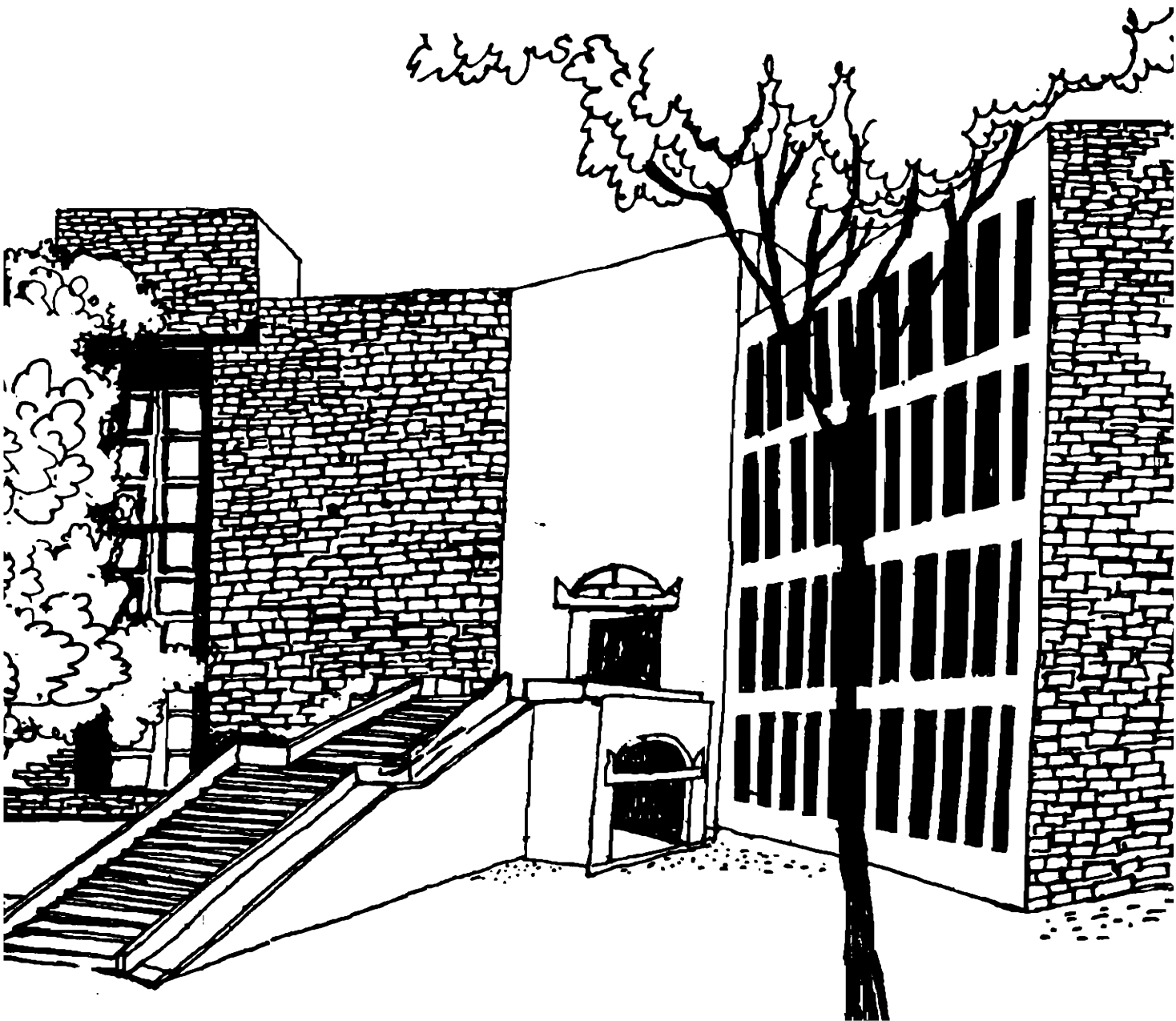




# Working Paper



A STUDY ON THE PERSONALITY PROFILE OF  
MIDDLE MANAGERS: THE INDIAN EXPERIENCE

By

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**A Study on the Personality Profile of Middle  
Managers:  
The Indian Experience**

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1998**

## **Table of Contents**

Acknowledgements

Abstract

I Introduction

II Scope of the Paper

III Methodology

A Objectives

B The Instrument Used

C The TAT Summary

D Themes of Cards

IV Sample of the Study

V Emergent Themes

VI Findings and Conclusions

VII Nature of Influences on Middle Managers

VIII Implications for HRM (Human Resource Managers)

IX Bibliography

X List of Figures

Figure 1 : A Map of the Gap in the Middle

Figure 2 : Changing Attitude of Managers

Figure 3 : Organizational Space of the Middle Manager

Figure 4 : Management Levels and Integration

Figure 5 : Emotive-Cognitive Map of a Manager

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## **Abstract**

In the context of transformations taking place in the environment, organizations are initiating major changes in their structure, design and human processes. These changes generate a great deal of anxiety and apprehension amongst different levels in the cadre. It appears that the middle level managers in the organization are affected the most through these changes. The top levels and the lower most levels are becoming more powerful whereas the middle levels are questioning their space and location in the organization.

An action research study was undertaken to get into the universe of this level of managers and get a feel of how they perceive and respond to these changes. This study utilized a projective technique (the Thematic Apperception Test) to unfold the personality traits of these managers which were then linked to their response patterns in social and organizational contexts. An effort was made to move from a micro to a macro level. This work was undertaken in groups of 12-15 middle managers across different organizations. Three day workshops were held to explore and enlarge the concepts of job, task, role, hierarchical relationships, membership in a group and professionalization of systems. These workshops facilitated a look into the self in the context of the external environment. The aim here, was to generate greater ownership and enhance effectiveness among the middle managers.

Having explored the universe of the managers through their stories and the group interactions that took place, some specific traits and experiences got revealed. These are grouped into specific themes like (a) individual's definition of self, work

and social roles; (b) individual's experience with authority and relationships; (c) individual as a group member; and (d) individual's experience with structure, system and processes. The external and internal influences on a manager's role-taking processes are also discussed in the paper.

These findings have relevance for the human resource professional in designing such systems and structures keeping in view the socio-cultural context, the dreams, aspirations and ambitions of this group and the present reality of the organization and the environment .



