

Men, **Monkeys** & Management



Effective strategies for dealing with personalities,
politics and primates in the office.

by **B.P. McGregor**



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PROLOGUE

The *Men, Monkeys and Management* theme ignited over a couple of beers with a colleague in 2006.

I thought we were toasting his imminent retirement from what was a very successful career. The quality of his work created a steady international demand. I was particularly impressed with his style of working in harmony with others, having a lot of friends, and genuinely enjoying his days.

However, tonight something was bothering him. He wasn't celebrating. Eventually he confessed. He admitted that despite all his success, there was one thing missing, one thing he never accomplished. "I always wanted to run the show," he told me. He wanted to be the boss, but never made it – and despite all his success, that one fact made him feel unsatisfied, his career incomplete. I was moved by his honesty but also a little disturbed by how instantly his feelings resonated with me.

I'd been working around the world for 20 years, and all of a sudden I could see this force that pulsates through the workforce – the desire to rule the world. It occurred to me in a flash that like this stand-up guy, many people would prefer being the boss to having a career with lots of travel, friends, and success!

After that evening, I began to look at the world differently. I began to observe how people acted and interacted at work, and what motivated them. I began observing how the desire to be boss seriously shapes our behavior, in good ways and in ways that make people want to tear their hair out.

And boy, did I have a fertile environment in which to research! My career led me to various positions in overseas construction projects whose sheer scale, complexity, and fast-paced nature led to high levels of stress and conflict.

Over time, I began seeing that practically all the behavior of some people was in some way designed to display their superiority relative to others – either through projecting their position as a boss, wanting to be the boss, or just trying to show they were better than everyone else. In this condition, the workplace can begin to resemble a jungle. Think fight-or-flight, exerting territorial control, displays of dominance. We've all seen them – and likely experienced them first-hand at one time or another.

The idea had me hooked. I've always believed that harmony in the workplace increases efficiency and job satisfaction, not to mention the ease of my job as a manager. If this insight into human nature had any truth to it, I needed to better understand it and learn how it can be channeled or managed. Men, Monkeys and Management started from a lighthearted attempt to explore how our jungle roots play out in the modern workplace and ended in this tomb of personalities and hopefully useful advice.

With the ideas of Men, Monkeys and Management in mind, we can better manage ourselves and our colleagues, making work a better experience for everyone. Make more room for fun!

INTRODUCTION: MONKEY MINDED

We've all met someone – maybe even been someone – who wants the universe to revolve around them. This egocentric view is actually a natural one.

The universe has a design of choice – domineering centers¹.

Here are some examples of that design:

- ▶ Atoms: electrons orbiting a central nucleus
- ▶ Molecules: atoms organizing around an electrical charge
- ▶ Cells: atoms organizing around central DNA
- ▶ Solar systems: planets organizing around a central star
- ▶ Galaxies: planetary bodies and stars orbiting around a center of mass
- ▶ Flocks of animals: homogenous organisms organizing around a shared purpose

This domineering center can be related to how our minds work. Each of us is a unique center. Our actions are designed to pull resources toward us and mold circumstances and people around us in arrangements which are beneficial to us. So in a sense, we are the “center of our universe.” We're acting in the way the universe designed us, on impulses designed to protect us. These impulses are rooted in ancient physical and emotional needs.

However, like many attributes of humans, our wiring has evolved more slowly than our circumstances. For example, our brains tell us to eat as much fat as possible, even though it is an abundant resource in modern times. Likewise our egocentric impulses care little for things essential to the modern workplace, such as cooperation and teamwork. In a day and age where most of us can easily access our basic needs and are presented with the very real opportunity to operate from higher and more logical centers, the use of archaic mental subroutines is largely no longer necessary and can bring a wide range of complications in group settings.

Territorialism, chest-beating, charging, screaming, and baring teeth have their rightful place in the jungle. They don't fit so well in the office. Yet many impulses – which we'll call “monkey behaviors,” no offense to monkeys – are actually quite powerful and often outside our conscious control.

¹ See Centerpath.org for more details.

In social animals, the alpha is the individual in the community with the highest rank. Where one male and one female fulfill this role, they are referred to as the alpha pair (the term varies when several females fulfill this role - it is extremely rare among mammals for several males to fulfill this role with one female).

In this book, we'll explore different office personalities, get some insights into what drives and motivates each personality type, and discover ways of dealing with the specific monkey behaviors of each personality type. We no longer need to be the center of the universe to lead a great life and enjoy a great career. As an employee or as a boss, we can get on very well through simply being open, honest, fair, sincere, direct, and forthright. Such behaviors naturally generate good will and cooperation with the added benefits of increasing efficiency and job satisfaction.

