

# Finding a New Prince for Management Science: The Antithesis to the Machiavellian Prince

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**Abstract:** Machiavelli's *The Prince* has been cherished for more than 500 years, with its various facets used by scholars and researchers of management sciences. But with the dawn of positive organizational scholarship, the Machiavellian prince with his dark aspects does not appear compatible. Hence, the emerging field, resting more on humans' positive side, is also in need of an idol the way Machiavelli's *The Prince* has been idolized through the traditional views of management and business. As a result, the current study has reviewed Prince Myshkin, the protagonist in Dostoevsky's *The Idiot* as the alternative and antagonist to Machiavelli's style. Hence the current study identifies the possible ethical implications in human resource management which can be guided through the character of Prince Myshkin. The study also analyzes how two different princes (i.e., Prince Myshkin and Machiavelli's prince) guide managers under similar situations, thus guiding managers to deal in contemporary tones with the way of the new prince (i.e., Prince Myshkin).

**Keywords:** Fiction for business ethics, Machiavelli, Machiavellian Prince, Prince Myshkin, Ethical Managers

A good amount of literature has been engraved in the form of fiction, stories, tales, and poetry, but very little has been used or applied in management science. Management science, which stands close to sociology and psychology, has been somewhat restrained in adopting the models other sciences use to learn from myths and tales. To comprehend the increasing complexity, managers in business environments can use wisdom from historical and fictional books and records (McGuire & Hutchings, 2006). Machiavelli's *The Prince*, a political treatise written in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, has been extensively used by scholars in marketing and management (Walle, 2001; Harris & Lock, 1996; Swain, 2002). After 500 years, the Machiavel-

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lian prince is still a subject of serious discussion in various fields, similarly being extensively adopted in management science (Harris & Lock, 2000).

The subject matter is still as fresh as when Machiavelli had penned it to guide Lorenzo De Medici on how to rule a state, guiding managers and leaders now on how to react to the global competitive environment. Jay (1967), discussing the similarities between *states and organizations*, discussed the similarities that exist between states and organizations and how their ultimate success or failure will stem from the traits of a leader/manager. Hence, Machiavellianism had been of special interest to organizational behaviorist theorists (LeBreton, Shiverdecker, & Grimaldi, 2018; Dahling & Whitaker, 2009). Philips and Gully (2011) elaborated on the notion that Machiavellianism refers to the degree an individual can manipulate others in interpersonal situations. They stressed that *The Prince* was taught by Machiavelli to influence others to achieve one's end and that feelings become unnecessary or insignificant during the given course. Notably, this may appear as a lack of ethical concern and deceit, a tool perhaps usable by the Prince (Judge et al., 2009). The Machiavellian prince holds no ethical considerations; winning the situation stands as the top-most priority. Nevertheless, a different figure has appeared in Dostoevsky's *The Idiot*. The character of Prince Myshkin prioritizes ethics and morals in every situation while fearing losing the situation less. Thus, both Princes (Machiavelli's and Dostoevsky's) either trade off or don't on ethics and come out with different answers in similar situations (Jackson & Grace, 2018). Positive organizational scholarship has already looked into a business environment with virtuousness and compassion having goodness that one with greed and selfishness does not (Cameron et al., 2003, Muceldili et al, 2015). Cameron et al. (2003) disregarded the traditional view where maximizing wealth and successful competition is considered a success story. The traditional view had given boom to the Machiavellian view of management, namely the use of deceit, power, and fear. Bragues (2009) considered this to result from the definition Smith (1901) set where "self-interest encourages the greater good." This understanding of self-interest is what has transformed into a major challenge in the field of business ethics. However, with the dawn of positive organizational scholarship that followed, novel models and facts have evolved that can cope with humility, virtuousness, and respect. Prince Myshkin is one of the figures to have liberated the world from distrust & self-absorption. Positive organizational scholarship urges the discovery of fresh definitions for crafting and generating meaningfulness, purpose, and positive relationships among humans (Cameron et al., 2003). The current study aims to find a new prince/archetype who can nurture positive relationships at work, and the idea of a new prince would be the antithesis to Machiavelli's prince. Cordeiro (2003) avowed

