the role of MMs, such as technical problem-solving along with innovating and improvising, provide them with increased intrinsic value and interest in their job. Even though these intrinsic returns do not shield MMs from the intensive LP that tightens around their activities (Hassard *et al.* 2009), they do distance them from those in routine jobs, whose work provides them with little intrinsic satisfaction or pride (Hodson, 2001).

On their part, paternalism and collegiality, which emerge from dynamics inside as well as outside the workplace, further secure MMs' assent to the tough reality they have to face at work. Paternalism surfaces as a form of interpersonal relationship between the two tiers of managers (Jackman, 1994), but empirical evidence captured in this study suggests that, actually, it is a style of management (Pellegrini and Scandura, 2006) which SMs use to evoke MMs' cooperation. When acting paternalistically, SMs reaffirm their *highest* status, and in their exchanges with MMs, they intertwine benevolence (concerned with MMs' wellbeing) and control (concerned with SMs' position of authority) in an insidious way.

Collegiality matters for SMs because power is central to it, even if it is in a less visible and unobtrusive form (Rastin, 2000). This research's data show that SMs set boundaries of when to treat MMs as 'equals' suggesting that collegiately can also serve as a target for an insidious mode of control granting a spurious legitimacy through the illusion of 'full' collaboration (Brundrett, 1998). For SMs, the purpose of collegiality is twofold: a 'deliberate strategy' and an 'unavoidable necessity' (Jarvis, 2012). While it serves SMs to mitigate potential power struggles and to protect their own position, it is also a necessity for them because they inevitably rely on the MMs' expert opinion on technical matters.

Eventually, professionalism and the intrinsic rewards, together with paternalism and collegiality, operate in such a way that they nudge MMs to contribute further to their own stressful condition (e.g. work intensification) and reduce the chances of disagreement from developing between them and their superiors. Moreover, while professionalism and the intrinsic rewards highlight MMs' diligence in fulfilling the technical coordination of the LP, paternalism and collegiality push MMs away from the control function and closer to the coordination function. These relationships, particularly paternalism, stress MMs' subordinate position, weakening these managers' hierarchical authority. Nonetheless, at the same time, through these social relationships (mostly collegiality) MMs are granted leeway and are closely consulted on technical matters. Such circumstances prove that it is predominantly technical coordination that these managers accomplish within the management process.

On the basis of the foregoing discussion, an attempt is made to frame MMs' consensual behaviour within the LPT framework by differentiating between their behaviour (consent and compliance), which is disengaged from forms of conflict within the LP. However, a difficulty quickly arises because the concept of consent is rather equivocal (Edwards, 1986; 1990). For Edwards (1986), since dutiful and conforming behaviour in the workplace depends on a range of circumstances, it cannot be reduced to categories such as consent and compliance, which have a range of meanings. But Thompson (1989) postulates that, at the abstract level, consent suggests 'some level of agreement' and compliance indicates that employees 'give way' to the built-in power and control in capital's domination. In this context, this study concludes that MMs' consensual

behaviour overlaps between consent and compliance, swinging significantly towards the latter though not without a degree of commitment to their expert role.

Consent comes to the fore given that, on the whole, on account of their dual-role MMs accept the performance requirements that are requested of them. Despite that, these requirements lead to overwork, stress and anxiety while promotion opportunities and job security are low. This implies that MMs ultimately find themselves making personal sacrifices, such as to cope with a distorted work-life balance. Additionally, MMs' participation in paternalistic and collegial relationships further stimulated their consent, in this case to work relationships. Yet, since these relationships are established on hierarchical positions and SMs use them to perpetuate their power, it is difficult to see them as solely cooperative and consensual processes, separate from elements of control.

The compliance detected in this study takes on a specific form, and to some extent it arises because MMs “*give way to the structure of power and control inherent in capital's domination of the labour process*” [emphasis added in the original] (Thompson, 1989, p.176). Amongst MMs there is an element of fear of losing their job due to the reforms their organisation is undergoing and they are hesitant to completely discard boundaries imposed by increased bureaucratic regulations and performance monitoring (Hassard *et al.* 2009; McGovern *et al.* 2007). Yet, in the case of MMs, the systems and practices that restrain their behaviour and secure their compliance do not arise solely from a greater range of regulations materialising under capitalism. As illustrated in this chapter, compliance is also structured by the sense of professionalism that these managers internalise.

Professionalism instils in MMs what they refer to as commitment and willingness, however in reality it secures their compliance. MMs are eager to work hard, take on new challenges, and learn new procedures and processes. They also work to a high standard to safeguard their reputation, and observe duties and obligations without direct supervision. Indeed, elements of compliance emerge since MMs give way to the expectations that arise from their role, driven by a sense of professionalism that constrains their actions. Ultimately, professionalism makes MMs work harder but, at the same time, this underlines their identity and defends their distinct interests (e.g. protecting a sense of standing above other employees and keeping close contact with SMs). Hence, overall, MMs' compliance is not entirely spurred by market conditions,

but it also results from their professional way of doing things and from taking their opportunity to align to a certain degree with SMs.

It is probable that the industrial allegiances of MMs will remain conditional and continuously subject to tension. However, when MMs execute an expert role, they tend to shape their social relations on the basis of the PE that characterises their role, and their allegiances shift towards senior management. Nevertheless, their employment relationship remains characterised by tension and pressure due to the distinct interests that they pursue at work.

9. Discussion and conclusion

9.1 Introduction

This chapter starts off by summarising the rationale behind this research before briefly presenting and assessing its findings. Afterwards, it discusses its contributions in relation to the research questions.

Key findings of this research are that: (i) MMs used PE to execute their management functions and to compensate for shortages they had as managers; (ii) MMs were subject to a hybrid set of control practices, but they maintained considerable autonomy and resisted deskilling; (iii) despite MMs being unionised, they chose to oppose their superiors individually and informally, rather than embark on collective resistance; and (iv) irrespective of the tough realities they had to face at work, MMs closely aligned themselves with the interests of senior management, though their role was still subject to tensions.

In terms of its major contributions, this thesis adds to the literature on MMs, particularly to the LP analysis and to research concerned about the influence of organisational restructuring on MMs, as it offers insights into the LP of middle management in the context of workplace reform. Its contribution towards the LPT is specifically in relation to PE and to the dynamics of control, conflict and consent. Meanwhile, this thesis contributes to industrial sociology as it offers insights into managerial resistance and misbehaviour. Furthermore, as presented in the next section of this chapter, which is devoted to a discussion around prominent scholarly debates (sociology of professions, expert labour, knowledge work and skills), the LP analysis offered by this thesis contributes to these debates too. Owing to its evidence, this thesis complements and/or contradicts issues and explanations put forward by these debates.

Subsequently, a later section of this chapter engages with the broader implications of this research, with regard to: (i) managerialism - the non-separation of general management functions and specialist expert functions at middle managerial level weakens the drive towards managerialism and the effects thereof; (ii) autonomy - MMs avail themselves of considerable autonomy in the LP, gained through professional resources; and (iii) proletarianisation - through their developed PE MMs prevent shifting towards the labour function.

This chapter closes by presenting its limitations as well as some reflections on recommendations for future research about the LP of MMs and their expert labour.

9.2 A labour process analysis of middle managers

This research focused on an unconventional category of HR, namely MMs. As outlined in the introductory chapter, it is challenging to define ‘who the MMs are’ (Dopson, *et al.* 1997; Kay, 1974; McCann *et al.* 2004) and to determine ‘what they do’ (Carchedi, 1977; Carter, 1985; Edwards, 1979; Hales, 1986; Koontz and O’Donnell, 1968; Kotter, 1982; Mintzberg, 1973; Torrington and Weightman, 1987). Yet, as discussed in chapter 2, empirical evidence shows that MMs are particularly affected when organisational restructuring is carried out (Carter and Fairbrother, 1995; Dopson and Steward, 1990; Hassard *et al.* 2009; Kunda and Ailon-Souday, 2005; Osterman, 2008).