# **A Study on the Personality Profile of Middle Managers: The Indian Experience**

## **I Introduction**

Like society and the country, Indian organizations are also undergoing dramatic transformations in their business strategies, organization structures, policies, people profile and ways of working. Changes occurring in the external environment have led to necessitating changes in the internal working environment of organizations. The interdependencies caused due to globalization, internationalization and liberalization have made demands for new designs of physical infrastructures in organizations, interfaces in relationships and linkages with people and situations. In this process, it is inevitable that organizational transformation would take place. This situation can be taken as an opportunity, challenge and a form of organization learning so that new initiatives, redesigning and redefining can emerge. Or it can be taken as an inevitable compulsion and organizations can remain rooted in the past modes of working which then would make their survival difficult.

These shifts have compelled organizations to review and redefine their mission, vision, structure, task, functions and management practices. Considerable effort is being made to realistically assess and to mobilize resources and potentials of human beings, and recognize that there is a need to invest in the human resources through management training and education.

The western literature on management practices reflect the changes in the nature of managerial work life which are potentially unsustainable. Managers have not only become effective - but hyper-effective (Belasen, Benke, 1996). Organizations have responded to the productivity challenge by increasing emphasis on virtually all managerial roles which offer prospects of increased effectiveness. The managers describe themselves both directly and indirectly as being out of time and out of control. There are changes in the importance of clarity of roles, clarity of tasks, and clarity of responsibilities.

The study of Indian organizations revealed that besides being business organizations they are also impacted and influenced by the socio-cultural and familial system (Parikh, 1976). Each individual enters an organization with his own history, heritage and culture of his society and family context. His own experiences of growing up influenced by his socialization processes determine the meaning he gives to his role in the organization, his relationships across jobs, tasks, and functions and the events occurring in the organization (Garg and Parikh 1986). There is a sensing that the clan of middle managers in India is unable to keep pace with change and is experiencing a lot of pressure. Middle levels of most organizations are confronted by demanding seniors and workers. Seniors demand performance and targets while workers demand money for any and every additional work (Parikh unpublished consultancy report 1996). What makes their position almost impossible is that the real nature of their jobs and stress is unrecognized - that they must deal with inconsistent signals and changing messages. Coupled with these feelings of powerlessness, these elements make the jobs of middle managers

so full of frustration, disappointments and anger that it ultimately result in a death of spirit (Frohman and Johnson, 1993).

There are no clear cut consensus about the future place of middle managers. Indeed some have raised the question whether middle managers are needed at all. They are seen as "concrete layers getting in the way of progress". (Frohman & Johnson, 1993). However, it is also true that the middle level managers are the backbone of any organization. Given the transformations occurring both in the external and internal environment, what is therefore required is a redefinition of their roles and an exploration into their world of work and organizational realities to understand how the middle level managers perceive their roles and what kind of map and definitions of people and systems they bring to the organization. The middle manager has often been criticized for his resistance to change, his conformity and surrender to the authority and hierarchy with organizational power and his redundancy in the ever turning professional organization (Kamat, 1996 and Peters, 1987). There are demands on his personal productivity, on the productivity of his subordinates and on his time. These constant demands and expectations from him and the pulls and pushes from both the organization and family many a times leave him helpless, powerless and marginalized (Shah, Singh, 1996).

The long term approach to the global competitiveness lies in taking middle managers out of their traditional roles and give them new responsibilities. "Functioning in new roles, middle managers hold the key to global competitiveness" (Frohman & Johnson, 1993). This middle managers group represents that resource which is underutilized and a resource that has tremendous potential to grow and

shape the world economy.

With this backdrop of transformation and the changing role of the middle managers it was felt necessary to understand this group of Indian managers in the organizations.

A mental map of the world of middle managers has been developed by Frohman and Johnson. This map takes into account the sequence of changes in the external environment to the changes in the internal environment. This was followed by individual and organizational factors, that resulted in the organizational outcome which was labelled as a “gap in the middle”. However, this map was subsequently revised with new research findings.

**Figure 1 : A Map of the Gap in the Middle**

Change in the External Environment	Changes in the Internal Environment	Organizational Factors	Organizational Outcomes
Deregulation Global competition Preference for short-term results	Delegation of decision making Growing complexity of cross-functional coordination Shorter time frames.  Increasing reliance on data-based information systems Organizational down-sizing	'Individual' career plateauing at mid-life 'Organization'  Inadequate lateral team work in the middle	The gap in the middle

(Source: Frohman and Johnson, 1993, pg.33)

## II Scope of the Paper

This study was taken up as an action research project wherein primary and secondary data was collected. The data was not only used for research purpose but also for participative and experiential learning. The attempt of the study was to

change the mind-sets of the middle managers so that they acquire a professional orientation and contribute to the efficiency and excellence of task.

### **III Methodology**

This study arose out of several workshops designed for middle level managers. The focus of the study was about the job and concept of managerial roles as held by the middle managers in the organization. Most of the training programmes focus on the knowledge and skills of individuals and postulate that the attitudes themselves will be shaped through this process. Such programmes are cognitive in nature and impart new concepts and knowledge. This study and as such the workshops focused into the individual's personality, maps and definitions and attitudes towards the self, the role and towards work. These workshops were designed to explore the maps, definitions and orientations of the primary system and the secondary system of the middle managers which are the family and the organization respectively. They were participative and focused on the individual's roles, identity, strengths and limitations and the implications of these on the managers' role taking in the organizational context. For this a projective technique of Thematic Apperception Test (TAT) (Holt, 1961) was used.

#### **A *The Objectives of the Workshop***

- 1) To enlarge the concept of job, task, role and performance to acquire a clarity of work culture.
- 2) To explore the concept of the hierarchical relationships that the middle managers worked with and to enhance effectiveness in relating to superiors,

colleagues and subordinates.

- 3) To acquire a clarity of managerial role anchored in efficiency and effectiveness.
- 4) To acquire an organizational perspective anchored in quality of product and the image of the organization in the environment.

## ***B The Instrument Used***

To conduct the workshops a personality tool was used. The Thematic Apperception Test (TAT) developed by Henry Murray was considered most suitable for the purpose (Holt, 1961). This test has a series of 30 picture cards. The cards most suitable to the subject and his context are selected and shown to him one by one. The subject writes (or narrates) a story based on what he sees in the picture. The story can have a past, present and a future and an outcome-success or a failure or the situation can remain unresolved. The story generates a rich source of data about the individual. The stories reflect the psychological and emotional state of the protagonist or the story writer. According to Murray (1935), there are some determinants that shape the TAT stories. They are: the situational context, the perceptual impact, the arousing of needs and affects, the directing sets, the associative elaboration, the enabling and limiting effects of abilities, defensive circuiting, the internal milieu and the personal style. The subject's reaction may involve all, most, or only a few of the determinants (Holt). The story is produced differently in each person.

