

**The Games Companies Play  
A Survival Guide to Office  
Politics**

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# The Games Companies Play

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**To Anita 'Bunny' Parker (1944–1992)**



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All the characters and company names presented in the scenarios are fictitious but the scenarios themselves are based on fact.



# Preface

The lie is revealed – the king has no clothes. Senior management have been conning us. They are interested only in their own survival and in accruing power for themselves. This book is not a tract against capitalism. It is a guide for you to survive in the business jungle.

Enron, WorldCom, Andersen have shown us the underbelly of senior management and it ain't pretty. Power is a zero sum game – which means that the more they have, the less you do. This is always the way it has been and nothing is going to change that. You might want to join them in fact. Again, that's OK. But in the meantime you have to survive. And to survive you need to understand how the game of corporate politics works. They may want blood on the carpet – OK, but it won't be yours.

When you understand that, you can then make a call on how you intercede. You might want to opt out totally; you might want to engage in order to win and join the other side; you might want to just live out your career life – enjoy what you do at work and, more importantly, what you do outside of work. But even if that is your choice you have to get a little involved. If you choose to opt out totally, you may lose, and in this book you will see why.

You don't need a book in order to win friends and influence people – your intuition will tell you how to do that. But you just



might need some of what we have laid out for you here to survive in the ruthless games of office politics. Why?

Because when you feel you are loosing in a political struggle, your first inclination is to react based on your emotions. Let me remind you just how powerful they can be. You can feel threatened, alienated, betrayed, bitter, angry, embarrassed. Mix them all together and you have a potent cocktail. However, if you act on these emotions you can walk onto a bear-trap. Again we will show you how that can be the case.

So, we offer you this survival guide to help you plan out your response to a political game played against you. This will help you identify what exactly is going on. One of the chimeras of office politics is the sense that perhaps it is just your imagination – perhaps there is nothing going on at all. Wrong – if you sense dissipation in your power base or feel that you are being sidelined, you are probably correct. Trust your intuitions but don't react based on them or you may be air-brushed out of the corporate history book faster than an accountant can shred a document.



SECTION I

# The Scenario



# We are at War

## BUSINESS AS WAR?

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The German military theorist Karl Von Clausewitz (1780–1831) once wrote that ‘War is a continuation of politics with a mixture of other ingredients’.<sup>1</sup> One of the underlying themes of this book is that business, like sport, is a continuation of war with a mixture of other ingredients. Von Clausewitz might have agreed, though as a proud Prussian aristocrat he would consider commerce as far below his dignity. The fact that he was only 50 when he died suggests he didn’t do much sport either.

## Parallels

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There are many parallels between the worlds of war and business. There have always been historical parallels. The search for markets, new sources of supply and additional territory have gone together for many centuries. At a cultural level there have also been parallels. These are seen in terminology. Advertising for a product or service is organized in a ‘campaign’. Corporate people are often called ‘officers’, and this militarization of the office world often means you are a nobody unless you belong to the new ‘Officer Corp’. A manager of a particular



department may be called, say, the Research and Development Officer. There may not be different uniforms, more epaulettes or gold braid, but the pecking order of command is just as tangible. There is better pay, bigger offices, maybe a chauffeur-driven car. This leads to motivational parallels: the successful commander earns promotion – the company, like an army, is a meritocracy.

There are tactical parallels too. War and business are both dynamic and acquisitive. The ancient Chinese military strategist Sun Tzu said that war ‘is a matter of life, a road to either safety or to ruin’. Replace ‘safety’ with ‘good profits’ or ‘a healthy balance sheet’, and let us say that ruin and bankruptcy are pretty much the same things.

### **Total war**

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In the world of the military there is always a clear line of communication. There is no shirking, no sleeping on the job. There is a war to be fought, a battle to be won. Everyone knows that total commitment is expected from all in the organization.

It is only in terms of the material used that wars differ from business. Business uses the least energy of all. Its battles are fought for control of markets – for people’s choices. Unchallenged dominance of a market is nice, but it is rarely attained these days. Anyway, it isn’t popular. Even if attained, it soon slips away. Control of a market share bigger than anyone else’s is usually more realistic.

Armies fascinate people in any organization. There is the sense of power. They are vast but always seem to work well.



They are the perfect tools for getting things done. For people in the ‘Officer Corp’ there is the sense of belonging to something big. Call it comradeship, *esprit de corp*. There is the hierarchy: everyone knowing what to do, when to do it. The discipline: everyone knowing who his boss is and whose boss he is. It is like climbing a mountain – the higher you go, the clearer you see the top. At the same time, you see what (or who) is below you.

### **Business as war: the Japanese example**

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The parallels between war and business have been very strong in Japan. The companies that grew up throughout the twentieth century mirrored Japanese political society. In the past, loyalty to a clan leader often meant the difference between success and failure – even life and death. Japanese society is based on deference; values such as loyalty and respect are thought to be good things. A classic Japanese company differed from an old feudal clan only in size.

To become an employee of a corporation such as Sony, Mitsubishi or Tokyo Gas was a badge of honour. Much ritual accompanied the induction of each year’s new recruits; for example, they all gathered at company headquarters, a senior executive read out their names and each one stood up and made a deep, low bow. The ceremony usually finished with a rousing and moving rendition of the company song.

### **A way of life**

A job in a Japanese company was more than employment; it was like joining a new family. In Europe and the United States



it is not uncommon for employees to work for a string of companies during their working lives. In Japan it was the exception and was viewed with disapproval. Once an employee joined a firm he stayed there until retirement. The firm looked after everything, from golfing holidays to housing loans. In return for a job for life the employee gave unquestioning loyalty. Disloyalty meant dishonour: maybe loss of a job but more seriously loss of face.

The only difference from the days of the feudal lords was that the modern employee received a salary. The Japanese word for a business employee is *sarariman* (salaryman). The job was never just a nine-to-five existence. Japanese employees lived, worked and played together. After work ended the employees did not go home but went to a bar. At the weekends they might play golf or baseball, sometimes in the firm's sporting facilities. Many enterprises had their own song, celebrating its achievements and teamwork. It was not uncommon for everyone in all offices to begin work each day by singing a few verses. What mattered was achievement: it wasn't individual achievement, but what the group had done.

### **Winds of change**

The classical model of the Japanese company has come under strain in the past two decades. With its loyal troops it was effective in its day, but the generals became too old, too fat and less brave. Perhaps they didn't need success and power badly enough any more. The influence of how things are done elsewhere has crept into the Land of the Rising Sun. Problems in the Japanese economy have not helped either. There have

been many occasions when a Japanese CEO committed suicide rather than face the dishonour of bankruptcy and lay-offs. The disloyalty to his retainers whom he had failed to protect was something he quite literally could not live down.

The impact on others was often traumatic. Imagine the effect on children if they went down for breakfast one morning and they were told that Mum and Dad were splitting up. The house was being sold and they would have nowhere to live. The streets were a good place to start looking for new accommodation. If they wanted food they could find some waste ground and maybe try growing it themselves. They would have no money but they could try begging. If the police caught them, their family would disown them. In fact, they no longer had a family.

### **Facing facts?**

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The woes that have hit the Japanese corporate sector have forced a rethink on some salarymen. There were some bosses who jumped out of windows, but others survived, maybe thanks to some pretty hefty downsizing of staff. Most salarymen thought they had a job for life. The company was a second family. The company's goals were their goals too. Yet in middle age they discovered that this was no longer the case. Their loyalty to the company has not been repaid. Had they all been pursuing common goals, or had they been used? We all know about the 'Viet vet' who gets demobbed and can't seem to fit into 'Civvy Street'. His world has changed. He was good at taking orders – very good – and good at passing them on down the



line. Change the landscape; there is no longer a superior, or an inferior. In fact, there are no longer any orders. He can try to give orders, but to whom? Power is great when you just have to obey it.

## WHAT EVERYONE WANTS

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The fundamental parallel between business and war is the desire for power. When an army is told to move, it moves. While a single individual can seem pretty feeble, unite his strength to that of others and nothing is impossible. Niagara Falls is made up of individual drops of water, after all.

What good is power unless it has directions, objectives, goals? *If only the firm, my firm, could be more like an army ...* No doubt there are already lots of officers but, let's face it, some of them would get lost coming from the Men's Room. They like working in groups; that way there is always someone else to blame when things go wrong.

## Power is all

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At the end of the day you want to – you need to – have power over others, and over circumstances. Whatever your position in the organization, you have to have some power.

It may involve people either believing in something or being inspired by words or deeds. Or it involves some abstract fear that expressed itself for everyone. Power is faith and belief. Power is fear. Power is a game. We will define 'game' later on, but a working definition is: a set of actions or manoeuvres



directed towards a certain result – a pay-off. Often the game is played at two levels: upfront and at a more concealed level. As Lady Macbeth said in the play: ‘Look like the innocent flower but be the serpent under’t.’

The similarity between war and business still holds, but is war not more honest? Let’s go back to Sun Tzu, who wrote that ‘all warfare is based on deception’. So is business, but a lot of deception is a game for two. People are at this moment on their feet, but hold on. Is all deception bad?

### **The will to power**

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Power really is the ever-popular ecstasy (Viagra maybe), Lear Jet and 24-carat gold Rolex with diamond-encrusted numerals, all rolled into one. Look at the profiles of some prominent business people who rise to the top of the corporate pyramid and then, after a while, step off. Perhaps it’s because of early retirement, or perhaps it’s the result of a takeover and accompanying shake-out. Whatever the reason, our ex-CEO now has all the time in the world, and hopefully more money than he could ever want or need. Does he put the Louis Armstrong song in the CD player? Retire to the golf course, becoming a stalwart of the nineteenth hole? Maybe take up sailing around the Bahamas? Or take up that long repressed love of orchid breeding? Perhaps. Or he might realize that he can’t do without power, without The Buzz. Within a short time he has set up a new company that is cresting the waves of profit and loss. He may lose money at first but he has enough to cover the red figures.





There are many examples, and one of the best is Hans Rausing, the Swedish founder of TetraLaval. In 1984 he sold out to his brother Gad, and netted a cool \$4.4 billion. With this big cheque in his pocket he could have retired behind the high walls of his Caribbean mansion, or pottered around the roads of Sussex, driving his Lada Niva. He opted to start all over again. He acquired a 57% stake in manufacturer Ecolean, making biodegradable cartons. It will make him a billionaire again one day. At the moment it is swallowing a lot of his fortune, but he is still no. 33 in the Forbes Rich List for 2002.

Malcolm Healey made £200m in 1989 when he sold his kitchenware company in the north of England. He ploughed the money back into American kitchenware manufacturer Mill's Pride. This made him a billionaire in the 1990s.

George Soros made billions through his Quantum hedge fund. In the past two years he had handed over its management, to spend more time on his George Soros Foundation. This is no simple charity – it is dedicated to spreading the ideals of an open society in Eastern Europe and Central Asia. Mr Soros takes a very active hands-on approach and he has made some high profile enemies in the process, such as Slobodan Milosevic.

### Letting go?

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There has to be something to get up for in the mornings. If you are a general in a war, it's probably a battle. But what happens once the war finishes? This problem has faced many, including General Dwight D. Eisenhower after the Second World War. He was a hero, but even heroes need something to do, people to

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control. He found the answer by going into politics and, seven years after the war ended, he was elected President of the United States. There are quite a few generals who yearn for political power but, in Western democracies at least, they tend to be distrusted.

Politics can have the same allure for the CEO needing a challenge. It is a third way between the boardroom and the golf course. The United States has many powerful and successful businessmen who decide to go into politics. Their personal war chests allow them to bankroll their forays far more effectively than other politicians. The best known is Ross Perot, founder and Chief Executive of Texas Instruments. He spent multi millions in the 1992 Presidential election, garnering millions of votes, but no seats, in the Electoral College. In spite of the failure, no doubt Perot felt that it was worth it. He got his message across. In 1996 he was less successful. There are others, some more successful than Perot. They set their sights on attainable aims such as a state governorship (e.g. Pierre Du Pont in Delaware) or a Congressional seat. Michael Bloomberg was recently elected mayor of New York City, after spending \$70 million. Everyone agrees he has taken on one hell of a Big Apple.

The phenomenon has returned to Europe. We use the word returning because it is only in the twentieth century that politics in Europe could be played without a sizable fortune. Here, attitudes towards ostentatious displays of wealth differ from the United States. Nevertheless, Europe has seen the businessman-turned-politician. One of the most successful in both fields has been Silvio Berlusconi. Founder and Chief Executive of the Fininvest Group, he set up a right-of-centre po-



litical movement called Forza Italia (literally, ‘Come on Italy!’). His message was well served by the numerous television stations, newspapers and magazines he owned. He became Prime Minister of Italy for the second time in 2001. He has never concealed the fact that he is a self-made billionaire and that he started pretty near the bottom in life.

Lord David Sainsbury was born with a silver shopping trolley in his hands. Tony Blair made him a minister a few years ago. He likes working for Tony so much he doesn’t even draw a wage.

The most extreme example of hunger for new power is Roman Abramovich, the second richest man in Russia. After making billions in the energy sector he ran successfully for governor of the most northeasterly province in Russia – the part nearest Alaska. Reindeer outnumber people here and it stays dark for months on end. Being so far north, the odd cold snap occurs too. All the indications are that these factors have made him think twice about seeking a second term.

Danger can co-exist with the power bug. Rafik al-Hariri became a billionaire thanks to the construction industry in the Middle East and Persian Gulf. He then returned to the political world of his native Lebanon. He became Prime Minister in 1999. He is no doubt aware that three of his predecessors have been assassinated.

## **Motivation**

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What motivates the Perots or Berlusconi of this world? The friendliest attitude is: here are self-made men who know how

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to make lots of money; they aren't afraid to take risks; they no longer want just to help themselves, family and shareholders, but the greater community.

If these new politicians have a message, it can be summed up in three words: 'Look at me'. Their ideologies are similar: pro-private enterprise, low taxation and the reduction of bureaucracy. Their success attracts voters who think, *He's different; maybe he can do something that the others can't*. Others, more cynical but perhaps equally supportive, think, *Unlike the others, he's not becoming a politician to make himself rich – he's already got enough*.

This attitude has a flip side. There are those who are less friendly to these moves into politics. They say, 'The billionaire wants to neutralize the last bastions that can stand up to his corporate muscle. Laws will be changed in favour of the no-questions-asked acquisition of loot. Investigations will run out of steam ... it is a corporate takeover of The State Inc.' In some countries popularly elected officials enjoy criminal immunity.

But maybe there is a third explanation. The CEOs are power aficionados. They have tasted, consumed and luxuriated in power already. Now they want to try a new brand, which they have yet to sample – but it promises even more of a buzz than they have ever had before.

### **Empowerment**

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Thus, power is a drug – so where do I get it? Is the answer to be patient and wait? Can it be acquired or does it have to be given?



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## THE GAMES COMPANIES PLAY

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We are all confronted by these questions in our careers. We all want it, because it is a measure of our success; it is also the means to further that success. But to get ahead in your quest for success, to be that guy in the distance ‘getting on planes’ ... how do you master the art of power?

Do you have to wait your turn, as in many Asian firms, waiting for age and experience so that you can climb over the ‘deadbeats’? Risky: you may be a deadbeat yourself by the time it happens. Sure, you can put in the hours, kiss the right butts, be a member of the right clubs, etc. – but will that be enough? It seems so easy for others. What do *you* need to do?

### PLAYING BY THE RULES?

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So, to say it again, business is a game. It has its rules, like any other game. But it is made up of a whole lot of component games. The secret of playing one game often involves playing other ones well at the same time.

### Propaganda

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Propaganda is one of these games. It is about deception, but it is not the same as lying. It is a little like flower arranging, only the plants are replaced by data. Some pretty plants will be in the foreground; others may be further back, maybe invisible. All may be artificial.

In war and business every side has a message: ‘We are doing this because ...’ This type of propaganda is aimed at an external audience. It came into its own during the Second





World War: Lord Haw-Haw relayed disturbing messages in an acceptable accent for English radio listeners. Had he spoken with a thick German accent, William Joyce would have been laughed at. The fact that he did not, that he could have been an announcer with the BBC, closed down the difference. He was able to spread fear and terror far better. Our old friend Sun Tzu, way back when radios had not been dreamt of, knew about this too: ‘When we are near, we must make the enemy think we are distant; when distant, we must seem near.’

The psychological effects of propaganda continue today. It is great when propaganda is so crude that it can be put into the trash can straight away. But what happens when unwelcome messages start filtering through – the type that cannot be so easily brushed aside? Much of Lord Haw-Haw’s broadcasts was untrue – every listener knew that – but some of it *could have been* true. He mixed lies with just enough fact to make it plausible. Take someone in middle management of a manufacturing company dealing with complaints. A recent product has got a lot of bad press. Then accidents start to happen. Is all this accidental? As for consumer groups, are they the warriors fighting the small person’s battles, or are they Trojan horses for competitors? Similarly, the policyholder who has had his house repossessed. Genuine? Sure, he didn’t read the small print, but the media know about it now. Who told them? During the Spanish Civil War, General Mola was asked which of his four columns he expected to capture a besieged town. He answered ‘the fifth’ – his agents on the inside. Maybe a rumour slips out that people in the technical and development end weren’t ready, and that the product was announced too soon. Is there someone



on the inside, a colleague, maybe someone who you know and trust, who has started to be indiscreet? You know a few who have been sore about not getting promoted. And soon, effective propaganda has sown new and healthy seed of its most high-yielding crop – suspicion.