In the context of organisational restructuring, MMs are increasingly exposed to forces of rationalisation, work intensification and performance pressure, despite reduced opportunity for upward mobility and heightened job insecurity (Hassard *et al.* 2009). The authority of MMs is curbed due to subordination (Carter, 1995 and Fairbrother; Carter *et al.* 2002) and their influence over senior management’s decisions is limited (Hassard *et al.* 2009). The implication here is that their hierarchical authority is circumscribed. Confronted by these circumstances, MMs seem reluctant to turn to conflict to rebalance the situation (*ibid.*). Meanwhile, the work of MMs is growing more sophisticated and complex (Hassard *et al.* 2009), reflecting increased levels of expertise within their ranks (Reed, 1989; Mutch, 2008). In fact, data suggest that the skill and responsibility levels of MMs have increased in the reformed workplace (Hassard *et al.* 2009; McCann *et al.* 2004; 2008; 2010).

At this point, a conundrum surfaces: if MMs’ managerial authority (deriving from the hierarchical line) is curtailed, which of their responsibilities have increased and why do they remain important players in the restructured organisation? Are MMs happy to be exploited? Is it possible that they do not cut corners in their work or is there a specific terrain that MMs use to survive, to execute their role and to defend their interests in the modern workplace? If so, what is this terrain, what is done with it and how do they use it?

These queries prompted this research and, to unravel them, as well as to provide new insights in middle management’s LP, the researcher initiated her research on MMs by adopting a priori the LPT. The analysis of one case study, a Maltese public sector organisation, was carried out. The selected organisation was undergoing restructuring

due to national policies that pushed for the liberalisation and privatisation of a number of its services, as detailed in chapter 3.

Eventually, this study was able to address the aforementioned conundrum because, once in the field, the researcher uncovered a set of causal mechanisms (see chapter 4). Together, these mechanisms became the basis of a new understanding and clarified MMs' particular forms of behaviour and the meanings they ascribed to events (Ackroyd, 2009a). This thesis expounds that, specifically, this new understanding was the development of PE (a combination of knowledge, skills and experience) as the terrain that characterised the role of MMs. Once this became known, the researcher grew interested in finding out more about PE and MMs, with the overarching research question this thesis has put forward as follows: 'what role does PE perform in the LP of MMs and what difference does it make to the LPT's framework, grounded on control, conflict and consent?'

The significance of this research question results from the fact that the issues it investigates go beyond the interests of PublicOrg. The way expertise, skills and control are shaped by the structural properties of the capitalist LP, and the overlapping responses (resistance, misbehaviour, compliance and consent) to shifting forms of control, are chief issues within the LPT (Thompson, 1990; Thompson and Harley, 2007; Thompson and van den Broek, 2010). To a degree, these issues are also of interest for industrial sociology (Ackroyd and Thompson, 1999, 2015; Thompson and Ackroyd, 1995), the expert labour (Reed, 1996; Muzio *et al.* 2008a) and knowledge debates (Warhurst and Thompson, 1998; 2006), along with the more contemporary LP analysis of skill (Grugulis 2007; Grugulis and Lloyd, 2010). In any case, in this study they were applied to MMs who, despite all the changes taking place in the workplace, continue to be important and valuable for work organisations (Hassard *et al.* 2009; Osterman, 2008; Warhurst and Thompson, 1996).

Basically, this thesis has applied the LPT's core propositions (Thompson and Harley, 2007). Originally, these were adopted to investigate the experience of the collective worker at the point of production, but this study applied them to MMs. Hence, although focusing on the managerial regime, this research acknowledged the pivotal proposition regarding the inherent indeterminacy of labour in the capitalist LP. This fundamental condition leads to a number of other core propositions, including the necessity of management and the existence of structured antagonism (*ibid.* Edwards, 1990).

In order to provide answers to the overarching research question and to build an argument around the LPT's core propositions, the following set of research questions was formulated to guide the research task:

- What role does PE play in the management functions of MMs?
- How do the dynamics of control operate in the case of MMs?
- What are the motives behind MMs' unruly behaviour?
- Why do MMs embrace what they do at work?

The answers to these questions were considered in the four preceding empirical chapters (chapters 5-8). The next section is intended to provide a summation and an assessment of the significant findings of this research endeavour.

9.3 A labour process analysis dominated by professional expertise

9.3.1 Middle managers and professional expertise

MMs at PublicOrg were specialist managers, executing a dual-role (managers-and-experts) that was characterised by significant PE that reshaped the basis of struggles over LP control. MMs' perceptions and experiences at work, as well as their responses to managerial practices and organisational restructuring, could not be assessed separately from their expert role, which is the point of departure for the forming of PE.

Essentially, PE is both a technical and social resource. It served MMs as a technical resource, because they required particular knowledge and specific skills to provide operational control, technical expertise and specialist support. With respect to PE as a social resource, there is an element whereby it is socially constructed. In other words, since PE was regarded as a high-quality ability crucial for the organisation to operate effectively and efficiently, MMs used it to attain power and to defend their hierarchical position. The element of social construction was leveraged in intra-organisational struggles that MMs led, given that they used PE to draw boundaries, uphold their standing and preserve their autonomy.

Ultimately, the technical aspect and the social aspect are interlinked because they provided MMs with a substantial degree of autonomy and a high standing, as seen by the employees they manage and the SMs who manage them. Thus, at PublicOrg, which also sought to streamline its middle tiers (Dopson and Steward, 1990, 1993;

Gordon, 1996; Heckscher, 1995; Livian, 1997; Smith, 1990; Wheatley, 1992), MMs drew on PE to defend their job, prestige and status.

In theory, there is a significant relationship between PE and the management aspect of the role of MMs. At the theoretical level, this implies that MMs need a combination of knowledge, skills and experience (PE) to execute the specialist technical coordination of work required to organise, integrate and direct the LP in the organisation's specialised units operating under their responsibility. This thesis's data show that MMs were not necessarily involved in setting the policy and developing the strategy of the respective divisions (Hassard *et al.* 2009). At the same time, certain people management matters were not completely under their control, but they did have the authority, autonomy and discretion to coordinate and direct the LP of subordinate employees.

The coordination function is a solid management process that specialist MMs execute and they accomplish this function on the basis of their PE. In line with MMs' leading role and leverage over the technical coordination of the LP within the organisation's units, they use this position of authority and influence in the social coordination and control of the LP. Through top-down coordination, MMs are able to manage employees in such a way that they succeed to obtain from them satisfactory behaviour and output.

When MMs' exercise of managerial authority is fragmented, they transform the labour power of their subordinates to actual labour (Braverman, 1974; Thompson, 1989) on account of their PE rather than on grounds of their hierarchical position. PE's social aspect serves MMs as a resource to attain power and so they succeed to manage employees and to mobilise themselves in relation to SMs.

9.3.2 Middle managers, professional control and traditional controls

Control over PublicOrg's MMs was hardly manifested in outright supervision and authoritarianism (Hassard *et al.* 2009). Nonetheless, professional control (arising on account of their PE and containing a normative dimension), bureaucratic control and work intensification operated in combination to address MMs' indeterminacy gap (Thompson and Harley, 2007; Thompson and van den Broek, 2010). These forms of control gave rise to tensions, but in each case MMs used their PE to either support or defend their autonomy.

Professional control is based on three distinctive features: intrinsic, regulatory and vertical aspects. The intrinsic and regulatory aspects were activated outside PublicOrg. The former was put into action through MMs' self-control (Thompson, 1989), self-regulation over work (Ainsworth and Harley, 2014), distinctive ethos and sense of duty. The regulatory aspect was based on external regulatory parameters established by professional bodies. These two aspects gave rise to control that appeared more voluntary in nature and instigated a normative orientation. Once in employment, the vertical aspect was triggered as MMs were required to take a hands-on approach to deal with specialised technical and operational responsibilities.

As the intrinsic and regulatory aspects evolve from the expert role of MMs, irrespective of whether they are in employment and where they work, it is certainly more beneficial for MMs to be directed by professional control compared to any other form of control, simply imposed by senior management. Besides, under professional control's vertical aspect, in order to deal with technical, operational and managerial aspects, which are unpredictable in nature, MMs inevitably retain considerable authority, autonomy and discretion.

Meanwhile, similar to other studies (Carter *et al.* 2002; Carter and Fairbrother, 1995; Hassard *et al.* 2009; 2011), this research found that traditional forms of control, namely bureaucratic rationalisation and work intensification, were also applied to non-manual/white-collar workers. In such cases, it was MMs who undertook expert labour. Bureaucratic control and work intensification gave rise to tensions because their goals to achieve increased output, stability and predictability (Edwards, 1979; Thompson and McHugh, 2009) worked in conflict with the creativity and flexibility MMs needed to carry out their role. Faced with these circumstances, MMs drew on their PE to defend their autonomy. They discarded boundaries imposed by bureaucratic systems and work intensification, unless they could use aspects of them to mitigate personal responsibilities in case of mishaps, or to express their competence and efforts.

