



A Machiavellian analysis of organisational change

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to undertake a Machiavellian analysis of the determinants of organisational change. It aims to present a model of how power, leaders and teams, rewards and discipline, and roles, norms and values, serve as drivers, enablers or inhibitors of organisational change.

Design/methodology/approach – The paper adopts the sixteenth century Machiavellian text *The Prince* as a lens through which to examine organisational change.

Findings – The paper concludes that Machiavellian thinking provides a valuable guide to the challenges and obstacles in negotiating organisational change and identifies the individual as occupying the central role in determining whether the change intervention will be accepted or rejected.

Originality/value – The longevity of Machiavellian thinking underlines the constancy of human behaviour and the relevance of age-old thinking in understanding and negotiating change in a complex fast-paced business environment.

Keywords Organizational change, Strategic management, Management power, Individual behaviour

Paper type Conceptual paper

Introduction

As management practitioners and academicians have sought to comprehend, and address, the challenges and opportunities presented by the increasing complexity of modern business organisations and rapid change within the international business environment, they have increasingly sought guidance from the wisdoms of political and military strategists of past centuries. The treatises on government and political power by the sixteenth century political scientist, Niccolo Machiavelli, are writings to which political administrators and business leaders turned their attention in the latter half of the twentieth century. Used by scholars to understand political dynamics in organisations, the discourses of Machiavelli have been adopted as leadership guidelines for politicians, administrators and managers, and Machiavelli's most famous work, *The Prince*, has been widely utilised as a handbook for strategic action. Though Machiavelli wrote 500 years ago, his political world has much in common with the modern political and business world that is also beset by change, turmoil and challenge to the *status quo*. Indeed, the longevity of Machiavelli's contribution to political and management science underscores what Parel (1972) describes as Machiavelli's fundamental axiom, namely that human nature is the same always and everywhere.



As a study in the acquisition of enduring power, the central premise of Machiavelli's *The Prince* is that specific attitudes, strategies, and tactics lead to political success. That he referred to the effectiveness of such methods without making reference to ethical and moral standards has meant that his name has become associated with "Machiavellianism", a term used to describe individuals who will behave immorally to achieve their own desired ends. Though *The Prince* does not present the entirety of Machiavelli's political thinking, Femia (2003) suggests that the same basic values are evident throughout Machiavelli's works. Moreover, it is *The Prince* from which business leaders have drawn their inspiration.

One of the first contributions to the Machiavellian business literature was the work of Jay (1967) in which he argued that corporations and states are essentially the same organism and that Machiavellian principles are highly significant to modern management techniques (Buskirk, 1974). Further, in positing that Machiavelli saw success and failure as stemming directly from the qualities of leadership, Jay (1967) says that *The Prince* is a work of extreme realism. Jay (1994) argued that the new science of management is only a continuation of the old art of government, and that management theory and political theory are but two similar branches of the same subject.

Though most of the business literature focuses on what Machiavelli tells us of leadership, the treatises of Machiavelli give us much more than this. With his focus on the individual Machiavelli does not just provide us with an understanding of the role of managers and power, but also of the role of employees within organisations. Some studies have been conducted that examine aspects of Machiavelli's work in terms of its application to employees. An early study by Guterman (1970) examines the effect of Machiavellianism on the solidarity feelings expressed by employees. Grams and Rogers (1989) and Kets de Vries and Miller (1985) consider the effect of Machiavellian personality traits on the use of influence tactics, and Reimers and Barbutto (2002) explore the moderating effect of a Machiavellian disposition on the relationship between sources of motivation and influence tactics. Yet, one erstwhile not addressed application of Machiavelli to management and business studies is within the realm of organisational change. We address this gap in the literature by examining organisational change through the lens of Machiavellian thought. Basing our discussion on *The Prince*, with its orientation to the individual, we present a Machiavellian model of organisational change.

The paper begins with a discussion of the individual in Machiavelli's writings and is followed by consideration of the determinants of organisational change as proffered in Machiavelli's *The Prince*. In the subsequent discussion we explore our Machiavellian model of how power, leaders and teams, rewards and discipline, and roles, norms and values, serve as drivers, enablers or inhibitors of organisational change.

The individual as the level of analysis

In conceiving human nature, Machiavelli highlights that people are inherently unchanging and essentially similar, and that it is these commonalities rather than their differences which assume significance. As he argues in *The Prince*:

For all men are born and live and die in the same way, and therefore resemble each other.

Machiavelli further suggests that it is essential for any political leader (and we would argue, business leader also) who desires to retain power, that she/he be aware of human nature, and in so doing she/he will be able to judge and calculate whether it is better to be loved rather than be feared (Gutfreund, 2000).

