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From Forest Regulation to Participatory Facilitation: Forest Employee Perspectives on Organizational Change and Transformation in India

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ABSTRACT *Despite the critical role of government agencies in decentralizing natural resource governance, little work to date has focused on the organizational aspects of the responsible government bureaucracies. Based on a qualitative investigation of the perspectives of Forest Department employees involved in India's Joint Forest Management (JFM) program, this paper aims to provide an understanding of these internal dynamics. Elaborating on why bureaucracies with a learning orientation are essential if participatory natural resource management is to succeed, the paper underlines the constraints to transforming forest agencies' hierarchical work cultures. Foresters describe JFM as a radical departure from traditional forest governance, but suggest that corresponding transformation within the Forest Department has not occurred. Foresters cite as reasons: (1) a target-based incentive system that leaves little room for establishing the relationships with local people needed for collaborative management; (2) rigid rules and regulations that prevent the flexibility needed for adaptive, site-specific problem-solving; (3) a hierarchical, top-down style of communication that prevents the upper administration from learning what is happening on the ground and stifles initiative by field staff; (4) the need for a committed leadership to reverse this hierarchical culture. They point to the few such team-oriented leaders as the key to transforming the Forest Department and enabling participatory forest management to succeed. The authors also recommend accompanying changes in training and reward systems.*

Introduction

Governments all over the world are increasingly supporting decentralization, democratization, and collaborative natural resource management in the wake of growing environmental awareness and the concern that top-down approaches have failed. A great deal of literature exists on village-level issues related to decentralized

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natural resource management in developing countries, but very little research has focused on government agencies that are partners in this transformation. These agencies are being asked to shed their long-standing role as expert protectors of natural resources and to facilitate a shift in control to the people they once perceived as threats to the resource. Institutionalizing such a radical transformation requires major changes in the government agencies to build new skills and provide suitable enabling environments (Kolavalli & Kerr, 2002).

Forest management in India has witnessed a sea change since the inception of Joint Forest Management (JFM) in 1990. The Government of India called for state agencies to involve local communities in the management of government forests and to share the benefits with them. Under JFM, state-level Forest Departments constitute village-level organizations known as Village Forest Committees (VFCs) and enter into partnerships with them. Under these agreements, the Department provides conditional access to specified forest products as long as VFCs honor their forest protection responsibilities.

Several authors cite successful partnerships between rural communities and Forest Departments that resulted in effective protection of forests (Bahuguna *et al*., 1994; Dhar, 1994; Datta & Varalakshmi, 1999). On the other hand, while several states are fast issuing orders that expand JFM, some observers express concern about the success and sustainability of these collaborative efforts in the absence of responsive Forest Departments (Jeffery *et al*., 1998; Lele, 2000; Sundar, 2001).

Despite the bureaucracy's critical role in transforming forest governance, very little attention has been given to the challenges facing the Forest Department bureaucracy in transforming itself from a policing organization to a facilitating one (Sundar, 2001). Past studies on organizational aspects of the Forest Department emphasize issues related to training and education (Hannam, 2000), rules and procedures (Saxena *et al*., 1997), and legal and administrative frameworks (Singh, 1991). However, there is no study that examines Forest Department functioning from the perspective of foresters who must implement these novel JFM policies (Vira, 1999). Very often, personal, cultural and historical dynamics known only to members of the service influence the decisions of the forest staff (Robbins, 2000). Hence it is essential to understand the perceptions of foresters on the organizational aspects of JFM. For example, do foresters consider JFM as a fundamental change in the nature of their work and functioning as has been perceived in the literature? If so, what organizational dimensions need to be addressed to advance this participatory management strategy?

The objective of this paper is to provide an understanding of the organizational factors and processes that influence the Forest Department's ability to operationalize and apply participatory planning and management strategies. The literature that forms the basis for exploration and analysis of these organizational factors is outlined in the next section.

