THE SYNCRETICS GROUP
Consultants in Leadership and Change

Ghosts in the Executive Suite

Every Business is a Family Business

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People take it for granted their families have played an important role in their lives, but most of us are only vaguely aware of just how profound that impact has been. We often have little sense of the way in which our personalities and behaviors have been shaped by previous generations – the ghosts of the past.

Though it may not be apparent to those sitting around a conference table for a meeting, every business is a family business. That is, the organization is a meeting place for the beliefs, values, and behaviors generated by early family influences. Because we often assume the beliefs and values of others are like our own, conflicts and frustrating misunderstandings are commonplace at work. The goal of this article is to outline a conceptual framework that will shed light on the way families can influence our lives at work. This understanding can be used for increased self-awareness and personal effectiveness. In addition, since each organization is itself a sort of reconstituted family, these family lenses can provide powerful insights into the dynamics of the work place – and suggestions for improving organizational effectiveness.

THE POWER OF GHOSTS

Bill was a highly successful student completing his second year in a prestigious management school. To his surprise, Bill found himself making sarcastic, inappropriate remarks in a class taught by a faculty member he respected. His need to challenge the authority of the teacher was both powerful and inexplicable. At the conclusion of the course, Bill came to the realization that his antagonistic remarks had been triggered by a family ghost. Seated next to two female students and facing the authority of the professor, he was transported to his original family role: the defender of his sisters against the will of an authoritarian father. Although Bill was initially unaware of the source of his motivation, the power of this role was so compelling as to be nearly uncontrollable.

Of course, family influences can also be positive. As a respected vice-president in a Fortune 100 financial institution, Nancy has been highly successful in an organization noted for its machismo culture. She has been able to behave collaboratively in an environment where many of her peers have conformed to the dominant ethos of competitive individualism – or they have left the organization. However, Nancy has pursued a course of successful idiosyncrasy consistent with her values.

For Nancy, the transfer from family to work was a natural one. Faced with a corporate culture steeped in traditional male values, Nancy called on the skills she had developed in dealing with her four brothers: "In my family I learned how to tease, cajole, and generally get my way. I know how to deal with the system, but I kept my own values." By consciously using the repertoire of skills developed in her family role, Nancy found a way to thrive in an organizational culture that many other women found alien and uncomfortable.

Rick's experience provides a contrasting example. As the CEO of a successful family business, Rick had an impressive track record as a manager. Yet in the middle of a presentation, he found himself nearly speechless with anxiety. His fear was so compelling that he had difficulty completing the presentation about a topic he knew well.

Although Rick's experience had family origins, it was different from Nancy and Bill's experience. After the workshop presentation, Rick realized that he had recreated a scenario from another work setting. As the CEO of a business created by his father, he had often wondered how employees of the organization perceived his role. Was he there because of competence, or nepotism? Did he truly deserve his position, or was it an artifact of birth? These doubts led him to question his ability and undermined his self-confidence.

The external features of Rick's presentation were parallel to those he experienced at work. Just as his father had created a role for him in the family business, Rick's presentation had been sponsored by a mentor who was sitting in the audience. Others who did not have such opportunities were judging his presentation. For Rick, the conditions were similar enough to trigger a "flashback". He began to question his right to be speaking. Was he truly an expert, or was this a new form of nepotism? The onslaught of questions and self-doubt were paralyzing, and it was all he could do to stammer to a conclusion.

These three cases underscore the power of early family experiences in shaping behavior in organizations. But how do these ghosts operate? What are the mechanisms that give them their power?

TRANSFERENCE: THE ACTIVE INGREDIENT

Transference is a term often used to describe the way in which feelings from earlier relationships carry over into the process of psychotherapy. But transference can be thought of as a more general process in which a response learned in a family setting can be activated in any current relationship.

All three of these examples represent a kind of transference. In Nancy's case, the transference was used consciously, and it had a positive effect. The danger of transference, however, is that it can operate unconsciously with unintended outcomes.