Machiavelli's conception of human nature has been the subject of significant critique within the literature. Plamenatz and Wokler (1992) argue that Machiavelli's work has no conception of scientific method in that it is rooted in empirical generalisations based upon experience and observation. Yet, Reimers and Barbuto (2002) maintain that criticism has been levelled at Machiavelli because of his honest acceptance of aggression and perhaps unethical behaviours to achieve a goal. Commentaries on Machiavelli's work reveal a complex treatise open to interpretations and seemingly full of inherent contradictions. Ten Bos (2002) argues that it is not clear whether Machiavelli was a humanist or anti-humanist, moralist or anti-moralist. Typical of this divergence in interpretation are the analyses of Walle (2001) and Gilbert (1977). Walle (2001) characterises Machiavelli as a humanistic analyst in that Machiavelli's work does not concentrate on God or abstract moral structures, but focuses upon how people behave and what strategies work in actual practice. In this regard, he argues that Machiavelli's overall approach may be characterised as a pragmatic, practical one, aimed at assisting in securing and surviving in positions of authority. In contrast, Gilbert (1977) views Machiavelli's work as predominantly anti-humanist in tone in that it is based in reality and does not draw upon the idealistic principles of humanism.

Rooted in the power and actions of individuals, Machiavelli's description of individual conduct, and the centrality of the individual that he focuses on in *The Prince*, has, according to Harris *et al.* (2000) acquired a life of its own, in particular in the characterisation of a Machiavellian personality type. Indeed, in promoting liberation from the moral structures which he believed to confine or reduce the possibilities of human action, Harvey (2001) argues that Machiavelli must be viewed as an instrumentalist, who advocates virtue and morality when useful, yet who was also willing to discard them when necessary. Such thinking was clearly enunciated by Machiavelli arguing that the end justifies the mean and that it is acceptable for an individual to add to their personal power by limiting that of others (Boucher and Fortin, 1995).

A contingency approach characterises Machiavelli's view of an individual's *modus operandi* in making decisions. Easley and Swain (2003) suggest that Machiavelli dismissed classical philosophical perspectives that reality possessed a particular order or arrangement in favour of concepts of chance and variability in the causation of events. Berlin (1981) maintains that Machiavelli's approach to leadership disregards Tayloristic notions of "one best way" in favour of the existence of multiple realities. Machiavelli thinks of the individual as an autonomous being who is not entirely bound by norms and conventions, which also allows for consideration of the individual as enriched by the historical and cultural artefacts surrounding them. To this end, Berlin (1981) argues that the relativity of Machiavelli's conceptualisation allows the individual to adopt positions which may appear inconsistent and opposing, but which may be warranted by the situation in which the individual finds themselves. This is consistent with Gutfreund's (2000) reading of Machiavellian individuals as being not entirely rational creatures but who may, on occasion, not be able to be located within a

coherent, comprehensible framework. In this regard, the apparent prescription of Machiavelli's prose belies an openness and fluidity which concerns itself with the utilitarian nature of action rather than a uni-polar morality based approach.

In his re-writing of Machiavelli in a modern context, Demack (2002) identifies seven principles of power, the first of which is: trust people to service their own interests. As he argues:

... there is a social covenant which regards self-interest as a form of weakness. It is so strong that most people are blind to the extent of their self-interest. If you seek power, you must learn to recognise and exploit this blindness (Demack, 2002).

Jay (1967) also suggests that a Machiavellian approach is cognisant with self-interest as being the principal motivation of employees. Jay (1967) suggests that within organisations loyalty is to oneself and one's career and that this surpasses employees' loyalty to the organisation and its goals. In order to rectify this situation, Jay (1967) suggests that the self-interest of individuals may be harnessed to the good of the organisation through the creation of mutual goals. Yet, Plamenatz and Wokler (1992) argue that Machiavelli exaggerated the extent to which individuals can change institutions to suit their ambitions and ideals. It is just this question of the relationship between employees and managers as self-interested individuals which is salient to a Machiavellian analysis of organisational change.

Figure 1 shows a model of organisational change. From a review of contemporary organisational change literature, the drivers of organisational change as well as the