The present study uses a modified version of the TAT. However, the framework for the interpretations is based on Murray's methodology and is also translated into the socio-cultural, managerial and organizational context of Indian organizations. Given below is a brief history, scope, scoring and interpretations of the original TAT. provides a useful context of the present study.

## **C TAT Summary**

The Thematic Apperception Test (TAT), a projective technique, was introduced by C D Morgan, and Henry A Murray in 1935. It is a method of revealing to the trained interpreter some of the dominant drives, emotions, sentiments, complexes and conflicts of personality. A special value resides in its power to expose the underlying inhibited tendencies which the subject is not willing to admit because he is unconscious of them. The TAT originally consisted of 20 pictures. Since 1938 (second revision), the scope of inquiry expanded and the pace of research quickened.

The third revision of TAT consisted of 30 pictures and 1 blank card. The pictures were selected and marked for boys, girls, males and females. The testing process was divided into two sessions and for each of these it was suggested that no more than 10 TAT cards be administered with at least one day intervening between the two sessions. More recently, practical considerations have led to a reduction in the number of cards administered. Most testers now present the subject 8 to 12 cards and use only a single session. The cards are presented individually and the respondent is instructed to provide a story about the following points.

(i) the depicted scene, (ii) what led up to it, (iii) what the characters in the picture are thinking, and (iv) what the outcome will be.

Although typically administered as an oral test in clinical situations, the TAT can also be administered in writing and as a group test. In dealing with the content of the stories the method recommended is that of analyzing each successive event into



- (a) the force or forces emanating from the hero;
- (b) the force or forces emanating from the environment (press).

Murray has provided a framework for the scoring and interpretation of the TAT stories. This is briefly stated below:

- 01 *Hero*: It is the character in whom the story teller is most interested and the individual who most resembles him. Attention is given to his intelligence, achievement ability, conflicts, leadership qualities, feelings, etc.
- 02 *Needs of the hero*: After the identification of the hero, the interpreter must formulate the reactions of the hero to various forces. This can be accomplished with a classification of the needs of the hero.
- 03 *Environmental forces*: These are categorized according to their effect on the hero. These presses could be real or imaginary - the predominant forces are aggression, dominance, rejection.
- 04 *Outcomes*: Outcome refers to the result of the story. It signifies relative strengths of the forces emitting from the hero.
- 05 *Themes or themas*: Themes or themas describe the interplay within the story of the hero's needs, presses and successful or unsuccessful resolution of his conflicts.
- 06 *Interests, sentiments and relationships*: In this a note is made of various interests, sentiments and interpersonal relationships expressed in the stories by the subject.

The TAT can reveal data regarding thought organization, emotional organization, needs, subject's view of the world, interpersonal relationships, his conception of and attitudes toward himself, dynamics of development and illness. This has been adapted in the organizational context and it indicates the person's definition and meaning of work, his image of himself, his relationship with his seniors, colleagues and juniors, and his interface with the organization.

#### ***D Themes of Cards***

For the purpose of the study, we identified six pictures relevant to an individual in the context of his work, his relationships, and his own ambitions and aspirations.

The basic themes of all the six cards are as under:

**Card 1** shows a young man sitting at a desk. There is a photograph of a woman near him. He is facing a window. This card brings out the attitudes to a job, meaning of work, inclusion or exclusion of family members and the themes around self-motivation, involvement and commitment.

**Card 2** shows an old man and a young man, both dressed formally in an environment of an office or a formal setting, with a portrait on the wall. This card brings out the relationship theme across generations. The theme centres around relationships between father-son or superior-subordinate. This card evokes feelings around authority, power, loyalty, conformity, expectations, autonomy and independence.

**Card 3** shows a group of men in different postures around a table. This card brings out behavioural issues in group settings - formal or informal. Issues on group

dynamics, team membership, interpersonal relationships, decision making, and meanings around peer relations.

**Card 4** shows a well dressed middle aged man sitting on a chair by a window with a book and glasses in his lap. This card brings out the themes of success, achievement, accomplishment, and reflection on past, present or future.

**Card 5** shows a rural setting with a young man dressed casually, sitting on a fence, talking to an older man dressed in a suit. This card brings out encounter between strangers belonging to different contexts - rural and urban. The emergent themes are around values, beliefs and attitudes around relationships, interactions and authority. This card brings out the residual issues of Card 2 around relationships.

**Card 6** shows an elderly man sitting at a desk which is full of files. There is a coat and a hat on a tray. The other desks are empty and no one is around. This card brings out the theme of success, failure, overwork and overengagement, routine versus creativity and meaning of work. This card also portrays the continuity and residues of Cards 1 and 4.

The six cards together portray the individual in his job, tasks, role and performance, relationships across hierarchy and authority, in social and work setting, group work and team spirit, success and failure and the diversity of context and belonging.

Each card is shown on a transparency for thirty seconds. The participants are asked to write a story on what they see, who are the people and what is happening. Five minutes are given to write the story.

#### **IV Sample of the Study**

The study is based on 75 middle managers from 3 medium sized organizations, and divided into 5 groups of 15 managers each. These managers came from different functions, different organizations and varying industries like pharmaceutical and engineering. The turnover of these companies ranged from Rs.100 crores to Rs.300 crores. These were companies which were owner managed and were moving towards professionalization.

The stories of each individual manager on the six cards was explored, analyzed, interpreted and discussed in the group. There was self exploration, and one-to-one interaction with the facilitator as well as the other group members adding to the inputs. The workshops were participative where the managers openly explored their data without fear of evaluation or judgements and with a zeal of making a difference to themselves and to their work in the organization.

Initially there was some resistance to the technology of the TAT as the managers found it difficult to believe that the story they had written, based on the actual picture had something to do with their inner reality and personality. They were convinced about the technique only when they could identify a continuity and a similar pattern of feeling/response across the six stories. For example, if the story the manager wrote portrayed the main character in the story as a shy person in one card, the pattern of this discomfort and shyness in relating to people continued in all his other stories. The individual could relate this description to himself and his inner reality

with the interface in both work and social settings. A person who was portrayed as taking charge or playing the leader role, continued to do so in all his other stories and could then relate it to himself and his interface with systems. The individual learnings were translated to understand the implications in the role taking as managers in their organization setting. The directionality was the role of an individual in actively shaping the organization culture as well as in taking the ownership of the organization performance.

The exploration and analysis of the stories was the context - past, present and future, the people, their roles and relationships, the themes of the interfaces, and the way the story ended or what was the outcome of the story.

