

Playing Them at Their Own Game: Where Managing in the Real World is about Organizational Power and Politics a Business School Education is very Real-World Relevant

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This paper reverses interpretation of the relevance debate in management education. Real management practice is seen as characterised by non-relevance to real-world business situations, primacy of self-interest, consolidation of power with image, and avoidance of responsibility and accountability. Business schools have been producing doctrinaire graduates schooled in non-relevance, who are well suited for such practice. Unwritten rules for real-management maneuvers: consolidating power; influence building; positioning to avoid responsibility; and self-promotion, are described. Hypocrisy may be an effective survival strategy and individuals can defend against self-promoters by playing them at their own game.

INTRODUCTION

Over the past fifty years, the numbers of business graduates and university business schools worldwide have increased. In North America, business school graduates have come to constitute 20-25% of university graduates every year (*CAUT Almanac, 2013-2014*; United States Department of Education, 2015). Along with this growth there have been continuing charges that business graduates, programs and schools have been lacking relevance to the real world of business corporations and other organizations. (See, for example: Behrman & Levin, 1984; Leavitt, 1986; *Fortune*, 1991; Elliott & Goodwin, 1994; Pfeffer & Fong, 2002; Doria, Rozanski & Cohen, 2003; Mintzberg, 2004, 2009; Bennis & O'Toole, 2005; *Financial Times*, 2011; and Muff, 2012). Wider concerns also have been expressed regarding graduates-as-managers' mercenary self-interests, lack of responsibilities to stakeholders, society and the natural environment, and their questionable ethics. (See, for example: Hayes & Abernathy, 1980; Saul, 1993; Ghoshal, 2003; Carroll & Mui, 2008; *Business Week*, 2008a, 2008b, 2009; Mintzberg, 2009; and McIntosh, 2015.)

Business schools have advertised initiatives to address concerns for relevance. (See, for example: Porter & McKibbin, 1988; *Business Week*, 1991, 1993; Leith, Kovacheff & Price, 1994; Boyzatis, Cowen, Kolb & Associates, 1995; *Management Education at Risk*, 2002; and, AACSB, 2003-2018.) Even so, concerns have persisted regarding teaching and program content. (See, for example: Benson, 1985; Gioia & Corley, 2002; Pfeffer & Fong, 2004; Navarro, 2008; Rubin & Dierdorff, 2009; and Glenn, 2011.) Also, internal forces in business schools can militate against more relevant teaching. These include the

research-publication culture (Fielden & Gibbons, 1991; Harmon, 2006; Khurana, 2007); media rankings (Gioia & Corley, 2002; AACSB, 2005); theory-based classroom content (Ghoshal, 2005); and detached pedagogy (Mintzberg, 2009). There have been calls for improving curricular relevance (Rubin & Dierdorff, 2011), rethinking the MBA (Datar, Garvin & Cullen, 2011), teaching evidence-based practice (Rynes, Rousseau & Barends, 2014), and for re-invention of management education (Beyes, Parker & Steyaert, 2016).

The above concerns can be seen as based on the presumption that management in corporate organizations is directly connected with and relevant in real-world business operational situations. As the first point of departure, this paper views the practice of managing in corporate organizations as constituted by two components: (1) organizational power and politics, and (2) real-world business task activities and operations. There need be no connection between these components and individual managers can choose to spend most of their time and efforts on organizational power and political activities. Second, management discursive communications and activities in public must be socially desirable and politically correct. This public relations discourse can be a cloak or mask for what managers actually say and do (which can be less desirable and less correct) in exercising their positional power behind closed doors. Third, and relative to managers' communications and activities inside the organization, there need be no connection between what managers say and what they do. Managers can say one thing today and do another or even the opposite thing tomorrow.

Business school education has continued largely unchanged for a long time. Calls for change, to give attention to contemporary business task and operational activities and situations, appear not to have been heeded. This may indicate that managing in the real world really is more about organizational power and politics than operational task activities and situations. If so, the traditional business school education always has been real-world relevant in providing normative theory content for discursive rationalization, cloaking or masking discourse, organizational "safe-talk," image projection and authoritative language. It is also possible that as more and more politically educated business school graduates have been hired as managers, management in organizations has become more about power and politics, causing more business graduates to be hired...and so on.

This paper is aimed at individuals with integrity who are students in business schools or who are managers or employees in organizations. It is intended to be both cautionary and educational. Individuals with integrity who are focusing on doing their jobs, i.e., on task and operational activities and situations, and working hard can be trusting of others and therefore vulnerable to organizational politicking. Individuals with integrity need to be aware of the realities of managerial power and politics so that they can do what they have to do to protect their positions and their jobs and be given the credit that they have worked for. This paper describes what we believe are very real characteristics and unwritten rules of management power and political practice in organizations. These rules are socially undesirable and politically incorrect and so power-sensitive that no-one can talk about them because if they do they are "cutting their own throats."

