Management Fad Adoption: An Exploration of Three Psychogenic Influences

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ABSTRACT

Management fads and fashions are not forced on unsuspecting, mindless corporate leaders. Therefore, an understanding of the reasons behind the decision to adopt a fad would provide practical insights. While there have been sound sociological theories advanced regarding management fashion adoption, the psychological theories on adoption have lacked substance. In particular, there is an absence of literature on the psyche of the individuals who adopt fads that fail. Thus, this paper proposes three possible psychogenic influences on management fashion adoptions including: (1) limited cognitive capacity, (2) defensiveness, and (3) neuroticism. Because the organization behavior literature has little research exploring neuroticism, this area is dealt with in detail. Finally, recommendations are given on how to overcome these influences along with concluding remarks.

An Introduction to Management Fads

The notion of fads often brings to mind such novelties as pet rocks, bell-bottom pants, nouveau cuisine, and pyramid schemes. However, the negative connotation frequently associated with the term “fads” is not limited to the fashion and restaurant industries. Management theory too has been criticized for being replete with fads (Zemke, 1997). For example, in the 1960s there were employee assistance programs; in the 1970s, T-groups; in the 1980s, quality circles; and in the 1990s, reengineering initiatives. In fact, some see managers as superficial problem-solvers who are continually looking for off-the-shelf, ready-made answers for complex business problems. Yet, whereas managers are the organization’s decision makers, much of the research examining the precursors to fad adoption has focused attention either on environmental/economic, organizational, or sociological influences (Abrahamson, 1997; Carson, Lanier, Carson, & Birkenmeier, 1999; Kieser, 1997; Nohria & Berkley, 1994).

The bulk of the management fashion theory that does exist has been derived, extrapolated, and adapted from theories of women's clothing fashions. This is not to suggest, however, that understanding trends in apparel has no relevance for the study of management fashions. For example, the collective selection theory of fashion holds that consumers purchase garments that are defined as vogue because the narrow selection of options considered "in" limits the need to individually evaluate choices and imposes order in a decision that could otherwise be overwhelming. Further, dressing in accordance with trends of the day minimizes social ostracism and isolation (Davis, 1992).
Interestingly, while being part of a recognized collective of fashion trend-setters is desirable, another theory of women's fashions, the trickle-down theory, suggest that when lower social classes imitate higher-ones, the latter need to then change their styles to maintain their status differentiation. This logic has been applied to explain why many companies abandon well-entrenched management fashions in the face of increasing acceptance. However, it is at this juncture that clothing fashion theories offer limited applicability and utility for understanding management practice (Carson, Lanier, Carson, & Guidry, 2000; Davis, 1992).

While the consequences of wearing skirts of varying lengths may not be that significant, the effects of introducing management fashions into organizations at inopportune times may be devastating. According to Nohria and Berkley (1994), it is the manager and his/her frame of reference that will determine the fad adoption decision. These authors suggest that there are three managerial types who engage in management fad shopping. The first type attribute the failure of an earlier fad to some missing element or implementation problem. Therefore, they hire new experts with variations on the fad theme in search of the correct approach. The second type get frustrated with the ineffectiveness of the fad and completely throw it out. They then wholeheartedly pursue a newer fad. The third type adopts every new fad that comes along. This last group often has their employees so busy with new initiatives that core businesses are eroded.

Abrahamson (1996) has examined this negative perception of fads as well as more positive perspectives. Rather than perceiving fad adoption as the result of childlike exhilaration, blind conformity, or mass hysteria, he notes that there are often healthy, adaptive reasons to adopt a management fad. Preferring the term "management fashion" to "fad," Abrahamson suggests that leaders (the terms leaders, managers, and executives are used interchangeably through this article) seek fashions that are rational and progressive. Fashions are rational when they are believed to efficiently improve the organization, and they are progressive when they are perceived as newer and better than preexisting fashions. Although these studies propose sound arguments for managerial influences on fad adoption, there is a lack of substantive psychologically-based rationale. Based on the present literature, a general model of management fad adoption follows.

