Time bandits: How they are created, why they are tolerated, and what can be done about them

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Abstract

Organizations today own little slack, and they must very carefully manage their resources. In this article, we describe an omnipresent, yet often ignored resource utilization problem whereby some workers abandon certain responsibilities and use the freed-up time to pursue personal interests such as hobbies and side businesses. In essence, these "time bandits" work part-time in exchange for full-time pay. While bandits are a minority among workers, their negative effects are significant and widespread. Specifically, banditry undermines an organization's mission, morale, and productivity, as well as putting stakeholder support at risk. In an effort to address this problem, we offer insights in three areas. First, we identify key causes of banditry, including supervisors not enforcing performance standards, poorly constructed reward systems, and the failure to recognize individual differences when designing jobs. Second, we describe reasons why banditry is tolerated within organizations, such as supervisors' desire to avoid conflict and their fear of being labeled as hypocrites. Most importantly, we offer a set of techniques that can prevent and reverse banditry. These include carefully defining expectations, intervening quickly when the symptoms of banditry appear, reducing bandits' compensation over time, and designing jobs that capitalize on individuals' varied skills and motivation.

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KEYWORDS
Time bandits; Resource utilization; Reward systems; Job design

1. A thief by any other name...

"Sam Cooper" (a pseudonym) is a mid-level manager within a division of a Fortune 500 firm. The firm's business centers on serving large, competitively-bid contracts. These contracts apply to fixed periods of time, so a steady flow of new contracts is needed for the firm to remain successful. Sam's performance in servicing existing contracts is regarded as reasonable. A much different situation arises where preparing bids for new contracts is concerned. At strategy meetings, Sam contributes both enthusiasm and insight about how to win each competition. When it comes time to actually write a proposal for a new contract, however, Sam is always "too busy" or "traveling too much" to participate. Yet, as an avid surfer, Sam always seems to have

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plenty of time throughout the week to hit the beach.

"Barb Dobler" is a department head within a state government agency devoted to public health. Barb possesses adequate technical skills and her performance on this portion of her job is satisfactory. However, her main responsibility is managing others, a role that she eschews. Barb not only fails to give subordinates guidance and support, she also verbally abuses them. Ignoring her managerial duties has freed up a lot of time for Barb, and she uses this time to trade stocks online. Upper management has sent Barb to a series of out-of-town seminars on effective management, but she has treated these trips as vacations.

"Phil Moulton" has long served as a professor at a large public university. Like most professors at such institutions, Phil is assigned responsibilities in teaching and research. In the 1980s, Phil's record of research accomplishments resulted in his appointment to a position that granted a reduced teaching load. The university's expectation was that Phil's research activity would flourish via the freed-up time. In the intervening decades, however, Phil has conducted very little research. He teaches his classes – a task that takes only a few hours a week, given his reduced teaching load – and contributes little else to the university. Meanwhile, Phil works many hours at the Italian restaurant that he runs "on the side."

Several forms of theft take place within organizations. Some are well known, such as insider trading, shrinkage (where employees pilfer goods), and embezzlement. The anecdotes offered above illustrate another form of theft, one that most of us are aware of intuitively but that has not yet been discussed in the practitioner or academic literatures. In each case, a person has chosen to not fulfill part of his or her assigned work responsibilities. We label these people as "time bandits" because they are stealing *time* from their employers and therefore are paid for *full-time* employment, but only work *part-time*. With the time freed up by shirking some of their responsibilities, bandits pursue hobbies (such as surfing or online stock trading), enjoy leisure time (such as following the latest celebrity gossip via the Internet), or enrich themselves through side businesses (such as running a restaurant or a real estate agency).

