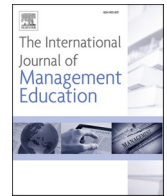




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The International Journal of Management Education

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/ijme

Managerial taboos: How the ideal of a manager may harm people and organizations

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Deep acting
The romance of leadership
Organizational taboos
Idealization
Trauma

ABSTRACT

This conceptual paper explores the seldom-discussed "unspoken rules" or managerial taboos that are often part of a manager's career but are rarely acknowledged openly. These sensitive issues can trigger feelings of guilt, shame, or self-doubt, creating tension between a manager's real identity and the idealized image of an "ideal manager." We propose a conceptual model that links this identity conflict to adverse outcomes, such as decreased productivity and compromised mental and physical health. We argue that the idealized identity is facilitated by several processes in broader management education and learning processes: idealized management skills taught in business schools, popular literature that defines what a "good manager" should be, and high expectations from stakeholders, colleagues, and employees. We recommend transforming management education and training because confronting these managerial taboo topics head-on is necessary to help managers become more resilient and effective and improve their overall well-being.

In management practice, some issues are not discussed. They are not found in textbooks or influential monographs, they are not taught in management courses, and their mention during a board meeting elicits a raised eyebrow or, in extreme cases, banishment. Ben Horowitz, the founder of a prominent venture capital firm, Andreessen Horowitz, provides this example, "Over the years, I've spoken to hundreds of CEOs, all with the same experience. Nonetheless, very few people talk about it, and I have never read anything on the topic. It's like the fight club of management: The first rule of the CEO psychological meltdown is, don't talk about the psychological meltdown" (Horowitz, 2014, p. 201). Imagine the following situations: a leader of a project cries or sobs during a meeting; she speaks about her sadness. A manager has such jitters that his knees tremble, and he admits he is uncertain about a project's future. A COO admits she uses cocaine, has a relationship with her assistant, whom she claims is the only person who truly understands her.

We contend that the typical reaction to each of the above situations in the business world is to ignore them, conveniently forget them, and, at least officially, not deal with them further. However, incidents of this nature do constitute an integral part of leadership and managerial experiences, but they have become a managerial taboo (Hudson & Okhuysen, 2014; Schoemaker & Tetlock, 2012; Wright, Van Der Heijden, Bradfield, Burt, & Cairns, 2004). Academic literature views them as negative symptoms of managerial practice: excessive workplace stress is understood as the consequence of job demands, competitive business environments, and work-family conflicts (e.g., DeFrank & Ivancevich, 1998; Judge & Colquitt, 2004); the burnout syndrome stems from emotional exhaustion and lack of job meaning and significance (e.g., Ángeles López-Cabarcos, López-Carballeira, & Ferro-Soto, 2021; Cordes &

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<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijme.2024.100992>

Received 7 February 2024; Received in revised form 10 May 2024; Accepted 12 May 2024

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Dougherty, 1993); organizational silence is considered to be a failure to communicate risks and challenges within firms, interpersonal distrust, or the absence of psychological safety (e.g., Dyne, Ang, & Botero, 2003; Edmondson, 1999; Milliken, Morrison, & Hewlin, 2003). Alternatively, managers' weaknesses are conceptualized as hidden opportunities for self-improvement and authentic leadership (e.g., Avolio, Reichard, Hannah, Walumbwa, & Chan, 2009; Walumbwa, Avolio, Gardner, Wernsing, & Peterson, 2008). However, we argue that phenomena like the expressions of fear, nervousness, and the public acknowledgment of own weaknesses and personal or professional issues are not separate problems from the management (van Amsterdam & van Eck, 2019); instead, they are structural consequences of the organizational demands in which managers of some organizations live and as such, cannot be understood in isolation and solved by adopting partial fixes.

Why cannot some parts of the experience of being a manager be recognised, shared and discussed openly? We use the concept of idealization: "the ideal of a manager," i.e., shared norms of what traits, skills, and behaviors managers are supposed to display in an organization. As the tradition of the romance of leadership suggests, "we may have developed highly romanticised, heroic views of leadership – what leaders do, what they are able to accomplish, and the general effects they have on our lives" (Meindl, Ehrlich, & Dukerich, 1985, p. 79). However, if a leader's idealization becomes an accepted and enforced norm, its unquestionability within organizations obscures the now-stigmatized phenomena that the manager experiences. In so doing, the manager no longer acknowledges them or even wishes to experience them.

In the current discourse on management education, a notable gap exists in understanding the clash between the aspirational identity managers are encouraged to embody and the reality of their inherent traits and capabilities. This article aims to bridge this gap by proposing a compact model explaining a dynamic of a perpetual conflict between the ideal identity and a manager's actual traits or skills within any organization. We argue that the idealized identity is facilitated by several processes in broader management education and learning processes: idealized management skills taught in business schools, popular literature that defines what a manager must be able to accomplish, and high expectations from stakeholders. The clash of identities gives rise to managerial taboos because no manager can frankly admit that she or he is just a shadow of the ideal (see also Fig. 1). This conflict may have severe adverse outcomes on managers and organizations; Table 1 contains several negative consequences of managerial taboos.

1. Taboos

Taboo can be defined as a significant deviation from the ideal of the right person; it is "the prohibition of an action based on the belief that such behavior is either too sacred and consecrated or too dangerous and accursed for ordinary individuals to undertake" (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2020). In many countries, taboos restrict sexual behavior, such as incest, abortion, homosexuality, or premarital sex. Taboos formulate unacceptable behaviors or beliefs. They are a fundamental part of the individuals' life in which they feel that if they exceed these fundamental values, the community's sanctions may follow.