Some people think Propaganda doesn't exist any more. If it does it is only used by dictators. In a free society more subtlety with information has to be used. People are more cynical about 'good news'. The mechanics of manipulation are far too well known – the media consultants, the spin-doctors, etc.

### **Internal propaganda**

But what about internal propaganda – the type used on your own people? We all know many corporations are bigger and wealthier than some states. Corporations are not slow to use propaganda within their organization. The nuts and bolts vary; some employees may be expected to sing the praises of the firm even when off the job.

They may or may not realize that their company is playing games with them. They hope to reap rewards for joining in. They have been told that the better they play, the stronger will be the overall team – and the better the pay-offs for them.

### **The propaganda cocktail**

Propaganda owes its powers to belief and fear. To be really effective it needs both. Propaganda should be believed. This is best when it is the only form of information. Propaganda has also relied on fear. You don't have to be massive to use it on your employees. Many businesses rely upon belief and notions of a



mission and these organizations may be headed by a prophet-like chief executive who tells staff that he has seen the promised land. Such an enterprise may seem more like a revivalist cult than a firm. Some of the best generals are the charismatic ones. Charismatic business leaders are usually media friendly, such as Richard Branson. They can persuade their people to forgo pay rises in the short term. Present economic difficulties are like bad weather. When things clear up they will be able to enjoy their place in the sun. The fear element is also prevalent: only those managers who increase profits or reach their targets will survive the next big purge. A couple of high-flyers may also go, just to make sure no one gets complacent.

### **Company cultures**

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Many firms have a culture, though they can often be hard to define. A corporation that originated with a dime store in the Midwest after the Depression may believe strongly in family values and community. Another company that came from nowhere but has great ideas may emphasize efficiency and mobility. Whatever the culture, it will be expressed through propaganda, not just in the glossy annual reports, but also through initiatives and programmes for staff members.



### **Rituals**

Sometimes the culture of a corporation takes on theatrical elements. In each branch of a large American retailing company a day is set aside each year for 'staff recognition'. All the employees gather together, while the statistics of success are read out,





sector by sector. When it comes to a department's turn, all the employees cheer wildly at the announcement of the results. Enthusiasm is the order of the day and any lack of it is treated with suspicion. The Anglo-Dutch conglomerate Unilever holds a similar ritual called the OBJ day (Oh Be Joyful). The name probably owes a lot to the Evangelical upbringing of the company's founder.

## STRUCTURES AND PLAY AREAS

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The business world owes a lot to military organization. Armies used to have the monopoly of organizing people. As industries and states grew, they spawned structures based on military models. Discipline was as important in the office, or on the factory floor, as it was on the battlefield. It was a harsh life, but a good life. There were those to whom God had given special gifts; others had not been so fortunate. They were still useful, but their role was to obey: by obeying they made a contribution. There was a natural logic about it. Some tended to react better when controlled from above. Promotions might occur, but everyone knew how far they could go. There was always a limit, and upbringing and background prevented progress beyond this point. A highly skilled factory worker could rarely go higher than plant supervisor.

### Inside the machine

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Not all factories were organized like clockwork toy soldiers, as were Henry Ford's and André Citroën's, for example. On the



whole, industries were gigantic machines, with lots of small, intertwined cogs. If one fell out, it was replaced quickly and easily.

Whether in the factory or the office, you gave your all. There was a permanent work incentive scheme: ‘Work hard or get fired’. In return you got a wage. It wasn’t much, but you had a job. Sure, you didn’t earn much, but you didn’t starve. There were frequent economic downturns to remind you of the alternative: mass unemployment, soup kitchens and hungry kids.

### **‘We have the power’**

In terms of power relationships it was clear who had the power – and who hadn’t. Employees could be hired or fired at will. You might try to pool your power and use it as a lever in a strike, but strikes tended to be counterproductive. All the best cards were in the hands of the bosses. In a long strike they complained how much they were losing a day and, at the same time, you and your family starved. Strikes never solved anything, and frequently made things worse.

### **In the office**

If you were a white-collar worker, say one of the clerks in the office, the situation was similar, although you dressed better than the factory workers and your work was cleaner. You didn’t earn much more though. The chances of promotion were similarly restricted. Work was as monotonous, as repetitive and as boring as on the factory floor. There were few chances to complain. Loss of a job could lead to poverty – the same poverty as that faced by an industrial worker. Striking and militancy

were, well, working class. Nice people (and all white-collar workers believed themselves nice) didn't strike. You identified with your betters.

### **The bosses**

Above all were the management echelons, separated from everyone else by better pay and education. The management had a benign attitude towards its employees. Yes, managers did contribute towards profits, but that's what they got paid to do. The workforce was anonymous, induced by money to work. If they didn't, they starved. There were many bosses who took an interest in their workers, but history showed that those who looked too deeply usually went bankrupt. As for giving the workforce any say in how things were done ... be serious! Some were born to work, others to manage; some to rule over those whose role was to serve. That's how it always had been. It worked well – why change it? Middle management thought they were lucky when they looked down on their inferiors. They could command them at will. But they could be commanded as well.

Employers didn't regard employees as subhuman – they were just different, from a different social background. They lived in a less pleasant part of town. Their education was limited to being able to read, write and count. Their 'cultural' life was less sophisticated, and less civilized. In the early days of the British Industrial Revolution many factory owners built towns for their workers. These were to be Godly places: no bars or dance halls. They didn't want their workers losing energy in sinful pursuits. This was going too far, and by the mid twen-



tieth century employers didn't worry about their employees' private lives. They could spend as much on broads and booze as they could afford.

### **Social immobility**

One choice was still beyond employees though. They could never save enough to challenge the financial superiority of the employer. A thrifty employee could save enough for a nice holiday, maybe to buy a car or a house. However, the type of car and the type of house he could aspire to were always smaller, less grand, than that enjoyed by the management.

### **The 'new' management**

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In the mid twentieth century a new type of management emerged. Naturally, it was influenced by economics and mathematics. Sociology and psychology were there as well. This was management theory or scientific management. Sure, people had written about this topic earlier. There was Frederick W. Taylor, who had a huge influence on Henry Ford – and Lenin. But Taylor's 'time-and-motion' studies were a little too harsh. He saw workers as extensions of their machine. In the 1920s and 30s it was realized that employees had feelings beyond the primitive. Between 1924 and 1936 a study was carried out in the Hawthorne Works of General Electric in Chicago. The workforce had not responded to offers of pay rises with greater productivity. However, they did respond to initiatives from management that they interpreted as signs of the management showing an interest in their work.





After the ‘Hawthorne Effect’ was identified there was a changed attitude to employees. They were human beings, but their purpose was still to contribute to a better balance sheet. The Hawthorne Effect did not herald any re-tweaking of the power relationship – just the occasional rewording of the rules. The power relationship was to be expressed in more sophisticated and softer terms.

### **New scientists**

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The twentieth century saw the appearance of new scientific disciplines. Apart from management science there was behavioural science as well. This was useful for analysing the employees’ responses to work, to one another and to the firm. These new sciences acquired their own stable of experts and their expertise was sought after by the business world. In the late twentieth century there was a change in vocabulary; for example, employees became resources. They had a real value.

Some of this reflected improved education. Companies diversified and underwent specialized internal segmentation. New areas have grown in importance, such as marketing and IT departments, not to mention personnel or human resources. Staff training now demands a bigger bite out of the budget. There is a demand for skilled personnel, and great efforts go into attracting ‘the right sort’ of employee. Some are descendants of men who once worked on the factory floor.



## **Working places**

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An employee's working environment is also given value. The office is supposed to be a 'fun place' – brighter, happier, with room to breathe. The working environment is no longer a battleground between 'them and us' but is 'all of us together' – 'One Big Team'. Profit-sharing schemes reward employees with stocks in the company. There are also staff discounts, and not only on company products. As an employee, you should feel that you are working for yourself. After all, who else are you working for? Haven't you noticed you are on your own?

## **Problem solving**

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The world of work was for so long a war zone: the employers versus the workers and the unions. Unions are hardly visible any more. They became old-fashioned, out of touch with a changing world. Anyway, they were organizations for factory workers; people in offices never had much time for them. Problems are now solved not by strikes but internally, through negotiation. The bosses have changed as well; no longer are they all selfish monsters, but caring human beings.

## **What's new?**

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How much of the power relationship has changed? How benevolent is the 'happy work place'? Is it not a very successful attempt by the company to define and control the working environment, and in its own interests? Are most of these changes





in the working environment – empowerment, profit-sharing schemes, etc. – mere gimmicks? Pleasant froth, eye-candy to disguise the essentially unchanged structure of the power relationship? What has changed is the packaging.

The company is still playing games with its employees – all its employees; they're just a little cleverer. And what's more, the company still holds all the aces.

### **Feeling anxious?**

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An article in the *Financial Times* by London Business School Professor John Hunt discusses the fact that anxieties about corporate politics 'are most often expressed by people in their 30s as they begin to realize that their career is not a dress rehearsal; that peers with better political skills may pass them by ... It is a time when the importance of politics and patronage in medium to large organizations becomes undeniable.'

They have woken up, smelled the coffee and realized that the game is on. Suffice to say, a game involves a ruse – there is more going on than meets the eye. This is what upsets the 'people in their 30s'. 'Politics' is the series of activities that attends the presence of, or transaction in, power.

Business and war are games. This is not a trivialization. Remember the working definition of games we used earlier on? A series of actions, manoeuvres, transactions. At one level they are pursuing one set of objectives, but that's only half the story. Let's look at a game in practice.

# Playing the Game

Something was about to happen. We were in the penthouse boardroom. My colleagues' eyes were darting over my shoulder, squinting nervously at the horizon. I looked in the same distant direction. A large speck appeared and grew bigger. A fearful shudder Mexican-waved around the cedarwood table. A name was silently mouthed, like some deity whose name was never to be said in public. The CEO was on his way: the sound of the helicopter his only warning.

The nervous shivering of the top executives fell into sync with the heavy chugging sound of the helicopter as the CEO landed on the roof. He was feet above our heads. The room fell silent. We could hear his footsteps.

In that boardroom I saw and felt power at work. What was clear was that fear ruled this organization. Not just fear of being fired. The firing policy seemed so arbitrary that there would be no real disgrace to have been sent packing; it would have been nothing personal. No, the fear was undefined – yet everyone felt it. Perhaps it was a fear unique to each individual. Maybe the cult of that CEO was a canvas upon which each aspiring executive painted his or her own career insecurities and terrors. Maybe the CEO was really a nice guy, who liked



kids and had a dog. But, as he jumped out of that helicopter, he looked a bit unbalanced to me.

## POWER RELATIONSHIPS

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### Power is faith

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In the 1980s, Big Jim Brown<sup>1</sup> was hailed as a corporate messiah. The football-playing ex-captain of the Cleveland Browns had achieved major productivity gains at RMI, a subsidiary of US Steel. Big Jim's campaign was spearheaded by the 'smile' as both logo and rhetorical device. Niles, Ohio (where they were based), was replaced by 'Smiles', Ohio.

Big Jim spent much of his time driving around the factory on a golf cart (remember those scenes of Elvis travelling the hallways of the Las Vegas Hilton on a gold cart? I grew up thinking that was the normal way a rock star got on stage). Big Jim also encouraged sayings such as 'if you see a man without a smile, give him one of yours'. Productivity went up 80 per cent; union grievances came down from 300 to 20.

The people had faith in Big Jim; they believed in him. He was an icon, the worker's friend. He was also a football hero. Faith brought about a leap in productivity. They believed in Big Jim (the rhetoric) although they served the 'real interests' of productivity. Faith was the foundation of Big Jim's power.

### Power is a game

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When researching this book, we have had many conversations

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with learned professors who have spent decades teaching, directing, scrambling and unscrambling top executives from around the world. Some have kept detailed notes on what drives these executives to succeed. In the view of many of these academics, the men and women who attend their executive programmes are mostly driven by the quest for power. (The data also suggests that women are as driven by this quest as their male colleagues.)

And the academics are not talking about power to achieve other things – to bring about a realization of personal ideas, aspirations and visions. No, it is power as an end in itself. It is like a drug, attracting and binding the aspiring executives. Put like this, power becomes a game. It generates its own set of rules and can be enjoyed on its own ('neat' – not shaken, not stirred) without need for further justification.

According to Stanford's Jeffrey Pfeffer, organizational politics and power are closely identified: indeed, the concepts of power and organizational politics are related. Most authors, myself included, define organizational politics as the exercise or use of power.<sup>2</sup>

## **Power principles**

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### **1 BELIEF**

The belief that the employee is being supervised. That is a belief not just in the sense that the employee 'believes' that he is being supervised, but also a belief in the *authority* of the supervisor and a belief in the *system* that places both employee



and supervisor in that organization (e.g. your employment) in the first place.

## 2 FEAR

The second principle is fear. It is more straightforward. It is 'fear' of the possible coercive measures (psychological, economic or physical) that the employee may or will experience should he or she step out of line. The starting point here is the 'strategic' or planned use of space into which the employee is placed. The end point is a continuous and efficient power relationship over the employee.

### Extreme politics

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**Step 1** Organize the space for the employee that produces a two-way and unbalanced information flow. Separate the employee from others and establish a direct link with the centre.

**Step 2** The unbalanced information flow means that you know everything about the employee, while all he or she knows is that you know everything about them, and about everything else.

**Step 3** This type of information flow will generate two states of mind: belief and fear. It sets up a basic power relationship.

### The politics of Henry Ford

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Henry Ford's production line was a crude but effective use of

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a power relationship. It needs to be pointed out that Ford's system can be applied more subtly – examples of which will be explored in the game.

Ford's success was producing a car at low cost. This meant he could fulfil his vision: to put a car on the market which 'will be so low in price that no man making a good salary will be unable to own one'. Note that the car was produced in a planned space – the production line – which corresponds to Step 1, above. We can break down Ford's system, as follows.

### **Step 1 Separating the employees**

'Ford believed in people getting on with their jobs. He didn't want engineers talking to salespeople ...'<sup>3</sup>

### **Step 2 Total knowledge**

Again, Ford's knowledge of the process was complete. He calculated that the production of the Model T required 7882 different operations. Of these, 949 required strong, able-bodied and practically physically perfect men; 3338 demanded ordinary physical strength. The remainder, Ford calculated, 'could be undertaken by women or older children'. And he added, '[W]e found 670 could be filled by legless men, 2637 by one-legged men, two by armless men, 715 by one-armed men and 10 by blind men.'<sup>4</sup>

### **Step 3 A blend of belief and fear**

Ford led with his passionate vision of the Model T and its place in society (corporate mission) and he paid double the industry's average wage (personal mission). Both approaches inspired



belief or faith in his workforce. He also operated a ruthless environment. Ford executives were widely spied upon to make sure they did not begin to make decisions for themselves (thus inspiring fear). According to corporate legend, Ford physically kicked to pieces a version of the Model T that did not meet his approval (fear again).

#### **Step 4 Self-governing**

In the Ford culture there were no managers apart from Ford himself. The culture for the whole organization was: do his bidding as directly and as transparently as possible, *as if he were actually present* at each moment. In other words, the workforce would govern itself in a way Ford would have wanted.

### **THE GAME**

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#### **What we mean by it**

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An interesting approach to the ‘game’ was set out by Eric Berne in his seminal work – *Games People Play* (Penguin, 1968). Although the approach was based in psychology and psychoanalysis, the structure of what constitutes a ‘game’, and how it is different from a set of manoeuvres, is appropriate to the tasks here.

According to Berne:

*A game is a series of complementary ulterior transactions progressing to a well-defined, predictable outcome. Descriptively, it is a recurring set of transac-*



*tions, often repetitious, superficially plausible, with a concealed motivation; or more colloquially, a series of moves with a snare, or 'gimmick'. Games are clearly differentiated from procedures, rituals and pastimes by two chief characteristics: (1) their ulterior quality and (2) the pay-off ... every game ... is basically dishonest.*

### **Points of real interest**

- The notion of 'concealed motivation' – i.e. the player has an ostensible gambit which conceals his or her real intent.
- This intent is revealed when you examine the pay-off: that is the key to discover the real but concealed intent.
- The concept of ulteriority, or an ulterior motive, is that which differentiates the activities from a set of operations designed to achieve an end.



Conceived thus, many daily and regular management relations with staff could be conceived of as a 'game'.

In many respects a good manager is the one who attempts to mobilize employees precisely by masking the real intent.