Most of our direct experience with time bandits (or, more simply, "bandits") comes through our roles as professors. Our contention, based on a collective total of 44 years at seven universities, is that banditry is a pervasive problem within educational institutions. In particular, we have observed the widespread existence of bandit professors such as Phil Moulton, who have made a conscious decision to not fulfill the research responsibilities of their positions. At many business schools, the work assignment of a tenure track professor includes a significant portion of their time (perhaps 25% to 50%) that is supposed to be allocated to research activities. Often, bandits will teach their classes but that is the extent of their contribution to the institution. Bandit professors are generally tenured, and they treat tenure not as the intended protector of academic freedom, but as a sinecure and a license to steal from the educational system. Hambrick (2005, p. 300) has stated that abandoning research responsibilities is a main reason why "if tenure could be redecided five years after the initial decision... about 20% to 25% of professors would be asked...to pack their bags."

While tenure clearly facilitates banditry among some professors, the cases of Sam Cooper, Barb Dobler, and many others demonstrate that the absence of a tenure system has not prevented banditry from arising within businesses and government organizations. Indeed, we routinely hear MBA students, College of Business Advisory Board members, our spouses, and our friends offer complaints, jokes, and derisive comments about the proliferation of bandits at their places of employment. While bandits are a minority, it appears that they can be found within the corral of most every organization.

Business executives may be dismayed to learn that our expectation is that banditry will become more prevalent within industry over time. Organizations may be most susceptible to banditry when an employee has the ability to be frequently out of the office. Salespeople and professors, for example, often have the freedom to come and go as they please. This situation allows potential bandits to claim to be "working at home" or "on a business trip" while they are engaged in hobbies or side businesses or just avoiding work. More broadly, businesses increasingly rely on arrangements such as virtual teams and telecommuting whereby workers receive little direct supervision and can adjust the hours they work (Ford & McLaughlin, 1995; Greenberg, Greenberg, & Antonucci, 2007). Like the bandit salesperson or professor, some workers will not resist the opportunity to misuse this freedom. Thus, part of our message to executives is to take note of the abuses that have evolved among a minority of employees and strive to prevent similar scenarios from developing in your organizations. In this sense, we believe that a daunting challenge sales managers and university administrators have faced for decades foreshadows an emerging dilemma for many supervisors.
We do not believe that all bandits maliciously pursue the theft of time. Some employees become bandits due to their situational context: as a result of boredom, lack of direction, lack of support, or frustration with work. Regardless of the underlying causes, banditry is costly. Indeed, the dollar value of banditry is substantial. For the purpose of illustration, consider that according to the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSMB, 2006), the average salary of a business school professor is $96,000. If we assume a fringe benefit factor of 25%, this equates to $120,000 in direct and indirect compensation. A professor with a time allocation for research of 40% (a percentage that varies by appointment and school) is compensated $48,000 annually for his or her research efforts. Bandits such as Phil Moultr, who are disengaged from research, are stealing this amount of money every year from university stakeholders. Similar calculations can be made for industry and government desperados such as Sam Cooper and Barb Dobler.

This reality becomes more troubling when the sources of the money with which bandits abscond are considered. Faculty salaries are derived from state funds, tuition dollars, and endowments from the donations of alumni, companies, and friends of the university. Essentially, bandit professors rob their colleagues, their institutions, and university stakeholders (such as students and legislatures) as surely as if they stuck a pistol in their stakeholders' ribs. Within industry, bandits rob firms' shareholders and fellow employees, among others. Within government, taxpayers are the primary victim of banditry. However, the ill effects of bandits go well beyond the dollars pilfered; we take a closer look in the next section.

2. The effects of banditry

2.1. Undermining the mission

All organizations have missions that need to be accomplished and some fixed amount of resources at their disposal to achieve those missions. The loss of resources through banditry undermines organizations' ability to meet the challenges of their missions. For example, as noted above, Barb Dobler is a department head within a state agency devoted to public health. The mission of this agency is "to promote and protect the health and safety of all" citizens of the state. By neglecting the managerial aspect of her position, Barb has undermined the ability of subordinates to work toward this goal. Every hour that subordinates spend confused about their duties or spend protesting Barb's abuse to higher administrators is an hour that could have been devoted to improving the health and safety of the state citizenry. The mission of Sam Cooper's firm centers on helping customers achieve success. Sam's stealthy refusal to work on the contract proposals that create new customers jeopardizes the firm's future by hurting its ability to serve its constituents and accomplish its mission.