Human society has always distinguished between sacred and profane, often defending the first against the latter, both on a social and personal level. In each culture, taboos arise and strengthen, or weaken and disappear, with varying intensity. Most of them probably emerged due to biological and environmental factors or historic shocks and have been internalized within social identity. For instance, a taboo of dietary restrictions could have reduced the spread of locally common diseases. As part of social identity, it persisted even when the original reason has disappeared (Haidt, Rozin, McCauley, & Imada, 1997). Other taboos, such as the Christian ban on borrowing with interest, have vanished, and the advancement of a previously stigmatized activity followed, "opportunities have arisen for deviants to break the code and make economic profits, with consequent rise in their social position and erosion of the taboos" (Akerlof, 1976, p. 609).

Taboo means that even thinking about breaking a taboo is a taboo. Taboos act as mind police that render it impossible to question since they are "unthinkable" (Tetlock, Kristel, Elson, Green, & Lerner, 2000). The taboo is characterized by inherent truth, strong intuitive validity, and intense emotional qualities (Jay, 2009). If individuals try to explain why it is important to respect it, they are anxiously confused as they do not know them explicitly and must, therefore, rationalize them posteriorly (Evans, 2008; Haidt, 2001).

Individuals who are stigmatized by a taboo believe that it is their fault. What arises is a so-called internalized oppressor (David, 2013). The internalized oppressor is a sum of the cognitive and emotional processes stigmatizing beliefs, experiences, and behavior, which are socially unacceptable. Suppose an individual does not fully share the social identity to which she or he wishes to belong (Mendonca, D'Cruz, & Noronha, 2022). In that case, they experience guilt, shame, and unacceptability associated with the threat of potential social exclusion or the loss of face. Indeed, external oppressors in the form of condemnation from other members of society or a group are also readily available.

2. Taboos in organizational context

As Schoemaker and Tetlock stress (2012, p. 5): "taboos are a universal feature of social systems. Even the most avowedly open-minded organizations place tacit constraints on what can be said or even thought." There are thoughts, beliefs, or behaviors that are unsayable and unacceptable in every organization.¹ There are always absolute values at the heart of a taboo, "sacred values," which

¹ Issues relative to taboos arising from the violations of law, misdemeanours, and serious corporate offenses; or non-managerial taboos, i.e., religious, ethnic, national ones, although taboos are out of the scope of the current discussion. First mentioned class of taboo is definitively beneficial as it prevents significantly immoral organizational behavior. They are thus understandably absent from the ideal of the manager. The second class of taboo is heavily addressed in sociology and other social sciences, and we refer to this extant literature in a section "Taboos".

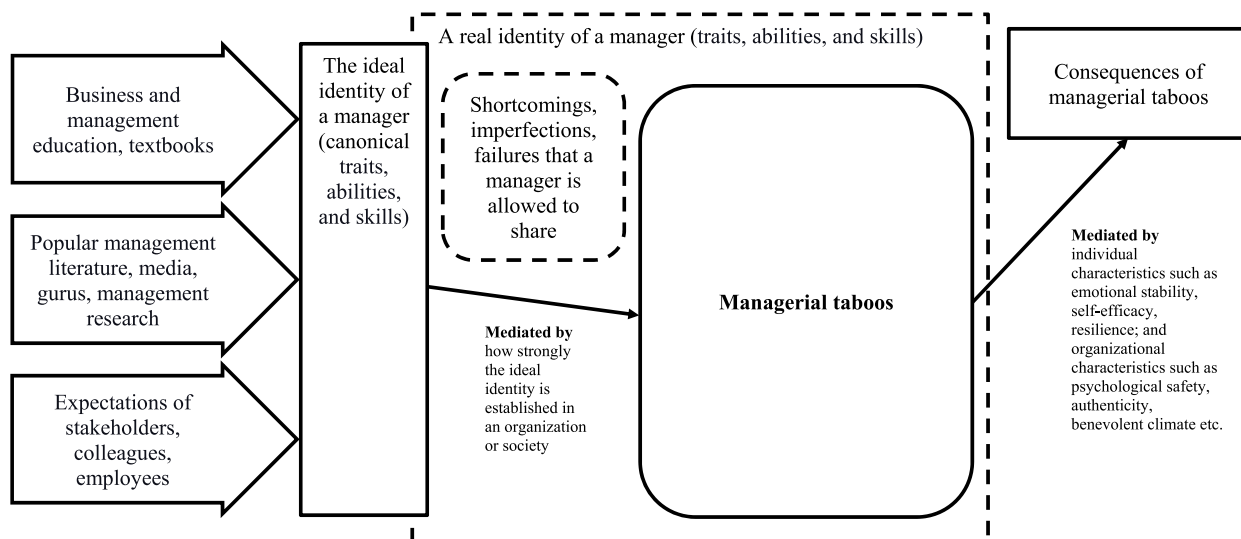


Fig. 1. A conceptual scheme. Forces such as business education, textbooks, management gurus, and expectations from stakeholders or colleagues create the ideal identity of a manager. Their real identity cannot fully achieve the ideal and thus differs in many ways. The inability to acknowledge some differences leads to managerial taboos, which cause several negative consequences (see Table 1).

Table 1

Managerial taboos (a conflict of normative managerial identity and the real identity of a leader or a manager) and their consequences.

Aspect	Normative (Ideal) Identity	Real Identity
Handling of Mistakes and Failures	Mistakes are rare and handled with grace, learning from them without significant personal or professional cost.	Mistakes and failures are common, often leading to feelings of helplessness, weakness, and failure.
Emotional Expression	Emotions are controlled and expressed strategically to maintain a composed and authoritative image.	Frequent and public expression of negative emotions like guilt, shame, insecurity, and sadness.
Influence and Control	High level of control over outcomes, with a clear understanding of how to influence people and processes effectively.	Acknowledgment of the influence of external processes beyond one's control, leading to feelings of helplessness.
Coping Mechanisms	Effective stress management techniques that ensure a healthy work-life balance and personal well-being.	Reliance on unhealthy coping mechanisms due to the inability to manage stress and emotional turmoil effectively.
Work-Life Integration	Achieves a perfect balance between professional responsibilities and personal life, with each enriching the other.	Struggles with integrating work and personal life, often at the expense of personal relationships and health.
Leadership and Influence	Seen as omnipotent and omniscient, with an unwavering ability to lead and influence effectively in all situations.	Experiences doubt and acknowledges limitations in ability to influence outcomes and lead effectively.