Table 1

Management Fashion Adoption: Major Influences and Outcomes

<table>
<tr><th><u>MAJOR FACTORS</u></th><th>-
OUTCOMES</th></tr>
<tr><td>(1) Environmental/Economic</td><td rowspan="2">(1) Adaptive & Progressive</td></tr>
<tr><td>(2) Organizational</td></tr>
<tr><td>(3) Sociological</td><td rowspan="2">(2) Maladaptive & Regressive</td></tr>
<tr><td>(4) Individual</td></tr>
</table>

The study of the mind and its processes have historically been the realm of psychiatrists and psychologists. These past psychoanalytic insights have proven most useful in helping decipher present-day and even future managerial puzzles. This article will consider three long-established psychogenic variables and their proposed influences on management fad adoption. The three areas discussed are restricted to: (a) limited cognitive capacity, (b) defensiveness, and (c) neuroticism. While many areas could have been chosen, the authors wanted to recognize cognitive explanations found in the organizational behavior literature and more “abnormal” processes that are relatively unexplored in management articles. In addition to exploring these areas, methods for overcoming managerial deficiencies and resulting faulty management fad adoption are addressed.

Psychogenic Influences

Limited Cognitive Capacity

Limited cognitive capacity refers to the inability of managers to take in all the information influencing their decisions. While individuals vary in their innate abilities, managers take shortcuts in their decision making because they do not have the time or capability of processing everything. On any given day, individuals may be called upon to make difficult decisions often with very limited information. Ideally, they seek the optimal outcomes for their decisions. However, there are many factors and considerations involved in most decisions, rendering it impossible to make a precise determination of the causes of problems (Kelley, 1973). Although individuals in complex roles might prefer to make decisions that are analytical, creative, and practical, both internal and external factors make this a difficult feat (Sternberg, 1997).

The major obstacles to making rational decisions are time shortages, insufficient resources to examine problems in depth, and lack of cerebral and emotional capacity for the decision-maker to thoroughly deal with each problem. These obstacles are not uniquely associated with managerial decision-making. Consumers make multiple daily decisions concerning product or brand purchases. Confronted with conflicting and incomplete information, individuals may make more extreme decisions (Houghton, 1998). In other words, in the presence of information overload processing requirements become too demanding due to limited cognitive capacity. Furthermore, Houghton (1998) concludes that even experts will have trouble making rational decisions when they have limited cognitive capacity.

VanDevender and Barker (1999) examined the relationship between cognitive capacity, decision-making ability and promotion to higher levels of responsibility in the army. They found that information processing acuity played a significant role in an individual's decision making strategy, in turn influencing their likelihood of promotion. Additionally, Rohrbaugh and Shanteau (1999) focused their research on how contextual, cognitive, and personal variables influence the decision process and maintained that these variables did in fact contribute to the development of the decision process.

It follows that managers attempting to make decisions in an ever-changing world, besieged by conflicting information and opinions might also experience feelings of helplessness due to their inability to "take it all in." They simply lack the cognitive capacity to grasp all the available information (Levinson, 1988). Because of these constraints, theory suggests that decisions are typically made on the basis of "bounded rationality." Individuals are bounded in their rationality because of both their own and organizational limitations and also because of environmental turbulence. Therefore, ideal decisions can't be made in most circumstances. Instead, the manager "satisfices," settling for a decision that is good enough (Simon, 1983).

Thus, pressured to hurriedly make complex decisions and bombarded by data, managers may find themselves reaching for the magical bullet--a management fashion. These fashions are seductive because they provide for ready-made solutions. According to Cohen (1998) management fashions are appealing because they can be put into place quickly, there are always well-known success stories, programs are easily measurable or at least appear to be so (actually the measurements usually track activities rather than results) and programs can be delegated to others (organizational members or consultants)--so if the fashion fails, it is someone else's fault.

Yet, when leaders are seduced by these management fashions, their attention is diverted away from the real opportunities that exist. The paradox, according to Cohen (1998), is that executives really know what is wrong with their organizations. They know where to look for the hidden opportunities. However, there is not enough time to pursue the real problem because of day-to-day requirements of their jobs. In other words, managers may adopt fads due to limited cognitive capacity. Practitioners are looking for a solution in the management literature that is not overly ambiguous and complex. They want something that is easy to understand. Implementing fads rather than wading through true management research serves to reduce the communication barriers between academics and practitioners in the jungle of management theories (Koontz, 1961).