But before we get started, a couple notes on housekeeping and navigating this book:

- 1) While the work structures we focus on in this book primarily relate to project-based work, most (if not all) concepts and ideas can be applied to non-project-based work as well.
- 2) In general we refer to men and use men's names throughout. However, for the sake of fairness (and because we ran out of men's names in Chapters 2 and 4); Men, Monkeys and Management applies to mankind in general and can be applied to women where appropriate.
- 3) While the book is structured in a linear format (i.e. you can read it from front-to-back), its format lends itself to 'thumbing through' or starting at any chapter that interests you most.



Part I

Hanging from Trees

CHAPTER 1: MONKEY SEE, MONKEY DO



- ▶ Pete complains about everything and everybody all the time.
- ▶ John just made yet another provocative statement in what should have been a straightforward discussion.
- ▶ Bill seems to put others down all the time to make himself look better.
- ▶ Mike openly bends the truth to support his stance, no matter the subject is.

So many behaviors in the workplace - and far too many are an annoyance, disruption, or detriment. What motivates us to act in these ways? How can you get your arms around all this turbulence, deal with the issues, and still affect positive change?

We need to put these negative behaviors in perspective first.

Imagine a tree. At its extremity are hundreds of leaves. All are similar in shape, form, and function, yet all are distinctly different.

The alpha animals are the first to eat and the first to mate; among some species they are the only animals in the pack to mate. Other animals in the community are usually killed or ousted if they violate this rule. Animals have a natural tendency to live in groups with a specific social order.

Now trace a path along this great structure from the leaves all the way back to their source. Start with the smallest of twigs and work your way progressively lower down the tree: from small twigs, to slightly bigger, to medium-sized, and on to larger, until you arrive at the core, the main trunk. It is from this central point that every single part of the tree began its journey. It is also the location from which the source code of all those leaves at its extremities originated.

Now go back to the personalities we listed at the beginning of this section. Imagine the various personalities we meet in life and at the workplace as the leaves of a tree – each similar yet distinct, and all programmed from the same source code at the core of our minds.

What is the source code perpetuating all these similar behaviors in the workplace? The answer is simply a common desire to be the center of the universe, and thereby forge its contents into advantageous and often subordinate relationships around us at the core.

In the old days, we used more direct and physical means to obtain these things – tactics our various monkey cousins still use today when they fight over territory, mates, food, shelter, and resources.

Because we're more civilized today – and because such overt and violent tactics will land us in very real trouble – we've developed a myriad of social skills designed to keep us as close to the helm as possible in group settings. Today, we fight for supremacy via title, position, importance, behavior, or attention.

Where ambitious men are unable to achieve positions of power via talent and hard work, they revert to the next series of methods to get ahead, namely, pushing

others down to gain advantage and stature. In fact, most of the behaviors listed throughout this book can be placed in the context of an employee or boss trying to impart a relative positioning on those around them, either by attempting to claw their way higher, or by pushing others lower.

The most classic techniques come from those who act out behaviors closest to our monkey impulses – when men openly act aggressively in the workplace. This includes the use of comparative, rude, and cutting words to make others appear subordinate, marginalized, or incompetent. These men actively work to keep others at bay, shutting them down, belittling them, and embarrassing them. Other typical overtly aggressive behaviors include bragging, exaggerating, deceiving, manipulating, coercing, game playing, and even outright shouting and shoving.

As aggressive men are often also very talented, they make up a disproportionate number of those rising to top positions of leadership in our society. They are often CEOs, politicians, lawyers, and bankers. Now, isn't that inspiring?

Since we can't all be bosses, the next most widespread tactic for keeping others beneath us (or at least preventing them from rising too far above us) is to marginalize and subtly tear them down by contradicting them for the sake of contradiction, withholding information from them, gossiping about them, dismissing their accomplishments, one-upping them, and trying to place ourselves at the center of attention.

But it doesn't have to be this way. We can all do our bit to make the workplace a better and more enjoyable place if we start by improving our own behaviors. After all, we spend so much of our time at work and with our coworkers that a great portion of our lives and satisfaction are shaped by our work experience. So why not make it as optimal as possible?

Let's begin by uncovering the "leaves" of human behavior and linking them to their "roots" so that we can improve our working relationships and be better informed to deal with all the volatility we experience in the workplace.

CHAPTER 2: BAD MONKEYS



"It's easy to get good players. Getting them to play together, that's the hard part."