Types of Manifestations	Consequences
Manifestations in personal and family life	Addictions to substances, especially alcoholism, abuse of stimulants and sedatives
	Deteriorating mental health, depression, manifestations of psychiatric disorders, eating disorders
	Extreme reactions of managers to stress – suicides, self-harming, or self-destructive behavior such as extreme adrenaline sports
	Adultery relationships, lovers, silent witnesses
Manifestations in managerial behavior	Absence of trust, decision paralysis, and confusion
	Internal insecurity leading to overachieving as a strategy for gaining intrinsic value
	Burnout; loss of purpose in work and escape dreaming of entering the monastery, dedication to craft, etc.
Manifestations in organizational behavior	Golden cage and a feeling of elitism
	Culture of abuse of power in asymmetric relationships superior to a subordinate, source understanding of subordinates and their overloading
	Organizational traumatization in everyday management – shouting, insulting, cynicism, humiliation, disrespect, threatening
	A culture of hypocrisy and intrigues

If there is a contradiction between normative (ideal) identity and real identity, a managerial taboo arises, which can then manifest itself in the following consequences.

are central and accepted. They ensure the certainty of the rules and beliefs under which each group member or the organization acts. Through it and because of it, the community defines what is normal and what is a deviation. The tendency towards normality then signifies that there is something that cannot be acknowledged on the opposite side of the spectrum and threatens expectations, order,

and harmony. Displacement and marginalization of the disturbing factors make it possible to experience normality and, simultaneously, ensure an individual's place in the group.

For example, in hierarchical organizations, it cannot be voiced that top executives are ill-equipped to make crucial decisions or that the leaders' influence on an organization in many ways is insignificant. The sacred value is that management by a qualified and competent leader with discretionary power is a prerequisite for the organization to function (Raelin, 2016). As March (2011, p. 60) famously states, this is a "grand myth of human significance." In general, the attribution of large organizations' outcomes to individuals is very challenging and context-dependent (Frollová, Tkáčik, & Houdek, 2024); however, most of the factors affecting the performance of an organization are most likely beyond the influence of the decisions and abilities of a single leader (Liu & de Rond, 2016; McGahan & Porter, 2002). More than half the decisions in organizations fail (Nutt, 1999; see also Herz & Krezdorn, 2022). However, most stakeholders cannot recognize or accept that leaders' influence on organizational outcomes is not absolute (Bertrand & Mullainathan, 2001). As Meindl and Ehrlich (1987, p. 93) suggest, "leadership has assumed a romanticised, larger-than-life role."

An organizational taboo may be derived from stronger cultural taboos and not be unique to organizations. For example, women's natural experiences of menstruation or menopause are taboo topics in many situations and, therefore, also in organizations (Beck, Brewis, & Davies, 2021; Grandey, Gabriel, & King, 2020). However, we limit our focus on managerial taboos, i.e., related only to expected managerial or leadership roles in an organization (which thus will vary according to the type of organization, sector, or country). We define a managerial taboo as a stigmatized conflict of normative managerial (or career) identity or skills and a leader's or a manager's real identity or skills (in meaning as they perceive themselves; Cerulo, 1997). Surely, managers make mistakes and missteps that they regret or are considered failures by others; if they can admit them and learn from them, it is not taboo. However, if they do not want or cannot reveal them, they fall under our concept of a managerial taboo.

A manager is an ideal social identity shared within an institutionalized environment of an organization, being formed and demanded by the individual and the team, the organization, and the society (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). Based on the institutional theory, "individuals [are] guided in their habituated behavioral routines purely by tacit or explicit mental schema that have encoded institutional expectations into the meaningful scripts that shape future enactments" (Douglas Creed, Hudson, Okhuysen, & Smith-Crowe, 2014, p. 276). These schemas, or institutional myths, are widely and collectively rationalized, mostly unchallenged, and pervasive in their influence (Amis, Mair, & Munir, 2020). A managerial taboo makes it possible to define what is acceptable, desirable, and at the same time, refers to the limits of this identity. "Taboos are an important part of any social identity. Adopting an identity implies accepting the taboos and the social norms associated with this identity" (Fershtman, Gneezy, & Hoffman, 2011, p. 141). If we continue with our example, the question as to what extent and whether an organization requires directors is taboo within an organization. Could an executive in a hierarchical company say: whatever I do, the long-term impact will be minimal, am I even needed to manage the company? On the other hand, could a partner in a self-managing organization or organizational democracy say that it needs hierarchy and top managers? (Gibson & Tesone, 2001; Lee & Edmondson, 2017).

There are parts of managers' experiences, thoughts, and behaviors that are unacceptable to their organizations. Nevertheless, that does not mean that they do not happen. Managers learn not to admit to them, keep them only in fantasies, and not talk about them (at least publicly). They use several strategies to marginalize, suppress, and overlook this part of their own professional mental lives. They are required to do impression management and deep acting, i.e., subordinate their genuine emotions to (lack of) emotions, consistent with manager role expectations to satisfy their organizations or employees (Bono, Foldes, Vinson, & Muros, 2007; Mesmer-Magnus, DeChurch, & Wax, 2011). We assume that an essential part of the leaders' inner life may be devoted to suppressing organizational taboos, thus exhausting a vast amount of their physical and mental energy, creativity, and leadership potential, eventually leading to severe negative consequences in personal life and managerial behavior.

