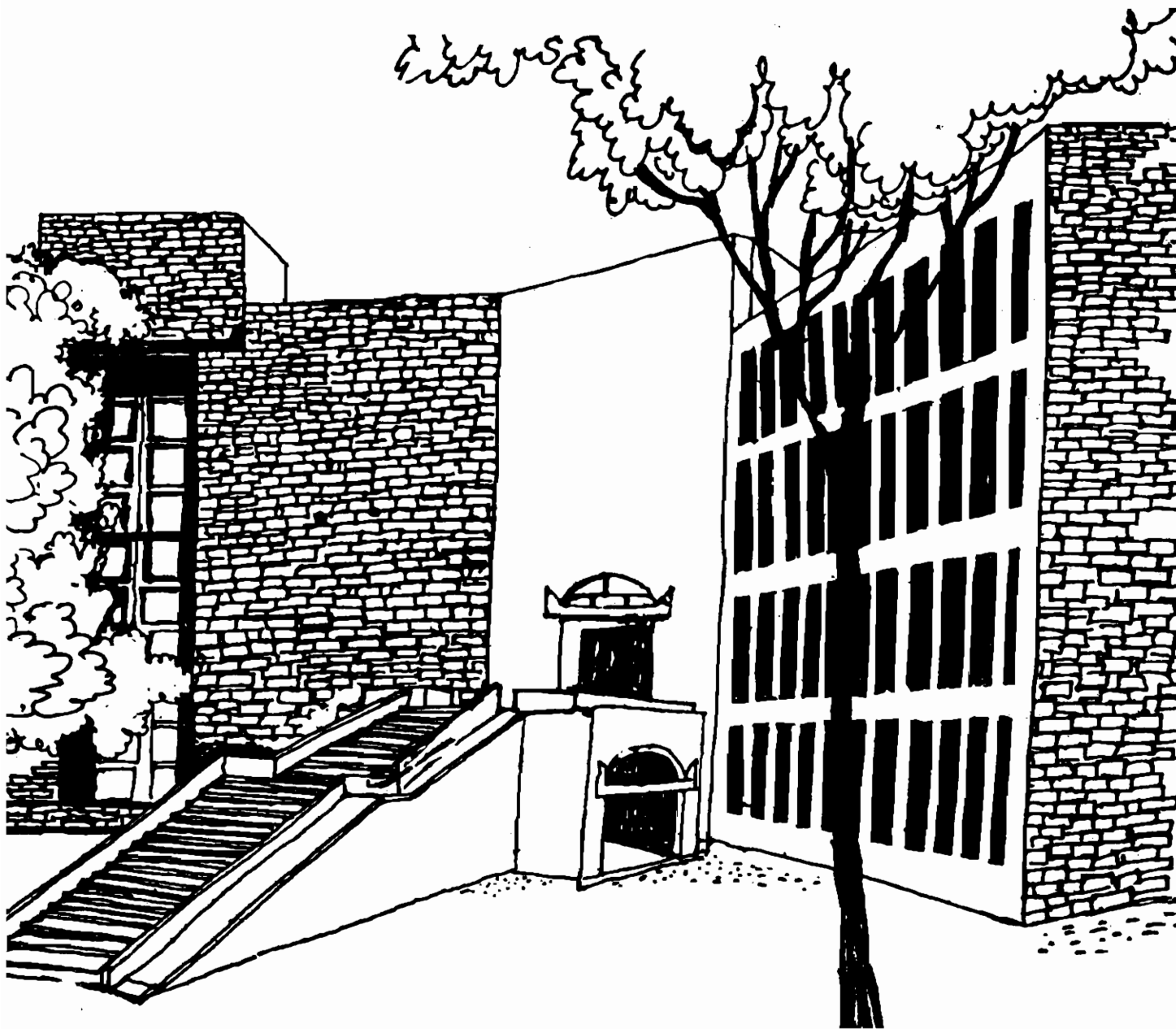




Working Paper



**MIDDLE MANAGEMENT MOTIVATION:
A STATE OF CHOKED POTENTIAL**

By

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Middle Management Motivation: A State of Choked Potential

"In a successful multi-product engineering firm in the Indian public sector with an employee strength of 15,000, a middle manager raised an indent on July 27 for cutter blades weighing 350 kilograms. The material was required by December 31. The procurement manager processed the requirement, and called a purchase committee meeting on October 15. The material was to be imported from the United States, and the estimated freight charge was indicated as \$900 for ocean freight and \$1070 for air freight. Eight other middle managers were required to sign the purchase committee recommendations before the file could be sent to the Director (Operations) who had the authority for approving shipment by air freight. The Director received the file on November 16 and decided that 50 per cent of the material be airfreighted (to meet the urgent requirements of the plant) and 50 per cent be ocean freighted (for ensuring some economy). In the meanwhile, the purchase department received the actual freight charges: for 175 kg. each of material, charges were as follows: \$750 for ocean freight and \$600 for air freight. Thus ocean freight was, in fact, more expensive. The procurement officer also felt that ocean freight was problematic for other reasons: (a) greater documentation involved and greater problems of collecting the material and (b) greater risk of a small package being lost.

