

Symposium on Golf, Business, and Leadership

Jude Chua Soo Meng
Associate Professor and Head,
Policy and Leadership Studies
National Institute of Education
Nanyang Technological University,
Singapore

Javier Calero Cuervo
Assistant Professor in Management
Department of Management and
Marketing
Faculty of Business Administration
University of Macau, Macau, S.A.R.,
China

This short piece is intended both as an introduction and as a distinct contribution in itself. Here we track the evolution of this symposium collection on “Golf, Business, and Leadership” but also briefly theorize the scholarly context in which this discussion of golf, business, and leadership is embedded.

A spiritual writer once wrote that rest ought to be taken as recuperation, as a kind of change of occupation so that one can bounce back with new impetus to one’s daily job. It was never to be taken as mere idleness.¹

Such a way of relating rest, leisure, or recreation to work, one’s job, and occupation seemed to us a very interesting one. On the one hand, it suggests that leisure is not a disjointed break from work and one’s professional occupation during the day. Leisurely rest, which could also mean refreshing play, is not a disconnected escape from one’s daily professional enterprise. Rather it is to be more intimately related to work. Leisure, or play, is closely tied with work. It is to be different no doubt. Yet it is nonetheless to be in some sense continuous with work. It prepares for and supports work. It is not a useless appendix to work. Rather it is that which formed and reforms the work. In this sense leisure or play is itself a kind of work, a change of occupation, and not idleness.

Such an interesting idea begged for more reflection and interrogation. Is such a way of characterizing rest, leisure, or play intelligible or defensible? It was somehow fortunate that several independent sources of reflection had converged on this theme or on themes immediately relevant to this, and it seemed to us a good idea to come together to surface its potentials. On the one hand, Javier, who had been exploring the correlation between sports and leadership, had on

several occasions bumped into anecdotal and journalistic reports of how one leisurely sport, golf, was beneficial for work in one way or another.² Jude, on the other hand, was intrigued by a recently published collection of essays titled, *Golf and Philosophy: Lessons from the Links*, in which eighteen philosophers had written how golf connects with philosophical ideas, several of which had to do with moral philosophy.³

After several emails bouncing around ideas, we thought it would be good to get people together to meet and have a chat. In June 2017, we hosted a short seminar at the National Institute of Education (NIE), Nanyang Technological University, Singapore. Javier, then a short-term visiting scholar at NIE, shared with seminar participants some of his initial findings on sports in youth prefiguring the subjects' performance as managers. That discussion gave us the opportunity to revisit how golf, which many business people are rather familiar with, might be beneficial for the professional life. A couple of participants have played golf, so there was an interest in putting some ideas on paper. Thus the plan was to have a special symposium with the *Journal of Markets & Morality*, further theorizing the relationship between golf and professional life.

The focus on how golf and professional life relates is not just a question of how sports shape our working life-world. Members of the seminar were aware of the literature on neoliberalism and had brought that up as a context for situating the relevance of the topic. Sociologists who write about neoliberalism often worry about how the marketized world had misshaped professional agency. Their idea is that the desire to pacify market demand leads to a vicious consequentialism that undermines ethical intentions and fosters a selfish, competitive outlook. This is often described as the “terrors of performativity”—the obsessive desire to perform toward performance indicators (proxies to fitness in the market) terrorizes one's cognitive space and displaces what does not fit with that consequentialist, Machiavellian outlook.⁴ What are often displaced are ethical principles or valuable goals not captured or not capturable by quantitative proxies. The further worry is that organizations that are not necessarily in business (e.g., educational organizations) have gradually adopted a similar “business” or “marketized” outlook. Much of the scholarly work has complained about the distortion of the moral or professional agency of people at work. But there has been little discussion of a solution. In this we see a gap and an opportunity. Can leisurely play such as golf have benefits for mitigating the specter of the terrors of performativity—perhaps even of exorcising it? Could it foster the right mood or comportment for ethical ideas to better flourish, in the midst of pressures to dismiss ethics?