3. The ideal of a manager

When speaking of a leader or a manager, we talk about a group or an organization's management or leadership role. From where is this expected normative role derived? Becoming a manager means growing into an idealized gestalt, a social identity; we name this gestalt "the ideal of a manager" as conceptualized by the self-discrepancy theory (Dore & Meacham, 1973; Higgins, 1987); specifically, the ideal identity includes whom they and others think they ought to be, and who they might be. An ideal manager is a general category of traits, abilities, and skills stakeholders expect from managers or leaders. The more organizationally and socially expected the ideal identity is established, the stronger the managerial taboo's antecedent will become.

We hypothesize that several processes facilitate the ideal identity: (i) teaching the demanding and idealized set of management skills at business schools through the popular and widely used established textbooks; (ii) management and popular literature, and to a lesser extent, research on an endless line of determinants and correlates of a good manager or leader, and (iii) the romanticised expectations and views of the leadership of stakeholders, colleagues and especially employees (see Fig. 1).

3.1. Superheroes from business schools

Whether reading management textbooks or studying at business schools, the working world appears to need heroes for organizations' proper functioning. This image provides order to organizations and a sense of security to stakeholders, especially employees, as a manager constitutes an agent that controls this world and manages its development. Moreover, if there is a normative ideal of managers, everyone can understand and evaluate "their strengths and their shortcomings, what they did or did not do, should or should not have done, who they are, and perhaps most importantly, who we need them to be" (Bligh, Kohles, & Pillai, 2011, p. 1059).

Schermerhorn (2012), in one of the most frequently used textbooks centered on the study of management, states that a manager is a

role model who is expected to lead by example, behave ethically, act as a figurehead, leader, liaison, monitor, disseminator, spokesperson, entrepreneur, conflict resolver, resource allocator, and negotiator. Besides, the manager must possess conceptual, interpersonal, and technical skills and a high level of all other perceived management skills, such as teamwork, self-management and direction, critical thinking, professionalism, and communication competencies. Such curriculum-based texts systematically constitute the ideal of a leader – sacred managerial values.

Textbooks detail that stress, ambiguous situations, and multitasking challenge the manager, "managerial work is often intense and demanding" (Schermehorn, 2012, p. 10). Still, there is a lack of systematic interpretation of the downsides of management and their solutions. Business students expect the correct answers from their instructors, case studies, and textbooks, which management practices to apply, what skills are needed, and how to make optimal choices. All management textbooks exist to offer the ideal methods to resolve problems "... textbook writers may be eager to give that answer (or perhaps particularly the answer that is politically correct in the field). However, often the honest answer is that "it's complex and we're not entirely sure" (Ferguson, Brown, & Torres, 2018, p. 580).

Contemporary management may resemble psychology, wherein authoritative textbooks contain vast knowledge simplified to the extent that it misleads and lacks the necessary context. Controversies about the recommendations, procedures, or (ir)relevance of many theories in specific contexts are usually not reported at all (Ferguson et al., 2018; Warne, Astle, & Hill, 2018). Nevertheless, a current systematic study of the validity of management textbooks does not exist (however, see Miner (1984), who analyzed 32 organizational science theories in terms of their importance, validity, and usefulness but found only slight evidence of relationships among these three variables).

3.2. Management "self-help" literature

Management and business literature, both academic and popular, convey an exponential number of recommendations on what determines or relates to a leader's success. The ideal image of a leader is based on management textbooks, business education, and articles from practical-oriented managerial journals such as the Harvard Business Review (Jalbert, Furumo, & Jalbert, 2011; Jung & Shin, 2018). Furthermore, the ideal is created by various managerial preconceptions, archetypes, and popular beliefs, all of which form a dominant but rather folk management discourse (Pearce, 2004).

Upon compiling this knowledge, a superhuman is created, which cannot and does not exist. It may be a profound projection of the divine principle of the leadership authority, which is envisioned of the manager, "the leader as someone who is omnipotent, unafraid and capable of anything. Omnipotence sometimes extends to omniscience, especially an ability to read the minds of his/her subordinates," states Gabriel (1997, p. 337). As Pfeffer (2015) points out, this management and leadership industry creates fantasies and unrealistic expectations about managers. It is completely disconnected from the reality most leaders and managers work (Alvesson, 2013) made a similar argument, "These sell-a-good-story motives also dominate many of the popular management books, which are entertaining and easy to read. They often seem persuasive, but may say little about the complications and messiness of what actually has occurred ...", p. 173). However, stakeholders believe that the ideal of a leader can be found, and managers think that they can fulfill this image.

Although undoubtedly a candidate as co-creator of the ideal manager, academic research is not likely to set it up. A gap between management sciences and practice is challenging to fill (Bansal, Bertels, Ewart, MacConnachie, & O'Brien, 2012). As reported by Rynes, Colbert, and O'Boyle (2018, p. 2996), "[managers] are unaware of research findings; even if they are aware of findings, they don't believe them; or even if they are aware of findings and believe them, they don't bother to implement them."

Indeed, some authors criticize and define themselves against management's sacred values (e.g., Brown, 2012; Scott, 2017). They demonstrate that the ideal manager marginalizes many real-life issues. Despite this, the authors should acknowledge that the manager can or should express emotions, honesty, and authenticity (Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Gardner, Cogliner, Davis, & Dickens, 2011). However, the broad concept of authentic leadership has introduced different standards that the manager must adopt, such as self-awareness, relational transparency, internalized moral perspective, and balanced processing, without directly addressing the causes of the manager's weakness (Alvesson & Einola, 2019; Ford & Harding, 2011).

Authentic leadership is characterized "with little to no mention of what exactly are the nature of these weaknesses and how should leaders experience them beyond their acknowledgment to obviate defensiveness" (Diddams & Chang, 2012, p. 594). In most organizations, it is impossible to acknowledge weaknesses and emotions, as they are not appreciated. It is part of organizational life, which is neglected for various reasons.