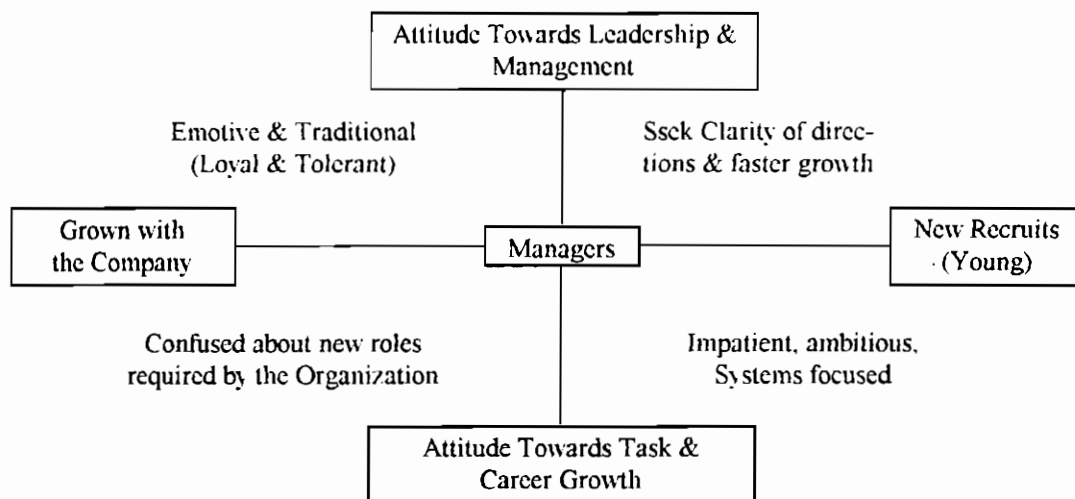
After the individual level exploration was done for each card, a group exploration was carried out. Since the groups were from the same organization, there were shared experiences and themes which revolved around organizational issues. Individual themes reflected personality characteristics and were translated into managerial issues.

The managers in this study can be categorized into two groups. There were experienced people who joined when the organization had just been set up. This group had been with the organizations for a long time and had a long history of association with the organization. They were used to personalised relationship and accessibility of the leader. The managers carried the feelings of closeness and perceived the organization as a second family. They felt obligated to the owner for his personal accessibility, acceptance and inclusion. Today this group appeared to

be confused and lost due to the changes both in the external and internal environment of the organizations and the leader's pre-occupation with managing the growth of the organization as well as the changes. They wanted to hold on to past modes of relating and working and their experiences both with people and systems.

The other group was of the young professionally trained people. They entered the organization when the organization had grown and acquired significance. This group was more ambitious and carried the maps of the earlier organizations they had worked with. This group was a little impatient with the slow pace of growth of the present organization and pushed for faster growth. Personal growth and career were most important and they were reluctant to get in touch with the organizational perspective. Some of these managers had also migrated from smaller towns or regions and come to bigger and larger organizations to fulfil their career dreams. The younger and professional managers differed in their attitude towards the organization and the management. They were inclined to be more systems focused, whereas the older experienced managers valued loyalty and personalisation, and carried a sense of belonging to the organization.

**Figure 2: Changing Attitude of Managers**



- The experienced are more traditional, affiliative and people oriented in approach.
- The new recruits are more logical and rational in approach.
- The experienced are confused by the new roles expected of them.
- The new recruits are impatient with the pace of growth.

Both these orientations of the experienced and the young exist simultaneously in the organization. Each group brings a certain kind of managerial focus and resources to the organization. The organization has to discover processes through which these managerial resources can be mobilised for organizational effectiveness.

A marked difference was noted in the stories of the old and experienced managers and the new recruits. The former group were passive and gave in to the demands of the seniors whereas the young recruits were more assertive and forceful in their interface with other roles. They re-defined their roles in the changing organizational scenario and were open to review their roles. The organizations were passing through a transition and were pulled and pushed by the traditional and the new styles of management. Similarly, the organizations and their leaders were also

caught up in issues of handling the external changes in the business environment with the existing internal realities.

## **V Emergent Themes**

These themes are a summary of the six stories written by the 75 managers and the resultant explorations and discussions. The six stories are grouped into three distinctive focus. Cards 1, 4 and 6 reflect individual setting. Cards 2 and 5 reflect interface with authority and hierarchy. Card 3 reflects group work. The significant and dominant themes are presented.

**Cards 1, 4 and 6** centered around themes of task, role and performance. They were single individual cards and projected the manager's attitude towards work, role and achievement, how he experienced himself in different settings and what meaning he gave to his environment. The themes also reflected whether the individuals brought a conclusion to the story and whether there was successful, unsuccessful or no resolution of the story.

- Most of the managers' pre-occupation was with the routine. Work was seen as monotonous and unchallenging. The ownership of the task belonged to the seniors. Yet the managers carried a duty to complete the job.
- This group of managers found it difficult to delegate. The managers by and large stayed back after office hours to complete their work.
- There was an absence of job and role clarity. The individuals felt over-engaged and overloaded with routine work and there was no scope for creativity.



- Managers found it difficult to hold both work and social roles in simultaneity. The family occupied a marginal space.
- Though many stories were problem related, there were few solutions. The ownership of the problem as well as the solution belonged to the seniors. The problem space was definitely larger than the solution space. If the solutions were identified they were a small part of the problem. The problems kept recurring and the cumulative impact created a belief that problems in the organization cannot be solved. Managers need to keep addressing the recurrent problems. Whenever the task was successfully completed or the problem solved, it was mostly achieved through personal contacts with the hierarchy and authority rather than through the systems or the manager's ability to take a decision and solve the problem.
- People orientation was high in many stories and the hierarchical, functional, systemic and task linkages got marginalized.
- Very few stories ended in positive outcomes or resolutions.
- The managers could not identify any challenges and opportunities making it difficult to actualise their potentials. The belief the managers carried was that 'Success is the privilege of only the top management'. The junior managers only worked behind the scenes and underplayed their potentials and capabilities. They saw their role as instrumental to the success of the seniors only. They could hardly visualize and own up their own achievements and accomplishments.

**Cards 2 and 5** stories reflected the relational stances with authority and hierarchy. These stories focused on the interface between the superior and the subordinate or the father and the son. The stories brought out the pattern of communication, the attitude towards the seniors and the response stance taken by the junior managers. The emerging themes reflected the socio-cultural and familial interface between the father and son and or superior and subordinate.