### **Game example**

A manager initiates a team-wide training programme, providing each team member with a selection of three courses from which the individual picks two. The stated aim is to increase and maintain customer focus and levels of satisfaction. The real intent is to get employee A, a senior team member who has been a long-term cause of trouble in the team, to go on a course to sort out his poor interpersonal skills. This is a ruse (admit-





tedly elaborate) to avoid embarrassing A about his shortcomings. In this instance, anything more direct would have been counter-productive.

## **ELEMENTS OF THE GAME**

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The game concept can be broken down into the following series of elements.

### **The core value**

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This is the starting point. What drives the game? In the above example the thesis would be something like: ‘OK, team, this coming quarter I would like us all to pick two of the three programmes I am going to supply to you. This is part of our ongoing drive to increase quality and customer satisfaction.’

Core value: quality/customer satisfaction. There is a choice built in – no one programme is seen as enforced – though it just so happens that two of the three offered to A deal with the issue of team building. He has no real choice here.

The surface-level orientation is external – i.e. getting increased satisfaction levels among the customer base – an unarguable gambit.

### **Activity**

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Why have this set of manoeuvres been initiated in the first place? In the example above, better team-based relations are needed, because of complaints about employee A’s behaviour.

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### **Power principle**

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For a power relationship to be established, a connection has to be made between the ‘supervisor’ and the individual or group being governed. There will be a dominant principle governing the way this relationship actually functions – belief or fear. Often it is a mixture of both.

### **Roles**

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In Berne’s terms, games are played by participants with differentiated roles: the example above illustrates what Berne would call a ‘four-hander’:

- Role 1 Employee A – the ‘wrongdoer’, at the centre of repeated complaints from the rest of the team.
- Role 2 The Team that is on the receiving end of employee A’s poor interpersonal skills.
- Role 3 The coach, i.e. the manager, who is trying to create a more harmonious and hopefully more productive team environment.
- Role 4 The person or group in whose name the action is proposed in the first place. Here, the customer performs this role. It is in his/her/their interest that this particular course of action is being taken.

Of course, from employee A’s perspective, he or she might actually be the victim of both continual sniping and lack of support from the team. The manager does not understand what is hap-



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## THE GAMES COMPANIES PLAY

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pening and is wasting precious time sending the whole team on training courses when he should get rid of half of them! But that is a different game ...

### **The pay-off**

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This is often the real key to separating the ‘upfront’ element from the real intent of the manoeuvre. The ostensible reason for sending the team on the training course was to maintain focus on customer satisfaction. The pay-off, if the game is a success, results in better behaviour from employee A and improved productivity from the team generally, i.e. the real reason all along.

## **THE AEROPLANE GAME**

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Let’s go flying. You’re on the plane. Think about it: you haven’t much power. This has nothing to do with being unable to fly the plane. First, you are allocated a specific space (seat). The organization of space on the aircraft is the key to making power operate. When do you sit down? When you are permitted. When can you stand up? When you are permitted. When can you smoke or take off your seat belt? ... This is getting boring. This is not just for safety. OK, they are ‘in the interests of safety’. Safety would seem to warrant a lot of personal restrictions, but it is only responsible for some. There are other reasons why you get treated the way you do. One is to allow the stewards to serve the passengers adequately. The carrier can then put the minimum number of staff on each flight.



### **Take-off time**

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Let us go on. What food can you eat? What seat can you sit in? These are determined by the contract you have with the carrier. This is another way of saying the type of ticket you have. There is a power relationship behind this contract: seating is the way the power relationship is expressed. This is important. Seating is also the means the carrier uses to exert power over you once you are on board. Let us put it another way: seating is the carrier's means of keeping you in your place. You have more control over the stewards when you book first class than when you book economy class. True?

Let us go further still. Feeling sleepy? When can you sleep? Anytime. The carriers often run warm air through the cabins to make you drowsy on long-haul flights. That way you get some sleep and the stewards get a rest. On the overnight flights they run fresher air through the cabins when they want you to wake up for breakfast.

### **Feeling hemmed in?**

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When you fly, you experience a fairly extreme, but not unique, form of power relationship. We are not criticizing flying: without these power relationships the carriers would not be able to keep flying. We said that the power relations on the plane are pretty extreme, but there is no coercion, no show of superior strength. You see those pretty ornamental ropes sectioning off the different flight classes: first, business and economy? These



ropes demarcate various zones. They are also economic symbols of what the traveller can and cannot do.

Ask yourself this: ‘Which side of the cord am I on?’ Can you step out, but not in? You see a friend in economy. As a business traveller, can you go down (without permission) for a chat? Suppose you’re in economy and you see an acquaintance in business: can you have a chat with him there? The space begins to take on value. This indicates the space on board is being used to leverage power over you, to keep you in your place.

Let us also remark on the military-type uniforms of the ‘captains’. They are not really military personnel, but the uniform acts as a symbol. He knows how to fly these things – who else on board the plane does? So there is a safety issue here. Did you choose the pilot? Of course not; the carrier/airline did (that is whom you have a contract with too, by the way). There is often more in common with wars than just the titles and uniforms. Many pilots learned to fly in combat situations.

### **Feeling coerced?**

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The airline never exerts any force to gain and maintain control over you: you conform. You do what is necessary in the circumstances, partly through experience and knowledge of what is required. You acknowledge signs and symbols in the craft. Many are in the name of safety – your safety – but there are other reasons too. The organization of space on the craft is *the* means of making the whole exercise possible.

A humorous end-point by way of illustration: in mid 1998, a captain working with Go!, the low-cost British Airways spin-





off, held his passengers on board for an hour after landing until the person who had been smoking in the toilets owned up to the 'crime'. In fact the captain himself was arrested for 'false imprisonment'!

Let us systemize this aeroplane game so we can apply the principles in other situations. We can do so using the following methodology:

- Core value (What drives this game?)
- Activity (This is the activity being stimulated)
- Power principle (Which is the dominant principle: belief or fear?)
- Roles (What is the role of each player?)
- Pay-off (What are the ulterior motives?)



The box below illustrates the application of this methodology to the experience on board an aircraft.



### **THE AEROPLANE GAME**

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#### **Core value**

(What drives this game?)

Safety.

#### **Activity**

(This is the activity being stimulated.)

Ensure total passenger compliance.



### **Power principles**

(Which is the dominant principle: belief or fear?)

Fear – (being 30,000 feet in the air usually provides enough fear ‘raw material’ for the carrier to work with and to ensure your compliance).

### **Roles**

(What is the role of each player?)

- 1 Passenger – the object in the power play.
- 2 Steward – the agent of power; ‘looking after you’ but also ensuring you comply with the on-board laws.
- 3 Captain – the ultimate source of power on board; the absent authority – a disembodied voice, calm, benevolent and omnipotent.

### **Pay-off**

(What are the ulterior motives?)

Smooth and commercially viable running of the service. For example, have you ever said to the steward, ‘Actually, I’m not hungry at the moment – could you get back to me in an hour?’ It would just not be viable for the carrier to provide such individual service. The fact that you never question when you can eat is itself a tacit acknowledgement by you of the power the carrier has over you.

## **POLITICAL POWER GAMES**

Let us move to a recent and unambivalent power game – that



for the most powerful position in the world – as occurred in November 2000 in Florida. First, a little flavour.

### **Every voter counts**

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Florida, like most US states, has a cabinet made up of the governor and a number of executive officers, such as the Secretary of State and Attorney General. These are elected, according to party affiliation, so that it is common for a Republican governor to have a cabinet including Democrat members, as is the case now.

The Republican Party has become more entrenched in Florida. This may have something to do with population growth. Florida is a popular place of retirement for people from further north, who choose to swap the chill winds of Chicago or New York for the balmy climes of Florida. Florida is also ‘Cuba in exile’, the location that continues to attract refugees from Castro’s Cuba. Since 1998 the Republican Party has had majorities in both the state House of Representatives and the Senate.

Throughout the 70s and 80s the governorship was held by Democrats. All that changed in 1998, when John Ellis (‘Jeb’) Bush, younger brother of George W. Bush, won election, replacing the ailing Democrat Lawton Chiles. Jeb Bush had moved to Florida in the early 80s, establishing a fabulously successful property development and real estate business. He was a Bush, which meant he had political ambitions. He ran for governor in 1994, losing narrowly to Chiles, and spent the next four years building a powerful base throughout the state. One of his ini-



tiatives was the 'Florida for the Future' campaign. When the election came it coincided with a nationwide swing against the Democrats, caused in part by 'Monica-gate', and Jeb won the governor's mansion. Among the others to be carried to power was Katherine Harris, the photogenic new Secretary of State. Harris came from a family whose fortune was based on the growing and processing of citrus fruits – Florida's No. 1 agricultural sector. Harris was ultimately responsible for the organizing and announcement of elections, so that's why she played such a pivotal role in the events of November 2000 in Dade County and elsewhere.

### **November 2000**

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Florida's 25 votes in the Electoral College were crucial: Al Gore had already chalked up 266 votes; George W. Bush 246. The arithmetic was simple: if Gore won Florida, he would have 291 votes in the college, 45 more than Bush. With Florida, Bush would have 271 votes – 5 more than Gore, but one would be enough.

When all the votes in Florida were counted they showed Bush leading Gore by only 1784 votes. An automatic recount then took place. Nobody could do anything about it. This was probably the most worrying time for Bush. After the first recount his lead had been cut to just 327 votes. Gore smelt blood. The focus switched to individual counties, those that were usually Democrat strongholds such as Miami-Dade. They demanded manual recounts – in fact, nothing less than a forensic examination of the vote. Secretary of State Katherine Harris



was against manual recounting. As Secretary of State she had overall charge of all elections in Florida. An attack on the system was ultimately an attack on her. She initially certified that Bush had won Florida by 300 votes. As for manual recounting, what was the point of having mechanical voting at all if every time a candidate with sour grapes could demand a manual recount? If it were allowed in one state, it would set a precedent elsewhere. The recounts could take years. By the time one election was finally decided it might be time to hold the next one.

So, Secretary of State Harris could be seen to be acting in the interests of good administration. It was not as if there were only a handful of votes. OK, they were a few hundred out of a total vote of nearly 6 million. But while the gap between Bush and Gore narrowed, it never narrowed by enough for Gore; even his own people admitted that. And then, after all, Katherine Harris was a Republican; she belonged to the same party as George W. Bush. Her colleague in cabinet was his brother.

But not all the votes had been counted. There were still those from Americans overseas. These included military personnel, wealthy businessmen – traditional Republican voters. When they were counted, Bush led Gore by 930 votes. On 26 November – nearly a fortnight after the election – the Secretary of State issued the official result, even though one of the recounts was still going on. This one showed Bush ahead of Gore by 537 votes.

The Bush lead was always small, but even if every vote in every one of the 67 counties had been counted by hand, it was unlikely to have grown smaller.



Although it is clear that Al wants the top job, he cannot explicitly articulate it this way. It must be dressed up as something else. For his power game to work he must begin by appealing to a shared value: in this instance fairness/democracy. It could be stated as: ‘We need to give democracy a fair hearing.’

The strength of *any* power game lies in the salience of its core value. If it is not commonly shared or believed in then the power of the activity is diminished. For example, in the US the right to bear arms is a common value not only in law but also in culture. This could be a value that drives a power game. In Europe it is not – so, clearly, any activities predicated on this value would be doomed. Try fairness/democracy during the 2002 presidential elections in Zimbabwe and see whether it would have held sway as Mugabe tried every method to hold on to power. These core values are culturally and socially specific – what holds in one part of the world will not necessarily hold in another. When we come to play corporate power games you will see that by identifying the dominant values driving an organization you have the ability to start or subvert power games quite easily.

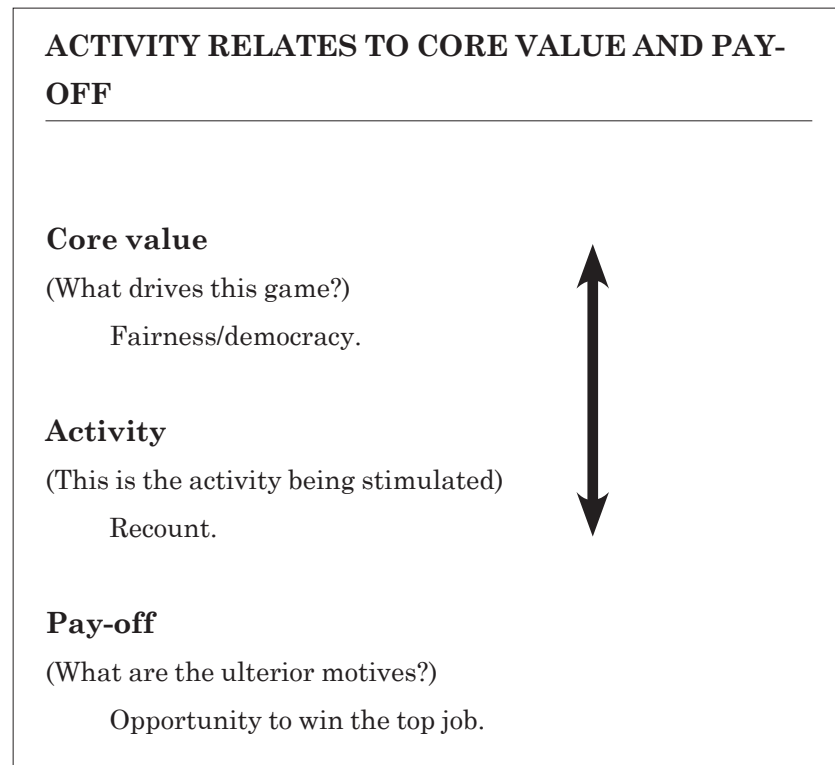
In Al’s case, by appealing to a shared value, he was able to initiate a power game of his own.

*Core value (What drives this game?) = Fairness/  
democracy*

The next thing that Al needs to do is come up with an activity which follows naturally on from the core value but which will

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also deliver his own selfish personal gain – in this instance, the recount. This activity is the clever bit in power plays. It has to be chosen carefully because it has to serve two masters: one, the thesis and, two, the pay-off (see box below).



Again it must be stressed that, while it is clear Al wanted the top job, the stated reason for the recount was to allow democracy to have its day.

The danger for anybody trying to counter or block the activity is that they risk being positioned as going against the core value. This again will be returned to when we advise you on subverting power games played against you. If you block an

activity, you risk being seen as destructive and political – even though you might be the converse of this.

### Power principles

When we look at later scenarios and how to stop games played against us, the key will be to work out whether they are belief-driven games or fear-driven games, that is in the sense that belief usually implies belief *in* something – being drawn towards something – and fear usually implies risk, coercion or loss of privilege.

While the aeroplane game revolved around the thesis of safety and had fear as its driver, Al's game is primarily belief based, i.e. belief in the democratic process. If he were appealing to people who did not believe in the democratic system then his words would be lost (see box below).

#### BELIEF-BASED POWER PRINCIPLE

##### Core value

(What drives this game?)  
Fairness/democracy.

##### Activity

(This is the activity being stimulated)  
Recount.

##### Pay-off

(What are the ulterior motives?)  
Opportunity to win the top job.





**Power principles**

(Which is the dominant principle: belief or fear?)

Belief.

**Roles**

Examination of the roles of the power game is the most difficult and sophisticated part of the overall analysis. This is partly because it is subjective, it is based on your judgement of how progressed you feel the game actually is – i.e. what momentum lies behind it. In short, if you feel that the game is too progressed then, rather than trying to block the game, you merely work out which role you would prefer to have. In corporate terms, this is when you start horse-trading.

When we were conducting the power game methodology with a large pharmaceutical firm, it was acknowledged by the role-playing group that the game (activated by an NGO) was too progressed. The role that was assigned was that of culprit, and the pay-off for the NGO was increased media visibility and recruitment. The group then decided to attempt to reassign their role within the game, i.e. to join forces with the NGO to help *them* gain *their* pay-off, which meant that they had to reassign the role of culprit in order to validate the system. In other words, for this game to work it needs blood on the carpet – just make sure it's not yours.

We can now examine the roles of the protagonists in the Florida campaign of the 2000 US presidential election, as illustrated in the box below.

## THE FLORIDA CAMPAIGN

### Core value

(What drives this game?)  
Fairness/democracy.

### Activity

(This is the activity being stimulated)  
Recount.

### Pay-off

(What are the ulterior motives?)  
Opportunity to win the top job.

### Power principles

(Which is the dominant principle: belief or fear?)  
Belief.

### Roles

(What is the role of each player?)

- Al: guardian of the right of democracy.
- GWB: self-serving politician only interested in getting power at all costs.
- Harris: scheming manipulator, not to be trusted, but who holds a responsible job.
- Jeb: symbol of the nepotism and closed networks that never guarantee democracy a fair hearing.
- People of Dade county: symbol of the fact that every vote counts.



- Media: arbitrators, although clearly biased at times toward either party.