3.3. Romanticised expectations from stakeholders

The ideal manager is normative not only to the managers themselves as their criteria of self-evaluation but is more, perhaps the most, required by their subordinates and other stakeholders (DeRue & Ashford, 2010). Employees have unrealistic expectations as the manager role is perceived as basically flawless and perfect. If not, they are dissatisfied, demotivated, and anticipate who will resolve the problem; "[b]oth counter dependence and overdependence lead managers to hold unrealistic views of what a boss is. Both views ignore that bosses, like everyone else, are imperfect and fallible" (Gabarro & Kotter, 1980, p. 95). Employees expect the manager to meet their needs and, in doing so, render this authority responsible for their work experience. However, to say that many prefer a dependency relationship or are control-oriented (Gagné & Deci, 2005) is an organizational taboo. On the other hand, many managers who desire to be unmistakable and omnipotent offer solutions, but they cannot satisfy them perfectly.

The concept of managerial taboo does not contradict the fact that managerial and leadership skills lead to corporate growth in

stakeholder value or create better workplaces (Bloom, Eifert, Mahajan, McKenzie, & Roberts, 2013; Bloom, Genakos, Sadun, & Van Reenen, 2012). The content of managerial taboo is neither anti-leadership nor anti-management. Neither the normalization of errors, the celebration of helplessness and insecurity, nor the promotion of emotional imbalance represents this concept's underlying message. We argue that these phenomena happen, and the associated managerial taboo deepens their negative consequences. Just as the change of perception of errors as failures and instead of assessing them as learning opportunities (learning by doing or trial-and-learning experimentation) leads to productivity increase (Birkinshaw & Haas, 2016; Gillier & Lenfle, 2018), we should de-taboo the whole ideal of a manager.

4. Managerial taboos and their consequences

In this section, we predict several classes of negative consequences that may arise from the existence of managerial taboos (a conflict between normative identity and the real identity of a leader or a manager). The internal oppressor pushes towards the unachievable ideal, resulting in feelings of insufficiency and failure. Realizing a taboo and the lack of identity conflict resolution leads to further negative consequences. Some of these subsequent consequences are taboo, too, which further strengthens the ideal and deepens the adverse effects of its unattainability (see Table 1).

To illustrate this point, consider that a manager is systematically overworked. Stress, mental health issues, and burnout may follow (Schaufeli, Leiter, & Maslach, 2009; Xu & Farris, 2022). At first glance, the cause for burnout may be that he is an incompetent manager or a company culture based on unrealistic performance expectations, poor management practices, inappropriate planning, etc. However, we argue that manager overwork may be understood as an intrinsic desire to achieve an ideal – which is unobtainable – and the unwillingness or inability to publicly acknowledge one's limited abilities and reluctance to ask for help leads to overwork, followed by burnout. The root cause is thus the existence of a managerial taboo.

What protects the existence of the ideal of a manager? The belief system that says that not fulfilling the ideal of a manager means failure, losing a job, feelings of shame, embarrassment, or incompetence, and the loss of intrinsic value built on the foundations of success. The managers cannot discuss the difference between the ideal and their real identity and the consequences of this difference. In addition to the far-reaching negative consequences of being a messenger of "bad news" in organizations (Roberts & O'Reilly, 1974), failure to fulfill the ideal threatens the manager's social and leadership status and income (Leana & Meuris, 2015). Simultaneously, according to the ideal, they also evaluate their colleagues, so there is no escape from the vicious circle of managerial taboos. Managers who do not fulfill the ideal leave and are replaced by those who believe in the validity of the ideal.

The described dynamics is certainly not universal; we assume that the stronger managerial taboos exist in an organization, the more intense their manifestations in personal and family life, managerial behavior, and organizational behavior will be. This relationship will be mediated by both personal traits of leaders or managers, such as emotional stability, self-esteem, self-efficacy (Harrison, Thurgood, Boivie, & Pfarrer, 2020; Judge & Bono, 2001), or resilience (Asthana, 2021a, 2021b; Kossek & Perrigino, 2016), and organizational characteristics such as a person-environment fit (Houdek, Bahník, Hudík, & Vranka, 2021; Schneider, 1987), a culture of benevolent climate and psychological safety (Edmondson, 1999; Leroy et al., 2012; Liu & Chiu, 2020) or authenticity (Avolio & Gardner, 2005).

4.1. Manifestations in personal and family life

One of the impacts of taboo dynamics may be the worsening of well-being and increased levels of managers' stress, consequently deteriorating their mental and physical health. Managerial positions could be very damaging to health through stress-related illnesses (Pfeffer, 2018). The evaluator of their work is (often) the managers themselves, who try to stand up to the ideal criteria. It causes a high level of stress that goes beyond the positive benefits of eustress. As a result, diseases such as ischemic heart disease, higher blood pressure, diabetes, back pains, or fatigue syndrome (Byrne et al., 2014; Follmer & Jones, 2018).

A widespread strategy to cope with stress when feeling helpless is to use alcohol and similar substances, THC, amphetamines, and other anxiety-inhibiting drugs (Bacharach, Bamberger, & Sonnenstuhl, 2002; Frone, 2008; Zhang & Snizek, 2003). Managers are a threatened group because of their performance orientation and life under stress; alcohol and drug consumption may be preferable to cope with stress (Grunberg, Moore, & Greenberg, 1998).

A healthier way to cope with stress responses is adrenaline or extreme sports, endurance running, or other challenging physical activities (Self, Henry, Findley, & Reilly, 2007; Traldi, 2016). Leaders say they must 'have a run to feel good.' We speculate that they do not admit it or do not want to perceive this as a reaction to stress and an unconscious way to cope. However, addiction to running is a suitable way to relax unless the long-run negative consequences prevail (Leedy, 2000). Other means to cope with this stress, although with higher risks, are adrenaline hobbies, aggressive driving, or self-harming.