ethical managers to be the only possible solution while looking at the decline of business ethics in 21<sup>st</sup> century. Furthermore, Cordeiro elaborated on the findings by highlighting the role of individuals in ethical practices; ethical behavior is ultimately an individual matter. Cordeiro recommended that ethics are not what managers do but rather who they are. In context with this, the present study attempts to highlight the idea from *The Idiot*, presenting one possible ethical implication in managing employees. In addition, the study also attempts to cite two incongruous phenomena related to human nature and how Machiavelli and Dostoevsky separately addressed them, giving an ethical guideline to managers for tackling different situations.

An exploratory analysis (discourse analysis) has been undertaken while reviewing Machiavelli's *The Prince* and Dostoevsky's *The Idiot*. *The Prince* and *The Idiot* have been used as the key texts, with research papers and secondary data already established in such realms being used for further investigation. The qualitative research approach has been used to induce new guidelines from Dostoevsky's original work, *The Idiot*. During the study, common ground was first established (Coulthard, 2014) wherein guidelines based on Machiavelli and Dostoevsky were both given to managers. As much research has already been conducted on the Machiavellian style for managers, a detailed discourse analysis was thus conducted on Dostoevsky's *The Idiot* to find congruent/incongruent guidelines for managers as put forth by Prince Myshkin. As a research methodology, discourse analysis deciphers new practices. In discourse practices, the language of a text is used not just as a passive means of reporting an event but also for introducing new practices for social settings (Anderson & Holloway, 2018). After identifying the common areas of interest between Machiavelli & Dostoevsky, new practices in similar settings were recorded from Prince Myshkin and later integrated with management science.

### Preview of the Machiavellian Prince

Authors like Grant (1997) have highlighted Machiavellian philosophy, which rationalized the times when being a little bad is good. The trade-off between hypocrisy and integrity assures that the prince only uses virtue as a pretense for fulfilling selfish needs. Machiavelli's original text considers cruelty to be a better trait for the prince to use than being merciful. Continuing on to chapter XVII, Machiavelli chooses a prince who is feared rather than loved. Machiavelli questions human nature, stating, "for love is preserved by the link of obligation which, owing to the baseness of men, is broken at every opportunity for their advantage; but fear preserves you by a dread of punishment, which never fails." In chapter XVIII, he goes

on to regard human nature to be better controlled by force rather than law, thus recommending copying the traits of the lion and the fox simultaneously. Interestingly, this led to the great debate regarding human nature that occurred between Hobbes and Rousseau (Prinz, 2012; Schwitzgebel, 2007) and that was theorized by McGregor in the form of Theory X and Theory Y (Robbins & Coulter, 2007, Koppelman, 2008). Machiavelli forwarded a negative view where mankind should be curbed and ruled in order to control their selfishness, which is the Hobbesian view of human nature and was similarly highlighted by McGregor in Theory X. The earliest critique received for Machiavelli's *The Prince* was made by King Frederick of Prussia in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, who defended his moral view that "being a King does allow him or one to be a user of the strategies as suggested by Machiavelli."

Attempts have been undertaken to reconcile Machiavelli with a brighter and more positive organizational aspect (Cunha et al., 2013). A similar attempt was also undertaken by Jackson (2000), who advocated that *The Prince* guides managers to be vicious when the majority at large is already vicious; acting virtuous later on holds no profit and would lead the system into further decline. This guides managers in various situations where they can have a better result by sacrificing values (Cunha et al., 2013). Thus much of the literature available on Machiavelli talks about the trade-off on morals and ethics. One major facet of being Machiavellian is that bargaining with better manipulation allows you to actually receive more than your share (Graham, 1996). Another major dimension is about the concept of power; Machiavelli suggested various techniques by which power can be sustained or enhanced. To do this, however, the prince (or manager) should have knowledge of human nature to exercise power at a better level (Gutfreund, 2000). Even while authors were attempting to rationalize *The Prince's* instrumental use of morals (Harvey, 2001), others strongly argued and looked at *The Prince* as a sheer realist who hardly accounts for the Divine or absolute morals (Walle, 2001). Thus Machiavellianism is still called, remembered, and used more for deceit and using power blindly. This negative attachment to Machiavellianism is visible from its addition to the dark triad test, where Paulhus & Jones (2011) used Machiavellianism alongside narcissism and psychopathy. The dimensions of Machiavellianism measure the respondents' manipulative attitudes. Researchers still explore the Machiavellian view of organizational change (McGuire & Hutching, 2006) and negotiation; however, another school separate from the traditional power-oriented view of change and skills of deception in negotiation encourages devolving power to the lower echelons (Avolio et. al., 2004). Thus, Machiavellian thought has compromised ethics and morals while keeping its pragmatic view: the negative conception about