The different forms of control bind MMs to sensitive duties, increased responsibilities and routine tasks, causing stress and anxiety. However, this study reveals an important ambivalence. The interviewed MMs complained about their increased workload, hours of work, exhaustion and pressure, yet it was in their interest to maintain and play up the role they performed on account of their PE.

Indeed, MMs accepted more technical and operational responsibilities, as these strengthened their position at work. Moreover, the intrinsic and regulatory aspects guided their behaviour in such a way that it was extremely important for them to attend to the quality and value of their work, and to do so they were prepared to apply extra effort. However, in due course, these realities contributed to the downfall of MMs, because they had neither adequate resources nor sufficient managerial authority. Thus, for MMs, accepting this unfavourable trade-off allowed them to maintain their managerial position and professional standing, but they have to do so at a cost. Basically, they are their own ‘gravediggers’: they want more and want to do it at a high-level of quality leading to increased pressure.

9.3.3 Middle managers, resistance and misbehaviour

Conflict in the employment relationship around the frontier of control was mainly expressed as ‘misbehaviour’. MMs tended to identify themselves collectively, but acted individually and mainly informally (‘misbehave’) to: allow concessions to their subordinate employees, even if these resulted in rule breaking; adopt cynical attitudes each time they felt that their position was being compromised due to senior management’s decisions; and/or to seek ways to curb work intensification. Basically, MMs engaged in misbehaviour when they wanted to defend their autonomy in the LP, boost their managerial influence and disengage from certain SMs’ decisions, but without obstructing the operations they were managing.

Nonetheless, an element of ‘resistance’ among MMs was also detected each time they submitted an official grievance against their superiors. When they resisted they did so individually (without trade union involvement), claiming that this was more effective and less likely to escalate tension between them and their superiors. MMs embarked on resistance whenever they wanted to challenge formally and directly the power structures, mainly because they felt that specific top-down decisions were going to infringe on their standing. When offering resistance, MMs based their arguments on technicalities, vast expertise and experience (PE).

Whether in the form of misbehaviour or resistance, MMs’ unruly behaviour was not simply an expression of dissatisfaction and essentially was not designed to escape work, but rather it emerges from the tensions that characterise their employment relationship.

This is driven by senior management's desire to curb their autonomy to manage and restrain their behaviour in order to extract more output from them.

This thesis's evidence affirms that collective resistance through trade unionism is unlikely to be part of a formula that would adjust MMs' intensive LP (Hassard *et al.* 2009; 2011). Although PublicOrg's MMs were unionised, they preferred not to use formal collective resistance to redress their challenging working lives, because in their view it caused more distress for the operations that they were responsible for and could jeopardise their position. Such findings indicate why MMs' relationship with trade unions is an ambivalent one (Hassard *et al.* 2011). Yet, independent collective organisation still has an important role for MMs. On this basis, they establish a collective identity and terms and conditions of employment, which otherwise would be differentiated individually on some grounds, possibly giving rise to more tension amongst MMs.

Overall, although MMs have never been on the forefront of collectively organised resistance, they are not 'quiet' because the potential for some form of conflict is always there. Such conflict within management indicates that MMs can go beyond mere 'resigned compliance' (Hassard *et al.* 2009), but their unruly behaviour confirms that their allegiances are in fact tilted towards senior management.

9.3.4 Middle managers, compliance and consent

MMs' responses to relations of control overlapped from resistance and misbehaviour to compliance and consent (Thompson and Harley, 2007; Thompson and Newsome, 2004). Their consensual behaviour emerged from dynamics inside, as well as outside, PublicOrg.

MMs' 'compliance' with the daily realities they faced at work materialised for two main reasons. First, on the basis of their PE and sense of professionalism, initiated outside PublicOrg, MMs adhered to intrinsic duties and obligations to execute work of a high quality and to solve organisational problems. Besides, professional forms of organisation (certificates, warrants, professional bodies) operating outside the workplace acted as a compelling influence on these managers inside the workplace. Second, there were occasions when MMs did 'give way' (Thompson, 1989) to the

structure of power and control present inside PublicOrg. For instance, they did not completely discard the performance appraisal mechanism, as they were apprehensive about the repercussions if they were to do so, and they were also concerned about the increased possibility of losing their job in the face of ongoing restructuring (Hassard *et al.* 2009; McGovern *et al.* 2007).

‘Consent’ to the tough work demands were generated from both MMs themselves and through social relationships that SMs established with them. MMs gave rise to consent because they agreed to perform work, which was demanding, advanced and required creativity. Meanwhile, SMs established a paternalistic relationship with MMs, based on close and personal contact that, at times, even extended outside the workplace. Through this relationship, SMs elicited further assent from MMs to their demands. Additionally, since SMs and their middle counterparts shared professional and managerial understanding, experiences and interests, there were occasions whereby the former preferred to embark on collegiality. Collegiality was mostly articulated in the fact that high-level decisions on technical aspects of work were based on consensus with MMs, rather than hierarchal authority. Remarkably, however, paternalism and collegiality served as insidious modes of control, by means of which SMs succeeded to inhibit clashes between them and MMs.

Although, as outlined in this research, conflict in MMs’ employment relationship persists, consensual behaviour remains, which suggests there are a number of factors that drive these managers to embrace what they do at work. MMs’ tendency to uphold what they do at work is driven by the fact that their work is challenging. The level of responsibility and the degree of competence that they exert, drawing on their PE, are the impetus for the intrinsic returns they acquire. Meanwhile, the pace of MMs’ work is intense, but when inter-level contact, support and involvement (under one form or another) are not degenerated outright, it is more likely that MMs accept the tough demands they face in the workplace. More importantly, MMs conform to the reality they face at work, because their employment, secured through PE, provides them with a privileged position (Reed, 1996) and underlines their ‘professional identity’ (Hassard *et al.* 2009).

9.4 Three key contributions

9.4.1 Middle management functions

An analysis of MMs' functions and the notion of studying "middle management *as work*" [emphasis in the original] (Bozkurt, 2013) barely features in the LPT. Indeed, what this thesis has uncovered is based on previous generations of research (Armstrong, 1989; Braverman, 1974; Carchedi, 1977; Carter, 1985; Edwards, 1979; Friedman, 1977; Thompson, 1989) and long-standing concepts and ideas about MMs (Hassard *et al.* 2009; McCann *et al.* 2004; 2008; 2010).

This thesis has carried out a qualitative realist-informed research to uncover what MMs are capable of doing under a set of circumstances and within a particular socio-economic system. The empirical contribution of this thesis lies in the fact that it has not simply concentrated on observable individual activities of managers (Tsoukas, 2000) that decontextualise managerial work (Hales, 1986), but rather it has examined their functions. This was a challenging pursuit, since while activities can be seen, functions, as analytical devices, cannot (Thomas, 2003; Tsoukas, 2000).

Focusing on MMs in Malta, this thesis observed that unlike Anglo-American countries, the general management functions and the specialist expert functions are not separated. The generic image of management is extensive and peculiarly Anglo-American (Armstrong, 1987; Grugulis, 2007; Thompson and McHugh, 2009). In Malta and in other European countries such as Germany and Italy (Delmestri and Walgenbach, 2005), holding middle managerial positions typically depends on one's specialist expertise, commonly related to the activity being managed. The institutionalisation of MMs as holders of technical knowledge in Germany and Italy can be ascribed to the educational system (in Germany) and to a normative concentration on the regular improvement in employees' professional skills (in Italy) (*ibid.*) In these cases, due to the considerable specialised technical functions, MMs develop PE, which becomes significant as they become *directly* involved in the execution of high-level technical duties and the provision of specialised support.

In order to understand the functions of the MMs under investigation, this thesis constructed its analysis on the tradition of the radical debate, which claims that, under the premise of capital accumulation and the pursuit of competition, management has

two different functions: control and coordination (Carchedi, 1977; Carter, 1985; Edwards, 1979; Thompson, 1989). It is on this basis that this thesis makes a theoretical contribution, as outlined in the next subsection.

9.4.2 Function of coordination

The LPT provides a theoretical grounding for MMs' functions (Carchedi, 1977; Carter, 1985; Edwards, 1979). It also throws light on professionals engaged in jobs (Edwards, 1979; Friedman, 1977; Smith, 1991), as well as on expert labour (Warhurst and Thompson, 1998; 2006). However, the role expertise plays in the LP of MMs is not fully developed by the radical approach. On grounds of its empirical contribution, this thesis filled this gap. It generated theoretical insights into the role of PE as it relates to MMs' function of coordination.