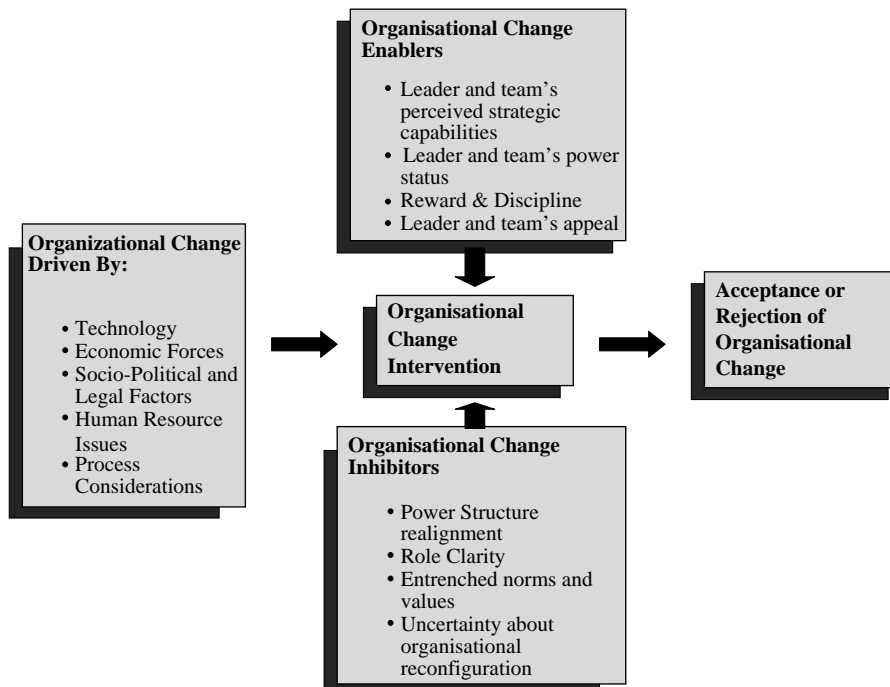


Figure 1.
A framework for organisational change

factors which enable or inhibit the organisational change process have been identified. The model posits that the success of organisational change interventions is premised on the state of equilibrium between the opposing forces for change within the organisation. The model provides a focal point for examining Machiavelli's thoughts on organisational change and facilitates the direct application of Machiavellian thinking onto an organisational change framework. The following sections discuss the constituent components within the model.

Determinants of organisational change

While traditional rationalistic notions of organisational change are predicated on the need of organisations to respond to changing environmental conditions (Thornhill *et al.*, 2000, p. 6), it is now acknowledged that profound environmental change is occurring with greater frequency and organisations are learning to live with constant change (Kanter *et al.*, 1992; Nutt, 2001). A range of both external and internal factors are responsible for triggering this change (Senior, 2002). Ivancevich and Matteson (2002) identify technology, economic forces and socio-political and legal factors as important drivers of organisational change. They argue that these forces for change are beyond management's control and cause a significant shock provoking the organisation to adjust internal processes and systems.

Several internal factors are also critical to driving organisational change. Ivancevich and Matteson (2002) maintain that human resource issues and process considerations are the most common forces for change within the organisation. They argue that internal factors are generally within the control of management, but can sometimes be more difficult to recognise and diagnose than external factors. The following paragraphs provide a Machiavellian perspective on the internal and external forces driving change.

Adapting to change is one of the principal themes which permeate Machiavelli's work. Within his work, Machiavelli accepts the reality that change is a highly charged, tumultuous process which will be resisted by some and welcomed by others. He acknowledges the inevitability of change and sets out to formulate strategies to ensure the successful implementation of change and to broaden our understanding of the complexities of organisational change. He cautions:

It should be borne in mind that there is nothing more difficult to handle, more doubtful of success and more dangerous to carry through than initiating changes to the make-up of a state. The innovator makes enemies of all those who prospered under the old order and only lukewarm support is forthcoming from those who would prosper under the new. Their support is lukewarm partly from fear of their adversaries, who have existing laws on their side, and partly because men are generally incredulous, never really trusting new things unless they have tested them by experience.

Technology has played an important role in changing the structure and shape of the organisation. While technology is a relatively recent phenomenon, Machiavelli identified the principal driver of organisational change as changes to the structure of the organisation itself. Thereafter, he distinguishes several forms of organisational change primarily along the basis of whether the change itself is expected or unexpected and whether it accords with customary tradition and practice or is dramatic and transformative in nature. He maintains that structural change which follows from customary tradition requires less drastic action to secure control than transformative

change, but enters the caveat that ambition and advancement are worthy leadership traits, which have popular appeal amongst employees and are highly instrumental in fuelling organisational allegiances.

In the case of transformative change, the prognosis for action is more severe, with Machiavelli arguing that devastation is the surest way of keeping control. Wolin (1977) argues that Machiavelli's prescription for the use of strong-arm tactics in this instance forms part of a "new way" based upon the science of the controlled application of force. Furthermore, he maintains that the task of such a science is to preserve the distinguishing line between political creativity and destruction. This approach proposes that the judicious use of violence is a highly effective strategy in securing organisational control and the allegiance of employees.

Economic forces are also strong determinants of organisational change. Machiavelli does not conceptualise economic forces in terms of abstract changes in market conditions but rather in relation to the power base of individuals and their ability to affect change and improve conditions for their subordinates through the exercise of power. In this regard, Kontos (1972) argues that the goal of political leadership is to establish an environment whereby the basic and immutable tenets of human nature are fully accommodated and utilised. Such an analysis firmly establishes that an essential quality of leadership is the ability to maintain a measure of control over the economic environment. In examining human nature, Machiavelli distinguishes between needs and emotions. According to Easley and Swain (2003), needs are defined in terms of a desire to acquire material requirements that cannot be satisfied because of unlimited appetites that dwell within an uncertain future, whereas emotions are thought to give rise to needs and are identified as the drivers of one's decisions and subsequent actions. This explains Machiavelli's emphasis on the importance of perception and the need to impress subordinates with displays of strong leadership and control. In this context, Viroli (1998) characterises Machiavellian rhetoric as "adonostare" – to colour one's intentions and goals so that they appear positive. He argues that this technique is frequently used to arouse feelings of love, loyalty and patriotism among the populace.

