Leadership in Action: Courage, the Critical Leadership Differentiator

We are fascinated with our leaders! The success of enduring organizations and institutions is largely attributed to their leaders, as is evident in the popular press, anecdotal accounts and widely held beliefs. Leadership researchers and numerous theories doing the rounds over the last five decades and more have attempted to explain what makes a great leader, and consequently, how organizations should select and develop their leaders. As a result, one finds a complex array of desired leader personality traits, behaviours, definitive styles, situational variants, and value-laden ideal-types (servant, charismatic, transformational-transactional duality and authentic leadership) to choose from. While these leadership theories seek to provide prescriptive guidance on what goes into the making of a good leader, not many touch upon the equally critical aspect of the emergence of bad or dangerous leadership; it being, at the most, implied that the lack of observance of the stipulations of a specific theory would result in unsuccessful or bad leadership.

However, the recent spurt in high-profile ethical lapses in some of the world’s top organizations has turned the spotlight directly on the ethical facet of leadership and decision-making. Understandably, if leaders take the credit for the success of organizations, conversely, they need to be held equally responsible for organizational failures. While decisions made with all the good intent behind them can yet result in bad outcomes, it is where the leader’s intent itself is questionable that we need to be wary. So, incompetence alone is not the full reason for their demonstrated inadequacies; they are more directly and conscientiously responsible for their actions that lead to organizational harm.

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and failures. This important issue has not been addressed adequately in the ethics debate as to why some leaders act as per high ethical and moral standards; while others, equally smart and seemingly intelligent, do not. Is it only ignorance or a lack of understanding of appropriate ethical behaviour under the given circumstances, or is it something more than that?

Lack of courage to do the right thing is one commonly observed failure on the part of leaders. There is a stream of leadership research that recognizes the critical role of courage in leaders. It is an important facet that we believe can help answer some of the questions raised above. Once we have taken into account all that a leader is and all that the leader brings to bear upon the situation, in the final analysis, the leader must yet demonstrate the courage to go ahead and do what needs be done. Good leaders do that. There are two approaches to this: while some may go about it in a slightly cautious, politically savvy manner, others are more upfront and direct in their approach.

In our research, we explored the relationship between leader courage and how leaders come to be judged for their actions and decisions—specifically, right and wrong leadership behaviours. Why some leaders come to be recognized as exemplars and models for others to emulate, while others come to signify what has been identified as “bad leadership” (Kellerman, 2004)? Based on our research into two national-level crises in the Indian context, supported by additional data from wider real-world case studies, we identify and expand on the role of “leader courage” as the causal discriminating factor in inducing these differentiated behaviours. We posit that above a base-level presence of leader-like traits and behavioural characteristics in today’s environment, other things being equal, leader courage is the critical factor that differentiates between authentic leaders and ineffectual or non-leaders. We propose a two-axis leader courage typology, where the moral and physical courage dimensions of leader actions and decisions reflect a more practical and enduring appreciation of exhibited leadership. The framework enables the classification of leaders into four types: ‘authentic’, ‘non-leaders’, ‘misguided’ and ‘ineffectual’; thus helping us to develop insights into the pitfalls that all leaders need to watch out for. As we describe below, we believe this framework provides a robust typology that is a reasonably reliable indicator of how leaders will end up being judged by history for their actions. In our discussion, we also validate the principal axioms of our framework against some recent events, which helps to throw light on these authentic and ineffectual or non-leadership behaviours in our current environment.
Altruism, Ethics and Leadership: Brief Background

Societies have long been concerned about leaders and their ethics. This is evident in countless popular epics and mythologies, such as the philosophical discourse between Krishna and Arjuna from the epic *Mahabharata*, recounted in the *Bhagavad Gita* (Radhakrishnan, 2004). More concrete evidence is present from around the fifth century BC onwards in the writings attributed to early philosophers, such as Lao Tzu, Plato, Aristotle, Kautilya\(^1\) and the later middle-ages philosophers who tried answer these, at one level, political dilemmas in human life. In fact, the cumulative learning from a number of these treatises forms the basis of current theories of ethics and morality. The fundamental ethical principles that can be used for guidance or justification of one’s choice in a difficult situation are (Weiss, 2003): (i) ethical relativism (a self-interest approach), (ii) utilitarianism (a consequentialist [results-based] approach), (iii) universalism (a deontological [duty-based] approach), (iv) rights (an entitlement-based approach), and (v) justice (procedures, compensation, and retribution). Amongst other influential studies, Kohlberg (1969) laid down three levels of moral development (comprising six stages), as a guide for observing a person’s level of moral maturity in conducting organizational transactions; namely, pre-conventional (self-orientation), conventional (others orientation), and post-conventional (universal, humankind orientation), which has been widely used as an index of the level of ethical maturity of practising leaders/managers (e.g., Jones, 1991; Weaver, Trevion and Cochran, 1999).

We know that leaders are often called upon to make critical choices in difficult decision situations, which require them to choose the right from the wrong—choices which at times are presented clearly as between the difficult and easy, while at others in a fuzzy, unclear manner. To make the right choice under such circumstances calls for leader courage, both a moral conviction and raw physical fortitude, interwoven together in complex ways. As Weiss (2003: 8) puts it: “Ultimately, ethical principles alone cannot answer for anyone what the noted theologian Paul Tillich called ‘the courage to be’ in serious ethical dilemmas or crises.” Bazerman and Watkins (2004: 215) speak about the leadership quality of “Courage—the willingness to, as John F. Kennedy put it, ‘speak truth to power.’”

Bazerman and Watkins (2004: 152), in their work into “predictable surprises,” find that these happen because leaders cannot bring themselves up “to be

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\(^1\) Also known as Chanakya (c. 350–283 BC), Advisor and Prime Minister to the first Maurya Emperor Chandragupta (c. 340–293 BC), and the architect of his rise to power
courageous, and to stand up to special interests”, and conclude that “courage is one leadership quality that is indispensable in [the] efforts to mobilize to prevent predictable surprises (p. 215).” Kellerman (2004), in her work describing seven types of bad leadership, e.g., incompetent, rigid, intemperate, callous, corrupt, insular and evil, suggests that bad leadership can be defined either as immoral or ineffective, or a combination of the two. Pfeffer and Sutton (2006), who propose that evidence-based management grounded in hard facts can provide rich opportunities for those leaders and companies that actually implement such an approach, end by asking, “The question remains: Who will have the courage and wisdom to do it (p. 238)?”

In view of the above, it may seem somewhat surprising that more has not been done to consciously incorporate ethics and moral courage into leadership studies. Day and Antonakis (2012: 13) also point to this need in their introductory chapter in the section on “Emerging Issues”:

It is surprising that ethics and ethical leadership has not been a mainstay of leadership researchers. Indeed, Bass (1985)—one of the most prominent figures in the field—did not make the distinction between authentic (i.e., ethical) and inauthentic (i.e., unethical) transformational leaders until more than a decade after he published his theory (see Bass, 1998; Bass & Steidlemeier, 1999). The ethics of leadership and a leader’s level of moral development are increasingly becoming essential elements of leadership research and theory (Turner Barling, Epitropaki, Butcher, & Milner, 2002). Future leadership models should consider the ethics of leader means and ends, as well as ways in which leader moral orientation can be developed and otherwise improved (Day, Harrison & Halpin, 2009).

This paper is an effort in this direction.

**Courage in Leaders: Evidence from Real-World Crises**

In a study (Bangari, 2005) of two contemporary national-level crises by one of the authors of the present paper, namely, the Kargil border intrusions and the IC-814 Kandahar hijacking crisis, both of which occurred in 1999, it was observed that the behaviours and actions of the leaders and their institutional representatives was keenly followed in the media, often-times magnified and put under the scanner in the emerging information environment.