For most business schools, teaching and research are the two main elements of their missions. Deans today face the unenviable task of leading their schools to make contributions to these elements in a complex and challenging context. According to the AACSMB (2002, p. 2), "the most critical problem facing business schools today is the insufficient number of new PhDs being produced worldwide." There is little slack left and this supply shortage could drastically reduce the ability to meet teaching and research obligations. The AACSMB (2003, p. 1) predicts that "unless decisive action is taken to reverse declines in business doctoral education, academic business schools, universities, and society will be faced with an inevitable erosion in the quality of business education and research." To cover classes, many schools are moving to a faculty structure whereby appointments are tilted more heavily toward part-time instructors rather than traditional tenure-track slots (Nemetz & Cameron, 2006). As a result, fewer faculty members are tasked with serving a critical component of the mission of the university; that is, research. The effects of banditry are thereby spread out over a smaller number of research faculty and its effects become more damaging and noticeable (see Albanese & Van Fleet, 1985).

2.2. Undermining morale and productivity

Our observation over time has been that bandits have significant deleterious effects on the work habits of other employees. Particularly strong-willed and dedicated workers have the focus needed to concentrate on their own tasks. However, most of us 'mortals' take notice of and are influenced by the situation around us. A 'law abiding' equity sensitive worker who observes bandits getting away with working part-time may question the wisdom of working hard. Equity theory would suggest that such people will reduce their efforts until they believe that they are receiving rewards relative to their inputs at a similar rate to the bandits in their department (Adams, 1965). The result is that, like rabbits, bandits multiply. Another outcome predicted by equity theory is that productive workers who observe banditry find it intolerable, become cynical, and ultimately leave in order to join an organization with more distributive justice (McFarlin & Sweeney, 1992). Furthermore, an emotional contagion (Hatfield, Cacioppo, & Rapson, 1994) may occur whereby other employees start to
think and feel like the bandit. None of these possibilities bode well for an organization.

2.3. Undermining institutional support

No business, government agency, or university can "go it alone." Instead, each organization depends on the support and resources of other organizations in order to function. Through their behavior, bandits create questions about whether their organizations are good investments and thereby jeopardize their support. For example, Barb Dobler's agency works in conjunction with other state agencies that have similar missions, such as protecting the environment. Over time, Barb's managerial malfeasance made these other agencies reluctant to work with her. They had little confidence that Barb would put her subordinates in a position to succeed. If these subordinates failed, the result would be that none of the agencies' missions would be effectively served. Because Barb's agency received funding from these allies, the difficulties Barb created ultimately reduced the resources of her agency.

Key university stakeholders oftentimes possess only a peripheral understanding of the nature of the work done by professors (Gordon, 1986). For example, legend has it that a university president was once summoned to a state legislative hearing. The following exchange ensued:

Lawmaker: "How many hours do your professors typically teach?"

University president: "Six hours."

Lawmaker: "What do they do the other two hours of the day?"

The mystery surrounding what we do has helped universities minimize accountability. But as tuition continues to grow far faster than inflation and publicity about tuition increases continues to rise, we suspect that it is inevitable that state legislatures will more carefully scrutinize the internal operations of the universities that benefit from their largesse. When found to be populated by the aforementioned $48,000 bandits, some universities will find themselves losing legislative support. Frankly, they should.

3. How are bandits created?

It is difficult to attribute the motivational process of bandits. We doubt that a bandit wakes up one morning, has an epiphany, and proclaims, "I am tired of working full time and I think I will take advantage of my employer." In our observation, a bandit's turn to the 'dark side' evolves in a gradual way and may be driven by several factors, including lack of interest or support for an activity, lack of direction, or frustration with the work environment. Doubtlessly, some people are more disposed toward exploiting the system than others, but employees would struggle to achieve banditry if effective controls were in place. Ironically, the organizational features that facilitate banditry run counter to the basic principles of good management that business school professors routinely teach in our classes and that most managers learned in these same classes.

