Journal of Business and Economics December 2010
Vol. 9 No. 2, p 151 - 155
ISSN: 1412-0070

Machiavellian Leadership and Team-Based Organizations

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Machiavelli and modern team-based management styles are said by several scholars to be at odds with one another. Callahan (2004) and Buttery and Richter (2003) associate the concepts of organizational leadership power, control, and fear with traditional organizational structures and Machiavellian philosophy. Love, collaboration, and empowerment, on the other hand, are viewed as being the exclusive domain of contemporary leadership styles. However, it is the conclusion of this article that Machiavellian leadership and team-based organizations are not necessarily incompatible. To assume, as Callanan does, that current "collaborative work systems" are in some way superior because they do not focus on, so called, Machiavellian "tactics to increase power and hoard it as a means to ensure a leadership position" is at best naïve. In reality, precisely the opposite is taking place: Organizations are currently being structured into collaborative environments for the express purpose of enhancing "individual accomplishment and the building of power." It is not the principle of maintaining and building power that has changed, but rather the manner in which this power-building is being expressed that has changed. Powerful leadership and control should not be seen as the enemy of modern organizational structure. Only powerful organizational leaders who are in total control of their organizations can successfully implement collaborative work systems into their organizations.

Key words: machiavelli, team-based managements styles, traditional organizational structures, machiavellian philosophy, collaborative work, teamwork

INTRODUCTION

Machiavellian Leadership and Team-Based Organizations. Machiavelli's writings have been very popular amongst managers in the corporate world. In today's "new economy", however, the decision-making emphasis is shifting with teamwork and employee empowerment becoming more and more of an important method for creating a high performance organization. With the advent of teambuilding and team empowerment in modern management, is Machiavellian leadership still important today? They writer of this article is of the opinion that traditional (Machiavellian) organizational structures and the modern managerial concept of collaborative teambuilding are compatible rather than mutually exclusive.

Some modern scholars (Callahan 2004, Buttery and Richter 2003) associate the concepts of organizational leadership power, control, and fear with traditional organizational structures and Machiavellian philosophy. Love, collaboration, and empowerment, on the other hand, are viewed as being the exclusive domain of contemporary leadership styles. Power, control, and fear are given a 'dark nature", to be avoided like the plague. Nevertheless, as with love, collaboration and empowerment, these are common elements basic to human nature and existence. In themselves, these emotional needs are neither good nor bad. Neither are they moral nor immoral. In the introduction to the *MIT Sloan Management Review* article entitled Leadership and the Fear Factor, the writer perceptually states that, "The ability to generate an emotional response is the key to any leader's success." The writer, after citing the examples of Moses, Winston Churchill, and Martin Luther

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King, Jr., continues by saying that "business leaders, too, must inspire emotions in order to persuade people to give their best." (Maccoby, at al. 2004) It is the motivation for the use of misuse of power, control, fear, love or empowerment that will determine the morality of an action. When motivated to manipulate emotions for purpose of intentionally and maliciously hurting, destroying, or deceiving others it becomes immoral and evil. Human beings naturally manipulate these elements to structure and shape their destiny. Organizational leaders, regardless of their leadership style, must also manipulate these elements to structure and shape the effectiveness and success of their organizational destiny. It should be remembered that in order to empower others, a leader must have power and be powerful.

Callanan writes that team empowerment and Machiavellianism are incompatible. Machiavellianism, Callanan asserts, must call for a command and control hierarchy. It has strict lines of authority and accountability. The very idea of leaders delegating power and responsibility to work teams runs in the face of Machiavellianism. Management theorists assert that organizational success in the modern and future business arena rests on how well a leader delegates power to lower-level members of the organization. I take issue with Callanan's idea that traditional organizational approaches are incompatible with empowerment, teamwork, and the delegation of power. Delegating power and responsibility to teams does not mean that modern leadership requires less command, control, authority, and accountability than traditional leadership. Traditional organizational leaders should and do incorporate empowerment and collaboration into their organizational structure. The value of teamwork, with all its social and psychological advantages, should never be seen only in terms of empowering employees or lower management. It should, perhaps more importantly, be recognized for its empowerment of leaders who use the collective wisdom of respected teams to make more effective business decisions. (Callanan 2004). In this regard, Machiavelli would say that the modern organizational leader" … should take counsel when he wants advice, not when others want to give it. "However," a prudent CEO should ask selected advisors about everything, hear them out, and make his decision after thinking things over, according to his own style." (Parkhouse 1990) Assuming ultimate accountability always falls on the leader. This must always be the case for just as a captain is always responsible for his ship, a principal for his school, and a president for his country, so a business executive is ultimately responsible for his enterprise. Empowering employees toward collaboration will not always guarantee success. Machiavelli, therefore, asserts that a business executives'" … wisdom does not come from having good policies recommended to him; on the contrary good policy, whoever suggests it, comes from the wisdom of the CEO." (Parkhouse 1990).

To assume, however, as Callanan does, that current "collaborative work systems" are in some way superior because they do not focus on, so called, Machiavellian "tactics to increase power and hoard it as a means to ensure a leadership position" is at best naïve. Callanan asserts that" … attention to individual accomplishment and the building of power runs counter to what is happening structurally within organizations." In reality, precisely the opposite is taking place: Organizations are currently being structured into collaborative environments for the express purpose of enhancing "individual accomplishment and the building of power." It is not the principle of maintaining and building power that has changed, but rather the manner in which this power-building is being expressed that has changed. Leaders in non-tradional and

non-hierarchical business entities and cultures still continue the philosophy of pursuing personal power which, in turn, translates into power for their organization (the competitive edge). Nevertheless, they would do well to heed the Machiavellian advice that when they think" … more about the refinements of life than about the competitive edge, they have lost their positions." (Parkhouse 1992).

