



Managerial Roles and Interfaces: Some Organizational Issues and Implications through Thematic Apperception Test

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Abstract

Indian organizations are encountering transformations within the organization and in the external – both national and global environment. In this era of rapid transformations Indian managers need assess their role taking and interfaces across the organization. This study is based on 30 workshops arising out of diagnostic studies of the organization and its resultant identification of developmental inputs. The organizations were set on a path of growth and a commitment to professionalize their existing managers so that the organization could become vibrant and dynamic.

The present paper emphasis on the content of the stories, situations involving mostly interpersonal relations, Such as father-son or superior and subordinate are examined for the feelings and subsequently, what actors are being triggered off by the interface.

The paper also explores the manager's perception of the job, role, task and performance. Based on the content analysis of each story, the paper investigate how the manager take's initiatives to accept the challenges of their jobs and subsequently, adding new dimensions to their role.

MANAGERIAL ROLES AND INTERFACES: SOME ORGANIZATIONAL ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS THROUGH THEMATIC APPERCEPTION TEST

INTRODUCTION

All organizations and systems are externally and internally driven.

The external drivers include the changing global economy, the national economic environment through new policies and directions, changes in technology, changes in the business environment, industry or services impacting the organizations, and the customer profile, the clients and the business.

The internal drivers include the history of the organization, the successive leaders and their role and functioning style, the organization culture, its people profile, the cumulative organizational and managerial issues as well as the energy level of employees to move into new directions and action initiatives.

With the pulls and pushes of the external and the internal environment, managers are caught in a flux and are being enamored by the issues emitting from both primary and secondary systems. To confront such issues, Thematic Apperception Test (TAT) helps to reveal such issues and it also explores managers perception of the job, role, task and performance.

The TAT is a projective personality test that was designed at Harvard in the 1930s by Christiana D. Morgan and Henry A. Murray. The TAT is one of the most widely used psychological tests. A projective test is one in which a person's patterns of thought, attitudes, observational capacity, and emotional responses are evaluated on the basis of responses to ambiguous test materials. The TAT consists of 31 pictures that depict a variety of social and interpersonal situations. The subject is asked to tell a story about each picture to the examiner.

OBJECTIVES

1. To facilitate of work through clarity of job, function, and role performed by self and others.
2. To understand the boundary conditions across functions and linkages required for teamwork.
3. To explore the intricacies of relationship across hierarchy, authority and levels of management.
4. To understand nature and meaning of achievement, success and failure of self, others and the system and to discover processes of success.
5. To be able to work as a group for managerial and organization effectiveness.

METHODOLOGY

The paper is designed around Thematic Apperception Test (TAT). The TAT has 30 cards, out of these 30 cards, the investigators has selected seven cards depicting seven different settings with unique themes and across in various roles. The samples were asked to write stories on these settings. Each story of each individual are being explored interpreted and analysed. Group themes are identified to understand their implications for the managerial roles and the organization.

SAMPLE

The test was administered on the top managers of various organizations ranging from the age group of 25 to 50-55 yrs of age. These managers are from every walk of life and working in a diverse situation. These samples represent many organizations who initiated diagnostic studies and then followed it up by developmental input through workshops. The data consist of so many diagnostic study and so many managers from these organizations. This study is based on the inputs gathered from 600 managers who attended 30 workshops.

PURPOSE

The purpose of the paper is to explore the managers perception of the job, role, task and performance. Based on the contest analysis of each story the investigator explored whether the managers individually or group can or cannot take initiative, accept challenges in their jobs subsequently, adding new dimensions of their role.

TOOLS

The investigator used Thematic Apperception Test (TAT)

TEST APPLICATIONS

Thematic Apperception Test is used to measure the following:

- Individual potentials at induction/entry levels
- Recruitment/Selection
- Identifying the focus of training needs
- Designing career path
- Succession planning
- Promotions and the focus of developmental inputs
- Performance Appraisal and educational inputs
- Leadership role and potentials
- Cultural fit with the organization
- Individual directions for career and choices

DESCRIPTION OF THE CARDS

Card 1 shows a young man sitting on a work desk. There is a photograph of a woman. There is a window facing him. This card brings out the attitudes to job, meaning of work, achievement, aspirations, ambitions, social relationships and the themes around self-motivation, involvement and commitment.

Card 2 shows an old man and a young man in an interaction, both dressed formally in of either an office or a formal setting. There is a photograph/painting of an older man dressed formally on a wall. This card brings out the relationship theme across generations or across hierarchy. The theme is around father-son and or superior-subordinate. Occasionally the younger man is the boss and the older man the loyal subordinate of the father. The themes are around authority, power, control, loyalty, conformity, and change in expectations, autonomy and independence.

Card 3 shows a group of men in different postures around a table. The theme is around groups, teams and colleagues either in a formal meeting or an informal friendly setting. The theme revolves around achievement, results, inter-personal relationships, in the context of either teamwork or social informal gathering.

Card 4 shows young man scarcely clad climbing a rope. The theme is around achievements, success, fulfillment, aspirations and reflects whether the individual sees himself ascending or descending the rope. The card is symbolic of the person's faith in himself and his abilities.

Card 5 shows a middle aged man well dressed sitting on a chair by a window with a book and glasses on his lap. The theme is around success, achievement, accomplishment and reflecting and reviewing on past, present or future. The theme portrays success and satisfaction.

Card 6 shows a rural setting with young man dressed casually sitting on a fence talking to an older man dressed in a suit. The theme is around encounter between strangers who belong to two different contexts - rural and urban. The interaction is around belonging, values, beliefs and attitudes around relationships, interactions and authority. This card brings out the residual issues of Card 2 around relationships.