ORGANIZATIONAL POWER AND POLITICAL MANEUVERS

Organizational power is seen as falling into two broad categories: Formal Positional to Protect Power, and Informal Influential to Build or Expand Power. Organizational political maneuvers, such as "right place-right time" positioning actions and image projection, can be either Directly Linked with Power, or Indirectly Linked with Power. A two-by-two matrix can be constructed, as shown in Figure 1.

FIGURE 1
A FRAMEWORK FOR ORGANIZATIONAL POWER AND POLITICAL MANEUVERS

ORGANIZATIONAL POLITICAL MANEUVERS	ORGANIZATIONAL POWER	
	Formal Positional to Protect Power	Informal Influential to Build or Expand Power
Directly Linked with Power	<u>Consolidation</u>	<u>Influence- & Empire-Building</u>
Indirectly Linked with Power	<u>Protective Positioning</u>	<u>Self-Promotion</u>

Figure 1 characterises four types of relationships between organizational power, and political maneuvers. Consolidation and Protective Positioning are direct or indirect maneuvers used to protect organizational power. Influence or Empire Building and Self-Promotion are direct or indirect maneuvers used to build or expand organizational power. The body of this paper describes various maneuvers that can be used in each of these four categories by managers. Inside the managerial hierarchy individual managers simultaneously are positioned as superiors and as subordinates. It follows that they can use these various maneuvers simultaneously from the top-down as superiors and from the bottom-up as subordinates. These maneuvers can be seen as constituting real-world management practice(s) for which a business school education is very relevant.

CONSOLIDATING ORGANIZATIONAL POSITIONAL POWER FOR MANAGERIAL SUPERIORS, USING DIRECT MANEUVERS

In society, the structure of hierarchical organizations is taken for granted and the real nature and exercise of positional power inside them is unquestioned. Organization theory and behaviour textbooks provide normative cloaking and legitimising discourse that includes naming top-down power as formal authority that is defined as “legitimate power” (so that any questioning of this power must not be legitimate!) In practice, positional power is autocratic and threatening, and therefore not openly questionable by those over whom it is exercised. Managerial superiors are free to exercise their power in any way they want, and to act and behave in any manner that they want – and to do so for as long as their power enables them to get away with it. See, for example: *The Westray Story*, (1997); Kantor & Twohey, (2017); Houlihan & Seglins, (2018); and Farrow, (2018). (However, the “#MeToo” movement arising out of media reporting of sexual harassment may be a force for change (Bloomgarden, 2018).)

In hierarchical organizations, individuals from the top-down are expected to do as they are told by their superiors, ask no questions and make no complaints – or else! While business school textbooks may have discussions on employee empowerment no sensible manager is going to give away any positional power or encourage subordinates to take it. Any collective action by subordinates where they begin to develop their own power, perhaps to unionize, is an anathema and is dealt with severely. Some unwritten rules for consolidating power are described below. Individual managerial superiors who do not quickly learn these rules can lose their power and also their positions.

Keep Subordinates Powerless and Under Control

Superiors can use their actions and behaviours as a continuing reminder to subordinates of their power-position over them. Managers can choose to act as “the mailed fist in the velvet glove” but “reminding them who is the boss around here” using intimidation, manipulation and harassment also has its attractions.

Generally, when managing subordinates and human resources: hire minimum numbers at lowest cost and keep them working harder, faster and longer (and this can include unpaid overtime). Superiors make all pay and promotion decisions. All job evaluations are controlled by superiors if only to ensure that their positions and work activities are most highly evaluated.

Employees can be hired on casual, part-time or short-term contractual positions so that they are dependent on being called into work or renewal of their contract. If so, they are likely to do what they are told without question or complaint, and they can be made to put up with lower pay, no benefits, unpaid overtime, and any kind of harassment.

Existing subordinate employees perceived as possible threats, or just because they are disliked, can be treated to “front-stabbing” political actions. For example, an individual can be set up as a scapegoat for blame and can be disciplined or fired. Alternatively, a re-organization can be done so that there is a smaller number of newly specified subordinate positions, and individuals are made to apply for them. Those whom the manager wants to get rid of are not given positions.

Keep all Resourcing Decisions and Control Communications

Superiors keep all decisions regarding resourcing, including budgeting and staffing. As a general rule, employee costs generally are aimed to be kept as low as possible. Superiors ensure that they are the post-box for all internal communications from subordinates to and from other managers and especially those in higher positions. A superior must never allow subordinates to directly inform other managers and especially higher-ups on any matter. This is so that s/he is not blindsided by being “out of the loop,” and to ensure that subordinates do not pass on information that could be damaging. Communications to employees generally are on a “do not need to know” basis. They will be the last to know about management decisions that will affect them. For example, in March 2015, Future Shop employees across Canada turned up at stores for work only to find the doors locked, that the company had shut down, and they had no jobs (*CBC News*, 2015).

