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Faking heroism as a mechanism of 'Mafia Offer': A critical realism perspective on the abuse of heroism

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Introduction

Humans have always undertaken deceptive actions to achieve personal gain. Similarly, organizations tend to use 'twisted means' to establish a strong position in the market, regardless of the extent to which they are ethical. In organisations, deceptive actions often involve using a unique character or quality that differentiates them from competitors. This chapter argues that the motive for individuals and organizations adopting deceptive or fraudulent actions is to enhance their public perception by drawing a heroic image, a concept referred to as 'Faking Heroism'. The concept involves creating an image of a hero for an unheroic action, or using heroic terms to describe what is actually an ordinary person or situation.

It can be argued that Faking Heroism is a mechanism to achieve a 'Mafia Offer', a concept borrowed from the Theory of Constraints (TOC) (Lang 2010, 159), to enable organizations and individuals to lead the market in a certain area. The TOC Mafia Offer is an offer that is so good that customers cannot refuse and competitors cannot match it (Cooper 2010; Youngman 2016). Mafia Offer has been used in business mainly to make higher profits than competitors. For example, Hyundai used their Assurance Program as a marketing solution to increase their sales (Lang 2012). Mafia Offer can also be used to capitalize on a decisive competitive advantage. A case in point, cited by Lang (2010), is a company that prints private labels for clients. Each client orders 100+ labels for their food and beverage products. This company delivered an offer to clients that they cannot reject: a) clients will not have to hold more than two weeks' inventory compared to six months inventory required in the past; b) clients will never run out of stock, and if they do, the company will pay $500 per day per label; and c) no change to the price. This label printing company created a competitive advantage over its competitors (Lang 2010). This is a Mafia Offer, because it did not rely on price reduction or product innovation, nor can competitors match the offer.

This chapter explores the concept of Faked Heroism and its role in attaining a Mafia Offer using recent examples including the Lance Armstrong doping scandal in cycling and Volkswagen's 'faked environmentally friendly' image. Unfortunately, the number of cases of fraudulent actions is continuing to rise, and more creative and innovative techniques are being used to acquire the title of hero even if it is faked (Ludtka 2012, The POW Network 2012).

Adopting the lens of business management enables us to identify and describe the benefits and costs organizations seek to obtain through constructing a heroic or fake heroic image even for a while. Such actions taken by heroes, according to Franco (2017), are the protective barrier that prevents the various expected damages and distractions including, but not limited to, physical, financial, emotional, or philosophical. These explanations are also necessary to determine the strategies which may prevent organizations utilising this kind of Mafia Offer as this mechanism has catastrophic implications in the long term for business success and customer confidence. These include social damage (Gehring 2003); financial cost (Franco 2017) due to a damaged reputation and costs resulting from loss of customer trust, and in turn, loss of customers; and the likelihood of poor performance (Smith and Parloff 2016).

This chapter explains heroism and faked heroism and discusses why organizations are eager to have heroes, and how they use them. The chapter explains how heroism could be used as a mechanism of Mafia Offer using two cases.

Heroism and Fake Heroism

To appropriately define Fake Heroism, the concept of hero first needs to be explored, as well as why there is a need for heroes, and the process by which heroic figures are appointed.

Who is a hero?

The concept of 'Hero' is both complex and controversial. Heroes have always been a part of societies' history, culture, and social structure. A hero is the subject of a heroic action, which, according to Franco, Blau and Zimbardo (2011), involves acting in a pro-social manner despite personal risk that might be associated with such actions. Heroic actions are considered complex behavior; the complexity emerges from the contradictory nature of the heroism concept. For example, even though heroism is a personal act, it is not a personal attribution: it is a social one. Further, acts of heroism are usually determined historically, situationally and culturally. For example, the act of whistle-blowing may be considered a heroic action from the perspective of some sectors of society, while other sectors of the same society may perceive it as a betrayal (Hoffman and Schwartz 2015). Moreover, what might be considered a heroic action today might be perceived as a crime tomorrow (Franco, Blau, and Zimbardo 2011). In fact, history is full of examples of people who have been acknowledged as heroes because they took action against the 'nation's enemy', considered the 'right thing to do' at the time; subsequently, those same figures were often persecuted due to changes in the circumstances and understandings related to their actions such as war "hero" who investigated for crimes

against humanity. Thus, heroism is a relative concept and defining it is challenging because it needs to take into account the action, the time, the context, the culture, and the group. For example, Gibbon and Gomes (2002) argue "It is hard to have confidence in the word hero when reputations rise and fall ……Names and stories linger in our memories and make a difference" (31-32).