The Kargil crisis came about with the covert occupation of dominating heights across the Line of Control (LoC) by armed groups owing allegiance to Pakistan-Occupied Kashmir during the period April–May 1999. The groups were later
reported to be closely supported by the regular Pakistani Army. The Indian Army’s efforts to push back these nearly 550–650 intruders went on for nearly three months, before a mutually agreed to withdrawal was effected. The Kandahar hijacking involved the Indian Airlines flight IC-814 from Kathmandu (Nepal) to New Delhi, with 178 passengers and 11 crew members on board, which was hijacked midway by five armed men on 24 December 1999. The hijackers belonged to militant groups fighting for an independent state of Kashmir and their demands were based on securing the release of a number of their imprisoned leaders. The crisis was finally resolved with the Indian government agreeing to some of their demands in the negotiations that followed. (See Appendices 1 and 2 for brief summaries of the two crises.)

What stood out quite distinctly in the crises coverage and our grounded theory analysis was the presence or absence of “courage” exhibited by the top decision-makers and their institutional functionaries in the face of tough choices they were called upon to make during the course of the crises. Courage exhibited in making tough but correct choices in a crisis situation, taking into account all the stakeholders’ interests from a long-term perspective, also shows greater responsiveness and accountability to the stakeholders in the crisis context. In the Kargil intrusions crisis, frontline soldiers and junior military officers displayed tremendous physical courage in their repeated assaults up difficult slopes, facing near suicidal odds, to evict the intruders. All along, they courageously shouldered ‘moral’ responsibility for the intrusions (in an institutional sense), holding themselves accountable to public stakeholders for setting right the lapse. In sharp contrast, in the Kandahar IC-814 hijacking crisis, there appeared to be a total abdication of responsibility by the top leadership—both political and bureaucratic. This behaviour was reflected in their not owning up to their responsibilities and shying away from doing their utmost. The tendency to ‘look over their shoulders’, in an effort to pass on responsibility, and worse, a selfish concern with ‘keeping their backsides covered’ when bold action was required to be taken upfront, reflects clearly a lack of moral courage. Consequently, the Kandahar crisis soon spun out of control, with the Indian government finally being pressured into making compromises with their own (earlier) loftily stated criterion of “no bargaining” and agreeing to release three top militant leaders in exchange for the hostages. To add insult to injury, the nation witnessed the awkward spectacle of the terrorists being escorted to their freedom by a high-ranking Union minister, (The Hindu, 2001), which is still a subject of debate and controversy, shrouded by conflicting claims and counter-claims (Singh, 2006).
Evidence from these crisis studies into the socio-psychological responses of the leaders, their close advisors and the bureaucracy during crisis decision-making, with regard to the responsibility entrusted to them, brings to fore issues related to their accountability towards stakeholders from a moral perspective. Though decision-makers in the public domain may seek to take refuge behind the anonymity of their offices, Moore and Sparrow (1990: 151) nevertheless hold that since they act with the “license granted by others, on behalf of others, and with materials provided by others, their work is intrinsically morally significant. Their fundamental duty is to articulate, and seek to produce, a shared conception of what a just, decent, and competent society would do in their domain.” Similar moral obligations also devolve upon business leaders with regard to the ethics of the choices they make (Banerji and Krishnan, 2000; Bass and Steidlmeier, 1999; Kanungo and Mendonca, 1996; and Seeger, 2001).

Leadership research has acknowledged the importance of values and ethics in leadership, as well as the need for an ethical environment in organizations and institutions (Ciulla, 2004; Kanungo and Mendonca, 1996). Although Kanungo and Mendonca (1996: 78) found that “management research has centred primarily on the achievement and power phenomena within organizations to the complete exclusion of examining altruistic motives and behaviours among organisational members”, philosophers and political scientists have for long recognized the need for ethical leaders.

Research has finally got around to defining what ethical behaviour implies. However, our deeper understanding of what motivates and differentiates leaders who make ethical (or value-congruent) decisions from those who do not, is still rather fuzzy. How do we explain the ethically deviant behaviour of the leaders that we observe around us in everyday life? Researchers talk of the need for moral virtues in leaders (Bass and Steidlmeier, 1999; Kanungo and Mendonca, 1996) and the need for moral courage to take positions “in a way that elevates and dignifies public enterprises; in a way that makes them more consistent with what would be determined to be in the public interest if effective public deliberation occurred (Moore and Sparrow 1990: 160).”

Finding the courage to act in situations encompassing ethical dilemmas is … far more than an intellectual problem. It may well be that not all the emotions that grant the necessary courage are very attractive…. Indeed, courage generally comes from many things other than an intellectual commitment to one’s cause. It comes from psychological sources such as anger at one’s opponents, love of one’s colleagues, fear of humiliation, and rage at bureaucratic sluggishness.
We recognise, then, that virtue requires the cultivation of stomach and heart, as well as mind (ibid.: p. 161).

**Values Framework**

Leadership research has recognized the importance of leader values as an important variable in predicting their influence and effectiveness, as evident from the end outcomes (Blanchard and O’Connor, 1997; O’Toole, 1995; Zaccaro, Kemp and Bader, 2004). Analyzing leadership though is a complex process, and one does not expect to gain a complete understanding of it on the basis of a limited set of attributes and observations. According to Zaccaro (2007: 7), “Leader attributes likely exhibit complex multiplicative and curvilinear relationships with leadership outcomes, and trait conceptualizations of leadership need to reflect this complexity.” Yet a leader’s decisions and the choices s/he makes tell us a lot about the nature and character of a leader and can help predict leader effectiveness in the longer term. We therefore view leader values as the prime driver of leader motivation, behaviour and the leadership process. These are evident to us in the courage exhibited by leaders in the choices they make in critical situations, which we take as an indicator of where they truly stand (see Figure 1), in line with the observations of Bazerman and Watkins (2004), Kanungo and Mendonca (1996), Kellerman (2004), Moore and Sparrow (1990), Weiss (2003), amongst others. As we argue below, leader decisions/choices reflect leader courage and the underlying values, which go towards categorizing leader types and assessing their long-term effectiveness from organizational and societal perspectives.

**Proposed Framework of Leader Courage**

The lessons from these two crises, in conjunction with our observations from a number of other instances and contexts, presented as mini-cases (see Appendix 2 “Profiles in Silent Courage” and examples referred to in the discussion below), help us to identify two discrete dimensions that define courage in the leaders
for our times: (i) moral courage, defined as steadfast moral conscientiousness, i.e., the courage and conscientiousness to correctly evaluate the right from the wrong, without fear or prevarication; it is one’s intrinsic courage to make the correct choices when confronted with decision dilemmas, in the larger societal, longer-term interests, aligned with stringent universal human values; and (ii) physical courage, i.e., the courage to stand up for what one judges to be morally right—going to the extent of facing privation and hardship (fortitude), and exercising self-control over temptations and weaknesses of various kinds (temperance).

We follow Miller’s (2000) usage of contrasting descriptions of courage and cowardice to label these two axes. Along the moral dimension, moral righteousness aligned with universal, humankind orientation is contrasted against moral cowardice aligned with narrow self-orientation at the opposite end (Kanungo and Mendonca, 1996; Kohlberg, 1969). Similarly, along the physical courage dimension, leaders who exhibit physical courage by standing up and acting for their beliefs, at one end, are ranged against the ineffectual and cowardly leaders at the other. The presence or absence of these two courage dimensions helps us to classify leaders into a proposed four-quadrant typology, as seen in Figure 2.