Callanan correctly points out that there has been a paradigm shift in leadership style from a central authority to teamwork. Nevertheless, to view past managerial practices as anti-collaborative and anti-empowerment and modern team-based designs as anti-control and/or anti-authoritarian is to misunderstand the change. The fact is that organizations in the past with traditional organizational structures have been very successful. Traditional organizations have and do implement varying degrees of empowerment, teamwork, participation and contribution. Today, in most of the non-western world successful organizations are still using traditional organizational structures. In this regard, Callanan misunderstands the nature of global organizations when he states that, "Even in the present environment of intense global competition, many organizations still cling to bureaucratic rules, policies and procedures that prevent managers from fully creating collaborative and boundary-less structures."

The reason for this should be obvious; it is not yet practical or expedient for them to so. To restructure their organizations aling modern team-based designs would lead to confusion, consternation, and failure. In this case it may be wise to heed to Machiavellian advice to go and live where your company is so that" … you can see troubles getting started, and take care of them right away; when you do not live there, you hear of them only when they have grown great and there is no longer a cure." (Parkhouse 1990). A powerful leader should "keep his ear to the ground" and "his finger on the pulse" of his organization. Change for change's sake is detrimental and when necessary it should be introduced incrementally. Machiavellian or traditional thinking is not anti-change. As with other human endeavors, such as, education, politics, or entertainment, business too is shaped by socio-cultural trends. Organizational change occurs gradually under various circumstances and Machiavelain thought asserts that, "You should never let things get out of hand to avoid a restructuring. You don't avoid such a restructuring, you merely postpone it, to your own disadvantage." (Parkhouse 1990).

Powerful leadership and control should not be seen as the enemy of modern organizational stucture. Only powerful organizational leaders who are in total control of their organizations can successfully implement collaborative work systems into their organizations. A leader cannot share or give away what he does not have. If a leader does not have power and is not powerful he cannot empower others. In order to implement empowerment through teamwork a wise leader" … will lay his foundations on what is under his own control, not on what is controlled by others." (Parkhouse 1990). It is incorrect to think that modern leaders empower others to lessen their power, on the contrary, modern leaders empower subordinates because it enhances their power and effectiveness. In the modern western organizational climate, the delegation of power, authority, and control is primarily commended because it is plain and simply "good for business." Of course, this does not imply that "anything goes" or that organizations can engage in immoral or unethical behavior in the interests of their "bottom line." No, it implies that organizations will structure themselves in such a way as to be as effective as possible, and it makes good business sense to be as socially responsible and politically correct as possible. Callanan is correct when he encourages

leaders to" … re-examine long-standing philosophies on the behaviors that have the best chance of resulting in organizational success." (Callanan 2004). In other "behaviors". Furthermore, Callanan states that the "… use of fear tactics, the hoarding of power and information and the use of forma policies and rules to limit the discretion of lower level participants should be replaced by an empowerment philosophy that encourages team work, participation and contribution." As effective as they may be in the current western organizational climate, empowerment, teamwork, participation and contribution do not foster a fearless working environment. The source of fear may have shifted or now be veiled; nevertheless, there is still fear, among others, fear of letting team members down and the fear of rejection. Fear comes in many forms: fear of failure; fear of punishment; fear of insecurity; fear of humiliation. The negative results of such fear may be just as devastating as those in more traditional organizational structures. Power, authority, control, and fear will be components of any organizational style and as such organizational leaders must ethically micromanage fear for effective operations no matter what form it may take.

D'Andrade has a different take from Calhoon with regards to Machiavellianism and team-based organizations. In effect, he advances the idea that Machiavellianism offers a solution for team empowerment. Today's corporation, he claims, receives too much command and control from the higher echelons of the organizational pyramid. In addition, such direction has to pass through too many layers of bureaucracy. A Machiavellian approach to this problem would be to structure workers into small groups. Each group would have a great degree of control over their production of a saleable product. Every employee in the group will have relatively complex tasks. This is in contrast to the common assembly-line words, as Machiavelli migh say, "the end justifies the means." In this case, the end being "organizational success" and means being ethical and moral business approach to production, where tasks are simple and workers are easy to replace.

The aim of this process is to achieve two Machiavellian goals. First, this gives employees as much control over their future as possible. When individuals have control over their future, they tend to be content. A company full of content individuals promotes stability, something a Machiavellian leader should try to aim for in running a business. The second goal achieved is that of increased power for the leader. The Machiavellian group structure advanced by D'Andrade has the added advantage of cutting out the middle management. The middle management level in today's corporations is analogous to the nobility that existed in the princely state of Machiavelli's time. By eliminating the "nobility," the Machiavellian leader concentrates even more power in his or her own position. Alongside these two goals, D'Andrade outlines the possible added benefit of increased worker productivity and production quality. People work better when they are not being watched and only have a deadline to meet. Excess supervision, D'Andrade asserts, is a hassle that workers would rather do without. (D'Andrade 1993).

However, D'Andrade admits that proposition for a Machiavellian structure is highly idealistic. It requires that the culture of the corporation be well embedded in its workers. Every employee must understand what the goals are of his or her group and of the organization in general. These groups, in effect, are teams, for they have common goal or purpose in mind. The rewards of success are sufficient motivation. The threat of punishment or excessive supervision should not be necessary. It seems as though D'Andrade is applying the concept of a "high-performance organization" to Machiavellian thought. If such an

organization is applied correctly to the right type of corporation, then Machiavellian leadership thought is highly compatible with the team empowerment ethos of modern management. (D'Andrade 1993).

In conclusion, it can be said that, even with the advent of team-based structures in modern management, the Machiavellian leader will always be present. Powerful leadership and control can coexist with team-based structures. Indeed, powerful leaders can facilitate a team-based organization.

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