Organizational Change and Transformation

Organizational change and transformation can be defined as adaptation of an organization to its changed work and task environment.[1] In a dynamic society, contemporary organizations increasingly face pressure to be more effective, efficient,

and responsive (NSF, 2001). In particular, the recent trend toward decentralization puts government agencies under pressure to transform themselves from a hierarchical, top-down style of governance that is devoid of public interaction to one that is more closely aligned with the principles of stakeholder participation, collaboration and democratization. Natural resource management agencies that deal with dynamic ecological and social systems now operate in location and context-specific situations that involve multiple stakeholders and multiple objectives (Rastogi, 1999). When changing conditions pose new problems and challenges, Gundersen *et al*. (1995) maintain that open and flexible systems of management are required. Systems of authority, communication and work organization need to be geared to the contingencies of these situations. A focus on innovation, use and acquisition of resources, and identification of appropriate alliances should be the guiding philosophy (Morgan, 1997). These conditions imply that the organization needs to operate on the principles of continuous learning and improvement and adaptive management (Holling, 1978; Lee, 1993).

Adaptive management through organizational learning can be described as the processes within an organization that provide a continually modified understanding of evolving conditions and an ability to improve performance based on learning at scales appropriate to issues. Further, systems level learning and its dissemination represents an enhanced knowledge base, an integrated organizational vision, and an ability to engage in organizational renewal and revitalization (Nevis *et al*., 2001).

Constraints to Learning

Adopting a learning systems approach may be essential for a natural resource management organization that is undergoing transformation, but it does not occur automatically. Morgan (1997) maintains that the factors that influence information flow and decision making are critical to determining an organization's ability to learn and continuously improve. Integrated information webs that acquire, disseminate and utilize knowledge are necessary for the development of approaches appropriate for progressive refinement of performance. In particular, for improved performance and accountability in the public sector, changing the organizational culture from traditional hierarchical structures to participative management styles is needed (Kim, 2002; Rishi, 2002).

However, many suggest that changing a culture from a rigid, divided hierarchy into a more flexible and networked environment is the most difficult aspect of organizational transformation (Rago, 1996; Sims, 2000). Transformation involves changes in beliefs, perceptions and feelings that are held deeply by an organization's members (Lurie & Riccucci, 2003). Cultural change needs to be a 'substantive reform' (Arellano-Gault, 2000) that involves corresponding changes in other dimensions of an organization as an 'overall organizational development effort' (Bate 2000). Some of the antecedent conditions that influence organizational change are leadership, training and education, roles and responsibilities of employees, and resources and incentive structures (Whisnant, 1980; Kitchen-Maran, 1992; Schumaker, 1995; Mahler, 1997; Padgett & Imani, 1999). Understanding an organization's culture, its influence on organizational transformation, and how to reshape the culture are critical requirements of a leader (Morgan, 1997; Sims, 2000).

Rishi (2002) maintains that cultural transformation requires that senior managers believe in the need for nurturing styles of management (Rishi, 2002). Rago (1996, p. 227) states that they must "personally transform the way they go about their work".

The remainder of this paper examines the extent to which the Forest Department in Tamil Nadu has embarked on such changes, the obstacles to a real transformation, and the steps needed to make it happen.

Data and Methods

A major approach to understanding the factors and processes influencing organizational transformation is through the study of stakeholder perceptions (Hobbs, 1999). In particular, understanding employees' expectations and experiences is essential for successful organizational diagnosis and development (Pond *et al.*, 1984). As such, an ethnographic approach was adopted for this study.

The study was carried out in the state of Tamil Nadu, India, where JFM was initiated in 1997 as part of the Tamil Nadu Afforestation Project (TAP), funded by the Japanese Overseas Economic Cooperation Fund (OECF). Tamil Nadu was an especially interesting study site as it was a late adopter of JFM as a state policy and hence had ample opportunity to learn from other states' experiences.