human nature (Walle, 2001). With lessening morals and ethics, the Machiavellian school has made situations far worse by only focusing on success. Cohen (2015), a professor of organizational psychology, remarked knowing how Machiavellian an employee is to be important because they can have greater self-serving tendencies and can continue to compromise on ethics and morals during situations. Empirical studies have also raised questions about Machiavellian traits, which have been used traditionally for greater success and productivity. Belschak and Muhammad (2018) verified high levels of stress and reduced trust among stakeholders when Machiavellian managers have to work with Machiavellian leaders. Belschak et al. (2018) identified ethical leadership as a cure for employees' Machiavellian behaviors. Thus the literature has shifted towards curing managers' Machiavellian behaviors and making them more ethical. Hartog & Belschak (2012) previously identified the role of ethical leaders and managers at the workplace, as they communicate the ethical standards expected at a workplace. The reward for honesty was greater than for deceit, which reflected the standard expected from workers.

### Finding a New Prince for Management Science

King Frederick of Prussia's famous work, *Anti-Machiavel*, was also endorsed by Voltaire for its lack of ethical and moral considerations (Wade, 1969, Kapossy et al., 2017). Meanwhile, another archetype of prince appeared in Dostoevsky's revered work, *The Idiot*. The prince in this fictional tale is the protagonist of the story and is known as Prince Myshkin. However, this prince's traits are quite paradoxical to those of Machiavelli's prince (Young, 2004). Prince Myshkin has caught the attention of a large number of readers, scholars, and psychologists for decades. In a letter to his niece, Dostoevsky wrote that the idea behind *The Idiot* was "to depict a positively beautiful human being" (Bogdashina, 2013; Young, 2004). Similarly, the advancements in positive organizational scholarship in the field of management has provided researchers with a newer lens for unveiling this new phenomenon. Thus, a new prince who looking at the positive energy of mankind and considers ethics can be scrutinized first for further use in the management literature.

Published in 1869, *The Idiot* for 140 years has held the attention of psychologists and psychoanalysts. Rancour-Laferriere (1989) highlighted from this work various aspects of psychoanalysis that are used. The story roams around the central character, Prince Myshkin, who came to Russia from Switzerland after being treated in a rehab center. Though a prince, he came penniless to Russia when the country was in a state of lust, greed, and disorganized social array. While he encounters other charac-

ters with greed for power, affiliation, and money, Prince Myshkin settled as a gentle soul initially and yet became a pure soul with no self-interests who believes others full heartedly, even those who intend to deceive him (Becket, 2006). Hence, Prince Myshkin is introduced as a saint or Christ-like figure who has been born in a culture obsessed with greed for money and power. McKenna (2014) argued that Dostoevsky had portrayed this Christ-like figure as a leader with no lust for worldly desires who innocently deals with every situation that comes to him. Thus the literature reflects Prince Myshkin and the Machiavellian Prince to be two opposite poles with different assumptions regarding human nature and how to deal with it.

