

Editor's Note

It is almost axiomatic that good information is a prerequisite for sound decision making by managers. The question is that where this information come from?

Conventionally, hard data and logical analysis are seen as the source of intelligent decision making. This is where focus of information management is centered.

However, long time research in the field of decision making and policy studies have shown that not all decisions (including those made in organizations by the top management) are always based on hard data and logical analysis. In fact, research has revealed that rationality only in a limited manner is applied to the process decision making¹. Equally, if not more important, are informal and personal sources of information and influences, among a wide range of other forces. These also play a major role in shaping the intellectual repertoire of decision makers. No wonder why modern organizations (and societies at large) invest a great deal of time and effort in training and recruitment of people whose influence and advice could help top management to make more intelligent decisions.

What intrigues me to raise the issue of qualified advisers to top managers of organizations was a program that I watched recently on our national TV. It was a 30 minute program in which the three participants spent 10 minutes

(no exaggeration) to exchange complements and praising each other's great dedication, altruism, and achievements.

Unfortunately, in our culture, it is not only on the media and in the published literature that one witnesses a disproportionate allocation of time and attention to exchanges that could be easily dubbed as flattering. It seems this behavior is a rule rather than an exception in our transactions in formal situations, particularly in the public sector where power and politics are is more at work.

Where this behavior has has its roots, and why we have developed this habit in ourselves? What are the implications of a culture of flattering?

The majority of sociologists and social pathologists attribute the prevalence of such behavior in a society to social insecurity, lack of social participation, lack of freedom, etc.

In our public sector people are appointed to position not according to their merits and a transparent process of selection. Appointment of people to public positions, almost at all levels takes place in the absence of an equal employment opportunity (EEO) policy. It seems that legislatures and policy makers in our country do not have the perception that such a policies are needed. As long as favoritism and political preferences, instead of individual's merits is the reason for the appointment in public organization, and an

effective system of performance appraisal is not at work, and as long as people with expertise staff are not free and encouraged to speak their minds, the arena will be left to the mediocre. The mediocre, then hide shelter behind the power for protection. One important tactic they appeal to in order to safeguard their interests and status, could be verbal bribe they offer the boss!

I am thinking of three reasons why such behavior becomes prevalent in an organization:

1) Some individuals quite purposefully find flattering the most direct way to promotion and power, much more effective than expertise, experience, and hardworking.

2) We have frequently witnessed that in our county those who speak openly, soon fall into disgrace of the powerful. If lucky, they will be expelled ignored, otherwise they have to pay a heavy toll.

3) Such experiences have lead to a culture of lack of boldness and brevity in expressing one's opinions.

Negative impact of such a culture for the organization and the society at large, are more obvious to need elaboration. Obviously, it will forbid a decent level of criticism and critical thinking; prevents intellectual contributions by people who do not tend to be a member of the 'the inner circle' around the boss; and consequently blocks innovation and improvement of affairs.

Shakespeare is quoted to say praise is the fodder for the fool. One would say mainly because those who receive constantly receive praise from their subordinates, gradually indulge themselves with the illusion that they are the centre of every thing that goes on around them. Managers, then, could become so intoxicated with this illusion that hardly can understand what is going on around them. No surprise, that around them, form a circle of people with personal agenda and interests and

at the same time the knowledgeable and genuinely concerned people avoid them.

If we understand management as the application of information to practice, then the culture of flattering prevents the free flow of information, distorts information, and consequently, provides a false picture of the strength, opportunities, and threats. Most likely, transforming false understanding into action leads to misinformed decisions by top managers. Such decisions, regrettably, occur so repeatedly find no repercussion in the environment, hence normal.

Ethical and religious teachings warn us from flattering. In ancient Greek flatterer was considered to be the most noxious creature! Ethical values, in addition, require the receiver of the flatter to reject it and "though dust into the eyes of the flatterer". Remember that Imam Ali warned his governors from accepting praise and flatters.

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