Foresters[2] interviewed for the study answered semi-structured questions on their experiences working on JFM projects, how they viewed JFM, and what they considered to be important challenges in JFM. The study sample consisted of three senior officers of the rank of either Chief Conservator of Forests (CCF) or Conservator of Forests (CF) who represent the small number of state-level officers and who set policy and provide guidance to field level officials. In addition, 10 Divisional Forest Officers (DFOs), 10 Range Officers or Rangers (ROs), and 5 Foresters were interviewed among the Forest Department staff who are involved in district- and village-level implementation of JFM. These officers, together with Forest Guards and Forest Watchers, are the ones who come in direct contact with the public. The DFOs, ROs and Foresters were based in five districts where JFM had progressed the furthest in Tamil Nadu; senior officers concurred that these districts can be considered typical forest areas under JFM in other respects. In the case of ROs and Foresters, a minimum of three years of experience in conventional forestry as well as in JFM was used as one of the selection criteria to yield the above numbers.

Interviews were taped and transcribed verbatim. Procedures pertaining to the confidentiality of participant responses and protection of individual privacy and identity were strictly adhered to during the data collection process. Following Miles & Huberman (1994), participants' responses were coded to identify themes and concepts that were essential to understanding the foresters' experience with implementing JFM. In particular, the analysis focused on the organizational dimensions that are crucial to the performance of foresters in the changed work environment under JFM. Coding and analysis focused on identifying themes associated with the foresters' perception of the nature and magnitude of change, resources and incentives available to meet the changes, roles and responsibilities, rules and regulations, organizational culture including communication and information flow and leadership in the changed situation. These themes were

emergent, but also guided by the authors' understanding of the literature. Direct quotes are presented to provide insight on key themes that were identified in the analysis.

Research Findings

Discussions with forest officials revolved around the changes that took place in the work environment of the Forest Department after the onset of JFM, and the consequences of these changes for the staff and the organization. While a majority of the discussions indicated little change in the Forest Department's existing structure and functioning, a few exceptions suggest some hope for change in this direction. Overall, the respondents were eager and enthusiastic to share their experiences with JFM, as well as their ideas on how to bring about change within the organization.

Nature and Magnitude of Change

Respondents expressed the unanimous view that JFM required a colossal change in the way in which the Forest Department did business. One DFO, for example, said that the expectation of interacting closely with communities that were previously regarded as either detrimental or irrelevant to forests meant a radical change in thinking and in practice. Senior officers (CCF and CFs) stated that it was a tremendous task for technically trained staff to now deal directly with the social, political and economic issues that arise when working directly with communities.

A few DFOs said that in the beginning, JFM was new for the villagers as well as for their own staff. According to these officials, the villagers and the staff were skeptical of the activities and approach and it took considerable time for them to understand what was going on. A DFO described a first meeting with villagers that lasted until 2am in order to explain the program's nuances, but commented that it ultimately had helped build rapport with villagers. Similarly, another Forester recalled how his DFO was genuinely motivated to work hard and promote the cause of JFM. As an example of this dedication the Forester described how his DFO worked to remember the villagers by name and made a point of addressing them personally, much to their surprise and delight.

The officials interviewed indicated that change had been particularly difficult since JFM was introduced in highly degraded forests and in some of the state's least developed areas. Because degraded forests take a long time to regenerate, local forest dwellers may have no immediate incentive to be enthusiastic about JFM. Hence, according to senior officers, the Forest Department undertook ambitious forest improvement activities in the quickest possible time frame. However, field staff (DFOs, ROs and Foresters) pointed out that undertaking new, intensive work such as installing water harvesting structures and promoting afforestation on a micro-watershed basis needed extensive technical and engineering help and required enormous effort. In numerous places, many officials stressed that the technical work itself had increased five to tenfold.

Aside from presenting new and more work for foresters, JFM was also risky and uncertain, said some foresters. The officials stressed that the consequence of working in remote areas with acute development needs was that often JFM's objectives did

not match local people's immediate needs and interests. They particularly underscored that this difference in objectives had often made the task of spreading the JFM program difficult. While the Forest Department made some strides to bridge this gap, the results were limited, according to the officials interviewed, mainly because of the difficulties associated with providing viable alternative employment to forest dependent populations and foresters' dependence on other agencies to meeting various development needs. In addition, respondents observed that the foresters had difficulty establishing and maintaining long-lasting, cohesive village-level resource management groups that have a strong interest in forests and could function among the social and political complexities in each village.