But the procurement manager decided to implement the Director's decision. He felt that the material was urgently required, and an additional month would be lost in file movement if he brought up the fresh developments, and he would, as usual, end up missing the deadline and be blamed for it."

This narrative raises several questions: why did not the middle manager raise the issue directly with the Director? Why did he follow the path of least resistance? What reinforces the playsafe attitude? Are middle managers of the indenting and procurement departments functioning as responsible members of a team, and sorting out issues among themselves in the organization's best interests? What contributions are made by the eight middle managers who are required to approve the purchase committee recommendations? When decision making processes are characterized by paper exchanges, judgments based on fragmented bits of information, inordinate delays, and apparent paradoxes, how do they affect the perceptions of middle managers about the organization? Answers to these will help us obtain an insight into the world of middle managers and understand the reasons why they feel energized to perform and excel or feel deflated, powerless, and incapable of taking charge.

Managers in the Middle

Manufacturing enterprises in developing countries like India typically tend to be large hierarchies with multiple layers of management. Usually, a middle level manager is one who is not a functional/divisional head with a profit/cost responsibility and also one who is not a first level supervisor.

Middle managers are expected to play a crucial role in ensuring that organization activities are well-coordinated, that employees act responsively and responsibly, and that the organization continuously generates creative alternatives to grapple with its problems. Further, it is at the middle level that the organization's policies and strategies get translated into decisions and actions. However, it is evident that the nature of middle management dynamics in organization has remained largely unexplored and appropriate strategies for effective utilization of this critical resource remain unexplored. While the literature on managerial work has been based on either chief executive roles or general management roles, there is a theoretical void about the nature of middle managerial roles and aspects of their functioning (Fulop, 1991).

Writings on managerial work suggest that at middle levels work is more focused, more short term in outlook, and the characteristics of brevity and fragmentation are more pronounced (Pavett and Lau, 1983). According to Stewart (1982), three aspects characterize managerial work: demands, constraints and choices. It is reasonable to assume that, at middle level, managerial roles will be relatively low on choice and high on demands and constraints compared to higher levels. Nilakant and Ramnarayan (1990) have proposed a framework in which middle managers are seen to accomplish two essential organizational functions: a maintenance function oriented to ensuring current performance and profitability and an entrepreneurial function which includes activities intended at promoting novelty, innovation, and growth, and aspects relating to implementation of new ideas. In Nilakant and Ramnarayan's study of middle managers in four Indian organizations, middle management work was observed to consist largely of "fix-it" type of activities - trying to deal with systems and processes that are not working and managing breakdowns in normal/routine flow of work. The middle managers were found to be involved only to a very limited extent with the entrepreneurial function.

The present study is aimed at obtaining an in-depth understanding of how middle managers perceive the world around them and how these perceptions affect their functioning. The study explores the perceptions in their own language and using their own frameworks to gain insight into factors which mobilize or block their energies. A brief description of the sample and data collection methods is given in Box 1.

Summary of Findings

The study generated an enormous amount of data relating to middle management perceptions of the characteristics of the organization, nature of relations with superiors, the way work is done, the nature of middle management role, and the consequences of middle management roles for individual middle managers and the organization. Figure 1 presents a summary of the major issues and concerns raised by middle managers which are further elaborated below. A number of quotes from the group meetings have been presented, as they communicate richly the way middle managers see the reality around them.

Perceptions of the larger organization

The middle managers perceived the organizational structures and processes as incapable of accommodating their views and ideas. They felt that they had access to only limited, segmented and dated information. They reported numerous anomalies, paradoxes, and contradictions in organizational decision making. The options open to them were to leave the organization, attempt to influence the decision making or do nothing. In the perception of the managers, resignation had high personal costs and the burdens associated with attempting to influence organizational decision making were so high that there were no real incentives to exercise that influence. A strong assumption was that they could do very little in the given context.

According to a middle manager: "There are many paradoxes in the organization. You find general managers being put in a corner without work. You find people thinking that they have completed the work when they release a circular. You find a system of identification of key tasks, without any consequences for performance or non-performance. You find filibusters who pretend to be champions of organizational values. People are sent for overseas training in areas where the company has no plans of entering. In such an atmosphere, you work only because you want to work."

Middle managers possessed low knowledge or information about several organizational situations and perceived low stakes in them. They complained that they did not have much control on most organizational decisions. With low information, low control, and high constraints, they perceived themselves marginalized in several organizational settings.

BOX 1

Brief description of the Sample and Data Collection Method

The objective of the study was to understand the way middle managers perceive the world around them and how these perceptions affect their functioning in organizations. Data collection was done in a large successful multi-product engineering firm in the public sector with an employee strength of about 15,000. A total of 144 middle managers were involved in the study. These managers were drawn from operations, marketing, finance, personnel, and research and development functions. In the organizational hierarchy, these managers were below the functional/divisional heads with profit/cost responsibility and above the first level supervisors. They had designations of Assistant Manager, Manager, Senior Manager and Assistant General Manager.

Memos were sent to a randomly chosen group of middle managers inviting them to a small group meeting "to discuss middle management motivation issues." The managers were then contacted on phone to communicate the date, time and venue of the meeting. Each group had between five and eight members. 23 different groups met over a period of four months to share and explore middle management concerns.