3.1. Lack of performance standards

Organizations facilitate banditry when they fail to create and enforce performance standards. In Barb Dobler's state agency, subordinates evaluate their direct supervisor through an annual survey. Year after year, Barb received the lowest scores of any department head, despite her attendance at a series of seminars designed to enhance managerial skills. Higher-level administrators responded not by removing Barb from the managerial ranks, but by moving her direct reports and putting her in charge of a new group of naïve employees. The department head who received the highest evaluation from her subordinates was 'rewarded' by being assigned the refugees from Barb's department. This department head was already putting in long hours, and now she had additional, uncompensated responsibilities due to the behavior of a bandit.

Universities face a challenge in this realm. Beyond the standards that are enforced prior to promotion to associate professor and tenure, there are few substantial performance hurdles for most academics. Hurdles do exist for those who wish to be promoted to full professor. However, it is up to the individual faculty member whether or not to achieve them and there is no time pressure to do so. This is in contrast to the first promotion stage, wherein a faculty member has to achieve certain performance levels within five to seven years. Likewise, once a faculty member achieves promotion to full professor, there are no more performance hurdles.

Post tenure review is intended to ensure sustained performance, but at most universities it fails to deliver much substantive action. In most cases, a negative post tenure review results in a 'slap on the wrist' for lack of productivity, a corrective plan, and a generous amount of time to correct the shortcoming. While professors at various universities have been fired for other forms of theft such as embezzlement, we are not aware of any cases where a bandit has been fired because he or she stole time and money by ceasing to do research.
3.2. Poorly designed reward systems

What is the worst thing that could be done in response to undesirable behavior? Reward it! Unfortunately, this is often what organizational reward systems actually accomplish. Almost 100 years ago, Thorndike (1911) recognized an important issue within reward systems. His “law of effect” posits that behaviors which are rewarded tend to be repeated. If we reward banditry, employees quickly realize that, contrary to the popular saying, crime does pay. The result will usually be more banditry.

Employees are often treated equally rather than equitably through an emphasis on across-the-board raises, when a portion of a salary program is across the board and a portion is merit, or when only minimal financial distinctions are made between the raises given to good performers and those given to bandits. Such raise schemes serve to equalize the increases received by dedicated workers and those provided to bandits. How often do bandits, who are working part-time, receive a 0% raise? Infrequently, based on our observations.

3.3. One size does not fit all

Over time, an employee’s interests may evolve and this culminates in varying levels of dedication to different elements of his/her position. For example, it is inevitable that, as careers progress, some professors will turn away from research due to a lack of interest or obsolescence of their skills. In the case of Sam Cooper, proposal writing may just be an activity that does not hold Sam’s interest or Sam’s proposal skills may have become obsolete. A policy that cannot adapt to these changes may result in learned helplessness (Petersen, Maier, & Seligman, 1995), whereby employees may become disengaged due to the belief that they are ineffective, have little control over their environment, and lack any reason to believe their situation will improve. Forcing a reluctant researcher or proposal writer to keep a large portion of his/her job devoted to research or proposal writing is inviting banditry. A predictable result is avoidance behavior.

Further, employees are motivated by myriad rewards (McClelland, 1961) and possess varying levels of capabilities (Wyer & Blood, 2006). For example, some are motivated primarily by a need for achievement (such as through writing research articles or winning proposals) while others are motivated by a need for power or affiliation (McClelland, 1961). If a group of employees is managed as a homogeneous set, one likely result is the disengagement of some individuals. Treat everyone the same and motivation will be the victim.

4. Why are bandits tolerated?

“"The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing.”