Another coping mechanism is increased sexual desire, which often leads to promiscuity or other non-standard behavioral expressions (Cline, Walkling, & Yore, 2018). Winter and Barenbaum (1985, p. 337) state that "power-motivated men often act in "profligate impulsive" ways: drinking, multiple drug use, gambling, verbal and physical aggression, sexual exploitation, interest in "vicarious" sex." One of the feelings accompanying managers is loneliness, although it is necessary to distinguish between loneliness and objective social separation, which leaders contrarily do not suffer (Lee & Tiedens, 2001; Waytz, Chou, Magee, & Galinsky, 2015). Loneliness does not reside in leaders having few relationships; it must be understood as the impossibility of intimately sharing their inner experience in failing to fulfill their ideal identity.

We predict that if the managers sense that they do not achieve the ideal, it is impossible to discuss it, and therefore, it cannot be shared in relationships. Paradoxically, this phenomenon is enhanced because managers, due to their higher social rank and power, are

sought after by their peers and subordinates, who tend to relate to or even envy their status. Although the manager establishes social relationships, they are borne by the ideal identity. Subordinates do not expect the leader to share the degree to which they cannot handle their position. In this context, there is the frequent need to find someone who "will understand them," with whom they can confide, listen empathically and sympathetically, and understand the difficulties. This function could often be satisfied by assistants, close co-workers, or escorts. Surrogates become the "silent witness" to the manager's struggle and serve as support. Managers may experience feelings of intimacy, thus creating a new relationship, which, in the background, becomes the stress-coping mechanism.

4.2. Manifestations in managerial behavior

Managers are forced into deep leadership acting, resulting in a gradual emotional burnout. Burnout has dynamics associated with an intrinsic value, which depends on external appraisal and an inability to experience one's performance as enough. Burnout is a devious process in which personal and professional life gradually deteriorates and, consequently, performance as well, leading to a tendency to higher performance and, as a result, to a further downswing (Cordes & Dougherty, 1993; Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001). The fact that the manager cannot talk about it worsens the situation. To admit it and to talk about their ongoing symptoms is seen through the eyes of the ideal identity as a shortcoming, as weak will, and, above all, failure.

One of the reasons for managers' emotional burnout is that they are at the center of the transference tendencies of employees and other stakeholders. "Executives may evoke positive transference from some employees and negative transference from others depending upon the quality and vicissitudes of internalized authority relations" (Diamond & Allcorn, 2003, p. 9). Employees have unsatisfiable demands on managers from their dependent position or within dependent relationships. This codependent transference and massive demand of the manager to live up to these expectations (counter-transference) get them in a no-win scenario in which anything they do will not be enough.

The manager cannot satisfy all requirements and effectively manage emotional labor and consequently suffers from harmful consequences (Liu, Perrewé, Hochwarter, & Kacmar, 2004). This opens a projection field for different types of employee emotions, often aggression and dissatisfaction from not meeting their needs (Diamond & Allcorn, 2003). The employees may become angry and irritated, express dissatisfaction or displeasure, and blame the system, the organisation, and their manager.

Due to the lack of voluntary conversation on specific issues, how does the manager's latent behavior influence their team? If the manager cannot speak or behave against the ideal, the co-workers and subordinates tend to share the taboo: helplessness and a feeling that things cannot be changed, that processes drag them beyond their control. If the manager does not talk about their emotions, helplessness, or doubts, these emotions remain dormant with the team. No one confronts the issues if the manager has problems discussing fatigue, exhaustion, and mistakes. This concealment exhausts everyone and introduces concerns about the public expression of emotions and doubts.

Alternatively, this information takes the form of 'water cooler' talk, gossip, and slander, which undermines team relationships and social trust (Wu, Birtch, Chiang, & Zhang, 2018). The credibility of communication declines and co-workers perceive that something is different than what is presented. Mixed messages lead to decision paralysis and confusion (Houdek, 2016). The atmosphere of a low psychological safety environment does not support resolving problems (Edmondson, 1999). Eventually, it aggravates co-worker engagement, their degree of motivation, satisfaction, and team performance. If this image includes a norm that mistakes are not forgiven and deemed a failure, it produces the practice of denying or ignoring errors, hoping they are not revealed.

The question remains as to whether and under what circumstances the manager reveals their failures. The norm remains to boast about successes and achievements and create narratives that confirm their managerial competencies (Birkinshaw & Haas, 2016). However, the more one doubts oneself, the less one can share one's misfortunes and errors. Sharing under these circumstances confirms that one is not a good leader rather than promoting the idea that one, too, is human and prone to fault. The need for greater authenticity without enough development of psychological safety becomes counterproductive.

If managers' feelings of inadequacy and shame are taboo, then issues cannot be facilitated at the organizational level or with their team. However, even employees experience shame when they fail to meet an objective or accomplish a task. "As such, a myriad of interactions, practices, and processes in daily organisational life have the potential to make us aware of how we fall short of these identities and evoke feelings of shame" (Daniels & Robinson, 2019, p. 2). Though it remains in the background of their experience, it does not become a topic whose public facilitation would resolve the issue (Peat & Perrmann-Graham, 2023).

Shame can be one of the most destructive emotions (Douglas Creed et al., 2014). It is characterized by the absence of intrinsic love and compassion for oneself and a decline in self-development efforts. Within self-devaluation, one becomes a victim of an internal oppressor. In a lesser version, an internal oppressor takes an inner critic. The manager is subjected to a continual inner assessment. If the manager is not aware of this pattern, they enter a spiral of incapacitating self-assessment that ends in burnout or other escape strategies. One way to work with an internal oppressor is to disclose its presence and share what everyone probably experiences with the team. Facilitation starts with managers asking subordinates for advice. Brooks, Gino, and Schweitzer (2015) found that those who seek advice are, in the end, perceived as more competent than those who do not. Starting to facilitate the self-assessment team dynamic, the manager leads co-workers to realize their unrealistic self-assessment and the inadequate assessment directed to the manager.

