

Creating Morally-minded Organizations in a Machiavellian Work Environment

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Abstract: Organizations are highly rational constructs operating in a competitive market and bureaucratic entities designed to attain first organizational-collective and individual-private ends in an orderly fashion. In an entity as such there is little formally accepted and approved room for personal maneuvers which may jeopardize much larger goals of organizations. However, organizations have an internally and interpersonally highly competitive environment, more like a war place for power and influence. Organizations are increasingly looking for competent, competitive and achievement oriented individuals yet expect them to work in teams as resource sharing saints. It is time to ask whether it is exactly this paradoxical tendency of modern organizations that encourage Machiavellian behaviors. What type of business organizations and environments are more conducive to Machiavellianism? What types of negative and positive incentives are there in regard to Machiavellianism? And what needs to be done? The aim of this work is to develop above argument further, answer some of above questions and then make workable suggestions for practitioners to help in their attempts to identify Machiavellian tendencies and differentiate Machiavellian behaviors from non-Machiavellian ones.

Relevance Of Machiavellianism In Modern Organizations

Niccolo Machiavelli (1469-1527) is one of the most influential and controversial personality in the history of philosophical literature. The term *Machiavellian* originates from the name of Machiavelli, the author of the 1513 treatise, *The Prince*. He possessed a negative and a pessimistic belief about human nature. He neither liked nor promoted such a nature. Machiavelli believed that he chose a realistic approach than a fairy tale to solve political problems of his time and country. According to Machiavelli individuals in general are selfish and lack wisdom and therefore they should be regarded as vicious, lazy, and untrustworthy and that a ruler should use cruelty, exploitation, and deceit to maintain power. Therefore, unless people are wise in general the ruler needs not to behave in ethical or moral manner. Although his general stance is considered to be amoral (not immoral), Machiavelli maintained that ethics and professional requirements are, by and large, irreconcilable with real politics. Since he drew a line between private (individual) sphere and the public - institutional sphere, there emerged radically different ways of evaluating the respective behaviors of each sphere.

As Galie and Bopst (2006) promptly argue, Machiavelli's teachings have never gone out of fashion; no doubt because power remains a central aspect of modern political and corporate life. The writings of this 16th century thinker seem as relevant today as they were a half millennium ago. Indeed, numerous monographs published in the last decade still argue for Machiavelli's relevance to modern management and corporate leadership. It is a truth that management textbooks concerning morality in corporate life seem to be inconsistent with the actual teachings of Machiavelli and paradoxically they fail to acknowledge that the teachings of Machiavelli are still most relevant to the modern corporate world. In this world occupational careers are filled with face to face interactions which allow almost endless opportunities for interpersonal manipulation and improvisation. The process of obtaining promotions and salary increases seems inevitably to arouse emotions and induce goal directed behaviors (Turner and Martinez, 1977, p. 326).

Despite his relevance in modern management the literature is inconsistent about Machiavellianism. It is not clear what Machiavellianism is. Is it a personality trait, a strategy, a type of relationship, a system, behavior or something else? To Christie and Geis (1970) for instance it is a world view which has three distinct themes. The first theme involves using manipulative strategies such as deceit and flattery in interpersonal relations. The second theme involves a cynical perception of others as weak and untrustworthy. The third theme involves indifference toward conventional morality in thought and action (Shepperd and Socherman 1997, p.1448). Machiavelli says "Any person

who decides in every situation to act as a good man is bound to be destroyed in the company of so many men who are not good. Wherefore, if the Prince desires to stay in power, he must learn how to be not good, and must avail himself of that ability, or not, as the occasion requires"(as Cited in Cyriac and Dharmaraj 1994, p.281).

Machiavellianism is also defined by the same authors as "a trait that involves strategically manipulating others for personal gain often against the other's self-interest" as conceptualized by Christie and Geis (1970). According to Christie and Geis (1970), high Machs tend to manipulate people for personal gain and have little emotional involvement in interpersonal relationships. High Machs are less altruistic, more likely to cheat, more flexible in tactic usage, less moral and less empathetic. Right after this Christie and Geis then consider Machiavellianism as a type of interpersonal relationship. In their measure of Machiavellianism, high-rated Machiavellians were those who are better positioned as manipulators (Porter, Allen ve Angle, 1981, p.122). Some others take Machiavellianism as a skillful management of interpersonal relations because they have a tendency to initiate and take control in interpersonal relations. Rationality and persuasive skills are essential for their success in face to face relations. Normative pressures have little impact on these people (Schermerhorn, Hunt and Osborn, 1995:56). For some Machiavellianism can be seen as an instrumental action since high Machs also spend more effort to gain political influence (Porter, Allen ve Angle, 1981, p.139).