The process of becoming a hero involves, according to Gibbon and Gomes (2002), a transformation, which involves an ordinary person becoming a great one through undertaking the unknown and enduring trials that result in gaining certain personal characteristics, depending on the values of a society, such as pride, selflessness, courage and humility.

The Role of the Hero in Organisations

The expansion and accompanying new challenges faced by organizations today means that the role of heroes has extended from the mere face of a brand to a reflection of the culture of the organization, a means of attracting a segment of the market, and a means of obtaining a stronger position in the market (Lang 2010). The concept of heroism is constantly linked to leaders who are willing to take risks to spare their organization from disaster (Franco 2017). In some cases, an organization conducts a heroic action and becomes a role model within both the society and the industry. For example, the founder of micro loans was awarded a Nobel Prize for introducing an innovative strategy that eased poverty, and the founder of Barefoot College managed to improve the quality of life in rural areas in India by teaching grandmothers how to make light using small solar panels.

Fake and Deceptive Heroes

Unfortunately, some individuals and organisations resort to cheating and fraudulent actions in order to gain the title of hero, and, subsequently to enhance self-esteem, gain financial benefits, or achieve rewards. Intended faked heroic actions have been discussed in different contexts; for example, Franco (2017) discussed what he calls 'heroic failure', referring to the failure of a leader to anticipate an impending crisis, thus hindering an organization from performing, resulting in financial as well as human costs. Gehring (2003) presented the concept of the 'virtue imposter' to describe a person who "lies about his experience, knowledge, achievements, or identity, in order gain advantage over those who ascribe to the imposter aspects of character not possessed by him" (14).

Fraudulent or faked heroic actions are even more complex in business due to the complexity of the environment, the involvement of stakeholders, and the widespread effect of the heroic image on customers, industry and different sections of society. Thus, and for the purpose of this chapter, it is necessary to differentiate two types of fraudulent and deceptive actions in business: a) deceiving people in order to make profits without seeking to achieve any kind of heroic status (this category is similar to Cehring's concept of 'virtue imposter'), and b) committing deceptive actions to draw or borrow a heroic image of an individual or a group and then using this image to gain profits. In this case, fakers make attempts to manipulate how their normal actions are described to make them appear heroic in order to create a false appearance of heroism. The second category is termed 'Faked Heroism' and is the focus of this chapter.

Heroism needs to be considered beyond the individual boundaries of this phenomenon to include the broader social context. Efthimiou's (2017) definition of heroism as "a distinct state of embodied consciousness accessible to all human agents in everyday lived experience" (25) best serves this purpose. In the context of organizations heroism can be defined as the idealism (Franco, Efthimiou, and Zimbardo 2016) status that a person or a group of people within an organization acquires during a process of transformation. This idealism status reflects the structure and culture of individuals, organizations and the wider community.

A lived heroic figure can be investigated across five spheres: biological, ecological, social, cultural and phenomenological (Allison, Goethals, and Kramer 2017). In this chapter, the focus is on the phenomenological sphere of Faked Heroism.

Why are Heroes Necessary in Organizations?
Campbell, who introduced the concept of 'The Hero's Journey' in his book *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949), believes that every system and individual needs heroes because the story of the heroic figure represents the central narrative of humanity (Triffitt 2015). Heroes symbolise the ambitions we would like to satisfy and the qualities we would like to possess (LaBarge 2000); thus, heroes of our choice define our ideals, which in turn define us. On a social scale, heroes help to define the culture and the values of that society, which significantly impact almost every aspect of the community's institutions, business and politics.

On a smaller scale, heroes are becoming an important component in organizations that seek to construct a culture promoted by certain types of heroes. Having heroes within a limited group, according to Franco (2017), "is often a tacit transaction wherein a heroic actor becomes the agent of the larger group" (185). The area of developing heroes and the ramifications of

having them in business has seldom been discussed or researched, despite the fact that the need for heroic leadership, leaders, and COEs has been discussed in the literature (Franco 2017, Lambert 2003, Senge et al. 2007). For example, Bach (1995) states that it is necessary for organizations to have heroes who are willing to take initiatives and explore the unknown to solve ambiguous problems: "we must face the need for heroism because in software development all problems are ambiguous" (96). He also distinguished between healthy and unhealthy heroism, referring to the developing and nurturing of these figures within an organization.