Furthermore, we believed it was possible that the sociological discussion on neoliberalism and the market is muddled. It is difficult to deny that the steering of

organizations under market pressures could lead to the terrors of performativity. At the same time, a closer inspection suggests a more nuanced diagnosis. The obsession with performative targets is certainly not exclusive to organizations immersed in a free market environment. One can imagine a department under pressure from a central planning office to deliver certain planned outcomes experiencing the same problem. Indeed, this and similar forms of corruption were often discussed by Friedrich Hayek when he analyzed the dynamics of systems that steered away from market signals. These socialist systems are unable to overcome bounded rationality and thus have to constantly cover up errors entailed by the consequentialist pursuit of misguided performance goals prescribed by the central planning committee. Still, they have to promote the deceptive appearance of good performance under the guise of these indicators that are yet unrelated with real and pressing needs or aspects of well-being.⁵ The problem is obviously not the market *per se*. It is the flourishing of consequentialist thinking under pressure, whether this is steered by the market or by central planning. These distortions, which are the result of consequentialism, were earlier painstakingly analyzed by the new natural law theorist Germain Grisez.⁶ If this is so, then the approach to mitigating these terrors is not always to attack the free economy (with its coordinating benefits!) but rather to fracture consequentialism. In this way one will not throw the baby out with the bathwater.

This approach has precedent. Stanford's James G. March was for many years attentive to the dominance of the logic of consequence in organizations and had sought not to dismantle the market but to fracture unreflective consequentialism and to mingle a deontological logic of appropriateness with the interest in consequences.⁷ March came up with a series of "technologies of foolishness" for professional thinking. These are different approaches to thinking at work compared with conventional consequentialist wisdom. For example, March encouraged the hypocritical celebration of ethical duties by consequentialist thinkers and leaders—with the hope that such hypocrisy would be transitional. Again, March welcomed the playful consideration of new identities and decisions different from the typical roles one plays; these, he believed, might help overcome consequentialist blind spots. Yet, notice that these discussions deal with how to reform one's thinking at work *during work*. What remains underinvestigated is the exploration of this neglected time we call rest or leisure. Can rest or leisurely play also be a tool for arresting the consequentialist spirit? Can golf also be a technology of foolishness? Are there indications that golfing might foster human qualities that could translate well into desirable attitudes for (business) leaders? Here is a huge segment of human life not sufficiently analyzed and exploited to reform professional and moral agency at work.

The following original essays are an attempt to begin the conversation. How does the play of golf—a form of leisure familiar to leaders of organizations and businesses—relate with one’s professional life? Does it support the cultivation of desirable ideas and qualities in leaders, relevant for their work? In various ways the following essays indicate positive connections between golf, ethical leadership, and business thinking. We hope this collection might be of interest to our readers who also play golf (or engage in other similar forms of leisure) and start them off wondering with us along the lines of philosophies of golfing relevant to leadership and professional agency. Most of all, we hope readers will enjoy what we believe is a refreshing approach to thinking about these issues.

Finally, we thank the editors Kevin Schmiesing and Dylan Pahman for their support and for taking a chance on us; we hope we have not disappointed them.

Notes

1. See Josemaria Escriva, “No. 514,” in idem, *Furrow* (Manila: Sinag-Tala Publishers, 1994), 413.
2. Most recently, see “Secret to Working at 95—Play Golf,” *South China Morning Post*, August 30, 2018, B2.
3. Andy Wible, ed., *Golf and Philosophy: Lessons from the Links* (Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 2010).
4. See Stephen J. Ball, “The Teacher’s Soul and the Terrors of Performativity,” *Journal of Education Policy* 18, no. 2 (2013): 215–28.
5. See Friedrich Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).
6. See Germain Grisez, “Against Consequentialism,” *American Journal of Jurisprudence* 23, no. 1 (1978): 21–72, available at <https://scholarship.law.nd.edu/ajj/vol23/iss1/2>.
7. See, for example, James G. March, *A Primer on Decision Making: How Decisions Happen* (New York: The Free Press, 1994).