

The Dead Snake Theory: The Mirror Image for Power Quantum in Organisational Governance

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ABSTRACT

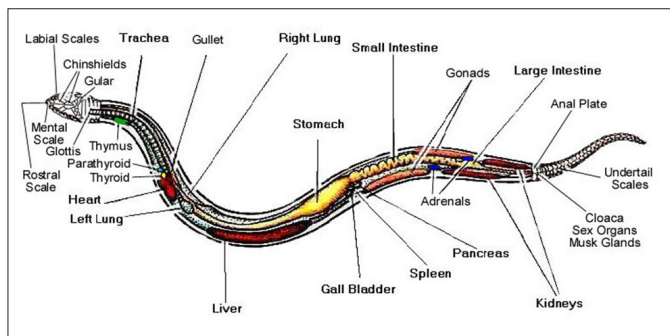
This paper is an introduction to a new governance theory, herein referred to as, *The Dead Snake Theory*. The paper starts by providing the three major parts of the snake, assigning functional roles to each. This is followed by identifying power quantum at each level when the snake is optimally functioning and when the snake is not in good health or is dead. The paper does identify both exogenous and endogenous factors as contributory to the disproportionate levels of power during the dysfunctionality of the major parts of the snake. These brief anatomy and narrations on the functionality of the three major parts are then simulated to the three major parts of an organisation, the management, the technocrats, and the auxiliary/support staff. Power quantum at each level are then used as indicators to mirror the governance efficiency in the organisation and to reflect on the death or collapsing signs and symptoms of the same organisation. The paper takes the position that in a dying or dysfunctional organisation like in a dying or dead snake, the tail remains alive for a while as all power will have drifted from the head to the auxiliary staff.

Keywords: Dead Snake Theory; management; technocrats; auxiliary staff

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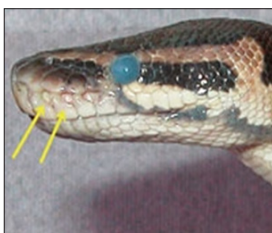
1. BACKGROUND TO THE DEAD SNAKE THEORY IN GOVERNANCE

Botanical studies by Cates¹ identified the head, body, and tail as the major parts in a normal snake. Each of the identified parts has specific roles and power pockets (quanta) without which the snake will not survive. The diagram below is a longitudinal section of a terrestrial snake showing the portions representing the three parts.



From the diagram, the head section starts from rostral scale to the gullet. The body starts from the gullet to the anal plate so that the remaining part is the tail.

2. ROLE SEGREGATION



The Snake's head Encyclopedia Britannic²

Research by Coborn³ indicated that the head has all the vital afferent sense organs. These senses enable the snake to be informed about the immediate environment. Moran⁴ made the following observations that

The pits, found in the region between the nostril and the eye in the pit vipers (the viperid sub-family Crotalinae) and in the scales of the lip line in some boas and pythons, are sensitive to every slight change in temperature. These snakes feed almost exclusively on animals, including birds and mammals, that maintain a constant body temperature and can therefore be located by the snake through the reception of the heat of the warm body. The heat lost by even a small rodent is sufficient to alert a waiting viper and enable it to direct a fast strike at the animal as it passes by.

Citing the presence of sensory organs serves to highlight

the need for the snake to receive stimuli from the environment and take appropriate actions for the survival of the whole body. In addition, the eyes of the snake have no lids and are covered by a transparent cap of epidermis, which mimics the rest of the skin at each molt. Arboreal snakes often have a bulging, laterally placed eye, which permits them to see activities directly below as well as above and around them. The eyes therefore play a crucial role as a sensory organ for the snake to distinguish between friendly and dangerous stimuli.