The creation and use of heroes out of context has been labelled the 'hero business'. For example, Ned Rorem (cited in Gibbon and Gomes 2002) gives the example of Mother Teresa being used in "the hero business" referring to attempts to capitalize on her iconic status to promote religious concepts rather than humanity and compassion.

Incorporating the positive side of heroic figures into the leadership of organisations is seen as, at the very least, averting an expected and unexpected crisis, which is relevant in the case of Steve Jobs who was arguably considered a heroic leader for Apple Inc. With his unconventional leadership style, he spared his organisation and the brand several potential crises and created one of the largest organisations in the world. Some organizations become the real heroes by taking risks to support causes such as human rights, or to prove a moral point, such as Charlie Hebdo, the French satirical newspaper, which refused to give into threats by terrorist, ultimately resulting in the death of twelve of its journalists (Franco and Zimbardo 2016 cited in Franco 2017).

The cases of businesses who adopt faked heroic figures have been highlighted in the media (Franco 2012, Smith and Parloff 2016) and strongly support the argument for the existence of Faked Heroism in business. The heroic image* usually leads to building customer loyalty and community commitment to that created image and what it represents because "it is human nature to at once hunger for and elevate exemplars of heroism" (Franco 2012). Furthermore, if the heroic figure or heroic image is 'popular or fashionable' in the wider community, it is likely that the business increases their market share, customers, and in turn sales, resulting in higher profits. For example, Lance Armstrong's image as a hero significantly

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* Heroic image is the image perceived and created to or by public about certain figures. It might be used to promote genuine hero or to magnify non-heroic figure or action to marketing a product, an organization or an idea.

changed after he became a prostate cancer survivor. Defeating this disease created widespread compassion for him as a person and it enhanced his heroic image. This was strong support for what he and his business (sponsors) represented.

Organizations believe it is necessary to acquire a hero or create a heroic image to: attract more customers directly or indirectly, thus make higher profits, and second, lead the market by gain a competitive advantage over their competitors,

Creating and Using Heroes

To discuss the use of heroes in business, there is a need to discuss the creation of those heroes without the need to undertake the hero's journey (Campbell 2004). I classified heroism into spontaneous heroism and planned heroism. Spontaneous heroes are people who are "ready, willing, and able to act decisively" (Franco 2017, 185) such as war heroes and crisis heroes. Planned heroism, on the other hand, refers to people and organizations who use innovative means and technology to take action or develop an outcome that earns them a heroic image. Therefore, spontaneous heroes are the outcome of an uncontrollable situation; businesses or organizations seek to use such an unexpected hero who might be an individual or group of individuals to support the promotion of a certain message, the marketing of a product or service, or the introduction of a certain ideology. On the other hand, planned heroism involves creating heroes through one of two ways: first, a hard and usually long and legitimate process to create a hero figure by earning real heroic qualities, and second, a hard and usually long, but illegitimate process to create a 'fake' heroic figure with unreal heroic qualities to be perceived publicly as heroes; this is a fraudulent exercise. In the latter case, an organization or group of people pre-think and plan the creation of a heroic image. They initially define their goal, then how a heroic figure will achieve this goal, and finally, will construct the image of a hero or borrow it, but in this case it is a Faked Hero.

The illegitimate process of making a hero involves using unethical, illegal, and fraudulent actions. The precise processes of creating a fake hero are still unclear and require further investigation; however, they might begin by defining the area or the image that the organization wants to promote, then the organization might study what their competitors are doing in this particular area. The outcome of the previous steps will affect how the fake hero is created, with significant attention on not being exposed. This applies where organizations develop their own faked hero; the processes will be different when using an existing heroic

figure. For example, an organization might borrow a particular heroic figure to promote an image that reflects how they want to be perceived.