Card 7 shows an elderly man sitting on a desk which is full of files with a coat on hat and a tray. The other desks are empty as well as no one is around. The theme is around success or failure, overwork and over engagement and meaning of work. The card is counterpart to Card 5, which of success brings out and relaxation. This also portrays the continuity and residues of Card 1.

The cards were shown one at the time on transparency for 30 seconds. The managers were asked to observe the site of the 7 cards in terms of:

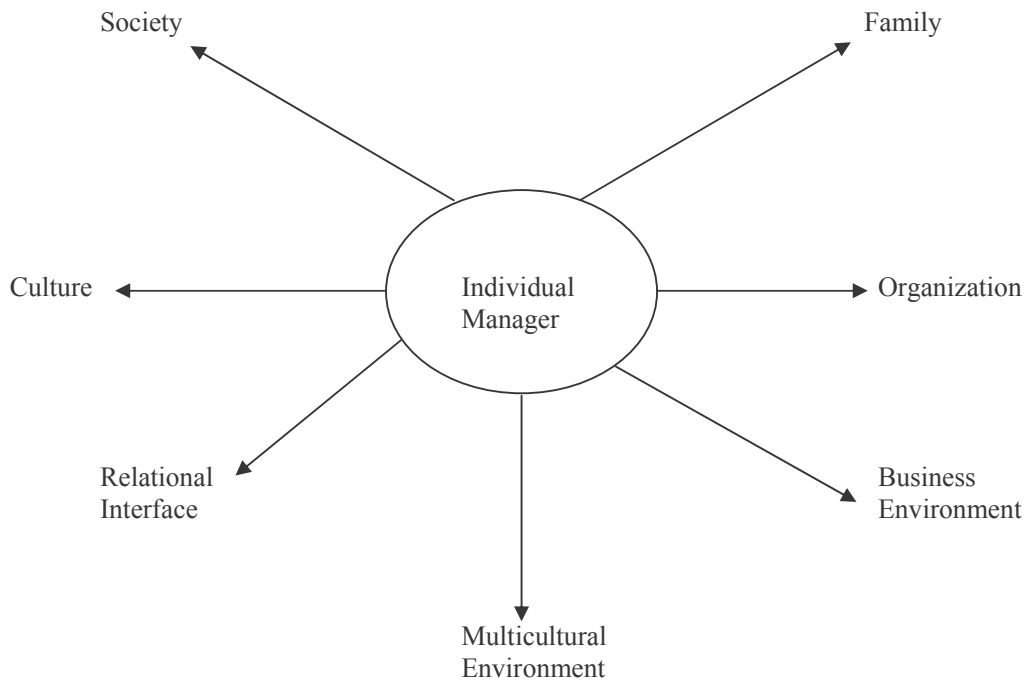
- 1) Activity going on
- 2) Who were the Characters
- 3) The interactions/interface when was going on
- 4) Outcome

The managers were then asked to unite a story on what they see, who are the people they have identified and what is happening in the story. They were given 30 seconds to observe the cards and were given another five minutes to write their story, likewise, simultaneously all seven cards were showed.

The stories on the seven cards are based on events with people or systems. In this paper the analysis of the stories were done where events and people were located in a context of social or work settings in which the individual played their social or work roles. The stories reflect the maps definitions of people and systems held by the managers both of the family and family members as well as organization and work roles.

The analysed stories went from micro to macro. The individual was located in the center with the periphery of area increasing depending upon where the individual was located. The figure 1 presents the models of those systems influencing the individual.

Figure 1
Forces Impacting the Individual



- Individual is influenced by its culture, social, family and the organization.
- The relational interface with the organization as well as with the primary system does impact the individual's behaviour.
- The individual's behaviour in a role of manager in the secondary system is being impacted by the multicultural business environment.

(Unpublished consultancy report, 2005)

All the above influences the individual shaping his role and how he configures the map and definition of social and work systems and social and work roles. The individual gives meaning and crystallize his social and work roles and contributes to social and work culture as well as gives meanings to his identity.

However, this is disowned and much of the constraints and difficulties are attributed to external sources. As such, the investigators explored the difference between the real problems and the solutions possible and the macro problems, which require group and organization effort. (2).

Before venturing further with the analysis of the stories, let us first discuss how stories are important in reflecting an individual's unconscious pattern.

Stories are derived from shared norms, values and belief systems. Incorporate contexts, they help individual make sense of their work place and their reasons for working (O'reilly, 1989). Deal and Kennedy (1982) refer to this shared perspective as the way we do things around here. The analysis

of stories has gained increasing credibility among researchers of organizational culture (wlikins, 1978, Wilkins and martin, 1979, martin, 1987, martin etal, 1983, schein, 1985) (2)

Stories are seldom factual. Instead, stories reflect what people believe needs to be true. For example, contradiction and exaggeration in individual accounts of a superior's stroke in provoking organizational discord and chaos were uncovered by Feldman (1990). The coloring of actual events reflected a deeper belief that emphasized the superior's role and responsibility for organizational problems and corresponding control of the people. The underlying themes of stories are quite interesting when one considers what the unconsciously choose to remember and tell [Schrank, 1990]. Thus, story elements such as heroes can act as cultural models revealing much of what employees believe needs to be organizationally true.