Defensiveness

Defensiveness is a second psychological factor that becomes important during uncertain and undesirable sets of circumstances. When confronted with not only ambiguous but also conflicting information, individuals may instinctively employ defense mechanisms. This is especially likely if the information received clashes with an individual’s self-concept. For example, a manager may react defensively when confronted with negative organizational performance data because it challenges his/her self-concept regarding managerial ability. Some of the mechanisms employed by individuals are largely primitive, while others are more advanced. Perhaps the most common classical defense mechanism is rationalization. Rationalization is a more sophisticated defense in which leaders attempt to explain their choices or behaviors in logical ways (cf. Carson & Carson, 1997).

Negative feedback and disruptive change can threaten executives’ self-concept on several different levels. Change evokes fear--fear of power and status loss, fear of the unknown, fear of failure, and fear of uncertainty. These fears may lead to inappropriate managerial decisions. For example, they may focus on unimportant issues rather than the important one(s); have distorted perceptions, thus adopting the wrong fashion; become paralyzed with anxiety for fear of making a mistake, or escalate in their commitment to the wrong management fashion (cf. Cohen, 1998; Kets de Vries, 1994). Spitzer (1999) found that organizational trainers became more defensive when evaluated, specifically if they were unable to see a link between their training interventions and measurable changes in the organization’s performance. Furthermore, instead of cutting losses short, decisions often are made to continue investing in a management fashion despite indications that further expenditures may not be worthwhile.

Although defense mechanisms can be shields to protect individuals from information that might damage their self-esteem, these mechanisms can inevitably lead to either no decisions or bad decisions. So, management fads may be adopted which are inappropriate for the organization’s particular circumstance due to the manager’s inability to accurately process the information. Once these wrong decisions have been made, the manager must continue to take whatever actions are necessary to further protect him/herself. This escalating commitment causes continuing or increasing resources to be thrown at a course of action even though feedback indicates that the action is wrong. Ultimately, this can lead to a major crisis for the organization.

Escalating commitment has been linked with more general aspects of the leader's psychological state, as well as social pressures. The psychological states of leaders that lead to throwing good money after bad are primarily centered in the leaders' self-concept and attempt to protect his/her self-esteem. These states include: (a) consideration of sunk costs; (b) a need to save face; (c) feelings of personal responsibility for the adoption; (d) interpretation of ambiguous information as being consistent with beliefs; (e) discounting of opposing information; (f) a high degree of choice when selecting the management fashion; (g) lack of job security or board support; and (h) a need to justify prior mistakes (Brockner, 1992; Carson, Carson, & Roe, 1995).

Additionally, the social issues that can cause problematic managerial decision-making are consistent with defensive behavior. These factors are: (a) the leader's fear of disapproval from others; (b) the visibility of the leader in choosing the fashion; (c) the degree that social identity is tied up in the fashion; and (d) the executive's perception that many social rewards will follow successful implementation (Brockner, 1992). Thus, a manager confronted with data that contradicts his/her self-concept will engage in defensive behavior thereby adopting and retaining management fashions through the use of ill-informed and inappropriate thought processes.

Neuroticism

One psychological area that has frequently appeared in the management literature is the study of personality traits. Personality variables have been suggested to influence work-related behaviors such as career success (Judge, Higgins, Thoresen, & Barrick, 1999), leadership skills (Taggar, Hackett, & Saha, 1999; Watson & Clark, 1997), job-seeking ability (Wanberg, Watt & Runsey, 1996), job performance (Barrick & Mount, 1991; Tett, Jackson, & Rothstein, 1991) and job competence (Robertson & Kinder, 1993), just to name a few. Additionally, in a distinct but related area, there is research linking personality with decision-making ability (Haraburda, 1999; Jackson, Furnham & Lawty-Jones, 1999; Manrai & Andrews, 1998; Shafer, 2000). Yet, in spite of these thoroughly researched connections, little has been written in the organizational behavior literature on neurosis. Further, the relationship between maladaptive personality traits and fad adoption has not yet been explored.