Organisational change may be necessitated by a range of socio-cultural and political factors. Inherent in the concept of change itself entails an obligation to challenge beliefs and interpretive schemas to accommodate emerging realities (Easley and Swain, 2003). This requires an awareness and understanding by organisations of the changing direction of employee values and priorities. Accordingly, Easley and Swain (2003) argue that Machiavelli places a strong emphasis on interpersonal awareness and the role of individual employees in driving and responding to organisational change. Julius *et al.* (1999) argue that in engaging in organisational change, leaders must motivate others to change and such motivation must be perceived as inspired by the values of integrity, wisdom and selflessness. They suggest that such values are not essential for leadership, but that if leaders intend to engage in organisational change, a perception of sincerity, honesty and fairness is vital.

Changes in the relationships that exist between employees and management can provoke and necessitate organisational change. A recurring theme in Machiavelli's work is the need for leaders to be respected by their subordinates. While he counsels that leaders should possess the cunning of the fox and the power and strength of the lion, he also examines situations where change occurs by virtue of the leader having been disposed and replaced by the populace. Machiavelli argues that:

There are two things a prince must fear: internal subversion from his subjects; and external aggression by foreign powers. Against the latter, his defense lies in being well armed and having good allies; and if he is well armed he will always have good allies. In addition, domestic affairs will always remain under control, provided that relations with external powers are under . . . Now, as far as his subjects are concerned, when there is no disturbance, the prince's chief fear must be a secret conspiracy. He can adequately guard against this if he avoids being hated or scorned and keeps the people satisfied.

In situations where a leader has been disposed and replaced by a candidate selected by the populace, Machiavelli argues that the new leader's position is secure, so long as he retains the friendship of the people and eliminates the sources of their oppression. However, Gutfreund (2000) suggests that an assumption of rationality cannot be expected in the workplace at all times. He maintains that on occasion, individuals will act in a particular way that eludes explanation and that in such cases, leaders must rely on good fortune to survive. Further, Flanagan (1972) argues that Machiavelli's use of the word "fortune" designates the uncertainty and dependency of human affairs.

Process considerations are an important internal driver of organisational change. Machiavelli places responsibility for process issues squarely on the shoulders of organisational leaders. He considers the vision and future intentions of a leader as critical in determining the shape and structure of the organisation. Machiavelli argues strongly that a leader's reputation can be enhanced greatly by demonstrations of strategic competence:

Nothing causes a prince to be so much esteemed as great enterprises and giving proof of prowess.

In this context, McAlpine (2000) maintains that at the heart of this advice, is an exhortation to leaders to show courage, honour, ability, perseverance and above all, total dedication, for these are the ingredients of success and, together are the alchemy that allows success to become a possibility. Machiavelli also acknowledges the importance of knowledge and learning as essential elements of a leader's toolkit. As Kontos (1972) states, Machiavelli viewed the acquisition and understanding of historical knowledge as critical to a fuller understanding of reality and repeatedly advises leaders to emulate the great deeds of past leaders.

The role of power, organisational leaders and teams in enabling and inhibiting organisational change

The role of leaders and top management teams and the nature and level of power which they possess perform an important role in the negotiating organisational change. A summary of organisational change models by Cummings and Worley (1993) identifies the role of strong leadership as critical to the successful implementation of change. They maintain that leaders need to develop a commitment and readiness to change, create a vision by describing the outcomes of the change and develop political support by addressing the power and influence dynamics of the proposed change. Similarly, Francis (2003) argues that leaders need to bring into existence the new reality within which subordinates frame the new changes within the workplace. Such perspectives recognise that leaders need to use power constructively in encouraging commitment and preparing employees for the challenges inherent in the change process. Conversely, the misapplication of power can result in the failure of change

processes and can have disastrous consequences for the organisation. Increasingly, top management teams are playing an important role in the change management process. Katzenbach and Smith (1998) maintain that top management teams can deliver superior performance through shared leadership roles, individual and mutual accountability, collective work products and clear specificity of purpose. However, Rimmer (2002) argues that teams are frequently used to camouflage coercion with the appearance of cohesion, conceal conflict with the appearance of consensus and convert conformity into the appearance of creativity.

Methods of leadership and strategies for retaining and employing power were a constant source of preoccupation for Machiavelli. Calhoun (1969) suggests that Machiavelli would applaud the widespread application of his precepts of leadership in today's organisations and maintains that Machiavelli's observations have continued to find favour because his tactics are based on a sound and realistic knowledge of behaviour and describe ploys that are "natural" courses of action, undertaken by leaders of any period to acquire power, resist aggression, and control subordinates. Moreover, there is much in Machiavelli's depiction of power that has relevance to a modern understanding of the roles that organisational leaders and teams play in enabling and inhibiting organisational change.