In common usage Machiavellianism and Ethics are thought to be two distinct edges of a scale. In other words Machiavellianism is perceived as an anti-ethic. Machiavelli himself argued that if a ruler wishes to attain his ultimate objectives he would find morality as irrational. Following the morality of the people will turn every attempt of a ruler into a terribly irrational policy (Skinner 2002, p.60). Machiavellianism has been seen by most thinkers from Marx to Shakespeare as the most fatal blow at ethical foundations of political life (Skinner 2002, p.11). Yet this is an unfair attack. First Machiavelli provided eye-opening ideas about real politics. The exemplary politicians he described in his writings actually lived before him not after him. He warned against excessive use of power and punishment, thus we cannot blame him for the despots of the 20th century. He was not a revolutionary but promoted a moderate politics to gain and maintain power and order. He also showed the way for ordinary man to climb up the ladder of hierarchy to be elite. And this is why he is still relevant. He was not against individual ethics or morality in general. He thought them as instrumental, a mask for the ruler to wear or sometimes a hindrance.

More in line with these point of view Machiavellian individuals can be seen as lacking conventional moral sense and adopt the angle of individualist utilitarianism when relating with other people. Machiavellians may not be devoid of morality, they just do not behave consistently with traditional moral values. Machiavellian leaders seem to be more successful in negotiations and persuasion so much so that they can be handy for organizations. They can concentrate on analyzing the situation and developing winning strategies (Christie ve Geis, 1970). However corporation must confine Machiavellian tendencies and strategies to certain boundaries in which achievement orientation, persuasive skills and goal attainment stay alive and also possible harms of opportunist, selfish and deceitful behavior can be avoided (Mandaci, 2007, p.54).

Association of Machiavellianism with Other Personality Traits

What kinds of individual dispositional factors are there to facilitate Machiavellianism? Barlow and Qualter-Stylianou's (2010) recently investigated the association of Machiavellianism (Mach) with emotional intelligence (EI) and the theory of mind (ToM) on 109 primary school children. High Machs think first then act while low Mach first act than amend their consciousness. Although Machiavellians do not necessarily score high on intelligence tests they are more likely to be perceived clever and astonishing. Consistent with previous research on adults, a negative association was found between Machiavellianism and social-emotional intelligence. Subsequent regression analyses showed that being more adept at emotional and social intelligence do not lead girls to manipulate others in social encounters. This was not the case for boys. Paulhus et all (2001) showed that Machiavellianism and psychopathic behaviors are negatively associated with conscientiousness. The Machiavellian remains most realistic while the Narcissists are least realistic about their own character. Paal and Bereczkei (2007) showed that (1) a strong negative correlation between Machiavellianism and social cooperative skills; (2) a connection between the extent of cooperative tendency and the level of mindreading; and (3) a lack of significant correlation between theory of mind (an understanding that other people have beliefs and desires) and Machiavellianism.

Rayburn and Rayburn (1996) found that the relation between personality traits and ethical-orientation indicate sex is not a good predictor for differences in Machiavellian and Type A personality and ethical-orientation. Intelligence is found to be positively associated with Machiavellian- and Type A personality-orientation but negatively associated with ethical-orientation. Machiavellians tend to have Type A personalities, but tend to be less ethically-oriented than non-Machiavellians. Type A personalities are more ethically-orientated than Type B

personalities. There is a lack of agreement as to what constitutes ethical behavior and whether there is a relation between personality traits and ethical orientation.

Rayburn et al (2003) compares academic achievement, Machiavellian levels, Type A or Type B personality traits, ethical orientation, and charisma of female and male students. Female students report higher academic achievement, but male students are statistically more charismatic than female students. However, female respondents are more ethical. There is no significant difference in the Machiavellian score and Type A/B personality between female and male respondents. Higher academic achievers have higher Machiavellian scores while Type A personalities are more ethical, but are less charismatic.

Shepperd and Socherman (1997) pointed at some paradoxical issues. For example, people scoring high in Machiavellianism (high Machs) can be manipulative and domineering. Yet the domineering style of high Machs may stop them from using manipulations that require a display of weakness. The authors examined whether Machiavellianism moderates the use of sandbagging—a manipulative strategy in which people display low ability to induce an opponent to reduce effort or lower his or her guard. In Experiment 1, participants reported that they would reduce effort in response to a disadvantaged opponent and anticipated that their opponent would behave similarly if they were disadvantaged. In Experiment 2 low Machs in competition sandbagged their opponent when they were uncertain that they could otherwise beat him. High Machs, in contrast, preferred a show of strength to weakness, displaying high ability even when sandbagging might have been an advantageous strategy.

