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# Ties that Bind

**A** lot has been written about individual and team effectiveness with focus on leadership and teamwork and how they combine for organisations and teams to succeed. Not much has been written or spoken about what it takes to build sustainable, strong and effective families.

It's important to look at the framework of a family. Family has universal appeal and recognition but the structure of families across the world has changed. Consider the structures of contemporary families for instance. There are several like nuclear families, joint or extended families, single parent families, step families, grand parent families, adopted families, foster families, the list goes on. Regardless of the structure, family effectiveness is linked to a set of common factors. Born in a joint family, my early childhood was spent with a melee of uncles, aunts, cousins and grand-parents apart from my own parents and early teens was spent in a boarding school where friends became family. Now, after 20 years of living in a nuclear family, I have come to identify a set of common elements that drive family effectiveness. These elements combine to create the Family "RASHI".

Elements of the Family "RASHI"

- 1) **R**espect and trust
- 2) **A**spiration and growth
- 3) **S**acrifice and values
- 4) **H**appiness in togetherness
- 5) **I**ndependence and interdependence

### Respect and Trust

These are the foundations of any successful family and the essence of strong enduring relationships. In the context of a family respect is about treating each member of the family equally and with dignity. Respect is also what maintains the "Equilibrium or Balance" in a family. In nuclear families this means spouses or partners respecting

each other and believing in a 50:50 relationship irrespective of who the bread winner is. Similarly, in extended families respect is about understanding and accepting the differences between family members. In step families or adopted families respect is a two way street between the adopter and the adoptee.

If respect is critical for maintaining equilibrium, trust is like a bank account. It builds over time and one can draw from it on a rainy day. Think of this as "trust credits." In family relationships, the trust account takes a long time to build but one mistake or error of judgement can draw down the balance quickly and lead to family "bankruptcy!" In

nuclear families, trust is about spouses having confidence in each other's commitment and being non-judgemental. In wider families trust sometimes takes the form of interdependence. Trust is also what parents in wider families repose on their children for care and what foster parents need to build in their children over time with love.

If the relationship is a tree, respect and trust are the roots. They provide the strong foundation for sustained strong family relationships and performance. It takes time to build and the key is to make it an enduring positive force for the family. In tough times families draw on the trust deposits to stick together.

### Aspiration and growth

Aspiration characterises the performance dimension of families. Effective families aspire and grow with time and across generations. In entrepreneurial families, the mantle of business continuity passes down from one generation to the next with the expectation of growth and prosperity. In middle class service families, upward mobility is an overarching family objective and academic excellence is the sought-after vehicle to fulfil that ambition. The theory of

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relativity also fuels aspiration and growth in families. Family success is relative and measured in relation to other families. So, this is clearly an important facet of family effectiveness. There are many examples of this dimension of family effectiveness. Take the large Indian family business houses. Noted author, commentator and consultant Gurcharan Das believes Indian firms, by and large, continue to be family-run. And that, too, by the Bania families of the traditional trading castes. It is predominantly the Aggarwals and Guptas in the north, the Chettiars in the south, the Parsees, Gujarati Jains and Banias, Muslim Khojas and Memons in the west, and Marwaris in the east, and, in fact, across the country. Of these, the Marwaris have been the most successful. The Tatas are a great example of the growth aspiration of a family-run business over generations. Founded in 1868 by Jamsetji Tata, the group has expanded phenomenally over the past century and a half reaching a combined turnover in excess of USD 100 Bn. They remain essentially a family-run business with the descendants of the founder and the Tata family owning majority of the stake in the business. In his book *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, Thomas Piketty, argues that the influence of inheritance, which undermines true merit, has not diminished with economic growth. Instead, it has risen.

Success in Indian families does not stop at business but is also apparent in sports, politics and cinema. Take for instance, Lala and Mohinder Amarnath in cricket, Ramanathan and Ramesh Krishnan in tennis or, Dhyan Chand and Ashok Kumar in hockey or, Milkha Singh and Jeev Milkha Singh in athletics and golf respectively. The Kapoor's, Bachchan's and Khan's carry on a successful family tradition in Bollywood and the Gandhi's in politics.

## Sacrifice and values

Sacrifice and values are possibly the most endearing part of a family's persona. Sacrifice and resilience focuses on how families hold together in tough times and come out stronger. Values are the common foundations or roots of the family and passed down from generations.