## NOTES

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- 1 Peters, T. and Waterman, R. (1982) *In Search of Excellence*, Harper & Row, New York.
- 2 Pfeiffer, J. (1994) *Managing with Power*, Harvard Business School Press, Boston.
- 3 Crainer, S. (1998) *The Ultimate Book of Business Gurus*, Capstone, Oxford.
- 4 Ibid.



SECTION II

# War Stories

*These are based on true and recent office situations. The names of the people and the companies have been changed or masked for obvious reasons. The industry sector and geographic base have been retained for relevance.*



# Personalities

Nothing can be as difficult to negotiate through as personality clashes at work. They are hard to objectify. They threaten to make you look petty, emotional and defensive. And yet we need to realize that at the heart of many work problems – and political manoeuvrings – there lies the personal agenda. When there is a new kid on the block, their personality fills the air and carries many a floating voter with them. We have a classic story dealing with this. On the other side of the coin is the retrenched bully – one who preys on the new arrivals, the vulnerable, the uncertain: hard to deal with but not impossible.

## NEW KID ON THE BLOCK

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Jerry had been PR director for two years in an international non-profit organization. He was a well-regarded head of a team that acted as an in-house consultancy. While aloof, he was committed. He pursued apolitical behaviour in a highly political working environment. Jerry worked directly into a six-person management committee. The job of the PR team was to build the brand of the organization.

Bill had just joined the organization (six months ago) and his job was to raise funds (donations) for the organization. This

function was seen as key to the success of the future of the organization. Bill was given a carte blanche to recruit a large team and his budget for year 1 was not capped.

The organization had great ambitions for Bill and his team and it was generally acknowledged that its long-term success was tied inextricably to its fundraising capability.

### **The scene**

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It was coming up to Christmas and Bill suggested to Jerry that they have a ‘director-to-director catch-up’ on the year and, at the same time, take the opportunity to socialize a little. Nice idea, Jerry thought, and, over the starters in the Chinese restaurant, Bill outlined some of the ups and downs of his first six months.

Over the main course Bill referenced the quarterly strategy document, which the management committee issued. Being apolitical and outward looking, Jerry never paid much attention to the management committee strategy documents and filed them in the small circular cabinet under his desk!

The particular document Bill referenced was called ‘Project Synergy’ and it called on the organization to work more in harmony – to get better bangs for its bucks. Bill said he found the document very interesting and in fact had initiated a number of discussions with management about how he might reflect such thinking in his growing department.

Coffee arrived as Bill suggested a merged department – between fundraising and PR – perhaps renaming it Corporate Marketing. On the face of it this would help the fundraising as



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PERSONALITIES

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PR could be bound into a fundraising proposition. It would also be a concrete symbol of the ‘project synergy’ campaign and be a lesson for the rest of the organization. Jerry began to realize that this was not just an amiable lunch ‘catch-up’ but in fact a demonstration of Bill’s ambition.

Jerry asked: ‘Out of interest, Bill, who would head up such a merged department?’ Bill responded that while naturally he would head up such a merged entity (with a new title such as Director of Corporate Marketing) there would be a role in it for Jerry – and with increased line management responsibility.

Jerry was further disenchanted to learn that Bill had been in discussion over the previous three months (since the document had come out) with individual members of the management committee and, so far, each felt that it looked like a good idea.

Jerry ended the meal by declaring that such a merger would only take place ‘over my dead body’. Bill was genuinely puzzled and felt that the proposition represented a real step forward for the organization, for Bill and, if Jerry wanted, for Jerry’s career also.

What Bill did not realize is that Jerry really cherished his and his department’s independence.

When Jerry got back to his office he had a number of ‘one-on-ones’ with his team members and each agreed that they thought it was a bad idea. Jerry also told them that if the merger was to go ahead he would resign and each member in turn said that they would also go.

Jerry then went around each member of the management committee and said how disappointed he was that they



had not raised the matter with him directly. They replied that they were happy for Bill to raise it, as it was initially his idea. Furthermore, Jerry threatened each member by saying that if the merger was to go ahead then he and his full team would resign and all of the value they had accrued would be lost to the organization.

The box below analyses the scenario.

### **ANALYSIS OF BILL'S GAME**

#### **Value**

Synergy.

#### **Activity**

Merged departments.

#### **Pay-off**

Grandeur job title for Bill and perhaps less direct responsibility for fundraising.

#### **Power principles**

Belief – in as much as the game seems to have been instituted though a subscription to the need for synergy and integration; fear – in as much as ‘what Bill wants, Bill gets, or else the organization risks (hence fear) loss of fundraising revenue.

#### **Roles**

- Bill – a symbol of the new way of doing things – e.g. happy to work in harmony with other departments.

- Jerry – if he accepts Bill’s proposal then he too could become a symbol of the new way; however, by appearing to want to stay independent and threatening the management committee he looks a divisive and political operator. Jerry’s team are used to bolster Jerry’s constituency and augment his threat to resign.

### Survival plan

- If you react emotionally against the Bills of your working life then you will end up reacting against the activity; this is not the issue and you may end up getting positioned in counter-point to the core value: dangerous territory.
- Threatening to resign may work this time but it will harm your long-term career.
- Getting the department to join your cause is smart but it would be smarter to watch out for the current values and ensure that department/team activity forms a direct link with one of them – this will protect you against the Bill’s of this world.
- Jerry could always consider cutting a deal with Bill but be careful if you hitch your cart to a political careerist – you may not know where this will take you.
- If you do cut a deal, of course make sure that your slice of the joint pie is bigger than all of your original pie. Don’t settle for responsibility without authority or remuneration (as in ‘the age of uptitling’).

## THE BULLY

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Trevor was a credit manager for Powerbreaks, a company offering short breaks in luxury hotels in Europe and North America. Trevor had been with Powerbreaks for years. He had started out in the sales department and then moved to customer credit as a supervisor. It was in this role that he had begun to be feared. He was not a very prepossessing man; middle aged, of medium height and build. He laid great value by punctuality. He was there ahead of everyone else in the morning and always seemed to be the last to leave. He went through every piece of arithmetic carried out by anyone in the department. Lack of accuracy caused a ticking-off. It was the very public nature of these ticking-offs that caused upset. A clerical worker who made a mistake was shouted at in front of his colleagues, described as an idiot and a waste of space. One secretary was told to tidy up her hair and get her act together clothes-wise ‘... because you’re making most of the lads around here feel sick whenever they look at you’. A receptionist was asked sarcastically if she had razor blades in her mouth, because whenever she spoke she opened his head. He was always dissatisfied with his coffee, asking those brave enough to bring it to him whether they had put in more than coffee and water.

After being the object of a torpedo from Trevor, staff members were supposed to act as if nothing had happened. Trevor always did. They had to take their medicine. In time, their transgression might be forgiven or forgotten. If they attempted to defend themselves or sulked, Trevor simply got worse. When anyone earned Trevor’s displeasure, there was nothing they

could do. The abuse, the name calling, was relentless, until they were hounded out of the department or the company altogether. Some people resigned, either immediately or after a sufficient amount of abuse. Others stuck it out. The ‘stayers’ said that they got used to Trevor after a while – ‘his bark is always worse than his bite’. They felt confident that there was no new insult that Trevor could throw at them – they were usually wrong – and that there was a bully in every office.

Trevor had his friends in the office. These would hear no word said against him. *They* could do no wrong. The punctuality and attention to minute detail demanded of other staff members was relaxed with them. It was known that Trevor often went out drinking or playing football with his circle. Whenever a place on a course or at a seminar became available, one of Trevor’s friends was sent. At the end of the week Trevor joined everyone else in going for a drink, but he was soon surrounded by his friends. Sometimes even friends fall out. These ‘defectors’ offered insights into the world of Trevor. Larry had been rewarded for his disagreements with Trevor by being demoted. One day he was a member of the department’s elite, attending powerful strategy meetings; the next he was back on the ‘office floor’, taking down customer credit information and checking creditworthiness. He was reluctant to talk too much about what had happened, as every time Trevor came into the office, his gaze seemed to fall upon him. It was the same at lunchtime. Later, after work, he opened up.

‘That Trevor guy’s a nut, a control freak,’ he explained. ‘He has no friends. OK, lots of buddies, but none of them really know too much about him. They only know what he’s told them

– which isn't much – so they don't know where he lives, whether he has a family ...'

Trevor ran a tight ship. He was proud of this, and he got successive promotions. He was finally made head of the marketing department. The staff in the office were delighted to see him go, but they organized a party where they pretended to be sad to see the back of him. Trevor seemed to be really sad at leaving and said that the happiest times of his life in the company had been spent there. Also, the staff were the most dedicated group of people anyone could hope to work with. At the end of the party there were some who viewed his departure with something approaching regret.

As head of the new department Trevor started off with a smile on his face and a skip in his step. He seemed to fit in very well. Then, just after nine o'clock on the third day there, he went on a tour of his office. He met a number of staff members approaching their desks at two minutes past nine. He stopped them in their tracks, refusing to allow them to even sit down. He then announced that, since his arrival only two days earlier, he had spotted a number of instances of sloppiness, especially about timekeeping: 'These will stop,' he thundered. 'The next person who comes in late, or attempts to leave early, can start looking for another job.' The whole office went silent. Once again the figure of so much fear could be anything but awesome. Often, when somebody presented a report to Trevor, he would be cordially invited into his office. If there happened to be a page missing from the report, Trevor would coldly ask where it was and, if the hapless individual said it was on his desk in the office, Trevor would shout at him: 'Go and get it, you inef-

ficient waste of space.' His No. 2 in the department, Margaret, had many years' experience in marketing in the company. She had secretly hoped to be given the job of department chief, but realized that Trevor had even more experience. She knew all the stories about Trevor's rudeness and boorishness, but when she first met him she felt that some mistake had been made. He was kind, courteous and considerate. He was also genuinely at ease working with her. She often worked late finishing her work, and Trevor seemed appreciative of this, once remarking, 'It's good to see not everyone's a clock-watcher'. The following week she had to leave early because her daughter had had an accident at school. She met Trevor as she was leaving her office:

'Where are you going?' he enquired sternly.

She tried to explain about her daughter and how she had been taken to hospital.

'Nobody leaves work before 5.30. I'm sure your daughter is in good hands without you. You career women must know that your jobs should come first.' This was said in front of the departmental staff. She was so upset that she ran back into her office.

The next day it was difficult for Margaret to go into work and face Trevor. Her daughter had not been badly injured and had been discharged from hospital. When she did go into her office there was a knock on her door. It was Trevor, who wanted to know how her daughter was and if there was anything he could do. He then apologized for speaking harshly to her the previous evening.

'But I hope you can see it from my point of view. There can't be one law for the staff and another for the management.'

It is hard enough to get some of them to come into work.’ For the next couple of weeks Trevor often seemed to have a toothache. He was short-tempered with everyone, including Margaret. She didn’t react to any of this, deciding to ‘put it down to experience’.

A number of people in the division had asked for time off to attend a seminar on the holiday trade. They asked Margaret whether they could take time off, and she agreed. The allocation of time for attending events had always been part of her remit. She never thought about passing it by Trevor.

One afternoon Trevor asked Margaret whether she was going to be working late in the office, as there was something he wanted to speak to her about. It didn’t seem urgent but she sensed it was important enough for him to ask, so she agreed. When she went into his office at 6.30 she sensed that his mood was not good.

‘Close the door’ he said to her without turning round. ‘What the hell is this I hear about Oscar and Karen going off to the Holiday Conference next week?’

Margaret explained how they had approached her and, since it was almost a tradition that someone from the company went along to ‘fly the flag’ (as she put it), she had agreed.

‘Who the hell gave *you* the authority to send staff members to conferences?’ he shouted at her.

Margaret explained how this had been part of her job for the past two years.

‘Well things have changed around here, and the sooner you get that through your stupid little head the better; and if you can’t, well, that’ll be too bad, but you won’t see me crying.’

‘And who the hell gave *you* permission to go around treating your staff like dirt, shouting at them like kids in a playground?’

‘Somebody has to take the lot of you by the scruff of your necks and wring some work out of you.’

The meeting soon degenerated into a shouting match. There was no exchange of ideas. Finally, Margaret left, slamming the door. That night she wrote a letter of resignation to the head of personnel, in which she highlighted the impossibility of working with Trevor, and how he seemed to take pleasure in ridiculing her and everyone else in the department. She was asked to meet Chloe, the head of personnel, the next day. She explained that Trevor had responded to her allegations with a list of his own, stating that Margaret’s work was not up to scratch and that she resented any suggestions at improvement. He also said that since he had become head of the department she had been ‘hell bent’ on frustrating him in trying to improve his department’s efficiency. He also accused her of standing in the way of the development of an effective rapport with his staff. Chloe assured her that if she wanted to make an official complaint about him, her word would be given as much weight as Trevor’s, ‘... but it will be your word against his, and ...’

Margaret learned that Trevor had called in all the section heads of the department and told them of Margaret’s ‘pending’ complaint. He had produced the text of a statement categorically denying all the assertions of bullying made by her. He suggested that they sign it. He didn’t say anything more. There was no threat such as ‘Sign it or else ...’ All the section heads knew that what Margaret had said about Trevor was true. All of them signed Trevor’s rebuttal.

Margaret did not pursue her official complaint against Trevor. Trevor earned further promotion, even making it to the Board of Directors.

The box below analyses Trevor's game.

### ANALYSIS OF TREVOR'S GAME

#### Value

Productivity.

#### Activity

Allowing corporate life to become more important than personal life.

#### Pay-off

Trevor retains high profile with senior management.

#### Power principles

Fear.

#### Roles

- Trevor – taskmaster.
- Margaret/employees – the pawns in Trevor's game; if they change behaviour it is testimony to Trevor's impact.
- Trevor's 'pets' – the carrot to the stick, i.e. examples of what you can achieve if you play ball in Trevor's game.
- \* Trevor's peers – tacit supporters.

### **The survival plan**

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- Bullies are ultimately cowards, so don't back down.
- Trevor's behaviour is unprofessional, so Margaret needs to behave very professionally in order to beat him.
- Trevor's value is productivity, so Margaret needs to demonstrate that professional courtesy can also yield productivity gains.
- Margaret needs to initiate her own game with productivity as the value but with professional courtesy as the activity and belief as the power principle.
- Margaret needs to recruit one or two of Trevor's tacit supporters to her own gambit of professional courtesy.



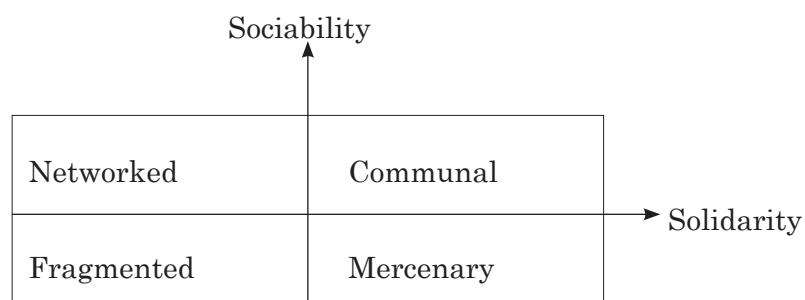
# Culture Clashes

Academics Rob Goffee and Gareth Jones have presented a way for managers to chart where their organizations stand with regard to two main criteria: sociability and solidarity.

Sociability is ‘a measure of friendliness among members of a community. People do kind things for each other because they want to – no strings attached.’

By contrast, ‘solidarity is based not so much on the heart as the mind. These relationships are based on common tasks ... and clearly understood shared goals that benefit all the involved parties, whether they personally like each other or not.’

Using these principles, Goffee and Jones have divided organizations into four main types: networked, communal, fragmented and mercenary.





So, for example, a technology company that aims to build and market an innovation might be a mercenary organization – it will not have much in the way of mutual support networks within the business but will have strong teams driven towards common business goals. The top right-hand quadrant (communal) is where many organizations aspire to be (Hewlett-Packard is an example). The authors warn communal organizations to beware of smugness and complacency.

### **POLITICS WITHIN LARGE ORGANIZATIONS**

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Large organizations are hotbeds of political intrigue. Managers pursuing their own personal agendas are often blamed for undermining management initiatives. But, far from being the block, a leading academic claims that company politics offers the key to change.

Effective change management should recognize the way organizations really work, especially the politics, says Dr David Butcher of Cranfield School of Management (see Des Dearlove, 1999, 'Power games pay off', *The Times*, 11 November). According to Dr Butcher, creating organizational change involves the 'principled use of power and stealth'.

'Senior managers have competing agendas,' says Dr Butcher. 'It was ever thus. Management works that way. If you ask managers about what they do, they say that politics is part of their job. It is a purely notional view that says otherwise. It's time we recognized that fact. But the theory is only now starting to catch up with the reality.'

Once you accept that a company is a political system, Dr Butcher argues, you can begin to make things happen. The political dimension brings new insights. Rather than starting at the top, change is often best coming from the grassroots – through so-called ‘pockets of good practice’ within the organization.

Companies that have experimented with this approach include the timber and builders’ merchant Jewson, Mitsubishi Electric, and BP Marine.

