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29 March 2007

All firms have a clearly articulated philosophy on how individuals are evaluated, every HR manager and every document will ask individuals in the firm to focus on performance, focus on teamwork, focus on living the company values, commitment to company ahead of commitment to self etc etc. Reading the brochures or listening to HR departments could lead you to believe that the people who make it to the top of a firm are like standardized products coming off a good assembly line!!

Every firm has its folklore of how their senior managers made it to the board. In my experience there are three groups of managers who rise to the top. The first is the manager who manages **the system**, the second is the manager who has **latched himself onto a successful godfather** and the third group is the good old **hardworking, committed manager**. All three groups need a healthy dose of luck and have varying degree of competence.

About 10 to 15 pc of senior management belongs to the manage the system variety, about 25 – 35 pc belongs to the Godfather blessed variety and the remaining 50 to 60 pc belongs to the hardworking, committed lot. The first group is an intelligent group and they are good at sensing the organization and the shifts in the organization well. Their motivation is to get ahead faster than their peers and they play their unique game of corporate gamesmanship. For some young managers, managers in this group are role models, because they have in a sense outwitted the system!!

The second group is smart in recognizing who is doing well and ride on the coattails of the successful godfather. In today's times where fortunes and alignments change regularly, there is a greater chance of getting it wrong than right. Some people hedge their bets by trying to build loyalty to two or more godfathers. That's good risk management. When a successful manager leaves one firm to join another, he invariably takes some near and dear ones along with him. This happens across the globe and not just in India. Robert Nardelli, of GE hired a number of people from GE when he moved to Home Depot, so much so that the rank and file in Home Depot started calling the firm Home GEpot!! I have seen this trend more in advertising, consulting, and durables firms in India. When the godfather's luck runs out ... the flock takes wings. The manager in the flock derives his identity and respect from the godfather's shadow. There are a few who have the ability, panache and timing to step out of the godfather's shadow and make their own mark. This is one form of a success club and the godfather decides who belongs to the club. You need to get an invitation to this club!

The third and last group, the committed group, is in some organizations labeled the Weight carriers. They keep the organization going; they are the unsung heroes whose commitment to the organization is never in doubt. Everyone respects them, learns the fundamentals from them but this group is never spoken in the same breath as the first and second. In many ways the organization and its people take this group as a given.

HR systems, appraisals, performance benchmarks apply more to the last group in organizations; the first two groups manage their own brand of HR!! Most boards and senior managers are aware of this but for a variety of reasons, don't correct it. When an organization leaves this unchecked, it runs the risk of turning the firm into a mercenary outfit. Enron is a good example of what happens when the senior rank and file is filled with the first two groups, the firm goes into the wrong chapter of history!! The choice is yours!!