In short, in business, Faked Heroism is the heroic image that a business borrows or draws for themselves to enhance the business's image in the market, make profits, and/or control the market. Businesses usually create this image without conducting any real, genuine or authentic heroic action. In fact, this heroic image might be built on deceptive, unethical and illegal activities. Therefore, the result is the emergence of faked heroes that last a while until the truth is exposed or exposes itself. Businesses might use a hero figure without knowing whether it is faked or genuine. However, despite the doubts around the genuineness of the heroic figure, businesses continue to use and support their faked heroes because they provide the organization with a Mafia Offer, discussed in detail below.

Mafia Offer

Eli Goldratt, the founder and developer of the Theory of Constraints (TOC), introduced the concept of Mafia Offer as a marketing strategy to increase and control organizations' sales. The term Mafia Offer refers to making an offer that customers cannot refuse, and that competitors cannot quickly match (Lang 2010). It is an unrefusable offer to the market to encourage customers to desire products and/or services. Mafia Offer is a unique and creative planning method; it helps businesses to uncover offers in the marketplace that organizations normally would not consider. However, it does not have to be an innovation, according to Lang (2010). Mafia offer is not a about price reduction, having better quality, a great reputation, good customer satisfaction, responsiveness, customer support and more trust than competitors. Rather, it is about using the organisation's available internal capabilities to target a 'market constraint'. What makes a Mafia Offer unrefusable is a combination of the product/service, its characteristics, and the method of delivery; it's an offer that is too good to be rejected. For example, Air New Zealand's development of Sky Couch in economy class is a mafia offer: considerable time may pass before competitors can match this offer. Mafia Offer is based on two assumptions:

- Customers are buying products and services as solutions to their problems
- The value of these 'solutions' for the customers is not based on the seller's effort such as cost and time; rather, value is derived from acquiring this product or service.

These assumptions can be applied to both fraudulent and non-fraudulent 'legitimated' offers, and it might be an explanation for why organizations desperately seek to develop a Mafia

Offer. Mafia Offer is one of the TOC tools for value creation (Kaarna and Seppo 2006). Thus, using the Mafia Offer in marketing increases the customers' realisation of the value of the product over the value that the producer aims to deliver. Mafia Offer is an internal solution targeting an external constraint. A constraint of a system is anything that keeps the organization from achieving more profits or more goal units; this constraint might be physical or non-physical (Rahman 1998, 2002). It might be an internal or external constraint. Most external constraints can be internally controlled and then removed, because, according to Pass and Ronen (cited in Blackstone Jr 2010) "it is easier to control an internal constraint than to be tossed by the ups and downs of the market" (159).

The focus of a Mafia Offer is not only on the current existing products and services of the organization but also extends to the development of potential products and services (Youngman 2016). It is "the development of an idea that results in change which produces greater throughputs from an existing sales stream. The underlying dynamic is that we don't expect our buyer to change; we must be the ones who change. After all, we have total control over that" (Youngman 2016).

The Mechanism of Mafia Offer
While the aim of a Mafia Offer is to increase sales through targeting the market constraint, one mechanism by which it does this is Faking Heroism, that is, it uses deceptive means. This mechanism enables organizations to be seen as an unmatchable business; thus, they can offer customers an offer described as too good to be true, then to be rejected. Consequently, not every fraudulent or deceptive action that aims to achieve extra profits or attract more customers is a Mafia Offer. To be specific, a Mafia Offer, for the purposes of this chapter, is an offer made by business and organizations who used deceptive means to make an offer that cannot be matched. One way to do this is to associate a product with a heroic figure that no other business can use in a similar way. This heroic figure –regardless of whether this heroism is genuine or not – psychologically empowers organizations and puts them in advance of their competitors, for example, a heroic claim about how the company has endeavoured to be environmentally friendly in ways that others have not, earns them an advantage. Similarly, the use of the iconic imagery of an unbreakable athlete who is employed as a spokesperson makes the unique.

What is a Mechanism?
The term 'Mechanism' emerged as the basic building block to explain phenomena such as the tides, the motions of plants, properties of light and the flow of blood (Craver and Tabery

2016). Identifying the mechanisms generated an observed phenomenon, according to a realism perspective, aimed at explaining the links between causes and effects (George and Bennett 2005). Mechanisms go beyond statistical relationships to define the causal or the generative mechanism that brought them about.