Dr Butcher adds:

*As organizational structures become more loose, the power of individuals increases. The question then becomes how to ensure that what is exercised is principled power. This refers specifically to differentiating between good and bad politics.*

*Politics is all about competing interests and competing value systems. We don’t like politicians when they seem to be in it for themselves. The same applies in business. When people think of politics in their company, they usually mean bad politics.*

Principled politics, or good politics, is about balancing personal motives and organizational motives. But, according to Dr Butcher, it involves the same processes and skills. In particular, it involves activities such as lobbying decision-makers behind closed doors; the use of stealth and influence; and being parsimonious with the truth. He says, ‘I know people who will deliberately travel on a long haul flight simply to sit next to



someone they want to influence. They know that six hours of drinking wine with someone can be a very effective way of lobbying. You can say it's Machiavellian, but it really depends on the outcome. What is certain is that you won't find it in the job description.'

The worse scenario, Dr Butcher says, is when a senior manager goes to a meeting only to discover that the decisions have already been made in private discussions. In effect, the lobbyists have already won the day, and all that remains is rubber-stamping the decision.

According to Dr Butcher, it is unrealistic to expect total decision-making transparency in a modern company. The question for managers is whether the political ends justify the means. The real issue is that whether someone has the organization's best interests at heart or is simply building his or her personal empire, but it is almost impossible to tell until it happens.

'It is about the ends justifying the means,' he says. 'It goes right back to basics. Why are people in management? If it is a self-serving activity, then that has important implications, especially with increasing social responsibilities. We are asking some fundamental questions about the role and purpose of business. In whose name were some of the decisions taken?'

The response of managers suggests he may be on to something. A recent open day at Cranfield to discuss the ideas drew more than 200 applications for 100 places. The framework being used at Cranfield focuses on pockets of 'good practice'. This suggests that change should be driven by people at the bottom of the organization, with the unofficial support of senior



management. In other words, change isn't aligned with a recognizable or senior management sanctioned initiative. It calls for internal activists to challenge the status quo using whatever political tools they have at their disposal. These pockets could represent the equivalent of 'covert operations'.

'Pockets of good practice' represents a move towards what has been called an 'adhocracy'. Coined by leadership expert Warren Bennis in the 1960s, and popularized by futurist Alvin Toffler and the strategy guru Henry Mintzberg, adhocracy is the opposite of bureaucracy. It is an organization that disregards the classical principles of management, where everyone has a defined role, in favour of a more fluid organization where individuals are free to deploy their talents as required.

In an adhocracy the concept of what is a worthwhile activity is crucial. Once managers see that unofficial activity is useful, they will start to ring-fence and support these pockets. But to be effective, pockets of good practice often have to be kept covert at first. Their creators have to act subversively. In the British political world, it's akin to unofficial government support for a private member's bill.

If their motivation is in the long-term interests of organization then this is justified. 'We're talking about a political model of change', Dr Butcher says. 'It involves making a sharp distinction between those who are doing worthwhile activities. Management should encourage these useful, but possibly subversive, groups. Official approval too early can be the kiss of death.'

What Dr Butcher is advocating is a framework that is inherently messy. He acknowledges that it is guaranteed to





offend some people's sense of corporate neatness. In its most extreme form, the pocket of new practice could transform the whole business.

Under this model, senior managers should be more 'hands-off', and flexible. Part of their role is to nurture new ideas unofficially. This creates the opportunity for change to build from grassroots activists close to customers and flow up through the organization – what has been called 'micro-strategy'.

Successful companies such as Virgin and Asea Brown Boveri (ABB) are living examples of this style. Both have highly devolved decision-making processes centred on the individual companies within the group, which are given licence to create change. The role of senior management in the corporate centre is to set the culture, and articulate aims and a brand identity for the group.



## **JUMPING THROUGH HOOPS**

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This scenario is set in a fragmented – low sociability/low solidarity – organization.

Valerie was a systems analyst. She had spent over six years in college. Two years after leaving college her father died following a heart attack. She was an only child and her mother was going to be on her own. Valerie decided to move back to her provincial hometown. She took a job with the local government authority. Nobody introduced her to the other members of staff and for most of her first morning she was searching for a place to work and somebody to tell her what to do. She was nervous



and found it very hard to engage any of her co-workers in eye contact, let alone conversation.

At about eleven o'clock she went into the smoking room for a cigarette. The place was almost full and there was a hum of conversation. She finally found a free spot and, as she was sitting down, she remarked to the lady beside her, 'I know it's a filthy habit, but I just can't give them up.' She noticed the volume of the conversation fell from a hum to virtual silence. The woman she had addressed did not answer her. Valerie felt very uncomfortable. Nobody was looking at her directly, but she felt she was the object of everyone's attention.

When it came to lunchtime, she simply followed everyone else in the office to the restaurant in the building's basement. She was curious why they all went to a row of lockers first. She couldn't see any cutlery or plates, and so she asked one of the catering people where they were. 'Have you not got your own?' was the curt reply. She explained that she hadn't (it was her first day) and was supplied with the necessary eating equipment. She was told: 'Bring your own stuff tomorrow. Everyone else does.'

Having found somewhere to sit, she was joined by a middle-aged man, who asked whether he could join her.

'I'd love the company. No one else is speaking to me. I don't know why ...'

'I heard about your experience in the smoking room earlier. Didn't you know you had taken a regular's place?' He laughed. He then responded to Valerie's obvious embarrassment by saying, 'Don't worry. They're a funny lot here. They hardly spoke

to me for the first two years until I became a Grade VI. Now they mutter at me.'

Mention of grades made Valerie think of Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*. The man then introduced himself as John, and added that he had often played football with her father in his youth.

Next day Valerie again braved the smoking room, but stayed standing beside the door.

On Friday evening she was asked by one of the women in her office: 'Are you not coming to the pub?' Valerie took this as an invitation. Once there, they began to take an interest in her, but Valerie found this unnerving. She had always been a real 'people person' who got on well with everyone, but she felt she was being interrogated. They began asking her where she was from, her age, whether she was married, had a boyfriend, etc. She found the questions intrusive; the information sought really irrelevant. She soon made up an excuse to leave.

When she related the 'interrogation' to John the following Monday she felt a little embarrassed.

'I'm sure it was just me; they were probably just trying to be friendly ...'

'Friendly? They wouldn't know how. It was just inquisitiveness. They are probably jealous. You're cleverer than they are; that's a bad start.'

'I'm not cleverer. So, I have a degree and diplomas, but that doesn't make me cleverer.'

'You know that, but that's not how they see it.'

Back in the office it was almost comical the way that the place emptied at five o'clock each day. Nobody ever invited

Valerie for a drink again. She came to value the time when the office was empty, to do some extra work and earn some overtime money.

Occasionally the office hum would be replaced by a very audible whisper: 'Shh, the boss's coming.' A large, overweight, sweaty man with a red face, greying hair and a greasy suit would then walk through the office without speaking a word.

Although Valerie was earning good money, and liked being with her mother, she found that she was not in good health. Sore throats and blinding headaches were a common occurrence. She went to her doctor who said, 'Look, I can prescribe all the pills in the world for you, Valerie, but what you're suffering from is stress, and what you need is some time off.' She took his advice and found that her request for leave did not cause any anxiety among her superiors. In fact, they asked her how much free time she wanted.

Not a telephone call or a 'get well' card from anyone in the office. When she returned, three weeks later, she couldn't even find her desk. She later found it pushed into a corner. Her computer had been disconnected and sent back to the technical services department. Not a word of apology. She knew why they had done it; they thought she wasn't coming back.

The job had not been good for her health, but somehow this incident with her computer gave her a new purpose. She realized, first, that her co-workers really disliked her and, second, that it wasn't her fault. She knew a couple of other things as well: she was getting well paid, and would be paid even better in the future. She needed a job in the same way as her mother needed her. She also knew something else, though her modesty

had stood in the way of her recognizing it – she was damn good at her job. So she gritted her teeth and decided to stick it out. After all, the insults directed at her were from small minds.

Five years on and Valerie is still working for the same local government department. She has now achieved Grade VI on the promotions ladder. She doesn't really know what it means except that she earns more and gets more free time. As for her relationship with other staff members, she knows that she is respected rather than liked. As for her, she has learnt to tolerate the others. 'You can't have it all ways,' she tells herself.

An analysis of Valerie's game is given in the box below.

#### **ANALYSIS OF VALERIE'S GAME**

##### **Value**

Self-reliance.

##### **Activity**

Not provide the hostile department with any materials/ instances to use against her.

##### **Pay-off**

The space to continue her career as she desires.

##### **Power principles**

Fear – as long as she maintains her distance she is able to ensure the department does not come out against her.

### Roles

- Valerie – a clever, apolitical, high-achiever.

### The survival plan

- In such fragmented status-conscious arenas it is important to trade on your technical competence.
- In this type of environment you will need to get your ‘love and attention’ in places other than the workplace.
- Look to derive your work satisfaction from the thought of ‘a job well done’, regardless of whether the organization has the equivalent high standards.

### NEW TRICKS AND AN OLD DOG

Here, a mercenary organization clashes with a networked organization.

Bill Chatterton was the managing director of WhiteRose Mutual, a small Yorkshire-based mortgage-lending agency. He was a Yorkshireman through and through. He was a cricket zealot. He had been born near Halifax and had worked all his life there. His motto in life, taught to him by his father, was ‘Do as thou wouldst be done by’. He joined WhiteRose in 1950 and by dint of hard work and honest dealings he rose to the top job.

In the late 1980s a property boom swelled up in the south-east of the United Kingdom. Some properties that were hardly proper were going up in value by as much as £1,000 per week. Bill was not overly concerned. While there was a ‘bit of a boom’

in the Yorkshire property market, Bill had seen many a boom and many a bust before. WhiteRose had always adopted a conservative – Bill preferred to call it sensible – approach to handing out mortgages. Applicants had to be in steady jobs, usually for at least five years. They had to be able to put up at least 16 per cent of the mortgage themselves, and so they had to have at least a good savings record. He knew that most people had a desire to own their own home. WhiteRose had helped generations to achieve this. For him it was more than an advertising pitch to tell how the company had given mortgages to couples, their children's families and their grandchildren as well. He was proud of the fact that WhiteRose had one of the lowest repossession rates of any mortgage institution in England or Wales. They rarely had any repossessions at all.

They were approached by a much larger lending institution from the south-east, called Essex and Sussex (E&S), with the view to a takeover. WhiteRose was in a healthy financial state but the E&S group's offer was attractive and generous. They had taken over a lot of other smaller lenders, but they had always been anxious to say they were not 'swallowing up' the smaller fishes. So the WhiteRose name, branch network and senior staff would be left intact, for the moment. Bill supported the takeover.

However, Bill didn't like the people from E&S. To his way of thinking they were a pack of southern yuppies in sharp suits who thought they knew it all. He made his views about their lending policies very plain. At a meeting he stated, 'Giving mortgages of tens of thousands of pounds to people in their mid twenties with no savings track record and without sound

employment prospects is throwing good money after bad.’ He added, ‘Many of these people are dreamers. Well, up here, we’ve always preferred lending money to people who know a bit about hard graft, and that way, we’ve always got it back.’ While many in the E&S group nodded in approval, he thought he sensed a snigger from others. He knew they saw him as a dinosaur. He also knew some of them called him ‘the Yorkshire Pud’, but he didn’t care.

Bill maintained a tight rein on WhiteRose’s cash in the first year after the takeover. He didn’t veer away from its lending policies. As a result, WhiteRose mortgages, in terms of volume, did not go up that much, in spite of the housing boom. Neither did their repossessions increase. WhiteRose came under pressure from E&S to ‘get in there’. However, its own repossession figures were skyrocketing. Bill expected to be eased out of his post, to be offered a golden handshake and be replaced by one of the detested southern yuppies. He even thought of what he was going to say in his retirement speech. But then the economy slipped into recession. The property bubble in the south burst; property prices started to tumble; demands for mortgages dried up, and the property boom didn’t so much run out of steam as evaporate into thin air.

The E&S group’s repossessions went into outer space. Many mortgage holders found themselves in a ‘negative equity’ situation. Worse, as the recession started to bite, some found themselves out of a job. E&S soon found itself in a perilous financial position. Shareholders demanded blood, and so there was a purge of its senior management. When it came to filling the CEO’s position it was obvious that they needed

someone who knew the mortgage business well, had lots of experience, and who also took a realistic attitude to lending. The rough patch had not really had any effect on WhiteRose, and so its managing director was approached to take over a new, revamped E&S. Bill was as proud as punch, especially to see the backs of the 'southern yuppies'.

The box below gives an analysis of the scenario.

### ANALYSIS OF THE E&S GROUP'S GAME

#### Value

Growth.

#### Activity

Market consolidation.

#### Pay-off

Market dominance for E&S.

#### Power principles

Belief in the fact that it takes critical mass to maintain profitable growth.

#### Roles

- Bill – a symbol of the old way of doing things.
- E&S – a symbol of the new dynamic approach to the market.

### **The survival plan**

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- Bill survived by having a game plan of his own, his value being consumer needs. His activity was maintaining a long-term perspective in sales strategy, with 'belief' in consumer focus being the driver.
- Bill was playing a dangerous game taking on the 'southern yuppies' but was able to leverage his experience.
- Bill's ability to survive allowed the market to turn (i.e. the housing boom), making his cautious approach seem like the desired approach.



# Careers and Promotions

Ask a mountaineer why he climbs mountains, and the answer may be ‘because they’re there’. Life for anyone ‘at the bottom’ of any career is always tough. If it were not, why would anyone want to advance?

The bigger the organization, the bigger and more deliberate the distance between the bottom and the top. Those on the lower scales feel powerless and vulnerable; they are playthings. They want security, and that can only be provided by ‘moving on up’. The further up the ladder the individual goes, the more power he gets, not only over himself, but also over others.

In a rigidly hierarchical organization, such as was common in the Japanese business world, patience was needed. Seniority was the key to advancement. But where promotion is based on intangibles, such as merit, too much patience and lack of movement can convince observers that you are a corpse.

Following a career should be like climbing a mountain, but it often seems more like playing ‘Snakes and Ladders’. There are also slippery, greasy poles and glass ceilings and all manner of obstacles. But it is important to remember something about mountains: there is never a lot of space at the top of them.

## SUPERHIGHWAY TO THE TOP

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Hal Micheson joined NQA, a medium-sized office supplies firm, in 1995 as a lowly office junior. He was the guy who had to collect the post, deliver the memos and generally do the jobs that no one else would do if they could avoid them. Hal was only 25 but he was worried. Everyone seemed to have a PC on their desk, and this new craze of the Internet and electronic mail meant that executives could send their own mail, anywhere in the company or in the world. No need for office juniors it seemed. Hal wondered if this was the writing on the wall for him.

One evening he met his friend Bob, an electrician, for a few beers.

‘I’m history,’ he lamented. ‘I’ll soon be replaced by a machine.’

‘The solution’s simple,’ answered Bob. ‘Don’t stay an office junior. You say a machine will replace you; well there are no robots around yet. These machines have to be operated by people, so why shouldn’t one of them be you?’

‘But I’m no propeller head. I know nothing about technology or computers.’

‘Computers? Nothing to them. They are just big boxes, really, with lots of wires. And the wires are all safe, not like in my job ...’

Hal thought about this, and it made sense. His sister’s boyfriend, John, was a computer programmer in a bank. He never struck anyone as being a rocket scientist. He always struck Hal as a bit of a geek.

NQA didn't want to be left in a technological Ice Age; so they invested in a new computer network. It really was the works. It took the team from the computer networking firm two months to set it all up. Hal busied himself in this time by keeping his eyes and ears open, watching the network installation team's every move. He also hung around with them at coffee breaks. By the end of the installation period Hal had picked up all the jargon and was talking the talk. He started to buy computing magazines.

One day an elegant woman came into the office to load the software systems on the new network. Hal introduced himself, not as an office junior, but as a member of the company's IT staff. Once she realized that Hal wasn't hitting on her she answered all his questions patiently. He learnt the basics of operating systems, spreadsheets and communications software. She even loaned him books. Whenever he had a question he called her.

The company's executives all went on some fairly intensive courses to learn about the new machines. Mostly it went in one ear and out the other. Whenever and wherever a problem occurred Hal always seemed to pop up with the solution. In the office where he was a junior, the modems weren't working. Hal found that some of them weren't fitted into the proper sockets, and anyway, the settings on the machines were incorrect. One afternoon a cloud of gloom descended when a computer file containing an important document 'disappeared'. Hal 'just happened' to be passing by the office in question, and he found the file within a few minutes. Hal soon established himself as a technical 'Mr Fix It'. This suited the company



very well. Instead of having to call up the helpline each time a problem occurred, they had their own IT whizz-kid on site. He also ‘spoke their language’ and had an easygoing personality. After a few months Hal was no longer just an office junior. He started assisting staff members with certain software applications. This saved the company time and money, as they didn’t have to send their people on expensive courses. He also started to earn more.

