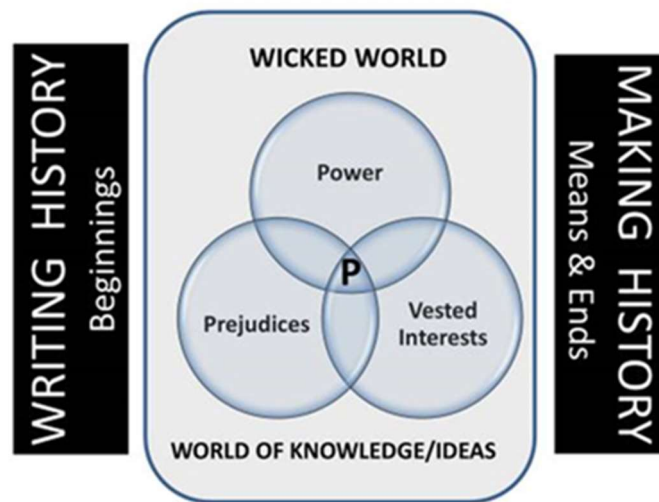


Politics – Reading 2

“the political aspects of life in organisations, the struggle of reasonable men [& women] to have what they consider to be right and proper prevail, derive from the basic processes of human association”
[Mangham 1979 p xii]



The wicked & paradoxical character of the situations in which managers find themselves, and the issues with which they contend, combines with their context of **collaboration** to engender a deeply **political** character in their:

- melding of perspectives and interests
- crafting of beginnings, means & ends,
- acquisition of social capital
- shaping & sustaining of promises to 'hold to' our beginning & ends, and enact the 'decided' means

Brunsson terms 'decision' as simply a 'waymark' between politics and action- and he has a good point in that, as we have seen, the making of decisions is intrinsically political. But, given the integrating character of much managerial work, and its organisational context, it is actually a 'waymark' between politics and even more politics! The *"Not so sure I agree that was the decision we made, or the way we agreed to go about enacting it!"* conversations often begin in the corridor immediately on departure from the meeting room where the decision was taken!

'Nichomachean Ethics', the book in which Aristotle contends with the topic of Practical Wisdom is seen as the preparatory text for proper engagement with the topic he covers in its sequel – 'The Politics'. It is clear that he sees practical wisdom, what he terms phronesis, as the essential capacity that enables the governing citizen to successfully deal with the intrinsically ethical choices in the wicked world with which they must contend. I disagree with Aristotle on much, but on this, we concur.

The Mindful Manager understands that the work of leading/managing is intrinsically political, as it is a work of governing, and involves the wicked world situated melding & mobilising of divergent perspectives & disparate interests in the organised pursuit of a collective purpose within/for a community.

Sadly in organisations the term political is mostly used, pejoratively, to describe a set of interpersonal behaviours/tactics that are illegitimate/unsanctioned, usually covert/underhand, often divisive, more or less cunning & devious. The managers in my extensive field studies, and those of many other researchers, have a clear view of politics, as the use of underhand influence tactics in the pursuit of individual, as opposed to collective goals:

".. see politics two ways ...politics from the point of view of the capital P..like Tony Blair and all that... then politics with a small p... how people pursue their careers...how people pursue their organizational success... its lobbying, its influence, pressure..... it's downright lying... and that's repulsive" [VP Major software firm]

" in big corporations some people only measure their personal success by 'do I secure the most senior job'.... that's their driver, they will bend with the wind and do whatever they need to do to achieve that" [VP Major Sports Brand]

Among managers politics is a dirty word – this is a sad state of affairs given, that as Mangham says, *"Political behaviour.....is not a reflection of the darker side of humanity, but a necessary consequence of individuals coming together and seeking to achieve a particular goals"* [1979 p xii]