Machiavelli stresses the need for leaders to assert their power if they are to effect change (Femia, 2003). As Machiavelli argues:

Fraud, as well as force, is a necessary component of effective government.

Machiavelli argues that effective leaders possess both power and the *savoir-faire* to use it to effect change. Termed in modern management research as influence tactics (Kipnis *et al.*, 1980; Mowday *et al.*, 1978), Machiavelli examines the strategies used by leaders to effect changes in the decisions and actions of their followers. A Machiavellian understanding of personal power acknowledges the importance of both self-defence and self-promotion and the complex inter-relationship that exists between both skills. However, Stone and Pashley (2000) argue that in Machiavellian thought these skills may be employed in an acceptable or disreputable manner.

Loyalty features as a vital component in the Machiavellian leadership toolkit. While much of the Machiavelli's work is interpreted as being focused on the leader and his personal power, Machiavelli also highlights the importance of competency and loyalty in the teams that work for the leader. According to McAlpine (2000), Machiavelli viewed loyalty as begetting loyalty and argued that loyalty was of utmost priority in the selection of the top management team. Machiavelli suggests that when there is a loyal relationship between the top management team and the leader individuals will not fear change but rather will be confident of the efficacy of those who hold power. As he says:

When you see a minister thinking more of himself than of you, and seeking his own profit in everything he does, such a one will never be a good minister, you will never be able to trust him. This is because a man entrusted with the task of government must never think of himself, but of the Prince and must never concern himself with anything except the Prince's affairs . . . When therefore, relations between princes and their ministers are of this kind, they can have confidence in each other; when they are otherwise, the result is always disastrous for one or other.

Machiavelli recognised the importance for a leader of being surrounded by competent staff. He identified the need for individuals to work together in teams as central to the attainment of organisational goals and successful organisational change. Therefore, he maintained that the perception of the competence and loyalty of the top management team was critical to maintaining stability and ensuring acceptance of organisational change. As Jay (1967) notes, while individuals are viewed by Machiavelli as essentially self-seeking, this self-interest may be harnessed for the common good of the organisation where mutual goals are articulated, such as the creation of teams that work towards enabling organisational change that profits all organisational members. As he said:

The first opinion that is formed of a ruler's intelligence is based on the quality of the men he has around him. When they are competent and loyal, he can always be considered wise, because he has been able to recognize their competence and to keep them loyal. But when they are otherwise, the prince is always open to adverse criticism, because his first mistake has been in the choice of his ministers.

Equality of power is an alien concept in Machiavellian thinking. Demack (2002) argues that there are no alliances between equals as no two individuals are ever truly equal and power will always be an issue. Demack (2002) maintains that individuals respect power and submit to change and what is demanded by management because they fear dismissal and other repercussions. Julius *et al.* (1999) argue that workplace conflict is inevitable in dealing with organisational change, but the key factor is to engage in conflict on issues where there exists a high payoff and where possible, when resources are great and moral righteousness is on your side. Also, the resolution of conflict by reference to a central authority which can wield unlimited power within a community is a key aspect of Machiavellian thought (Held, 1989).

The value of the characteristic of virtue in leaders and managers is also strongly represented in Machiavelli's work. Wood (1972) defines Machiavellian virtue in terms of conscious, self-directed energy channelled in a purposeful fashion in order to personally shape the surrounding environment. Yet, Harvey (2001) argues that, for Machiavelli, what is important is not the actual possession of virtuous qualities of honesty, mercy and good faith, but rather an individual's belief that their leader has these qualities. In arguing that a moral approach does not fit the world in which we live, Harvey (2001) views Machiavelli's approach as practical and realistic based upon an accurate comprehension of humanity's weakness. Harvey (2001) is defensive of negative interpretations of Machiavelli's analysis of power and suggests that analyses of Machiavelli which present him taking diabolic delight in deception and wickedness for their own sake are off the mark. Instead, he maintains that Machiavelli's use of power is oriented towards achieving successful organisational outcomes and recognises that in arriving at this point, certain casualties will result. Machiavelli views power as essential to the security of people (Wolin, 1977) and identifies a virtuous leader as one, who can achieve greatness by utilising power to marshal his people by firstly, producing a direct inspiring effect such that the people wish to imitate them and second, in having the capacity to imprint the same vital quality on their followers (Skinner, 1981). Thus, it can be argued that such a Machiavellian approach can be utilised to enable change.

Just as Machiavelli recognises the inevitability of change, so too does he highlight the unavoidability of challenges to a leader's power. However, he maintains that such

power contests may actually be a force that enables or inhibits organisational change. Machiavelli warns that leaders should be wary of potential challenges to their power but says that:

Political life is, at bottom, a gladiatorial arena where the strong subdue the weak and obtain preferential access to the limited number of goods.