Everybody in the company needed his help at some stage – from the managing director downwards. So everyone recognized Hal.

As the computer world changed, sometimes in the space of months, Hal asked to be sent on courses – at the firm’s expense. He was always able to demonstrate that knowledge of such-and-such a product or application upgrade would have practical benefits for the company. This way he was never left behind. At seminars and courses he met people from other IT departments. At first he was a little nervous. He had bags of confidence but he was afraid of being ‘found out’. He soon realized that many of the people in other companies had learnt about the machines ‘on the job’. He was soon able to describe himself in a better light. He became an IT Support Officer, with his own office – well, cubicle really at first. Whenever the firm’s board thought about upgrading either software or hardware he was consulted. Because he knew the jargon – the technical stuff – he was also invited to meet computer salespeople when they visited; he was able to debunk a bad deal.

In 1997 he played a major part in the design of the company’s website. A lot of people thought it was a gimmick at

first. Hal made the argument for Internet presence and how this could help company profits. His advice was always sought whenever it was modified. The company now earns a considerable part of its turnover through e-commerce. Customers can order online and track the progress of their order by computer. The growth of the Internet into the home meant that NQA gained a whole new market. Profits have been healthy as a result.

Seven years on from joining the company and Hal is the IT Director. He is also a recognized expert on e-commerce solutions. Other companies seek his advice, and he frequently gives seminars. He once met an old schoolmate who asked him, 'How come you've been so successful?'

'I'm just a lucky guy I guess ...'

See the box below for an analysis of Hal's game.

#### **ANALYSIS OF HAL'S GAME**

##### **Value**

Embracing new ways.

##### **Activity**

Get IT/Internet taken more seriously as a core business process.

##### **Pay-off**

Hal gets associated with this core business process.

### **Power principles**

Belief in the need to adopt new processes to stay competitive.

### **Roles**

- Hal – the change maker/enabler
- ‘The elegant woman’ – the white knight rescuing Hal from his office-junior position

### **The survival plan**

- Hal cleverly noted an area in which not only he, but also a lot of senior management, lacked confidence and knowledge.
- As in the earlier case with Bill, the market went his way (i.e. technology became a core business process). He had ‘backed the right horse’.
- Hal was successful in becoming associated with solutions, so he became synonymous with a can-do attitude.

### **A KICK UPSTAIRS**

Securitransit Ltd is a security company providing transit for large amounts of cash. They work for banks, building societies, insurance companies and, occasionally, private individuals. It goes without saying that this is a risky business. Electronic transfer of funds is a big enough draw for thieves, so the thought of all of that nice crisp cash travelling along the highway is often too much of a temptation to resist. Sure, there are highly dedicated guys there to stand in between the money and the robbers: but it’s money, and they are only human beings.



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## CAREERS AND PROMOTIONS

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Securitransit has always looked after its workers well, paying them slightly above the industry average. It also provides employees with a wide package of benefits, including hefty medical insurance and life assurance cover. Its workforce is also unionized. The bosses have never had any trouble with the unions. There has always been a spirit of partnership throughout the firm. Everyone realizes that they need one another. The employers have to have dedicated, committed workers whom they can trust with other people's money; the employees see the bosses as a necessary and generous supplier of employment and benefits. The trust is reciprocated.

Reggie Browne was a driver with the firm for a number of years. He was popular with everyone. He knew everyone and it seemed everyone knew him. He always had a joke or funny story to relieve the stress that was something of an occupational hazard. He knew, as all his colleagues did, that they were doing a dangerous job, but in a way the danger added an element of spice to his life. He wasn't reckless, but he had found that his job helped him to attract the girls.

He had worked as a security guard before joining Securitransit. He hated the long, lonely hours. He often felt like a sitting duck; he alone stood between millions of dollars of equipment and whoever wanted to take it. It was different with Securitransit. The pay was better for a start; there was none of the loneliness and the tedium. You did a 'run', and that was it – off the job. If something went wrong – which it rarely did – there was back-up and protection. If something went really wrong, and he got hit, he would be looked after. A plain security guard never had such safety nets.



Reggie took a very active part in union affairs. He was no loudmouth doctrinaire. He shared the feeling of partnership in the firm. He felt that the union represented a channel of communications with the management and not only did the management value this, but it also gave the workers that extra feeling of strength.

The union's representative in the company was standing down after a few terms in the position. Reggie was persuaded to let his name go forward and was chosen unanimously. He didn't really want the hassle or the kudos of the position, but he did feel that he could help people out. He got on very well with the union officials and with the management, who were always very pleased to see him. He was anxious to improve overall worker safety and security. He was conscious that the workforce's mental health wasn't addressed until something went wrong. He wanted longer rest periods between runs. He also wanted better rest rooms with more recreational facilities. He sensed that his predecessor had not always devoted himself to these areas.

The management felt some of the proposals would eat into the firm's profits. It was not that management begrudged any of these initiatives: if the company's bottom line got threatened, everyone would be a loser. The management was in a quandary. A new management trainee, just out of business school, advocated sacking Reggie. This was a non-starter for a host of reasons. He was the union rep. The company's other staff would go on strike or resign, and they couldn't be replaced by people off the street. The firm would become a pariah in the industry. Most people in management genuinely liked Reggie. They had nothing against his proposals; they would just cost



too much. Then the No. 2 in the company suggested, 'Instead of kicking him out, why not kick him upstairs? We get on well with him. Give him the promotion of a lifetime.'

Everyone agreed that this would make a lot of sense. But would Reggie buy it? Would he not see through what was, deep down, a ruse?

Fred Smith, who had been 'on the vans' before joining management, was given the job of sounding out Reggie. He called him in for 'a chat' one day. He began by extolling Reggie's work, and saying how highly everyone thought of him. Reggie thought he was going to get the sack. When Fred mentioned the promotion, he was initially startled. Then he asked him, 'Is this because of my proposals for longer rest periods?'

Fred's uncomfortable shuffling answered the question, but he added, 'But, Reggie, would it make that much difference if it was?'

Reggie assured Fred that he would think about the offer.

Part of him felt betrayed and outraged. He was being bought out. If he accepted, he would have to give up the position as union rep, quit the union even. He would be selling himself out and selling out the trust that others had placed in him. He would be joining the bosses. But he knew the management well. They were not a pack of sharks. Perhaps they were not spinning a deceitful spider's web with their praises. Perhaps he could help people just as much in the new job. He broached the subject to a couple of his workmates. Once, while out on a 'run' together, he asked his co-driver's advice. His response startled Reggie.

'Go for it, man. Think of the extra pay, the perks – you might even have your own secretary ...'



‘But I’d miss being on the road.’

‘You’d get used to it. And anyway, you’ll always be one of us.’

Finally, after a couple more meetings with Fred, he opted for the promotion.

A couple of years on and he is now a senior manager in the company. He’s still on first-name terms with everyone, and every fortnight he goes for a couple of drinks with the ‘delivery boys’. And, in addition, they’ve got longer rest periods and better rest rooms.

The box below gives an analysis of the scenario from the management’s point of view.

#### **ANALYSIS OF THE MANAGEMENT’S GAME**

##### **Value**

Rewarding service.

##### **Activity**

Promote Reg ‘in recognition of his service’.

##### **Pay-off**

Remove him from union activity.

##### **Power principles**

Belief in the ideal that good service should be rewarded.

##### **Roles**

- Reg the union activist or Reg the whiz-kid – the ‘choice’ was his.

### **The survival plan**

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- Reg needs to realize that the ‘promotion’ has an ulterior motive.
- Once he does this he can balance out what he would achieve in terms of his ideals within management versus what he can achieve in his existing position.
- Reg’s strength is based on the fact that he is not seen as self-serving but as being motivated by independent values, and this builds trust for the future.

### **JUMPING SHIP**

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Ken Browne had joined the public sector just after graduating from college. He had passed the examination and done well in the interviews. At the time he joined there were not too many openings for Arts graduates without a teaching diploma or friends in high places. The public sector seemed a good alternative to washing dishes part-time or selling ice cream and popcorn in cinemas. Ken had always been a words-and-ideas man, never much good with figures. He was really surprised, and a little terrified, to be assigned to a government department with an annual budget of billions. He barely knew how to work a calculator. He certainly did not know one end of a balance sheet from another. However, everyone was in the same boat. Ken found the work challenging and never stressful.

Over the years Ken gained promotion. He also won the trust of senior civil servants. His advice was frequently sought. There was a fairly laid-back culture in the beginning, but eve-



ryone did their job to the best of their abilities. But after a while new buzzwords, such as ‘result-based strategies’, started to be used. Employees were offered incentives to take courses and attend seminars and Ken was always eager to learn, so the incentives were a nice bonus.

After only eight years he was relocated to the central office of the department. He was frequently asked to draft consultation documents for government ministers, as well as write answers for them. His relationship with politicians was excellent. He developed the habit of being able to give ministers straight, no-nonsense answers to questions. Ken believed that he was on a career fast track.

New strategies to help curb the amount of spending by the ministry were sought. Ken was one of those put in charge of bringing these proposals to the minister who headed the department. Not for the first time he was charged with implementing some of his own schemes, in the process saving tens of millions of pounds.

One day he was informed of a meeting of the top brass in the department. A new chief secretary had been brought in, so Ken thought it was just a ‘getting to know you’ exercise. The new secretary introduced himself and then continued thus: ‘This department has been spending far too much money over the years, and nobody seems to want to stop the trend ...’ Ken thought of his own contribution, and that of many others, in belt-tightening, but this was neither the time nor the place to object. The new chief secretary explained his determination to ‘sort this mess out once and for all’.

He announced plans to take responsibility for much of the broad policy guidelines away from the department. These would be granted to an external 'parallel agency'. The agency would also be a watchdog, capable of spotting overspends anywhere in the department. Ken and many others were not over the moon about this. 'A bunch of inexperienced number-crunchers are going to be looking over our shoulders all the time,' he commented.

Some weeks later Ken learned that he was being moved out of departmental head office to become chief of the department's office in a dreary provincial town. Technically it was a promotion, but Ken didn't see it like that. Every little expense had to be cleared with the agency, so Ken didn't feel he was in control of anything. The department had always been responsible for a huge budget and Ken felt that he, and others, had been able to trim a lot of the waste. They were still fulfilling a vital public role. They earned respect for this, and Ken felt able to share in this respect. However, the agency was breathing down his neck to make even more drastic cuts. He explained his misgivings to an executive from the agency during one of their far-too-frequent visits.

'If these cuts are introduced, it's hard to see a reason for our continued existence as a department.'

'Who told you that you had a job for life?' was the reply. Among the cuts Ken was told to make was the winding down of schemes and projects. Ken knew this was illegal. He anticipated trouble in the form of a lawsuit against his department. When it came, the agency head told him that he had better keep his fingers crossed for a good outcome, otherwise the

department could be faced with a 'seven- or eight-figure bill'. He would not suffer any problems personally, but he could be 'rewarded' by appointment to some punishment post. The fact that he had not been responsible for the illegality in the first place was irrelevant. He felt that he had been set up as a 'fall guy'. He was a pawn in somebody else's chess game.

Ken found work increasingly difficult. He was only 42, so retirement was out of the question. Then he heard informally that a new government-funded project was being set up to improve technology take-up and knowledge in schools. There were problems attracting suitably qualified people. Most graduates were opting for the better pay of the private sector. So an internal recruitment drive was launched to lure people already in public service. A very attractive retraining package was on offer. Ken persuaded himself to telephone the project's head. He thought his name was familiar, and he was delighted to find that they had been at college together, and had joined the government service at the same time. He said that Ken, with his experience, was just the type of person they needed. Retraining would occur 'on the job'. There would be no salary decrease and he would not lose any precious pension entitlements by transferring. So Ken bade goodbye to his old department, and the intrusive parallel agency.

Five years after leaving and Ken is deputy chief executive of the technology project. The parallel agency, meanwhile, was disbanded because of 'inefficiency' – they were spending too much money.

Ken's game is analysed in the box below.

## ANALYSIS OF KEN'S GAME

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### **Value**

Continuity.

### **Activity**

Maintain as much ongoing operations as possible, despite the new secretary.

### **Pay-off**

Time to look for a new job.

### **Power principles**

Belief.

### **Roles**

- Ken – representative of the old way but useful during the transition period.

## **The survival plan**

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- Sometimes during times of major upheaval it is best to see the writing on the wall.
- In such circumstances your job is to manage the decline of your post efficiently.
- It is important to maintain confidence in your competency as well as buy yourself enough time to look for an alternative position.

THE GAMES COMPANIES PLAY

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- Remember Ken was not trying to win the battle with the new secretary; he was merely delaying losing it.



## CHAPTER 6

# The Politics of Space

When we think of geopolitics (i.e. the politics of space), even in a smallish enterprise, we think of territory, maps and spheres of influence. This two-dimensional approach is short-sighted. Geopolitics is at least three-dimensional. What really matters is not the ground but the space above it. The desire for space, for the bigger office, on a higher floor, may come from the need to acquire. It may also stem from deeper emotions and insecurities, such as a need for privacy or a dislike of proximity, a distrust of uncoordinated interaction. There can also be a lack of personal self-worth, best compensated by the background scenery of success. So much geopolitical rivalry and uncertainty in the office is a result of ‘thinking personally, acting globally’.

An early proponent of ‘open-plan’ office styles based his enthusiasm on his belief that offices gave executives places to hide. But the reality is that no matter how much office inhabitants may like to stay there, they do have to leave occasionally. This can be a fearful prospect. It means entering a foreign field of battle. Geopolitics affects more than individual offices, but the desire for security stays the same. You often only feel secure in an area you control.



## CREDIT WHERE IT IS DUE

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Guy Priest was hired to work in the publicity department of a government agency. He had been a freelance editor and copywriter for a while, but his biological clock was ticking. He was thinking of getting married to his long-time girlfriend Lisa. He wanted to set up home and start a family. As a freelancer his income was just never steady enough to attract a mortgage lender. Lisa was an artist, so she wasn't exactly in steady employment, although her work was very popular and commanded respectable prices – she even got commissions. But the spirit of freedom was just too irresistible.

The job in the government agency came as a godsend. The money was not great but it was steady. Promotion was bound to come his way if he was patient: 'It's a government agency, not a meritocracy. There is no hassle. You'll get promotion and pay rises based on time served, not on results.' He was also told that he would have a job for life, and a nice pension too.

At first the work was interesting and at times challenging. He enjoyed the 9-to-5 existence. He was able to switch off once he left the office, while weekends were a blank page. As a freelancer he had stopped when the work was done. If it meant working Saturdays and Sundays, so be it. The work had been fun, but getting paid for it had often been a struggle. Now, he got his wages every Thursday evening.

He was full of enthusiasm. But he noticed that everyone else in the organization worked at a slightly slower pace. They just seemed to drift into the office in the morning. The same thing happened after lunch, only fewer seemed to come back.

Whenever he was looking for something it always seemed a lottery whether he would find the right person. There always seemed to be a lot of illness if not a chronic flu epidemic.

Guy had his own office, which was nice, as he felt he deserved it. It was rather pokey though, and he had to share it with what seemed to be rubbish from other departments. Everyone seemed to have offices with closed doors. It wasn't the same as when he had worked in the PR industry, where there had been a lot of open-plan arrangements – the few office doors had always been permanently ajar. Guy never closed his door, but nobody came in to see him. The chief of the publicity department, Mr Sweet, worked in a building on the other side of town. He used to drop in occasionally. He always seemed tired and older than he was. He always had lots of complaints.

Guy had been working on a publicity campaign for a government facility. He had some great ideas for copy and spoke to the publicity chief on the phone. He seemed quite enthusiastic, so Guy volunteered to send them in to his colleagues in the media. Mr Sweet said, 'You'll have to pass them by the State Commissioner first.'

Guy agreed that he would drop them into her. He knew the State Commissioner quite well and, anyway, her office was in the same building.

'No, you can't,' Sweet answered.

Guy stuttered, '... but it's no trouble.'

'You have to send it to me first, and I will send it to the State Commissioner. She will then give her response to me, and I'll get back to you.'

‘But that could take days and, anyway, I thought you agreed with my proposals.’

‘I do, Guy, but that’s the way things are done around here.’

Guy felt deflated. He had heard all the jokes about a camel being a horse designed by a committee, but he thought they were an exaggeration. However, he grabbed his proposals, stuffed them in a file and took the elevator to the floor where the State Commissioner’s office was. He tapped on her secretary’s door and asked her to pass them on. At this the Commissioner came out of her office, saw the papers and asked Guy, ‘Are these for me?’ He said they were proposals for a publicity campaign and that he’d like her feedback. She invited him into her office for a chat about them, and when he left he had her full support.

The following morning Guy’s telephone rang. It was Sweet.

‘I’ve heard you went to see the Commissioner yesterday.’ Guy tried to explain but was talked over.

‘I thought I told you to send *me* the proposals first.’