As we go on to discuss the typology of our framework, we would like to draw the attention of readers towards the dynamic nature of this classification, which shifts with time, and the actions of leaders, as well as towards the difficulty in classifying leader actions in some instances, as fine judgment may need to be used in such cases. This is especially the case when observed in routine circumstances. However, in crises situations, when leader values are more directly challenged, leader courage and actions are more transparent to the observers, who can sense the presence and/or absence of these courage dimensions. We come back to the point of how the framework can be applied at the managerial level in the discussion on managerial and policy implications.

**Discussion of the Typology**

The immense scope for variations in human sense-making, cognition and responses makes it difficult to accurately predict how different individuals in organizations will respond even when confronted with similar circumstances. This stems from differences in their personal characteristics and behaviours, their value systems and beliefs, and the parent organizational culture, which plays a significant part in the development of ethical responses of the employees. As observed in the two crisis case studies, the response of the leaders, who
may well be equally endowed with intelligence and experience at their jobs, could be quite different, reflecting in the choices they finally make. Their choices are hypothesized to be influenced by their stands along the two courage dimensions under these circumstances. Increasingly, society expects its leaders to stand up for them, for what is right; and good leaders exhibit these characteristics, as evident in recent leadership research (Bazerman and Watkins 2004; Kanungo and Mendonca, 1996; Kellerman, 2004; Weiss, 2003).

Notice how Greenleaf (2002: 24) describes the “ferment” in support of servant leadership (in the manner of action-orientation) on its way to becoming a “major society-shaping force”:

…many, having made their awesome decision for autonomy and independence from tradition, and having taken their firm stand against injustice and hypocrisy, find it hard to convert themselves into affirmative builders of a better society. How many of them will seek their personal fulfilment by making the hard
choices, and by undertaking the rigorous preparation that building a better society requires? (italics in original).

Bazerman and Watkins (2004: 36) distinguish between what they call “the vision for change” that existed in the Clinton/Gore Administration in the United States, while referring to the initial draft of the Gore Commission on Aviation Safety and Security (1996), and their inability to actually see it through all the way, “lacking the courage to act forcefully on its vision”, when faced with “formidable organizational and political barriers.” Thus, leaders routinely face dilemmas in actually acting out their moral convictions: while some do, many others simply do not, for numerous, seemingly valid reasons that they use to justify their own choices. While these slip-ups may not be very discernible under most routine circumstances (without implying that these are, therefore, any less important!), the distinct character of any crisis per se makes such slip-ups so much more visible to the prying eyes of the media and expectant stakeholders. Crises, often, call upon leaders and organizations to make choices that make their “fundamental ethical stance highly visible (Seeger, Sellnow and Ulmer, 2003: 219).” The lens of the media “strips an organization’s ethical framework to its most basic elements and makes these available for close public scrutiny (Seeger and Ulmer, 2001: 369).”

In fact, Kanungo and Mendonca’s (1996) work in this field is partially aligned with our proposed framework in some ways, wherein they identify the following cardinal human moral virtues underlying one’s manifest behaviour, in what is more widely and socially accepted as morally correct, from within one’s inner self and the prevailing philosophical discourse: prudence, justice, fortitude and temperance. While “prudence” and “justice” can together be interpreted as pursuits of moral truth, depending on one’s fair subjective evaluation, “fortitude” and “temperance” place demands on one’s physical courage to actually practise one’s moral convictions to their logical end.

**High Moral Courage and High Physical Courage**

Leaders who exhibit both high moral and high physical courage exemplify the ideal leader. They do what is right as per universally accepted norms and human values. Such leaders are not constrained by boundaries of narrow nationalism, or any other -isms for that matter, if they run counter to basic human values and more everlasting truths. They are, indeed, the ‘saviours’ in a crisis, and their life’s work is genuinely focused on the eventual empowerment, liberation and well-being of their followers. Very few leaders truly match up against these extremely exacting standards: some from our times are Mahatma Gandhi,
Martin Luther King, Mother Teresa and Nelson Mandela (see also Bass and Steidlmeier, 1999; Ciulla, 2004; and Kanungo and Mendonca, 1996). From what we observe, two characteristics set these leaders apart from others: (i) they are change agents, in the sense that they challenge the prevailing status quo and seek to improve the state of affairs to the best of their abilities; and (ii) they are genuinely concerned about their followers, seeking to empower and liberate them, and eventually bring dignity into their lives.

The inclusion of leaders such as Gandhi, who stood for peace and propagated non-violence as a means to achieving larger goals, in this category is not inconsistent with our typology. Gandhi advocated a struggle on the basis of truth and moral force. This, in fact, required greater commitment and personal sacrifice from him, as he had to be right upfront of the masses he sought to motivate to do his bidding. And even though he was against physical violence, he never shied away from physically putting himself on the line during his many confrontations with the ruling British authority. His hunger strikes are a classic example. During the Dandi Salt March in 1930 with 78 satyagrahis, he led from the front, prepared to face whatever the British administration of the day would throw at him. Gandhi was convinced that non-violent civil disobedience would form the basis for any subsequent protest. One of Gandhi’s principal concepts, ‘satyagraha’ goes beyond mere ‘passive resistance’—it was a synthesis of the Sanskrit words ‘Agraha’ (persuasion) and ‘Satya’ (Truth). For him, it was crucial that Satyagrahis found strength in their non-violent methods. In his own words, “Truth (satya) implies love, and Firmness (agraha) engenders and therefore serves as a synonym for force… that is to say, the force which is born of truth and love or non-violence (Easwaran, 1997: 148).

“If we are Satyagrahis and offer Satyagraha, believing ourselves to be strong… we grow stronger and stronger everyday. With our increase in strength, our Satyagraha too becomes more effective, and we would never be casting about for an opportunity to give it up (Gandhi, 1924).” He did not flinch from holding back his struggle for freedom against the British (going against even the majority opinion of his followers) if he felt that the moral upper hand or righteousness that was the sacred bedrock of his philosophy was in danger of being violated. Only when this moral upper hand was restored (on to the side of the freedom struggle), would he agree to give the green signal to resume the struggle in such instances.

An important facet of this courage is that it is not a trait one is born with. Instead it is consciously practised on a daily basis. As Rajmohan Gandhi (2006),
grandson of Mahatma Gandhi, put it, “It is not that Gandhi did not know fear. But what’s more important is that he stood up and acted, despite the fears within him.” Evidence of this courage is also present around us in many ordinary instances in our daily lives.

Amongst everyday heroes who exemplify this at the grassroots was Warrant Officer Hugh Thompson, who on 16 March 1968, landed his helicopter between a group of fleeing Vietnamese civilians and pursuing American soldiers, to confront the officer in charge and proceeded to get the civilians evacuated (Angers, 1999). In the heat of the battle, it called for high moral courage to characterize the conduct of fellow American soldiers as immoral and despicable. In addition, this was backed by tremendous physical courage to confront and face them down to save the lives of the Vietnamese civilians, exposing himself and his crew to being shot at by the much larger body of confronting ground troops around them.

Are these leaders then the same as transformational leaders? Our assessment is that these ideal leader types that we describe here go even beyond how transformational leadership has come to be defined and viewed over time. In this context, it is interesting to note that Bass’ original transformational leadership theory had subsequently come under attack by critics who saw in it shades of subtle exploitation by leaders to achieve their own goals, foisted upon often unsuspecting followers (Bass and Avolio, 1993; Western, 2008). Hence, these leaders who exhibit both high moral and high physical courage in pursuit of larger societal goals, as described above, can more appropriately be called “truly authentic” leaders. The term has come to be used in more recent leadership research, which has begun to identify authentic leadership as an ideal amongst leaders in our organizations and society (Avolio and Gardner, 2005; Luthans and Avolio, 2003). However, there does not appear to be any consensus on how it is defined and what these leaders stand for (Cooper, Scandura and Schriesheim, 2005). Some researchers speak of authentic leadership in specific contexts and situations. It is not clear whether authentic leaders can be looked upon as such across organizational contexts and situations.

