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Author(s)	Chua Shuyi, Farah Aljunied, Junaidah Jaffar, Liew Pang Hai and Hussein Topiwala
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Power Play and Playing Politics

The Micropolitics of Change Implementation in Schools

MCT 804 - Curriculum Implementation: Major Concepts and Issues
Shuyi, Farah, Junaidah, Pang Hai, Hussein

What is Micropolitics?

- use of **formal** and **informal** power to influence and/or protect
- by individuals or groups to achieve their goals in organizations
- result from perceived differences
- manifest in both **cooperative** and/or **conflictive** actions

(Blase 1991, p. 11)

Why the micropolitical perspective?

- Accounts for complexity, instability, and conflict in organizational settings.
- Takes into account individual differences, for example, in values, ideologies, choices, goals, interests, expertise, history, motivation, and interpretation.

(Blase, 1991, p. 3)

Effects of Culture

Western	East Asian
Individualism or self-oriented or independence "Every man for himself."	Collectivism or group-oriented or interdependence "No man is an island."
Focus on task achievement rather than maintenance of relationships.	Place preservation of relationships above the pursuit of tasks.

(Cheng, 1998; Dimmck & Walker, 2002, Nisbett, 2004)

Research Question

How did teachers leverage on formal and informal relationships in their schools to implement change?

Methodology

- Qualitative approach
- Semi-structured interview
- Purposeful convenience sampling:
 - beginning teacher
 - middle managers
 - school leader
- Played the role of "change implementer" in their schools

S/No.	Designation	Change Implemented	Yrs in Service
1	Assistant Vice-Principal (VP), Academic	Problem-Based Learning (PBL), Cooperative Learning (CL)	10
2	Head of Department (HOD) of Information & Communications Technology (ICT), covering for Chinese Language (CL)	Primary Education Review & Implementation (PERI) for CL, ICT curriculum	10
3	Mathematics Coordinator	Workshops for parents & teachers, Math Olympiad, Holistic Assessment (HA), Math Performance Tasks	5
4	Character & Citizenship Education (CCE) Coordinator	CCE curriculum	18
5	Level Representative for Science (Sc) and Computer Applications (CPA)	21st century skills in CPA, Organization of scheme of work (SOW) for Science	2

Table 1. Characteristics of participants

Findings

1. Strategies used when implementing change (informal power) - "cooperative strategies"
2. Strategies used to resist change (informal power) - continuum of resistance
3. Strategies used to overcome resistors (formal power) - "conflictive strategies"

Authority VS Power

Those with authority or position are not necessarily those with power and influence.

And those without authority or position can actually have a lot of power or influence.

Informal Power Strategies

Strategy	Example
Building Coalitions	Looked into interest of teachers and understood their struggles through spending time with them (Asst. VP, Acad)
Practice Diplomacy	Speaks with respect to senior teacher, though senior teacher is in the wrong (ICT HOD)
Exhibit Sensitivity	Pre-empting needs of recipients and proposing changes that take them into account (ICT HOD) Readiness to do the legwork for others (BT)