In the fast-paced, constantly evolving world of business, successful managers must possess the ability to alter their behaviors and managerial style to fit the situation. Those individuals classified as neurotic do not possess this capability. Neurotic individuals are most likely to lack emotional stability and to be especially affected by negative life events (Judge, Higgins, Thoreson, & Barrick, 1999; Suls, Green, & Hills, 1998). In other words, they lack the ability to adapt. They use the same style for all scenarios. Sometimes this rigid style will fit what is needed in a particular situation, but most of the time it won't (Carson & Carson, 1998).

Furthermore, individuals possessing high levels of neuroticism have difficulties making decisions. Haraburda (1999) found that participants who scored higher in decisiveness had lower levels of neuroticism. Jackson, Furnham, and Lawty-Jones (1999) conducted a similar study investigating the relationship between "can't decide" scores and personality traits. Their analysis showed that the "can't decide" score was moderately and positively correlated with neuroticism.

Finally, neuroticism has been linked also to the trait of negative affectivity. Stokes and Levin (1990) found that the negative affectivity scale was significantly correlated with the Eysenck Neuroticism Scale. Negative affectivity is characterized by a disposition to experience negative emotional states and the tendency to interpret ambiguous information in a negative manner (Isen & Barron, 1992). Therefore, the neurotic manager, who also possesses the trait of negative affectivity, will be most likely to process uncertain information in a negative manner. This misinterpretation will cause inaccurate decision-making that may lead to the inappropriate selection of a fad. Consequently, neurotic managers may adopt fads due to both a lack of emotional stability and a lack of appropriate decision processes. Moreover, these fad adoptions will seldom be effective because the rigidity of their pathology will interfere with fashion adaptation.

For example, Manfred F.R. Kets de Vries, a practicing psychoanalyst with a doctorate in business administration from Harvard, notes that inflexible personalities of executives seriously affect the organizational culture. He and his co-author, Danny Miller, draw parallels between individual neurosis and organizational neurosis (Kets de Vries & Miller, 1984). They note that, particularly in centralized decision-making structures, the rigid style of the executive is reflected throughout the organizational process. They identify five types of neurotic leaders: (a) Dramatic, (b) Suspicious, (c) Depressive, (d) Compulsive, and (e) Detached. The following text will describe how these neurotic orientations influence the inappropriate adoption and abandonment of management fashions. These five styles (plus a sociopathic style and the two other psychogenic factors) and the motives for adoption and abandonment of management fashions are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2
Psychogenic Factors and Motives for Adoption and Abandonment of Management Fashions

PSYCHOGENIC FACTORS	MOTIVE FOR ADOPTION	MOTIVE FOR ABANDONMENT
Dramatic Neurosis	(1) Boredom, (2) Attention-Seeking, (3) Dependence on Specialness of Guru, (4) Status Differentiation	No Longer Exciting or Distinctive
Suspicious Neurosis	(1) Reduce Risk, (2) Increase Power, (3) Increase Control	Cover Up Failed Initiatives
Depressive Neurosis	(1) Late Adoption for Conformity, (2) Dependency on Powerful Guru	Late Abandonment; Searches For Next Messiah
Compulsive Neurosis	(1) Increase Power, (2) Increase Rituals, (3) Obsession with One Best Way	Exhaustive Evaluation Long After Its Utility

Detached Neurosis	Second-Tier Managers Struggle Over Which Fashion To Consider; Piecemeal Changes	Avoids Adoption
Sociopathic Neurosis	Gain Advantage Over Stakeholders	Exploitation Is Maximized
Limited Cognitive Capacity	(1) Simplicity of Understanding; (2) Supposed Ease of Implementation and Measurement	Quick Fix Is Not Forthcoming
Defensive-ness	(1) Negative Performance Data; (2) Self-Esteem Threatened	Escalating Commitment Results in Major Crisis

Neurotic Leadership Styles

Dramatic

Kets de Vries (1994) indicated that there is a dramatic type executive who is dedicated to getting attention from and impressing important people in his/her life. This type of manager seeks attention, excitement, and stimulation and has a tendency towards extremes. S/he is grandiose and feels a sense of entitlement. Essentially, this type of executive has traits of a narcissistic personality disorder.

According to the recent work of Westen and Shedler (1999), there are several characteristics that define a narcissistic personality. These include fantasies of unlimited success, power, perfection, and self-importance; entitlement to a privileged position; the need to be the center of the universe with others being put on earth to witness his/her brilliance; arrogance and dismissiveness; competitiveness and power-seeking; need to associate with high-status, special others; and an internal void and boredom.