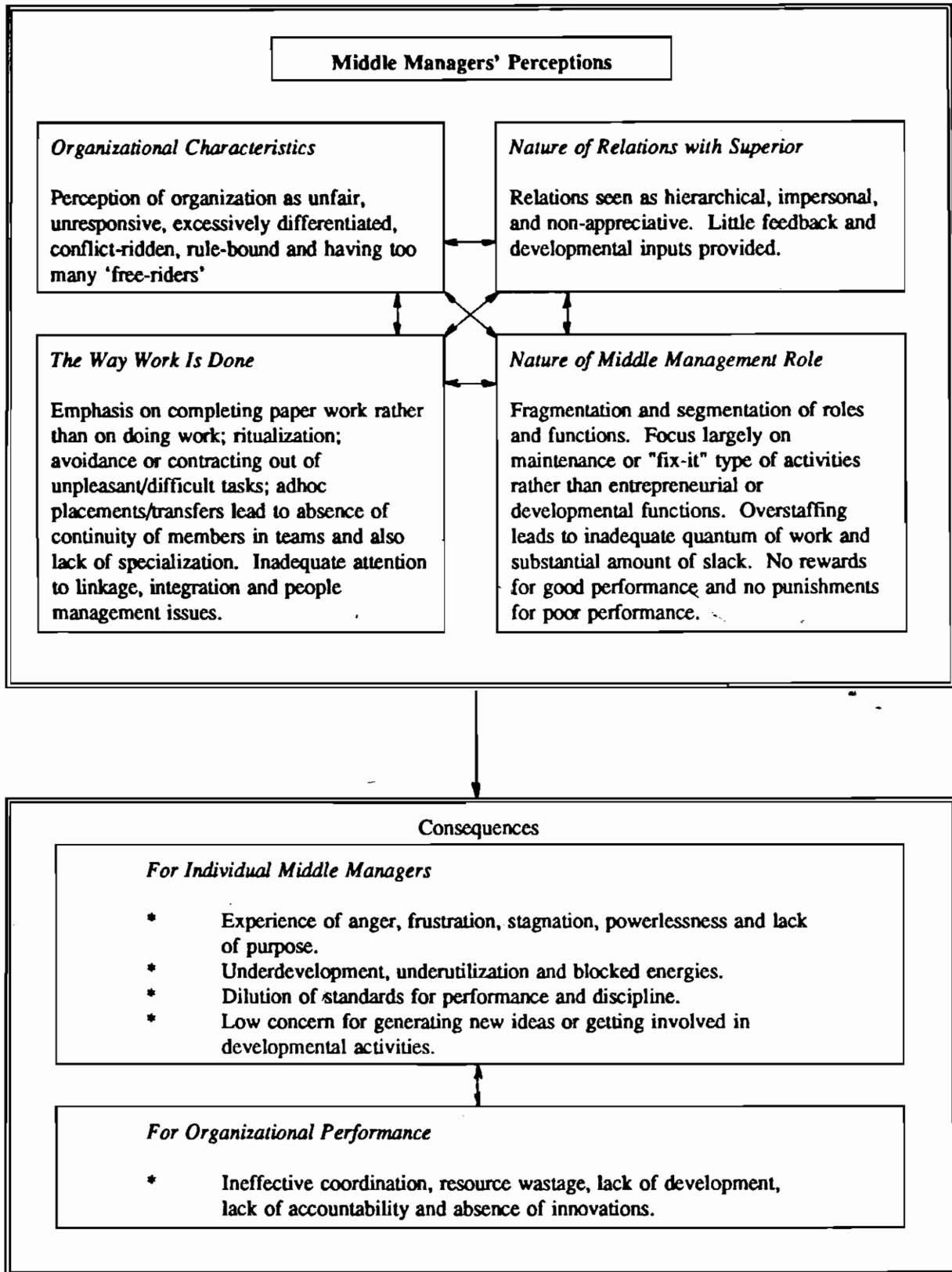
At the beginning of the meeting, the researchers asked the participants to share significant experiences in which they felt a sense of personal enrichment, excitement, personal effectiveness or a sense of being involved with meaningful work, and also situations which led to negative feelings at work, such as low enjoyment of work, a sense of powerlessness, boredom, or a sense of stagnation. The participants were asked to reflect on how strongly they felt committed to the following:

- ensuring quality of the task they perform,
- taking time bound actions and being responsive to others,
- owning their responsibilities,
- initiating innovations and improvements in their area of work,
- pursuing their personal and professional development plans, and
- supporting their subordinates' personal and professional development.

The managers were asked about the dilemmas they faced and the choices they made in pursuing the above commitments. They were also given a checklist of the following issues, and asked to comment on them: (a) their roles, (b) their goals, (c) expected contributions, (d) nature of relationships with their superiors/colleagues/subordinates, (e) professional opportunities, (f) rewards, (g) availability of appropriate resources, (h) nature of organizational challenges, (i) systems, and (j) climate. The checklist and questions were provided, only as broad guidelines, and the managers were requested to share issues and concerns which they considered important.