Keep Subordinates Performing

Superiors have the right to specify and assess the performance of subordinates. As basic positional protection superiors always must keep subordinates specifically responsible and accountable for what they are doing. Performance standards and targets are specified along with cost and time parameters to be met, so that subordinates always are kept working hard to make their numbers. Generally, the higher the subordinates’ sales levels or process output, and productivity performance, the higher the superior’s bonus.

Power Games for Superiors

Managers, including first-line supervisors, can make sure through their actions and behaviours that subordinates continually are reminded of “who is the boss around here.” They can choose to be bullies, two-faced social manipulators, or idiosyncratic “loose cannons,” to keep subordinate employees generally in fear of their jobs, so that they work long and hard and keep their mouths shut. Particular individuals can be targeted for more directed bullying or harassment. Some specific power games are as follows.

Overloading

A superior can overload employees with work or raise output standards so that their performance always falls below the unreachable requirements and they always will be under threat of losing their jobs. Subordinate employees always are dependent on the superior’s goodwill towards them, so they will work hard and keep their mouths shut. They are free to work unpaid overtime and, perversely, their doing so will enable a superior to say that the performance standards are reachable.

Divide-and-Rule

A superior can make it known that, every year, the top 10% of performers will be candidates for bonuses and promotion while those in the bottom 10% will be “let go.” Employees therefore can be kept

competing with each other and output is likely to rise overall as last year's above-average performance becomes this year's average. Individuals who "burn out" must be unable to "do what it takes," and so automatically put themselves in the bottom 10% to be got rid of. If a superior desires, employees can be put into so-called teams that compete with each other, and with performance standards established on a team basis. Teams can be left to discipline individuals whose output falls below the team standards or targets. A variant is for a superior to play favourites and give better working conditions and/or higher salaries to those whom s/he likes. Those who are disliked can be given lower salaries and otherwise discriminated against.

Double Binds

A superior can allocate to employees a mix of client-driven, variable activities demanding immediate response, together with specified project or task work to tight deadlines. The superior demands specified performance in both areas, which by design is impossible. Employees therefore must be dependent on the goodwill of the superior to keep them in their jobs. If the superior wants to get rid of an employee, this easily can be justified because the individual repeatedly has not completed assigned project work or responded to clients in a timely manner. If employees want to do the project or task work in their own time then this is acceptable and, again perversely, this will enable a superior to say that the work demonstrably can be done.

Surveillance

A superior can install surveillance cameras overtly in the workplace. Alternatively, cameras can be installed covertly to collect information on individuals, to use against them later. Also, and again overtly or covertly, a superior can install software on employees' office computers so that all of their keyboard activities can be monitored and recorded.

Image Projection for Position Consolidation

Individual managers always should dress and groom themselves to standards higher than subordinates and peers so as to project higher status. Language and body language should project superior education and information, and "being in control." Selection of office or desk position, and seat position in meetings all must demonstrate the manager's superior positional power. A superior manager always has the last word in any workplace interactions or meetings.

Socially Desirable and Politically Correct

Corporate public relations including social responsibility and sustainability initiatives can be used to project a socially desirable and politically correct discursive image of the management group. This can act as the cloak for any less correct and less desirable behaviours and actions out of the public eye. Any manager or employee talking publicly and truthfully about management power, self-interests and practices is "cutting his or her own throat." What s/he says will be countered by corporate public relations and s/he can expect to be terminated, professionally discredited and pursued by company lawyers.

Individual managers must maintain social desirability and political correctness in communications and behaviours generally, and especially in witnessed or publishable interpersonal interactions inside and outside the organization. Emails can be posted on the internet, and individuals can carry their cell phones with them and secretly record conversations and even make video recordings. (Of course, managers also can make their own recordings and videos.) Correctness is especially important where subordinates may be able to complain to external agencies that have investigatory or legal powers, e.g., human rights commissions and trade unions.

Managers at all times can mouth and write normative generalities as cloaking discourse. Business school normative theory ("What should be," and, "What should be done") provides the socially desirable and politically correct discourse. This can be used: (1) to cloak or mask the real management practice of organizational power and politics; (2) for "safe-talk" inside the organization (because mouthing "what should be done" is always safe to say); and, (3) for managerially authoritative image projection.