### Similarities in the Context of the Machiavellian Prince and Prince Myshkin

However, a similarity exists between the contexts of how both works were written. Machiavelli wrote *The Prince* when Italy at the time was in a state of political turmoil and various states had been attempting to conquer other neighboring states. Machiavelli guides the prince so that, by the use of power and manipulative skills, situations like that could be handled more effectively. Thus he was proponent of the economy of violence (Cunha et al., 2013). Similarly, when Dostoevsky introduces Prince Myshkin to the readers in *The Idiot*, Russian society was in a state of political and social chaos, where hunger and starvation had been increasing. The other characters and society at large are greedy and aim to deceive others to win positions or power. Myshkin, after receiving a large share of money, still extended cooperation to others, not violence, to safeguard his newly received wealth (Becket, 2006). Thus both authors in similar contexts came up with divergent answers to similar questions. The following table highlights the generic similarities and differences between both ideas.

Table 1.

#### *Generic Similarities and Differences between Machiavelli's and Dostoevsky's Princes*

Characters' behavior/condition	Machiavelli's Prince	Prince Myshkin
Political & social conditions around writer when original texts were written	Chaos	Chaos
View towards human Nature	People are selfish & should be controlled by power	People are considerate and generous and their liberty should be preserved
Ethical School	Utilitarianism	Deontology
Attaining goals vs. Considering feelings	Attaining goals	Considering feelings

## Findings and Discussion

The results from the discourse analysis reflect how Myshkin forwarded answers differently than Machiavelli. While Machiavelli is addressing a world standing on the assumptions of self-interest, Prince Myshkin appears with more enlightening answers suitable to the philosophy of positive organizational scholarship. Machiavelli's prince stands no differently than a realist leader with a highly initiating structure, just as an Ohio State study (Baddeley & James, 1987) mentioned. Leaders only define the role for attaining a goal and have no consideration for the feelings or ideas of other members. A similar behavioral dimension is seen in the Michigan study (Sellgren et al., 2006) where the leader only had concerns for production, which kept him from having an employee-oriented attitude. However, Prince Myshkin keeps his concern for people high by being compassionate and preferring to lose situations, not by deceiving people. Prince Myshkin encourages others to learn about compassion and gives them the chance to be compassionate. He helps others learn about kindness, excluding no one from the story (Youn, 2004). Machiavelli's prince struggles to win more than his share and advances competitiveness in the system using the economy of violence, which underlies the basic assumption Machiavelli had regarding human nature. On the other hand, serving people and exercising altruism (Greenleaf, 2002) can be seen as a trait in various leadership models (Fry, 2003). With ethics declining and competition increasing, the Machiavellian model, which rests on the economy of violence, can lead the global business condition into the worst situation by inflicting manipulation and deceit in order to achieve more. As per Machiavelli's (1961) view, a leader's better qualities may not become a hindrance to a successful rule. Excessively global competitiveness takes managers to every limit while compromising ethics and morals. Future businesses and upcoming managers should embrace people as their highest concern, not as the object or a means to achieve near-sighted goals. This would align with how positive organizational scholarship looks into a positive view of the world and workforce.

Similarly, various papers have worked on the use of Machiavellian skills for negotiation (Graham, 1996) or for organizational change (McGuire & Hutchings, 2006), though papers written earlier have clearly mentioned the lack of morality and ethics by highly Machiavellian people (Turner & Martinez, 1977). However, Prince Myshkin is kind in his interpersonal skills and truthful while making arrangements with others (Becket, 2006), while other characters around him keep on nurturing their greed and lust yet are unable to change the holy personality of Prince Myshkin, who is attempting to save mankind from inevitable sins (Barn-

hart, 2005). The idea behind Machiavellian negotiating skills is how skillfully one can deceive another to raise their share. However, Prince Myshkin stands against the snowball of sins by allowing for the chance to love and for truth. Though he may be called an idiot, he secures his soul from the system of greed and lust and forwards a fresh soul to the upcoming members of the society/organization (McKenna, 2014). Prince Myshkin doesn't mix lies with the truth, nor does he corrupt ethics with relativism; he helps distinguish between right and wrong and between fake and real.