- The stories addressed work related hierarchy.
- The superior interface was in terms of giving advice, guidance and direction to the junior. The subordinate on the other hand accepted the advice passively but internally did not agree with the senior. Few dialogues or disagreements emerged. If the subordinate stated his disagreements and differences, it usually lead to resentment and conflicts.
- There seemed to be a high degree of dependence of the subordinate on the senior. The junior exhibited a strong need for acceptance and approval from the seniors.
- The culture was that of restricted expression of feelings and thoughts. Disapprovals and disagreements ended in silences, passivity and withholding of the feeling.
- Maintaining the relationship occupied significant time and effort in the interface.
- Stories ended in no action or outcome, thus the task got marginalised. Both the senior and the subordinate carried residues of hurt, anger, resentment at being

controlled and lack of space for a dialogue in the relationship.

- Managers found it difficult to relax even in social settings. They found it difficult to share ideas and get into meaningful relationships. Hierarchical relationships made it difficult for people to openly share and initiate a dialogue or discussions. In both, the work and social settings, the quality of interface was either in the form of guidance, advice or suggestion from the senior or the father, with the junior or the son not accepting the advice or suggestion, thus leading to a silent withdrawal of the subordinate.

**Card 3** was a group card and the stories centered around themes of inter-task, functional and role linkages. The stories depicted either a social and informal setting or a formal work-related setting. The stories largely depict description of positions and postures of the individuals on the card which were often stereotyped.

- Most of the stories involved several levels of hierarchy. There was identification of an authority related to the hierarchy and the interface was around the authority and hierarchy theme. The focus was on the person and authority rather than on the processes in the group.
- The task linkages were vertical and there was no identification of lateral linkages.
- The pull of the card for a group of people meeting for a task or a discussion did not emerge. There was no relatedness amongst the collectivity of people. The group did not work as a team.

- The channels of communication were largely downwards and collegiate linkages did not emerge. As the meeting progressed, the group became dyads and triads with no interpersonal or inter-role linkages. In situations with disagreements and differences of opinion, individuals rarely expressed their view points. They withdrew in silences and held silent evaluations and judgements of the situation or the people.
- Meetings led to few discussions and no decisions got taken unless there was a superior who had called a meeting and took a decision.
- None of the stories were indicative of an organizational perspective.
- Essentially, the managers were focused on inter-personal relationship with the seniors or authority and were unable to work within a systemic frame.
- In the stories, there was no task or organizational focus. Almost 80% stories remained unresolved as they depicted only the description of location and intentions.
- The stories depicted the conflicting situation the manager was in or his resignation in actually making things work out for him.
- The stories reflected that managers were guests or visitors in their own space.
- Out of the twenty percent where some resolution did emerge, the number of success and failure themes were almost equal.

The themes and issues that emerged from the discussions and analysis are

categorised into four patterns.

### **01 Individual's definition of self, work and social roles**

In most of the stories, ownership of self, task and organization was missing. There was absence of role and job clarity leading to lack of initiative and psychological disengagement from work. A kind of resistance in expressing emotions was conveyed by the managers. Work was meant "to be finished" which generated a kind of meaninglessness. Family life was sacrificed due to long hours at work but rewards in terms of appreciation and recognition were not experienced. The managers saw that the workers were indulged and they were caught between the harshness of the management to them and the defiant-arrogant attitude of the workers. Obedience meant conformity with no room for disagreements or differences. Junior managers were role-bound and had no space to derive and to express their own meanings (identity) of work and family life.

### **02 Individual's experience with authority and relationships**

A sense of relatedness with authority was found to be missing among most of the managers. There was a distance between the two levels and hence, a healthy communication process was absent. Feelings of disinterest and disrespect were seen with no possibilities to deal with differences. Need for acceptance, appreciation and reward from authority was of utmost importance. Superiors were experienced as imposing and threatening, leaving little scope for independent thoughts and actions. High level of dependence on the superiors for solutions and decisions on the superiors was displayed. However, the relationship and task

interface space was filled with caution, suspicion and tentativeness. Responsibility and accountability without authority were held with anger and frustration. Due to non-inclusion in decision making the managers question their location in the organization space.

### **03 Individual as a group member**

The junior managers found it very difficult to make decisions in a group setting. A strong presence of hierarchy was experienced in work related situations. Lot of invisible waste occurred in group settings in terms of individual and organizational resources. Healthy or dynamic group processes occurred only in informal situations, where the individual was relaxed and did not have the fears of evaluation and was expected to perform and achieve to show results. Team work was missing. Within the organization, competition often superseded team work. Downsizing is the most viable aspect affect the middle management. They feel restricted to function fully in the existing structures and practices of a vertical organization. Each person was seen absorbed within himself. Systemic discipline and healthy group dynamics was difficult.

### **04 Individual's experience with structure, system & processes**

Most of the organizational space was attributed as the reserve of the top management. Almost all the dysfunctionalities, inadequacies, non-performance, non-commitment, unrelatedness, non-expression, etc. were attributed to "the system". However no effort to institutionalize a systemic code was perceived by the junior managers. In the Indian context structures and systems are located in the

individual leadership. Systems and structures without the person is generally not respected or valued. The junior managers seemed to be ailing from the middle-child 'Syndrome'. There was no space which they could rightfully claim to be theirs. The structure was experienced as controlling and inhibiting, systems were experienced as unfair, unjust and non-transparent and the rewards based on subjective and personalised likes and dislikes. As such, structures and systems to be experienced as part of the organization without personalization becomes difficult.

## **VI Findings and Conclusions**

The written stories, followed by explorations and discussions with each manager and the group brought out their personal, social and organizational realities. "Each individual is a microcosm of the socio-cultural system he belongs to. The macrocosm of the society in its operational processes is internalized and reflected back by each individual." (Garg, Parikh, 1976). The managers' role reflected the influence of primary socialization processes from the family as well as the secondary socialization from the organization. Both the influences determined their role, definitions and meanings of work, social and work relationships, hierarchy, and their interface with authority.

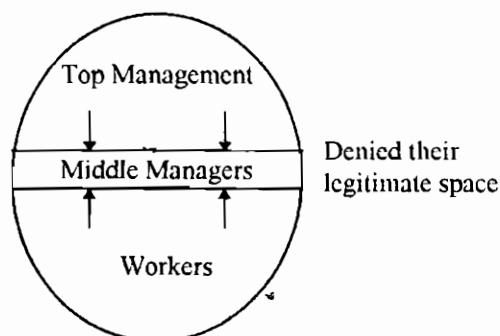
The middle managers represent that group who are required and expected to achieve the results, succeed and take the organization practices forward. However, this group, with whatever dreams and aspirations they may have had have become disillusioned and disenchanted with the emerging systems and organizational realities. They have frozen themselves in their routine work and repetitive job

requirements. They have risen from the ranks but have encountered many barriers in their growth. The organization as well as the managers had so far not invested in their managerial role and growth. They experienced themselves as marginal and carried a feeling that they did not belong to the organization. They saw their role in the organization as implementers and doers. They also could not visualise themselves in the managerial role.