Managerially Authoritative

A managerial image can be based on actual activities or results but this is not a requirement. (See below for discussion of self-promotion.) The theory-normative phrase, “*Getting things done through and with people,*” always sounds authoritative in terms of organizing and task results orientation and has a socially desirable “people” flavour. A managerial image can be projected by communicating, acting and behaving as “getting things done.” The phrase, “Bottom-line focused” also can be used for its authoritative flavour. Other normative or socially desirable discursive content regarding, for example, leadership, commitment, professionalism and teamwork, also can be mouthed. Image can be enhanced (as well as responsibility diffused) where a manager says, “*The company has decided that...*”

The managerial vocabulary written in business school textbooks usefully can be mouthed. For example, as general normative “the kind of thing that should be / should be done / or needs to be done” or type-situational prescriptive “the thing that people should do / need to do.” These forms of words always are generally applicable, not incorrect and can sound authoritative. In practice, business school normative theory stated as “What should be done” is a powerful authority statement from a superior to subordinates. Usefully, this statement simultaneously delegates work or job performance and enables pre-emptive indirect positioning or “Passing the Buck” (described below) for later taking of credit or placing of blame. To protect and enhance their image individuals can be economical with the truth, and they can lie (Bonanos, 2013).

Communicating and behaving in terms of “doing things” is seen as projecting a “technical” image that will negate any managerial imaging. This is because technical “doers” always have direct responsibility for “doing things” and this is linked to performance assessment by, and accountability to, those who “get things done.” Any manager who communicates in terms of technically “doing things” is imaging a subordinate position and accepting direct responsibility that can lead to accountability and blame. It follows that those who would project a managerial image must “Never say Do.” Some other words also can diminish managerial image projection. For example, “I” and “we” can be seen as doing or as taking responsibility, and “because” can be seen as somehow justifying to others. (On the other hand, where results are good or the project is successful, “we” can be used politically to associate with good results and with the success of “the team,” and “I” can be used to claim managerial and leadership credit.)

PROTECTIVE POSITIONING FOR MANAGERIAL SUPERIORS, USING INDIRECT MANEUVERS

Preserving Deniability

Organizational Distancing

The organizational hierarchy distances managers at the top from what subordinate employees actually are doing at the bottom. Those at the top also can use their power to ensure that they are not in the chain of command for particular projects or operations and therefore cannot be held directly responsible. (See, for example, Maier,1992; *The Westray Story*,1997.) As well, subsidiaries can be established or subcontractors can be used and these entities can be blamed if things go wrong.

Constructive Ignorance

A superior can say what should be done and make it clear to subordinates that s/he does not want to know what they actually will be doing regarding particular tasks, operations or projects. If things go wrong a superior can say, “*Why didn't people go up the line with their concerns...etc., etc.*”

Technical Ignorance

Complete ignorance regarding the technical aspects of products, processes, operations, etc. is an asset to a superior. S/he can truthfully say that s/he could not know and relied completely on those with the technical qualifications and knowledge who were doing the job (and will carry the blame).

Pre-Emptive Indirect Positioning (Passing or Sharing the Buck)

“Passing the Buck” always should be carried out routinely (by saying “What should be done”). This is so as to be able to deflect responsibility and accountability onto others if things do not turn out well, or to avoid or place blame if things turn out badly. (See *The Telegram*, 2017a, 2017b, 2018.) Superiors’ indirect positioning through delegation also enables them to take the credit for any successes by claiming to have got the job done. Business school pedagogy of detachment (Mintzberg, 2009), where it is orienting students outside real-world situations so that they are spectators rather than actors, can be seen as effective preparation for indirect positioning.

Generally, Passing the Buck through downward delegation will occur through all management levels until all responsibility and accountability stops at the bottom with those who cannot delegate any further. If a superior manager says “what to do” then s/he has given direct instructions and can be held responsible and accountable for subordinates’ actions. It therefore is essential that delegation is carried out using managerially authoritative language by saying only “what should be done.” Business school normative theory provides vocabulary that can be mouthed authoritatively and facilitate indirect positioning. Passing the Buck or Sharing the Buck (described below) also can be accomplished by other means, e.g., involving staff groups, contracting out, hiring consultants, etc. If the Buck cannot be passed or shared, then a manager can actively procrastinate.

In practice, Passing the Buck can be done using a variety of power-language indirect communications and associated actions. For example, a manager who is chairing a meeting with subordinates can mouth normative generalities and then say, *“We have good people on the team here who know what to do,”* and walk out of the room. Smart subordinates will get up and leave immediately after the manager. Their leaving effectively will Pass the Buck to those remaining in the room who will have to figure out what to do, and will get to do it. Alternatively, the manager can Pass the Buck by saying, *“Jim really knows a lot about this.”* This is a damning compliment because if Jim does not himself immediately Pass the Buck to someone else he has got the work to do. However, if Jim wants to do the work he can use this as a self-promotion opportunity and using power-language say, for example, *“Thanks for giving me the lead on this and I would like to have Jane and John on the team for the more technical aspects.”* If Jane and John do not quickly Pass the Buck or bargain assertively they will end up labelled as “technical,” reporting to Jim and doing the work that Jim will be taking credit for.