Mader⁵ made the following summary observations that the snake's head has the major sensory organs whose main purpose is to make decisions for both the body and the tail. In terms of power quanta, the head has the largest amount of decisional power when compared with the other two major parts. The head is likened to the Central Processing Unit (CPU) in a computer. All activities are designed here. Thus, a snake's head contains the eyes, nostrils, mouth (and structures within), brain, and a special sensory structure called the vomeronasal or Jacobson's organ. Its paired openings are just in front of the snake's choana, the open slit like structure on the upper inside of the reptile's mouth. All snakes have a forked tongue. When they flick their tongue, the tips pick up the smallest particles in the air and place them in direct contact with this organ, where they are sent to the correct depots for required action. Thus, the day-to-day survival kit for the whole body is a derivative function of the health state of the head.

3. THE SNAKE'S BODY

The body is often strongly compressed laterally, which permits greater rigidity of the body frame while crawling from branch to branch. Experimental research by Catania⁶ identified the major parts of this part of the snake as parathyroid, heart, lungs, stomach, gallbladder, spleen, intestines, gonads, adrenals and kidneys. This part of the body is the workshop area where specific organelles are zones of specialisation. Each organelle has expert power for implementing signals and directives from specific parts of the head. Outputs from this part of the body are largely dependent on the quality of the services from the tail and organisational proficiency of the whole head.

4. THE TAIL

Bellairs⁷ informs us that, this is the region between the small and large intestine, the cecum, the kidneys, and the cloaca. Experimental research on the afferent responses recorded from the trigeminal ganglion on five cases of different snake tails indicated that in all the five cases, receptive fields in trigeminal ganglia were very small, pointing at the insensitivity of the

1 J. Cates, *Snake Anatomy, Physiology, and Taxonomy*, Snake Exclusion Bugsinthenews, Vol. 01:01(02) (2016).

2 *Snakes, Eye to Eye with Animals*, Encyclopedia Britannica (2013).

3 Coborn, *The Image of Snakes: Literature Review About Attitudes Towards Snakes*, November 2010, DOI: 10.13140/RG.2.1.2111.9445 (1995).

4 T. Moran, *Shoshone Falls on the Snake River; Shoshone Falls*, New York, Gilcrease Foundation (2005), at 35.

5 D. Mader, *Snake Respiratory System Anatomy* (Sage Publishers 2014), New York.

6 K.C. Catania, *Tentacled Snakes Turn C-Starts to Their Advantage and Predict Future Prey Behavior*, 106 Proc. Nat'l Acad. Sci. USA 11183-87 (2009).

7 A. Bellairs, *The Life of Reptiles* (1970).

snake's tail to external stimuli (Westhoff, Fry, and Bleckmann).⁸ Further electrode tests on the external receptors of the same snakes indicated that the tentacles were very receptive and characteristic of myogenic tissue. From the experimental results, the snake's tail is covered by dead cells not receptive to external environmental stimuli. This feature enables the tail to propel both the body and the head during motion; the tail is the snake's centre of gravity providing all the required anchorage for internal and external processes requiring use of extra energy. The internal tissue is myogenic as such is a repository for high energy molecules, the Adenosine Triphosphates (ATP) molecules which release the required energy requisitions to all parts for optimum functionality of the whole body. The power quantum of the tail relative to the other two parts is the lowest. The tail has facilitative power meant to ensure that the head and the body perform optimally. The tail remains alive for a while after both the head and the body are dead. It is on this herpetological character that the Dead Snake Theory on organizational governance was developed.

5. THE ANALOGY

The Dead Snake Theory was developed from a functional analogy of the three major parts of a snake as simulated to the three major parts of any organisation, namely the top management, the technocrats, and the support staff in terms of their roles and power quantum. As in a dead snake, the tail remains alive for a while after the snake is dead. Viewed from this perspective, the basic indicator for a failing or a collapsing organisation in this theory is the presence of large quantum of decisional power at the tail/supportive staff in any organisation.