The group explorations generated a great deal of interest and involvement. Though the meetings were expected to last four hours, most groups went beyond the scheduled time for closure. All meetings were attended by two researchers, who intervened mainly to raise questions or seek clarifications. They took notes during the meetings and prepared records of experiences shared and issues raised.

Figure 1



The organization was seen as unresponsive, and this was a great source of frustration. A manager said: *"Administrative irritants take a toll of our emotional energies. In my department, we need 221 refills for ball point pens. But we get 190 or 200 refills. Some people don't get refills and will come and tell you. They may even talk of not writing reports. Last week, I paid out of my pocket and got the refills. Examples such as these sap your energies."*

According to another manager, *"the system is lethargic. I have no assurance that things will work as they are expected to. I have to chase all the time. Till the material or service arrives, I am never sure."* Another participant noted: *"Poor implementation leads to a feeling that the company does not care. I received a note asking me to receive my long service award a day after the function. Somebody could have informed me on phone but did not. In the past, we have even granted promotions to people who had already resigned. These things happen because a few top managers base their judgments on obsolete records."* Another complaint was about meaningless procedures. *"To get a Rs. 7500/= loan, we are required to submit a solvency certificate."*

In a resource-scarce environment, middle managers also felt dependent on the organization for a number of things, for example, telephone, car, accommodation and so on. The dependence created additional complexities in the relationship between the middle manager and the organization. A middle manager said: *"According to my level, I am expected to be given a telephone at home. It would be given only if I did some bit of chasing. It is seen as giving someone a favour, and not as my work requirement."*

Middle management perceptions were found to be subject to self-reinforcing cycles. The individuals seemed unlikely to search for better ways of coping with the situation. They persisted with their perception that no initiatives were really expected of them outside a narrowly defined area. According to a middle manager, *"I spent a considerable amount of time this morning trying to trace a file on our photocopying machine, which has not been functioning for a long time. When I am myself feeling so helpless, how can I help or upgrade my people?"* Another person said, *"I can't figure out what our policies are, because we keep making exceptions. When we make exceptions, people say 'if that person can get it, why not me?' When I asked for promotion for staff in my department, I was told that there were no vacancies. But six months later, all the promotions were given. Where did all the vacancies suddenly come from? So I persist with my demands even if they seem unjustified or irrational."*

Relationship with Superior

A key question is whether superior-subordinate relations create a context in which middle managers experience a sense of self-efficacy. Conger and Kanungo (1988) point out that the individual's sense of personal power is closely related to feelings of personal efficacy and a sense of self-worth. They note that factors like feelings of mastery related to the job, superior's exemplary behaviour, and superior's encouragement and emotional support are significant sources of self-efficacy information. How do the middle managers rate the quality of relationships in their organization? The following quotes are representative of what the managers had to say on this issue.

"My relations with the superior are governed by hierarchy. He is three levels higher in hierarchy and behaves with me as he would with an irresponsible kid. For example, if I am not at my work place, no matter for what reason, I am liable for cross examination. But we never ever have serious work-related discussion."

"There is very little consultation. As a manager, I receive no information on placements, promotions, and transfers of people in my area of work and so I have little commitment to those decisions."

"We have cabin managers who think up plans and key tasks without any involvement or participation. And then they wonder why their 'brilliant' plans aren't working."

"We never meet as a team. There is little communication. My ideas are dismissed without as much as an explanation. When I seek information from the superior, it is viewed with suspicion."

"I feel like a bullock drawing the cart. When a milestone is crossed, the bullock never receives a pat."

Many middle managers had other middle managers as their bosses. When the bosses themselves felt powerless, there was little hope of constructive resolution of issues.

"When I was bypassed for promotion, I asked my boss what the reasons were. He avoided the discussion by saying that he had not participated in the decision process. I asked him how the promotion committee could judge my worth in 15 or 20 minutes of interview. He replied that I was at liberty to not attend the interview and not be considered for promotions. That was the end of our discussion, leaving me very agitated."

"Presently the only reward for performance is assignment to a challenging job, which is decided at senior levels. When your boss has no discretion, he is redundant for all practical purposes. In fact, he competes with you for top management favours."

"As a person or as a professional, your boss should be someone that you can look up to. When this does not happen, there is disillusionment."

"We have a system of seniority-based promotions, which tells me that I am 36th on the list of 40. I want to work very very hard, and I want to know how I can become No. 1. But my superior has no answer."

There were hardly any instances of superiors exhibiting the following aspects of enabling style:

- * having and communicating standards of excellence
- * spotting opportunities for changes/innovations
- * having regular discussions on important departmental or organizational priorities
- * taking genuine interest in developing people
- * levelling with others and getting out of hierarchical barriers
- * building trusting relationship and facilitating team orientation.