Transference can distort perception: for example, mistakenly seeing a supervisor's constructive coaching as threatening or demeaning. This distorted perception may result in inappropriate behavior, as in Bill's need to confront his professor. In work settings, valuable energy can be diverted from the task, and the costs are directly reflected in diminished organizational performance. It is ironic that the effects of negative transference are especially likely under crisis conditions when they are most costly. Research has shown that, under severe stress, people often fall back on responses learned early – whether or not they fit the situations. This tendency can be fatal for pilots flying high-performance aircraft. It can also be devastating for a CEO faced with a financial crisis who unconsciously reverts to an inappropriate behavior learned in early family experiences.

Mike was a partner in a major consulting firm. Disenchanted with the exploitative behavior of his senior partners, he left to create his own organization. He recruited a team that was excited and inspired by his vision of a new venture with shared responsibility for decision making.

Like the creators of many new businesses, Mike soon found himself facing the inevitable cash flow problems of startup. Although future prospects were good, these short term financial pressures triggered an early theme that had characterized his family culture: *Disaster is imminent. Prepare for the worst*. Under the pressure of this imagined crisis, Mike began to control every detail. Hours were spent debating trivial purchases. And Mike became fixated on a worst case scenario, constantly talking about the *water fall*: the date when the revenue stream would end if no new business were generated.

Staff members also began to complain of exploitative personnel practices that were reminiscent of the old consulting firm. Within a year, all the key staff members had left the organization. Faced with the stress of building a new organization, Mike literally recreated the anxiety-ridden culture of his family.

Like Mike, we can recreate our family dynamics at work. We can also choose – consciously or unconsciously – to join an organization with characteristics like our family. But why would anyone choose to create or join an unhealthy culture – for example, one in which anxiety and disaster lurk around every corner?

It appears that people do these things because, paradoxically, an unhealthy environment is familiar in its unpleasantness. It is easier and safer to repeat behaviors that have been repeated hundreds of times than to learn new behaviors. Therefore, people are drawn like magnets to organizations that resemble their original families.

THE FAMILY SYSTEM

A system is a set of things connected to each other. Move one element, and all the others are affected. The world is full of systems: solar systems, computer systems, transportation systems, and even sanitation systems.

Families are also systems – living systems – in which the behavior of each person has an impact on all other family members. The dynamics of a family system are determined by a set of five key elements. These five components are *Values*, *Roles*, *Secrets*, *Boundaries*, and *Triangles*. Together, they make up the foundation of a family system.

Through an analysis of these basic building blocks, we can develop an understanding of a unique family system. We may also be able to make sense of behaviors that, on the surface, make no sense at all.

VALUES AND BELIEFS: THE FAMILY COAT OF ARMS

Just as each organization develops its distinctive culture, each family has a unique character that is transmitted to children through its central values and beliefs. These values and beliefs represent a set of shared assumptions about the world. They tell us what is important, and how to distinguish good from bad. Ultimately, these values are translated into a framework for behavior. Much like a coat of arms, they define the unique identity of the family.

Family values can have a major impact on behavior in organizations. David, the CEO of a profitable mining organization, came from a family in which a core value was, "Whatever happens, behave as if things are just fine." Family members learned at an early age to pretend that the world was a perfectly secure and harmonious place – and to ignore evidence to the contrary. Despite what they were actually experiencing, family members always behaved as if things were *just fine*.

The assumption underlying this value was that acknowledging problems made them real, and if they were real, they could be dangerous. Further, the presence of problems raised the possibility of failure, and failure was an intolerable threat.

How did this play out in the organization? Very much the way it affected the family. Because problems were threatening, staff members soon learned that raising concerns was unacceptable behavior.

One key manager tried for months to discuss the imminent failure of a bearing in a piece of equipment critical to the entire manufacturing process. David's reaction was one of obvious stress – even of retaliation and threat. The frustrated manager finally got the message and gave up. So, too, did the machine, which stood useless for a month while the replacement bearing was on order. The cost to the organization was over $1,000,000 a day.

Besides these financial losses, the effects on staff morale were severe. Coupled with the frustration of equipment failure, managers were forced to deal with two conflicting messages. Overtly, they were told to be honest and to express their views about ways of improving productivity. In fact, speaking out resulted in certain – albeit covert – retaliation.