Resources and Incentives

Many respondents stressed that the resources that influenced the performance of JFM in the field were mainly related to money, material, manpower, information and time. Senior officers said that insufficient funding restricted the scope and application of JFM to a few eligible villages as well as to a few selected people and activities within a JFM village. They further elaborated that these limitations had severely hampered JFM's progress in several places as non-JFM villages and non-beneficiaries were antagonistic to the program. Even within JFM villages, the respondents said that the Department lacked the resources necessary to run awareness courses that were crucial for the program's adoption and sustainability.

According to many senior officers and DFOs, the department also lacked the manpower to match the task at hand. Many DFOs said that JFM activities, especially those involving micro planning and village organization, required new skills on the part of the staff. Narrating the troubles involved in managing 'subordinates'[3] who had very little capacity to engage in this sensitive forest management strategy, one DFO highlighted the importance of improving the capabilities of existing staff or posting staff undertaking the program:

> We cannot expect a man who has been doing policing duty all these years to suddenly accept this system without any training, information, or experience, either direct or indirect. (DFO[4])

Training for the field staff lasted only one week, and it started only after JFM was initiated. Some respondents commented that training sessions concentrated mostly on technical problems and not on the more important behavioral and social issues. Worse yet, in some cases the trained officers were not involved in JFM or those working in JFM were not trained. These observations by respondents are consistent with the findings of Hannam (2000), who reviewed the curriculum for training Indian Forest Service officers at the Indira Gandhi National Forest Academy. He found that 10 years after the introduction of JFM, the curriculum had changed little and failed to impart the kinds of skills and attitudes needed to facilitate participatory management.

Some field officers stated that they were constrained by a lack of information on several fronts. Since undertaking a multi-dimensional development activity such as

JFM in remote forest habitations is the first effort of its kind, baseline information on community diversity, infrastructure, forest dependence etc., are essential for designing site specific JFM approaches with villagers. Field level respondents highlight that in most cases they undertook this data collection effort themselves with an increased burden on their time and effort.

Most important of all, almost all the field staff interviewed complained that there was insufficient opportunity for foresters and villagers to interact with each other. According to them, the source of this problem was that JFM was run purely on a project basis with explicit targets for achievement but with little emphasis on understanding its underlying principles. Some respondents, expressing a deep sense of disenchantment, said that there was absolutely no time for exchanging information with people, for allowing in-depth discussion or debate in the village, or for the emergence of a bottom-up institutional development process. Some respondents underlined that the sheer drive to achieve targets, sometimes under fear of disciplinary actions, led the staff to look for shortcuts. This problem is discussed further below in the context of departmental culture.

The shortage of resources is compounded by a lack of professional rewards or recognition for the increased workload under JFM. Some senior officers, while saying that lack of a timely recognition and reward is a system-wide problem, cited some merit certificates and awards available to the staff. However, they clarified that these were meant for general performance of the staff and were not specifically related to JFM work. Insufficient motivational incentives seem to be a major negative factor contributing to the low morale of staff of any rank in the department.

> Personally I feel that whatever effort a person is putting, it is not being recognized. If that is the dissatisfaction at my level, you can understand the situation at the lower level. There is no recognition at all. For me I don't want any reward, but I need you to recognize my contribution. That doesn't happen in this service. If that happens many things will be good. (Senior Officer)

Many respondents also complained about professional stagnation and insufficient promotion opportunities in the department. Almost all the officials interviewed talked openly of the poor work conditions of some of the lower ranks in the service. They wondered how such people could be asked to lead a development-oriented program such as JFM when their own situation was so poor.