- Casey Stengel

"A major reason capable people fail to advance is that they don't work well with their colleagues."

- Lee Iacocca

No matter how much we resist the thought, we are largely creatures of habit. We fall into repeated patterns of behavior that lead us to act and react in similar ways time and time again. Our behaviors often become so habitual – even reflexive, they can fully engulf us and define us in our entirety!

In this chapter, we'll examine some of the various "prime" monkey personality types that you are likely to encounter in any office and explore ways in which we might try to work more effectively with them. By identifying and raising awareness

“Submission is the Price of Admission” Seth

In order for you to gain admission to Seth’s world, you’ll first need to kneel and kiss his ring. Otherwise, you’ll always be an outsider. However, if you acknowledge his “superiority” and rarely challenge him, he’ll welcome you warmly into his world, share his knowledge, and possibly even fiercely support you.

Seth’s “King of the Jungle” Motivation

The literal definition of submission is acknowledging the superiority of another. It is in this way that Seth stays on top.

Dealing with Seth

It depends on your relationship with Seth, but it may be necessary to pay his price of admission in order to gain access into his world and foster an odd harmony in your relationship.

Make My Own Owen

Owen will never give you a direct reply. His method is to take all subjects, deconstruct them, and then recreate them from himself – they now become his. Only after this will he acknowledge or join in something originally not his own.

Owen’s “King of the Jungle” Motivation

By routing all things through himself, Owen believes that he’s kept the universe centered on him.

Dealing with Owen

If it’s important to get Owen to take on the task, you’re often going to have to be patient and go along on his ride. Otherwise, for the sake of time and getting some work done, you might have to cut the journey short.

Aggression can take a variety of forms and can be physical or communicated either verbally or non-verbally.

CHAPTER 3: GOOD MONKEYS



“Team player: One who unites others toward a shared destiny through sharing information and ideas, empowering others, and developing trust”

- Dennis Kinlaw

In the previous chapter, we examined some less-than-savory, office-place behaviors generated by our monkey minds – a collection of monkey-like impulses holding us back from being all we can be – productive, admired, and sought after employees.

In the following sections, we’ll look at ways to temper our monkey-mindedness and let reason take control. We’ll also recommend various techniques promoting greater depth, performance, and cooperation in the hope of making your workplace experience as successful and enjoyable as possible.

Common Mistakes and Misconceptions

Being a Manager is the Ultimate Goal

Some believe the only way to have a fulfilling career is by becoming a manager. But this simply isn't the way to a successful career. If you have the talent and you really want it, being a manager can be a very rewarding experience when faithfully and positively executed.

How is a successful career truly judged? In the long run others will judge your career – and hopefully, how you'll judge it yourself – is on how you went about your days. Did you try? Were you forthright? Did you put a fair measure of care and diligence into your work? Did you help others and offer your knowledge willingly? Did you do something you love and enjoy?

Through living and working such a lifestyle – whether you're a CEO or a career janitor – you'll end up living the kind of life and having the kind of career people truly look up to, remember, and value.

If We Can't be a Manager, the Next Best Thing is to Resist Them

Although so many managers give us reason enough to believe that they are the bad guys, many are just trying to do their job to the best of their abilities. Try to understand where they're going and what they're trying to achieve, and help them the best you can. Resist the urge to defy the boss just because he is the boss. We all have our mountains to climb, so try to help the leader when you can. It might also make your own journey lighter and more enjoyable.

One Needs to be Provocative to Get Ahead

Some think they have to turn up the volume to get noticed. After all – how to get noticed without moving and shaking it a bit? Wrong. While marginal managers might respond to this tactic, most recognize it for what it is – flashy, self-serving behavior. In fact most gauge an employee's career success through the opposite style. Being a success comes through steadfastly developing skills through good old fashioned diligence, hard work, and giving your best.

Bipolar Decision Making

A detrimental misconception in the workplace is to appear strong, one must make quick and absolute decisions. Many view hesitation or consideration of other options as a sign of weakness. But this is plainly false and is in fact not the sign of a great leader.

CHAPTER 6: STRATEGIES THAT WORK IN THE WORKPLACE



Now that we've gotten through the behavioral aspects of the workplace, we'll start to focus on the tools for improving efficiency and effectiveness.

In this chapter, I'll present various means, methods, and techniques I developed over years of fast-paced project work. And while these tools are often project based, most are applicable to any office environment.

Office Layout

Just when you think you've seen it all, someone invariably raises the bar higher than your wildest expectations – or in this case, lower than your deepest disappointments. I thought I'd already seen the worst possible way to greet visitors to an office after once being met by a manager hidden behind a stack of papers; but imagine my dismay when walking into my new supervisor's office to find a row of cactus plants separating us! Barking dogs could quite possibly top this but, to this day, the wall of cactuses remains the pinnacle experience for me!