Machiavelli (1961) preaches that the prince is to be feared rather than love. Forwarding the argument that the bond of love is fragile and can be betrayed, the bond of fear, however, is strengthened more by terror of punishment. This again rests on the traditional view where members working in organizations are characterized by fear and distrust. This view agrees with McGregor's Theory X, where employees dislike work and hence should be directed strictly. Prince Myshkin is the torch bearer of compassion and love, carrying it unconditionally to the master or servant of the home. He carries the message of love in all case, even if the other entity is exploiting Prince Myshkin's mental state or resources (Youn, 2004). Prince Myshkin's character aligns with McGregor's Theory Y, which believes in employee's positive aspects and encourages positive organizational scholarship.

Prince Myshkin is the revival of deontology, contrary to the utilitarianism that traditional businesses have widely practiced. The traditional view measures success through wealth and winning situations. Durant referred to the work of Kant, who argued that though the "...wisdom of the serpent fares better in the world than the gentleness of the dove, and any thief can triumph if he steals enough," still mankind chooses the way of goodness. Thus Prince Myshkin also prefers being deceived rather than meeting a negative person on the same footing. Continuous use of utilitarianism has already been criticized for losing sight of absolute truth and virtue. Prince Myshkin stands for the ethical decision without fearing the obvious consequences. Hence, suggesting to adopt deontology, McKenna (2014) portrayed the character who vanguards his soul from the world of passion and lust as losing his mind. He protects his soul so a rightful message can be forwarded to upcoming generations.

Table 2.

*A Summarized View of Ethical Guidelines for Managers Using Dostoevsky's Prince Mushkin and the Machiavellian Prince*

Guideline for Manager in a situation	By Machiavelli's Prince	By Prince Myshkin
Negotiation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Win-Lose approach</li> <li>• Be Machiavelli</li> <li>• Secure the deal</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Win-Win approach</li> <li>• Lose-Win approach</li> <li>• Strengthen relationship then the deal</li> <li>• Preserve the soul</li> </ul>
Dealing with followers	To be feared	To be loved. Treat them kindly and compassionately and win situations with love
Ethical position	Utilitarian – if it's ok to be a little bad, then be a little bad for the greater good	Be ethical by being deontological in your approach. Stay ethical without worrying about consequences. Truth is truth in all conditions, deceit is never an option no matter how many benefits it holds
Result-oriented versus people-oriented	Always be result-oriented. Leave no stone unturned. Be a fox to be successful and remain in power.	Be people-oriented and they will create results for you.
Initiating structure versus consideration (Ohio Studies)	Initiating structure	Consideration

## Conclusion

Management science has been using the multi-disciplinary approach to attend to the dilemmas faced by managers, practitioners, and researchers. Fiction has also been used widely to address the dilemmas faced on the work floor. The current study has explored Dostoevsky's work *The Idiot* in comparison to the widely applied philosophy of Machiavelli. Machiavelli's prince suits the traditional view of management (i.e., greed, selfishness, use of power etc.). But with changing conventional views and the dawn of positive organizational scholarship, a new figure is

required who has more humility, virtuousness, and collaboration. Prince Myshkin, the protagonist of the novel *The Idiot*, has been explored as a figure for positive organizational scholarship. The current study has analyzed the work of Dostoevsky and derived four major implications from it for human resource management. First and foremost, managers and leaders should keep high concern for people, even in adverse situations from the business environment. Secondly, instead of being manipulative during negotiations to receive more than you deserve, Prince Myshkin's view is not to manipulate the negotiating environment with deceit but to enhance it with trust. A certain initial loss may give way to a future positive environment. The snowball of sin and deceit (i.e., an eye for an eye leaves the whole world blind) would stop. Thirdly, the Machiavellian philosophy of using power rather than love remains obsolete in the current age, and Prince Myshkin arrives with a message of compassion in all situations for all ranks. Lastly, business and management science largely moves around the utilitarian view of ethics in which some amount of loss is compromised for larger virtue. On the other hand, Prince Myshkin revives deontology. For upcoming generations, the message of absolute right should exist with no further compromise. Thus the business and management science environment may adopt the deontological ethical view for better protecting consciousness and the environment. Hence, Machiavelli's prince has been used as the idol in the traditional view of management, whereas Prince Myshkin appears as an alternative for better implementing positive organizational scholarship.

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