Not everyone will have an interest in contesting power. Demack (2002) argues that many individuals realise that power is beyond their reach. They may not be prepared to pay the price for acquiring power or they may affect disdain for power – although, he cautions that this may not actually be an indication of integrity. Yet, Demack (2002) maintains that it is often better to allow others to contest power on your behalf. Further, sharing power is necessary to the maintenance of power as the leader cannot produce all that the organisation makes or provide all the services that the organisation offers as well as manage and oversee its operations. This indicates the necessity of having teams and team leaders in administering organisational changes. Recommending empowerment strategies, Jay (1994) advises:

... put small management teams of your own into one or two key factories, because otherwise you'll use up half your staff in giving orders and issuing requests, and then checking that they've been properly fulfilled.

This means that the leader needs to relinquish some power, to do otherwise would prove unmanageable. However, in order to successfully empower the employees in times of organisational change, the leader needs also to use the tools of reward and discipline.

Reward and discipline as tools for achieving organisational change

As the two primary tools for controlling employees within the organisation, reward and disciplinary systems are critically important in organisational change processes. Lawrence (2002) argues that reward systems can be used to generate and leverage change by valuing specific outputs, behaviours and values required to deliver the organisation's strategy, promote the desired culture and motivate employees to embrace change. Similarly, Kanter *et al.* (1992, p. 513) argue that rewards (such as special incentives, finding new heroes) can be an effective way of signaling management's commitment to change. In examining the effectiveness of disciplinary measures, Daft (2004) argues that approaches such as threatening employees with loss of jobs or promotions or by firing or transferring them can be used to overcome resistance to change. He cautions, however, that this approach is not advisable because it creates anger in people and accordingly, the change may be sabotaged.

Machiavelli argues that there are two primary ways in which managers may convince employees of the value of organisational change and successfully implement change within organisations. Commonly known as the "carrot and stick" approaches, the first approach involves offering rewards and incentives, while the second approach entails the utilisation of disciplinary measures. Despite Machiavelli's nonchalant attitude towards reversing previously held positions as circumstances require, he prizes the virtues of organisational commitment, loyalty and worker dedication. However, in doing so, he clearly distinguishes between the position of the manager and the position of the employee, highlighting the centrality of management directives in

people management in providing “rewards where they have been earned and punishing malefactors when necessary” (Ledeen, 1999). However, Machiavelli advocates that rewards and incentives be utilised in the first instance, and this is integrally related to his belief in the value of governance by the people. He suggested that power should be held in the hands of many as when people govern themselves they evoke balance and a greater capacity to survive (Easley and Swain, 2003).

Machiavelli understood human nature’s inherent fear of change when he argued that change was better accepted by people when they were offered either incentives or directives. Machiavelli cautions that incentives in themselves are only effective when they are accompanied by a greater sense of security. As such, incentives are valuable when they come in the form of freedom or liberty from domination, and the need to innovate and be secure (Easley and Swain, 2003). As Machiavelli advises:

Benefits must be conferred gradually; and in that way, they will taste better. Above all, a prince must live with his subjects in such a way as no development; either favourable or adverse makes him vary his conduct. For when adversity brings the need for it, there is no time to inflict harm; and the favours he may confer are profitless, because they are seen as being forced, and so they earn no thanks.

Empirical research has examined the impact of Machiavellianism on the influence process (Grams and Rogers, 1989; Kets de Vries and Miller, 1985). This research suggests that in past operationalisations, the Machiavellian disposition has been overly simplified to describe Machiavellian leaders as power hungry individuals who do not consider the needs of others and consistently act in an antagonistic, forceful, and unethical manner (Reimers and Barbuto, 2002). However, Reimers and Barbuto (2002) argue that Machiavellian personalities first seek to influence using charm, friendliness, and tact, and if these influence attempts fail, Machiavellians exhibit influence behaviours more consistent with previous definitions of the term (namely, that they are unethical, forceful and antagonistic). Further, Reimers and Barbuto (2002) suggest that without a keen understanding of how to modify other’s thoughts, beliefs, and behaviours, as well as one’s own, many potential leaders might lose their “kingdoms”.

Machiavelli makes a case for how organisations and managers can create an organisational culture in which people feel valued in their work, secure in their position in the organisation and rewarded for their organisational commitment. He writes of the role that the leader should play when he says that:

A prince should also show his esteem for talent, actively encouraging able men and honouring those who excel in their profession. Then he must encourage his citizens so that they can go peacefully about their business, whether it be trade or agriculture of any other human occupation . . . the Prince should be ready to reward men who want to do these things and anyone who endeavours in any way to increase the prosperity of his city or his state. As well as this, at suitable times of the year, he should entertain the people with shows and festivals. And since every city is divided into guilds and family groups, he should pay attention to these, meet them from time to time and give an example of courtesy and munificence, while all the time, none the less, fully maintaining the dignity of the position, because this should never be wanting in anything.

