

Politics – Reading 1

Politics is the practice of influencing other people on a civic or individual level - it refers to achieving and exercising positions of governance & organized control over a human community. Political action is the process of mobilising different actors, with potentially different/divergent interests, in collective endeavour around a common purpose.

The Mindful Manager understands that the work of leading/managing is a work of governing, and that it involves the wicked world situated melding of divergent perspectives with regard to beginnings, ends & means in pursuit of a collective purpose within/for a community. S/he also understands that it requires, not only the melding of perspectives, but also the melding of disparate interests.

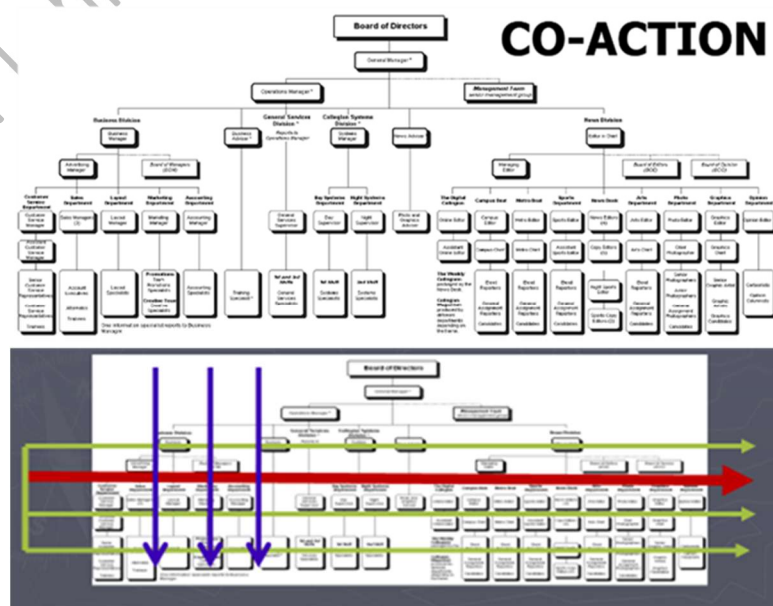
The Mindful Manager therefore understands that the work of leading/managing is intrinsically political.

It is for the political arena that Aristotle saw practical wisdom as the paramount virtue –it is therefore its nexus of dispositions and capabilities that the Mindful Manager seeks to acquire.

The Business of Talk

A multitude of studies have pointed out that managers spend the vast majority of their time talking, and, more often than not it would appear, talking to other managers within their own organisation – even for those with putatively externally oriented roles. What is all this talk about? A substantial component of this talking does work of interest & perspective melding, but, in the main, this torrent of talk mostly represents the everyday practical activity of what I term **co-action** - the ‘working-through’ of the differentiation-integration dilemma that is generated when we structure & specialise to gain efficiencies, but thence gain a substantial countervailing coordinative challenge. We differentiate one way, and then we have to integrate the other.

The responsibility for attaining and sustaining organization is most usually distributed widely across many different specialisms with differing functional responsibilities [e.g. sales, marketing, operations, finance etc.], and vertically through different ‘levels’ of management with increasingly pan-functional scopes of responsibility. Numerous studies of managing point up the intensity of the lateral interactions between managers, both in terms of content and frequency. Most managers/leaders in organisations spend most of their time bringing back together the parts of the operation that have been separated “by the need for specialists, departments, and organizational checks and balances.” [Sayles 1964 p259]. **We are organised one way, functionally & hierarchically, and are then necessarily and feverishly organising in the other!**



This 'coordinative' dimension of 'managing' has almost certainly been further emphasised by the increasing dispersion of functions [e.g. marketing], into sub-specialisms [e.g. public relations, advertising, digital, product management, brand management, merchandising, analytics, etc.]. The emergence of so-called 'lean' organizations with considerably flatter structures, and the ever increasing geographical complexity of business operations, has undoubtedly exacerbated the need for the working through of the differentiation – integration dilemma.