If the Buck cannot be passed it may be shared. (See *The Telegram*, 2017b, 2018.) This can be accomplished by sending information to higher-ups and other managers or involving them in some way, so that all can be blamed if things go wrong. This is risky as higher-ups delegated the project downwards in order to get themselves “off the hook,” and they will not like being put back on it. If a managerial subordinate chooses to risk Sharing the Buck s/he can put in writing specifically “what has been agreed to do” and send it to his or her superior(s) as confirmation of the project or work objectives, scope of work, revenue, cost and profit projections, activity plans and risks. Ongoing project reports, risk assessments and concerns also can be sent to as many higher-up and other managers as possible.

Hand-off the Hot Potato

Where the work or the project is not expected to turn out well, or where there is possibility of disaster, it absolutely must be handed-off to others as quickly as possible so that blame can be avoided, deflected or at least shared. For example, a superior can hand-off to a subordinate (and preserve deniability), by saying: *“We are impressed by your enthusiasm and commitment and know that you will do what it takes -- you do not need to be told what to do.”* Under this apparent compliment the subordinate is nailed with the project and is aware that the superior does not want to know what s/he and his or her department actually will be doing. If complete Handing-Off cannot be accomplished then other means of diffusing responsibility can be used, such as passing it to a staff group, contracting out, hiring consultants, etc., or the Hot Potato can be shared by involving as many others as possible. Trying to involve others, especially superiors, can be risky because they will be aware that it is a Hot Potato.

CONSOLIDATING ORGANIZATIONAL POSITIONAL POWER FOR MANAGERIAL SUBORDINATES, USING DIRECT MANOEUVRES

Never say “No” to the Boss and Make the Boss Look Good (or Else!)

This is the primary unwritten rule for subordinates. Any questioning of a superior in any way whatsoever, (including “*Yes, but...*” and “*Why?*”), especially in public, is a threat to the superior's authority. Those asking questions or speaking out can expect to be disciplined, made scapegoats for blame, subjected to administrative harassment and discrimination so that they find jobs elsewhere, or simply terminated (e.g., *The Globe and Mail*, 2014). Their fate will be a reminder to others to do what they are told and keep their mouths shut. It follows that telling a superior what s/he wants to hear can be more advisable than saying what s/he needs to know. On the other hand, a subordinate can risk telling the superior what s/he needs to know where doing so can have a political payoff. Providing such information always should be done privately because if it is done in an open meeting it will make the superior look bad and retribution can be expected.

Cover Your Backside (CYB) (or Else!)

Those who do not CYB easily can be made scapegoats for blame and can lose their jobs. Individuals should keep copies of all CYB materials in some safe and secure place(s) outside the office. As well, where bad things in the organization are likely in the near future, are coming to light, or already have led to some publicly reported disaster an individual can find another job as quickly as possible so as to CYB by “getting out from under.” Alternatively or as well, s/he can “blow the whistle” on what has been going on and make a deal with investigators to act as an informant. A strong CYB file is needed to provide factual information and place culpability and blame on superiors and others.

Acting as Instructed

A variant of CYB is to try to get specific directions or instructions in writing from a superior. An individual then can deflect blame by showing that s/he was acting as instructed. However, requesting a superior to “put it in writing” can be risky because s/he certainly will not wish to accept responsibility and possible blame.

By the Book

Being on the record in communicating to superiors, peers and subordinates that “things should be done by the book” can provide partial CYB and is difficult for others, including superiors, to object to. The things that should be done, the written policies and procedures, and any legal and safety regulations and requirements can be confirmed frequently in emails and other documents.

Make Your Numbers (or Else!)

Subordinates always must do what they have to do to make their numbers because they know that superiors always will find someone else who will. Superiors (to preserve their deniability) do not want to know specifically what subordinates actually are doing so long as the numbers are made. However, sometimes the truth will out. In September 2016, Wells Fargo announced that it had fired 5,300 employees over several years for creating millions of unauthorised bank and credit-card accounts (Egan, 2016). More recently, according to Egan, (2018), “...*Wells Fargo has admitted to charging customers for mortgage fees they didn't deserve and forcing them into car insurance they didn't need. Some people even had their cars repossessed as a result.*”

One driving force for these actions by employees likely was a desperate need to meet unrealistically high sales goals imposed upon them by managers in power, so as to keep their jobs. Presumably, employees knew that what they were doing was wrong. However, from an employee perspective, it is better to do what you have to do (even if it is unethical or illegal) to keep your job right now. If you get found out or blamed later then at least you have had a job for as long as you could keep it. Significantly, according to Egan, (2018), “*Wells Fargo also faces lawsuits and other legal actions from former and*

current employees who alleged they were retaliated against after raising sales practice misconduct issues. Almost half a dozen Wells Fargo workers told CNN Money in 2016 they were fired after calling the bank's ethics hotline."