Another method to cope with the self-doubt of one's competence is the overachievement strategy (Braslow, Guerretaz, Arkin, & Oleson, 2012). Through achievements, it is possible to experience one's value. This strategy drives one's growth and, above all, performance. The darker side is the missing segment of the identity, which sees one's intrinsic value without proof; but with compassion and kindness. Overachievement as a functional pattern is not easy to remove. It brings (short-term) results and may render the leader very successful but not necessarily satisfied in the long term. Overachievement perpetuates feelings of self-doubt (Braslow

et al., 2012). It is a process from which it is challenging to withdraw; a frequent exit is burnout, chronic fatigue, or a promotion to a position that exceeds the leader's capacity that breeds feelings of failure and internal devaluation (Fairburn & Malcomson, 2001). This structure is desirable from the shareholders' point of view, so it is appreciated and supported. The fact that feelings of inner insecurity could feed it belongs to the offices of coaches or therapists.

On the other hand, managers can eventually perceive the discrepancy between identities as a drive to personal and professional growth, learning to cope with stressful situations. Individualized goal setting and purposefully directed actions accompanied by clear feedback would be practical tools to use the ideal identity constructively (e.g., Kizilcec et al., 2020).

Management is associated with a higher social rank. Leaders enjoy a higher income than most non-managerial positions, better advantages, and benefits. These benefits are often evaluated as inadequate, undeserved, unfair, and unrelated to corporate performance (Goergen & Renneboog, 2011; Wade, Porac, & Pollock, 1997; Zorn, Shropshire, Martin, Combs, & Ketchen, 2017). Managerial work differs from professions that possess intrinsic vocational content that incites people to do the job, as management could be seen as a technology of power. Therefore, leaders certainly gain undeserved benefits, but at the same time, leaders without a Machiavellian personality can face a loss of purpose and alienation (Korman, Wittig-Berman, & Lang, 1981), or they start to feel that they would like to do something else instead.

Ideas of escapism become prevalent: move to the countryside, enter a monastery, live on an exotic island, start manual work, or craft to view the tangible results of their work. These dreams and fantasies reflect their frustrations of being trapped in a job that lacks meaning, sense, or value (Bailey & Madden, 2019). At the same time, there are demands to maintain the current living standard. This deadlock keeps managers stuck in their dream of a different lifestyle and is a functional escape mechanism. The mental pattern is detachment from one's power, from the psychological rank that increasingly permits them to defend themselves and influence their environment. However, this requires a high level of courage as the manager must face the ideal image with little space for these doubts.

4.3. Manifestations in organisational behavior

Management is a profession which "implies a degree of power and status within the organizations" (Parker, 2002, p. 7). Parker (2002) further talks about the emergence of a new class, a group of people with higher rank, higher capabilities, and specific common characteristics, which could create a managerial golden cage and feelings of elitism (Boxall & Gilbert, 2007; Davidson, Dey, & Smith, 2015; Leckelt et al., 2018). A manager who realizes that she does not reach the ideal may try to regulate his perceived flaws by more intensive use, or even misuse, of organizational and personal power (Hogg, 2005). The main attribute of a managerial position is contextual power, based on a traditional managerial paradigm of managers being the most powerful and the most informed individuals in a firm's hierarchy. The challenge for managers is to learn to handle the power and not misuse it (Gruenfeld, Inesi, Magee, & Galinsky, 2008; Magee & Galinsky, 2008; Winter & Barenbaum, 1985). At the same time, power tends to make managers less sympathetic, more convinced of their intelligence and skills, and less aware of their high rank (Diamond & Jones, 2005). From the perspective of power, the manager-subordinate relationship is always asymmetric. This very dynamic is a source of opportunities to misuse power, despite the fact that the more powerful individual may want to help others (Diamond & Jones, 2005; Tepper, 2000).

The ideal is also reflected by the mindset of a subordinate or a colleague of an ideal-defined leader. What are the characteristics of a worker who seeks this ideal? What is the shareholders' view of such workers, who must be directed by ideal leaders? It is someone who requires goals or vision to be defined to realize the purpose of the job, someone who needs to be controlled and motivated externally, and someone who relies on being managed. It is someone who celebrates leaders for the organization's successes and blames them for their failures (Gagné & Deci, 2005).

Such perceived characters of employees allow managers to treat them as a resource. A manager is a person who can manage and get things done. Even though leaders are taught that employees are the most important assets and that people matter when they find themselves in a hard place, they have the power to demand results; they are the ones who begin to exert pressure, use transactional tools, and understand workers as resources. Gruenfeld et al.'s study (2008, p. 123) shows that "a focus on rewards, opportunities, and related goals under power conditions can lead to seeing people as instruments for goal attainment and approaching others on the basis of their utility." Treating employees as instruments can lead to a manager's disrespectful, insincere, hypocritical behavior, even bullying and traumatization.

It is feasible to speculate that the probability of organizational trauma occurs when managers feel they do not obtain the ideal, worry about their career, or are under pressure to deliver results, where subordinates must perform above their ability. Anger and stress that result from such situations provide leaders the impetus to resolve the issue. This forced intent creates an environment in which the managers despise any roadblock that prevents them from doing so. Organizational traumatization emerges if they vent their anger on subordinates and colleagues (Vredenburg & Brender, 1998). (As the psychological insight of Jedis states – "Fear leads to anger. Anger leads to hate. Hate leads to suffering." (Yoda in Lucas, 1999)). When managers use borderline techniques and deliver results, the organization is inclined to overlook this "deficiency"; hypocrite and concealment intrigue emerge.

5. Conclusion: The ways of growth

The history of major social change can serve as an example of the de-tabooisation of management. These revolutions occurred when a taboo was named – with which stereotypes and mistaken paradigms does society live. Stigmatized populations were then able to live in normality, and, eventually, the majority also opened their hearts and minds. Management faces the same challenge: people in organizations should feel like real humans treated with deep respect and without stereotypes or biases or idealization. The change should not lead to managers' victimization, which would only exacerbate the taboo; it should promote managers' agency and

resiliency.