- Edmund Burke

4.1. The high price of dealing with bandits

Most individuals prefer to avoid confrontation and conflict. Managers are no exception. Performance appraisals are sometimes difficult occasions, especially when there is a need to redirect performance. Dealing with a bandit can easily degenerate into an uncomfortable, confrontational situation. Like a sheriff with an empty gun, direct supervisors often have little authority to accompany the responsibilities they must handle (Gallos, 2002). Further, if punitive action is taken, the bandit may make a ‘big fuss,’ file a grievance, or even pursue a lawsuit. All of these activities take managers away from the more positive, value-added work that they would prefer to emphasize. When a grievance or lawsuit is filed, firms, governments, and universities often settle the case rather than suffer negative publicity and the expense of mounting a defense. This, of course, encourages other bandits to follow the same path.

At a minimum, dealing with bandits is more time consuming than not dealing with them, especially in the short run. Managers are pulled in many different directions. Avoidance behavior and appeasement may seem like the simplest ways to deal with bandits, but they are seldom effective. Managers need to understand that doing what is right isn’t always easy, and doing what is easy isn’t always right.

We do not suggest, however, that direct supervisors alone are responsible for dealing with banditry. Acquiescence to bandits is as much the fault of the other employees as it is the fault of supervisors. In many movies about the Old West (e.g., “High Noon”), the cowardly townsfolk let the sheriff stand alone against bandits. Some supervisors are, in Old West lingo, “yella,” but others are willing to correct bad behavior. Managers need to know that other employees will back their efforts to overcome banditry. In the case of universities, this burden falls mainly on senior faculty because junior professors often fear retribution from tenured bandits. Overall, individuals must realize that when they ‘look the other way,’ they are in essence condoning banditry.
4.2. Fear of inconsistency

A person promoted to a sales manager position often steps away from his or her sales responsibilities in order to be a full-time supervisor. Similarly, department chairs and deans are pulled away from their research programs as they step on and climb up the administrative ladder. We suspect that some of these sales managers and administrators would prefer to challenge bandits, but are held back by a fear of being labeled as hypocrites. Bandits are likely to respond to a reprimand by pointing out that ‘the pot is calling the kettle black’ – the person offering the reprimand has also neglected sales or scholarship. This point is faulty, however. The fact that a person no longer sells to customers or publishes research does not in itself constitute banditry. Sales managers and university administrators who contribute full time work in the tasks prescribed for them by their positions should reject accusations of hypocrisy that bandits might offer.

5. What can be done about bandits?

“No man is above the law and no man is below it; nor do we ask any man’s permission when we ask him to obey it.”

- Theodore Roosevelt

As television viewers who are fond of police dramas are aware, a premeditated crime arises because the criminal possesses a motive, a means, and an opportunity. When any of these three conditions is absent, the crime does not happen. In the case of banditry, the motive and means may be impossible to eliminate. Bandits’ motive is to create time to pursue their own private interests. The unstructured nature of many jobs provides the means to become a bandit. The third element of a crime is where banditry can be stopped. Specifically, there are several mechanisms that can be put in place to take away or at least reduce the opportunity for banditry and, if banditry does occur, can make dealing with it easier.

5.1. Put expectations in writing

Virtually every person in an organization has a job description. Often, however, this document is excessively general or is out-of-date. Such a job description has little value. Job descriptions should be revisited on an annual basis to ensure that they reflect current expectations and thus serve as a formal accountability mechanism (Hall, Bowen, Ferris, Royle, & Fitzgibbons, 2007). Job descriptions should also be treated as a contract: in exchange for pay, an employee must fulfill the demands specified within the job description. Like any contract, the job description also should specify the penalties for not fulfilling one’s requirements. If, for example, Sam Cooper refuses to fulfill the portion of the contract that discusses proposal writing, the pre-determined consequences should follow. Additional benefits of putting expectations in writing include reducing the likelihood of a successful grievance or lawsuit and reduction of the potential for employee/supervisor conflict.