Simultaneous conflicting messages are common in organizations. (Samuel Goldwyn is quoted as saying, "I don't want any 'yes-men' around me. I want everybody to tell me the truth even if it costs them their jobs!") However inadvertently, David was unconsciously communicating Goldwyn's blatantly contradictory message.

Double binds occur when families and generations communicate simultaneous conflicting messages — expectations and beliefs that are incompatible. For example, the message may be, *You are capable of doing anything you want, so go after your dreams – but don't take risks or make mistakes!*

Most of the time, families are unaware of double binds — at least, until someone caught between them cries out. Even then, double binds are very hard for families to recognize because they were – or are – functional in sustaining the family.

How could a family develop such an obviously irrational and counter-productive value system? The origins of family beliefs can be lost in the history of previous generations, but evidence suggests that family values reflect the *wisdom of the past* – that is, that they are the result of past necessity.

A classic story tells of a family that traditionally cut off both ends of a roast before putting it into the oven. Curious about the reason for the tradition, the youngest daughter asked her mother about the custom. The mother, who had never questioned the practice, asked her mother. The grandmother's reply was instructive: "Oh, I only had one small pan, and a regular roast never quite fit!" Family values, like organizational traditions, need to be reexamined to ensure that they are consistent with contemporary needs.

Just as the wrong values can be problematic, the right values can have an extremely positive effect. Ken was a senior executive in a large telecommunication firm facing severe competitive pressure. He was one of a select group of managers designated as "exceptional," and his staff had ranked him in the 99th percentile in an organization-wide leadership survey.

Asked to explain his success, Ken talked about the values he learned in his family: "A leader's job is to create conditions so that people can do their jobs. I learned that from my family. I try to figure out what my people need to be effective, and then I get out of the way!"

It would be a mistake to characterize the values of David's family as uniformly bad, or Ken's family as uniformly good. David's family valued education, and this emphasis led him to develop an excellent technical background at a prestigious university. The emphasis on *getting out of the way* that Ken learned in his family proved a handicap in settings where he was the focus of attention. He sometimes found it difficult to speak out in meetings, and to share his ideas with others.

The point is that family values have an extraordinarily powerful impact on our behavior at work, and that these learnings frequently have important consequences for professional effectiveness. Because these values are so much a part of the way we see the world, we are frequently unaware of their presence. It is only when we can step back and compare the values of our family with those of others that we can see the distinctiveness of our own core beliefs.

FAMILY ROLES: THE PARTS WE PLAY

In grade school, I was always puzzled by the fact that, in every class, there seemed to be one kid who was *The Troublemaker*. The Troublemaker's principal interests involved throwing spitballs, passing notes, and generally disrupting (and amusing) the entire class – that is, the entire class except for the teacher and *The Brain*. The Brain studied throughout the melee, enraptured by the *Tale of Two Cities* or methods for multiplying polynomials.

And, of course, *The Comedian* and *The Princess* played their parts as well. It was almost as if the principal's office had assigned students according to a casting scenario for a serialized television program.

A key concept in the lexicon of the family system is the notion of *The Role*. The Role – a term derived from an actor's script originally written on a roll of paper – is an expectation about behavior. In this sense, a role is a script in a family drama – a drama in which each member of the family system has an important part.

Where do these roles come from? Who are the script writers? What functions do they serve? And why do we continue to play these parts in organizations when we no longer live with members of our families? These are important questions. Understanding the origins and functions of family roles provides a basis for greater personal effectiveness in whatever work setting we find ourselves.

Roles can be traced to a number of sources. Roles develop from birth order; from expectations that a child will resemble a favored relative; from the desire of each family member to establish a unique identity; and from the need to establish *balance* within the family system. Let us look at birth order. Although the effects of birth order are not as predictable as some would suggest, there are some typical patterns.

The eldest, for example, is often given the role of *The Achiever*. The job of The Achiever is to prove that he or she has "the right stuff" of the family – to embody its core values, and to measure up to the family's definition of success.