George et al. (2007: 130) describe authentic leaders as those who “demonstrate a passion for their purpose, practice their values consistently, and lead with

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2 Transformational leadership is referred to here as is defined by Bass (1985) and in some of the contemporary work. Over time, as is the case with most models dealing with complex issues, there are iterative refinements to encompass aspects missed out earlier, which subsequently come to assume higher profile and to being viewed as major weaknesses.
their hearts as well as their heads. They establish long-term, meaningful relationships and have the self-discipline to get results. They know who they are.” Goffee and Jones (2005: 87) observe that “[l]eaders and followers both associate authenticity with sincerity, honesty, and integrity. It’s the real thing—the attribute that uniquely defines great leaders.” Avolio, Gardner and Walumbwa (2005: xxiii) write: “Authentic leaders are leaders who: (a) know who they are and what they believe in; (b) display transparency and consistency between their values, ethical reasoning and actions; (c) focus on developing positive psychological states such as confidence, optimism, hope, and resilience within themselves and their associates; (d) are widely known and respected for their integrity.”

From our research, we take the view that along with the other basic personality and behavioral traits expected of successful leaders, authentic leaders are those who are also wise and courageous enough to pursue what’s the right course and in the long-term interests of organizational stakeholders and the wider society. In fact, in their later work, Bass and Steidlmeyer (1999: 191) speak of “authentic transformational leaders,” who “increase awareness of what is right, good, important, and beautiful… help to elevate followers’ needs for achievement and self-actualization… foster in followers higher moral maturity… move followers to go beyond their self-interests for the good of their group, organization, or society.”

Eulogization of this leadership type is also to be found in numerous religions and epics, as evident from their projection as the real heroes and saviours of humankind. Hindu epics, for example, project both Rama and Arjun as ideal leaders, who exhibited both moral courage and physical prowess in their fight on the side of higher human values and universal truths. But, despite the inspirational ideal before humanity for centuries, leaders actually come with their own sets of inadequacies and weaknesses in real life, some of which are in the other quadrants of this leader typology. In this quadrant too, aside from these righteous and ideal leaders, we have others more mortal—i.e., those who exhibit somewhat lower and a varying mix of levels of courage along the two dimensions. Many of these types too are looked upon as successful leaders, despite their few frailties, as they variously rise to the occasion when needed. The Hi PC–Hi MC (High Physical Courage–High Moral Courage) quadrant, therefore, provides tremendous scope for a rich description of a wide variety of successful real-world leader types that occupy distinctly different spaces within it.
For example, next to and lower down the hierarchy to the truly authentic leaders at the apex, are other variants of good leadership, which include, in order, transformational leaders and transactional constructionists (Lichtenstein, Smith and Torbert, 1995) (see Figure 3). Still closer to the margins and bordering the Lo MC–Hi PC (Low Moral Courage–High Physical Courage) quadrant are the transactional opportunists (ibid.), who exhibit negative shades of fairness in their conduct. “Such ‘opportunists’ practise manipulation, deception and contingent reinforcement for utilitarian purposes. Their ethical awareness is to exchange ‘an eye for an eye’ (Bass, 1997).” Further, placed somewhat above and to their right, along the physical courage dimension, are the silent, conscientious soldiers/bureaucrats/volunteers and others, who do their duty, braving stiff odds and shoulde...
incident eerily similar to the two crisis case studies described earlier, during the 26/11 terror attacks in Mumbai, there were many a foot soldiers who displayed tremendous moral and physical courage while doing their jobs. We are aware of the gallantry displayed by Major Sandeep Unnikrishnan who moved in to cover and arrange the evacuation of an injured commando; handing him over to his team members, he turned to give chase to the terrorists by himself, saying, “Do not come up. I will handle them (The Hindu, 2008).” Not just the soldiers and policemen, there were also ordinary people who stayed put at their workstations at the Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus and the hotels that were attacked, risking their lives to save others; notable amongst them being the actions of Assistant Sub-Inspector Tukaram Umbale who, armed with just a wooden stick, chased, lunged on and grappled with an armed terrorist, which led to the eventual arrest of this lone survivor amongst the attackers (Zore, 2009).

**Low Moral Courage and Low Physical Courage**

Those who lack both moral and physical courage are really “spunk-less” non-leaders (described as the absence of leadership, i.e., laissez-faire) (Antonakis, 2012; Tejeda, Scandura and Pillai, 2001) since they lack courage and vitality—essential attributes traditionally associated with being a leader. However, they revel in their position, and their self-seeking behaviour is characterized by the manipulative use of position and power. They are in the leadership saddle merely on account of their position or inheritance, and they represent, at best, self-perceived benevolent autocrats. Existing in a world of more make-believe than reality, their conduct is laced with a potential for degeneration into organizationally induced helplessness (Martinko and Gardner, 1982) and ultimate decadence, in the face of a real crisis and turbulence. At the extreme are tinpot dictators who are wholly dependent upon brutal force to keep their subjects in line, like bullies who can subdue only the meek; but when faced with a viable threat to their authority, they prefer to turn their tails and run. Examples are the likes of Saddam Hussein (epitomized by his meek surrender, when cornered in an underground refuge, to save his own life after all the noise and boasts he had earlier made and consequently brought his country to ruin); and the military dictatorship overseeing the administration in erstwhile East Pakistan, who were swiftly out-manoeuvred in the 1971 Indo-Pak War and surrendered meekly, resulting in the creation of an independent Bangladesh.

Many in the United States would tend to believe that the neo-conservative “chicken hawks” fall into this category. These ‘activists’, many of whom dodged
the draft during the Vietnam War in the ’60s and ’70s, were ardent proponents of the 2003 War against Iraq to oust Saddam Hussein—a war they championed using a plethora of lies, misrepresentation of facts, exaggerations, etc. Some of these modern-day crusaders, who actively pulled strings and used every trick in the book to dodge the draft and avoid serving in Vietnam themselves, project to the world that they feel obligated to save freedom, democracy and the world from evil dictators, who they perceive are bent upon destroying it.

Elsewhere, close to the inner borders of the Lo PC–Lo MC quadrant are those public functionaries who typically seek not to rock their own boats in the face of ethical dilemmas by asking uncomfortable questions, even when things are obviously going wrong, because then they could be held accountable for the same. These spineless bureaucrats are the “clerks” (Moore and Sparrow, 1990: 151):

> Officials working in government (who) have sought refuge from the burden of acting for others in the anonymity of their offices. Unsure of their ground in proposing public purposes, afraid of criticism for taking more on themselves than was their due, many officials have made themselves clerks, subordinating their own moral feelings and intuitions to preexisting traditions (emphasis added).

During the Kandahar hijacking crisis, the decision-making machinery, comprising the high-level Crisis Management Group (CMG) of the government, including ministers and top bureaucrats, exhibited precisely this behaviour—they were mentally and physically paralyzed and remained so, even while the crisis deepened and the whole nation looked up to them to provide leadership and succour under the threatening circumstances. As if taking a cue from the CMG, across organizations and executive hierarchies, officials in charge bungled too and did not respond appropriately in the face of the developing crisis. Subsequently, when they no longer held any leverage or control over the crisis, i.e., when the “recovery window” (Edmondson et al., 2005) had gone past, it could only result in a meek surrender to the hijacker’s demands. Incompetent leaders who do not muster the courage to act when needed bring untold harm and miseries upon their followers, organizations and nations.