In terms of ethical perception, studies suggest that people with high level of ethical perceptivity tend to demonstrate lower levels of Machiavellian tendencies (Christie ve Geis, 1970). According to Christie and Geis (1970) social pressure is less constraining for Machiavellian personalities and thus they are less likely to conform to ethical standards. Ural (2003, p.102) lists the following Machiavellian principles from “Prince” and “Discourses”:

- To win people, tell them what they want to hear
- It's better to make up a substantial reason than telling the truth when asking someone to do something
- An unqualified trust on someone will bring harms rather than goods
- It is hard to progress without holding the corners
- Honesty is not always the best policy
- The safest way is to acknowledge that every individual is evil but they lack opportunity to relinquish that evil
- When you see no benefit do not ever tell your reasons
- Don't try to justify deeds to yourself with a moral angle
- Flattering important people is a wise thing to do
- It is not wise to be humble and honest all the time
- People having incurable illness should be able to choose painless death
- It is impossible to be good in every aspects
- Men will not work unless they are induced
- The biggest difference between guilty and not guilty is the former is stupid enough to be caught

Machiavellianism in Different Cultures

Cyriac and Dharmaraj's (1994) findings indicate that Indian businessmen in industrialized towns show Machiavellian characteristics more. Siu's (1999) research on bankers in Hon Kong concludes that high Mach posses higher levels of job satisfaction than the low Machs. Corziona and Buntzman (1999) found that among the employees working in American Finance sector there is no significant difference between genders on their levels of Machiavellianism. A comparison between American and Hon Kong banking sector showed that both cultures indicate similar level of Machiavellianism. Kavak's (2001) research in Turkey concludes that average Machiavellianism score is 97.13 in general, 86 for public servants and 85 for private sector. That means the level of Machiavellianism in Turkey is higher than USA (84.5) and lower than Austria (98.6). Yıldız and Gültekin (1998) argue that mid-level managers show comparatively low level of Machiavellianism. Their study implies that collectivist attitudes might be less Machiavellian than individualist ones.

Machiavellianism and Organizational Behavior

Research suggests that employees possessing a Machiavellian personality have both advantages and disadvantages in the workplace. With respect to deception, high Machs are much less likely to be caught, more convincing liars, harder to judge and were believed to be telling the truth more than low Machs liars. The flexibility

of the high Mach is another advantageous characteristic. For example, high Machs with an external locus of control supposed to be better managers according to Goodboy and McCroskey (2007, p.290).

Jellinek (1985) found the interaction of high school principals' degrees of Machiavellianism and their schools' organizational structure with their experience of occupational stress. In general, principals in schools which had less than 1,500 students were lower in Machiavellianism and also experienced less stress. The relationship between school size and experienced stress suggested that Machiavellianism may be a response to current problems faced by high school principals, rather than being solely an enduring personality characteristic.

Subramaniam (2009) found the relationship between Machiavellianism orientation and job involvement among employees of an airline company in Malaysia. Machiavellianism orientation and job involvement are positively and significantly correlated. It is found that there was a significant relationship between age and level of job involvement, however, no significant relationship is detected between gender and Machiavellianism orientation.

Shome and Rao's (1996) research results indicate a significant difference among accountants holding different positions within the firm (i.e., partners, managers and seniors) in terms of Machiavellian orientation. In addition, audit seniors were found to have the highest Mach scores, partners have the lowest, and the managers have intermediate scores.

Liu (2008) determined the relationship between Machiavellian orientation and knowledge sharing willingness and found that there are significant negative correlations between the two. The correlation coefficients are all significantly negative.

Bodey and Grace (2007) examined personality characteristics, such as self-monitoring, perceived control, self-efficacy and Machiavellianism, within the realms of complaint behavior. The results indicate significant relationships between self-monitoring, perceived control and self-efficacy with attitude to complaining while self-efficacy and Machiavellianism was significantly related to propensity to complain.

Becker (2007) determined the relationship between Machiavellianism and organizational citizenship behavior (OCB). The negative association between Machiavellianism and organizational citizenship behaviors toward the organization (OCBO) is stronger than the negative association between Machiavellianism and organizational citizenship behaviors toward individuals or groups (OCBI). Additionally, Machiavellianism is associated with the OCB motive of impression management, but negatively associated with the OCB motives of organizational concern and pro-social values.

Latif's (2000) study indicate that higher levels of moral reasoning were significantly related to "internal" scores on Rotter's internal/external locus of control scale. Both higher levels of moral reasoning and "internal" scores on the locus of control scale were significantly related in the negative direction with Machiavellianism. However, only moral reasoning accounted for a significant amount of the variance associated with students' ethical behavior.

Goodboy and McCroskey (2007) study examined the relationships of organizational orientations and Machiavellianism with nonverbal immediacy and job satisfaction in the organizational context. Participants included 160 full-time employees who worked at various for profit or non-profit organizations in the Mid-Atlantic area. Results indicated that the organizational orientations (i.e., upward mobile, ambivalent, and indifferent) and Machiavellianism were significant predictors of employee nonverbal immediacy and job satisfaction.

Conclusion

The above accounts of Machiavellianism show that Machiavellianism is not simply a personality trait. Those who have high emotional intelligence show less Machiavellian behaviors. There is no significant difference between genders in term of Machiavellianism. However, the managerial position, business sector, the organizational size, economic development of countries and probably many other exogenous factors are more important facilitators of Machiavellian behaviors. We believe that ethical awareness is not simply an individual factor but actually more relevant with the cultural-normative factors and incentive situations within a social structure.

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