Most field staff looked to senior officers for a better understanding of their situation and hoped that they would play a proactive role in improving the department's image in the eyes of the public. Many ROs and Foresters recalled the crucial role played by their superiors[5] in encouraging them to learn and understand JFM processes and indicated that such interaction was the major motivational factor in implementing the program. Others indicated that the urge to do good for the department and improve its reputation, along with a benign competition among colleagues to do well in the eyes of superiors, as their principal motivational factors. Some staff, especially the ones working at the lowest levels, narrated how horrible their life was in the past when they were constantly fighting with locals. They now valued the opportunity to work directly with these people:

> When I go to the village, the villagers welcome me saying that 'our Forester' is coming. It is great appreciation for me. Also, I feel very happy when superior officers shake hands with a Forester level person. (Fr)

Rules and Regulations, Roles and Responsibilities

Rules and regulations provided guidance and direction to the staff in the execution of their work and rendered stability and uniformity to organizational functioning. The existence of clear-cut rules and regulations were especially important to an organization that has functioned for over a century according to strict codes. In the Forest Department, the actions or inactions of its members are judged purely by what is written in black and white. The long history of government forest management started with the British and helped in the evolution of detailed codes that provided specifications down to the last detail. However, many respondents in the study expressed that in the case of JFM, a lack of guidelines left many of them confused, insecure and directionless. For example, there were no policies to guide the determination of participant villages or the extent of forest area under each JFM village. Almost all the staff interviewed highlighted the lack of a clear policy on species composition and said that this omission had caused considerable tension between senior officers and field staff. Some DFOs also pointed out the lack of relation between the amount of funds allotted to a village for development activities and its population size or forest dependency. Further, almost all the field staff mentioned lack of a policy on un-recovered loans or malfunctioning VFCs.

Making government officials accountable to citizens is part of the rationale for decentralizing governance worldwide (Agrawal & Ribot, 1999). In fact, senior officials said that the basic objective of opening forestry to public participation was to provide increased transparency to foresters' work. They stressed that the field staff needed to improve their performance in view of the increased visibility of their work. Expressing a mild sense of frustration on the inability of the field staff to live up to his expectations, a senior officer remarked:

> Now the system is exposed. Everybody is watching you. You are making everyone vigilant. And if you don't perform in a transparent situation, you will be laughed at. What are you trying to show them? Opening up is not a solution—opening for what? Opening to perform better. But if you don't perform and just open, it is like becoming naked. What is the use? What is the use?

Not surprisingly, a majority of the field staff interviewed felt threatened by the risks that greater accountability brings. These officials perceived that while JFM warranted more flexibility in local decision making, a lack of clear support to enable this decentralization meant that the judgment of a staff member's action (or inaction) was left up to individual supervisors or the Principal Accountant General[6] (AG). They indicated that this uncertainty had put field officers in a highly vulnerable position and prompted many dedicated officers to leave JFM. Further, they stressed that unlike the previous system in which senior officers alone were judging the actions or inactions of the staff, now they were more broadly exposed. As

a result, they pointed out that it was easy for anyone to blame the staff for any reason. Moreover, they said that since the outcomes of most forest activities are dependent on natural factors, if there was little understanding of the subtle nuances involved, careers could be ruined by the slightest allegation. Some field staff attributed these problems to the heightened interference of politicians in JFM and sought an immediate remedy in this regard. They complained that a 'not my job' attitude of superiors to these forces had indeed left the plight of lower level staff to the mercy of the powerful; they said this had sometimes resulted in staff members' victimization. A DFO described the situation:

> Everything was done transparently—but what is the result? They (the senior officers) simply don't stand by us. DFOs are put in a defenseless position. See the number of charge sheets[7] and disciplinary cases. They started the program with an intention of easing tension in the department, in our work, but it has increased many fold. We are simply at the mercy of superiors and other big people. Anything done by us can be questioned anytime and action taken against (us). If they want to find fault and charge sheet, literally all the officers in JFM can be charge sheeted. They opened up the system—that is good—but at the same time they also exposed (us) to risk and in fact this has increased many fold and from several angles now. (DFO)

Clearly foresters felt threatened by the new accountability and fear that it may be used against them unfairly.

In contrast to problems resulting from inadequate guidelines, respondents also stated that many rules and regulations had conflicted directly with the letter and spirit of JFM. The DFOs cited examples such as the centralized, bureaucratic system for releasing money for JFM and monitoring JFM performance purely on the basis of 'target and achievement'. Further, even though JFM implied joint decision making and responsibility between the villagers and local foresters, the continuation of traditional command and control attitudes meant holding forest staff solely responsible for any lapses in execution.