As the first of two boys, Tom was expected to exhibit both his father's physical prowess and his mother's intellectual ability. His father, a former heavyweight boxer and career naval officer, was an imposing figure. An after-school conversation between father and son would be more likely to center on shotguns than local politics, and would often end in a friendly sparring match. At the same time, a dinner table discussion about the etymology or appropriate pronunciation of an unusual word communicated another message. For Tom's mother, in the top of her class in nursing school, education and the search for Truth were essential values.

In view of his father's expectations, it is hardly surprising that Tom's career choices would lead him to military service and the United States Marine Corps. It is also understandable that a later part of his career path would find him teaching as a professor at a prestigious university. Sequentially, Tom succeeded at the role assigned to him at birth and demonstrated that he had the hybrid values of both his mother's and father's families.

If the role of the eldest is to be the first bearer of family hopes and dreams, siblings who come later are given the task of finding their own identity. In Tom's efforts to show that he had *the right stuff,* he occupied a lot of the family role space. His single-minded drive to achieve in both of the key family values – scholastic excellence and male ruggedness – left his younger brother, Lee, to find alternative avenues of expression.

Tom joined the Marine Corps, so Lee enacted the core family values by becoming a police officer. Just as Tom was serious and responsible, his brother distinguished himself through charm and humor. And while Tom assiduously followed the rules, Lee experimented, lived on the edge, and frequently broke them. His role of *The Rebel* gave him a unique identity, and enabled him to differentiate himself in the family. After considerable experimentation, Lee was able to define success on his own terms, and to find a niche that fit.

Roles can also derive from the expectation that a child will be like other relatives. For example, a child's name

may be taken from a favorite uncle, aunt, or grandparent. Almost as if by magic, the child's personality comes to resemble that of the original family member: "He's just like Uncle Harry!" But the magic that occurs is, in fact, another illustration of self-fulfilling prophecy.

The process by which this happens at first appears mysterious, but it is the predictable result of adult expectation and behavioral reinforcement. It is the process by which ghosts of the past – the personalities of ancestors from previous generations – find expression in the behavior of their descendants.

Roles also develop in an attempt to provide balance within the family system. Jane and Albert, a dual career couple, have a family business. Albert is the optimist, self-confident, charismatic, and excellent at persuading clients. Jane is a pessimist who immediately sees the potential pitfalls in any new idea. These roles extend into their home lives as well. Albert's enthusiastic ideas for a summer vacation are often met with skepticism and groaning. Jane can already see the travails that lie ahead, the travel mix-ups, the rain, and the unexpected expenses.

What is not so apparent on the surface is that Albert's ideas have sometimes been too optimistic. The couple lost a great deal of money on an ill-advised business scheme, and Jane is determined not to be swept away by her husband's contagious enthusiasm. In a sense, this venture has become a metaphor for their relationship.

From the perspective of the business, this balancing act has some real advantages. Albert's expansiveness is balanced by Jane's reality testing, and he has been saved from mistakes by her critical questioning. So the two roles are defined in relation to each other: the system has found an adaptive balance. But in establishing a balanced system, the individuals have become lop-sided. Albert is the initiator, the *idea person*; Jane is the skeptic and the *prophet of doom*.

The role specialization established early in our lives can find positive expression at work. Complex organizations demand a range of skills, and the role specialization that developed in a family setting can fill a valuable niche. In an effective division of effort, we can all play our best parts to the benefit of the organization.

Unfortunately, there can be hidden costs to role specialization. These costs are incurred, for example, as we outgrow our assigned roles, but are stuck with the old label. When this happens, the potential for individual development is stunted and one's contribution to the organization is diminished.

The challenge, then, is to combine natural strengths that have been developed through family roles with current opportunities for growth and development. Finding this balance point is a key ingredient in individual and organizational effectiveness.

SECRETS: IGNORING THE MOOSE ON THE TABLE

Another useful tool for understanding the dynamics of family systems is the idea of *The Family Secret*. Secrets are topics so emotionally charged that they are never openly discussed. The Secret may be known to all, and even acknowledged in subgroups, but never addressed by the family as a whole.