There appears to be a need for carefully developed contracts across academic, business, and government organizations. In academia, when professors are granted tenure, they are, in essence, granted lifetime employment. Normally, however, there is no document that specifies ongoing and specific performance expectations. Although tenure may not be inherent in other types of organizations, the lack of documented, specific expectations is prevalent. The use of contracts can fill this void. For example, if a faculty member is on a specified work assignment before tenure, the contract could state that the professor must maintain a tenurable record on a rolling timeframe to keep their teaching load as is. Some allowance should be made for the pursuit of other academic endeavors such as textbooks, and for riskier, long term research projects. Thus, a minimum performance level for a faculty member might be the maintenance of a tenurable record based on the previous eight years of activities. If a faculty member such as Phil Moulto does not meet this standard, he should be forced to work a full-time schedule by shifting his responsibilities to emphasize teaching.

Although we propose that organizations create work contracts, we do not believe that these documents should “micromanage” employees’ time. To the contrary, in many cases flexibility should be incorporated into work arrangements. Much like the tenured professor, business and government employees could be allowed some discretionary time to develop work projects of personal interest, take continuing education courses, or pursue other activities that may benefit the organization. For example, Google, 3M, and Genentech have ‘pet-project programs’ that permit employees to use approximately 15% to 20% of their work time to pursue their own ideas (Frauenheim, 2006). The goal is to allow creativity and innovation to flourish unfettered. Innovations such as Google’s Gmail service, 3M’s Post-It notes, and Genentech’s anti-cancer drug Avastin have arisen from employees’ self-directed projects, illustrating the potential value of pet-project programs. At all three firms, employees are held accountable
for the use of their pet-project time, an approach which we strongly endorse.

5.2. Do not reward bandits. At all! Never!
Organizations must not reward undesired behavior through raises. In particular, across the board raises should never be used. Such an approach to raises supports the twisted, self-serving logic of the bandit and leads productive employees to question why they continue to work at a high level. If an employee is not performing a significant portion of his/her job, that person is, effectively, taking compensation under false pretenses. Therefore, to restore equity, an unrepentant bandit should receive a series of reductions in pay over time. In addition, bandits should not be offered chances to earn extra money beyond their normal compensation. For example, within the academic realm, bandits should not be given the opportunity to earn overload money for teaching summer classes or within executive education programs. The term ‘overload’ assumes that professors are fulfilling their assigned obligations; bandits are not. In the business context, bandits should be passed over to the extent that the law allows when extra compensation such as year-end bonuses and profit sharing are distributed.

5.3. Do not aid and abet bandits
'Aiding and abetting’ occurs when a person assists a criminal’s efforts to get away with an offense. Aiding and abetting is itself a crime, according to our justice system. A parallel process happens within organizations. Sam Cooper’s avoidance of proposal writing was the subject of wry, cynical jokes among the other members of proposal writing teams. Yet Sam’s banditry was enabled by these same colleagues because they all increased their efforts to make up for Sam’s lack of work. Because proposals were completed on time and were of acceptable quality, the supervisor of these teams was left assuming that all members of the team were contributing as expected.

Within academia, a bandit whose behavior is scrutinized by a department head will often look for ‘quick and dirty’ ways to boost his or her research credentials. Sometimes professors that are productive researchers will take pity on ‘bandits on the run’ by granting them authorship on research articles in exchange for minimal, if any, contributions. While this behavior can be viewed as humane and generous on one level, in essence it merely facilitates counterproductive behavior and ongoing abuse of the system. Further, in both of the business and academic situations we described, covering up for a bandit undermines the organizational controls that are in place and thereby makes it less likely that the bandit’s supervisor will be able to take any corrective action. Hard workers need to understand that aiding and abetting a bandit is not an act of collegiality or mercy. Instead, aiding and abetting turns a good organizational citizen into an unwitting co-conspirator of a fugitive from justice. It is also important to note that bandits who appear to sincerely seek to change their behavior should be encouraged, mentored, and supported.