The above example emphasis the importance of understanding individual's cultural norms as they convey them rather than imposing an external standard to understand or analysed them. However, stories allow researchers to examine perceptions that are often filtered, denied or not in individual's consciousness (Martin, 1982). (4)

ANALYSIS OF THE STORIES

The determination of the relationship between story and storyteller is the keystone of interpretation. This relationship can never be less complex than the one between fantasy and the larger matrix of the personality. Considering the nature of the imaginative productions called for by the TAT, it may even be even more complex. The individual is asked for something more than his fleeting, diffuse, private fantasies. He is called upon to interpret his behavior, feelings and expectations of individuals represented pictorially. It is for this reason that the individual in his interpretation of the lives of these characters may expose fragments of his own past history, his contemporary behavior and his future expectations and aspirations. He may reveal his public behavior, those facets shared only with intimates and private feelings guarded from any public scrutiny as well as wishes whose existence has been somehow guarded from even the individual's own awareness. (4)

The stories are being analysed in the following nature:

- 1) Story of one person situation by using card number: 1,4,5,2,7
- 2) Story of two persons situations by using card number: 2 & 6
- 3) Story of group situation by using card number: 3

EMERGING THEMES AND ISSUES FROM STORIES:-

1. The stories reflected the physical descriptions in the card. For instance the figure on the card is described as individual, person and someone.
2. The story is based on familial themes, which project their dependency on the system especially on the primary system. This implies that the managers are seeking nurturance in the relationship between the holders of the system and themselves. In other words, these managers are looking for directions, guidance and support. Once they perceive support or recognitions they perform.
3. Some of the stories reflect confusion which indicates that the managers are still anchored and embedded in the traditional role and they are not very sure or clear as to what is their new role. As such, there is confusion around the new role.
4. Many of the stories reflected positive focus of working.

5. There are some stories which are achievement and success oriented. This gives the individual satisfaction of a job well done.
6. Some stories also reflect hard work, from the stories, these managers come through as target oriented, sincere and hardworking focused towards success and achievement.
7. Most of the stories suggest that the managers are over engaged and over worked. As a result, they are not utilizing their full potentials.
8. The cards also evoked the feelings of personal involvement and effort in each task.
9. The stories reflect an ongoing work setting. The work is routine and the individual is a performer and a good employee of the system. However, the outcome in many stories or the result was missing. The stories kind of ended without reality ending.
10. Most of the stories depicted a grand vision but the vision was of the manager but not necessarily of the system or the organization.
11. Some of the stories reflected a lower syndrome. This implies that left alone these managers can perform well. But as a team or collectively, they do not fully converge or with as a team.

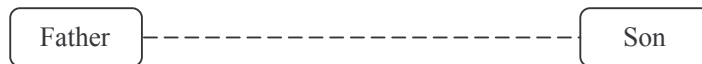
Essentially, the one person situation stories reflected that this group of managers is unclear about the organization structure, directions and the new roles as well as processes. The managers reflect dependency, which can be translated into mobilization of the managers through clarity of directions by the leadership, clarity of roles through dialogue and some support. What needs to be inculcated is the sense of self-worth and self-esteem and their support in the creation of a dynamic work culture.

THEMES ON CARD 2 & 6 TWO PERSON'S SITUATION:-

1. Many stories depicted the father-son theme. This brings out the traditional modes of relationship and as such its accompanying processes.
2. In most of the stories, the father is explaining while the son is either listening or not listening depending upon the situation and words as well as the issue being discussed.
3. Some stories depicted that the father was guided by the values and had traditional mindset whereas the son had difference of opinion. In short, the card evoked generation gap between father-son relations.
4. Most of the stories showed that the father is talking and there are no words from the son. Figure 2 presents the role and nature of father-son relationship.

Figure 2
Role of Father – Son Relationship

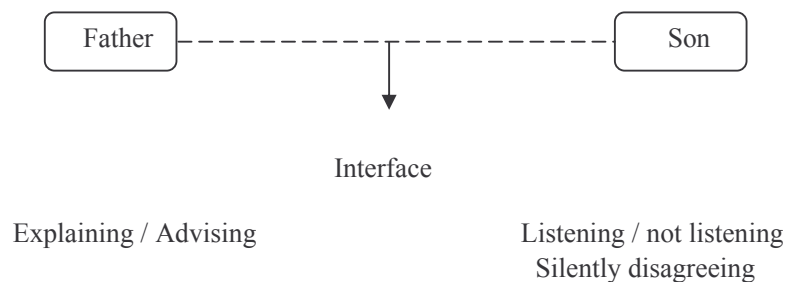
Interface



- The dotted line indicates that the father and son are located in their own spaces, which is bounded.
- There is need for communication and interaction to take place.
- The interface is not linked.

(Unpublished consultancy report, 2005)

Figure 3
NATURE OF FATHER – SON RELATIONSHIP



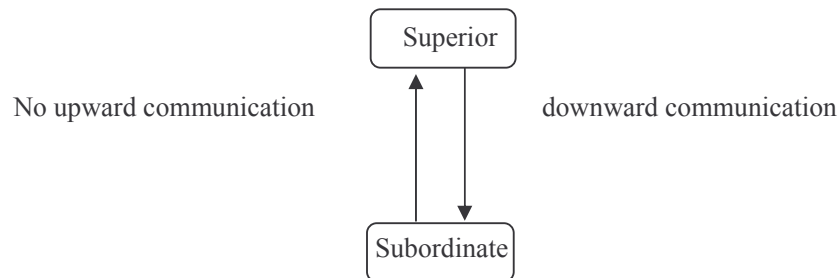
- During the interface between the father and son, the role of father and the role of son would be different.
- The father needs to play the role of ass advisor where as the son would be than playing the role of a listener.

(Unpublished consultancy report, 2005)

5. The stories of interface suggest that each role is bounded by its role space and waits for the other to take initiatives. There is no shared space where dialogues or discussions take place.
6. Most stories were about superior – subordinate relationship. The superior role is emphatic and talking while the subordinates role was to listen and /or argue.

7. The story reflected communication downward from the superior to the subordinate but rarely from the subordinate to the superior. Figure 4 depicts the nature of interface between the superior and the subordinate.

Figure 4
Interface between Superior and Subordinates

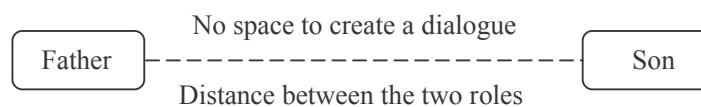


- In an organization there is a superior as well as subordinate.
- The nature of interface of superior with the subordinate would be different.
- The superior's communication is always downward where as the subordinate do not communicate with the superior.
- Hence there is no upward communication.