Secrets can be formed around almost anything. A family member may be an alcoholic, have an affair, or fail at business. When conversation moves in the direction of The Secret, tension becomes palpable. People may talk around The Secret, but they never reveal it directly. It is as if people are ignoring a sort of *Moose on the Table* – a large, imposing object which, although never acknowledged, exerts a powerful and distracting effect on communication.

The secret in Michael's family was that his mother was an obsessive collector. Of course, it is not unusual to have a family packrat – and the system is typically balanced with someone just as committed to throwing things away. But Michael's mother, Mary, was a cosmic packrat. She literally filled the house with objects of every description: old newspapers, magazines, washing machines, and, especially, empty cardboard boxes. Over time, it became impossible to move in the house. Little by little, the family was forced into the kitchen and the few remaining spaces not overflowing with saved objects.

In the beginning, the family complained about this invading army of possessions. But the discussions always ended when Mary broke out in tears and left the room, shaking with fear that her boxes might be thrown away. Over time, as the situation grew worse, the family became less and less able to confront the problem.

Michael's father even built an addition onto the house in the hope that new rooms could be kept free of Mary's collections. But the addition soon became filled, as eventually, the boxes literally took over the house. Never discussed openly, *The Secret of the Boxes* became a key element in the operation of the family system, and profoundly affected the way in which members related to one another.

Just as families have secrets, so do organizations. And organizational secrets, like family secrets, can create significant barriers to effective functioning. In a Fortune

100 technology organization, the CEO was concerned about their repeated failures in starting new businesses. In an attempt to get to the bottom of these failures, he convened a diverse group of the best and brightest to analyze the problem and to propose a solution. He made it clear to the group that he wanted their candid, *no-holds-barred* view of the problem.

What he found out was that decisions throughout the entire organization had been made with a view to protect the turf of a large sales force. The sales force had been highly effective in marketing existing products, but was ill-equipped to serve the needs of new businesses. This organizational secret was so sensitive that data from previous market tests had been rigged to obscure the truth.

This was a true *Moose on the Table*, since the cover-up was common knowledge, but it had never been openly discussed in a group setting. This pretense inhibited communication, created anxiety for those who knew the secret, and made effective problem solving impossible. It was only after *The Secret* had been clearly identified that something could be done about it.

BOUNDARIES: THE RULES AND WALLS

Families differ significantly in the way they think about structure. A cartoon caption shows a family sitting around a formal dinner table with the maid standing, holding a sheaf of papers. The caption reads, *Before we eat, Gertrude will read the minutes of the last Thanksgiving*.

This degree of structure would seem extreme to most of us but, for some families, rules and procedures are sacred. Other families value spontaneity over structure and have difficulty scheduling any formal dinners – much less keeping minutes.

Family boundaries can come out in a number of tangible ways. For example, boundaries are reflected in:

- The way we think about time: Are schedules fixed and rigid, or are they thought of as more flexible guidelines? Or are they non-existent?

- The way roles are assigned: Is there flexibility in role assignments with room for change, or are expectations fixed?

- The way decisions are made: Are they made by parents exclusively, or are children involved?

People often find that they are more comfortable in organizations whose boundaries are like those of their families. But there may be reasons for deliberately choosing a setting that is very different from one's family. Ron, for example, came from a chaotic family in which there were few boundaries. Meals were seldom held at the same time, and children came and went with little accountability.

Ron left school to join a small non-profit company with a culture much like that of his family's. He found that he enjoyed the freedom and spontaneity of this environment. But he also came to believe that he could be more effective if he could learn to use structure to his advantage. Consequently, he deliberately chose a job in a large organization famous for its use of standardized procedures and formal rules.

After several years, Ron left the organization to find a work environment more consistent with his natural style. But he had benefited from the experience, and had learned how to build an appropriate degree of structure into his own work.