5.4. Intervene quickly
In retrospect, early intervention by their supervisors might have forced Sam Cooper, Barb Dobler, and Phil Moulthrop to change their ways before they became fully committed to a ‘life of crime.’ Indeed, supervisors have a duty to intervene quickly before a potential bandit descends down the proverbial slippery slope. Similar to the quality control function of a manufacturing process, outputs must be continuously monitored to ensure that the proper output is maintained and, if it is not, to quickly discover and correct the weakness. One of two things should trigger a need for action: performance in a given year that is far below a person’s norm (i.e., an outlier) or two or more years that show the onset of a trend in an undesirable direction. In either scenario, there should be a consultation with the employee to try to uncover and remedy the cause, if possible. Of course, this process should be carefully documented.

5.5. Adopt a portfolio approach
In managing their investments, investors strive to achieve a balance among cash flow, growth in asset value, and risk. Because no one investment vehicle can match an investor’s particular preferences, investors adopt a portfolio approach whereby they own a variety of assets. Each asset has a different set of strengths and weaknesses, and collectively they form a portfolio that is expected to deliver the desired mix of outcomes. A similar approach can be taken to managing workers. If Sam Cooper is unwilling to work within a team to complete proposals, it is foolish to continue to expect Sam to deliver both effective management of current projects and substantial contributions to proposal work. The latter responsibility can be taken away, and Sam’s time can be fully devoted to managing current operations. This would free up another person’s time to help more with developing proposals for new business. As a bonus, the inability to hide behind more productive group members would make any future banditry by Sam easier to detect.
Recall that Barb Dobler had satisfactory technical skills but shirked her managerial duties. Her supervisors missed a critical opportunity when they reassigned her subordinates to another department. At that point, Barb could have been moved to a position that would utilize her technical skills full-time and not put her in charge of anyone. This would have eliminated her day trading and wasteful “vacations,” and would have ended her abuse of lower level employees. This is the essence of a portfolio approach to managing bandits: redesigning jobs to focus on tasks that bandits have shown they are willing to perform and that can be easily monitored. Unfortunately, Barb’s supervisors did not have the courage to execute a move that they knew Barb would view as a demotion.

In a university setting, a variable workload policy is the key to using a portfolio approach to prevent banditry. Such a policy could specify, for example, that a top scholar that occupies a chair of excellence would teach two courses per year, while productive researchers teach three or four courses per year, and teaching-only faculty teach eight to ten classes per year. Having a college-wide variable workload policy with clearly defined ‘tracks’ accomplishes two important tasks. First, it allows faculty to contribute in a meaningful way even when their interests shift. There is no need for people who lose interest in scholarship to become bandits; they can increase their contributions in teaching. This not only helps a professor remain valued, but it also lightens the load of those whose primary contribution is research. Second, creating a track system reduces the potential for confrontation, grievances, and lawsuits by establishing clear, measurable standards for work outputs.

Adopting a portfolio approach to managing workers necessitates other changes. To ensure fairness, creation of an academic track system should be accompanied by changes to reward systems. Many business schools give raises based primarily on research productivity. A person assigned to a teaching-only track who excels in the classroom should be compensated for this excellence.

6. Concluding thoughts

We have highlighted the presence of “time bandits” in organizations and have argued that these bandits are, in effect, stealing by taking money for a portion of their job that they have no intention of accomplishing. Bandits undermine the effectiveness of organizations, as well as the morale and productivity of other employees. While we might hope that bandits will rehabilitate themselves, it would be naive to expect these desperados to come to their senses in the absence of interventions. As a result, bandits are not the only culprits in this tale. Managers and colleagues are shirking their professional duties if they do not work to prevent and remedy banditry.

Looking to the future, we believe that shrinking resources will inevitably reveal the abuses of bandits. For universities, tales of professors collecting six figure salaries while working a few scant hours per week will someday create a critical mass of negative publicity and scandal. When this tipping point is reached, it is easy to imagine the tenure system that protects both the abuses of bandits and the academic freedom of conscientious professors coming under attack. The implication is that academics must address banditry ourselves before stakeholders force a more painful solution upon us. The same basic logic applies to managers within businesses and government agencies. As resources dwindle and scrutiny increases, those supervisors who have tolerated banditry among their direct reports will undoubtedly suffer the wrath of higher-level managers and the marketplace.

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