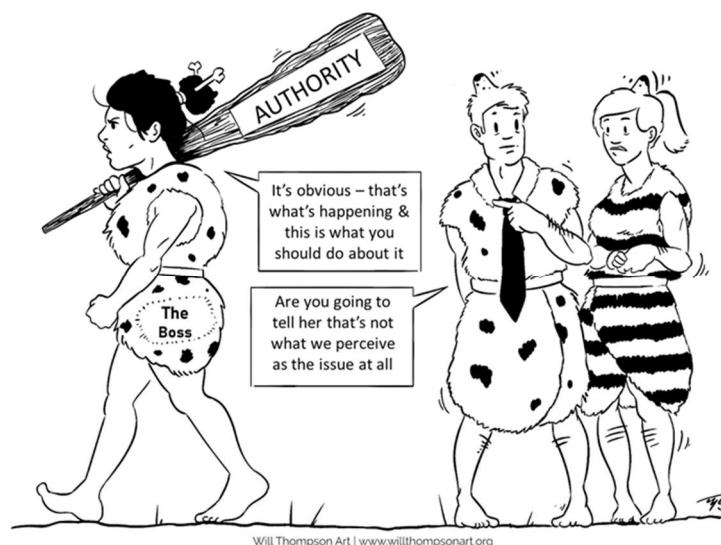
Collaboration and the potentially divergent character of vested interests, at whatever level, is writ large in these real world perspectives. **'Politicking'** might be disliked – political action is inevitable.

It is clear that interpersonal tensions with regard to beginnings, ends, means and their linkage is the norm in the political action of managers. The resolution-dissolution of 'beginnings, ends, means and 'promissory means of means' issues are the subject of perpetual inter-manager discussion and negotiation, with any position reached only ever being transient and precarious. Conflict is unavoidable and compromise inevitable in the work of leading & managing as differential points of view, wicked world problems and differential objectives are 'worked-through' in a context of limited resources and power differentials.

"...individuals in organizations are often in conflict... differences between organizational participants over the means and ends of organizational activity constitute one of the most, perhaps the most, pervasive facts of everyday organizational life" [Mangham 1979 p10]

The Mindful Manager does not shy away from conflict – the wise one has courage and is emotionally as well as cognitively disciplined.

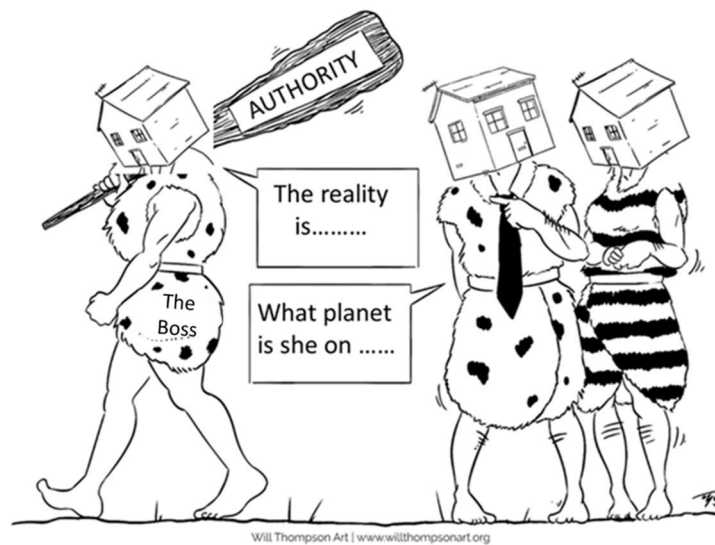
In the summarising figure at the start of this reading the **P for Politics & Phronesis** rests in the Venn diagram overlap of vested interests, prejudices & **power**. In the readings I have talked little of the latter, other than when we were discussing dialogue - there you would have seen a version of the cartoon below.



In my old firm, my brilliant worldly-wise boss once said to me – *"Peter, be careful now you are up here with us – you are now living above the mirrors"*. He was telling me that people would now be inclined

to simply reflect back at me what they thought I would want to hear now I was carrying a big club! In all my teachings of executives this cartoon has had the most telling impact, has driven the most serious minded discussion and generated the most laughter. It deserves serious attention and deep reflection.

Here's another version of the cartoon to reflect upon:



The dialogue-distorting compliance-generating impact of the club of authority the leader/manager carries pervades managerial work. In their dialogic crafting of beginnings, means and ends the wise one is mindful that 'the view is always from somewhere' - s/he is mindful of the club s/he carries in dialogue and asks her/himself- 'is the view being taken simply a reflection of My Somewhere/My Windows on the World?'

Mindful you must be of the club you carry and the 'clubs that are carried' – there are many forms of club beyond the one of authority – you may be wielding more than you think.

Here's more versions of the cartoon that make the point about 2 of these other clubs:



Reflect on these last cartoons and then ask yourself

- **who decides who is an expert?**

The Mindful Manager understands that -

- **to whom to listen is one's choice, and a choice of immense importance!**

Peter Lenney - Mindful Manager - Peter Lenney