Nature of Roles

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Middle managerial work was perceived as largely routine, fragmented, segmented, and repetitive. As a manager put it, *"I feel like a well fed parrot in a golden cage. There is security, but no freedom and no excitement."*

The organization had plethora of departments--operations, mechanical maintenance, electrical maintenance, instrumentation maintenance, production services, research and development, engineering services, management services, training, finance, projects, purchase, stores, corporate personnel, industrial relations, quality control, production planning, despatch, customer complaints, safety, and so on. Each department was further subdivided into sections. For example, the administration department had separate sections for transport arrangements, telephone facilities, office furniture, and so on. It was widely felt that boundaries had hardened around these groups, as a large number of individuals at lower levels had spent practically their entire career in a single group. A middle

manager noted, *"The people in my section haven't worked in any other section. They feel so strongly identified with our group that rejection and humiliation of others is what pleases them most. When I talk of extending a helping hand or making concessions to others in the larger organizational interest, they think I have no spine. The organization reinforces such parochialism further through mechanistic formulae for allocation of rewards. This sets up each group against the rest of the organization."*

Not only work was highly segmented across different functions, it was also fragmented across the levels of assistant engineer, engineer, senior engineer, assistant manager, manager, senior manager, assistant general manager, general manager and group general manager. Thus there were nine hierarchical levels between the first level supervisor and the director. Each function and level had its own view point and the integration of these different view points was found to be difficult.

In a tall hierarchy, personnel in the middle management positions were found to be primarily concerned with execution of routine tasks and instructions given to them by those in higher levels. *"Over a period of time, assistant managers have become assistant general managers, and have continued to do the same job. With such a high rate of inflation in designations, assistant managers have no value today"*, said a middle manager. With a large number of levels and functions, individuals also end up with "non-roles." A middle manager said, *"In a non-role, you have nothing much to do. Sometimes, you go out of your way to help trainees or other newcomers just to fill the available time."* *"My total job content barely fills two hours in a working day"*, said another manager. *"My skills have certainly gone down in the last five years."*

Given the status consciousness that existed in the organization, any non-routine decision could be taken only at senior levels. According to a manager, *"We are there to simply chase scarce resources, which include support from service functions, receipt of approvals and clearances from higher levels, and cooperation from workers and staff members. In this routine world, there is no place for any developmental activities."*

At the same time, the departments entrusted with developmental functions were generally perceived to be ineffective. There were strong inter-functional conflicts with the line managers perceiving the staff managers as *"ignoring the shop floor realities and making impractical suggestions"* and staff managers accusing line managers of *"resisting change."*

While middle managers experienced several road blocks in performing developmental, strategic or entrepreneurial role, there were relatively fewer problems in choosing the path of non-performance or mediocrity. In the words of a participant, *"We can choose to perform or not to perform. We are free to express our opinions, and that is nice even if nobody is influenced by them. Our time goes in activities where we feel comfortable. Some of us do our personal things, play in stock markets; some of us choose to put punctuation and correct grammar in our subordinates' write-ups, some check records, prepare reports or clear files. These may not be the tasks that we ought to be performing, but they are comfortable for us and keep us from straying into areas where there are problems and no easy answers."*

The Way Work Is Done

'Moving the files' and 'completing the paper work' were observed to be important priorities in the organization at managerial levels. A manager elaborated: *"For every issue, one is first required to open a file. This file makes its rounds through several offices, with individuals adding their notes, writing their comments, and making the file thick over a period of time. You need expertise in building good cases on files. Individuals can scuttle your case in subtle ways. You need members on your team who can counter them effectively."* In discussions, several individuals recalled with a sense of pride the notes that they had written, objections they had raised on others' notes, files that

they had got cleared, and so on. It did not seem particularly important whether these notes had actually led to any useful change.

A manager described how introduction of new schemes followed a predictable pattern. *"If you take schemes relating to the personnel function, for example, it all starts with forming a committee to make proposals for the scheme. By looking at the membership of the committee, one can make a fair guess of what the committee would come up with. Then the proposed scheme is taken for discussion with the union by designated middle managers. The file then moves to the turf of a middle manager with specialization in drafting circulars. Each one takes his own time and does his part without involving the key actors involved in actual implementation. The scheme is considered as 'introduced' when the circular is released. Implementation and monitoring would happen if there are some committed souls."*

Thus, the senior/top executives functioned more like bureaucrats than managers. According to a middle manager, *"The general managers and the assistant general managers are constantly shuffled around. They do not know where they would be tomorrow. Wherever they go, they will sign papers, write notes, and move files. There are no other expectations from them."* Another manager said: *people who approve decisions are constantly travelling. We call them 'airport managers' because they spend more time in airports than in their offices. They scratch the surfaces of several issues, but one doesn't know what they contribute. Yet they also control day to day issues. At middle levels, we feel happy when our own boss clears a pending file and approves a decision."*

How, then, does meaningful change occur? According to a middle manager, *"There are so many rules, regulations, procedures, and guidelines that the only way things move is when I say, 'OK, let us do it. I'll take the rap if there is any criticism.' If I seek advice, the matter would go round and round for ever."* But lack of attention to personnel issues hampers some initiatives. According to a manager, *"I did a detailed study in a technical area, but before the report was implemented, I was moved out of the department and nothing came of the report. The placement decisions are made at the very top. They were, probably, not even aware that I had been working in that area."*

The middle managers found it difficult to respond to questions relating to how they planned their work or how they developed their teams. In the words of a participant, *"How can I respond to questions such as how do you develop yourself, how do you develop your people or how do you plan work? Frankly, I have never paid attention to any of these issues. Assignments just happen when files complete their long journeys. Work gets mechanically taken on. I try to hoard good people and transfer unwanted people. After all, every team requires at least a few people who can bear the load and keep the wheels moving."* Several managers noted that their sections and departments relied only on a few key subordinates.