‘I wanted to save time –’

‘In future, if you have any bright ideas, I want to see them first. Is that understood?’ Sweet then put the phone down.

Guy muttered an unrepeatable epithet comparing the publicity chief to a human waste-disposal exit.

That lunchtime he met some of his co-workers in a bar. When he told them his story they merely guffawed loudly. They were a most insensitive group of cretins, Guy thought, and foul-mouthed as well. But they did have an unrivalled

store of knowledge on football and horseracing. Guy looked at his watch and jumped up in astonishment.

‘We’ll have to go or we’ll be late back for work.’

‘Why hurry? It’s only ten past two. Will you not stay for another?’ Guy declined.

For the rest of the afternoon Guy did absolutely nothing, except look at the clock in his office. ‘What a life!’ he exclaimed.

A fortnight later he picked up the local newspaper. There was a headline: ‘State announces new facility promotion’. This was his idea, with lots of his copy, but his name was absent. Then there was a photograph of a reception to launch it and who was there, wine glass in hand, but the chief.

This scenario is analysed, from the chief’s point of view, in the box below.

### ANALYSIS OF THE CHIEF’S GAME

#### Value

Protocol (you have to respect the way things are done).

#### Activity

To maintain the hierarchies and unequal information relay.

#### Pay-off

Chief able to maintain credit for all success.

### **Power principles**

Belief (i.e. in the system) and fear (of censure) if one bypasses the system.

### **Roles**

- The chief – guardian of protocol.

### **The survival plan**

- The boss taking credit for your work is an age-old gripe.
- While you have to respect the system, you can seek ways of maintaining a paper trail for your bright ideas.
- You have to seek ways in which you can leverage your work but ‘within’ the system.
- Consider, for example, a bright idea to make the protocols work even more efficiently, e.g. look to play them at their own game and inoculate yourself against being accused of ‘anti-system’ thinking.
- This is also a situation where you might seek to make your chief look even better and then bask in the reflected glory.

### **A ROOM WITH A VIEW**

Simon Johnson had been the sales manager for a leading commercial insurance company for eight years. He was based in a pleasant town on England’s south coast. He had refused promotion on many occasions, as this would mean a move to the Big Smoke. More pay, but more hassle. He was content



with where he was. So was his family. A move to London would mean having to give up his great love – sailing.

The company's branch occupied an imposing high-street building that had an air of solidity about it. However, when the building's lease came up for renewal, head office decided on relocation to a new purpose-built office block. This was situated in an out-of-town business park. It had twice the floor space of the old office. There was more than adequate car parking space and plenty of room for further expansion.

All the heads of department were brought out to see it. Simon was impressed when he walked into the foyer. There was the sound of water from a fountain – he loved the sound of water. The foyer's walls were decorated with marine knick-knacks: an anchor, a huge compass and drawings of ships. The foyer was also bright and airy. There was so much space. Simon loved space; that's why he liked sailing. He felt he was going to like the change. The managers then went up to the top floor for their meeting, where everyone was very upbeat and positive. The company's CEO was there and he explained that they had a commitment to providing an ever-expanding range of insurance products and services. He then outlined, individually, the part he saw each manager playing in this new world. This made Simon feel very special.

Then he was shown his new workspace on the third floor. This had a brilliant view over the sea and the harbour. It was also open plan, not like in the old offices in the town that had a central corridor and offices leading from it. This was somewhat startling for Simon; he had come to value his privacy, his space. An office, and a good one, was a privilege of rank.



When he talked about privacy it wasn't as if he did anything he might be ashamed of. He meant confidentiality and, after all, he often had face-to-face dealings with clients who, like him, valued confidentiality. He would still have an office though, but it would only be half the size of his old one. He nearly suffocated when he saw it. It was more a part of the open-plan space partitioned from the rest by walls that only seemed to be made of cardboard. Where would he put the cups he had won for sailing? And where would he hang his certificates and the huge marine chart that had adorned the wall of his old office? The walls did not seem to offer much confidentiality either. Furthermore, the sales department was going to have to share the third floor with the claims department. The move was starting to sound like less of a good idea. He thought to himself, *That's not an office! I might as well be in a tent, and with those walls, why not have the office in the middle of a street ...*

He warned himself that he was starting to be ridiculous. He said nothing at the time; everyone seemed so happy and positive that it would be a shame to rock the boat. But it was his office that troubled him for days – that small, pokey pigsty that he was supposed to work from. He was grumpy with everyone, his staff and family included, and he lost sleep too.

Finally, he set up a meeting after work with Pete, the building services manager. Simon explained his predicament.

'It's like this. My office is just too small. It's cramped. I'd have more room on a boat. And you know a man's office size says something about him and about the respect he's due, especially from his staff. I am the sales manager, after all. People look up to me ...'



Pete explained that each department had been allocated a certain amount of floor space, which was less than in the old office. If Simon got a bigger office it would mean taking space away from the open-plan sales department, which would become awfully cramped.

‘Look,’ Simon answered, ‘the sales department’s my affair, and anyway I should have been consulted before the plans were finalized.’

Pete agreed and assured Simon that if he wanted a bigger office, he’d get one. It would take a few weeks though, as they were all busy with the move.

A week later the sales department moved into the new building. Simon’s office wasn’t ready yet, but he called a meeting. He explained the builders made a mistake with his office and that it should be bigger. He then showed them all a plan of what the department would look like once the changes were made. Some of the sales people were shocked.

‘We’ll be working on top of one another,’ they complained.

‘Don’t worry,’ Simon answered, ‘there won’t be a problem. If you’re out doing your jobs selling, you won’t be in the office that much.’

Within a fortnight Simon had got his new bright and breezy office with its sea view. He also installed his trophies, certificates and the huge marine chart. He was able to fantasize about being out on the ocean waves. His staff were far from happy – in fact they hated it. Some compared it to a tin of sardines, a place to be avoided if possible. When the half-yearly figures were announced, sales had jumped by 10 per cent – so they *were* spending less time in the office.



The box below gives an analysis of Simon's game.

### ANALYSIS OF SIMON'S GAME

#### Value

Confidentiality (a large office is required for confidential meetings).

#### Activity

To encourage a systematic review of the relationship between space and productivity.

#### Pay-off

A large office for Simon, which both expresses and validates his self-importance.

#### Power principles

Belief.

#### Roles

- Simon – change-maker.

### The survival plan

- The issue of office space is always a fraught and emotional one.
- Your power is expressed and validated through the size of your office.



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#### THE POLITICS OF SPACE

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- If your workspace is under threat, like Simon's, you may need to horse trade.
- If your organization is shifting from segmented office to open-plan, this will result in a perception shift regarding the rank of those in the open-plan space. This is inevitable.





SECTION III

# Survival



# Case Study: Call-centres Versus Teleworking

## DIRECT LINE INSURANCE: CALL-CENTRE PIONEER

In the 1990s, Direct Line Insurance (DLI) caused a revolution in the UK insurance business. Essentially it did away with brokers and face-to-face contact and replaced it with a tele-marketing operation backed up by comprehensive advertising and competitive pricing.

It was founded in 1985 and by 1997 it claimed over 2 million customers for its home insurance business and over 800,000 customers for its home policy products.

In revolutionizing the financial services industry, DLI achieved and maintained a market leadership position in its field, despite severe price competition in the mid 1990s.

By the end of the 1990s, DLI was processing more than 12 million calls per annum, using just 1000 operators. This was achieved by tightly interrelating technology, the telephone and the people.

### Setting out the game plan

To succeed not only in taking a leadership position in your industry but also in challenging and changing the fundamental



rules of the game requires a tightly focused and strongly oriented operation. DLI would pass on both counts.

But what has made the real difference in the marketplace is the tightly fashioned way in which DLI manages its staff. Each staff member has become an incredibly productive component in the overall DLI system.

### **The information collectors**

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DLI is a big fan of information: collecting it, analysing it and using it to competitive advantage. Chris Smyth, call-centre manager for DLI, advises that organizations getting into the telemarketing sector should start by examining the data that is already located in most telephone systems. There is a wealth of information out there that can help the company benchmark future activity by determining workflows and planning for peaks and troughs of call patterns. As Smith asks, 'If the work volumes in your Call-centre fluctuate, what do you do with the staff in quiet times?'

Idle staff time clearly poses a productivity issue. But idle time also allows staff to 'slip loose' of the tight productivity-oriented environment.

### **Anatomy of a call-centre**

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In the call-centre, the Automated Call Distributor (ACD) performs the function of the light in the power doughnut. The ACD boasts the following features:



- handles many calls at the same time;
- automatically searches out the next available operator;
- plays 'holding messages' and telemuzak;
- facilitates transfer to other sites;
- produces management information;
- 'supervisor' screens, so the activity of all operators can be monitored in real time.

Obviously, the ACD is a key tool for DLI. Without it the company would merely be transferring a face-to-face service to a telephone-based one. As the latter is more impersonal, this would appear initially to be a disadvantage. It certainly could be when it comes to selling financial services if the interface between customer and operator is not rigidly managed. The last two features of the ACD (above) are particularly apposite to our discussion here. In the Taylorite mould, information management is the basis for not only the management of the business but also of the people. The following calculation, produced by DLI, shows (in a fashion which would not have disheartened Taylor) how to plan the staffing of a call-centre:

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How many staff?

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Expected number of calls	×
Average call length	=
Total hours	÷
(say) 35 hours	=
Full-time equivalents	+
Inefficiency factor	=
Total staff required	
+ supervisory staff	

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DLI defines the ‘inefficiency factor’ as time in which the operators will not be working – sickness, holidays, training – and estimate it as between 15 and 20 per cent.

The ACD can help determine the information needed to fill out the calculations above and to assess ongoing productivity performance when the system is in operation.

Then there is the Taylorite management of the operator–customer interaction. DLI has a series of ‘tight’, ‘loose’ and ‘mixed’ scripts in order to help each operator manage the customer. Selection of script depends on the experience and technical knowledge of the operator, as well as the type of customer. DLI does not appear to have a concern that the use of scripts imposes an overly rigid structure on the operator. It is concerned that oversubscribing to the script method might sound ‘false’. What people want is sincerity – and if you can fake that you can fake anything! DLI tends to use scripts like stabilizers on a bicycle – i.e. to get the trainees started.

The ‘looser’ types of script involve what is termed ‘call patterns’ – slotting the caller into classic types for which a prescribed approach is recommended but still maintaining aspects of the tight script, e.g. the ‘corporate welcome’.

## ANALYSIS OF THE CALL-CENTRE GAME

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### Core value

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What drives this game? Customer value.

The godhead of call-centres is customer value (although any of us who have spent an eternity climbing a telephone tree



only to be confronted by a disempowered script-reader might beg to differ). The call-centre game is set up between the two poles of 'boredom' and 'boredom relief'.

### Activity

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It could be articulated as, 'Look, we know this is a bit of a boring job and we do have to make the numbers, so why don't we try and have a little fun with it?'

*Boredom*: DLI acknowledges that the nature of the work is 'repetitive and pressured'.

The organization of the workspace is self-consciously old-fashioned, classroom style. Each employee is slotted into the 'rabbit hutch' system. The work is regulated, with defined times of start and finish. The average number of calls expected is designed to maintain a constant level of productivity.

The actual way in which each employee deals with a customer is also set out with clearly defined entry and exit points of the conversation, for example the 'corporate welcome'.

The work is repetitive with clearly identified patterns and procedures for each employee to follow. The scope for individual creative contribution is negligible. Even the scope for physical movement while working is extremely limited as each operator works with telephone and screen in a regimented fashion.

*Boredom relief*: i.e. fun, diversion, distraction or what DLI terms 'motivation' breaks down into:

- pay and benefits;
- surroundings;

- lively and fun activities; and
- socials.

Having deliberately set up an alienating workplace configuration, DLI then encourages the employees to break the rules – to subvert aspects of the organizing principles. Remember, call-centres are generally situated in large open-plan spaces with hundreds of operators working at screens, rather like those images of typing pools from the 1950s and 60s. But employees are permitted and encouraged to individualize their own workspaces.

Although each employee is isolated in their own individual ‘hutch’ and forms a separate and distinct relation with the central powers by virtue of the technology (ACD), they are also encouraged to form informal bonds of friendship with each other; to take work relations into ‘social’ situations.

This in fact goes further, as DLI not only tolerates but also encourages running practical jokes in the office environment – all in the name of breaking the tedium. Now there is nothing inherently wrong or duplicitous in making life as interesting as possible for the employee base. Making the workday that little bit more stimulating keeps a level of motivation current within the workforce. But the relief of boredom is part of the game – a game which, as we will see, has control and compliance at its heart.

The game *thesis* is set up using an arid spatial workplace with regimented and rigorous systems. This regimented system is then periodically undermined through boredom relief. Together, the two opposing aspects of boredom and boredom

relief set up satisfactory and quantifiable levels of productivity. But how and why? The why is easy.

Productivity was an important key to success for DLI as part of its new customer offering. When it entered the market place it offered considerably reduced premiums for its financial services. And, as with all price-sensitive scenarios, high productivity and continued gain in market share volume remains a key to ongoing success.

### **Operating power principle**

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- *Fear* (i.e. of the absent supervisor, or the ever-present possibility of supervisor intrusion and subsequent sanction) is obviously present.
- *Belief* (in the corporate mission) should never be dismissed altogether. But belief will play a subsidiary part in how the power relations are created and maintained.
- *Pay-off: Control and Compliance = Productivity*. The aim of the game is to create the conditions necessary to effect the pay-off, and here that aim is clearly control over the employees. As we have seen in the analysis of the anatomy of a call-centre, the level of control is extreme.

### **DLI's methods describe the overall call-centre environment**

- Cannot have fun without control!
- Maintain basic disciplines, e.g. time keeping, low sickness, dress standards, etc.

- Maintain objectives, e.g. number of calls per day, average call length, number of sales/registrations per day, etc.
- Call monitoring – one benefit of a Call-centre is that calls can be listened to and taped.
- Feed back taped calls to operators, breaking down the call in detail and suggesting improvements.

The tools in which DLI have invested allow them near absolute control over each employee as they carry out their duties. When the practical jokes commence, it is no wonder that DLI can feel confident that there will not be a lowering of productivity. If there is, the invisible manager will know it instantly; know where it has occurred; whether it is a repeat pattern; whether it needs to be rectified immediately or whether it can be allowed to ride. This information may then be passed on to the visible (floor) manager.

Finally, we can witness in the call-centre the ultimate power-based consolidation: the internalizing of the power relations. The knowledge of each employee that such information is readily available to the supervisor – the possibility that this actual call in which the operator is engaged could actually be in the process of being recorded and listened into – necessitates that each operator effectively governs himself. This makes the employees do their own governing.

### **Pay-off**

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What is the ulterior motive here? High productivity.

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Without the ulterior motives – that is to say, without the distinction between surface-level and real-level aims – we would only be dealing with a set of operations designed to achieve an end, and therefore not really a true ‘game’. The ‘thesis’ of the call-centre game was organized between the polarities of boredom’ and boredom relief. Power was not explicit. In this sense, the set-up of the surface-play involved the DLI management setting up an arid work scenario and then encouraging the workforce to subvert parts of it.

But the *ulterior motive*, that which is concealed, is *extreme control*. But why concealed? Simply because naked expression of control would not in itself yield up the aim of ‘high productivity’ that is sought. Visible and extreme forms of management will get compliance but not necessarily high productivity or staff retention. Similarly, the interplay between boredom and boredom relief would not yield the high productivity either, but both scenarios, set up as the apparent ‘thesis’ and the real intent (pay-off) of the game, do produce the desired result.

## Roles

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There are four basic roles, of which both the management and the employees play two roles each – to match two levels in action. We could call these the *official* and the *unofficial* sets of roles.

### Official roles

- 1 Employees – as workers. They are productive, entering willingly into the system and following the scripts and

maintaining pre-agreed call levels. They know there is constant call monitoring but remain conscious (and perhaps even willing) objects in the power relationship set up by the management.

- 2 Management/employers – they are present but invisible because they maintain the technology and assimilate the information provided by the Automatic Call Distributor (ACD). The ACD system can indicate the possible (but not certain) presence of the supervisor and it monitors real productivity in real time. The telephone equipment installed by DLI allows the supervisor to ‘listen in’ at any point in the conversations that the employees are conducting.

Again, remember that the telephone calls in these work instances are not just an adjunct to the work carried out by the employee – they *are* the work carried out by the employee. The ACD and ancillary technology provide management with the tools needed for a sophisticated and irrefutable means of establishing and maintaining an extremely high degree of control over the workers.

### **Unofficial roles**

- 1 Employees – as subversive. They enter willingly into the fun of the office games and practical jokes. They participate in the office ‘socials’ and they are participants in a network of employee relations, sanctioned but not formally recognized by the management.

- 2 Employers – as visible floor managers. They are benevolent, tolerant and motivating. They walk the floors, keen to get the successful call rations up. They care about the welfare of the staff but are also aware of the other absent role signified by the ACD. The ACD constantly calculates productivity and furnishes them with the details requiring extra attention – e.g. falling call-rates, below expectation customer-courtesy and so forth.