Yet, within *The Prince* there is also an argument that when rewards and incentives are not sufficient in themselves to convince people of the value of organisational change and the wisdom of their leaders, then disciplinary action is deemed necessary. In

essence, discipline is viewed as a necessary response when people do not display loyalty in their leader. As Machiavelli suggests:

It is far better to be feared than loved if you cannot be both . . . Any prince who has come to depend entirely on promises and has taken no other precautions ensures his own ruin . . . For love is secured by a bond of gratitude which men, wretched creatures that they are, break when it is to their advantage to do so; but fear is strengthened by a dread of punishment which is always effective.

In drawing on Machiavelli, Oliver (cited in Marshall, 1987) suggests that people are not fired for political mistakes but that mistakes can get one fired, rather than counselled, for poor job performance. However, within the pages of *The Prince* there is also the caution to leaders that even when disciplinary action is imposed it must be done in such a way as to have the people believe that they have not been unfairly punished. Indeed, wherever possible an effective leader will make punishment look like reward. In his reading of Machiavelli, McAlpine (2000) says:

When you dismiss an employee, always do this in such a way that the dismissed employees feel that they have been promoted. Find them a better job or merely tell them that they are too good for your organization.

Machiavelli suggests that rewards in themselves cannot be entirely effective as human nature in its greed and jealousy can never be satisfied by incentives. He suggests, however, that because of human nature's deceit, vanity, anger of revenge and dishonesty, punishment can be a very effective mechanism to address temptations. However, Machiavelli also argues that while the struggle for success is operationalised in terms of money, the struggle for success should be expressed in terms of soul. In *The Prince*, he teaches "for a man to act entirely up to his professions of virtue soon meets with what destroys him among so much that is evil" (McAlpine, 2000).

Roles, norms, values and uncertainty as inhibitors of organisational change

Overcoming a fear of change amongst employees is one of the key tasks of management in introducing organisational change. Several commentators have pointed to the tendency within organisations to resist change because of an inborn desire to control events, thus reducing uncertainty and preserving the *status quo* (Carr *et al.*, 1996; Hoag *et al.*, 2002; Katz and Kahn, 1978). In this regard, both Hoag *et al.* (2002) and Tichy (1983) argue that staff may resist change within organisations because of an attachment to the underlying beliefs, values and norms which are embodied within the organisational culture. Hellriegel *et al.* (2001, p. 553) maintain that passive resistance by employees to change is one of the most damaging inhibitors of change. They suggest that the non-participation of employees in formulating change proposals results in a lack of commitment to change and can sometimes ultimately lead to its overall failure. A lack of role clarity in the change process can often be rooted in employee withdrawal from organisational change.

An understanding of an individual's motivations, values and the roles that they adopt in organisations and society lies at the centre of Machiavelli's work. Gilbert (1977) argues that it is the lack of interest in institutional aspects of problems and the concentration of attention on the individual that characterises Machiavelli's work. Germino (1972) proposes a series of propositions that serve as a basis of Machiavellian psychology. Germino (1972) maintains that Machiavelli viewed men as basically

selfish and left to themselves, the agonistic impulses in their psyche predominate over the co-operative ones. Nonetheless, Machiavelli appreciated the psychological potential for socialisation in men and posits that men can be influenced to act sacrificially on behalf of the collectivity. Herein lies the key driver of human nature from a Machiavellian perspective: that the individual is predominantly motivated by self-interest, but may be persuaded to engage in altruistic activity. Femia (2003) supports this individualistic view and posits that inherent in Machiavelli's view of the human condition lies the natural selfish tendencies of men that will regularly subvert the state, reduce it to chaos and transform it into something different. For this reason, he rules out the possibility of a perfect state and suggests that human history is a ceaseless process of deterioration and renewal, constituting a never-ending cycle of recurrent patterns.

It is evident from his work that Machiavelli firmly believes that values and norms play an important part in affecting the behaviour and decision-making of individuals. Machiavelli argued that norms provided a useful means of maintaining power and control in society in so long as everyday conditions remained undisturbed. He maintains that traditional norms constitute a strong stabilising force in society stating:

So long as their old ways of life are undisturbed and there is no divergence in customs, men live quietly.

Role models are frequently used by Machiavelli as an exhortation to strong-willed individuals to strive fervently to achieve their potential. Kontos (1972) argues that the great men of history, founders and reformers of states seem to be Machiavelli's special idols. Machiavelli's rationale in invoking great leaders in his work is simple: if one is to succeed, he must actively seek the realisation of specific political qualities (Kontos, 1972). As Machiavelli states:

Men nearly always follow the tracks made by others and proceed in their affairs by imitation, even though they cannot entirely keep to the tracks of others or emulate the prowess of their models. So a prudent man must always follow in the footsteps of great men and imitate those who have been outstanding. He must behave like those archers, who if they are skillful, when the target seems too distant, know the capabilities of their bow and aim a good deal higher than their objective, not in order to shoot so high, but so that by aiming high, they can reach the target.