The outrage against such leaders is beginning to pick up strength. The public disappointment at this abdication of responsibility in the hour of need was evident in the post-26/11 terror attacks on Mumbai. Ordinary citizens demonstrated and carried out vigil to demand that action be taken against the state government leaders responsible for the lapse and lustreless response. The recent activism against corruption in the country (during May-August 2011)
owes not just to the media, but also to “the unearthing of one spectacular scam after another and the utter inability of the Manmohan Singh government to overcome a resulting paralysis of decision-making (that) has unsettled the moral foundations on which any political system rests (Dasgupta, 2011).” In effect, the public increasingly demands action from the political class—to exhibit both moral and physical courage. Dasgupta (ibid.) warns against this “headless chicken behaviour” and that the “importance of moral outrage against corruption shouldn’t be underestimated.”

**Low Moral Courage and High Physical Courage**

In contrast to the above, those who lack or are deficient along the moral courage dimension, but are action-oriented, i.e., capable in terms of their own physical courage and leadership abilities to galvanize their followers into action, fall into this category. For example, Saddam Hussein’s sons, thugs of the highest order, at least died fighting till the end and did not allow themselves to be captured alive, unlike their cowardly father. The former US Secretary of State, General Colin Powell’s conduct later in high office could possibly be said to fall into this category. A soldier who fought in Vietnam, this loyal camp follower failed when it came to rejecting evil conformity and defying immoral and imprudent orders to back the 2003 Iraq War. His presentation before the UN is likely to become a textbook case of moral cowardice by a public official who knew better. Powell later said that he felt “terrible about the claims he made in that now-infamous address—assertions that later proved to be false.” “Powell acknowledged that he has seen no evidence of a link between Saddam Hussein and the 9/11 terrorist attack. ‘I have never seen a connection.... I can’t think otherwise because I’d never seen evidence to suggest there was one (ABC News, 2005).’”

At one extreme, those who fit this description are the ‘bandits’ or ‘misguided’ elements. The emerging phenomenon of ‘suicide bombers’ amongst terrorists and other militant groups falls in here. Though the ideology of these individuals is highly debatable, yet the fact that they are highly motivated and committed to their cause, cannot be denied. In their own beliefs, they respond to ‘their higher calling’ and are prepared to make the supreme sacrifice for what they perceive is right. In this, though their motivations obviously are misguided (at least, seen from the majority human and universally accepted norms), they do possess and exhibit extraordinary levels of raw physical courage.

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It is important to highlight the nuanced element of political correctness that nevertheless appears to go with this categorization. Nobel Prize winner and game-theory economist Aumann (2006) opines that it is wrong to dismiss all the evils of the world as irrational. He goes on to elaborate that suicide bombers, for instance, are very rational. “They have a goal and they are ready to sacrifice themselves for a common cause”, he explains, in the context of society recognizing and facing up to these realities so that the world can develop more realistic strategies for handling these extreme aberrations.

Reverting back to the Kargil crisis, where we saw the conduct of the Indian army soldiers, especially the fighting units under its junior leadership, falling into the Hi MC–Hi PC quadrant, as they engaged valiantly in doing their duty in moments of national crisis. This does not, however, explain away questions of morality and accountability associated with the conduct of some middle- and high-ranking military leaders—if they were, as reported elsewhere, responsible for thrusting inadequately prepared and ill-informed troops into situations which they ought to have known (or judged) were beyond their capabilities. If that indeed was the case, this set of leadership must take the rap and be placed in this quadrant—for shirking from their moral responsibility of ensuring adequate preparedness and support to fighting troops that they ordered to uncertain fate under the circumstances.

Resolving the “Hitler Problem”

This discussion also helps take care of the one of the omnipresent dilemmas facing current leadership research: how to take care of the “Hitler problem” (Ciulla, 1995), or Hitler’s ghost (Kellerman, 2004)? Siding with the critics, Kellerman (2004: 11) questions: “Not only was his impact on the twentieth-century history arguably greater than anyone else’s, but he was also brilliantly skilled at inspiring, mobilizing, and directing followers. His use of coercion notwithstanding, if this is not leadership, what is?” Our overall view is that Hitler was a demagogue. We do not agree that he exhibited physical courage after he became Germany’s Chancellor (except maybe when faced with the prospect of being overrun/captured in his final moments by the Soviet troops; but then again, that was more from a desire to escape worse fate that lay in store ahead, than physical courage in any form). In fact, it will always be controversial to equate evil with leadership. Others too, supposedly charismatic and transformational but evil leaders, such as the Somali warlord Mohamed Farrah Aidid and Bin Laden, amongst others, can by no measure be equated with the righteous leadership that we define here, due to the complete lack of
ethics and morality in their means and ends (Bass and Steidlmeier, 1999; Burns, 1978; Ciulla, 2004). If at all these ‘evil’ demagogues can be considered leaders by any stretch of the imagination, this typology could questionably place them in some deeper recesses of the earlier described Lo MC–Lo PC quadrant. They may be leaders, but manipulative, ill-meaning, egotistical; can be extremely charismatic, so as to influence their followers immensely; but, above all, they are dangerous to society amidst which they successfully flourish till they meet with their just desserts, with time.

**High Moral Courage and Low Physical Courage**

Here are those who, despite knowing what is the right thing to do, are unable to withstand the physical pressures and demands that accompany tough choices. In case it is only a tactical retreat, as possibly Galileo’s actions could be construed in face of the retribution—excommunication and death—sought to be visited upon him by the all-powerful Roman Catholic Church, corrective moves over the longer term by the leader could eventually lead to a reassessment. But, if such a compromise with truth leads to untold harm being visited upon fellow humans, then there is no excuse for the lapses, as was the case when millions were exterminated by the Nazis during the Second World War, all because many of those involved happened to be ‘merely following orders.’

We also have those who pretend to be endowed with the desirable leadership characteristics in vogue during the season, but do not espouse them deeply. Those who profess or pretend to have moral courage, but lack physical courage and/or the capacity to act, are inevitably ineffectual. They are doomed to failure from the start because they are like “armchair strategists”, who can, at best, indulge only in “impression management.” Such leaders “stretch the facts to make themselves appear more confident than they actually are, to exaggerate their mental accomplishments, to project an image of greater strength and decisiveness beyond their actual endowments, and to say more about their good points rather than their shortcomings…. They appeal to the whims and fantasies of their followers (Bass, 1997).” Apologists and supporters may rationalize such behaviour by saying “…discretion is the better part of valour…”, “…live to fight another day…”, etc.; but, in the final analysis, the stark reality is that such individuals chicken(ed) out in a crunch situation—unless, one does make amends some time, and undoes the harms visited upon the affected.

Someone like Jimmy Carter, former United States President, who despite his very strong moral orientations and desire to do good, eventually proved ineffective on the ground during his presidency (Kellerman, 2004), would figure
in this quadrant. The League of Nations similarly would find a place here, as it proved ineffective in preventing the Second World War, despite its most honourable intentions, which were backed by only lip-service and no tough decisions and action on ground. We also include here the handicapped soldiers of morality, without the effective means to take the fight to the enemy; the lonely Brahmins; and those who become unsung martyrs in their struggle, going down without so much as a fight.