The focus on the function of coordination and the way it is executed through PE is a novel aspect in the MMs' debate that helps to situate PE theoretically. This thesis argues that the expert role of MMs, which is a springboard for PE, consolidates and supports their managerial role. So, PE is used across MMs' functions and roles, mostly as coordinators and experts, and to a lesser extent as exploiters. Such an analysis sheds light on the balance between the activities of control and coordination amongst MMs (Edwards, 2010), and suggests that the balance between such activities is not fixed, either historically or across different institutional contexts. Such a theoretical contribution is useful in moving forward the well-established debate on MMs' complex role (Carchedi, 1977; Carter, 1985; Edwards, 1979).

Research that employs an LPT interpretation to explain the effects of workplace restructuring on MMs does not differentiate between these managers' functions (Hassard *et al.* 2009; McCann *et al.* 2004; 2008; 2010). Thus, from these studies it is difficult to determine which of the MMs' responsibilities have increased in the modern corporation. Contrastingly, since this thesis focused on MMs' functions, it established that their hierarchical authority is limited and that parts of their work are increasingly subject to control pressures. This implies that MMs' control function is, to some extent, not evolving. But then, in an ever more sophisticated workplace, MMs are increasingly required to coordinate work, which is becoming more advanced. Therefore, they are the technical/specialist responsibilities that have become more demanding. Effectively, their main management function is the coordination function, which they perform on

the basis of their PE. At work, MMs use their leading role and hold over the technical coordination of the LP to undertake social coordination and control.

9.4.3 Negotiation of control, conflict and consent

As an LP informed research, the potential of this thesis lies in its ability to study the dynamics of the employment relationship. Through the LPT's fine-grained analysis of control, conflict, indeterminacy of labour and structured antagonism, this thesis did not risk succumbing to naïve claims about MMs. Had this thesis ignored structured antagonism and divergent interests, it would have simply repeated claims about MMs' consent, commitment and willingness, which are typical of mainstream approaches. Instead, by building on the LPT, this thesis shows that even MMs (who are concurrently 'managers' and 'experts') are entangled in struggles due to conflicts and contradictions, with the restructured organisation remaining a contested terrain. In these circumstances, MMs exploit their PE in relation to the dynamics of the LPT's core concepts:

Regarding *control*: MMs' actual output from their potential input is not chiefly elicited through conventional forms of control, generally applied to the other employees. Rather, these managers use their PE to, as much as possible, overcome boundaries set by traditional controls. For MMs, it is professional control that arises on account of their PE, which primarily directs their behaviour. Since professional control, with its normative orientation, involves a substantial degree of subjectivity, expressed in creativity (knowledge to labour and capital as well as tacit skills), it upholds MMs' autonomy and discretion.

Regarding *conflict*: Motivated by their responsibility towards their role, based on PE, MMs avoid collective resistance and instead choose to express their unruly behaviour in ways that do not disrupt the operations they manage. However, this does not stop them from basing their dissenting arguments on their broad know-how, expertise and experience (PE). Overall, in the case of MMs, the concept of 'misbehaviour', which reaches beneath institutional practices and explores informal acts of workplace conflict and is borrowed from industrial sociology (Thompson and Ackroyd, 1995), is more appropriate to conceptualize MMs' unruly behaviour. Thus, albeit the concept of 'misbehaviour' (Ackroyd and Thompson, 1999; 2015) was not necessarily developed

with MMs in mind, this study found that it works well and can be juxtaposed against the concept of ‘resistance’ when dealing with MMs.

Regarding *consent*: At work, MMs continuously seek to signify their usefulness with regard to their PE, supported by a sense of professionalism, which is established and exists independently of the workplace. Inside the workplace, MMs use their PE to carry out complex and sophisticated work, which requires substantial effort but also provides them with extrinsic and intrinsic rewards. Subsequently, they closely identify with the goals of the organisation and agree to make a number of decisions in line with the interests of SMs. Nonetheless, considering senior management’s escalated emphasis on enhanced performance (reinforced by performance measures, audit systems and accountability practices), the goal of SMs to secure the survival of the organisation against all odds (McGovern *et al.* 2007; Thompson, 2003; 2011), as well as the duties and obligations that arise from MMs’ expert role, it emerges that these managers’ consensual behaviour is significantly marked by compliance.

As this thesis touches on a number of issues and explanations raised by some scholarly debates, the next section conducts a series of discussions with these debates around MMs. These debates were first explored in chapter 2, sections 2.2 and 2.3 respectively.

9.5 The findings in the context of major theoretical debates

The goal of this discussion, held with the sociology of the profession (9.5.1), expertise and expert labour (9.5.2), knowledge work (9.5.3) and skills (9.5.4) debates, is twofold. First, it serves as an opportunity to show whether the LP analysis offered by this thesis complements and/or contradicts these debates, and discusses and explains the advantages of this analysis to the claims made by these debates. Second, by means of this discussion involving these debates, which at times overlap and interweave, this thesis seeks to contextualise its main argument that MMs use PE to retain and execute their role, as well as to defend their distinct interests, even though tension in their employment relationship persists because of control, conflict and contradictions.

9.5.1 The balance between middle managers' control and autonomy

PE is important for MMs because, it grants them both the authority to make decisions and the autonomy to act. Consequently, through PE they attain control over the LP, in direct relation to specific tasks. At PublicOrg, such control was reflected in the high degree of operational autonomy and decision-making that MMs had in order to execute the technical coordination of work within specialised units. Yet, concurrently, this study reveals that MMs did not have overall control of work when it came to working hours and volume of work, both of which increased due to demanding performance management and workload, driven by rationalisation and cost-cutting measures. As this subsection outlines, when considering these findings with the sociology of professions, it transpires that this thesis shares some common ground, but not in an empirical and theoretical sense.

Once autonomy is considered a key feature, or as Hassard *et al.* (2011) put it 'one major advantage', of managerial work, the LP analysis offered by this thesis reaches conclusions that, on the face of it, are also reached by the sociology of professions. This is not surprising, given that, on account of their PE, MMs did have the ability "to do their work as they see fit on the basis of their own sense of knowing how to do it" (Freidson, 1994, p.73). By means of their 'superior expertise' (Larson, 1977), involving abstract knowledge, and by reasoning requiring inference and judgement grounded on tacit, experiential knowledge (Abbott, 1988; Freidson, 1970), MMs identified and dealt directly with complex problems, as well as coordinated, monitored and evaluated the processes of work. In addition, accredited training, licensing, self-control and a set of values, norms and standards, which instigate normative orientation and typify professional autonomy (Freidson, 1970; 1994), characterised the role of MMs.

MMs were not micro-managed, rather they exercised autonomy anchored in their PE to make operational and technical decisions, which they believed were the best in the circumstances. In fact, when at any point MMs felt that their superiors tried to infringe on their operational autonomy, they resisted and intentionally designed their grievances to challenge senior management's decisions on grounds of their PE. So far, the implication is that, on the basis of their PE, MMs enjoy autonomy, power and privilege.

However, this thesis deviates from the sociology of professions. The latter holds that professionals' diagnostic authority trumps bureaucratic and managerial control, even when the professionals are ensconced as employees within large, complex work organisations (Brock *et al.* 2007; Hinings, 2005; Russell *et al.* 2015; 2016). Contrastingly, since this thesis entered the 'hidden abode' (Marx, 1976) of the LP, a realm that is often overlooked within the sociology of professions (Russell *et al.* 2015), it challenges this claim.

MMs do hold greater autonomy compared to lower counterparts, but they operate in conventional bureaucratic hierarchies, even if they are restructured (Alvesson and Thompson, 2005; Hales, 2002; Hassard *et al.* 2009). Thus, their role does *not* rest only on the balance between a large degree of operational-autonomy and normative orientation. Actually, at work, MMs have to deal with constraints on their autonomy, due to a combination of other control strategies (Thompson and Harley, 2007). The bureaucratic regulations are intended to obtain greater accountability from MMs, while management practices imposed on them are meant to monitor closely their performance for the purpose of continuous improvement, inevitably leading to work intensification and work pressure. Subsequently, MMs have to allocate significant time and effort in their work, suggesting that their overall control of work is restricted. On the whole, MMs comply with these difficult realities without much opposition (Hassard *et al.* 2009). However, this thesis did capture occasions in which MMs misbehaved in an attempt to control how much they became involved in work. In these instances, MMs did not abdicate from their responsibilities, but found ways to express their tension and, in return, sought to preserve their autonomy.