(Unpublished consultancy report, 2005)

8. Most of the stories indicated that the managers were showing responsibility and were problem focused.
9. The stories reflected that the opinions and dreams belonged to the father and he is communicating to his son and the son is not able to express his own vision and dreams.
10. The stories also depicted that the son does not get his own space and the relationship is a single person situation. The son is in the father's space and is merged in the father's role, identity and space.

Figure 5
Interface between Father and Son



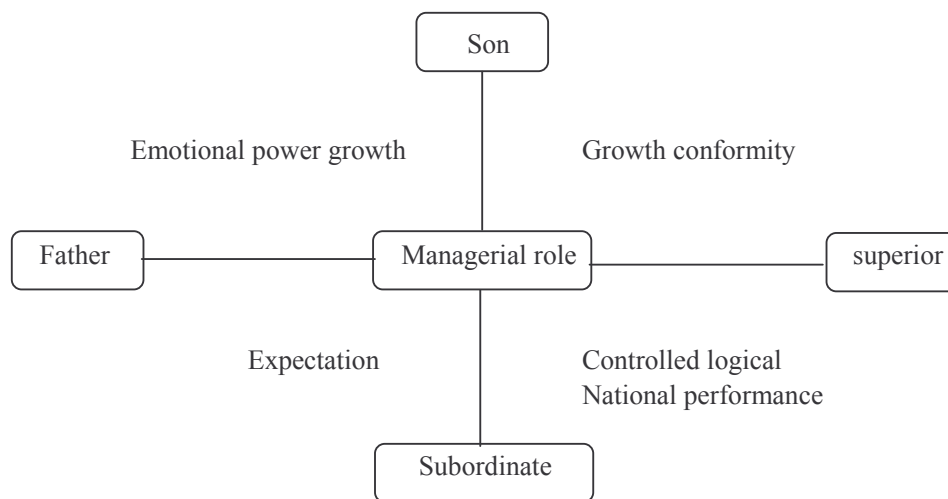
- The interface does not create space for exploration from both the sides. There is unidirectionality of flow from the father to son or superior and subordinate interface.
- The subordinate or the son is submerged in the senior's or the father's role and space.

(Unpublished consultancy report, 2005)

11. Essentially, the father – son or the superior – subordinate stories reflected the baggage of the primary system carried over to the organization.
12. The managerial implications are that subordinate is a recipient of instructions but does not bring his role to participate. He follows instructions whether he agrees or disagrees. There is no space to dialogue or discuss.
13. The subordinate do not carry the mindset of inclusion involvement, participative or being takes into confidence. The reality of the organization may be different but the primary pull is strong. The organization needs to initiate interface processes and persist so that the participation emerges in their group.
14. The superior are experienced as with holding and not providing any direction or guidance. They instruct what to do but not how to do.

The below figure 6 presents the interplay of relationship and the interface dynamics.

Figure 6
Relational Interface



- The relationship is either father – son or superior – subordinate.
- The father or superior has expectations of son or subordinate.
- The son or subordinate experiences control and feels pressurized to conform.

(Unpublished consultancy report, 2005)

The interface between the father and son and superior and subordinate reflect some characteristic patterns.

The interface between father and son reflect pattern of defiance, rebellion and a non-negotiable attitude. While the interface between the superior, subordinate reflects conformity and surrender by the subordinate. However, the stories that both roles of son and subordinate are willing to exile themselves leave the setting and opt out of relationships.

The whole issues around relationship revolve around legitimacy and illegitimacy of hierarchy and authority exercised by the senior. Although the managers expected guidance and direction they were ambivalent about the authority from the seniors. The belief was that the guidance and direction also took away from manager's autonomy and made him dependent. He merely became a performer. The organizational issue, which the managers explored, was whether the social authority could be exercised in work settings and whether work authority can use emotional power and pressure to make demands on the managers to conform and have personalized expectations. It was difficult for either the father or the son and the superior or the subordinate to explore, discuss, have a dialogue to resolve the issues and arrive at a shared understanding.

THEMES ON CARD 3 GROUP SITUATION

1. The story depicted that it is a group meeting either formal or informal.
2. Some of the stories reflected that some of the members are friendly and one person in the story is seen as hostile and who is walking out. This indicated that these are linkages and interface issues between the superior and subordinate as in most of the stories it is a either subordinate or well who is seen to be walking out.
3. Stories are largely descriptive of the peer group setting. There is very little involvement of the individual to engage with the situation. The group does not commit nor they are taking any stance.
4. The stories describe the geographical layout, the objects and people. The stories suggest a distance and non-engagement with press and non-involvement in the situation.
5. Most of the stories show that there is a lot of anxiety and stress amongst the peer group.
6. Each individual in the group is self absorbed and preoccupied in his own world.
7. The story reflected that there is no team leader and as such, the group is immobilized.

The stories on card reflected the group dynamics between social relation (friends) or collegiate relations at work. The relationships are either

- Friends Colleges
- Informal Task – functional
- Social Work

The interface quality is either

- Cooperative
- Collaborative
- Conflict
- Hierarchical
- Participative

The interface creates feelings of

- Discrimination
- Deprivation
- The individual
- Withdraws and or
- Disengages

The search is for

- Taking charge
- Be in command
- Take the leadership role

This card also has pulled out the most stereotypical responses and very little direction or resolution. The only stories which had some resolution where there was a superior and who took the decision or provided direction.

Essentially, the situation of the group card brought out the least connecting with the situation. This means that there are individual who are gathered together but it is not a group and definitely not a team.

The implications are that the individual in the leadership role would have to make immense efforts to see that a group gets formed and a team emerges who is working in a coherent manner.