TRIANGLES: THE COMMUNICATION SANDWICH

Triangles occur in families when individuals get caught in the middle of a relationship in such a way that they feel *sandwiched*. Children are experts in using triangulation to their advantage. The child who wants to go to the movies might say to her father: "Mommy said it was all right with her, but I had to ask you first." What Mommy actually said was, "Ask your father." But this non-committal statement has been altered to mean tacit approval, and her father has been *triangled*.
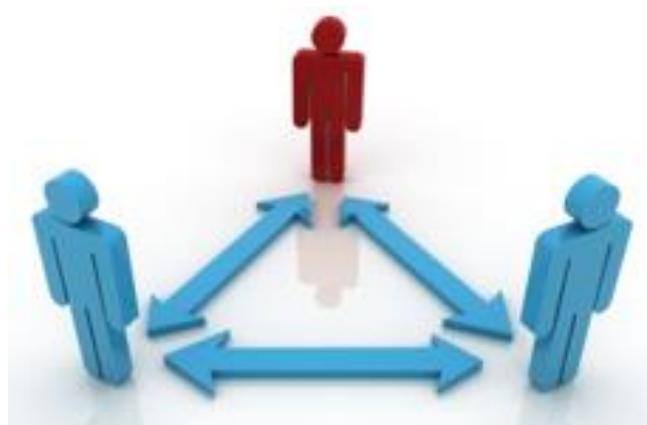
Parents can also play the triangulation game. A manager in a state agency described how she was put in the middle whenever her parents were fighting: "They wouldn't talk to each other, but they would communicate through us kids. Like, 'Jenny, would you please tell your father to pass the salt'."

Triangulation is common in organizational settings as well. One highly successful entrepreneur describes the way he got things done in his family business, "First, I would go to my father and say that Anthony (his eldest brother) wanted something done. Dad would write out the check. Then I would go to my brother and say, Dad wants this done." And it would happen.

Triangulation can be a way of getting things done, but triangular communication patterns can be problematic. Much like the child who wants to go to the movies, the ploy, *the boss wants you to,* can be used manipulatively. One frustrated senior manager finally decided that he would never respond to anyone who told him that the CEO wanted something. His reply was always, "Have him give me a call."

Beyond their potential for manipulation, triangles can also interfere with resolving conflicts. As long as Jenny is willing to pass the salt, her mother and father never have to talk to each other directly and work out their problems. The triangle diffuses the anxiety connected with their conflict, but it perpetuates the status quo. If the third point of the triangle is removed, the other two parties are forced to develop an independent relationship.

Of course, there is an alternative to working things out. One couple, who had communicated for years via their pet poodle, chose to separate when the dog died. They had lost their only communication link!

UNDERSTANDING YOUR OWN FAMILY SYSTEM

Seeing one's own family is difficult precisely because it is so familiar. To see the system clearly, it is necessary to find a way to step back and get a new perspective on familiar patterns.

One way of making the familiar patterns stand out involves the use of a device called the *genogram.* The genogram, developed by family therapists and researchers, is a remarkably powerful tool for summarizing complex patterns of family influence.

Therapists begin by diagramming the central relationship in a nuclear family, and expand the genogram so that it spans at least three generations. Because every family system is a product of those that precede it, this
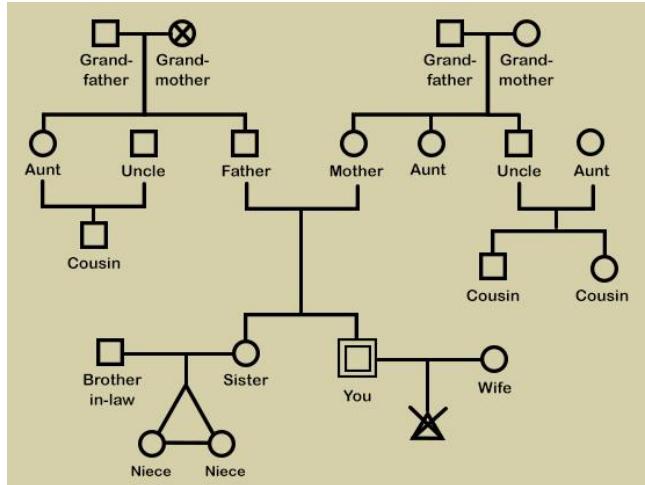
longitudinal view is important. Roles, for example, frequently skip a generation. So an authoritarian father may raise a son who reacts with excessive permissiveness, but the grandson becomes a tyrant at work.