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Sacrifice in families manifests in many ways. Take the generations of women in joint families who devote a large part of their time in providing for their men and children. They are in every sense the bulwark of those families. Another example of the sacrifice element is middle class parents who forego current material pursuits saving for children's education. It's this sacrifice that fuels much of the family success discussed in the earlier section. In a way in middle class families, one generation sacrifices for the prosperity of the next. In nuclear families where both spouses have a bright career ahead, one may need to slow down in the interest of the family. In an Indian context it is quite often

the wife who sacrifices her career to build a strong home. In western countries, home making is a shared duty. Sacrifice is also about support and giving. Think of parents supporting unmarried children or children supporting a single parent. Whichever lens we apply, sacrifice remains a key driver of family effectiveness.

Value is another essence that cannot be overlooked. Family values are those shared beliefs that members of a family align themselves to. It's the intangible thread that binds family members and personifies the goodness the family stands for. If the family was a personality, values would represent its character. India as a country has a rich tradition of family values. Our parents taught us the virtues of love, humility, respecting elders, working hard, among many other values. In school, we are taught the importance of discipline and perseverance. Over time our value system has changed under the influence of the West and mirroring the movement away from the traditional joint living ethos to the more individualistic realm of nuclear families. Independence and achievement orientation are more relevant today compared to interdependence and respect a few decades ago. Amongst leading Indian family business houses responsibility, integrity, excellence and unity form a common set of values. While each family has a different prioritisation of core values, it's good to identify the top three to five core values of your family and nurture and cherish them. Over time these become an enduring character of the family and a perpetual source of sustenance. In a sense it becomes the identity of the family and what it stands for.

## Happiness in togetherness

A litmus test of family effectiveness and strength is how members feel when they are together. It's a simple but powerful measure. In an effective family, togetherness is a positive force. We live in a complex, challenging world in which the family provides the docking station to help us unwind and prepare us to face the external environment. In a way, the family is like the inner sanctum of a temple where peace and happiness resides.

The key question however, is, do family members look forward to the "family time" or, are better off without it? That determines the element of happiness in togetherness. In effective families, irrespective of what each family member does or does not do, there is a positive energy when the family gets together. In nuclear families this could be just be a quick catch up between spouses on how the day panned out for both of them. A lot of the nuclear family issues result from the inability to participate in the "family time" engagement. Work life balance is a reality and a challenge. One way of coping with this is to treat the two as a continuum and not as compartments to ensure "life" does not take a backseat. A recent study of family businesses has shown that absence of open channels of communication and transparency are amongst key factors that adversely affect togetherness in Indian family businesses. Communication and transparency are important pre-requisites to creating happiness in togetherness.

The advent of the Internet has transformed the concept of family togetherness. Families spread across continents can connect via Skype and Facebook. Aged parents in India can keep in touch with their grandchildren growing up in a distant land and participate in their lives. The world has become a smaller place and affordable communication is at our fingertips. The onus is on us to leverage this gift and live the "family time" moments to the full.

## Independence and interdependence

Members of an effective family respect each other's independence. In nuclear families, that means spouses enjoy their own independence but with responsibility and at the same time value that of the other without being judgemental. Restrictive family relationships are generally not sustainable over long periods of time. Children growing up in families which provide an impetus on independence tend to be more confident and capable of handling the ups and downs of life. Independence in families allows members to make their own choices whether it is the choice of a career or choice of attire, or the choice of the company one keeps. Effective families enjoy their independence responsibly by making appropriate choices and that's a key guardrail.

While independence is the choice of individuals in the family, interdependence is akin to team work within the family. Excellent teamwork is the hallmark of an effective family. It could be as simple as splitting the overall family work streams like managing the home, financial planning, raising the kids, social networking and giving back to society. Effective families provide role clarity and roles are assigned based on relative strength of members. In strong families, members play complimentary roles for the collective good of the family.

**PEPSICO Mixed progress against IBP Pillars**

RASHI Pillars	Happiness	Success	Character or Goodness
Respect & Trust	✓		✓
Openness for Growth	✓	✓	
Sacrifice & Commitment	✓	✓	✓
Agreement in Negotiations	✓		✓
Independence & Interdependence	✓	✓	

## Conclusion

The RASHI framework attempts to provide an answer to what makes an effective family. How do we test this framework? To answer that let us think about how we can measure performance effectiveness of a family. In businesses typically revenue, market share and profit are the top 3 KPIs for measuring performance effectiveness. Likewise, in families the top three performance effectiveness measures are likely to be (in no order of importance):

- 1) Happiness
- 2) Success
- 3) Character or Goodness

Now let's apply the RASHI framework to see which of these KPIs each pillar ticks:

All five pillars tick the box on happiness and each of the pillars tick more than one KPI. In summary therefore, the RASHI Pillars provide a good framework for measuring family effectiveness. Now think about it... does your family have the RASHI? ■