

Reflective journal essay

Business, Management



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Week One

This week, we examined the definitions of key terms which are pertinent to the course. I personally felt that this week’s study was crucial to furthering my understanding of the overall subject: this week provided a foundation on which all other knowledge could be built. In particular, the discussion of the definitions of ‘ power’ was of interest to me as I find it to be such an ambiguous term which many misconstrue as being associated with tyranny, evil and social discontent. However, I have realised that this is only one form of power and that, in practice, a society requires leaders to be successful.

This understanding was demonstrated to me, in practice, when encountering a situation where several people were all trying to produce one project; none of them were listening to each other and so the project was taking on the

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appearance of several different projects all at once. Leadership was required to exercise a sense of order over the situation, and this in turn required a healthy amount of power. This topic allowed me to establish my own comprehension of ‘ power’ and leadership which meant I was able to diminish its ambiguity and exercise some control for the greater good of the group. As a professional manager, I feel that this topic is an essential aspect of my knowledge because it is the bedrock for all other necessary information; without it, I would not have understood the rest of the PPK.

Week Two

This week, we looked at the various different theories of power including those of Niccolo Machiavelli, John Locke, Max Weber and Michel Foucault. I found that the range of approaches was particularly significant. For example, Machiavelli’s approach through manipulation, persuasion and negotiation stands starkly alongside the view of Weber who saw power as a relationship to be shared, rather than as the sole property of one individual. However, my own personal view of power is most akin to the views of Foucault who felt that power was exercised and not owned. I believe this to be a fair representation of how power should be because if we all behaved like Machiavelli then society would be fundamentally flawed; instead, we mostly punish those who believe their power to be of the most importance (i. e. criminals). However, a major lesson which this unit taught me is that whilst I may hold fairer views of power, others may not and that it is important to remember this at all times, in order to preserve myself. This is of extreme significance as a professional manager.

Of course, this unit also holds a number of ethical considerations that are of

importance as a professional manager. The main being the incorporation of fair leadership which makes decisions to benefit the majority rather than one which exercises an abuse of power to benefit on itself. There are a constant supply of ethical issues that surround power and leadership, especially today in a world where I feel that intelligence breeds a notion of questioning the decisions of authority (be that politically or socially). It is important that a person of power is perceived as making sound decisions.

Week Three

This week, we discussed the subject of Power Elites which, in short, is a collection of people who exercise strong political power. This topic was extremely interesting to me and I think it is particularly prevalent in today's war-torn planet. For example, the recent war in Iraq was essentially an illegal war due to the distinct lack of evidence for the presence of nuclear weaponry and although the UK's former Prime Minister, Tony Blair has been questioned in court with regard to this, it is unlikely that he will ever be declared guilty of committing a war crime. This is largely due to the British government (along with that of the United States) being a part of a global power elite, whose actions are largely unaccounted for in a court of law. I also felt that the example of the Iraq war was relevant to the discussion of C. Wright Mills' discussion of the government, business and military spheres becoming increasingly interconnected which, in theory, entails that those with the most money will be the most powerful. This concerns me greatly as money does not necessarily denote intelligence and diplomatic capability.

I think that, as a professional manager, the concept of a ‘power elite’ is a potentially volatile one; it represents a minority making over-ruling decisions for the majority and if fiscal assets continue to be the driving force, then this could become an even more alarming debate.

Week Four

This week, we looked at the subject of Power in Organisations. I felt that this unit would be of immediate importance to my peers and I as potential future leaders of organisations. The concept of authority seems synonymous with power, in my opinion, and as such, authority must denote a certain level of respect. The focus of this week’s discussion seemed to be about ‘influence’ and how it can be used to achieve the desired outcome. To me, this sounded slightly like a Machiavellian approach, which initially did not sit comfortably with me. However, upon closer inspection, I found that the use of influence is a much less under-hand approach than I had first thought. Often, influence can be based upon a person’s reputation for being able to recognise a good or bad decision; this will be taken into account when discussing an idea with colleagues.

In practice, I have also found that the use of influence is a regular occurrence: I have repeatedly found that certain colleagues and seniors have held a greater sway over me and my ability to make decisions. The influence that they have over my decisions is palpable for a number of reasons: I want to bring about a result that they want, I respect their power, and they represent a strong authority. However, I do not feel manipulated by them – I

feel supported, and so I conclude that influence is a good thing within organisations.