Field staff also complained of ambiguity in the roles and responsibilities of officials of different ranks. They pointed out that with the enormous changes that took place in the nature and magnitude of work, there was confusion over the roles and responsibilities and some imbalance in the work distribution among various ranks. More specifically, since the thrust of JFM has been on local planning and execution, they highlighted that the work of those who were in direct contact with the public had increased tremendously. In particular, they cited the increased workload of DFOs, ROs and Foresters. Some DFOs found the traditional role of a CF as an inspecting and supervisory authority ill-fitting and superfluous to the mission of JFM; they recommended that the CFs spend more time devising guidelines and providing direction to the subordinate staff rather than badgering them to achieve targets.

Similarly, many respondents observed that the responsibilities of Forest Watcher and Forest Guard were unclear under JFM. They said that these two ranks were now mostly doing public relations work and their roles should be more clearly defined with better-defined responsibilities. Respondents pointed out that being at the public

front of the department meant that these individuals had the best knowledge of the situation on the ground and were crucial in implementing JFM. Some DFOs said that currently the Forest Watchers and Forest Guards were puzzled as to what to do in this changed situation. They said that this dilemma had led, in several places, to these ranks' indifference to the program.

Many officials complained that the field staff were still being moved too frequently. They maintained that short-term posts severely affected the stability of the program, as well as the accountability of the staff involved. Citing that longer-term posts are key when all other resources are scarce, many DFOs complained that Forest Department personnel management policies have hardly changed.

Department Culture and Communication

Some respondents, especially the ones considered in the department to be outspoken, blamed the department's culture for JFM's slow progress. They portrayed a rigid, hierarchical organization in which field officers are discouraged from taking initiative and senior officials are out of touch with the situation on the ground due to the absence of effective communication. Hannam's (2000) study of the training of Indian Forest Service officers found that the curriculum still promotes a hierarchical and authoritarian culture, and respondents' comments bear witness to the result. Many respondents suggested the need for leaders to take the initiative to encourage flexibility, learning and teamwork.

> In the present system, even if you don't do anything it is okay—you get only a smaller punishment. But if you do one hundred good things and even ten things go wrong in the process, you will be targeted, chased, and penalized for your life. (DFO)

Many respondents indicated that the department's semi-militaristic nature did not allow the flexible decision making and functioning at the field level that is crucially needed in JFM. According to a DFO, ''Nobody had the courage to raise any issues'', and ''If we show even an inclination to ask any questions, superiors give us an angry look''. ''The top officers are always right'' and for anything they say, ''We have to just say, 'yes sir' and proceed'', said an RO, describing his usual humble response to such a situation. Several field staff observed that the department's top-down culture had left most subordinates with little creativity and independent thinking. A DFO commented, ''You talk about participation to the whole world but where is the participation within the department?''

Drawing attention to increased disciplinary actions on staff, another DFO pointed out that the thrust of the department was simply on achieving targets but not on solving problems. He described the situation:

> Outside the agency we have changed but within the agency there is no joint decision or joint discussion. We have meetings—they are only for review. You have not done that—you have not achieved this—you still need to do this—your target is this. They never ask why you have not done that and what the problem is. Probably that costs very much. (DFO)

Almost all the field staff characterized current communication in the department as typical of a hierarchical flow of command. The field staff said that they were hesitant to say anything in the regular progress review meetings.

> Although the program is (supposed to be) bottom-up, practically it was top to bottom. If you go and say, 'Sir, I have this and that problem', —no-no-no, we are not here to solve the local problems. 'No sir, this may apply to other areas also'—they stare at us. So in the end we decided, okay we should not ask questions. Rangers stopped asking questions to DFOs. DFOs stopped asking questions to CFs and CFs stopped asking the CCF, who got the wrong picture. (DFO)

According to one DFO, peer pressure enforced a culture in which superiors were not sufficiently critical of the program. Thus, many respondents indicated that the tendency was for officers to ignore problems or deal with them in any way they could, without reporting them. This resulted in severe filtering of information. Further, field staff interviewed unanimously stated that the Department had no system for staff feedback. Some DFOs argued that improving the performance of the program required opportunities for sharing experiences in the field:

