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# Trends. Once, Shame on You, Twice, Shame on Me: Recapitulation of Scandal in the United Kingdom

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For the second time in a little more than two years, Peter Mandelson, often cited as the closest political confidant of the United Kingdom's Prime Minister, Tony Blair, has resigned from the government under scandalous clouds. Last time, as head of the Trade and Industry Ministry, he did not appropriately record obtaining a loan from an individual whose business interests were investigated by his department. This time, he admitted to reversing a decision to deny citizenship to a businessman who contributed significant funds for a project that Mr. Mandelson once supervised.

Analysts, journalists, and observers have been wittingly and unwittingly employing theories of personality in attempting to "explain" Mr. Mandelson's misbehavior. Some have focused on the contrast between his shrewd, political judgment in support of others and his seeming ineptness concerning his own behavior--as if consistency in all realms is to be expected. Others have cast aspersions via the mechanism of a character flaw--whether a tainted seed from birth or developed through experience and resistant to change. Still other theories of personality yield inferences concerning the degree of awareness of transgression, as well as its control.

Few individuals who have arrogated to themselves the authority to "explain" Mr. Mandelson have noted the significance of situational elements as elicitors of behavior--either largely independent of dispositional elements ("within the person") or interacting with such elements. Yet the power of situational elements in eliciting and affecting behavior--especially misbehavior--has been well-documented in scientific psychology (cf. Conway et al, 1996; Fein, 1996; Gilbert & Malone, 1995; Miller et al, 1990). So, the prevalence of assuming the contrary impedes efforts to develop selection, management, and rehabilitation programs to attenuate the frequency and intensity of scandalous behavior. In fact, predilections to attribute causality for scandalous behavior to dispositional elements of the perpetrator--regardless of the genesis of such predilections--may make good or even hard copy for the reading public but miss the mark of the nature of politics. (See Conway, M., Pizzamiglio, M. T., Mount, L. (1996). Status, communality, and agency: Implications for stereotypes of gender and other groups. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 71, 25-38; Fein, S. (1996). Effects of suspicion on attributional thinking and the correspondence bias. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 70, 1164-1184; Gilbert, D. T., & Malone, P. S. (1995). The correspondence bias. *Psychological Bulletin*, 117, 21-38; Hoge, W. (January 25, 2001). British aide is ousted from office once again. *The New York Times*, <http://www.nytimes.com>; Miller, A. G., Ashton, W. A., & Mishal, M. (1990). Beliefs concerning the features of constrained behavior: A basis for the fundamental attribution error. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 59, 635-650.) (Keywords: Peter Mandelson, Scandal, UK, United Kingdom.)