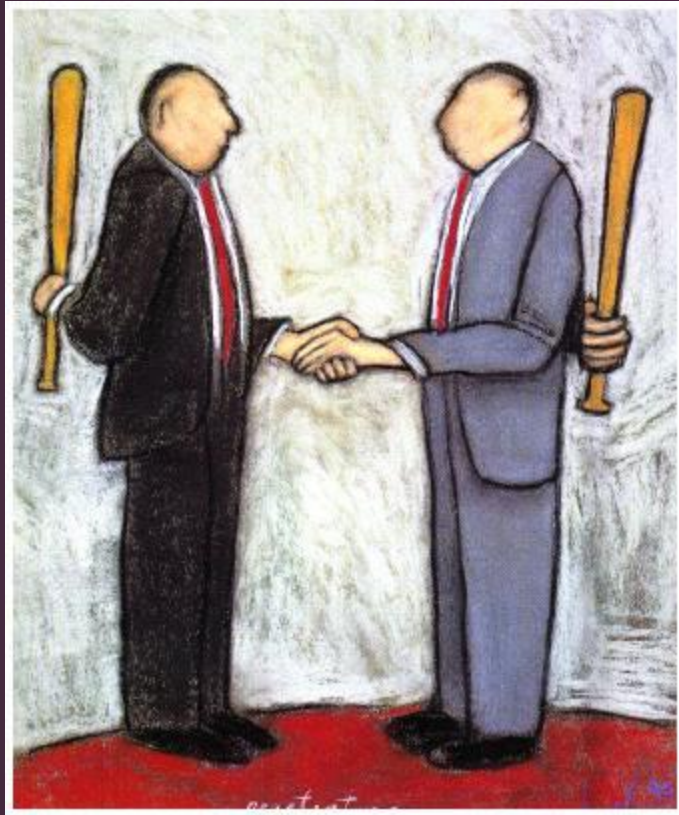
Informal Power Strategies

Strategy	Example
Building coalitions	<p>Whining, formation of cliques and balkanization.</p> <p>"Resistors" to Asst. VP (Acad) exerted negative peer influence on one another so as to stonewall the changes</p>

Formal Power Strategies

Strategy	Example
Denying Resistors of things in their interest - Controlling Resources and Performance Evaluation	Depriving "resistors" of change opportunities for overseas conferences. (Asst. VP, Acad)
Invoking names of school leaders	Sends principal the carbon copy (CC) email (MA Coord, CCE Coord)

Yet... used as "last resort" or never used at all.



To subdue the
enemy without
fighting is the
supreme
excellence.

- Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*

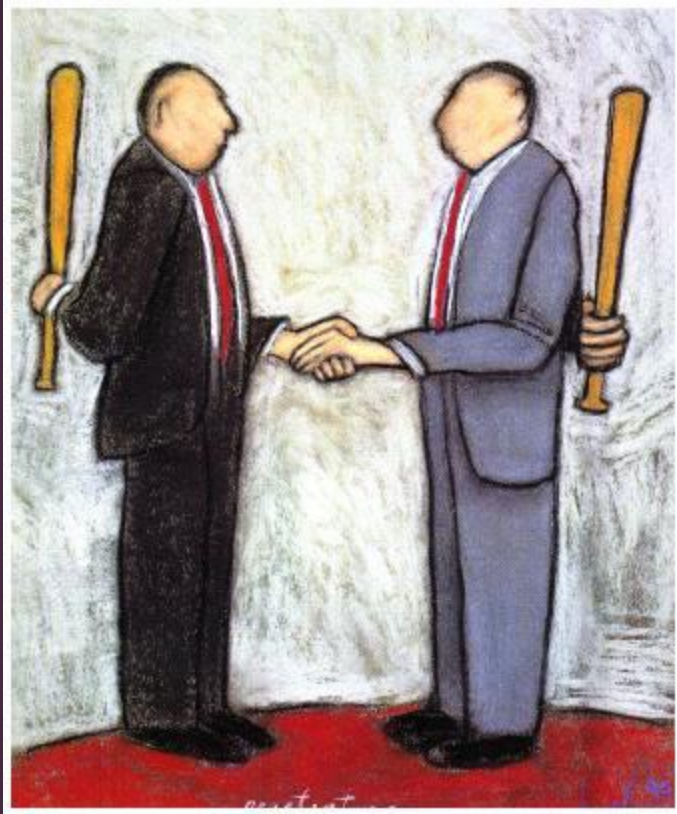
Implications for Singapore schools

1. Change implementers should be skilful politicians, with a repertoire of power strategies at their disposal.

"Change is a **bitter pill** to swallow but it can be made **easier and more effective** through the use of informal power strategies."

"People leave not because of **change**, but the **people** making the change."

2. Change implementers should understand the cultural context that they find themselves in and to enact changes based on it.



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shuyi.chua@nie.edu.sg

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Summary

- Educators in Singapore used both formal and informal power strategies to promote or prevent change.
- Informal power was preferred over formal power owing to the desire to maintain relationships and to prevent "burning bridges". Formal power is often used as "a last resort".

"... it is necessary for a prince to possess the friendship of the people; otherwise he has no resources in times of adversity."

Machiavelli, The Prince, Chapter 9

"It must be considered that there is nothing more difficult to carry out, nor more doubtful of success, nor more dangerous to handle, than to initiate a new order of things. For the reformer has enemies in all those who profit by the old order..."

Machiavelli, The Prince, Chapter 6, 24

"... there are two methods of fighting, the one by law, the other by force: the first method is that of men, the second of beasts; but as the first method is often insufficient, one must have recourse to the second."

Machiavelli, The Prince, Chapter 18