As indicated above, the sociology of professions is concerned with the knowledge that professionals possess, which is perceived to be effective in identifying and solving intricate problems and in allowing the professionals to control their work in ways that cannot be easily challenged (Russell *et al.* 2016). The LP analysis offered by this thesis acknowledges that PE is instrumental for MMs to solve complex problems and to acquire considerable autonomy and power. However, since this thesis descended into the site of MMs' LP and captured the complexity of relations between 'capital' (SMs) and 'labour' (MMs) (Thompson and Harley, 2007; Thompson and Newsome, 2004), it claims that their position is not an entirely advantageous one (Weber, 1978).

MMs have control *over* the specialist expert functions that accord them a high degree of autonomy in the LP, but their overall control *of* work (regarding its intensity and the hours they devote to it) is circumscribed. In reality, the autonomy (professional and operational) of MMs must strike a balance not only with the bureaucratic principles of the work organisation (Child, 1984), which is at the heart of the sociology of professions, but also with management intervention and control. These pose a direct threat to autonomy and lead to an increase in tension and pressure.

9.5.2 Middle managers, expertise, expert labour and tension

This subsection further discusses the tension MMs experience at work, by expanding on the expert labour debate (Fincham, 2012; Muzio *et al.* 2008a; Reed, 1996; Warhurst and Thompson, 1998; 2006). This thesis supports this debate on the grounds that it rejects the idea that knowledge at work is only concerned with information processing and manipulation, focusing instead on the strategic role experts play in the workplace, a role which is increasingly subject to challenges and control systems. Indeed, the tension faced by expert within the employing organisation is at the core of the expert labour discussion (Darr and Warhurst, 2008; Warhurst and Thompson, 1998; 2006).

This study elaborates upon this debate because it did not concentrate its attention on categorising expert groups, but focused on MMs, who turned out to be either ‘traditional’ professionals or ‘new’ specialists. These are two categories, which expert labour writers usually categorise into ‘independent/collegial professions’ and ‘knowledge workers’ (Fincham, 2012; Muzio *et al.* 2008b; Reed, 1996). Contrastingly, considering Reed’s (1996) detailed typology of expertise and Muzio *et al.*’s (2008b) contribution, PublicOrg’s MMs are closer to the third occupational category, namely ‘organisational professions’. The reason for this is that, as organisational professionals, PublicOrg’s MMs adopted credentialism as their power strategy and to gain status, while they colonised key organisational areas (specialised units) and occupied specific positions (middle managerial) in the bureaucratic structure on the grounds of their PE. MMs succeeded in this regard because they solved high-level technical problems and added value through the delivery of efficiency gains (Armstrong, 1985).

As specialist MMs do perform expert labour, they end up facing tensions that scholars discussing expert labour have already raised, but the advantage of this thesis is that it

discusses them from the (middle) managerial angle. Indeed, the discussion below indicates that although MMs, on account of their PE, manage to survive in the modern workplace and build a distinct relationship with SMs (Armstrong, 1989; Darr and Warhurst, 2008), they continue to endure tension, as divergent interests remain and the vertical division of labour persists. The tension faced by experts at work is often overlooked by the sociology of professions and knowledge workers debate.

Even though PublicOrg's MMs were covered by professional bodies issuing mandatory credentials, the politics of their expertise became more intense and complex as a result of uncertainties prevailing in the workplace (Reed, 1996). MMs had to operate within an organisational environment characterised by the economic and fiscal crises of the State, along with political ideologies. This led to an increase in job insecurity and to the development of forms of control that aspired towards increased performance, transparency and predictability. Meanwhile, in an era of extensive technical upsurge, technical matters were becoming more complicated, thus more demanding. Faced with such dynamic and uncertain conditions, MMs survived because they adjusted their PE to the economic, technological and political changes that faced PublicOrg. However, their role did remain subject to tension.

Inevitably, in the case of specialist MMs, the dynamics of structured antagonism (Edwards, 1986; 1990) became more intricate, because at the same time MMs fulfilled managerial and expert duties. Besides, SMs held expertise similar to that of the MMs reporting to them, so both tiers of managers shared values, norms, and standards. These circumstances suggest that middle management's work and senior management's outlook can to some degree be mutually supportive and not entirely antagonistic. However, antagonism endures and this thesis points to two main interlinked reasons for this.

First, divergent interests, between MMs and their superiors continue to exist. MMs' direct involvement in technical tasks means that they are often motivated by the desire to explore the boundaries of their knowledge and skill (Ackroyd, 2013). The drive towards technical initiative and creativity is typical of expert labour, but it does not necessarily complement senior management's targets and deadlines. These lead to bureaucratic procedures and managerial control, which constrain MMs' professional autonomy. The tension between creativity and control "has always been at the heart of

expert labour” (Thompson and McHugh, 2009, p.227), and in the case of MMs performing expert labour, it becomes even more complicated. MMs as ‘experts’ do their utmost not to be constrained within boundaries imposed by bureaucratic and management control (Warhurst and Thompson, 1998). However, as ‘managers’ they cannot discard such boundaries completely because they themselves use parts of them to manage subordinate employees. Meanwhile, as ‘the managed’ they are afraid of the consequences of rejecting them completely (Hassard *et al.* 2009).

Second, MMs experience tension as the ‘old’ vertical division of labour persists (Warhurst and Thompson, 1998). PublicOrg’s MMs executed work that was complex, domain-specific and had creative content. They also had authority over the technical aspect of work, and enjoyed higher levels of autonomy and trust compared to the other employees. However, their role was not exclusively directed by means of horizontal coordination. This supports the claim put forward by LP proponents (*ibid.* Thompson and McHugh, 2009), with this thesis confirming that, when dealing with expert labour, even at middle managerial level, the collegial form of management does not mean the elimination of vertical line management.

This study argues that, in the case of MMs, the tendency is for MMs to operate in a scenario where hierarchical and collegial forms of management are combined. SMs do not get involved in the details of the technical aspect of work performed within the organisation’s specialised units (Delmestri and Walgenbach, 2005). It is MMs who coordinate and communicate within and across these units. Additionally, when setting high-level plans and objectives that are of a technical nature, SMs prefer to embark on collegiality with their middle-counterparts. Concurrently, however, MMs are subject to increased performance monitoring, financial targets and penalties (Edwards *et al.* 1996).

In the workplace, MMs have to deal with tension, which, considering their expert labour, is becoming ‘sharper’ (Warhurst and Thompson, 2006). In these circumstances, PE is instrumental for them to retain, execute, and as much as possible, protect their role against ‘increased pressure’ and ‘heightened tension’ (Hassard *et al.* 2009). Indeed, the next two subsections open a discussion with the ‘knowledge work’ and ‘skill’ debates given that PE’s two main features are, precisely, knowledge and skill.

9.5.3 Knowledge and knowledgeable middle managers

This thesis argues that, although MMs meet constraints that create tension on account of their PE, they remain key players in the continuous functioning of the work organisation. As a matter of fact, this subsection queries predictions about the demise of middle management, due to an increase in circuits of knowledge, flows of information and data in the workplace. Next, it builds upon an analytical argument presented by LP scholars on ‘knowledge and work’. Consequently, it does not become mired in the controversies about the usage and usefulness of the concept ‘knowledge work/ers’ (Thompson *et al.* 2001; Warhurst and Thompson, 1998), but does not dismiss the ‘knowledge issue’ (Warhurst and Thompson, 2006), which is important for MMs. Nonetheless, in line with this discussion, two points of convergence that this study shares with the mainstream knowledge work’s debate are highlighted.

Mainstream knowledge work writers often base their conclusions on ‘assumption *cum* assertion’, with little empirical evidence and the material focusing on the work of knowledge workers is ‘analysis-lite’ (Darr and Warhurst, 2008; Warhurst and Thompson, 2006). Conversely, this thesis adheres to one of the strengths of LP analysis, namely its empirical interest in the experience of work at the point of production (Edwards, 2010). Indeed, it is on account of empirical evidence that this thesis challenges the proposition that middle management has been diminished, because: (i) MMs’ coordinating functions have disappeared; (ii) MMs do not know best anymore; and (iii) MMs are no longer seen as the solution of organisational problems (Dopson and Steward, 1993; Drucker, 1988; Rabin, 1999). The implication here is that the new information systems driven by ICT and/or the presence of knowledge workers, have absorbed these managers’ responsibilities and skills (Delmestri and Walgenbach, 2005; Mutch, 2008; Warhurst and Thompson, 1998).