> They even conducted seminars and meetings for all VFC Presidents to (learn) their difficulties. But they never asked the subordinates (what difficulties they faced). Because the higher-ups never think it is necessary to consult the subordinates. I think it is very bad. (RO)

> I would say we could have done better if there were good integration *within* our department. Discussion and free and frank interaction and thinking would have definitely improved the success and brought better utilization of funds. (DFO)

Leadership

Leadership was diffuse and still quite compartmentalized in the Forest Department as each level in the hierarchy provided supervision and guidance to the level immediately below it. In some cases, however, the head of the department's influence was pervasive across various ranks. ''The immediate boss is next to God'' is the guiding philosophy in administration. Very rarely did people have access to a rank higher than their immediate superior. Thus, in practice, a CF was the leader to the DFOs functioning under him and a DFO in turn led his ROs, and so on. The functions of these officials, their interest and involvement in field level issues of JFM, and the information they had varied. As a result, their comments concerning the role of leadership in JFM varied considerably. For example, one senior officer functioning at the policy level was of the view that the performance of the field staff needed to be improved first. Saying that the performance of staff in bringing success to JFM mattered most to him, he dismissed the idea of developing reforms in the Forest Department to improve staff motivation.

> Your team should be fully motivated to perform. All members should be happy. But is my intention to make them just happy or making them happy to perform more and get something? To me, I am always looking at the end and if they are not performing I do not make them happy but I will whip them, I will do anything.

In contrast, another senior officer attributed the success of JFM in his area to the commitment and hard work of officers working under him. While saying that there was no substitute for hard work, he said that his personal commitment to the JFM program as well as intensive interactions with his staff have helped them plan well. Other respondents explained how a team approach by the staff working in a given area brought a good name to JFM in that location. They attributed the chief reason for this change to the joint understanding of problems by all involved and flexibility in functioning allowed by their CF. A DFO described the benefits of such teamwork:

> When involvement of staff (by the superiors) is good, there will be good interest within the staff, which will lead to good awareness creation among the public. When the awareness creation is more, the public participation will be more. That means it goes like a chain. (DFO)

This sentiment seemed to be pervasive among field staff; it suggested that they believe that a change of attitude among senior officers could make a huge difference. Focusing the discussion on JFM mainly on behavioral and motivational aspects, one senior officer sympathetic to this view concluded that the focus of the department should be on improving human resources and relations.

Finally, it is important to note that senior officials interviewed indicate that they did their best to bring about changes in the structure and functioning of the Department, but it was difficult given the sudden onset of the program and the limited information they had on what kind of changes were needed to implement JFM more effectively. Given the nature of training for Indian Forest Service officers (Hannam, 2000), it is likely that senior officers have had insufficient exposure to more team-oriented approaches and it is unrealistic to imagine that they can make these changes on their own.

Discussion and Conclusion

Any change in an organization's basic objectives or mandate needs some corresponding changes in its people and functioning for the organization to be effective in the new task and work environment. The findings presented in this paper indicate that JFM required a major transformation of the Forest Department. More specifically, a change from a regulatory authority with the basic objective of managing forests for 'the national interest' to a facilitating service that would ensure multiple use, participatory management by a host of local communities. Increased involvement of stakeholders, both in number and intensity, and the need to cater to their interests and constraints required the acquisition of new skills, procedures and mindsets. In addition, the staff needed to engage in a host of new activities such as awareness creation, negotiation, coalition building and conflict resolution. The work

environment was no longer routine or stable, nor were foresters' tasks straightforward. It is fair to say that the foresters' task environment in JFM has changed beyond recognition (Hannam, 1999).

The findings from this paper suggest that the Forest Department has done little to change the work environment to align itself with the new set of tasks it faces. In contrast to the fixed approaches of the past, foresters reported the need for increased flexibility in their work and a greater emphasis on processes than outcomes. The findings also indicate the need for holistic and integrative approaches that lead to more interaction among the staff and between the staff and the public for the emergence of a team spirit necessary for better planning and prioritization of needs and resources. With the old 'guards and guns' or 'fines and fences' approaches disappearing from forest management, the century old tradition of a hierarchical command and control style of administration has become obsolete.

