

Start

As a cadre, junior executives and middle managers are much maligned as the “clay layer” where change initiatives get bogged down. Is that fair?

Take a romp around the game-board. Along the way, consider the pushes and pulls faced by the caught-in-the-middle manager. Each pressure is not experienced as a discrete one-off but as a compounding series of bombardments. If you find yourself caught in the middle, take steps to protect your own physical and mental health, as well as the well-being of others in your orbit.



1 Off-the-Clock Work

Work creates time commitments beyond office hours, such as commuting. To that, add the time spent reading and corresponding after hours. Now add time spent fretting over work dilemmas and conflicts. You may even be unofficially on-call—expected to answer queries at any hour.



2 Sea-Gull Delegation

New responsibilities are foisted on you without removing old ones. Everything is treated as a priority so that nothing ever becomes one. Whenever someone higher up the chain of command drops by, they dump new work tasks on you and fly away from the mess, like a dive-bombing sea gull.



3 Fire Fighting

Unanticipated urgencies cause a treadmill of mad scrambles. With no time to think ahead and build surge capacity, regular duties are neglected. Every “heroic save” is soon forgotten but the collateral damage lingers, yet every “dropped ball” undermines your reputation as a safe pair of hands.



11 Status Competition

The desire to project an admirable image to peers results in spending on status enhancements: home, travel, car, clothing, you name it. As peers do likewise, there is a competition to improve your social status. And this drives you to toil for another lap around the game board.

HOME

Maintaining Friendships

With less and less discretionary leisure time, it is difficult to maintain friendships outside of the household or workplace. Maintaining broader interests, such as hobbies, is even harder.

Extended Family

Various demands are making the nuclear family more isolated, which weakens relationships within the broader network of kin. Thus, an important source of social support is less present to make coping with life easier.

Elder Care

Becoming a middle manager or junior executive often coincides with parents reaching the late stages of life. Some care responsibilities may be added even if parents do not move into your household.

Managing Up

Without empowered delegation, decisions are approved through a chain of authority with many potential veto points. It can be a struggle to get enough access to senior decision-makers to be influential. If new duties are continually tasked from on-high without enough “air cover” and decision latitude, the daily grind becomes little more than a hectic form of stage management.

WORK

Managing Horizontally

You are expected to work with counterparts across organizational siloes. At the same time, bureaucratic systems obscure common ground with counterparts and add friction to working partnerships.

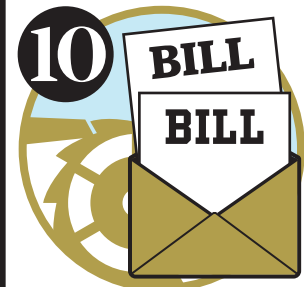
Networking Widely

Diffuse networks help get things done in complicated systems. They advance careers. Building networks requires a lot of socializing and face time. Social media can help but at the cost of new distractions.



4 Fad Surfing

Flavour-of-the-month ideas get all the short-term attention, only to be supplanted by another fad soon enough. There is no follow-through, nor accountability for the shifting priorities. Yet when it comes time for you to show meaningful change, there is very little to show for all the effort.



10 Expense-Ratchet Trap

Being time starved causes you to invest in labour-saving appliances and services. Expenses ratchet up, which require you to work more. Working more increases the need for time-savings, which leads to more expenses. The cycle is hard to break when the culture tells you that you can “have it all.”



Coughice

You catch a cold and spread it. -10 energy and staff productivity points.

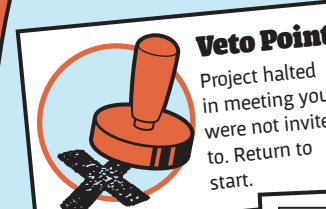
Let's Have a ...
Random Problem
Pick a Card

Parenting

Having kids is a job in itself, which is why the overworked are having smaller families. Children understandably want their parents to be highly involved with their lives. Even with fewer kids, parenting duties can take up a larger than expected share of the life-cycle because, these days, children tend to stay at home longer.

Managing Down

Successive generations of employees demand more meaningful work and a sense of professional purpose. They are more willing to move to new jobs to fulfill career aspirations. All of that makes leadership more akin to serving staff, rather than the other way around. This is more time consuming and emotionally draining.



Veto Point

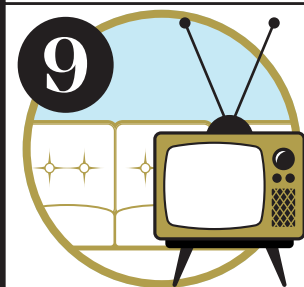
Project halted in meeting you were not invited to. Return to start.

Let's Have a ...
Pointless Ordeal
Pick a Card



5 Resource Burden

The contest for resources takes up time. Yet gaining funding and personnel does not come with the discretion to deploy them as you see fit. Spending and hiring come with plenty of hurdles. So even if lots of resources get thrown at your projects, the management burden can be overwhelming.



9 Passive-Leisure Trap

Work and chores have depleted energy reserves. There is no fuel left in the tank to engage in fulfilling physical, relational, spiritual, or intellectual pursuits. Slothful leisure activities take up your few spare moments, such as wallowing on the couch in front of the TV.



8 Gender Expectations

Performing chores is a thankless energy drain. The unequal division of household labour means chores fall disproportionately on women managers. If paid enough to hire help, move forward two squares. If shirking your fair share of chores due to male privilege, move forward one square.



7 Organizational Churn

Your boss gets a new job elsewhere. Any hard-won goodwill that built up is reset to zero as a new executive takes over. The new boss is unwilling to be the custodian of a predecessor's initiatives. Change duties are added to regular ones. Your previous hard work is dismantled.



6 Uncontrolled Time

False urgencies and arbitrary deadlines abound. Interruptions to high-concentration work require long periods to recover the train of thought. Meetings multiply on your schedule without your consent. Without fallow time to stop and think, there is no opportunity to ponder issues deeply.