An essential requirement of one who is entrusted with public office is a moral obligation to develop and exercise professional skills, as well as adopt appropriate orientations to the position they hold (Moore and Sparrow, 1990). They elaborate: “Their fundamental duty is to articulate, and seek to produce, a shared conception of what a just, decent, and competent society would do in their domain. From this perspective, there may be nothing in the conduct of public office that is morally insignificant, for every official act is done on behalf of others (p. 151).” In like manner, leaders and institutions must be equally held responsible for their inadequacies in carrying out what they must do in the line of duty. Being faced with unplanned-for crisis situations is not reason enough for decision-makers’ inaction during such instances. In fact, leadership today, as so very aptly demonstrated in the post-9/11 aftermath—at many levels—is expected to rise to the occasion and answer these calls of duty, going beyond the routine limits. If a leader habitually abdicates in such times of crisis, it will eventually lead to organizational drift and demise. Impression management could then well be the norm in such an environment. This happens to be the general stakeholder perception about the attitudes of the bureaucracy, which has become adept over time in shrugging off their own non-performance to myriad causes, ranging from deficiencies of their superiors and subordinates to lack of resources, amidst an organizational environment of lack of accountability.

Since bad leaders come in all shades of grey, for the somewhat more sophisticated of the lot, Bass and Steidlmeier (1999: 190) use the term “pseudo-transformational leaders,” to describe those who

may have the public image of a saint but privately are deceptive devils. They may appear to their followers to behave as a transformational leader but this appearance is deceptive for inwardly they remain more interested in themselves than their followers. They knowingly focus their followers on fantasies instead of attainable visions. They engage in shams and pretense. And these masquerades are at the expense of their followers. They are pseudo-transformational.
So, while these leaders masquerade as being persons with high morals, in reality they do lack both moral and physical courage, falling into the Lo MC–Lo PC quadrant, where they belong.

The “Wisdom” Dilemma: When Does Manoeuvring Cross the Thin Line?

In the earlier reference to Galileo’s recantation before the Church, there were elements of a dilemma: whether or not it was the only realistic option under the circumstances and therefore justified. During our executive class discussions, we find that managers often tend to justify their actions of making compromises in tough situations, saying that they had no other way out: “Speaking up or acting otherwise would have been disastrous for my career; only to be replaced by somebody else, who would readily accept all the terms offered.” Some, whose conscience troubled them more, would justify their actions saying that they decided to wait instead for an opportune moment to right the wrongs being perpetrated, or that they resolved they would try to minimize the wrong being done. Badaracco (2001) agrees with both these tactics. He argues that

the most effective moral leaders in the corporate world often sever the connection between morality and public heroism. These men and women aren’t high-profile champions of right over wrong and don’t want to be. They don’t spearhead large-scale ethical crusades. They move patiently, carefully, and incrementally. They right—or prevent—moral wrongs in the workplace inconspicuously and usually without casualties (p. 121).

In the same vein, Reardon (2007: 60) speaks of the need for “courage calculation” in business leaders, “a method of making success more likely while avoiding rash, unproductive, or irrational behaviour”, because in her long years studying human behaviour in organizations, she seldom came across courage as a matter of life and death.

Indeed, many will call it “wisdom”—knowing when to act, when the time is ripe. While we would tend to agree with this broad justification for routine contexts, our deeper point is that increasingly, leaders need to make “critical choices” in their day-to-day operations. We have earlier seen that small moral irritants and violations swept aside on a daily basis ultimately burgeoned and led to the collapse of large organizations with the consequent loss of trust of thousands of public stakeholders, much like Enron, WorldCom, Tyco and others (Bazerman and Watkins, 2004). We ask: Is this an acceptable state of affairs? Gardner and his colleagues, looking at creators and leaders recognized for their
achievements in their professional domains, found that these leaders from the field of business did not believe in what most other business personnel apparently believed—that one must trade moral and ethical responsibility for success (Gardner and Barberich, 2002). They found that while many of the others readily rationalized their beliefs, the professionals they spoke to had “disdain for peers who suspend[ed] their principles in order to fatten the bottom line (p. 62).”

For every manager who attempts to balance “political courage and political suicide” but comes good at an opportune moment later (Reardon 2007: 58), there will be many others who simply cannot reverse many of the compromises they would have made in the earlier course. Truly authentic leaders, such as Mahatma Gandhi, Nelson Mandela or Mother Teresa, would often choose not to be discrete even when the larger turn of events demanded it so. Take the example when Gandhiji called off the Non-Cooperation Movement in 1922 after the Chauri Chaura clashes. He did not make peace with the British during the Second World War, when he launched the Quit India Movement. He was also extremely reluctant to give his assent for the Partition of India later. For lesser mortals, though, this justification of being dictated to by discretion or wisdom may be enough pretext to put off action or take the easy way out (and that is why most of us shall possibly remain lesser mortals, in an analysis by history, and not be elevated to a higher pedestal). May be, we need to remind ourselves of Che Guevara’s reportedly last words: “I know you have come to kill me. Shoot, coward! You are only going to kill a man (Anderson, 1997: 739).”

This is the reason why we do not strictly buy into the wisdom angle to justify not making the right, but tough, choices when faced with critical situations, from the minor ones upwards. Those who do this would possibly fall somewhere along the intersection of the Hi MC–Lo PC and Lo MC–Lo PC quadrants, leaving themselves open to be judged by history, depending upon how they finally fare—and whether they do some good at some point in time in their lives.

**Overall Perspective: Differentiating the ‘Good’ From the ‘Bad’**

Our proposed typology gives us a good handle on real world leadership, both the good and the bad types—an issue previous research has tended to gloss over in its exuberance and identification of leadership with only the good and heroic (Kellerman, 2004). Three of the four quadrants of the proposed typology,
in one way or the other, denominate deficient leadership. A more sophisticated
treatment of the Hi MC–Hi PC quadrant, delineated above, helps to bring out
within it the many existing shades of acceptable real world leadership, placed
differently along the two courage dimensions, thus, giving a more
comprehensive picture of the inherent complexities of the leadership
phenomenon.

As we well know, all leaders certainly do not meet at all times the highly
restrictive expectations of ideal and authentic leadership, if it can be so defined
conclusively. Leader behaviours under different contexts could well place them
differently alongside this ideal state, at times, even spilling over into the other
quadrants. Transactional opportunists, the typical bureaucrats (‘clerks’), and
leaders with high moral values but who are not very effectual, like Jimmy
Carter, the former US President (Kellerman, 2004), are the other types of leaders
and managers we come across in our daily lives. More dangerous to society
and mankind, however, are leaders who are deeply entrenched within the other
three quadrants, e.g., suicide bombers, tinpot dictators and pseudo-
transformational leaders.

From among these broad categories of the proposed typology, it appears,
counter-intuitively to an extent, that the most dangerous to society are not the
suicide bombers, or even autocratic (often charismatic) despots and dictators,
who actually come to meet their just desserts, sooner than later, because of
their high profile and the intolerable scale of devastations inflicted upon society,
e.g., Idi Amin, Mohammed Farah Aidid (Somali military leader), Saddam
Hussain’s sons and even the likes of Hitler and Bin Laden. The more real,
insidious and longer-term damage to society is likely to be caused by those
with cowardice, but who manage to remain undetected for long. Examples of
such dangerous people are: Saddam Hussein (but for his obduracy in those
critical days before the launch of Operation Iraqi Freedom, he may well have
won another reprieve for himself, what with more than half the world and a
majority in the United States rooting for him!); the far-removed governing
military council in Myanmar; and corrupt politicians and spineless bureaucrats.
The complete scale of harm likely to be visited upon their own people by these
leaders, who are in the two quadrants to the left of our typology, is not fully
appreciated by the media, society and even the academia. Their thinking about
leadership is fashioned by what gets prominently splashed across newspapers’
pages and is the subject of current popular discourse; and not by what escapes
the people’s attention, gnawing constantly at the inner core and causing greater
harm.
Limitations of the Model and Managerial/Policy Implications

Limitations of the Model

One of the deficiencies of the proposed typology is that it does not fully capture the dynamically changing leadership behaviours in the real world. This is, however, a more widespread issue. Previous research has supported findings that leaders’ actions are governed by the prevailing organizational and environmental context (Avolio, 2007; Perrow, 1970; Selznick, 1957; and Vroom and Jago, 2007). So, we may well come across leaders whose actions fall in a particular quadrant during normal conditions, but fall into a distinctly different one when under pressure or in a crisis situation. For example, some leaders behave in a transformational manner when given a free hand and left to function with relative autonomy, but tend to exhibit distinctly transactional behaviours when they are themselves placed under closer supervision (Bass, Avolio and Goodheim, 1987; Hater and Bass, 1988; Shivers-Blackwell, 2004). As we have argued earlier, leaders who indulge in impression management may appear to be transformational to their followers for quite some time, until they are exposed in a crisis as pseudo-transformational. We have also talked of a temporary tactical retreat by leaders in the Hi MC–Lo PC quadrant when confronted with a difficult life-threatening choice or something closely parallel. Many of these complexities are not built into the framework at this stage. Further work in this direction will help to overcome and account for these concerns.

