Chapter - 5

IMPLICATIONS OF THE PRESENT RESEARCH AND USES OF PROFESSIONAL OBsolescence SCALE

The opportunities offered by a highly competitive, non-restrictive environment are immense. To be able to take advantage of these challenging opportunities managers need to keep themselves updated with the latest knowledge and developments and also upgrade their skills in relation to the job requirements so that they continue to develop professionally and contribute to organizations and are not rendered obsolete.

Middle managers are more likely to become obsolete because they tend to remain at the middle level for a longer period and continue to perform similar functions and responsibilities with fewer opportunities for career advancement. Sofer (1970) observed that "middle age and usually at middle management level career becomes problematic and most of these managers find their progress slowed, if not actually stopped. This may lead to stress and job dissatisfaction". In the words of Constandse (1972) and Levinson (1973), middle managers suffer fears and disappointments in silent isolation from their families. It is also observed that career progression in the beginning tends to be faster and there is a plateauing as one reaches the middle management level. As Peter (1969) puts it, over-promotion can lead to the 'Peter principle' which states that "in a hierarchy every employee tends to rise to his level of incompetence. This further strengthens the argument that managers need to update themselves, especially when they reach mid-career. Ginsberg (1984), Hunaseker (1986), and Dumaine (1988) made an observation that at middle management (a) Progress in career is slower; (b) There is fear of demotion or obsolescence because of having reached 'career ceiling'; (c) Age is no longer revered as it was earlier; (d) Management is eager to bring young recruits in a society which is technologically, economically and socially developing; and (e) Middle managers
experience psychological crisis as they are alienated from senior management, burned out and motivationally stagnant.

In this context what are the consequences for managers if they do not keep their knowledge and skills up-to-date? There are a number of possible outcomes, all of which are not very optimistic for the individual manager, nor indeed for their organizations. Some may become so incapable that they are demoted, retired or made redundant. Others may even cause so many problems that whole departments or indeed organizations may have to close as a result of incompetence. Thus, according to Jones & Cooper (1980), the consequences could be far-reaching and are likely to affect the following:

- Individual Manager
- Department & Subordinates
- Employing Organization
- Sector of Industry
- Local Region
- National Economy

Therefore, it is crucial to deal with this problem at various levels. To tackle the problem of obsolescence the present scale would be useful to identify the extent of obsolescence and the specific factors causing obsolescence. Based on this information, steps can be taken, both - at the individual as well as organizational level to deal effectively with obsolescence. Since the main consensus of the literature revealed that combating of obsolescence was a shared responsibility between the organization and its employees, the problem of obsolescence can be tackled by a two-pronged approach:

(1) Initiatives taken at the individual level for self development and updating; and

(2) interventions like training and continuing education to be carried out at the organizational level.
5.1 Initiatives at the individual level

At the individual level professionals can work towards updating themselves to maintain their effectiveness in their present jobs and also develop themselves for taking up more responsible and challenging jobs in the future. The individual's responsibility for updating has been clearly brought out by Drucker who recommends that managers take specific command of their career advancement opportunities with lifetime education and acceptance of complex project assignments (Pressly, 1999). A recent pre-post study on effects of training on perceived obsolescence by Mohan & Chauhan (1999) has shown that training helped in reducing the perception of obsolescence particularly on the dimensions like (1) Self-initiated updating activities; (2) Attitude towards learning; (3) Professional knowledge/skills; and (4) Motivation to update.

Initiatives at the individual level can be taken with regard to the following three areas:

- Develop a work ethic: By putting the onus for continuous professional growth on oneself;
- Set high development goals: Each year set high but attainable goals and stretch oneself to achieve those goals; and
- Make professional development your first loyalty: Keep enhancing one's skills in ways that will help ensure employability in and outside of the organization. Make profession the second loyalty.

The importance of self-initiation for self-development has been aptly put forth by Hull (1964) in his observation that "A man who wants to develop himself does – a man who wants to be developed rarely is".

To stay ahead of the opportunity curve, Kotter (1997) in his book, The New Rules: Eight Business Breakthroughs to Career Success in the 21st Century' advised that it is essential to aggressively seek learning opportunities at work, not just to maintain job satisfaction but also to ensure your employability in a
turbulent economic environment. He further emphasizes that success at work demands huge growth to learn new approaches, skills, techniques, and more. A turbulent environment offers opportunities for growth for those willing to take risk and reflect honestly on their experience. Mohan & Chauhan (1999) found in their study that without continuous training and updating skill and knowledge, the possibility of obsolescence increases.

5.2 Interventions at the organizational level

At the organizational level steps may be taken to provide a work environment which promotes innovativeness, creativeness and risk-taking on the part of individuals in dealing with on-the-job problems so that this proactive approach contributes to the overall effectiveness of the professionals and the organization. Superior organisations are taking a number of steps to ensure that their workforces are equipped to stay ahead (Mohan & Chauhan, 1999). Fossum et. al (1986) and Aryee (1991) are of the view that organisational policy can positively influence updating if technical competencies are rewarded. Mohan & Chauhan (1999) found in their “Pre-post study on effects of training on perceived obsolescence” that training helped in reducing the perception of obsolescence particularly on the dimensions like (1) Organisational Policies; (2) On-the-job Updating Activities; and (3) Organisational Climate.

Mumford (1956) suggests that society is undergoing a major transformation and the result will be that “education will constitute the principle business of life”. His prediction is becoming evident by emerging concepts that suggest that workplaces are becoming places of lifelong learning. Brownell (2000) explained that the importance of training has been brought out by business researchers in a recent Nation’s Business article which found that at present American business spends about 1% of its payroll on employee training. To compete successfully in the 21st century, however, will require businesses to expend closer to 3% of their payroll on training.
Organizations should make concerted efforts towards training in the following ways:

- Make training function a "mainstream activity" of the organization and align the HRD strategy with the overall organizational strategy. Mohan (1999) opined, "Training for life skills is an ongoing process".

- Identify the training needs of the managers at different levels.

- Commitment and support of top management is a prerequisite for training to have the desired effect.

- In addition to top management commitment, the middle level also needs to be convinced of the importance of training for their subordinates so that their training can be put to maximum and best use.

- Provide the appropriate conditions for the training to be transferred into the work situation.

- Make training "impact-based" rather than "activity-based". Training should be assessed for its impact and not merely as a necessary activity.

- Promotion should be given on the basis of improved performance rather than on the number of training programmes attended by managers.

- Encourage risk taking and decision-making at all levels to provide on-the-job training and problem-solving opportunities. Glennon (1999) found in his research that the most popular method of updating was that of on-the-job problem solving. Margulies & Raja (1967) also found "on-the-job problem solving" as a most important aid in helping managers to keep abreast with developments in their field.

The importance of training has been brought out by Mohan (1993) where it was found that training brought about positive change in the persons who had poorer style of leadership and were ineffective. Training is one of the important inputs to deal with obsolescence. This has also been brought out in a "Pre-post test design to study the effect of training on perceived obsolescence" by Mohan & Chauhan (1999).
To conclude, identifying obsolescence before it really sets is very crucial so that it does not come in the way of managers capitalising their potential and this in turn leading to a mismatch between their competencies and attainment of organisational goals. It is in this context that the present Professional Obsolescence Scale becomes important so that the extent of obsolescence and the factors causing it can be identified and actions initiated, both at the individual level and at the organisational level.