Choice of high cost options was another way that middle managers kept the wheels moving. The following quotes illustrate this view: *"As it is difficult to get work done from your own people, you build a case and get approval for subcontracting the work. Then the contractor does the actual implementation, and you only supervise the work."*

"A pump got burnt owing to a worker's negligence. When I confronted the worker, the union took up his case. My boss recommended that it was easier to resolve the issue by ordering another pump. We learn that such issues ought not to be raised. Even after the incident, it has not been possible to get workers to attend to their regular maintenance duties."

To sum up, inadequate attention was paid to linkage, integration, and people management issues in the organization. Diffusion of ideas was, therefore, very slow. As a manager said, *"There could be a problem in one part of the organization, and expertise to solve the problem in another part. But the two rarely come together."*

Consequences

How did the factors listed above affect the emotional state of the middle managers and the thinking about their roles and contributions in the organization? The following quotes throw some light on this issue.

"With our impersonal and procedure-bound approaches, everyone has been hurt at one point or the other. There are hardly any mechanisms for redressal. So people stay with residual negative feelings. They feel that they are wasting the best years of their lives, but do nothing to resolve their problems."

"Very few people believe they have a 'say' in the functioning of the organization. Most believe that they don't matter much in the organizational set-up. It is difficult to motivate them."

"I don't feel I am really a manager, because my wishes cannot be translated into actions in this system."

"I feel unconcerned about most issues. Even visible eyesores like leaking taps or scattered garbage don't hurt any longer."

"There was a feeling of pride when I was a part of the team that created a voluntary retirement scheme to resolve the overstaffing problem. But I feel distressed to see its implementation. I find that the yardstick for decision making keeps shifting with each decision, and I feel helpless. I don't know what the scheme is achieving now. There is a sense of meaninglessness when I process the papers. The lack of purpose is overpowering. I am not the most sensitive of individuals, but even I feel very disturbed."

In the opinion of the middle managers, absence of attention to people management had taken a toll of even positive events and developments such as organizational growth, foreign training, or organization's ability to attract top talent, as evident from the following comments:

"The company has grown in spite of us. It has been riding friendly waves and is being carried faster, which is quite different from moving faster on its own. Perhaps that is the reason why the company's growth has not 'touched' me. I am still operating in my narrow groove. As the company has grown, we have simply a larger number of middle managers operating in their narrow grooves."

"After sending me abroad for specialized training, I've been put in a job which has nothing to do with the training. My protests have fallen on deaf ears. How do you expect me to take any training effort seriously?"

"For the narrow jobs that the organization provides, we need just average people. But the company recruits bright people, even gold medallists. They get trapped by our pay and perks and turn cynics in no time."

Thus the middle managers felt underdeveloped and underutilized. They avoided decision situations which involved the exercise of power. They responded only to specific demands in their narrow work spheres and let go of opportunities to make improvements.

The consequences were equally serious for the organizational performance. As middle managers were unable to perceive their roles in a larger systemic context, there were several negative outcomes.

- There were problems of coordination in the organization
- Pay and perquisites became important issues while work became less meaningful as an intrinsic motivator
- There was lack of personal and professional development on the job. With organizational context fostering only narrow specialization, the middle managerial segment was unable to provide the leadership that was essential for the long term growth and development of the enterprise
- The responsibility for task completion was diffused, resulting in perceived lack of accountability at various levels
- Introduction and management of change was always problematic, as middle managers were reluctant to champion and sponsor change efforts.

In the words of a middle manager, *"Everything gets ritualized. In meetings, real concerns do not get expressed. The system of monthly reports and daily coordination meetings have stopped. People think that they have completed the work when they report a matter. There is no demand for performance upward or downward. I think our biggest crisis is that we accept lower and lower standards."*

Creating An Enabling Work Environment

The data presented above convey an overwhelming sense of powerlessness. But a small number of middle managers (9 out of the sample of 144) did not share this negative sentiment. They reported that they initially took initiatives against all odds, and had acquired credibility in the system which helped them take even greater risks. They paid attention to management of interface with other levels/functions and were able to arrive at mutually beneficial working arrangements with other organizational members, even when the overall system was faulty.

While other group members recognized that these individuals were able to cut through the maze of organizational procedures and systems, they did not share their optimism about the ability of middle managers in general to function as effective change agents. These individuals were seen to operate from a base of credibility that others did not possess. The investments required to build that base seemed very high. Unlike the exceptional participants, most middle managers felt marginalized in several organizational settings and came to terms with the situation by making the related organizational issues marginal to their lives.

To an outsider, it would appear that many middle managers tend to take a passive spectator stance, while the organizational situation demands proactive and dynamic steps. However, such a view ignores the realities of the world of middle managers which shape their consciousness in a significant manner. In the group meetings, the middle managers were requested to share both positive and negative experiences. But there were very few happy statements. Even when specifically asked to relate some positive experiences, the middle managers typically began with a satisfying facet of organizational life, but ended the story on a negative note.