Future research could also look at expanding the coverage of the leader types incorporated and populating this model, based on empirical data and the development of fine-grained measurement criteria along the proposed axes. More work in this direction will also help to refine some of the ideas presented and the utility of this framework for managers faced with day-to-day leadership situations at their workplace.

Managerial Implications

There could be a reading that this model is applicable only to crisis situations. While we have brought out our typology with the help of salient examples, we believe that much of this works even when an individual is confronted with ‘non-crisis hard decisions’. Managers may either consciously overlook the applicability of this model to their own contexts or may not be able to extrapolate to their own case. We hope the following discussion helps to clarify some of these concerns of leaders and managers.
The managerial implications of our model become clearer in the emerging context when we appropriately redefine and expand the meaning associated with physical courage, away from merely our conventional understanding of the term. In today’s world, when most leaders may not really need to go out and face daunting challenges requiring physical courage, as it were, an appropriate analogous context would be to compare it with the option of cutting back on their own physical (creature) comforts, along with that of their families. For example, a bureaucrat who silently abides when asked by her political masters to overlook a violation of the law, or suitably interpret a rule—because she is afraid that were she not to do so, it may lead to her being dealt with a summary transfer to a punishment posting, which would upset her life’s rhythm, family comfort, children’s education, etc.—exhibits a clear lack of physical courage in this context. In an analogous case of a top CEO, it could be the possibility of losing his position, power or status that he has become accustomed to; that is, if the CEO were to hesitate from facing up to the truth and speaking up, that would exhibit a lack of physical courage in his case. When interpreted in the above manner, we find that the typology of courage proposed in this paper becomes directly relevant to the current managerial context, where, many a times, one may need to demonstrate both moral and physical courage, in different mixes, in the line of one’s duty. As pointed out earlier, leaders and managers need to remember that courage is not something that one is born with, but needs to be consciously practised on a daily basis.

Let us now take the case of the need for hard decisions during routine conditions versus crisis decision-making. Essentially, the differences appear to be in terms of the time available for decision-making and the fluidity of the situation faced. So, while decision-makers may look for ‘satisficing’, as against ‘optimal’, decisions during a crisis, when faced with ‘hard’ decisions in non-crisis situations, in contrast, they should be aiming for well-thought out, as close to rational, decisions. But, evidence does not necessarily support this.

True leaders display courage during crises to take the onus of their decision outcomes—since there is always an element of risk involved as the outcomes could be negative. When faced with ‘hard’ decisions, leaders need constancy of purpose to do the right thing. Why do leaders fail the test in non-crisis hard situations? Former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi is believed to have dithered in taking the decision to move forward in the Shah Bano case (The Hindu, 2003). Why did he agree to a compromise? Probably, because of a “quite authentic inability to think (Arendt, 1971: 417; cited in Assy, 1997)!” Quite to the contrary, Mahatma Gandhi never compromised on secularism in his lifetime.
The current Prime Minister, Dr. Manmohan Singh, also cuts a sorry figure because he cannot differentiate between the virtues and vices of blind obedience (Arendt, 1977; cited in Assy, 1997). It is in the same sense that leaders are called upon to display their constancy of purpose in making non-crisis hard decisions. One may decide to underplay the significance of what one is facing and take the easy way out—but that is not being courageous, as authentic leaders are. Then there is the phenomenon of Anna Hazare’s stand on the Lokpal (Anti-Corruption) Bill, backed by both moral and physical courage, that has captured the imagination of a vast section of the people (Sunday Times, 2011).

There is evidence in the corporate world that when faced with tough situations great leaders remember the period of trial as “a period of intense learning (Bartlett and McLean, 2006: 7).” Jeffery Immelt, then heading GE Plastics Americas, describes his own leadership experience—facing severe inflationary pressures with long-term, fixed-price contracts with key customers—as “one of these great journeys into your own soul. It’s not like anybody can give you the answer of how to do it (ibid.: 8).” So, even though the easy option then for him was “to break contracts and raise prices unilaterally, he refused because it would have taken a decade to recover customer relationships (ibid.).” It was important for him not to back off his own integrity, and this separates great leaders from lesser ones.

Can leaders develop “courage”? Organizations such as the military have long been engaged in the development of certain aspects discussed in this paper and, over time, seem to be pretty successful in some respects. As mentioned earlier, sensitization, knowledge and awareness help. Towards this end, we have developed an indicative self-assessment questionnaire (see Appendix 3) to help managers to evaluate themselves on these courage dimensions and, hopefully, to improve themselves and become better leaders.

Policy Implications

Amongst the policy implications of the foregoing discussion is the need for leaders at the top and middle leadership levels to be sensitized towards not only increased cognitive moral development, as most ethics-specific training aims to impart, but also to be given an exposure to what are the practical imperatives of occupying that moral high ground in real world terms. This will prepare them to face the harsh realities in the murky world of politics, crisis and decision-making, by exhibiting both the dimensions of courage—moral, as well as physical—when the situation so demands. As discussed earlier, there is also a need to be vigilant against those whose actions may not be visible and
high profile, but have the potential to inflict significant damage over time. For example, the oft-lamented rot in the Indian bureaucratic systems, even though things appear to be changing lately as a result of increased transparency resulting from greater stakeholder awareness and the parallel use of technology to facilitate governance. In their day-to-day routine tasks, leaders at all levels must realize the need to exercise vigilance and not take the easy choices offered.

Conclusion

In this paper, we began by identifying courage exhibited by leaders as the critical discriminator of leader performance and their long-term organizational and societal impact. We defined two dimensions of courage that leaders distinctly exhibit, particularly in a crisis situation, as also on a daily basis: moral courage and physical courage. We then proposed a framework along these two dimensions of moral and physical courage in leaders, which enables the classification of leaders into four types: ‘authentic’, ‘non-leaders’, ‘misguided’ and ‘ineffectual’. The subsequent discussion elaborated and built on this framework, which also provided some prescriptive guidelines for organizational leaders, trainers and mentors. In discussing leadership, Sternberg (2003) proposed the WICS framework (an acronym for wisdom, intelligence and creativity, synthesized). In this paper, we have squared the triangle by elaborating on the ‘Boldness/Daring’ dimension. We hope this is another step forward in the epic quest to comprehending the leadership phenomenon!

References


4 A recent comparison of the Indian and Chinese business environments gives India a rank of 134 in 2006 (up from 138 in 2005) on the ease of doing business; while China ranks at 93 (in 2006; up from 108 in 2005), as per a World Bank report on “Doing Business” (available online at: http://www.doingbusiness.org/). Corruption in the Indian system and its complex bureaucracy has generally been identified as one of the major factors holding back the growth of its economy.