Week Five

This week's unit addressed the subject of Organisational Politics. To me, 'the games that people play' are an unavoidable aspect of most areas of life, and business is not without exception. Whilst there are sanctioned and non-sanctioned approaches to organisational politics, all have one end goal: to get the player ahead. My personal opinion of such matters is that they are sometimes necessary: history is written by the winners, and unfortunately it is nigh on impossible to succeed without indulging in some game playing – not least because everyone else is doing it, and the one person who doesn't is likely to be the loser. That said, the ethical considerations are massively important and therefore, actions that only directly improve your image without damaging others' are acceptable. I intend to build my political power through a process of knowledge acquisition, networking and relationship-forming because these are good-natured, respectable approaches and I want my reputation to be built upon respect and kudos, not fear and negativity.

Week Six

So far on the PPK, I feel as though I have learnt a lot with regard to how the world of power, politics and knowledge really works. I was especially shocked to find that there are a number of issues surrounding business that seem quite unethical and immoral to me. Whilst I am not naïve to the nature of the workplace and that of the people who work within it, I had hoped for a rather more evolved view of things given that it is now 2011. However, to me, it

seems that people become less preoccupied with behaving morally, the more money is involved.

I was particularly interested in the various different theories of power as these are the basis on which we work today. I hope that a firm grounding in these matters will induce a stronger standing for me in my future pursuits. The core understanding that I have taken away from my studies so far is the idea that everyone is different and approaches things from their own, unique angle. As a professional manager, and in any other future leadership roles that I may take on, it is important that I recognise this and keep it in mind when making decisions that affect the majority. Should I ever be fortunate enough to be a part of a power elite, I would hope that I wouldn't abuse that position, and that I'd uphold its respectful standing.

Week Seven

This week addressed the subject of Gender and Power in Organisations. My initial preconception of this topic would be the focus on equality in the workplace and I was glad to find that I was correct. The discussion of gender inequality in the workplace is an important one and under no circumstances would I accept sexism (or any discrimination, for that matter) in my place of work. I was shocked to find that the gender gap in pay has widened in recent years – I felt sure that, as a society, we were taking steps to reduce that gap. I was also disgusted to find that women have a much less significant role within the world of business due to the 'glass ceiling' and patriarchal, misogynistic views. Ethically, I think it is appalling that in 2011, we are still fundamentally unable to accept that everyone, as individuals, regardless of

their gender, brings their own skills to the table and that we all need one another to function successfully as one whole business.

I experienced one such concern when a female colleague of mine expressed to me her fear of wanting to have children: she claimed that she felt as though if she had children, she would struggle to be re-accepted after returning from maternity leave. I think it is a shame that women are made to feel like this whilst society places unrealistic expectations upon them to be both Mother and efficient worker at the same time. It is not an issue that men face and I think more should be done to recognise this in women – as a professional manager, I strive to provide support with such matters.

Week Nine

This week's focus was the subject of Language and Power. I place a lot of importance on the use of language in the acquisition and maintenance of power; diplomacy is all about the careful selection of words. I was particularly interested in the idea of how language can create a powerful or a powerless persona. I endeavour to speak articulately and confidently at all times because I am acutely aware of how my language paints a picture of the person I am. The discussion of Conrad's 'powerful speech', mostly struck a chord with me through its included factors such as controlling the direction of the discussion, asking questions and giving direct instruction, plus the initial initiation of communication. It takes a confident person to conduct himself in such a way, and it predicates a high level of respect from an audience. An excellent example of this was when I had to give a presentation

on a recent project: I spoke clearly, I gave direct facts, I asked specific and relevant questions and I was in control of the discussion that followed.

Overall

Overall, I found this unit of work to be extremely useful to me as a future manager. The topics (particularly those addressing organisational politics, gender equality, and language and power) have given me the knowledge to base future learning upon, and also an insight into how business works. My approach to power in organisational settings has not changed but rather, it has incorporated the newly acquired knowledge I have gained from the PPK: I intend to uphold my own morals and ethics whilst still keeping my eyes open for those who do not see fit to do so.