Family values may also follow a leap-frog pattern. Parents who experienced the financial hardships of the Depression, for example, may insist on rules that are inappropriate to the economic circumstances of their children. These interactive patterns become clear as the evolution of the family is portrayed in the genogram.

To use the power of Family Systems Theory as an analytical tool, step back and think about the way the family functioned as an organizational system. List as many names and roles as you can, extending back to three generations.

CORE VALUES AND BELIEFS

What were the principal values stressed in your family? These values are reflected in messages given to children about appropriate behavior, and are often communicated in the form of stories, sayings, and favorite expressions. Note especially messages related to:

- **Success—** A fast track manager in a large telecommunication organization remembered his parents asking him when he was in high school,

"What will they put under your picture in the year book?" This concern for achievement and recognition pervaded his career, motivating him to work long hours and to successfully negotiate a host of political hazards.

- **Careers** — Were some professions seen as respectable, others not? What were the career choices of your parents and grandparents? How did they influence your own career decisions?

- **The Nature of Work** — How was work regarded in your family? Was it seen as ennobling? A curse? One manager recalled his father saying, "A man should enjoy what he does so much that he wants to run to work." This expression obviously communicated a powerful message about the importance of intrinsic rewards.

- **Authority** — How did family members think about hierarchy and leadership?

- **Conflict** — How were disagreements resolved?

- **Affection** — How did family members express love and caring for each other?

- **Risk Taking** — What were the belief and messages related to risk, caution, safety, and financial security?

In thinking about your family's core beliefs, you may draw insights by answering the question: *What does it mean to be a (your surname)?*

FAMILY ROLES: *How would you characterize your role in the family system?* Note that names sometimes provide clues about expectations, as in the case of the boy who becomes "just like his Uncle Rob."

It can be informative to find out about names that were considered and then rejected. For example, an individual who had engaged in a series of arduous and frustrating career battles discovered that his parents had seriously considered naming him Lancelot. They thought better of it, realizing the kidding he would receive in school, but

their expectations that he would *uphold the right* were encapsulated in the nearly chosen name.

What were the roles of other family members – your siblings, your parents, and other relatives? Were differential cues given to men and women? Note the label that best describes that individual's role in the family system – for example*, obedient eldest son, black sheep, peacemaker,* and so forth.

In what ways do you carry your role(s) into the workplace — for example, as a leader, team member, coworker, subordinate, or in your dealing with conflict and authority figures?

SECRETS: *Were there taboo topics not publicly discussed?* If so, what were their effects on family communication? Note any secrets and toxic topics.

BOUNDARIES: *How would you characterize the boundaries of the system?* Was the family highly structured, with clear roles and decision making authority? Or was it more loosely bounded, with a flexible role and leadership structure? How well did the structure of the family fit with the external environment; with the needs of family members; and with the task of child rearing?

TRIANGLES: Next, think about the way members of the family interacted. *Were there communication triangles? How did they affect your behavior, or the behavior of other family members?*

THE FAMILY SYSTEM: Now reflect on the impact of all five elements in your family system. *How did it shape your own attitudes and behaviors? Were there any surprises?*

The effects of some influences will be more apparent than others, and critical information about some family members may be missing. These gaps are significant in themselves, and the process of filling in the blanks may be revealing. In any case, the opportunity to step back and observe the family as a social system will almost certainly provoke new insights.

CONCLUSION

An analysis of one's own family can enhance managerial performance and team effectiveness. It can help in making informed career choices. And the family systems concept, used as a metaphor, is a valuable tool for organizational assessment.

Like every tool, these ideas need to be treated with caution. The process of looking at one's family can stir up powerful emotions, and professional help may be useful in processing and integrating these feelings. But used appropriately, the lenses of the family system can be valuable source of creativity and strength. They provide a way of seeing workplace dynamics in a new light. And they increase our capacity to draw on the strengths of previous generations while, at the same time, freeing ourselves from the ghosts of the past.