Causal explanations must be differentiated from story–telling and predictions. Thus, mechanisms provide an account of what actually happened and do not predict the future (Mahoney 2001). Mechanisms can only be identified via their effects, and they operate at a level further than what can be observed in the 'real domain'. Bhaskar's (1978) stratified the reality into three levels empirical, actual and real domains (see Figure 1) (Mingers 2004). The empirical is where we directly or indirectly experience the events (e.g. Arab Spring). The actual is where these events happen regardless of our experience of them. The real is the whole of reality, and in this case, the real is the faking heroism and the social and psychological powers interact in that domain.
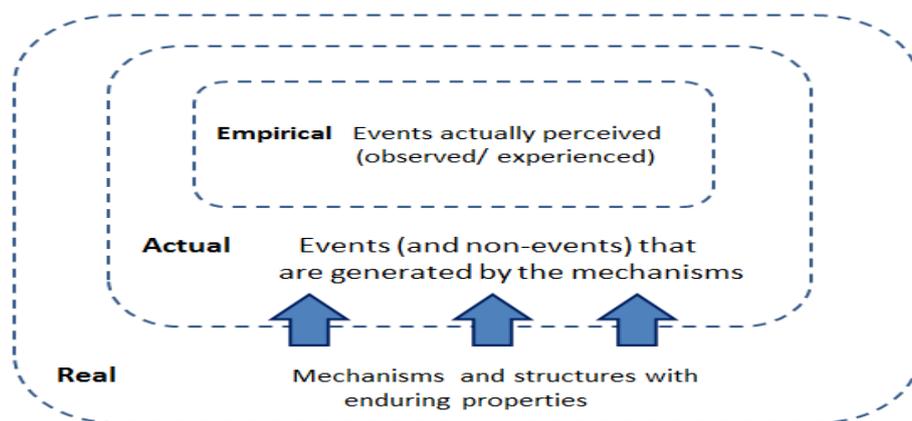

Figure 1: The three domains of reality

Mingers, J. (2004). Real-izing information systems: critical realism as an underpinning philosophy for information systems. *Information and organization, 14*(2), 87-103.

In the context of this chapter, mechanisms are the structures and powers that work to cause changes in other structures and leads to the emergence of new entities with properties different from the characters of the original ones (AL-Hameed 2017). In order to identify mechanisms, a Critical Realist approach requires certain stages. These stages have been included in Iannacci and Resca's (2016) five steps: step (1) identifying and abstracting the events being studied; step (2) explicating the structure and context where events occur by identifying components of social and physical structure, contextual environment, along with relationships among them; step (3) providing an answer for the question of "what makes the phenomenon of interest possible"; step (4) validating the existence of the proposed mechanisms, and step (5) deploying multiple

data sources and theories to validate the findings. This analysis includes step (1) defining the anomaly of the cases, part of step (3) whicg is suggesting mechanims from a theory and step (4).

To propose mechanisms that can explain a phenomenon, a theory is required. The Theory of Constraints TOC concept of Mafia Offer can provide such an explanation for the phenomenon of Faked Heroism. Thus, the focus of this chapter is to suggest that mechanisms that can explain the phenomenon, and propose how this mechanism generated the observed outcomes.

Analysis and discussion of the case examples

Before analysing the case examples, it is necessary to explain the philosophical position underpins the mechanism discussed below. The analysis of the case examples is conducted based on a realist perspective. Ontological realism implies that material things such as technical systems and technologies, and these structures and systems exist prior to any engagement with human agents. This will allow us to theorize about the occurrences of these things and structures (AL-Hameed 2016). The ontology, in this research, is that our world is real, stratified and changing (see figure 1). With this ontology, it is possible to go further than the empirically-observed events to define the mechanisms in the real domain that generate those events. In the actual domain, all possible generated events and non-events will occur, only some of which will be actualized and manifested in the empirical domain where we can observe them. Hence, outcomes can be explained, but not predictable. In other words, adopting this perspective will facilitate the explanation of the Fake Heroism phenomena using two case examples.

The phenomenon of Lance Armstrong

In 2013, Lance Armstrong, the seven-time winner of the Tour de France, confessed that he had been using performance-enhancing drugs for a lengthy period. He was under investigation by the United States Justice Department for cheating and being "unjustly enriched" from the U.S. Postal Service (one of the sponsors). Armstrong found no way out of this crisis except confession, especially once the truth was revealed by a whistle-blower from his team.