One of the primary reasons that narcissistic leaders may adopt management fashions is to associate with its high status guru or discourse-promoter (Kieser, 1997). These executives want to associate with the special, important, and superior experts. They also are in search of an avenue that will give them unlimited success and power. Additionally, by adopting a management fashion, they can refocus the organization on them. This new fashion is exciting to them, but then over time, their sense of emptiness and boredom returns. The imperfections in the fashion begin to show, so they set of to find another special guru with whom to associate.

Narcissistic leaders focus on becoming one of the first to adopt the next management fashion, thus distinguishing themselves from lower status executives and organizations. They have an unquenchable thirst for distinctiveness and novelty. These leaders tend to be hyperactive and impulsive, relying on hunches about what is the best management fashion. They seek diversification and unbridled growth, leaving in their wake haphazard organizational structures (cf. Carson & Carson, 1997; Carson & Carson, 1998).

Suspicious

A second type of neurotic leader identified by Kets de Vries (1994) is the suspicious type. These managers feel like they can't trust anyone, so they are constantly on their guard. Therefore, they are always preparing to retaliate against all assaults from menacing forces. To help them prepare for assaults, they seek large inputs of information. Because of their hypersensitivity, distrustfulness, and suspiciousness, they try to control their work environment by being over-involved in rules and details.

According to Westen & Shedler (1999), individuals with a paranoid personality disorder are hostile people who express anger out of proportion to the situation. This anger is a result of their perception that others are trying to do them harm. They tend to misinterpret others' intentions as malevolent, frequently getting into power struggles and arguments. Once a conflict arises, the paranoid executive will tend to hold a grudge and be very critical of the other person, losing all capacity to see anything good in the other person. Projecting unacceptable feelings onto others, they tend to come across as self-righteous and moralistic. Once a major problem arises they see it as disastrous and unsolvable, but they won't confide their concerns to others for fear of betrayal.

The suspicious executive mistrusts everyone. S/he can be described as intense, cynical, inflexible, and distrustful. Because of their continuing paranoia, which is typically unjustified, suspicious personalities defend against any perceived threat--real or imagined. Stubborn and rigid, they rarely relax or let up their guard. They maintain that hypervigilance is their key to survival. Everyone in the organization is seen as a potential menace, so the suspicious executive keeps a safe distance from colleagues. This distance makes interactions seem impersonal and callous. They seem void of kindness, sentimentality, and compassion. On the occasions when suspicious personalities exhibit humor, it is usually thinly veiled hostility--expressed in a stabbing and sarcastic manner (Carson & Carson, 1997; Carson & Carson, 1998).

Suspicious executives need to control in order to ensure their safety and security. When they are not in charge, the suspicious personality feels vulnerable. However, they hide such concerns because to expose weaknesses would give others an upper hand. Therefore, the paranoid tries to conceal feelings of foreboding, tension, and distress. They bluff their way through danger by acting fearless, inaccessible, and potentially vengeful. To protect themselves, suspicious executives emphasize organizational structure, centralized power, environmental intelligence, and diversification (Kets de Vries & Miller, 1984). Management fashions are adopted by suspicious executives to reduce risk, increase control, and augment power. Fashions are then dropped to cover up failed initiatives, thus avoiding criticism and attack (cf. Carson & Carson, 1997; Carson & Carson, 1998).

Depressive

During difficult economic cycles and stiff competition, executives may feel despair and frustration, thus making them vulnerable to quick-fix solutions offered by some management fashions (Abrahamson, 1996). There are some executives who constantly feel a sense of hopelessness. Kets de Vries (1994) labels these the depressive type. These managers feel as though negative events are irreparable. They have low self-esteem and self-confidence and perceive there just not good enough to change the course of events. Thus, they display little initiative, and they tolerate substandard performance. They depend on gurus for success.

According to Westen & Shedler (1999) depressive personalities display the following characteristics. They feel unhappy, inadequate, powerless, guilty, and ashamed; they tend to feel responsible for unfortunate events, be self-critical, and be intolerant of their humanness; and they fear rejection, require assurance, and are ingratiating or submissive.