Back in the 1960's one of the managers Leonard Sayles was studying commented - *"I only have 18 people directly reporting to me - the ones I can give orders to - but I have to rely directly on the services of 75 or 80 other people - they in turn are affected by perhaps several hundred others, and I must sometimes see some of them too"*. **A manager rarely has the authority that would match their responsibilities and, most usually, depends on many people over whom s/he has no control whatsoever.** S/he occupies a place within a system of informal relationships, out of which s/he must fashion 'organizations within the organisation' that will accomplish her/his objectives. **A leader/manager is perpetually, and predominantly verbally, 'fashioning' organization around objectives, and participating in 'organizations' 'fashioned' by other managers/leaders, around other objectives.**

"New managers learn very soon that formal authority is a very limited source of power. Most of those who can make a manager's life miserable are people over whom they have no formal authority; that is bosses and peers. Management has just as much to do with negotiating interdependencies as it does with exercising authority..." [Hill 2003 p262]. Back in 1955, in the conclusion of one of his major studies of managerial work, Blau comments, that "Informal relationships are key to the effective operation of bureaucracy". Much has changed since then, but I see little evidence in practice, or from research thereon, that this has changed at all! In fact I contend that the advent of email, and its 'copy to' function has generated a great number of additional, unnecessary and complicating involvements up, down and across organisations!

With the 'organizing' activities of managers/leaders being largely lateral, mostly not proceeding through formal hierarchical channels of authority, it is clear that their **'managing/leading' is an inherently micro-political social practice – one largely of influencing – not of commanding.** Even when s/he has command the Mindful Manager understands that there is, of course, **no panoptic of thought, nor very often, of action.**

The Mindful Manager sees an **organisation as a network of promises** shaped and sustained by its participants. S/he seeks to capture **authentic robust promises** from his/her collaborators.

We all know, often from bitter experience, that an individual's intentions may not necessarily be congruent or consistent with the promises they have made. **'Authenticity'** is hence a much sought characteristic of captured/accepted promises. The judgements one makes as to whom, and in what, to **trust** are fundamental – as fulfilled promises are the foundation of cooperative endeavour.

Given the turbulence, indeterminacy and complexity of the wicked world, it is in the 'spirit' of their promises, not in their detail, that one needs ones collaborators to act. The most 'reliable' of promises, are those where the spirit of their embedded objective has been at the centre of their capture/acceptance, and where their specification is detailed enough to enable coordination, but soft enough to enable their responsive, often improvisational, modulation in the face of the inevitable exigencies and unintended consequences of the wicked world – they are **'robust'**.

The Mindful Manager understands that the cultivating of personal relationships underpins the effective shaping and sustaining of authentic-robust promises - a thread of managerial conduct often termed **'networking'**. Compliance with norms, authority, procedures and the seeking of continuance may be heavily represented in individual rationales for the acceptance and fulfilling of promises, but the influence

of affective/relational factors is often very strong and crucial at certain times: “this is not easy for me...I’m only doing this for you y’know... if it was anybody else I’d...”.

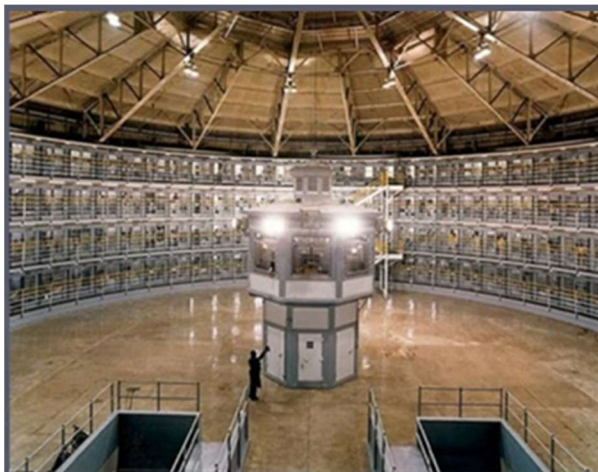
Effective networking represents the proactive accrual of **social capital** through many and varied mechanisms. This vital capital is probably most effectively accrued through the fulfilment of one’s own promises to others - particularly those promises where the degree of discretion you have is high and your level of compulsion low. One could say that **promises represent the currency of coordination & social capital, and that authentic, robust and fulfilled promises represent the interest payments on the social capital you have accrued.**

When one views an organisation as a network of promises, and the shaping & sustaining of promises founded on social capital as the essence of the work of leading/managing it is clear that Tom Burns was right when he concluded, from his massive studies of managerial work, that **organisations are collaborative systems founded on trust** – trust is the great simplifier - trust enables the avoidance of the potentially paralyzing complexity of purposive collective endeavour.

It is somewhat problematic that organisations are collaborative systems grounded in trust, given the context of the paradox of competitive cooperation we have already touched upon.

In whom to trust is your choice and a choice of immense importance

– it is perhaps the most crucial, and most difficult judgement of all!



THERE IS NO PANOPTICON

THE PARADOX OF COOPERATION

- ▶ You have to be mad to trust anyone
- ▶ **BUT**
- ▶ If you do not trust anyone you will go mad



Promises, promises, promises,.....