Armstrong gained his heroic image not only from being the second American to win the Tour de France, but mainly from his continuous winning streak. As his winning continued, his sponsors (including the US Postal Service) continued to earn financial profits and gain publicity for their brand image (Guyana Chronicle Newspaper 2013). In addition, having Armstrong as a prostate-cancer survivor strengthened and magnified his heroic image. His

sponsors and team continued to deploy his heroic image to represent their brand and link it to their image in the market.

Sponsorship support was continued in order to sustain the benefits of this phenomenological image. In other words, the sponsors were aiming to deliver a Mafia Offer to their customers and competitors and they used the heroic image of Lance Armstrong to do so. Their Mafia Offer was to be an unmatchable service provider who was trustworthy and strong, which was also their market image; furthermore, their mafia offer was the reliable postal services represented by a "heroic figure", which differentiated this offer from a general Mafia Offer. The sponsors did not stop sponsoring Armstrong until the truth was fully revealed. The sponsors, who can be viewed as stakeholders, had no initial intention of creating the Fake Hero; rather, they continued using this image of Lance Armstrong to represent their brand, products and services in the marketplace and make profits. The sponsors could not have fully known, at least initially, that Lance was not a hero, so they were capitalizing on his status to sell something (arguably unrelated to whatever heroism he might have had). Although this is not considered direct fraud, it is still a Mafia offer.

The phenomenon of Volkswagen
The Volkswagen case is slightly different from Armstrong's because the organization was aware of the fraudulent activity in which they engaged. Volkswagen worked to develop their image of manufacturing 'environmentally friendly' cars and being the 'environment hero'. They used a creative way of 'direct fraud' to produce software that was able to change the result of the reading of *carbon dioxide emissions levels* (Hoten 2015). This case is less complex than that of Lance Armstrong. The manufacturer admitted to increasing their sales specifically in North America and Europe using the "defeat device" (Hoten 2015). The Mafia Offer that Volkswagen developed was a strong car that consumes cheap 'diesel fuel' at a reasonable price, and, most importantly, that is environmentally friendly. They did this to lead the market for diesel cars. When the manufacturer realised that a strong diesel car cannot be environmentally friendly, it prompted Volkswagen to commit the fake action that gave them the image of an environmental hero. Seeking to gain an environmentally friendly image is totally legitimate; however, trying to reduce carbon dioxide emissions as a means of becoming an environmental hero requires ground-breaking actions.

Discussion
So how did the mechanism of Faking Heroism work in these two cases? Faked Heroism was triggered by the organization's goal of leading the market, motivated by attaining fast and

increased profits. Figure 2 shows the proposed mechanism of Faked Heroism and the factors likely to activate the mechanism of Faking Heroism. In the empirical domain in Figure 2, the observed outcomes are market position represented by the glory for the heroic organisation and the product and services represented by the hero, market share represented by sales and profits, and leading the market in their product differentiation.

The mechanism of Faking Heroism that generated the observed outcomes is the mechanism operating in the real domain. The mechanism of Faked Heroism emerges from the interaction between society's structures and culture and the power of the heroic image in the community, which is strongly affected by the culture of the society. Hence people's preference for products linked to heroic figures or heroic actions is a powerful force. This mechanism also activated due to the organisations and individuals' self-interest such as people and businesses working in 'hero business', whether they are in the sports, industry, services or religious sectors.

The empirical domain where outcomes are observed and experience

The actual domain where things (events) and non - events generated by mechanisms and we might/ might not observe