The box below summarizes the analysis of the call-centre game.

#### SUMMARY OF THE CALL-CENTRE GAME

##### **Core value**

(What drives this game?)

Customer value.

##### **Activity**

(This is the activity being stimulated).

Boredom, set-up and boredom relief.

##### **Pay-off**

What are the ulterior motives?)

Compliance/productivity.

##### **Power principles**

(Which is the dominant principle: fear or belief?)

Fear/belief.

**Roles**

(What is the role of each player?)

- 2 × official
- 2 × unofficial.

In the call-centre game, the sophistication of the technology ‘individualizes’ the power relations, e.g. the supervisor can home in on a specific operator and monitor his or her individual performance against specific and perhaps individually agreed targets. In this sense, the barriers that existed between inmates in the *Power Doughnut* also exist here. This time they are virtual and produced by the technology, but they are no less potent for that.

In the call-centre, there is no game plan that the workers can agree among themselves, no axis that can be formed, no coalition bonded that can refute the absolute and individual information and power granted to the supervisor.

The call-centre space may to some extent resemble the stereotypical dehumanizing work spaces we know from earlier this century (1950s typing pools, etc.) but the space here has also become a constant reminder to the workers of the advanced power relations which are in operation, almost like one of those signs which says: DANGER – HIGH VOLTAGE!

But what about the other side of the coin? What about that other modern phenomenon – working from home, or teleworking? Perhaps this is a work system that liberates rather than constrains the employee?

## THE TELEWORKING GAME

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### **Working from home – a release from control/ compliance**

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At first glance, this space would seem to be the opposite of the call-centre when it comes to the power relationship between employer and employee. The worker from home is in control of his or her own individual space. After all, they have chosen where to live, what it looks like, where to work within that space; quite often exactly when to work. The family, the space in which the personal identity of the individual is both expressed and reflected can be strongest in the home ('Home is where the heart is'). After all, it is a home and not a house, which is space plus value. If the call-centre represents that space which can be so easily manipulated by the management to leverage its power over you, then surely the opposite set of power dynamics are in action in the home, the space which is yours legally and socially?

For example, technology was the main agent producing and maintaining the power relations in the call-centre and the organization of space was key to establishing the 'thesis' of the game. In the home, the teleworker has considerably more influence over what technology gets installed and to what ends. Teleworkers also have more control over the organization of space: they choose whether to 'permit' meetings in their own workspace and so forth.

Research by Baruch and Nicholson<sup>1</sup> examined the reasons behind why many opt for home working in the first place. Some of these reasons are given below:

- Reduced need for travel 50%
- Improved quality of working life 42%
- High quality of work possible 29%
- High volume of work possible 21%
- Flexibility of hours/work methods 16%
- Easier childcare arrangements 5%

With these specific aims in mind, the research largely showed that teleworking was a success, with over 50 per cent of respondents claiming that their objectives were fulfilled either well or fully. Additionally, some 75 per cent of those surveyed felt that teleworking led to an increase in their own perceived levels of effectiveness.

But, as the researchers note:

*[A] protective barrier between home and work has been removed – protective against the spillover of problems from one domain to the other. The research shows that there is a considerable build up in home related stress experienced by those teleworkers surveyed: some 40% report home related stress to be either worse or much worse. Others reported sources of stress were ‘working to tight deadlines and timescales’; ‘general work overload’.<sup>2</sup>*

In response to the latter, the researchers note:

*Management may even set higher targets for home workers in the belief that this is necessary to prevent home workers having it too easy, or home working being a soft option.<sup>3</sup>*

The issue of target-setting is a critical one in assessing how the adjustment of space (which home working actually is) affects the power relations.

## ANALYSIS OF THE TELEWORKING GAME

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### Core value

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What drives this game? Autonomy. The assumption is that home is where we can most be ourselves. Work is where we ‘sell’ ourselves (become an object which is traded). We do so mainly in return for money, status and satisfaction. The core value of the game can be articulated thus:

*Look, forget this old-fashioned ‘us and them’ model. We are both too grown up for that. We, as your employers, recognize that if we give you back more of what you are selling us (i.e. yourself) it will actually work better for both of us. It will be a win-win situation. We trust you to take your work out of its usual place and perform it at home. We hope you will trust us that*



*you still are regarded as a key member of the team  
although you will be at the office much less.*

But of course there exists a real dilemma for the employee: the home (where the employee gets their sense of person) is now also the place where they carry out their masters' bidding. The dilemma? The employee will continually strive towards – but never be able to achieve – the level of personal identity because the workplace has now corrupted his home.

Again:

*[A] protective barrier between home and work has  
been removed – protective against the spillover of  
problems from one domain to the other.<sup>4</sup>*



This is stressful for the employee, stressful in the sense that there are two contrary impulses at play: the need to gain autonomy, as symbolized and constantly prompted by the home, and the need to retain a relationship with the employer, and therefore admitting a degree of reification (dehumanization) and maintaining 'object' status.

A case in point: when scientists want to stress rats in the laboratory, they send two contrary impulses. For example, the buzzer sounds and the rat goes to the trough where food is dispensed. The light in the corner flashes on and the rat receives an electric shock whenever it touches the trough. It associates the buzzing sound with food and the flashing light with pain.

What does the rat do the following week when, a regular pattern having been established, the flashing light signifies



food available in the trough and the buzzer brings with it a shock? It gets stressed, that's what it does.

In the same way, the employee has a reminder of home all around them. But they now also have the trappings of work, because that is what they need to perform. Like the confused rat, the employee has two contrary impulses going on which leads to stress. And, as indicated earlier, research shows a reported 40 per cent of those surveyed felt home-related stress to be worse or much worse.

In short, the core value of the game offers autonomy but there is, from the onset, an implied opposition (pay-off).

*Subject <-----> Object*

*Home <-----> Work*

### Activity

The activity being stimulated here is the control of outputs.

At the surface level the employee is much more empowered than our friend located in the call-centre. It would appear that he or she is able to dictate much more of the agenda than the call-centre employees.

Additionally, management control is relegated to the outputs rather than the process – another clear distinction. However, there are significant elements of similarity with the call-centre worker.

Here is a brief summary of what the teleworker has in common with the call-centre operator:

- Each is separated from his fellow worker and therefore individualized by the narrow banding (contracting) of the organization; the narrow banding both channels the outgoing information about organizational activities to the employee *and* contracts the basis for assessing the employee largely to the output. This in turn changes the employer–employee relationship from a task-oriented to a person-oriented transaction (a hallmark of the command and control management style).
- The employee has to become his own effective governor in place of the absent employer. In this sense the power relations are internalized, which is similar to what takes place for the call-centre operators.

As we have seen, the tactics of individualizing the employee and internalizing the power relations result in an effective and advanced form of exercise of power. The bars for the teleworker are psychological: the manager controls him or her at a distance. Working from home only creates an illusory release from control/compliance.

For the teleworker, the fact remains that the mechanisms for control and command have been transplanted internally (and they are supported by the organizational mechanisms for specifically assessing the output of the employee), by:

- individualizing the employee, i.e. abstracting him or her from the unofficial network of alliances with others;
- contracting (narrow banding) the amount of information that goes towards the individual; and

- corrupting the place for the self (the home) and locking the employee into an unending journey back and forth along the subject–object axis.

### Pay-off

Productivity is the ulterior motive here.

Baruch and Nicholson's research showed that the recurring reasons for reported stress included 'working to tight deadlines and timescales' and 'general work overload'. The research speculates that the management of home workers might even be setting higher targets for them. If you count commuting time as dead time, or at least reduced potential working time, then home working can present real productivity gains, with a narrow focus on measurable employee outputs. According to the research, the time saved on commuting is as follows:

<i>Less than 1 hour per home-working day</i>	<i>22.6%</i>
<i>1–2 hours per home-working day</i>	<i>35.5%</i>
<i>2–3 hours per home-working day</i>	<i>22.6%</i>
<i>3+ hours per home-working day</i>	<i>19.3%</i>

### Operating power principles

*Belief* in the corporate proposition or the company line. The official organizational 'propaganda' becomes increasingly important and key to sustaining the individual as it assumes a higher position than unofficial networked information. The

company line is increasingly all that the teleworker has to go on and cling to.

*Fear* can enter into it, but at a lower level than belief and certainly lower than the fear levels in the call-centre. Fear here would only manifest itself as fear of being sidelined; of not knowing what is being planned; of being alienated from the decision-making powers (or being peripheral to the centre). In this sense, the fear is not pure fear – it is ‘unbelief’ (an inverted form of belief): a realization that the corporate proposition as handed out might be a ruse and that the company line to which the teleworker clings might be mere illusion.

## Roles

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*Employees* – home workers trying to reconcile the contrary impulses drawing them along the subject–object or home–work axes.

*Employers* – absent but able to manipulate at a distance. They tightly manage both the employee outputs from home and information flow towards the employee. As with the call-centre, the employee is much less able to tap into the unofficial network of information flows normally open to the employee. To this extent the employer is able to ‘narrow-band’<sup>5</sup> the relationship.

In other words, a manager can contract and focus the information that goes from the company to the employee. The shotgun is replaced with a rifle!

*Family* – they have to support the employee’s ‘toing and froing’ along the subject–object axis. They are also in the para-

doxical position of having to support the work environment while also trying to exclude it. As one respondent in the survey observed: ‘They [i.e. the office] have our private number, and many times they call on it, as if by mistake ...’<sup>6</sup>

The box below summarizes the teleworking game.

### SUMMARY OF THE TELEWORKING GAME

#### **Core value**

(What drives this game?)

Autonomy.

#### **Activity**

(This is the activity being stimulated).

Control of outputs.

#### **Pay-off**

What are the ulterior motives?)

High and sustained levels of productivity.

#### **Power principles**

(Which is the dominant principle: fear or belief?)

Belief/fear.

#### **Roles**

(What is the role of each player?)

- *Employee* – journeying towards full realization of the self but now condemned to also being an object (unit of productivity) in the work system.
- *Employer* – sets objective performance measures from a distance; intrudes into the employee home by a number of means.
- *Family* – companion to the employee; context for the realization of self by the employee; corrupted by the employer.

## NOTES

- 1 Baruch, Y. and Nicholson, N. (1997) 'Home, sweet work: requirements for effective home working', *Journal of General Management*.
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 A term that came up in conversation with Professor Paul Wilman of London Business School.
- 6 Baruch and Nicholson.

# A–Z Survival Guide for Game-playing: How to Play Games More Successfully

## **Agenda**

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You need to work out the real agenda of those playing a political game against you. Do not be fooled by the apparent activity that is in play: this acts like the quick hands of a magician – designed to divert you. Use the methodology to analyse the real agenda and then look to stop it, redirect it or in fact tag on to it.

## **Ambition**

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Ambition is all round us and it is in itself not a bad thing. But be ambitious for your company, your team, your project or your brand. To be explicitly ambitious for yourself is counter-productive. Best of all to align your success with the success of the project – this means that it all goes in the same direction. If somebody's ambition is going to be at your expense then use the methodology to expose their selfish desires. This at least takes some of the impact out of their political game, although it does not necessarily nullify it. Remember Al Gore: while we



know he was personally motivated in asking for the recount in Florida – by aligning this with the core value of democracy – he was still able to push for it convincingly.

## **Belief**

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Political games depend on either belief in an ideal or in fear of some punitive actions (see *Fear*). In trying to work out the agenda of the political player – look to the value (see *Value*) that is being invoked and determine whether it is primarily belief or fear based. This will help you determine your response. For example, you can trump a belief-based game using a fear-based one but not the other way around.

## **Culture**

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Assessment and response to a political game depends on the culture of the organization (see page 00). The context in which you plan a response is very important. For example, if you are in a mercenary organization then fear will play very well (either for you or for your political opponent).

## **Diplomacy**

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The art of diplomacy lies in you being able to horse trade effectively. For example, if you can live with the ‘pay-off’ then, rather than stopping the political game of your opponent, you might want to cut a deal. For example, by stating ‘I will help you to achieve X if I can obtain Y ...’ In the ‘New kid on the

block' scenario, Jerry could have cut a deal with Bill to accrue more power for himself while allowing Bill to have his way as well. But beware who or what you hitch your cart to! You might not like where it leads you.

### **Emotions**

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The strength in this methodology is that it can help you to plan your response in a calm and collected way. Your initial response to a political game being played against you may be emotional – and therefore you might lash out at the ‘activity’ being promoted by your political opponent. This is a bear trap. Do not emotionally lash out at the activity for this can be interpreted by the powers-that-be as *you* being overly political and in opposition to a corporate value.

### **Fear**

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Fear can work alongside or instead of belief to drive a political game. Fear is a powerful engine and can trump belief. But it is also an irrational driver and therefore hard to control once it is unleashed. Watch out for fear-based games played against you. You can identify them when your opponent says something like, ‘If we don’t do what I advocate, then we *risk* ...’

### **Game plan**

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Use the methodology to sketch out your game plan. Do not react immediately and emotionally to a perceived move against you.

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We know that this is easier said than done but it is absolutely key that you co-ordinate your response.

### **Hierarchy**

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All organizations have hierarchies – some explicit, some implicit. Most, although not all, political games are manoeuvres to help the protagonist either continue his or her upward trajectory or consolidate/defend a recent move.

### **Intuition**

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Trust it – if you feel you are being sidelined then it is probably true. If you feel that somebody is on the political make then you are probably correct. Intuition is a sophisticated and built-in defence mechanism. However, use the methodology to plan and time your response.

### **Job security**

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When a fear-based game is played against you, one of the primary buttons pressed is your job security. If you are independently wealthy then it won't work so well. If you need the work – then it can be a very powerful motivator.

### **Knowledge**

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They say that knowledge is power. Well certainly information is power. Power is created by an unequal distribution of infor-

mation, i.e. the boss knows more than you do. Even if he or she doesn't, the belief or fear that they do establishes the power relations that support political activity – see the case study on call-centres and teleworking.

### **Leadership**

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Leaders are able to use the belief lever ('subscribe to this ideal ...') and the fear lever ('unless we go down this path we risk ...') discriminately. A leader who only uses fear (e.g. Al 'Chain-saw' Dunlap) will ultimately run out of steam and the one who works only by belief (e.g. former British Prime Minister John Major) will ultimately be perceived as toothless.

### **Motives**

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See *Agenda* – you need to establish the real motive of the political opponent in order to plan your response properly. In political games, motives are by definition concealed.

### **New kid on the block (dealing with)**

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If the new kid is clever, he or she will cash in on their honeymoon period quickly. But a handy tip is to look out for recidivist behaviour. Try to find out the tactics employed by your political opponent in their last job. By demonstrating a pattern you can seek to undo or at least predict your opponent.

## **Open-plan spaces**

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Designed to be less self-consciously hierarchical than offices. In fact, like hierarchies themselves, the politics of space centre as much around open-plan as around closed-plan. In call-centres, open-plan spaces represent a throwback to the old 'typing pool' set-ups. The politics are more sophisticated because of the role of modern technology (see the call-centre case study).

## **Productivity**

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Power is necessary to drive all organizations, and politics is the way in which power relations are enacted. If power is used properly, it drives real productivity enhancements. If it is used improperly then all it drives is personal enhancement.

## **Question**

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To question authority is usually a bad idea, regardless of whether the organization is openly promoting this as a philosophy. Organizations rarely have the confidence to carry through on 'empowerment'. Safest to presume that, although you may feel empowered, you do not question organizational rationales too closely or you will be seen as a pain.

## **Roles**

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If you can't live with the pay-off of a political game and you also can't stop it, then one way of redirecting the game is by look-



ing to reassign your role (see *Diplomacy* and also *New kid on the block*). This is a sophisticated form of political playing and perhaps unpalatable to some. It means that you might have to join forces with somebody you may not like or respect.

## Survival

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To survive you need to stay alert. Saying ‘I want nothing to do with politics’ is *not* an option because you and your team/project may get appropriated into somebody’s power game while you are not looking (see *Zero sum game*).

## Truth

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The truth can easily get lost in the hall of mirrors that is corporate or organizational politics. Don’t get fixated on this or you will end up indignant. For example, it may be true that you are not a political/territorial individual but, if you react emotionally to a game played against you, you can easily appear the opposite. This is a simple fact – so deal with it.

## Underachieving

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If you are underachieving – or feel that you are – then it may be because your job activity is not closely aligned, or is not seen to be closely aligned, with a corporate value (see *Value*). At its most simplistic, the way of rectifying this situation is by establishing a direct link.

## Values

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These drive political games and mask the selfish activities of the political protagonist. For example, innovation, customer value, enterprise culture, streamlining – all are common examples of dominant corporate values.

## Work

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Work to live – not the other way around.

## Zero sum game

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For a political operator to succeed, he or she needs to aggregate other people's/department's political 'equity'. In this sense we can't all do equally well – some will do better than others! If you try to opt out of political games you may risk becoming a pawn in somebody else's game.

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