Contrarily, this thesis’s data show that: (i) the technical coordination of work represents MMs’ chief management process; (ii) SMs choose to include MMs when devising certain high-level plans; and (iii) SMs still prefer to have information supplied to them directly by MMs, through regular meetings held with them. So, it is either the case that the new information systems, which give SMs the chance to access operational data directly, failed to meet their expectations, or since these MMs are specialist managers, the type and quality of PE that they hold and use is indispensable and not replaceable.

Based on robust empirical evidence, this thesis concludes that it is MMs' PE and their understanding that prevented them from being redundant in the face of advances in communication technology, software programming and potential growth of knowledge workers. Instead, through the development of PE, MMs strengthen their position. Nevertheless, it ought to be noted that while MMs retain and execute an important role at work, technology does have an impact on them. It enlarges the scope of their responsibilities, subsequently intensifying their role and manipulating their work-life balance.

Despite the fact that, based on their expert role, MMs engage in what are often referred to as knowledge work activities (complexity, creativity and initiative), this thesis prefers to expand on the disentangling put forward by LP scholars. In so doing, it is more important to focus on 'knowledgeability in work' instead of simply conflating types of work with 'knowledge work', which is too inclusive to be of an appropriate use (Warhurst and Thompson, 1998; Thompson *et al.* 2000; 2001).

By considering the content of MMs' work and what they are capable of doing, rather than just noting their job titles, this case study shifts beyond the traditional conception of knowledge (and skills) associated with knowledge *workers* and *generalist* MMs. The theoretical, technical and explicit knowledge, which for mainstream knowledge work proponents (Blackler, 1995; Blackler *et al.* 1993) is the basis of knowledge work (Thompson *et al.* 2000; 2001), is of great significance for specialist MMs. However, knowledge, which is contextual, social and tacit, is also important for these managers to fulfil their role. For knowledge work proponents (Blackler *et al.* 1998; Frenkel, *et al.* 1995), knowledge that is contextual, social and tacit is "of lesser value, significance or centrality to work" (Thompson *et al.* 2001, p.927). This is a conclusion overturned by this thesis, which asserts that the knowledgeability in work lens broadens the understanding of middle management work.

At PublicOrg, the theoretical and technical knowledge expressed in a formal qualification, used as a proxy for knowledge work (Warhurst and Thompson, 2006), was considered key to MMs' recruitment. For these managers to become directly involved in technical problem-identification and problem-solving, their specialised knowledge in an area (e.g. accountancy, engineering, ICT), technical competence and thinking skills were important. Yet, since MMs were not only the most competent, but also the most responsible for the running of specialised units, including its resources,

the utilisation of other knowledge became crucial. MMs execute knowledgeable work, but they also supervise technical work, manage a group of employees and monitor the performance of the latter and the unit. These are managerial responsibilities that necessitate MMs to acquire the knowledge and skills required to handle contextual and relational issues, besides the knowledge and skills to deal with technical issues. Thus, without ignoring the importance of theoretical, technical and explicit knowledge, for specialist MMs other ‘less traditional’ forms of knowledge are also essential.

At this point, before starting a discussion on skill, it is worth noting that there remain two points of convergence that this thesis shares with the mainstream knowledge work debate. The first point is that social actors’ knowledge can be considered as a resource applied to solve organisational problems (Blackler, 1995). This study adds that, to predict, analyse and solve problems, MMs not only draw on a body of theoretical knowledge, but also use different types of knowledge with varied usages and purposes.

In terms of the second point, the business writers Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) deviate from the mainstream’s assertions, because, on the basis of case study companies situated in Japan, they emphasise the continued importance of MMs. Their argument is that for work organisations to create knowledge, the best management style is neither top-down nor bottom-up, but rather what they label ‘middle-up-down’. In the latter, MMs form a bridge between senior management’s abstract knowledge and the frontline’s tacit knowledge. Although the way companies create new knowledge to sustain future competitive advantage was not the focus of this thesis, it can be inferred that PublicOrg’s MMs are closer to Nonaka and Takeuchi’s (1995) ‘middle-up-down’ Japanese style, similar to German and Italian counterparts rather than to the American top-down style, which British MMs seem to correspond to (Delmestri and Walgenbach, 2005).

9.5.4 Skills and middle management work

A discussion with the LP analysis of skill is inevitable, because this thesis is a study about the LP of MMs and so questions about ‘what MMs do’ and ‘how MMs do it’, which revolve around issues of skill (Grugulis and Lloyd, 2010), were imperative. This thesis complements the contemporary LP skill analyses, because its evidence supports the claim that soft skills are not generic (ibid. Grugulis 2007) and consequently also questions the assumed separation between hard and soft skills (ibid. Bolton, 2004;

Darr, 2004). This discussion adds to the LP analysis because it highlights tension faced by MMs due to the expansion of the concept of skill and contradicts Braverman's (1974) deskilling thesis.

When focusing on skills, the notion of MMs as a technical savvy manager emerged as a fundamental requisite at PublicOrg. MMs realised that their specialised knowledge and superior technical skills secured their relatively powerful and privileged position in the workplace (Crompton, 1992; Fincham *et al.* 1994; Reed, 1996). However, they acknowledged that in order to perform their role successfully, they required other competences. This is a point that even SMs emphasised during the interviews, stressing MMs' non-technical qualities and attitudes. This is not a question of semantics (Grugulis *et al.* 2004), but in part reflects the broadening of the concept of skill, which is being rendered conceptually 'messy' (Grugulis, 2007). Additionally, it partly reflects senior management's attempt to hijack MMs' attitudes, characteristics and dispositions to widen their remit of control (Grugulis and Lloyd, 2010; Thompson and Harley, 2007).

With PublicOrg's work practices and procedures becoming more sophisticated and complex, MMs had to keep up-to-date with technical knowledge in their field. Meanwhile, they were expected to identify, at first hand, efficient and effective solutions for operational problems and complex technical difficulties, connected to the area under their responsibility. As 'absorbers of uncertainty' (Delmestri and Walgenbach, 2005), in order to perform problem-solving (soft skill), MMs require a high level of technical know-how (hard skill). MMs carried out problem-solving, which was not straightforward and informational, based on a simple routine procedure.

Additionally, even though MMs were principally engaged on the basis of their qualifications in an area of specialisation, in their role they had to deal with people, primarily subordinate employees, and a number of them had to deal with subcontractors, customers and potential customers. Hence, similar to Darr's (2004) coverage of technical salespersons selling cutting-edge technologies, MMs with extensive hard skills but no, or very few social skills, are not an asset. The so-called 'geek' MMs are not 'good' managers, if for example they are not able to communicate well and effectively lead employees reporting to them, in order to execute their plans and decisions on how to deal with the problems they have diagnosed or want to prevent.

In this context, this thesis substantiates the argument presented by LP scholars, namely that soft skills are not generic (Grugulis 2007; Grugulis and Lloyd, 2010). The data captured shows that, for specialist MMs, problem-solving, communication and leadership are not achievable if they are not equipped with substantial technical know-how. Nevertheless, in the generic skill lists, these three would count as ‘skills’ required of any MM. In short, even the *form* of middle management (from generalist to specialist) influences the application and nature of soft skills.

Subsequently, this thesis also questions whether in practice it is necessary (Darr, 2004) and helpful (Bolton, 2004) to draw a distinction between technical and soft, social skills. On a daily basis, MMs employ a combination of ‘soft’ and ‘hard’ skills to perform their work. For their technical skills to be implemented effectively, MMs must possess and be able to manage soft skills. Therefore, it is more likely that, in the case of MMs, soft and technical skills are interdependent (Darr, 2004; Grugulis and Lloyd, 2010).