Another finding was that middle managers of these organizations experienced shrinkage of their managerial role space. Technological innovations, re-sizing, down-sizing, de-layering, restructuring, etc. made them feel dislocated and marginalized. For them most of the organizational space belonged to the top management. The supervisors and the shop floor staff also exerted a significant amount of pressure on their managerial roles and competencies.

They experienced having a negligible space in the organization structure as shown in Figure 3. In this marginal space, they felt pushed from the top and from below which would ultimately dislocate them physically or psychologically.

**Figure 3: Organizational Space of the Middle Manager**



- Their location in the organizational hierarchy and structure made them feel marginalized, insignificant, helpless and inadequate.



There is a need to effectively link both upwards and downwards so that the middle managers do not get displaced from their own space. They experienced a sense of illegitimacy in making demands and asserting in their jobs.

Although professional management systems based on western models are being institutionalized, the employees continue to hold aspirations and expectations from the seniors and authority in their traditional mould. This causes a fragmentation and a rigid boundary between the middle managers and the senior managers. At one level the middle managers seek active fulfilment of familial and social aspirations and expectations from the seniors, and at the other, they seek merit-based reward systems to be operative and institutionalised. The influence and impact of the social structure on the role and identity of managers, personal linkages become important in sustaining the relationships at work.

American consultants have indicated in their research that individual factors are not as much responsible for gaps in organizational outcomes as organizational factors. Vertical and lateral processes in communication and team work were the major factors responsible for the gap in the map of the middle managers (Frohman, Johnson, 1993).

Similarly in a research study (Frohman & Johnson, 1993), it was found that middle managers have lost the willingness to take the risks, to innovate, are reluctant to seize opportunities when they are delegated to take decisions and they focus on 'defending their turf', so information sharing and communication amongst departments remain ineffective.

## **VI Nature of Influences on Middle Managers**

Besides the impact of organization socialization on their managerial roles, there are many other sources of influences which have impacted the managers in their different phases of growing up and after their entry into the organizations..

### **A External Influences**

01 *Context of Growth and Socialization:* Most of these managers have grown up in a traditional home with emphasis on good behaviour, ideal role model of a *good son* and some pressure on education and achievement for better career options. The larger context of growth was the transforming Indian society anchored in social values moving towards industrialization. The managers grew up with responses of good behaviour translated into conformity and focus on performance in education. Relationships were based on respect for age and code of conduct governed by passive acceptance of messages which were considered good for the child.

Having done reasonably well in their studies, the entry into organizations was with the continuity of behaviour of a *good son* translated into a behaviour of a *good employee*. The organization and the superiors reinforced the *good employee* behaviour governed by instructions to be carried out with sense of duty. The transition from the social context to work context did not require many changes in their maps and definitions of people, systems and their own behaviour except that the individual did his duty in the job and was monetarily provided. The role stance of the manager did not undergo any significant changes when he entered the organization. From emphasis on studies and education the only shift was emphasis

on the job. The contexts though different resulted in the same behaviour of implementer, performer and a good duty bound son and an employee.

02 *Role of History of the Organization:* As an organization grows, it acquires its own history. The owner-manager of yesteryears acquires the progenitor's role who provides direction and guidance and maintains centralized controls (Parikh, Rath, 1996). The people who enter the organization directly from the educational institutions are loyal and dedicated employees. The managers who grow within the same organization acquire enduring relationships with the owner manager and a sense of belonging in the organization. The managers also acquire a history with the organization which is often held in nostalgia and with some residues of past interactions with the owner manager as well as with some of the superiors. In any organizational and relational interface some feelings of being denied or discriminated would be experienced by the manager. These are also carried as part of the historical baggage by the manager.

However, the pushes and pulls of growth in the organization and the changes in the external environment require the organization to change in terms of size, structure, and processes. New philosophies based on competitive strategies get formulated so that the organization can respond to the challenges of the environment. Task orientation and professionalism get introduced as new modes of working. There is a shift in the management orientation which now fosters accountability of tasks and roles which is not based on relationships but on merit and performance (Kanter 1989; Harriman, 1982).

Each individual and the organization carries the baggage of history of each other in terms of past modes of making choices. Redefinition of roles, relationships, task and performance become difficult. There is a wish to hold on to the past and deny the changes occurring in both the external and internal environment. This creates conflict and disharmony amongst different roles and groups in the organizations. Managers with past baggage and emotional residues of personal, organizational and relational history find it difficult to add new dimensions to their role and as such, make it difficult for the organization to respond at the necessary pace to the new opportunities and challenges in the business environment. The organization pushes forward but there is a time lag as the employees find it difficult to respond as they do not have the necessary skills and competencies for complex and comprehensive environment. This creates disillusionment and disenchantment in existing people and the management believes there is resistance to change. In reality, a whole lot of preparing of the people is necessary for the organization to respond to the challenges, opportunities and demands of a transformation.

03 *Phases of Organizational Growth:* Family owned organizations go through different phases viz (1) creating the business; (2) growth and development; (3) consolidation plateau; (4) succession of the second generation; and (5) public ownership and professional management (Parikh, Rath 1996). Each organization passes through these phases of growth either sequentially or simultaneously. The role-taking process of its members in the organization depends on the phase in which the organization is. In the first phase of growth the relationships are personalized and the managers have direct access to the leader. In the second

phase there is a greater focus on performance and a more dynamic interface with the external environment. A formal structure starts to emerge with an increase in the numbers and diversity of people. Specialized skills and professional capabilities are the needs of the hour for the organization (Parikh, I J). Managers socialized into direct and personal relationship with the owner-manager and superiors now sense a distance and experience discomfort. They start doubting their value and search for affirmation and recognition from the superiors.

The increase in size, turnover and people add complexity to the organization structure and the need for systems increases. The organization has diversity of people and need for coherence and convergence.

The third phase of growth of the organization requires increase in knowledge, skill and competence base in the managers. The managers are pressurised with the expectations of a knowledge base or organization-environment and increasing competition and have an organizational perspective. The transforming organization is under pressure to survive and as such differentiate between performers and non-performers and those with the competence and ability to respond to the transformations in the organization.

Technology too has a tremendous influence on the role of the middle manager. In the hi-tech companies, perfect division of labour has been replaced by team work and team responsibilities. The manager has to undergo a change in the way he works, the way he relates and the satisfaction he derives from this new configuration of the role required of him in the organization. In this phase of the organization's

growth, it becomes important that the organizations and managers take initiative to build additional capabilities which will turn the managers into an important resource of the organization.