It is clear from our concept of managerial taboo that it is necessary to transform management education and training; in a narrow sense of business school curriculums (Asthana, 2021a, b) as well as expectations of what managers must be able to do. A manager's ideal must be understood as a maximum, a horizon that can be strived for but is impossible to achieve. It is right for the ideal to create motivational tension between itself and reality; however, this tension must be supportive, not paralyzing. It should be seen as a drive to personal and professional growth and learning to cope with stressful situations, not as a goal itself. It is necessary to remove the taboo associated with overt discussion on emotion, mistakes, and wrong decisions, the omnipotent demand on managers, the tendency for perfection, codependency relationships, frustration, and burnout. Just as "fuck-up night" (TED-like stories of successful entrepreneurs about their failures, mistakes, and defeats) is popular in entrepreneurship training (von Bloh, 2021), management courses should also emphasize that some errors are inevitable, predictions will be inaccurate, and some expectations are unrealistic.

Organizations should focus on their leaders' and managers' unique identities, allowing them to train towards advancement, not requiring the ideal in which they should exist. The removal of erroneous implicit theories held by employees, stakeholders, or colleagues about the ideal qualities of a leader can lead to the development of managers. However, the change may be accompanied by negative consequences such as increased anxiety and unpredictability.

In management education and organizational practice, it is necessary to debate the dark side of management and draw attention to its dangers, risks, and pitfalls. If managers do not overtly address these problems, there are few ways to prevent managers from repeating past errors. The fact that it is possible to address these conditions openly and without reproach inspires the normalization of managers' experiences. The manager learns that others also experience feelings of hopelessness or disappointment, which can help him feel normal; consequently, the issue can be confronted and targeted in training (Boyatzis, Smith, & Blaize, 2006). Acknowledgment generates self-respect, thus strengthening the manager's authenticity (Avolio & Gardner, 2005). That is, to acknowledge and use the potential or energy of parts of the real identity. There is already evidence showing how effectively self-awareness or psychological safety can be taught in management education (Brewer & Devnew, 2022; Perrmann-Graham, Liu, Cangioni, & Spataro, 2022).

By not addressing managerial taboos, managers hinder their colleagues' professional growth. Once it is possible to talk about the taboo outcomes on the organizational level, it will be possible to facilitate them, make them salient, and suggest ways to solve them. This change cannot happen without an authentic culture of personal accountability of each employee, learning and implementing self-management tools, and supporting organizational processes. The change will undoubtedly be a challenging task; there are currently no studies that systematically track how organizations dynamically evolve when they break free from stigmatizing, tabooing tendencies or, conversely, when they move towards enhancing psychological safety, and what factors at the individual, team and organizational levels are essential mediators of these dynamics.

However, we do not think that educators, researchers, consultants, or therapists will achieve significant change in management. Their therapy and advice may not terminate or modify the ideal. They lack skin in the game in the organization. This group of experts creates another "should be" for the manager. Change originates with the organization, implemented by shareholders and leaders who identify the taboos in their organizations and actively seek solutions to these problems. A specific way is to host open forums and team and organizational meetings in an environment of strong psychological safety. As psychological safety is essential in failure-based learning (Carmeli, 2007), organizations should facilitate open and honest discussions about organizational issues, how people feel, and what prevents them from feeling better. The verbalization itself (or even swearing) can bring momentary relief, humor, and discussion (Lyttle, 2007; Romero & Cruthirds, 2006). Indeed, stabildestabilization and the culture of psychological safety are not a panacea, as noted by Edmondson and Lei (2014): "[The climate of safety] may send people down a path of wasting valuable time on unimportant things or a path of losing the motivation to really learn. [It is needed] to achieve a balance of encouraging open communication related to the task at hand and providing constructive feedback to limit irrelevant questions, comments, or discussions" (p. 40–41). Management education should continue with a more integrated, experiential learning approach, bridging the gap between idealized knowledge and messy practical application (Kolb & Kolb, 2005), ensuring that management education is not only about imparting knowledge but also about the ability to face the unpredictability of the world and requirements that may not be feasible.

Management should facilitate organizational success without the aura of extraordinariness and godlike principles. Management education should teach about future organizations where managerial taboos do not exist. Management taboos bring an alienation of managers and workers, lower engagement, employee depression, a transactional approach to work, lack of creativity, and the disappearance of happiness from work life (Salas-Vallina, Alegre, & Fernández Guerrero, 2018). Taboo-free organizations allow workers to experience and perceive themselves as individuals with respect to all their parts, not resources. Managers will be those who support their workers' emancipation through becoming human, with both their bright and deficient sides. This would support the further development of management science.

Research into formerly taboo topics will lead to greater acceptance, strengthening preventive and resiliency-building measures that can be taught to the next generation of managers. Companies should push business schools to educate real managers, not managers praying for the ideal.

Conflict of interest statement

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

Funding

The work on the paper was funded by the Excellent Teams Project (IP310031) by the Faculty of Business Administration, Prague University of Economics and Business.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Stanislav Háša: Writing – original draft, Formal analysis, Conceptualization. **Petr Houdek:** Writing – original draft, Formal analysis, Conceptualization.

Declaration of generative AI and AI-assisted technologies in the writing process

During the preparation of this work, the author did not use AI-assisted technologies in the writing process.

Data availability

No data was used for the research described in the article.

Acknowledgments

The authors are very grateful to Richard Brunet-Thornton, Joanna Campbell, Martin Lukeš, Trish Reay, Ivana Lukeš Rybanská, Niels Van Quaquebeke, and Sharon Toker for their thoughtful and constructive comments, which improved the quality of the manuscript. We also thank both reviewers for their comments, improving the quality of the paper.

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