I firmly believe in the ideas of Feng Shui. Our minds are naturally wired to recognize balanced and aesthetic arrangements in nature, art, and architecture; so it should be no surprise that we recognize and react negatively to things that we find contrary to our perceptions of aesthetics in terms of space, invite-ability, and flow; both in the workplace and elsewhere. Here's a checklist to help you evaluate your office's functionality and Feng Shui quotient.

- ▶ Is your office relatively clean and uncluttered?
- ▶ Can people enter your office space easily and be comfortably seated?
- ▶ Have you taken extra steps to create a welcoming environment? One colleague set healthy snacks on his desk so that people would feel welcome and enjoy a healthy treat.
- ▶ Do hallways and corridors feel open, bright, inviting, and natural?
- ▶ Are there plenty of accessible common working areas and conference rooms? These will facilitate discussions and impromptu meetings.
- ▶ Are noisy areas (bathrooms and kitchens) separated from workers so as not to be disturbing or distracting?
- ▶ Are people located physically near those with whom they work closely?
- ▶ Is relevant information - HR postings, project data, schedules, performance indicators, upcoming events, new policies, security information, etc. - posted in obvious and easy-to-read places?

Workstation Wonders

Next, you'll need to consider the optimal work environment for your employees. On one extreme, there are the Japanese-style offices with all employees situated in two rows of desks with the boss at the head of the rows like a dining room table arrangement. The other extreme is giving all employees their own office with the ability to close their doors whenever they want. When planning the optimal office layout, consider your employees and their work needs, but you'll need to balance that against unproductive environments that promote non-productive personal activities (such as too much privacy leading to inordinate amounts of time spent shooting the breeze or surfing the web).

The best layout is one which provides employees with a common workstation layout that provides some privacy but not too much. Allow enough space for people to work without them feeling cramped or boxed in. Allow some personal items however set clear guidelines and limits so that employees don't build shrines of themselves. See our website for some recommended layouts.

- ▶ Whenever a project or task starts late
- ▶ When people are complaining frequently
- ▶ When people are blaming other people or other companies for mistakes

If any of these occur, you'll need to take the time to talk with the various stakeholders and determine the underlying cause. To recover what's been lost you'll next need to put in place a good plan such as an accelerated schedule, a work around plan, or the correction of an error in quality, reputation, etc.

Communication

Communication is the foundation of everything we do in the workplace. Without communication, we couldn't get anything done; to be efficient and successful, make sure all forms of communication in your workplace are as well prepared and effective as possible.

General Guidelines

Communication is one of the defining features of mankind. It is also essential in everything we do in the workplace. Doing it just right is an art – too much data and people will ignore the message; too little information and the message is ineffectual. The 'just right' touch can be best summed up by means of an analogy.

If you look at a Chinese painting of a natural setting, you get a feeling of perfection from the precisely controlled minimalistic expression. If you take one thing out of the painting, it would make the painting incomplete; if you add something new to the painting, it would be unnecessary and overdone. Communications in the workplace are the same – you shouldn't be able to take out any words, nor need to add any words, to communicate your message. Here are some guidelines for crafting effective communications:

- ▶ Core principles should be communicated top-down.
- ▶ With brevity comes clarity.
- ▶ Take the time to provide an overview or introduction.
- ▶ Ensure a full understanding; close all gaps and uncertainties and take time to explain things that could be confusing (like changes in policy).
- ▶ Make sure expectations are known – who is responsible and when things are due.
- ▶ Be objective and professional (including the correct use of grammar).
- ▶ Use a neutral to friendly tone; don't be defensive, accusatory, or nagging.

AFTERWORDS

Congratulations!

You've graduated from the Urban Jungle University with your degree in Higher Monkey Studies. You're now empowered to go out into your world and make a real difference. Utilizing the golden rule as your guide, you will conquer the hearts and souls of men and monkeys alike – both at work and at home. Overcoming your monkey impulses, you can come down from the trees; forever forsaking the monkey kingdom – and finding your rightful place in the land of advanced humanoids.

Treating others with respect, acting mindfully, and leading by example, you are now truly ready to inspire others and make the world a better place.



Be sure to visit our website (www.managemonkeys.com) and share your feedback. If you've run across a personality type that you'd like to share with the world, post it on our blog. If it's good enough, we might even include it in the next edition of *Men, Monkeys and Management*!