This study adds to the problems LP scholars raise when considering the increased emphasis on soft skills, which expands the traditional notion of skill (Grugulis, 2007; Grugulis and Lloyd, 2010). During years of formal academic training, the principal focus of MMs is on the achievement of specialised knowledge and hard skills, with limited or no concentration on the development of soft, less often codified, interpersonal skills. However, at work MMs need both hard and soft skills. Besides, while the content of what MMs learn is the product of politics and consensus, usually reached by professional bodies (Abbott, 1988; Freidson, 1994), at work SMs alone decide what constitutes soft skills. Ultimately, SMs not only demand, but also assess and value MMs particularly with regard to ‘how they work’, and not just ‘what they do’ (Grugulis, 2007). Thus, the reality of MMs is difficult because in their case, technical skills and soft skills are interdependent, as well as *both* are expected, assessed and rewarded at a high level.

Meanwhile, although this study is on MMs, it does share similar grounds with Braverman’s (1974) inferences on blue-collar workers, specifically the notion of exploitation, control and increased workload. However, it does not support the notion of the deskilling of the ‘middle layers’. Alternatively, in line with other empirical research

(Hassard *et al.* 2009), PublicOrg's MMs and their superiors both reported increasing skill and responsibility levels.

The discussion around MMs' knowledge and skill is complicated, due to the complexity of their role. But, if anything, it is indicative of the wide range of responsibilities that characterise their role, leading to a heavy workload and high pressure. Ultimately, however, it is on the basis of their knowledge and skills (PE) that they defend their employment and their important role in the modern work organisation.

9.6 Implications of this thesis

9.6.1 The weakening of managerialism

While in some national contexts (e.g. Germany and Italy) MMs' competences tend to be 'more specialist', in others (e.g. the UK) they tend to be 'more generalist' (Delmestri and Walgenbach, 2005), with this thesis pointing out that Malta seems to align more with the former. When MMs' competences are 'more specialist', they can only deal with purely generic managerial tasks to a limited degree. They devote less time to generic managerial responsibilities compared to how much time they spend on technical matters (*ibid*).

The implication here is that managerialism weakens when MMs undertake specialist expert responsibilities alongside general management duties, because these managers are not trained in managerialism. From the managerialism perspective, managers are a distinct group of personnel who are specifically trained to perform *generic* management functions. Its focus is on the commitment to implement cost-cutting measures, marketisation and competition, and at its core it embraces notions of excellence and adding value amongst others. Indeed, managerialism equips the 'managers' with core functions of management, management techniques, as well as knowledge and skills to provide and apply the necessary business and market-oriented means for the benefit of any organisation (Alvesson and Sveningsson, 2011; Aucoin, 1990; Lawler and Hearn, 1995; McAuley *et al.* 2000; Mueller and Carter, 2005).

Under managerialism, "[a] deconcentration of power is regarded as essential to good management" and it advances principles such as decentralisation and delegation (Aucoin, 1990, p.122), which are meant to improve the managers' capacity. On the

precept of decentralisation, specialist MMs manage the operations of specialised units, entitling them to assume a hands-on approach with regard to high-level technical issues. Yet, the responsibility and authority for non-technical matters are not necessarily decentralised to them. When this *is* the case (as it was at PublicOrg), these managers face shortages when managing personnel. A lack of generic authority denies MMs the discretion to act directly, and deal effectively and quickly with HR issues concerning subordinate employees, in the same manner as they deal with technical matters.

Regarding delegation, specialist MMs are reluctant to delegate for two main reasons. First, they do not necessarily have adequate resources to delegate specific activities to subordinate employees. Consequently, MMs end up dedicating a large portion of their time to dealing directly with certain technical responsibilities, which could have otherwise been delegated (Delmestri and Walgenbach, 2005). Second, there might be cases where certain duties could be delegated by MMs to subordinate employees, but due to a weak hierarchical authority these managers end up performing these duties themselves. Such a state of affairs creates obstacles on the shop floor and affects the degree of responsiveness to clients.

The obstacles of decentralisation and delegation obstruct the rise of managerialism and their realities accentuate the specialist MMs' coordination function to handle technical matters, but reduce their control function to deal with non-technical matters. As a result, specific decision-making related to personnel and clients are delayed, confusion regarding responsibility for HR decisions emerges, and flexibility for these managers to achieve better results does not materialise.

Nevertheless, weakened managerialism should not essentially be equated with a rejection of management or a lack of interest in management and strategy. Rather, as indicated in this thesis, MMs devise ways to deal with managing that in some way meet both their managerial interests and the organisation's needs. However, the direction taken by specialist MMs is not essentially the optimal one in terms of managerialism, given that this is not necessarily based primarily on business, finance and marketing planning (McAuley *et al.* 2000). These issues, which determine organisational outcomes, request a strong management hold that sets priorities appropriately, is long-sighted, and have a good overview of the organisational strategy and a broad sense of the business, aspects which specialist MMs tend to be lacking.

The fact that there is a low level of managerialism in Malta amongst MMs can be attributed to two main aspects. First, MMs generally stem from traditional professions and new expert occupations, and so their primary focus and values concern the specialised side rather than the management side (e.g. HR and finance). Second, Malta does not have stock market-driven capitalism, which plants distinctive management structures within the organisation that are separate from shareholders. These two aspects are different in Anglo-American countries, which were a reference point of this study.

9.6.2 The accord of greater autonomy

Data from PublicOrg revealed that, although structured antagonism and divergent interests were embedded in MMs' employment relationship, their LP was characterised by substantial autonomy. This implies that control systems (performance monitoring and rising accountability, associated with heavier workloads) do subject MMs to pressure and conflict, yet the degree of autonomy (professional and operational) that specialist managers have in their work is greater. Such autonomy, arising particularly from MMs' expert role, finds expression in the PE that they develop which takes on an important role given the specialised technical functions they execute.

The fact that MMs' expert role is created and organised outside the work organisation gives them autonomy, which is further amplified by the fact that, inside the workplace, they retain exclusivity over a set of activities. This autonomy includes MMs' discretion to act on problem-solving and manage by exception, and then direct the most effective means to address specific issues, at times irrespective of concerns such as resources and cost.

Specialist MMs profess strong identification with the values, norms and standards of their profession; they take every opportunity to rely on their individual creativity and to defend their professional distinctiveness. Their greater autonomy and therefore their power within the work organisation rest chiefly with the PE they develop and only secondarily with their hierarchical position.

9.6.3 The proletarianisation thesis

In an environment of a changing public sector, it turns out that it is because of PE that MMs avoid facing the proletarianisation process (Braverman, 1974) and therefore secure a substantive function of capital. MMs are subject to work intensification and

performance pressure (Carter *et al.* 2002; Carter and Fairbrother, 1995; Hassard *et al.* 2009; McCann *et al.* 2004; 2008; 2010), but considering Kelly's (1989) detailed discussion on proletarianisation, there are at least three dimensions, which imply that their role is not shifting completely towards the labour function.

First, the role of MMs contains managerial functions. Besides general supervisory duties, MMs are in charge of planning, organising, monitoring and evaluating the work of subordinate employees. They coordinate and direct the LP in the organisation's units, though at times they have to do so with limited resources.

Second, SMs consult MMs on specific matters so, as a minimum, MMs have the opportunity to participate in the broader decision-making process. MMs have the chance to 'have a say' because senior management consults them on decisions concerning technical matters. Such a state of affairs shows that MMs' superiors value their expert contribution on specific aspects of work and they do not restrict their influence in this sphere.

Third, the role of MMs is characterised by considerable autonomy. While MMs struggle because their managerial authority, arising from their hierarchical position, is low, they do have control over the LP in direct relation to specific tasks and the work of others. The responsibilities allocated to MMs have increased and they do put them under considerable pressure, tension and anxiety. Yet, because they carry out work of an advanced nature and hold exclusivity over a set of practices and management functions, their role provides them with a high degree of operational autonomy, discretion and decision-making power.

Therefore, although MMs' LP has intensified and their hierarchical authority is somewhat limited, overall MMs are defending functions of capital rather than becoming part-and-parcel of the proletariat.

9.7 Limitations of this thesis

With some difficulty, the researcher decided not to embark on an ethnographic research by immersing herself in the daily lives of MMs under study. An ethnographic research was not possible given that the researcher was in full-time employment. Furthermore, the fact that in Malta, social science research based on ethnography is uncommon might have also constituted a hindrance, even if the researcher did have sufficient time. Nonetheless, the researcher acknowledges that the probability is that ethnography

would have been able to reach deeper beneath the surface to identify the reality of practices on the ground and to unearth MMs' voice and action (Hodson, 2001). The collection of such data would have added value to the research, as it would have aided in validating the experiences of MMs recounted in their interviews through gaining greater exposure to their behaviour during work itself.

