12. Rising Star Framework

Which moral dangers do I face while moving up the hierarchy?
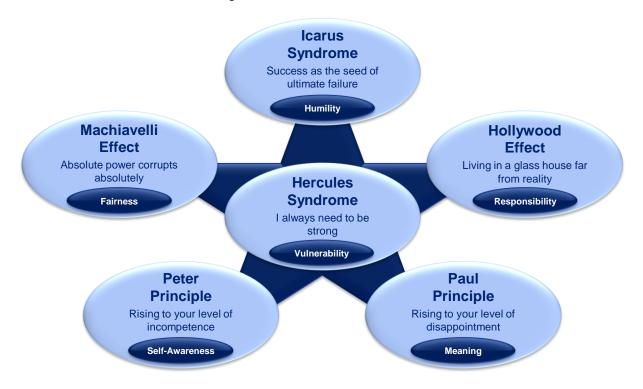
Key Definitions

A rising star is a person of above average talent who quickly makes career steps within or across organizations, filling positions of increasingly important responsibility. With this rapid move up the hierarchy comes more power, visibility and attention.

On the journey up, rising stars are exposed to a variety of temptations that have the potential to morally pervert them. The more meteoric the rise, the bigger the danger of moral harm. Yet, while these challenges can trigger rising stars to become *deformed,* as a person they can also become more *developed*, depending on the learnings they draw from the experience.

Conceptual Model

The *Rising Star Framework* suggests that there are six hazards to which high-potentials are commonly exposed. Each of the six can be encountered independently, but they are often experienced simultaneously, mutually reinforcing each other. At the same time, each of the six threats to the rising star's moral compass has the potential to teach her/him about the importance of a key leadership characteristic. In the model, this seed of possible learning is embedded in each of the six dangers.

Key Elements

The six moral hazards are the following:

1. *Peter Principle*. As Peter and Hull (1969) observed, people are generally promoted on the basis of their past success, until they reach a position beyond their abilities, where they sit

out the rest of their career. The faster they rise with great expectations, the higher the threat over overshooting the level they can handle. To avoid rising to their level of incompetence, rising stars need to develop a healthy *awareness* of their talents and limitations.

2. ***Paul Principle***. The faster a star rises, the higher the expectations of getting one of the top jobs. But with only a few C-suite slots available, there will be more HiPos disillusioned and demoralized along the way than satisfied (with a wink called the Paul Principle, as the counterpart of Peter). To avoid rising to their level of disappointment, rising stars need to find *meaning* and enjoyment in more things than only climbing up the corporate ladder.

3. ***Machiavelli Effect.*** As stars rise, so does their power. They have more sway, but also less checks and balances holding them back. As Lord Acton (1887) observed: "Power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely. Great men are almost always bad men…". To avoid becoming Machiavellian power players, rising stars need to work on their empathy and practice being *fair*, in attitudes, processes and outcomes.

4. ***Hollywood Effect***. As their power rises, so does their visibility and the attention people pay to them. Like Hollywood stars, they live in a virtual glass house where everything is seen, including the bad and ugly, while at the same time they are insulated from reality and given little feedback. To avoid such superstar detachment, rising stars need to remain connected, realize the impact of their example and take *responsibility*.

5. ***Icarus Syndrome***. As with the ancient Greek Icarus, success leads to arrogance and arrogance is the seed of one's own downfall. As Miller (1991) observed, rising stars often have too much success and too few failures, leading to overconfidence in themselves and contempt of others. To avoid such cockiness, rising stars need to embrace their mistakes and work hard at their *humility*.

6. ***Hercules Syndrome***. For rising stars the other danger of success is that they, and their environment, come to assume that success is normal. Expectations will keep increasing, leaving the rising star little room to make mistakes, fail, or even simply not have an answer. To avoid the pressure to always be strong, rising stars need to manage expectation down, shun overselling themselves and regularly show their *vulnerability*.

Key Insights

- ***Rising stars face strong moral hazards***. Rapidly moving up the hierarchy seems like a blessing, but can be a tragedy in disguise, as rising stars are exposed to a range of temptations that can morally pervert them. Rising stars need to be aware of the six most hazardous ones in order to avoid being a star that collapses into a moral black hole.

- ***Racing up can be hazardous***. Two of the hazards are due to the negative dynamics of quickly ascending the hierarchy to grab higher positions. The Peter Principle warns for overshooting one's abilities, while the Paul Principle warns for expecting too much.

- ***Being high up can be hazardous***. Two other hazards are the unhealthy effects of actually being in higher positions. The Machiavelli Effect describes the tendency to misuse power, while the Hollywood Effect describes the tendency to misbehave in full view.

- ***Having success can be hazardous***. The last two hazards are the psychological dangers of having too much success. The Icarus Syndrome is when success leads to arrogance, while the Hercules Syndrome is when success leads to the constant pressure to be strong.

- ***Moral hazards can deform or develop***. Each of the hazards is actually a potential learning experience, where the rising star can cave in to the temptation to do the wrong thing, but can also grapple with the temptation and come out stronger and wiser.

Meyer's Management Models
Insightful Tools to Kickstart Your Thinking

Publication Schedule

July 2019	*Mind the Gap Model*	*Change Management*
August 2019	*Digital Platform Map*	*Digital Strategy*
September 2019	*Interaction Pressure Gauge*	*Interpersonal Interaction*
October 2019	*Revenue Model Framework*	*Revenue Model Typology*
November 2019	*House of Engagement*	*Organizational Engagement*
December 2019	*Confidence Quotient*	*Trust Building*
January 2020	*Competition Tornado*	*Competitive Strategy*
February 2020	*11C Synergy Model*	*Corporate Synergy Management*
March 2020	*Leadership Fairness Model*	*Leader-Follower Interaction*
April 2020	*Strategic Agility Model*	*Strategy Process Approach*
May 2020	*Control Panel*	*Corporate Control Dimensions*
June 2020	*Rising Star Framework*	*Talent Management*
July 2020	Strategy Development Cycle	Strategy Process Steps
August 2020	7I Roles of the Corporate Center	Corporate Organization
September 2020	Deft Dialogue Model	Interpersonal Communication
October 2020	Digital Business Model Dials	Digital Strategy
November 2020	Fruits & Nuts Matrix	Priority-Setting
December 2020	Story-Telling Scripts	Leadership Communication
January 2021	Corporate Value Creation Model	Corporate Level Strategy
February 2021	Innovation Box	Innovation Approaches
March 2021	Empowerment Cycle	Employee Empowerment
April 2021	Partnership Distance Model	Interorganizational Relations
May 2021	Team-Building Cycle	Team-Building Process
June 2021	Followership Cycle	Leader-Follower Interaction