



The Fiefdom Syndrome: The Turf Battles That Undermine Careers and Companies - And How to Overcome Them

Robert Herbold

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The turf battles and territorial “fiefdoms” that undermine so many companies—and how to break through them, by long-term Microsoft COO Robert J. Herbold

There is a potentially infectious condition inside virtually all organizations that can cause more damage than economic downturns, management upheavals, and global business shifts. Until now it has had no name. But it has impacted some of the world’s leading companies, including Procter & Gamble, IBM, Coca-Cola, and Microsoft.

Robert J. Herbold, the COO who brought corporate discipline to a young Microsoft organization and helped to transform it into a mature global giant, calls it the Fiefdom Syndrome. And it happens at organizations large and small, profit and nonprofit, at the individual level as well as the group and divisional level. It can undercut a company’s effectiveness, and in extreme cases it has shaken entire industries and taken down major corporations.

The problem begins when individuals, groups, or divisions—out of fear—seek to make themselves vital to their organizations and, unconsciously or sometimes deliberately, try to protect their turf and others’ perceptions of them. It is a natural human tendency, dating back to the origins of our species, but if it isn’t managed properly, the damage caused by these “fiefdoms” can spell the death knell of what should have been a strong and vital organization.

People who create fiefdoms can become dangerously insular, losing perspective on what is happening in the world outside their own control. They hoard resources. They are determined to do things in their own way, often duplicating or complicating what should be streamlined throughout the company, leading to runaway costs, increased bureaucracy, and a loss of agility and speed.

In *The Fiefdom Syndrome*, Bob Herbold exposes the myriad ways such fiefdoms can compromise a company’s effectiveness—as well as show what managers, companies, and individuals can do to break up fiefdoms and conquer the turf wars. Illustrated with countless examples from Microsoft, Procter & Gamble, IBM, and other corporations, *The Fiefdom Syndrome* is an essential tool in every manager’s toolkit.

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