Another important decision that the researcher had to make at the beginning of the research was whether or not to choose a single case study or to spread the research across a number of organisations in Malta, possibly including one (or more) from the private sector. Eventually, a single case study approach was selected given that, in realist-informed case study research, the objective is to generalise about mechanisms (Ackroyd, 2004). Nonetheless, this thesis did not overlook the societal context in framing this research's phenomenon, so there is room for implications to be drawn. Meanwhile, it may also be possible to conduct comparative case studies to "clarify both the nature of a mechanism more fully and the range of variations it shows" (Ackroyd, 2009a, p.538).

One other limitation stems from the fact that while this study focused on the struggles and tensions experienced by MMs in relation to their vertical relationships, this focus might have blurred the peer-to-peer coverage. The interaction between MMs themselves could have been developed better to shed light on the pressures MMs experience on the basis of the horizontal relationships they establish at work.

9.8 Future research

In view of its findings and limitations, this thesis highlights the necessity of comparative case study research. This way, the nature of the causal mechanisms identified in this study and their range of variation is clarified. For this comparison to be effective, it is recommended that the second case study organisation selected would be a large manufacturing company operating in the Maltese private sector. This is more likely to reveal variation, given that PublicOrg is a service organisation operating in the public sector. This research programme, featuring two intensive cases with important variation, has the potential to develop better-founded knowledge on MMs' patterns of action and interaction (Ackroyd, 2009a; Ackroyd and Karlsson, 2014).

A more challenging comparative case study research, which gains inspiration from this thesis, would be to investigate the LP of MMs and their (expert) labour across different countries, which are characterised by different institutional arrangements. At the outset, it must be pointed out that since MMs do not form a homogenous group (Livian, 1997; Mulholland, 1998; Mutch, 2008), a major difficulty would be ensuring that the research subjects across the different contexts do hold middle managerial positions and so the researcher(s) must not only rely on job titles. Once this complication is addressed, such a comparative analysis would identify similarities and differences regarding the type of knowledge and skills possessed by MMs and how they use them to execute their work, and in their negotiation of control, conflict and consent in the workplace. This comparative research would also allow an appreciation of ‘blurring’ between general managerial and specialist expert functions in the workplace’s middle-levels (Delmestri and Walgenbach, 2009; Hassard *et al.* 2009). Therefore, it could help to determine whether the ‘persistent’ distinction between professional and management responsibilities (Ackroyd, 1996) is being gradually eroded.

This thesis did observe that MMs’ LP has intensified. These managers are working longer and bearing a heavier workload, against what they described as comparatively good working conditions. Against this background, future research should cover the various types of employment contracts that MMs are offered. Such an investigation is necessary because, through the employment contract, MMs concede to management “the authority to make them do particular tasks, within certain customary constraints” (Smith and McKinlay, 2009, p.39). In the case of MMs, matters become more complicated given that, unlike their lower-counterparts, they need considerable autonomy and expect privileged conditions to execute their role. Hence, this research should elaborate on matters such as pay and incentive provisions offered to MMs, performance management systems that cover these managers and the type and level of responsibilities that they are expected to assume.

A limitation of this study is its lack of focus on the horizontal struggles and tensions that exist among the MMs, possibly arising on the basis of their particular expertise, experience and area of work. Thus, further research is recommended to understand the nature and dynamics of conflict between MMs and to explore whether there are

elements of inter-professional conflict and competition within middle management (Armstrong, 1986), even in organisations where MMs are organised collectively. In this case, the use of the focus group method should be considered, given that the attention here is on the interaction between MMs and the ways in which they discuss issues ‘as members of a group’, rather than just as individuals (Bryman, 2004). This analysis would also serve as a platform on which to reframe ideas of individualism and collectivism as they relate to middle management.

9.9 Concluding remarks

MMs are not the largest group in the workplace, but they remain important and distinctive players in the running, effective coordination and technical control of the modern organisation. Indeed, this thesis represents the start of a research agenda about the LP of MMs and it aims to encourage broader arguments about MMs’ working conditions, expectations, demands, struggles and tensions, given that mainstream management studies have, until now, tended to treat managerial work as unproblematic and self-evident (Hales, 2001).

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Appendix I: Interview guide

1	<p>How long have you been employed here? And how long have you been employed in your current position?</p> <p>In which section/department do you work?</p> <p>What is your position here?</p>
2	<p>With respect to HR, what have been the main changes / practices / initiatives implemented in the organisation in the last few years?</p>
3	<p>What were the objectives behind these changes / practices / initiatives?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ In your opinion, are these HR initiatives more than a paper exercise?
4	<p>Do you think that the end result of these changes / practices / initiatives is improving performance levels?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ If ‘no’ please specify what, in your view, the changes / practices / initiatives did bring about?
5	<p>Which of these changes / practices / initiatives had a real impact on the improvement of the organisation’s performance and why?</p>
6	<p>How did these changes / practices / initiatives affect you in your role?</p> <p>Do you feel that these changes / practices / initiatives have affected you differently compared to how they have affected your superiors/your subordinates? If so, why?</p>
7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What can you tell me about the implementation process of these changes / practices / initiatives (i.e. to what extent was everybody on board)? ▪ To what extent do you legitimise yourself with the changes / practices / initiatives issued by the HR department?
8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Were there elements of resistance on your part when these changes / practices / initiatives were first introduced? If yes / no, why? ▪ Was the resistance different from that offered by others in here?

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What main issues / tensions were raised? ▪ How were these addressed and by whom?
9	<p>In the last few years, when these changes / practices / initiatives were implemented:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Did you experience a change in responsibility? ▪ Did you experience a change in the amount of work you were expected to carry out? ▪ Did you experience a change in the degree of flexibility? ▪ Did you experience a change in working hours?
10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Do you have a sufficient number of employees to work with? ▪ Do you have suitably knowledgeable employees to work with?
11	To what extent have these changes / practices / initiatives implemented in recent years offered you new opportunities ?
12	<p>Do your superiors trust you at work and involve you in the process of decision-making on work-related matters and future plans / policies?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ If yes / no, how does this affect you?
13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ At present, do you experience tension at work? If so, can you give examples? ▪ If you do experience more tension than before, how is this different from before these HR measures were implemented? ▪ What particular pressures do you deal with in your work, and how do you handle these?
14	Regardless of what is going on in the organisation, what drives you most to fulfil your role at work ?
15	Do you think that these changes / practices / initiatives are leading to a win-win situation in terms of job security ?

16	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Do you have the freedom / autonomy to implement initiatives in your own way? ▪ How much has the volume of reporting increased?
17	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To what extent does the trade union take up issues related to these performance initiatives? ▪ Are you a member of a trade union? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If yes, why did you become a member?
18	How much have these changes / practices / initiatives implemented within recent years impacted upon the quality of your life ? (e.g. with respect to work-life balance).
<p>Is there anything else which, in your opinion, is important but which I have not referred to?</p>	

Thank you

Appendix II: Consent form

Informed consent letter

Title of Study:

Contemporary changes in the labour process of middle managers

Researcher:

Rebecca Gatt

Purpose of the Study:

You are invited to take part in this research study on the role of middle managers in a modern contemporary organisation. This research forms part of a PhD project at the University of Leicester. It looks at how middle managers respond to wider human resource policies and how they and other managers/employees/trade union officials interpret their role in this.

Your Role and the Interview:

Before you decide to participate in this study, it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take the time to read the following information carefully. Kindly ask the researcher if there is anything that is not clear or if more information is needed.

Your expected time commitment for this study is around 45 minutes.

Study Procedure:

Explain procedure.

All your comments will remain anonymous and every effort will be made by the researcher to ensure your confidentiality including the following measures:

- Code names/numbers for participants will be used on all researcher's notes, documents and write-ups;
Participants should tell the researcher if he/she would like a copy of the interview.
-

The risks of this study are minimal and similar to those encountered when disclosing non-sensitive work-related information. However, if during the interview any of the topics upset you in any way then you may decline to answer any or all of the questions, and you may terminate your involvement at any time.

Person to Contact:

Should you have any questions about the research or any related matters, please contact the researcher on the email address [REDACTED] or on mobile no. [REDACTED].

Consent:

By signing this consent form, I confirm that I have read and understood the information and have had the opportunity to ask questions. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason and without cost. I understand that I will be given a copy of this consent form if I ask for it. I voluntarily agree to take part in this study.

Signature _____

Date _____