While high-functioning depressive personality have certain strengths, the low-functioning depressives tend to be insufficiently concerned with meeting their own needs and seek out relationships where they are rescuing or protecting others. This type of manager displays little activity, has decreased confidence, and is conservative. The organization is typically bureaucratic as there is a leadership vacuum (Kets de Vries & Miller, 1984). Change does not occur unless the depressed executive finds a guru to meet his/her dependency needs. This leader will stay with the guru long after it appropriate. When the executive finally must move on to another management fashion, there is no an innovative search. Rather, s/he searches for the next emerging fashion leader (cf. Carson & Carson, 1997; Carson & Carson, 1998).

Compulsive

Kets de Vries (1994) suggest that the compulsive type leaders abhor being at the mercy of events. Rather, they want to master and control all things that influence their lives. This type of manager wants to dominate organization by insisting that organizational members conform to rigid procedures and rules. This leader is obsessed with detail and routine in a lockstep organization.

According to Westen & Shedler (1999) individuals with a compulsive personality have many strengths. For example, they tend to be conscientious, articulate, ethical, productive, and logical. They enjoy challenges and take pleasure in accomplishments. However, they are over-devoted to work to the detriment of their personal lives. They are also over-concerned with rules, procedures, and time. They have difficulty expressing pleasurable emotions and tend to intellectualize even in personal matters.

Interpersonally, compulsive executives tend to be over controlling, particularly when things are not advancing according to plan. They become quite disturbed when the pre-established practice is disrupted. Also warmth, affection, and human emotions are not shared freely, leading to perceptions that compulsives are withholding. But they are also very hard on themselves about their imperfections. They ruminate and obsess about trivial and often inconsequential occurrences (Carson & Carson, 1997; Carson & Carson, 1998).

For the compulsive executive, the organization must be very orderly. There are well-rehearsed rituals, formal internal controls, standardization, hierarchical inflexibility, and careful planning through such instruments as action plans, budgets, schedules, and performance evaluations. When the compulsive executive adopts a management fashion, the concern is with increasing their power/control over their environment (Kets de Vries & Miller, 1984). What the obsessed leaders hope to find is the one best single way to manage. However, because of their tendency to over-think the situation, they are late in adopting a fad. They are also late in their abandonment, as change is difficult for them.

Detached

The last neurotic organization/leader described by Kets de Vries (1994) is the detached type. Reality for this executive is not satisfying and relationships with others typically fail, so it is safer to remain detached. Therefore, this executive is withdrawn, distant, and uninvolved. These detached executives exhibit some of the less severe traits of the schizoid personality. Their range of emotions seems to be restricted, and they seem boring to others. They lack close relationships and people skills, appearing reserved and inhibited in social situations. In fact, they seem truly indifferent to others, having little need for the company. Finally, they tend to lack psychological insight into the own and others' motives (Westen & Shedler, 1999).

Because of their withdrawn behavior and lack of interest in the present and future, this type of executive ignores management fashion. Because there is no adoption of fashions, abandonment of an approach doesn't have to be considered. There is a leadership vacuum, so any change in strategy is the result of shifting coalitions within the management team. Changes with this type of leader are piecemeal and are the result of the influence of the currently reigning political coalition (cf. Kets de Vries & Miller, 1984).

Sociopathic

Kets de Vries and Miller (1984) did not address the sociopathic organization, though the first author deals with this type of threatening executive in subsequent work (i.e., Kets de Vries, 1994). The executive with sociopathic traits is addressed in this article because many individuals with these tendencies don't typically wind up in prison--in fact, many wind up in the cushioned leather chairs of the executive office.

According to Westen and Shedler (1999), sociopaths tend to lie and mislead, taking advantages of others. They are impulsive, immoral, manipulative, and hostile. Sociopathic leaders have little empathy for others and no remorse when causing harm or injury. They tend to be reckless, abusive, sadistic, aggressive, and have little concern about the consequences of their actions. These sociopathic executives are fearless, guiltless, and repentless; they are uncaring, dishonest, and uncommitted; and they are insincere, irresponsible, and eventually unendurable. One telltale characteristic of the sociopath is a slick and superficial mask. They will use their charm and wit to disarm and deceive others.