Assertive Bargaining from the Start

Bargaining gives nothing away and implicitly establishes a power position versus the other(s). If an individual does not bargain then s/he has given up power without even realising it, because s/he is doing something for the other(s) for nothing in return. Managers can bargain with other departments to build working relationships and favours. For any subordinate, where work is being assigned by a superior, s/he must consider immediately requesting a restatement of priorities and more resources. This is risky because a superior must never allow subordinates to bargain with him or her. However, if such a request is not made the subordinate tacitly is agreeing that s/he (and his or her department) are less than fully loaded, or that the additional work will be completed in unpaid overtime and with no other expenditures. On the up-side, making such a request can project a managerial image and perhaps "the squeaky wheel gets the grease." If the request is made but resources are not forthcoming, then extra credit or time off can be claimed for getting the work done. Alternatively, the lack of resources and the pressure of other priorities can be used to justify why the new project or some other work cannot be expected to be done. Power language is important. It is authoritative to say that the work "cannot be expected to be done" but saying that the work "cannot be done" can be seen as unwillingness. The words, "cannot do it" should never be used as this phrase is personalising, demonstrates inability and diminishes power, and can be seen as refusal.

Project a Managerial Image

This is the same as Image Projection for Position Consolidation described above for managerial superiors.

PROTECTIVE POSITIONING FOR MANAGERIAL SUBORDINATES, USING INDIRECT MANEUVERS

To the extent that it may be possible, individual subordinates can use the same protective positioning manoeuvres as superiors, although it is hard for subordinates to preserve deniability. If a subordinate perceives that things may not turn out well or that the project is a "Hot Potato" s/he can try pre-emptively positioning to at least involve as many others as possible in sharing the blame. (On the other hand if a subordinate perceives that things are likely to turn out well then s/he would want to be able to claim as much credit as possible through self-promotional imaging as "getting things done" as described below.)

INFLUENCE- AND EMPIRE-BUILDING FOR MANAGERIAL SUPERIORS, USING DIRECT MANEUVERS

As a matter of course, all managers should work at influence- and empire-building, and this is easier for managerial superiors who already have some positional power. For example, an information technology department manager can seek to obtain a central role in specifying systems and procedures to be used throughout the organization, and s/he can aim to ensure that all system control is done by and through the department. Administrative departments can institute as many policies and procedures as possible and make work for themselves in coordinating and policing them for compliance. Managers can exacerbate problems, e.g., in industrial relations, so that they can create centrality and build up a staff to deal with them (but never solve them). Empire-building is especially important in the public sector as manager positions and salaries can be directly dependent on the number of subordinates reporting to them. An empire also can protect the manager's job against imposed cutbacks as s/he will be deciding who is to go. In addition to direct maneuvers, managerial superiors can use indirect manoeuvres as described below for self-promotion, in order to build influence and, eventually, an empire.

SELF-PROMOTION FOR MANAGERIAL SUPERIORS AND SUBORDINATES, USING INDIRECT MANEUVERS

Self-Promoters (SPs) always are in the organizational here-and now and this enables their expert political positioning, i.e., putting themselves in the right places at the right times and saying the right things to the right people. First, SPs use these opportunities brazenly to project or enhance an authoritative managerial image. (Image projection is as described above for managerial subordinates and superiors to maintain their organisational positional power.) Second, SPs are expert at extending their imaging into political influence and actions, as means to obtain real or increased formal positional power. Self-promotion activities and situations are described below.

Managerial superiors' indirect positioning (Passing the Buck) through delegation has been described above. This indirect positioning also enables them to take the credit for successful work done by subordinates. These credits can be used in self-promotion and influence-building.

Broadcasting and Boosting (Yes, I'm Good – Just Ask Me!)

SPs are very aware that in group and interpersonal interactions their manner of communication can be more impressive than being good at their work. They always and actively make it known (loudly and assertively) that they are leading and getting done more than a full load of important tasks or projects and that their time is too valuable to make time for anything that is not managerially important. SPs always make it known in workplace interactions, meetings and other arenas that their valuable high-level managerial skills and abilities are not being made use of in the job they have, and that promoting them is (naturally) the right thing to do.

Behaving Like a Manager in the Workplace

SPs brazenly assume managerial positional authority that they really do not have. To the extent that their doing so is unquestioned they get away with it and they can gain real informal authority. Eventually (if they continue to play their cards right) this informal authority can become formalized as promotion in the managerial hierarchy.

Meetings

To “get noticed” SPs can ask for information in a managerially authoritative manner, and so that those providing it are imaged as “doers” who are reporting in response to self-promoters' “managerial” requests. SPs always can say that the information is “*Good to know*” or is “*Keeping things on track.*” Either verbally or by turning up at meetings SPs can associate themselves with important work or projects that are being carried out successfully by others. SPs can project an image of planning and co-ordinating (to get things done) and they can claim credit-by-association.