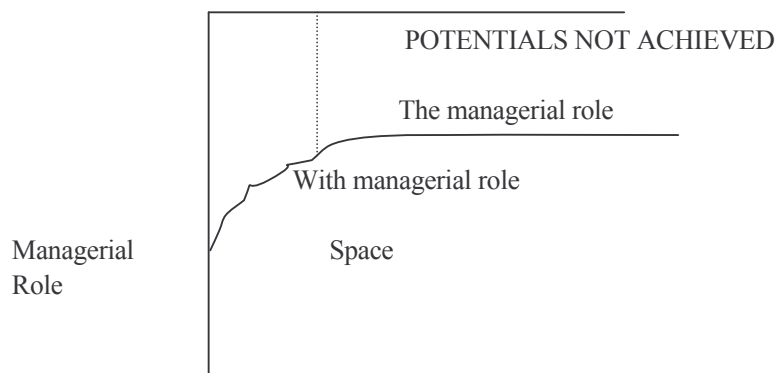
FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS FROM THE STORIES:-

All the stories put together suggested that:

1. The group is experiencing the stress of taking a bigger role as the expectations and pressures from the top management are increasing.
2. There are gaps in managerial knowledges, attitudes and perspective with the result that the dependency of the subordinate on the superior increases.
3. Most of the interactions are caught between social and work roles. There is a limited clarity regarding of the systems, structures and role processes. There are overlaps in their role behaviour which contributes to the confused expectations.
4. These groups of managers have reached a professional plateau and are in search of new meanings. They are reviewing their post roles in the organization and are in search of future direction and redesigned roles.

Figure 7

Managerial Role Space – Potential Interface

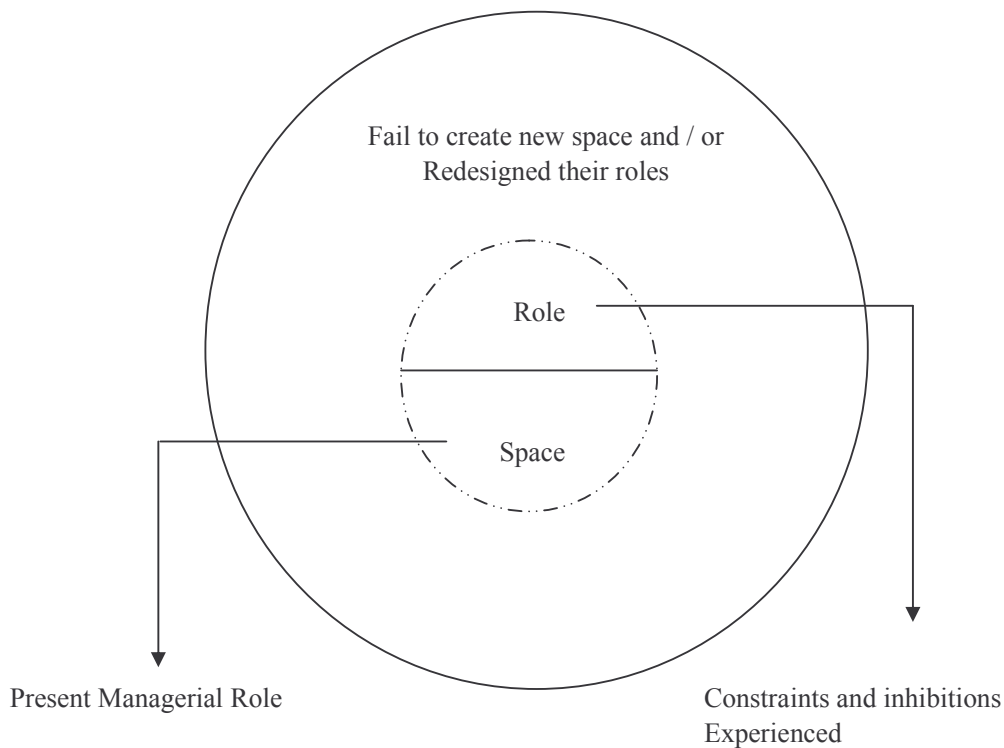


- The point where the managers stand, there are gaps of capability and competency.
- Managers do not actualize their potentials and talent.
- The role requires initiatives choices, enthusiasm and directions, fast pace growth, ambition and aspirations.

(Unpublished consultancy report, 2005)

5. Essentially the managers tend to under perform and feel inhibited to take limitations and run at a fast pace. Organizationally, the group needs to have a clear – cut picture of the organizational tasks, goals and objectives. Most managers come through as sincere, dedicated individual putting in hours of work. However, this effort is for routine day to day jobs.