Most individuals are caught up in the perpetual struggle of striking a balance between pursuing their own interests and respecting others' rights. When their own pursuits take precedent over others, individuals typically feel some guilt about their greed. But there is no such conflict inside sociopath leaders. They rationalize their exploitations, simply claiming that to which they feel they are entitled. When in power, they will often use their animosity to keep others in line. In order to survive, employees must identify with their aggressor or become one of the leader's victims.

With regard to management fashion, sociopathic leaders don't listen to others. They expect others to be dependent upon them. Independent thinking is not tolerated. They use their hostility and revenge as the triggers to picking a management fashion. They choose the ones that can be used to move against others. These can be aimed at the competition or used to exploit internal stakeholders such as employees. Management fashions will be abandoned when maximum advantage has been taken of others (cf. Carson & Carson, 1997; Carson & Carson, 1998). Dealing with the sociopathic boss is extremely difficult. However, we offer some suggestions on dealing with not only personality defects, but with other psychogenic factors as well.

Overcoming Faulty Mental Processes

The management fashion books are very seductive for individuals running complex organizations. Kieser (1997) identified ten factors that allow a management fashion to become a best seller: (a) one concept or factor is identified as most the crucial; (b) implementation is described as unavoidable; (c) the principles are linked to highly treasured societal values; (d) the problems are presented as being a result of radical environmental changes, so the leader should not feel guilty; (e) the author avoids instruction, instead pointing out outstanding solutions; (f) a clever mixture of simplicity and ambiguity is provided; (g) the concept is described as extremely difficult to independently implement; (h) the concept is linked to empirical research; (i) the book is easily readable; (j) and the timing is perfect.

When these factors are in place, it is easy for an executive to get caught up in the movement. If a fashion is adapted in an organization in a healthy way, then progress is made. However, wholesale adoption (rather than critical examination and adaptive adoption) is typically an indication that there are some faulty processes at work. Fashions are seductive, but positive results require applying the fashion to an underlying problem.

Limited Cognitive Capacity

Management gurus are clever in responding to executive's need for predictably in a quickly changing business environment. These gurus use fear, heroes, and patriotism to seduce the busy manager. Some management fashion proponents suggest that their approach is the only choice, others say that their approach is the right thing to do, while others suggest that their technique is the good thing to do (Jackson, 1996).

Because the executive's work life is very busy and fragmented, the strategic choice about adapting a management fashion is very important. Leaders should choose a fashion that has the right focus, but they should also understand the fashion will not completely solve their problems. Instead of looking for an ideal solution, leaders need to resolve problems in small, humble steps.

Executives can make incremental organizational changes. Between decision-making points, organizational members talk about the changes and identify other ways to approach the problem. Those organizational members who were initially opposed to the direction can have input into molding the process. This approach, called "logical incrementalism," provides executives the time needed to listen to opposing thoughts and revise decisions as needed. Leaders who make decisions in small steps, rather than in dramatic ones, have the potential for building the commitment needed for effective management fashion adaptation.

Cohen (1998) suggests that leaders need to start by realizing that they are tolerating substandard performance, ignoring underlying problems, and abdicating responsibility. To accomplish results, the leader should search for real short-term gains in limited areas. Problem areas should be compelling, available resources and authority should be relied upon, and results and improvements must be measurable.

Defensiveness

During the change process, defensive leaders must become aware of the internal psychological reactions taking place in themselves. Executives with self-awareness have psychological insight into one's own true feelings. These executives are aware of their moods, knows what makes them tick, and can describe their feelings to others.

For leaders to become more self-aware, they need more feedback from others. One way to do this is to employ difficult-minded individuals. Rather than hiring people who are similar in style to the executive, they should surround themselves with individuals with different learning styles who are not afraid to speak up. In addition to gaining self-awareness through discussion, the manager may want to set up mechanisms for anonymous feedback for the reticent and less powerful. For example, employee surveying can be used for top managers who want honest information about company initiatives.

To prevent over-commitment to a failing course of action, the following implementation strategies can be introduced: (a) encourage decision makers to recognize their biases toward escalation by pointing out that attainment may not imminent; (b) delegate responsibility for the project to someone other than the original backer; (c) avoid suggesting that a manager's job depends upon the success of a single project; (d) offer decision makers appropriate psychological and social support for project failure; and (e) do not kill messengers bearing bad news; rather, explicitly reward individuals for not filtering negative information (cf. Brockner, 1992; Carson, Carson, & Roe, 1995).