6. BASIC TENETS OF THE DEAD SNAKE THEORY

The theory is anchored on the following features of a reptile, the snake:

- Each of the three parts in a snake has specific roles attached to specific levels of power. Equally, the management, the technocrats, and support staff have specific roles attached to specific power levels.
- When all the three parts of the snake are operating optimally, both roles and power levels create a streamlined and smooth governed life. Similarly, when the management, technocrats, and the support staff are executing their roles within the ambit of their power levels, the organisation has a healthy working life, shown by the production of intended deliverables.
- But when the management deviates from its mandated roles, power levels become disproportionate, cliques will emerge within the management so the executive will seek allegiance from members of the technocrats. The management has now less decisional power as more of its roles and power have been shifted to the lower level in search of support.
- Technocrats will temporarily accept the new roles and new power levels but soon take a "let's wait and see position" that

leads to most personnel leaving the organisation for greener pastures. This is the same as what happens to the organelles of the snake in the body when co-ordination from the head has been disrupted.

- The management will seek allegiance from the support staff. The shift of roles to this level creates shock within the three parts with the support staff now having maximum decisional power. Both members of the management and the remaining technocrats will start to receive directives from the leaders representing the support staff. This is the point of the organisation's collapse. Like in a dead snake, it is the tail that remains alive when the head and the body are dead. Similarly, the support staff will remain active when both the management and technocrats are dysfunctional.

7. DEMONSTRATED APPLICATIONS OF THE DEAD SNAKE THEORY

7.1. Case scenario: Governance in a State University

The management in a university is headed by the Vice Chancellor who in turn is answerable to the Chancellor. The executive is made up of two Pro-Vice Chancellors, the Registrar, Finance Director, Library and Information Services Director, Director, and Information and Computer Technology. Each of the above offices has statutory roles attached to known levels of power. In a well-coordinated and governed university, each office within the management will contribute positively and significantly to the set outputs of the university's management.

The technocrats will be represented by deans of faculties, chairpersons, lecturers, and students' representatives. Again, these technocrats have specific roles and specific power levels. If the executive is doing its mandated roles well and within its power levels, the technocrats will equally perform to the expectations of the university. In the event that there is disharmony within the executive, cliques at that level will emerge. In a bid to remain relevant, each clique will seek support from the lower level, the deans, chairpersons, lecturers, and/or students' representatives. At the peak of this allegiance seeking, the whole university is sunk into institutional neurosis-characterised by high levels of suspicion, mistrust, hatred, and fear. Technocrats will temporarily align themselves with executive cliques but will start applying to other stable universities and leave.

The support staff is made of administration directors, managers, officers, and the auxiliary staff. This level has facilitative power and specific job descriptions. Under good governance, the support staff creates a timeous service delivery working environment at both the executive and technocratic levels. In the event that disharmony at the executive level has not been cured at the level of technocrats, the executive will decide to get its support from leaders at this level. Members of the management are usually not consulted; some technocrats are left in crucial decision-making platforms yet conspicuous presence of junior staff will be registered in executive gatherings

8 G. Westhoff, B. G. Fry & H. Bleckmann, *Sea Snakes (Lapemis curtus) Are Sensitive to Low-Amplitude Water Motions*, 108 Zool. 195 (2005).

and meetings. Directives are now from the support staff to the remaining management members and remaining technocrats. If no immediate intervention is taken, the whole university governance system collapses. As in a dead snake, the tail remains alive for a while, equally the support staff will remain in power after both the executive and the technocrats are gone. The support staff may continue to do its duties for a while but gradually disintegrates as the whole system finally collapses.

8. CONCLUSION

Major implications of the Dead Snake Theory to organisational governors are:

- All organisations have three major administration components: the management, the technocrats, and the support staff. This is an observation leadership must never ignore.
- Each component has specific roles and specific power levels, a component leadership must acknowledge and respect.
- Failure to carry out mandated roles within given power quantums will lead to dis-harmony across all departments/ units plunging the organisation into neurosis.
- Executive power and roles will end up being in the hands of support staff signaling the collapse of the organisation, a mirror indicator leadership must guard against.
- Those in organisational governance must always check with x-ray eyes the specific roles and power quantums at each level and ensure that all parts of the organisation are executing their mandated roles within the prescribed power levels lest the tail will remain alive when the whole organisation has collapsed.

Disclosure of interest

The author has no competing interests to declare.