The real domain where mechanism(s) interact with the existing structures and powers
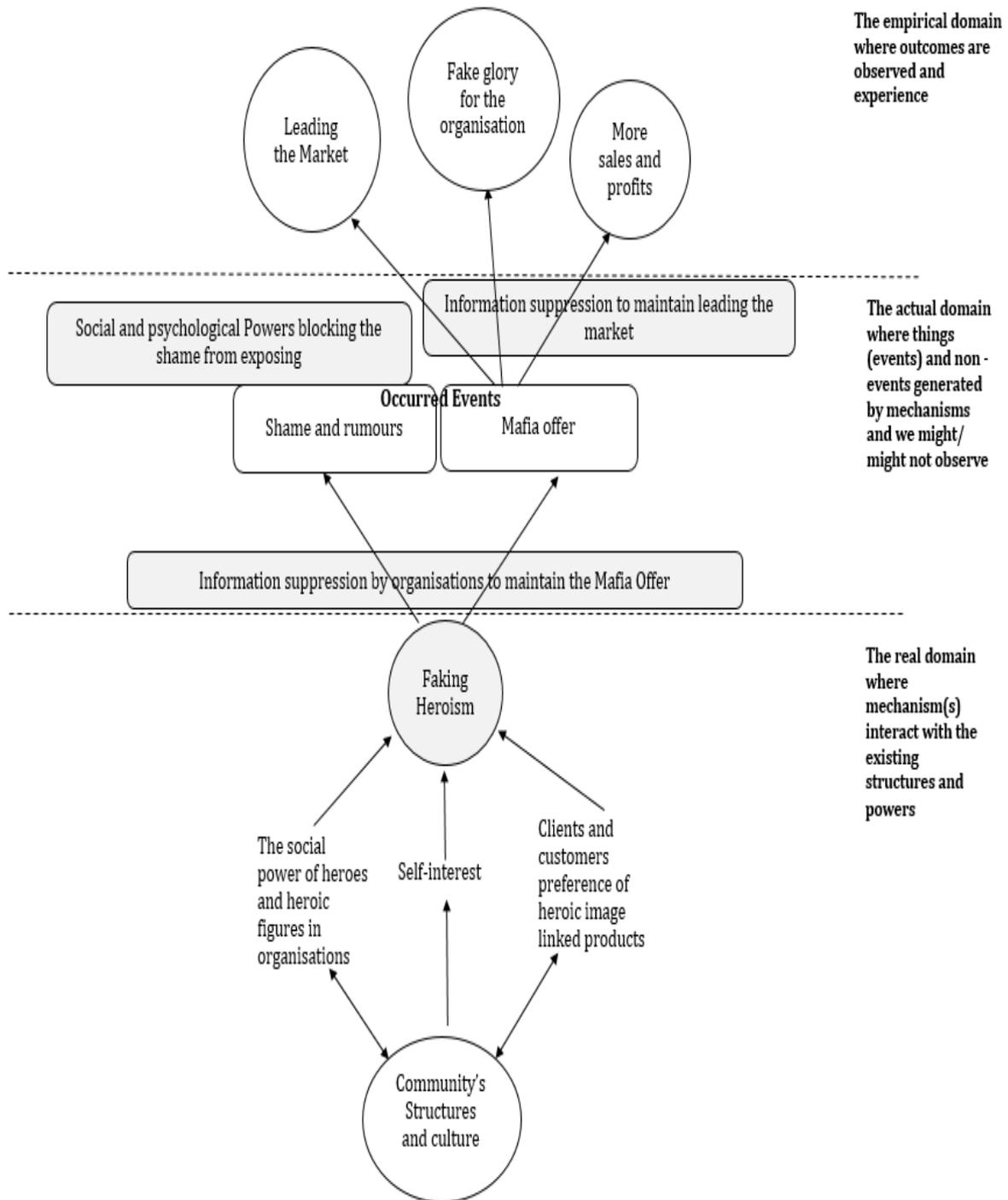
Figure 2: The proposed Mechanism of Faking Heroism to attain Mafia Offer

The interaction of these powers and structures in the real domain resulted in two events in the actual domain. The suggested events are a) the Mafia Offer and b) the shame and rumours related to cheating which might not be observed by everyone, but can be seen through its outcomes in the empirical domain. There are other powers that may prevent the shame and rumours from being observable in the empirical domain such as social or psychological powers or other powers that suppress information to maintain the Mafia Offer.

The mechanism discussed here is a possible explanation for the underlying attitudes that leads to organizations having a hero or being a hero to link to their products or performance.

Conclusion

The area of deploying or creating heroes in businesses is quite sensitive terrain and can be viewed from different perspectives: social, economic, ethical, psychological, and managerial. This chapter addressed the phenomenon of Faking Heroism by explaining how it is used to attain a Mafia Offer. Although Faking Heroism is not a new phenomenon, up until now it has not been labelled in an organizational context. Attempting to find an explanation for such a phenomenon is a complex process and requires examining different theories of organizational behaviour, management and social science. In this chapter I am proposing that the concept of Mafia Offer from the Theory of Constraints can explain how the phenomenon works in today's organizations; however, further research is required to investigate these cases to help explain the mechanism(s) and the conditions and structures associated with Fake Heroism that activated such mechanisms.

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