Figure 8
Managerial Role Space Interface

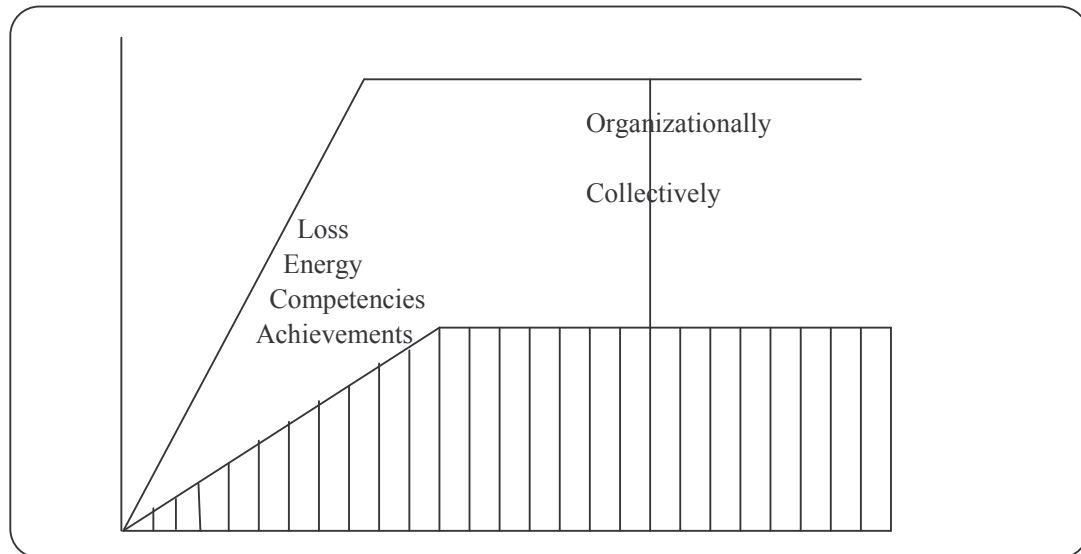


- A manager needs to enlarge the boundary and create a larger role space for himself.
- The group finds it difficult to enlarge the boundaries of the role space.
- Their fear is that if they do will they be intruding in someone else's space and territory. And if they do enter someone else's role and functional space, they question on whose terms shall it be?
- Will there be a negotiation or will they have to surrender?

(Unpublished consultancy report, 2005)

6. This dilemma does not release their choice – making process. They wait for being told and do not redefine or redesign their roles. As such, they remain frozen in their stances. The group needs a clear-cut directions and a path on which they will walk.

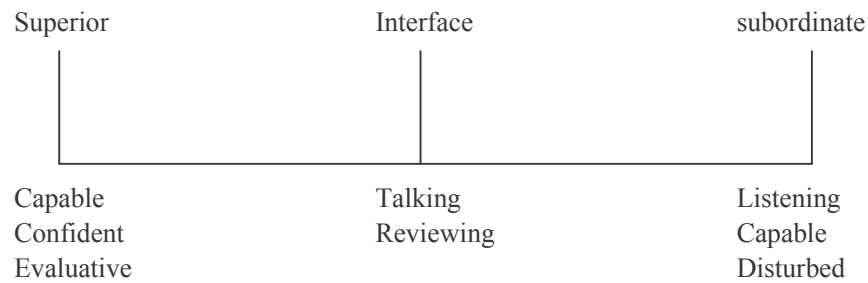
Figure 9
Individual and Collective Energy



(Unpublished consultancy report, 2005)

7. Collectively and organizationally so much is at loss. It shows that the group does not work together.
8. The managers are not able to take a position or have an opinion. They are unable to equip themselves to be accountable or motivate people to take initiatives to take responsibility and accountability down the line.
9. As a result, many times the managers find themselves over engaged, over worked and under utilized. They end up doing work one to two levels below their designations.
10. Few managers reflect capabilities competence and foresightedness and come through as goal – oriented. However, they wait for affirmation and recognition from the senior.
11. The interface between the superior and subordinate reflects lack of initiative and lack of strategic thinking. There are tight boundaries across each role which makes it difficult to have a dialogue. There are opinions, evaluations and judgments about each other.
12. The group displays lack of decisions – making and choice making ability.
13. The interface between the superior and the subordinate does reflect the fact that the superior is not communicating his vision down the line. There is no dialogue between the superior and subordinate.

Figure 10
Quality of Superior – Subordinate Interface



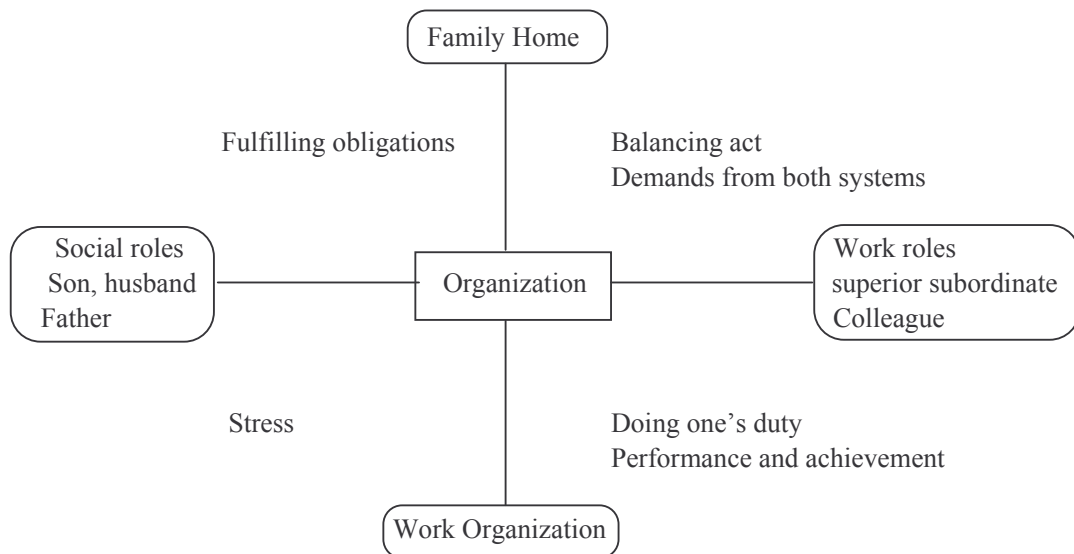
- These words describe both the father-son and the superior and subordinate interface.
- Each is a captive in his own space and there is frozenness and inhibition for talking initiatives or reaching out.
- Very rarely are the two in rhythm where one is open and sharing and the other is open and receiving.

(Unpublished consultancy report, 2005)

14. The managerial role taken by the managers have become obsolete in the present context.
15. The managers are caught in managing and balancing the two systems. The thrust for achievements and success at work and assure of well-being and comfort in social systems and roles seems to be difficult.
16. The managers have potentials but the organization or the manager himself has not been able to utilize these potentials.
17. the managers can generate many alternatives but they do not take any firm action. However, the managers need to accept other's expertise as well as constraints to effectively work with each other.
18. The managers do have purpose, but lack the initiatives to implement this purpose.
19. The manager carry the past baggage and residues of relationships while standing at the threshold of the future and waiting for the directions from the seniors.
20. There seems to be an ever-present tension between home and work, which fills the managerial space and roles.