Appendix 1: Brief Overview of the Crisis Case Studies

Kargil Intrusions 1999 Crisis

Kargil is a border district in the Indian state of Jammu & Kashmir (J&K), along the National Highway (NH) 1A—the lifeline to Ladakh—beyond the ZojiLa Pass. In the months preceding May 1999, armed groups, claiming allegiance to Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (PoK)-based militant groups fighting for the independence/secession of Kashmir, began occupying large unheld tracts across the Line of Control (LoC) overlooking NH 1A. Indian patrols ran into them only in the first week of May, but the magnitude of the incursions remained unclear till quite late. It was a crisis faced by the military and the government, which did not fit into their existing worldview of the ongoing insurgency and terrorist/militant strikes from across the borders in the state of J&K.

Initial attempts to downplay the incident soon gave way to a reluctant acceptance of “intelligence failure,” when the enormity of the task confronted the decision-makers. Over the next few weeks, the government launched a military offensive to clear the incursions physically, as also launched a parallel diplomatic offensive to take the truth about the incursion to the international community.

Said to be “India’s first media war,” there was immense interest generated among all sections of society, which manifested itself in diverse ways, fuelled by the so-called “live coverage” from the frontline and the funerals back home of those who died in the fighting. TV channels, print media, political parties and citizen groups jumped into the fray—raising issues, debating decisions and strategy, pressuring and showing the way forward to the government.

Simultaneously, neighbouring Pakistan refused to accept its complicity and instead rattled the nuclear spectre if its territorial integrity were to be violated. Thus, the two South Asian nuclear states appeared to be on the brink of a nuclear standoff—the closest that the world possibly came to one since the Cuban missile crisis (Hoodbhoy, 2002; Ramana and Nayyar, 2001; Riedel, 2002).

Finally, following the 4 July 1999 Washington declaration, Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif of Pakistan agreed to effect a withdrawal in his address to the nation (on 12 July). The crisis formally came to an end on 26 July 1999 when the Indian government declared that the sanctity of the LoC had once again been restored.
IC-814 Kandahar Hijacking 1999 Crisis

On 24 December 1999, Indian Airlines flight IC-814 from Kathmandu (Nepal) to New Delhi, with 178 passengers and 11 crew aboard, was hijacked midway by five armed men. While minutes counted, the plane, on being denied permission to land in Lahore, Pakistan, turned and landed in Amritsar. Here, a golden opportunity to resolve the hijacking crisis one way or the other was missed by the inept bungling on the part of the authorities responsible for taking and implementing counter-hijack actions. In the confusion, the aircraft took off from Amritsar after 48 minutes without refuelling. This time, it landed in Lahore, where it was refuelled and allowed to move on. The aircraft then sought permission to land in Kabul or Kandahar (in Afghanistan), but was not allowed to for lack of night-landing facilities. It then proceeded to and got permission to land in Dubai. Here, the hijackers released 26 women and children along with one dead, amidst American-backed negotiations, before taking off next morning for Kandahar.

For the next seven days, high drama was played out by the hijackers, the Indian government, the Taliban (who then effectively ruled Afghanistan), and the international representatives. In India, the nation’s attention was riveted by the ongoing events, heightened by media reports, the relatives’ actions, and the government’s dithering and confused pronouncements. Finally, the Indian government capitulated and agreed to release three hardcore terrorists in exchange for the passengers, culminating in the “awkward spectacle” of the Foreign Minister himself escorting the terrorists to their freedom and the agreed exchange.

The three terrorists released in exchange for the hostages disappeared after their release and later surfaced in Pakistan, carrying on activities in line with their avowed mission, detrimental to the peace and security of their target countries. They were: (i) Maulana Masood Azhar, who founded the militant group Jaish-e-Mohammed after he was released; the group is alleged to have been involved in the 13 December 2001 attack on the Indian Parliament in New Delhi, as also implicated for the kidnapping and murder of American journalist Daniel Pearl; (ii) Mushtaq Ahmed Zargar, former head of Al-Umar Mujahideen; the only Indian Kashmiri among the three released; currently active and based in Muzaffarabad, the capital of Pakistan-administered Kashmir; and (iii) Ahmed Omar Saeed Sheikh alias Omar Sheikh, a British national and graduate of London School of Economics; later arrested in Lahore for his alleged role in the kidnapping and murder of Wall Street Journal reporter Daniel Pearl in 2002; also alleged to have sent about US$ 100,000 from the United Arab Emirates to Mohammed Atta, who used the money in the weeks before carrying out the 9/11 terror attacks in the United States.
Appendix 2: Profiles in Silent Courage

Satyendra Dubey of the National Highway Authority of India

Satyendra Dubey was a project manager with the National Highways Authority of India in Gaya. He was an honest and upright officer who was killed for exposing the wrongdoings in the National Highway Authority of India (NHAI). Dubey was gunned down by unidentified assailants in Gaya on 27 November (Rediff.com, 2006). It subsequently emerged that he had written to the Prime Minister’s Office (PMO) about wrongdoings in the PM’s pet project, the Golden Quadrilateral, in addition to many other similar reports to local officers of NHAI. However, despite explicit requests to keep his identity a secret, it appears that this was not done. In his letters, Dubey had questioned the process of procurement of civil contractors for the Golden Quadrilateral Project, saying it was “manipulated and hijacked” by big contractors who submitted forged documents to justify their technical and financial capabilities to execute the project; he also gave specific instances of these. The murder led to sharp protests against the callous treatment accorded to Dubey’s efforts to highlight corruption in large-scale infrastructure projects and build opinion for the passing of a law to provide protection to honest officials who bring corruption to light.

Manjunath Shanmugam of Indian Oil

Manjunath, a 27-year-old sales manager with the Indian Oil Corporation (IOC), was killed in the Indian state of Uttar Pradesh for taking on the oil mafia (The Indian Express, 2005; The Telegraph, 2005). Considered to be an upright and honest officer, Manjunath was on a mission to check the adulteration of diesel and petrol with kerosene in his area. On 20 November 2005, his body was recovered from an area under the Maholi police station of Sitapur, a neighbouring district of Lakhimpur Kheri, where he was posted. He had earlier sealed the Manu Mittal petrol station in Gola on Sitapur Road and had recommended cancellation of the petrol pump’s licence, besides blacklisting several others in his jurisdiction. It is believed that several petrol outlet owners had plotted together to kill Manjunath. His killing galvanized a number of alumni of the Indian Institutes of Management (he had done his MBA from IIM Lucknow) and other professionals to come together and organize a sustained campaign to bring the alleged killers to book.
Appendix 3: **Self-Assessment Questionnaire for Managers to Evaluate Their Courage Quotient**

Managers can self-assess their own standing on the moral and physical courage dimensions by asking themselves the following questions. (The questionnaire is only for indicative purposes.)

**Moral Courage**

1. Am I honestly considering all possible, environmentally relevant options in the face of this situation confronting me?
2. Am I making the right choice in this situation? Am I afraid of the consequences of choosing any of the options in front of me?
3. Am I clear about my reasoning for the choice that I am making? Is it conscionable?
4. Am I making any compromises with my conscience in this situation?

**Physical Courage**

1. Am I afraid of taking the next step in line with my preferred moral choice in this situation? Is there a possibility that I may be concerned about my physical security?
2. Am I afraid of the consequences of my actions in any way? Could this be jeopardizing my selection of the morally correct choice in this situation?
3. Is there any possibility that the potential for harm to me, or my dear ones, could be influencing my decision in this situation? If so, what is it and what should I do?
4. Have I made my stand clear to all the relevant stakeholders? Implying, am I aware of the consequences of my actions and ready to face those?