04 *Styles of Management:* The culture of an organization is influenced by the external environment, new technology and younger people. The internal environment consists of the history of the organization and its baggage of relationships, leadership profile, role models of leaders, managerial and employee profile and past choices (Parikh, 1996). A traditionally managed company, be it owner-managed or leader managed, thrives on personalized relationships and the work culture of duty. Conversely, a professionally managed company tends to be task and result-oriented with little tolerance for inefficiencies. The junior managers of this study were from organizations which were either traditionally managed or were undergoing the transition from being traditionally managed to professionally managed. In these organizations, the organizational space belonged to the top management wherein the junior managers felt insignificant and marginalized. They felt sandwiched between the top management and the staff below. Not being sure of the support they would get from the top, they hesitated in taking a managerial stance for themselves or for others. Often, they disowned their creativity and innovativeness with the apprehension that they not only would not be recognized, appreciated or encouraged, but would in fact be accused or criticised for not following instructions. The managers often remained confused with reference to the behaviour in the organization which they could or could not bring.

05 *Leadership Style:* In most traditional organizations, there is only one

significant individual at the top who is in charge. The rest of the employees are secondary. At each level of the organization a similar pattern follows. The heroic style of leadership (Ramnarayan, S, 1993) where the leader/superior is responsible for all the good, gives rise to all others feeling either obligated or small and inadequate. The employees too give larger than life image and space to the leaders and often pay homage. Simultaneously, they disengage, withdraw, and complain of not having space to bring out their best and not being acknowledged or appreciated by the significant people of the system. In the post-heroic style, the entire team or group is responsible for achievement of task and the organizational space belongs equally to all the members. The managers of this study still had the heroic leaders where the managers' efforts were unacknowledged and unappreciated by the superior. They waited for the recognition of the seniors for their loyalty, duty, sincerity and long hours and years of work. The managers handed over the ownership of task and system to the leaders. Structures and systems got translated to relatedness with the owner/manager or seniors or leadership. This group of managers translated the complexity of the organization to one person at the top and held the definition of an organization as if organization is an individual or a group of people who hold senior positions.

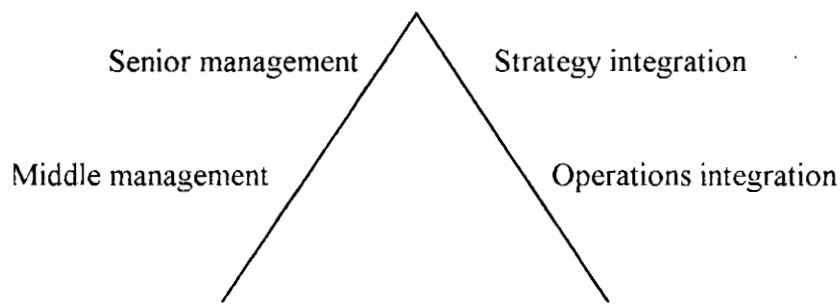
06 *Emergence of a new role:* Frohman and Johnson (1993) found that those firms that had become competitive, understood that the more responsibilities given to middle managers must be accompanied by changes in the organization's structure and procedures and equipping the managers with managerial competencies and skills. In turn these changes would provide support to the middle managers

needed to take up the challenges of the new roles and responsibilities. According to Frohman and Johnson, the balanced organization has here added lateral dimensions for middle managers:

- A horizontal/lateral dimension 'inside' the organization, flattening the walls of the old vertical firm that treat departments are water-tight.
- Creation of networks 'outside' the organization, cutting across traditional boundaries to improve access to new technology and to develop better communication and collaboration with suppliers and customers.

New lateral structures have to be added to the long established vertical ones for managers to do their job effectively.

**Figure 4 : Management levels and integration**



(Source: Frohman & Johnson, pg.85, 1993)

This model recommends the addition of structural arrangements that facilitate inward and outward networking for the middle managers.

### **B Internal Influences**

An employee who enters the organization is not only influenced by the external



variables but is also an extension of his own personality traits, his growing up experiences with all the internalizations and introjections. Some such direct influences which affect the role-taking in the role of a manager are:

01 *Ordinal Position:* Alfred Adler proposed the theory of 'Birth Order', stating that depending upon whether the individual is a first born, a middle child, a last child, or an only child and so on influences the personality of the child and as such the individual. This theory finds application that though the families today are comparatively small and the socio-cultural context has undergone drastic changes, the birth order does shape the child socially and the experiences of growing up shapes the child psychologically. In general, our findings suggest that the first born are usually very responsible, ambitious and take up leadership roles easily. A middle child usually is confused and/or competitive and experiences being caught up between the older and the younger sibling. The middle child is competitive and has a tremendous need to prove himself and be better than the others. The last born is the most significant as well as insignificant member of the family. He can be very confused as he is indulged as well as has many role models to emulate. He is flexible and socially conscious against injustice and wrong doings. Depending on the ordinal position, the primary socialization influences get translated into the organizational context, which in turn determine the manager's roles, desires, ambitions and relationships. (Saigal N, Unpublished PhD Thesis, 1995).

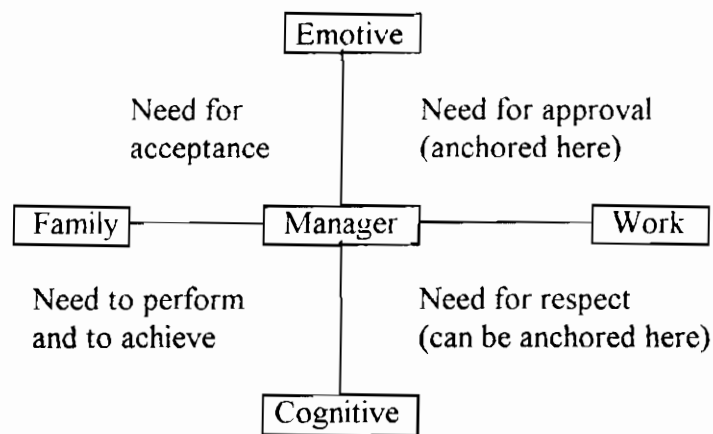
02 *Family Influences & Experiences of Growing Up:* The parameters of role concept and social identity are deeply ingrained and internalized through childhood experiences. (Parikh, 1976) When an individual joins the organization he brings with him the maps and definitions of people and systems through socialization and

interpersonal relatedness developed under his family influence. This is also brought over to the organization. The reaction of managers to situations, attitude towards authority and hierarchy, competition, collaboration and team work are influenced by the norms of the family the individual has grown in - a joint or a nuclear one. (Chaudhary,1971). He seeks acceptance and approval from his seniors in the organization and does not make a effort to earn respect and recognition for his achievements and performance. The cognitive-emotive maps are anchored in the primary socialization that gets translated into the organizational set-up.