Work Dumping

SPs can use any means to dump their work on others, for example, invoking teamwork or complimenting individuals on their expertise and leaving work files on their desks. SPs can tell their direct manager (using power-language) that the file has been passed on to other members of the team for technical input. It is hard for peers to refuse to do the work because they can be imaged by the work-dumper as difficult to work with, uncooperative and not team players. As well, if the work is delayed the blame will be put on them. The more SPs can get away with work-dumping on “the team” the more they can develop informal power to have members of “the team” do their work. They can go on to use this situation to project an image of “getting things done” through directing and coordinating the project and leading the team.

Bespeaking Like a Manager

In meetings, SPs communicate and act with assumption of managerial positional authority that they really do not really have. This is always using power language with concern for getting things done, and

especially when their immediate superiors or other managers are around. SPs create agendas for meetings and refer to them *“to keep things on track and get things done.”* SPs comment on what appears to have been done by others, e.g., *“I’m glad to see that...”* and on what appears not to have been done by others, e.g., *“I’m surprised that...”* SPs “assign” tasks to individuals to report back on, and make sure that they have the last word (as any manager would). SPs comment on individual or team work accomplishments and performance. For example, where there has been a successful outcome SPs can say, *“I’m pleased that I was able to be associated with a team that did such good work, and was able to help keep things on track.”* This type of statement associates SPs with successes and also projects a managerial image in “keeping things on track.” Ideally, any projected image also transmits that the “technical” team needed the SP’s “managerial” assistance. (See Backhanding and Boxing-In described below.)

The longer SPs get away with Bespeaking the more likely that they will develop informal power to speak like a manager in “keeping things on track,” commenting on individual and team performance, and assigning tasks. The aim of the SPs is that this informal power will become formalised through promotion to a (higher) coordinating, supervisory or managerial position.

Influence-Building with Superiors

Blending-In

SP’s dress, speak and behave like managerial superiors. SPs associate with superiors in the workplace and inside and outside the organization. If managers play golf then SPs learn to play golf and join them on the golf course. SPs and their spouses can join charitable or service organizations that superior managers support and spend time with them on these activities. SPs can build social contacts with managers who are more senior than their direct superior and in this way build more influence. (Blending-in is positioning for later Beguiling or “Brown-Nosing.”)

Beguiling (or “Brown-Nosing”) and Putting Down Others

This is a natural progression from Blending-In and can be done by SPs anywhere that there are superiors to be beguiled. The term “Beguiling” is used here because the most effective kind of Brown-Nosing is where it never is perceived as such until after an SP gets the promotion – and, ideally, not even then. For example, if an SP’s direct or higher superior always comes in early and makes coffee then the SP also comes in early and has coffee and conversation with the superior. Beguiling enables more Bespeaking like a manager in meetings and in conversations. It also provides a platform for Putting Down others “behind their backs.” This is more risky but, where used judiciously, peers unaware can be labelled and pigeon-holed as technical rather than managerial and they can be boxed-into technical work.

Backhanding and Boxing-in (with Bespeaking)

In meetings where direct superiors are present SPs can Bespeak like a manager using power-language, and while commenting on the accomplishments of individuals or “the team” use Backhanding to label them as technical and, by inference, not managerial. For example, an SP can say, *“I’m pleased that I was able to be involved with the up-front planning for this project, especially when such a good team of people was available for the technical implementation -- they did a good job.”* If the right form of words is used it is hard for members of the team to object to what on the surface appears to be a compliment.

A Bespeaking SP can say, *“Jane certainly has the right technical qualifications -- she really did a good job on this.”* On the surface this remark is complimenting Jane, but the Bespeaking process of making this remark develops the SP’s power to comment on Jane’s performance, and enables the SP Backhandedly to use Jane’s qualifications and performance against her, to pigeonhole her as “technical” and therefore not managerial. If Jane is present, the norms of social interaction make it difficult for her to object to what has been said. The SP can add a “Box-in”, for example, *“...and it’s good to know that we have someone on the team who can be relied on for this in the future.”* Jane will be stuck with this technical work in the future and even more pigeonholed. If Jane points out the Bespeaking and Backhanding that the SP really is doing she risks being made to look bad by the SP in the eyes of the superior(s).

Bespeaking SPs also can use others' technical strengths against them by "assigning" technical work to them. For example, after a superior has described a technical problem or task a Bespeaking SP can say Backhandedly, "*John really knows a lot about this, and would do a good job with it.*" If John is present and objects to the SP's Bespeaking and Backhanding, he automatically gives substance to an image (also projected by the SP) that he is too concerned with personalities, suspicious, distrustful and difficult to work with.