Machiavelli views change as the enemy of stability. In an uncertain environment, which may be caused by weak leadership, ambitious leadership or popular revolt, norms, values and role models become threatened. Such situations provoke self-enhancement motives and Machiavelli argues that men become more willing to change their leaders expecting to fare better. Roles and values are open to change in an uncertain environment and Machiavelli posits that these environmental conditions are adverse to good governance. Swain (2002) argues that Machiavelli advocates the creation of fear to prevent the escalation of environmental uncertainty. He maintains that fear prevents people from harming one another, either through the initiation of wrong-doing or through private efforts at retaliation. In essence, strong leadership promoted through the instilment of fear is necessary to promote an organisational change agenda.

Conclusion

A reading of Machiavelli provides a valuable roadmap of the challenges and obstacles in negotiating organisational change. He identifies the individual as occupying the central role in determining whether the change intervention will be accepted or rejected. What follows amounts to a psychological blueprint of options related to persuasion tactics and reward and punishment tools available to leaders to ensure the successful implementation of organisational change. Specifically, Machiavelli advises leaders to showcase both their strategic competence and personal appeal and urges them to promote loyalty within their ranks. He also advocates the gradual conferring of benefits and the appropriate fair use of disciplinary measures to deal with disloyalty and strengthen the leader's power base. He identifies the detrimental nature of uncertainty and its ability to undermine confidence and support for organisational leaders as inhibitors of change. In particular, he recommends carefully assessing the impact of change on existing norms, values and quality of working life of employees. In this context, he highlights the primary motivation of individuals as one of self-interest and proposes that organisational leaders should accentuate the benefits that change will bring to individuals in order to enlist their support for change.

The longevity of Machiavellian thinking lies in its focus on the individual and its realistic view of behavioural patterns within organisations. He offers compelling insights into the role and methods of leadership and proposes strategies for securing and maintaining organisational control. In a fast-paced business environment, Machiavelli examines the key premises underlying decision-making and provides an understanding of how individuals perceive and interpret events. While it has been argued by some that the only universal constant is change, Machiavelli's work indicates the constancy of human behaviour and remains extremely relevant to understanding and negotiating change in increasingly complex business environments.

Contribution to the field of organisational change

While Machiavellianism has been regarded by some as pessimistic, cold and detached in its approach to the drivers of human behaviour, its insights on power, control and leadership are steeped in realism and provide valuable guidance to managers in the field of organisational change. In essence, Machiavelli presents a treatise on the key requirements for developing and maintaining a successful organisation and ensuring that the organisation responds effectively to both internal and external challenges in its environment. Long before Cummings and Worley (1993) identified strong leadership as critical to the successful implementation of change, Machiavelli posited that leaders needed to be perceived as having strong personal attributes and an ability to instil loyalty in their followers in order to achieve and maintain success.

Perception plays an important role in Machiavellian thinking. Leaders need not have positive personal attributes; they need only to be perceived to have them. Likewise, the characterisation of Machiavellian rhetoric as "adonostare" clearly suggests that Machiavelli recognised the benefits of adopting positive language in courting approval for organisational change and arousing emotions of love, loyalty and patriotism for the leader's own ends. Such developmental styles of management are now commonly used in organisations to encourage commitment of employees to organisational objectives (Korsgaard, 1996; McGuire *et al.*, 2005).

On several issues, contemporary thinking departs significantly from Machiavelli. While recent advances in organisational change literature are broadly in favour of devolving power down the organisational hierarchy (Avolio *et al.*, 2004; Patterson *et al.*, 2004) and the creation of top management teams (Katzenbach and Smith, 1998), Machiavelli supported a more centralised form of power structure. Despite viewing top management teams as useful in promoting the appearance of good governance and recognising the reality of sharing power as being necessary to the maintenance of the leader's own power, Machiavelli remained suspicious of top management teams due to his strong belief in the natural selfish tendencies of men for self-promotion and self-enhancement. Equally, Machiavelli's ease with the use of disciplinary/punitive approaches in implementing change is in sharp contrast to the more affirmative humanistic style which persists in modern organisations. However, it should be equally noted that the autocratic society of Machiavelli's time contrasts sharply with the more egalitarian/rights-based society which exists today.

Change has also occurred in respect to the key drivers associated with performance in the organisation. Machiavelli viewed the individual as predominantly motivated by self-interest and in dogged pursuit of their own objectives. He viewed loyalty to the organisation as secondary to loyalty to oneself and one's career. In contrast, contemporary organisational development literature subscribes to the notion that employees are seeking to satisfy a wider set of psychological needs. While self-interest remains the primary motivating factor within organisations, research has indicated that factors such as a caring and empathetic workplace and the contribution of the organisation to the community can influence job commitment and satisfaction (Harris and Brannick, 1999; Stum, 1998; Walsh, 2001).

Machiavelli's realistic insights on the drivers of human behaviour have ensured that his writings remain much discussed within management circles and as we have illustrated throughout this paper, his prescriptions for successfully implementing change provides direction for managers and academics alike in understanding the complexity of modern organisations.

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