Now let us summarized the dilemmas of the group in the following conceptual frameworks.

Figure 11
Role – System – Interface

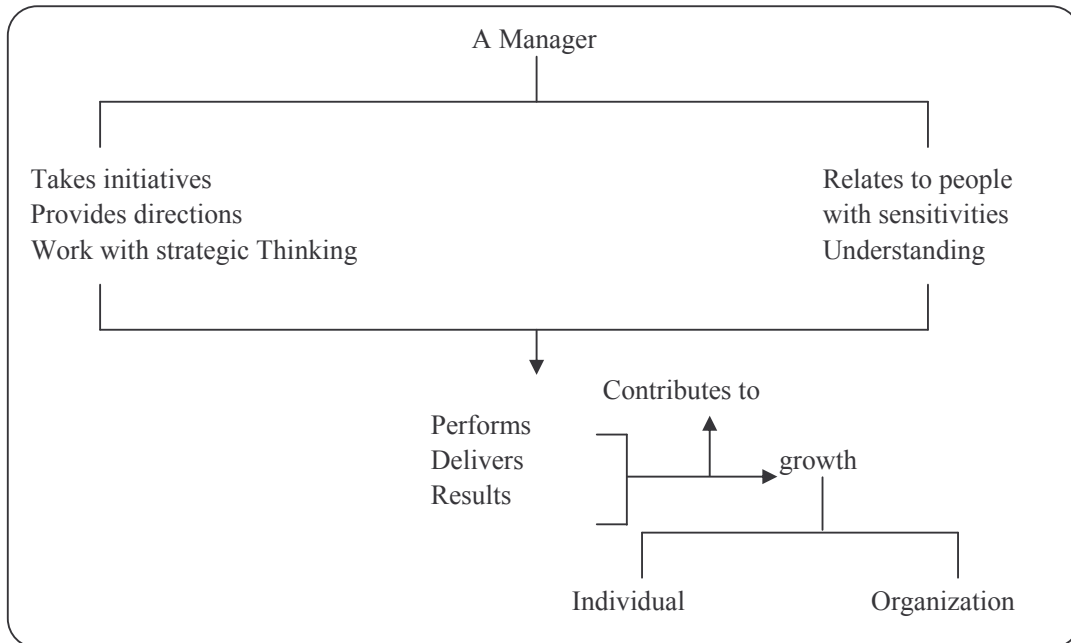


- Family and home demand social roles from son, husband and father.
- The organization demands work roles from superior, colleagues and subordinate.
- Social and work roles mean fulfillment of duty and obligations.
- The simultaneous demands from social and work roles demand a balancing act.
- The managers experience stress and overall pulls and pushes from both systems.

(Unpublished consultancy report, 2005)

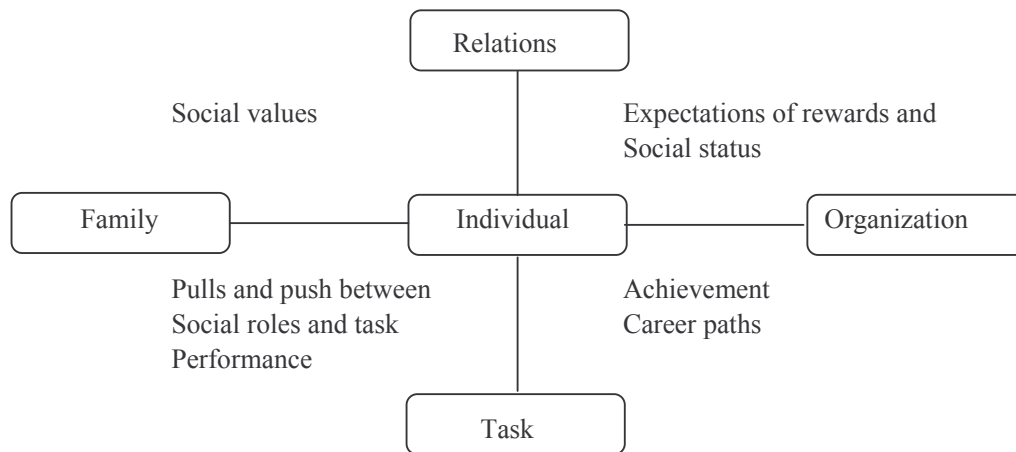
The investigators explored the sources of the manager's maps and definitions of organization, which they carried and which influenced in their managerial roles. However, the manager's characteristics of map reflect the new dimensions of role taking, which is figured out in the following figure.

Figure 12
New Dimensions of Role Taking



(Unpublished consultancy report, 2005)

Figure 13
Forces Operating on Individuals



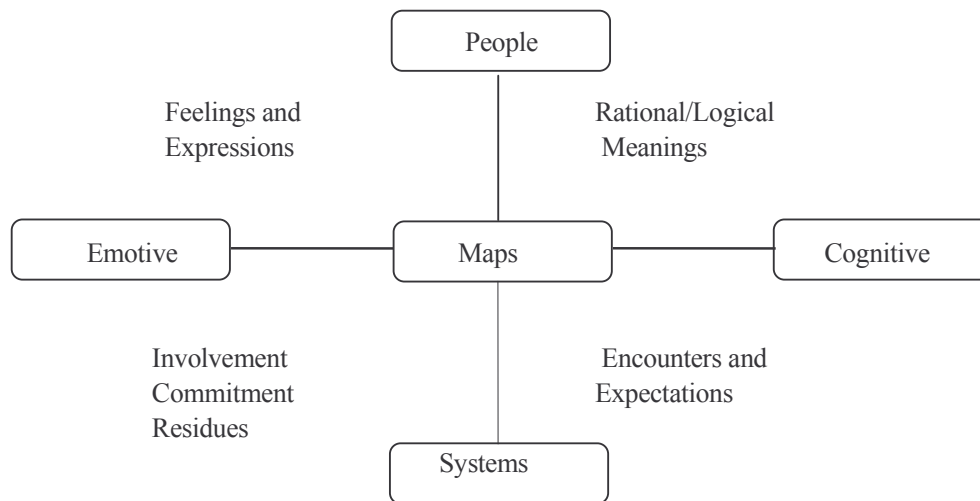
- Family fosters social roles
- Social roles and social relations make demands
- Organization has task demands
- Individual have their own achievements for career paths