Besmearing Others and Backstabbing

SPs confident of their Beguiling position with their superior(s) can choose to Besmear others. For example, SPs can say to them that, "*David is just too technical and really does not see the bigger picture needed to get things done...and we all know that he is just so hard to talk to.*" More generally, SPs can collect information on others that will make them look bad and, using an appropriately morally righteous approach, make it known to the superior(s).

SPs can take Backstabbing political action versus others usually to neutralize them as competitive threats but sometimes to get an individual removed from his or her position and take it over. This is risky but the payoff can be large. Where a Beguiling SP is "well in" with managers who are more senior than his or her immediate superior, or just because s/he is willing to take the risk, s/he can act directly to Backstab his or her immediate superior. An example was related to one of the authors, as follows.

A car dealership is one of many owned by a large automotive group. Direct reports to the dealership general manager include the sales manager and the service manager. The group has a management training scheme where graduate trainees rotate through various dealerships and are provided with experience and training in sales, service and other functions. In the car dealership in question, a management trainee with a recent bachelor's degree in business administration was working for the service manager. Towards the end of his training period the trainee told the dealership general manager that he was well trained for the service manager's job and would do it for a lower salary and a lesser model company car. The general manager took the trainee at his word and the service manager was "let go" just before Christmas.

Demonstrably, the service manager had not consolidated his position. As well, his professionalism and integrity in providing the proper training made him vulnerable to the trainee's self-promotion actions.

OBSERVATIONS

The Real Function of Business School Management Education Discourse

Real management practice as organizational power and politics can be seen as: pursuance of power-and-money self-interests; consolidating positional power; projecting a managerial image, active non-relevance to real-world situations, avoidance of responsibility and accountability; and, self-promotion. Such practice is neither socially desirable nor politically correct and certainly cannot be talked about publicly. Instead, management discourse uses business education theory-normative content. First, textbook so-called theories, e.g., organizational theory and scientific management, can be used to rationalize management positions and power as legitimate and as necessary for command, coordination and control. Second, managers can mouth theory-normative content as a cloak for their actions. Third, individuals at all levels can use theory-normative content as "safe-talk" because no one can disagree with what is socially desirable, politically correct and should be done. Fourth, theory-normative language regarding what should be and should be done becomes organizationally authoritative when mouthed by managers with positional power.

The Hypocrisy of Discursive Communications

In real-world organizations managers know that they are unable to communicate what is real because doing so could diminish their power or could incur responsibility and accountability. Managers therefore should communicate publicly in discursive business educational theory-normative terms. Subordinate employees know from experience that what managers say is most likely discursive hypocrisy and that they should not believe it. At the same time, however, employees are very aware that managers have power over them and that they must display appropriate (and equally hypocritical) “listening, taking notice and looking enthusiastic” behaviours, otherwise they are “cutting their own throats.” It is possible, therefore, that a most effective survival strategy for individuals in organizations is to not talk about reality and to become a total hypocrite who believes (sensibly) that everyone else is a lying hypocrite.

Technocrats at the Top

It is worrying that managers can get to the top of organizations through self-promotion, and that they can stay there through consolidating their power, maintaining deniability, buck-passing to avoid responsibility and accountability, and other real management power and political practices described above. These may be the Technocrats described by Pitcher (1995).

Managerial versus Technical

Individuals who concentrate on doing their work are likely to end up powerless in technical pigeonholes. They can see that managerial positions are more attractive and better-paid and they realize that they must stop “doing the work” and start projecting a managerial image of “getting things done.” This projection can be assisted by business school Master of Business Administration credentials. However, as individuals move away from being technical doers and obtain managerial advancement, who is doing the real work in organizations, and what do all the managers actually do that is of value?

Working Hard Cannot Beat the Self-Promoters so You Must Join Them

Self-promoters are politically highly-skilled with an uncanny ability always to position themselves in the right places at the right times, and always to say the right things to impress the right managerial superiors. As consummate liars they are persuasive communicators with abilities to project believable managerial images and “look good.” Self-promoters are adept at brazenly projecting a managerial image through assuming authority and associating themselves with the successes of others. Those who do the work know that the better their performance the more they will substantiate the technical image that the self-promoter has projected of them, and the more they will enhance the self-promoter’s own leadership and managerial image projection. Others may be doing more work and be managing it well, but self-promoters always have the leadership and managerial image in the eyes of superiors. Those who do the work have little defence against self-promoters who can ensure that anyone speaking the truth about them is adversely labelled and got rid of as soon as possible. It appears (sadly) that individuals with integrity must learn to play the self-promotion game themselves.

“Employees hate meetings because they reveal that self-promotion, sycophancy, dissimulation and constantly talking nonsense in a loud, confident voice are more impressive than merely being good at the job – and it is depressing to lack these skills but even more depressing to discover oneself using them.” Michael Foley.

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