The quality of interface is determined at one level by the cognitive map of roles, systems, systemic processes, ways of being and becoming and a world view of life space. At another level, the emotive map experienced in the family and the cognitive map experiences in the culture with personal meanings given to experiences becomes the determinant to transact with structures, systems and individuals.

With the passing of time, interfaces between superiors and subordinates and the employees and the organization may get frozen and acquire dysfunctionality for both individuals and the organization. The Indian experience (Parikh, 1990) suggests that as organizations introduce new structures and systems to manage growth and complexity, the cultural processes once viable for social living start to lag behind in large organizations. Large organizations then require redefinition of appropriate processes and redesigning of managerial roles appropriate and relevant for large organizations operating in a complex and competitive environment.

**Figure 5: Emotive-Cognitive Map of a Manager**



(Adapted from 'Role and Identity Issues' - Parikh, I J)

Based on role taking processes carried over from the social system, middle managers get caught with the need for acceptance and approval from their seniors and colleagues. They find it difficult to take risks, be innovative, take decisions and perform to their managerial potentials. The managers rarely move from the need for acceptance to the need to perform with excellence and earn the respect of superiors, colleagues and subordinates. This is not to say that managers have not earned respect. The managers focus is on acceptance and recognition by the superiors. According to Chaudhury (1970), the lack of competitiveness on one hand and the need of peer relationships and their acceptance on the other are the destructive features in the Indian social system. (Saigal, 1995) The managers respond emotively in the organizational set up and the logical clarity about tasks, roles, performance and relationships get marginalized. The maps the managers have evolved from their experiences of growing up in the family are carried to the organization. Thus primary socializing pattern is superimposed on the secondary systems and interpersonal relationship in the organizational context. The managers

find it difficult to add the new dimensions of organizational role-taking to their managerial roles. The identity of the individual lies in the roots of his family, whose value, norms and beliefs get internalized and this gives him a sense of belonging, meaning, membership and reality orientations. The structure of the traditional joint family restricts each individual to a single role towards each member and makes all relationships permanent and in the relationships, the totality is lost. To a father, a son is a son forever. The individual carries his sonhood and applies it to all roles that he takes up in life. Disowned personhood, role boundedness and concept of work as duty, dominate those relationships that permeate from the element of dependence rather than interdependence on the part of children on parents in the Indian culture' (Saigal, 1995). Hence in the performance of their tasks and managerial roles, the managers find that their role behaviour reflects:

Delayed decision making and awaiting approval and confirmation from the superior;  
dependence on seniors for instructions and then resentment towards the controls

Non-confrontation across any levels of management and total conformity.

Lack of initiative for inter-functional linkages and creativity around tasks

Managing relationships with people rather than focusing on the task and as such  
tentativeness and cautiousness in tasks

Non-assertion and passive aggression resulting in wait and watch and work with fail-  
safe system

Inability to make demands for tasks across levels of the organizations.

Translating these into organizational processes and managerial roles; this kind of behaviour contributes to enormous amount of invisible wastage in the form of under-utilization of managerial potential and ineffective management of time. (Saigal N, Ph D Thesis, Unpublished, 1995)

Similarly experiences of growing up in the family as influenced by socio-cultural context and the individual's experiences of relating with elders and authority shapes managerial behaviour. The way an individual experienced his parental authority and his siblings get reflected in the way he relates to his superiors, colleagues and juniors. Many a times, there is a direct application of such influences on the manager, which becomes a source of concern to him and the others. Indian organizations and managers adopt structures, tasks and technology of complex and large organizations but respond with behavioural processes which are congruent with the joint family system. (Kakar & Chaudhury, 1971) For example if an individual has experienced indifference and lack of acceptance from his father he ends up transferring the same experiences and meanings to his seniors and carries the expectation and strong need to be accepted by his superior, thus generating unrealistic expectations from the authority figures. This leads to stress in the interface between the individual and the authority figure. Similarly if the individual has not resolved sibling rivalry and feelings of discriminations, and deprivation it becomes difficult for him to relate to colleagues and juniors in the organization in a functional manner. Large part of his interface with colleagues is then be governed by comparison, feelings of discriminations and deprivations from the system. The individual experiences the seniors and the system as unfair and unjust. As such, it is

important for the organizations to facilitate the differentiation between the code of conduct and governance of systems in the family and the organizations.

03 *Rural Vs Urban Background:* Just as the family structure influences managerial behaviour similarly the region of belonging influences the socialization patterns. Working with the managers suggested that the rural-urban upbringing has tremendous influence in the role taken by them in the organization. The rural upbringing is governed by social structures, social roles and processes which determines the nature of relationships. The urban upbringing is determined by performance and achievements for career paths and career options. Both these then shape the expectations of the manager, his role-taking in the organization and code of conduct. This gets reflected not only in managerial thinking but in leadership and supervisory styles, in the application of delegation, control and authority, and in ownership and taking up responsibility.

## **VIII Implications for HRM**

The identification of the individual, managerial and organizational issues suggests some implications for the human resource management function.

- 01 Facilitating the middle managers to differentiate between the role-taking in primary and secondary systems.
- 02 Evolving a transparent system of evaluation for people to take ownership of their organizational role and function.
- 03 Realistic assessment of capabilities and competencies and providing relevant inputs to be congruent with the changing internal and external environment.

- 04 Middle managers to be empowered through role enlargement to extend his role as a mentor, a supervisory leader and an innovator.
- 05 Understanding the socio-cultural belonging and the maps and definition the managers hold to design induction, orientation, training, job designing and rotation, and career paths of middle managers.
- 06 Institutional events to be organized for people to experience a sense of belonging in the organization to reinforce commitment and involvement.
- 07 To provide challenges and opportunities and upgrade their management knowledge, attitudes and skills.

Hence the need of the hour is to energize this group of middle managers who are vital to the organization in the changing scenario. It is high time this group got their bit of attention, such that they experience themselves as legitimate, useful and important. Only when they experience a strong location in the organization, will they unfold to be creative, committed and effective in their performance. Just as other levels are experiencing relocation and re-definition of roles, this group of middle managers would call for similar timely interventions. If this is not done, they would not contribute to the value addition, just as a redundant element in the organization.

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