There was an implicit feeling of helplessness. In the perception of middle managers, a series of short term, so-called pragmatic steps had created an organizational system that found itself in knots to initiate any meaningful change. There were also a few negative loops operating in the system. For example, when individuals did not take responsibility, greater centralization was the result. But greater centralization alienated individuals further and so they took even less responsibility. It was also found that development was blocked when individuals were put in narrow roles. This made them unfit for larger roles over a period of time. Similarly, when middle managers expressed negative feelings and passive aggression toward senior and top executives, senior and top management responded by building walls between them and the middle level executives, which aggravated the negative sentiments.

Several problems emanated from overstaffing which had created a situation in which it had become difficult to fix responsibility. Performers saw a number of non-performers around them going scotfree and started to think of work as punishment. At the same time, non-performers had little meaning at work. In an excessively differentiated structure with several departments and levels of hierarchy, it did not seem possible to ensure meaningful assignments and the autonomy to perform the tasks.

The organization had instituted of regular training programmes at middle and senior levels. But the middle managers felt that the sermons ignored the mundane realities of their world. When one is so full of negative emotions and when one does not experience a sense of self-efficacy, how can one feel energized to excel?

To release the blocked energies of the middle managers, we have to address ourselves to the question of how we can create an enabling work environment in which middle managers experience personal efficacy and a sense of self-worth. As shown in Figure 2, an enabling work environment attends to ways of organizing work, people management issues, and organizational processes, and ensures top management involvement in the change process. These factors are discussed below.

Ways of Organizing Work

To create an enabling work environment, the principles used for organizing work at middle levels should undergo a radical change. Multiple levels in a hierarchical organization contribute to fragmentation of managerial roles. Restructuring should be aimed at reducing hierarchical levels and identifying accountability/responsibility of various positions. The organization should prevent overstaffing and resist the temptation of crowding the managerial hierarchy just to provide promotion opportunities for individuals. Making divisional and functional heads accountable for costs and profits is one way of sharpening accountability and responsibility. Meritocracy should be supported, and there should be consequences for performing or not performing. Finally, senior and top executives should attend carefully to the roles and work assignments of members. The performance planning system should have a provision for healthy interactions among superiors and subordinates on work priorities and work assignments.