Changes to the basic structures and processes that govern communication and decision making could significantly influence the bureaucracy's learning capacity and behavior. However, they remain virtually unchanged within the Department. As discussed above, there is neither bottom-up nor lateral communication. As a result, at the end of the five-year project period, there is a lack of awareness in the Forest Department of what it needs to do to transform itself to a participatory facilitator. While some efforts made in this direction seem to be scattered and invisible (for example, recognition and reward), some seem to be counterproductive to the purpose at hand (e.g. disciplinary actions for not achieving targets). Systemic relationships between people and processes appear to be lacking. Ambiguity and uncertainty continue to cloud the work environment. Perhaps one of the main consequences of ineffective communication and information flow is that it impairs the organization's learning abilities.

As is evident from the findings, the existing culture of the Forest Department seems to be squarely at odds with its needs for learning. The Department continues to function in an 'elitist and feudalistic' manner (Rastogi, 1999) and as a result has become a prisoner of its history. The relationships among different ranks of employees that are defined and dominated by a culture of fear and punishment continue to thrive. New rituals that create and nurture a new paradigm of forestry under JFM that is mutually shared and understood by all members are nonexistent. Thus, the Department's culture could be said to be the single most important factor standing between success and failure in its transformation from a policing body to a participatory facilitator. Changing the culture, however, is the most difficult part of an organizational transformation (Rago, 1996; Sims, 2000).

Effecting new ways to reshape an organization's culture is the crux of enabling its transformation. As a result, this effort needs proactive leadership (Sims, 2000) and substantive organizational reforms (Arellano-Gault, 2000). In an organization like the Forest Department where the leadership commands considerable power and influence, and where loyalty to the department forms the core philosophy of employees, transforming the culture should not be threatening to an effective and engaged leader. Radical reforms, right from recruitment and training of employees (Hannam, 2000) to incorporating practices that promote free and frequent communication in multiple directions (Bate, 2000), and flexible and transparent styles of management (Khare *et al.*, 2000) may help such cultural transformation.

The research findings presented in this study and elsewhere (Rishi, 2002) suggest that when the members broke the cultural barriers and worked together as a team, they made considerable progress in implementing JFM. There was satisfaction at all levels and as one respondent commented, it had a 'multiplier effect' among the staff and villagers. Such change only happened when individual leaders took the initiative to redefine their relationship with their subordinates; an underling could never propose such an arrangement. This suggests that transforming the Forest Department must begin with senior officers, who should set an example by incorporating participatory processes first within the Forest Department before experimenting in communities. Leaders not only should be encouraged to change their leadership style but also be rewarded accordingly. Training of Indian Forest Service officers can include a focus on productive leadership styles and teamwork. Assistance in this regard can perhaps come from the Indian private sector, which is known to be much more team oriented whereas a hierarchical work culture is widespread in the Indian public sector[8]. Transforming the Forest Department will not be easy but it is essential. It is a challenge as well as an opportunity for the Forest Department leadership.

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Notes

1 Task environment refers to the broader goals and objectives whereas work environment to the actual working conditions/ situations.
2 While the term 'forester' is used to represent Forest Department personnel of any rank, the term 'Forester' exclusively refers to this rank of foresters in the Department.
3 The term 'subordinates', used frequently by the participants refers in general to the categories of staff from RO and below.
4 DFO, RO, Fr (Forester) indicated at the end of each quote indicates the source of the quote from the respective rank of the official while Senior Officer indicated represents to that of a Conservator of Forests or Chief Conservator of Forests.
5 The term 'superiors', used frequently by the participants refers in general to all the categories of hierarchy functioning above the participant's rank.
6 Principal Accountant General or AG is a semi-autonomous body that audits government expenditures.
7 A statement calling for an explanation from an employee for certain omissions and commissions in his official conduct that entail disciplinary action against him.
8 This observation is based on personal experience of the authors and casual conversations with many people who have worked in either or both sectors.

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