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The configuration of primary and secondary systems generates the maps and definitions of people and systems and creates the patterns of interface in organization.

Each one of us is influenced by the systems we are part of. The family and the relationships influence the individual and subsequently socialization is done by both the family and the organization. The individual attempts to balance the two and both the systems make demands on him.

Figure 14
Socialization - Internalization Interface

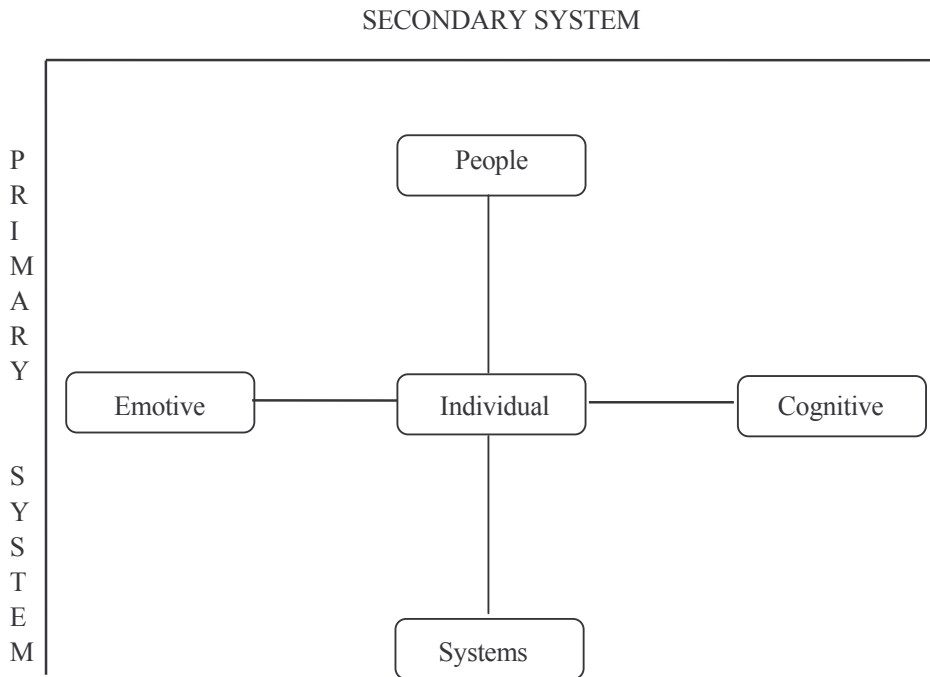


- Individual experiences people and evolve an emotive component of people.
- An individual is part of a system and evolves an emotive component of system.
- Similarly, an individual gives cognitive meaning to his experience of people, and to his belonging of the system.
- As such he develops an emotive and cognitive map of people and systems.

Garg, Pulin, K. & Parikh, Indira, J., "Organization Design and Definitions, Indian Society for individual and Social Development, Vol. 2

An individual is socialized and the individual internalizes the socialization process, which shapes his role. The socialization process has an experiential component, which consists of an emotive, and a cognitive component. This in turn gives birth to emotive and cognitive maps of people and systems.

Figure 15
Emotive and Cognitive Maps



- Socialization occurs from the family which is influenced by the society and culture.
- Socialization occurs from the educational, work, and other institutions influenced by the external environment.
- An individual internalizes both and develops emotive and cognitive maps of people and systems of both primary and secondary system.

Garg, Pulin, K. & Parikh, Indira, J., "Organization Design and Definitions, Indian Society for individual and Social Development, Vol. 2

The family socializes every child into a socially desirable role. The family is influenced by the society and culture. All this put together is the primary system of the individual. The individual encounters and experiences the significant people in the primary system and gives meanings to these experiences. The experiences also arouse emotions and feelings. As such, this internalization of experiences gives rise to emotive maps and definitions of people and systems. Similarly as the child grows, he learns the language and starts giving meaning to the experiences and feelings of the encounters with people and systems. These crystallize into cognitive maps and definitions of people and system.

As the individual enters the secondary institutions of education, external environment, and work, the secondary institutions also socialize the individuals into desired role behavior for the respective institutions. Thus, the individual acquires an emotive and cognitive map of people and systems of the secondary system.

However, this is not sufficient for the individual. Carrying the emotive and cognitive maps and definitions of people and secondary systems does not permit the individual to respond with his own identity.

The individual translates emotive and cognitive maps and definitions of people and both the primary and secondary systems into emotions and then takes a role vis a vis the people and systems. These are the emergent maps and definitions, which include the role and the self of the individual and give shapes to the interfaces in the secondary system viz, the organization. The new configuration of the maps and definition of people and system as crystallized by the identity then determines both the social and work interfaces. (1)

Many of the organization reflected the processes of transformations occurring in the organization, which put new demands on the managerial roles. The managers recognized that both the external and internal environment of the organization is changing at a rapid pace and that the organization is responding to that change this response also requires that they redefine their roles. For these redefinitions they need to learn and invest in themselves.

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