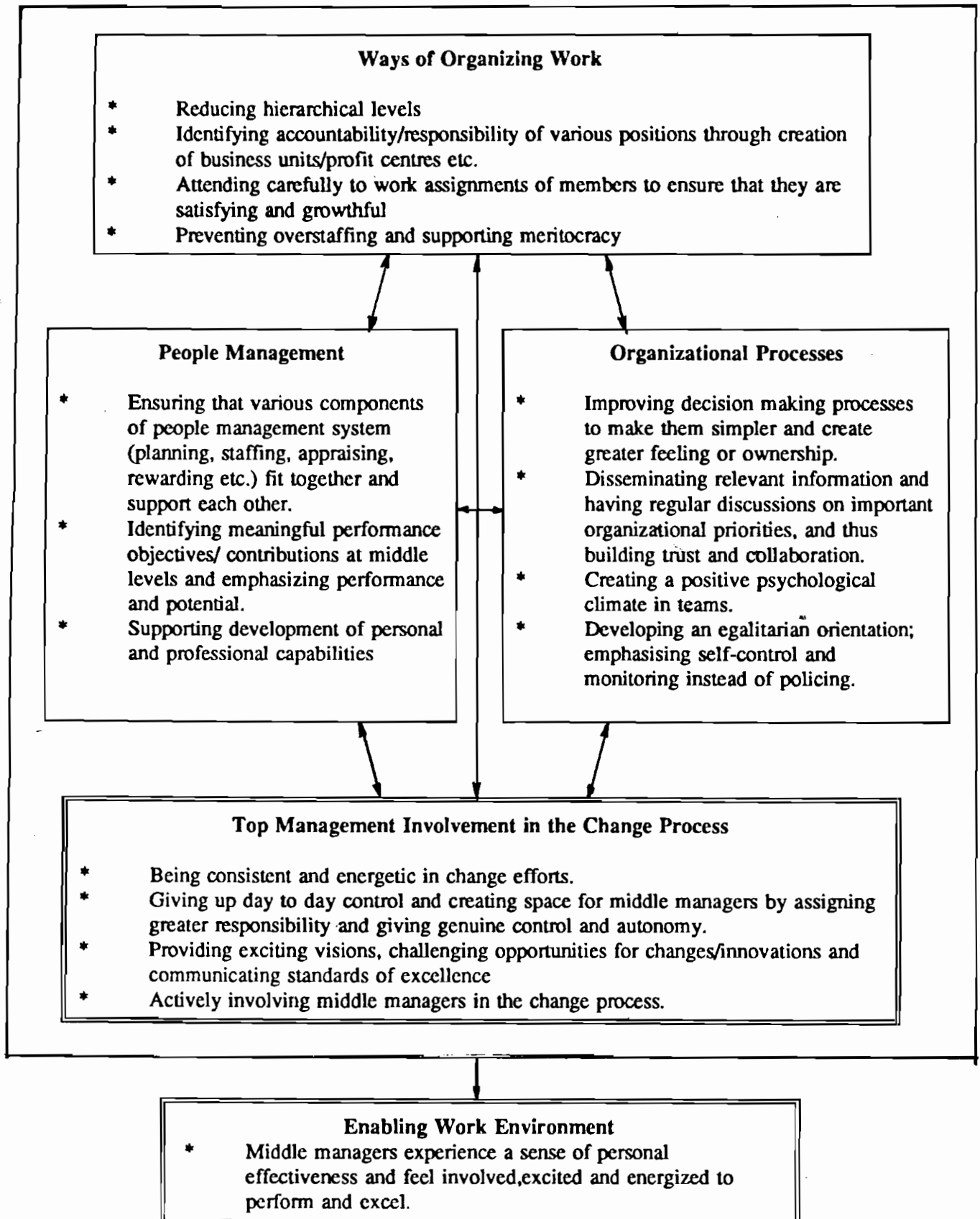
People Management

There is a growing realization that various components of a human resource management system must be managed to fit together and support each other. In other words, human resource management practices in the areas of planning, staffing, appraising, compensating, and training and development must be consistent and support one another (Schuler and Jackson, 1987). Segmented and fragmented approaches to the middle management problem are unlikely to succeed.

There should be greater emphasis on the following human resource management policies:

- a) basing promotions on a fair and objective performance appraisal system
- b) basing promotions on vacancies and promoting only if greater responsibilities can be given
- c) linking rewards with performance
- d) planning job rotations to develop people's potential rather than rotating people based on organization exigencies
- e) appraisal to provide developmental feedback and identifying distinctive contribution
- f) utilizing challenge in job and job satisfaction as motivators

Figure 2



- g) **greater decentralization and greater involvement of middle managers in decision making so as to arrive at consensus-based decisions**
- h) **utilizing training workshops as forums for diagnosis and action planning because: they provide a medium of participation by involving managers from diverse backgrounds; facilitate ownership of problems; establish a common language for framing organizational issues; and help to foster trust and collaboration. Combining diagnosis with learning will lead to a better transfer of learning to organizational situations and help link actions with learning**
- i) **greater attention to staffing issues: address questions such as who the organization is going to groom to fill critical positions in the coming years and how they are going to be developed.**

Organizational Processes

To create an enabling work environment, the organization should institutionalize a culture of excellence which facilitates growth, diversification, and internationalization, and provides work challenges for organizational members. By strengthening training and development, team work, result orientation, calculated risk taking and initiative, the organization can offset the inevitable pressure for excessive bureaucratization that age, size, and government ownership imply.

The organization should decentralize decision making. This requires not only delegating powers but also inculcating a sense of ownership, developing managerial thinking, and empowering middle level executives. Decision making should be simplified. There should be greater emphasis on information sharing and exploration of ideas using face-to-face meetings.

Top and senior executives should practice enabling style. Enabling style includes the following aspects:

- a) **Task-related aspects: Having and communicating standards of excellence, spotting opportunities for changes/innovations, careful attention to the work assignments of one's team members to ensure that they are satisfying and growthful, and having regular discussion with one's subordinates on important departmental/organizational priorities**
- b) **Development orientation: Taking genuine interest in development of people, having an optimistic orientation about the potential of employees, being able to listen to criticisms without getting defensive, and high level of receptivity to new ideas/proposals from others**
- c) **Egalitarian orientation: Commitment to establishing and sustaining an egalitarian style, getting out of hierarchical barriers; emphasizing self-control and monitoring instead of policing**
- d) **Sensitivity to relationship process: Building trusting relationship with team members, willingness to share openly, constructive confrontation of issues facing the team, facilitating team orientation/informality among team members, and creating a psychological climate in which team members feel strong to contribute to the organization and to themselves**

Training workshops should be organized in which the top/senior executives receive feedback on the extent to which they practise enabling styles. Prior to the workshop, feedback could be obtained anonymously from subordinates and colleagues on instruments which include items such as those listed above.

Top Management Involvement

Last but not least, efforts to increase utilization of middle management potential have to be initiated from top. In predominantly technocratic settings, unless driven from top, most change efforts in

human resource management are unlikely to have any impact. Top management needs to mobilize the energy of middle managers through exciting visions for the organization. They should enhance stakes for middle managers by assigning them greater responsibilities, giving them genuine control and autonomy, disseminating information, and legitimizing discussion of undiscussable issues.

But it should be realized that such efforts are not easy to implement. They seem to go through three phases: (i) cynicism, (ii) participation and involvement, and (iii) enhanced expectations. In the first phase of the change, top management efforts are likely to be greeted with a certain amount of cynicism. But the cynicism gives way to the second phase of participation and involvement if top management is consistent and energetic in pursuing the change efforts. In the third phase of the change effort, middle managers are mobilized in ways that modify their level of awareness, and top management is likely to experience pressure to meet the enhanced expectations. Several middle managers become strongly committed to pursuing new visions and programmes, and organizational decision making processes become more complex. This is a far bigger challenge for top management than the initial cynicism. It is important that top managers have the mental readiness to give up their day-to-day control. They should be able to rise to the occasion by developing their own capacity and organizational capacity to manage diversity of goals and viewpoints. They have the primary responsibility for creating an enabling work environment in which middle managers experience a sense of personal efficacy and feel involved, excited, and energized to perform and excel.

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