Neuroticism

Overcoming faulty decision-making because of the leader's neurotic style is very difficult. Often management fashions do not improve the situation because they don't go to the heart of the matter. Kets de Vries (1994) suggests that managers keep their neuroses under control by attending to the "3 Hs" of leadership: humility, humanity, and humor (p. 88). When managers don’t hold their neuroses it check, it often becomes very difficult for their subordinates. However, there are some recommended ways to deal with neurotic leaders (see Carson & Carson, 1998).

To the psychologically healthy individual, narcissistic executives appear condescending. But others can't change them, because they don't want to change themselves. They are pleased with their elevated position. Unfortunately, the narcissist is very capable of making bad decisions. However, challenges to the narcissist's superiority can provoke spitefulness and rejection. The idea is to not criticize, but subtly offer alternative ways to adapt fashions.

Because suspicious personalities are so paranoid, employees must behave in a sincere manner. But rising above suspicion is not be easy. Trust is developed very slowly and is lost suddenly. Directly challenging the beliefs of paranoid executives may expose the insecurities underlying their hostility. And they definitely do not want to appear powerless or dependent. Paranoid personalities are unusually cunning in detecting even small amounts of truth-bending, so they need accurate feedback about how the implementation of the fashion is progressing.

Depressives don't want to be depressed, but they often lack the motivation to help themselves. They are plagued by a pattern of despair, melancholy, and hopelessness. Depressive bosses lack hustle and have feelings of being powerless. They are in a state of learned helplessness. They have lost control, and lack emotional endurance. Through demonstrating confidence in and showing support for the depressive boss, one might be able to instill some feelings of self-efficacy with the appropriate implementation of the management fashion.

In dealing with a compulsive executive, the employee must realize that they enjoy rules and procedures. Hence, employees should not expect flexibility. Relatedly, they like a structured workplace where they are few disruptions. To make sure things operate smoothly, the compulsive executive occupies him/herself with insignificant matters. So while the executive is lost in details, other organization members need to attend to the big picture with regard to changing environments and new management fashions.

Detached, schizoid-like managers are withdrawn. As they don't attend to the current or future needs of the organization, they don't engage in adoption of management fashions. Also, trying to change sociopathic executives is impossible. They harvest many rewards from their unethical conduct. Sociopathic executives are good Machiavellians. Therefore, they are skilled at using their talents in emotional situations. In these circumstances, they take advantage of others and get a larger share of the pie. Perceptive individuals should recognize that sociopaths are not reliable at attending to details, so implementation of management fashions will fall to other organizational members.

Conclusion

Management fashions pass through predictable life stages (Spell, 1998): (a) invention (beginning awareness of the fashion creation), (b) acceptance (implementation of the fashion), (c) disenchantment (frustration with results), and (d) decline (abandonment of the fashion). However, the length of this cycle is decreasing with each passing decade. At the same time, fashions are becoming more radical and difficult to implement. Yet, managers seem to abandon them more rapidly (Carson et al., 2000). This quick turnover of management fashions can cause organizational members to be quite skeptical of management's next approach to the company's problems.

This article can serve to alert the practitioner of some of the possible individual problems involved in fad adoption. It also can be used as to recognize psychological problems in others. Although it is not intended that we formally label others with some type of neurosis, the classification of problems can help guide the intuitive psychologist in all human beings.

In addition to assisting the practitioner, it is hoped that this article will stimulate research in the area maladaptive adoption of fashions caused by psychogenic factors. For example, researchers could investigate that possibility that in more turbulent/complex environments, managers more likely to adopt management fashions that fail. Another proposition that could be examined is that escalating commitment to a fad creates a major crisis for the organization. Finally, numerous hypotheses could be developed for management fashion adoptions and abandonment based on the leader's neurotic style (see Table 2).

While managers can pick the best parts of a fashion and approach the process in a rational and progressive way, psychogenic factors can interfere with a positive process. One way to overcome individual flaws in adoption is to use a team approach to problem solving. In many cases, two heads are better than one. Also, a group approach increases the possibility of using the fashion in a creative way.

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