

THE  
**CENTRE**  
FOR  
**ARMY**  
**LEADERSHIP**



**The Role of Leaders  
in Building a Culture of Moral Courage**

The proceedings of the Centre for Army Leadership's 2017 Conference

Held on 8 November 2017  
Robertson House,  
the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst





# The Role of Leaders in Building a Culture of Moral Courage

The proceedings of the Centre for Army Leadership's 2017 Conference

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# The Role of Leaders in Building a Culture of Moral Courage

## Conference Programme

EVENT	SPEAKER
Welcome	Maj Gen Paul Nanson CBE Commandant and Director Leadership
Keynote speaker	Rt Hon. Jack Straw
Conference overview	Prof Lloyd Clark Director of Research Centre for Army Leadership
The challenge of building morally responsible leaders	Dr. Deborah Goodwin OBE, Head, Dept of Communication & Behavioural Science
The dangers of hubristic leadership: lessons from the finance sector	Prof Dennis Tourish, Professor of Leadership and Organisation Studies, University of Sussex
Moral courage in politics	Sir Anthony Seldon, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Buckingham
	LUNCH
Panel session	Chaired by Mr Tim McEwan The Lord Blair of Boughton QPM, Kt Mr Andrew Todd MBE Mr Steven Coles Lt Gen Sir John Lorimer KCB, DSO, MBE
Can we prevent the growth of toxic leaders in the British Army?	WO1 (Army Sergeant Major) Glenn Haughton OBE
Moral Courage: Behind the magic of leaders making the right choices	Dr Matthew Anderson, Research Fellow at the CAL and Vice-President of UNICORN ARC
Focus group sessions examining the lessons of the conference	Facilitated by a team from the Department of Communication and Behavioural Science, RMAS
An update on the Centre for Army Leadership	Lt Col Justin Baker Head Centre for Army Leadership
Summary of the focus group findings	Maj Will Meddings Centre for Army Leadership
Closing remarks	Maj Gen Paul Nanson CBE
	DEPARTURE

# Introduction to the Proceedings

## By Major Will Meddings

(SO2 Leadership at the Centre for Army Leadership)

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On the 8 November 2018, 80 delegates from across the military, public sector, business and academic world met at the Centre for Army Leadership at Robertson House in the grounds of the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst. They gathered for the Centre's inaugural leadership conference titled *The Role of Leaders in Building a Culture of Moral Courage*.

It examined two questions: how do we exhibit moral courage and how do leaders create a culture that reinforces and rewards moral courage?

The conference was the capstone event of the Centre's calendar and followed the 2017/18 theme of *Moral Courage and Human Behaviours in Leadership*. The exercise of moral courage, of speaking truth to power and of leaders' roles in enabling it, remain pertinent subjects. The Report of the Iraq Inquiry (the Chilcott Report) placed a strong focus on the failure of advisors to tell their superiors the uncomfortable truth. It placed less of a focus on the leaders for not enabling their followers to speak that truth.<sup>1</sup>

In his book *Moral Courage* Rushworth Kidder describes a checklist for moral courage that mirrors these conference proceedings<sup>2</sup>. Kidder asks five questions of anyone motivated to act in a morally courageous manner.

### 1. What motivates me to act?

Inherent in understanding moral courage is understanding what motivates a person to act in a morally courageous manner. This is, yet again, a question of living by our values and understanding what those values are. Although we may argue about the differences between 'military' and 'civilian' values, knowing that there are, in general, certain values that are widely shared gives us a useful foundation which we can refer to when dealing with moral conflict. Recognising that our differences in values, while real, do not prevent the development and acceptance of team goals is a useful starting position when we think about voicing and acting with moral courage: it is possible to share a goal and work as a team whilst still exercising moral courage.

Participants in the conference focus groups grappled with questions such as how to develop moral courage and the place of values in doing so. Many of the focus group participants reiterated an important fundamental: without a strong sense of values we cannot expect our subordinates to act with moral courage. Yet they also recognised that moral courage is only required in circumstances where one's values conflict with the prevailing norms.

<sup>1</sup>Learning Lessons from the Iraq Inquiry: The National Security Adviser's Report. (2017) <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmpubadm/708/70803.htm> [Accessed 1 December 2017]

<sup>2</sup>Rushworth Kidder, *Moral Courage*, New edn (London: HarperCollins, 2009)

## 2. What is inhibiting me from acting?

It is easy to frame moral courage discussions around the question of ‘what is the right choice?’ A more difficult question is ‘how do I go about acting morally and by my values?’ This more useful question helps us focus on the doing rather than the deciding. It accepts the reality of acting with moral courage – that the difficult part is not in recognising the moral choice but in enacting it in the face of the censure or punishment you may receive. Acting, rather than deciding, is one of the elements of moral courage the Rt Hon Jack Straw and Sir Anthony Seldon discuss in their conference papers. When life is lived in the bubble of the media, and moral decisions must be weighed upon the political outcomes, how does a politician consistently act with moral courage and rationalise the decisions they make?

Of course moral courage is not just the realm of politicians. The reality is that moral conflicts occur in every walk of life. Understanding how moral courage is fostered and enacted will always be important, perhaps nowhere more so than in a hierarchical organisation with strong personal and group loyalties. Normalising the exercise of moral courage has an important effect in making it easier for subordinates to exercise it themselves. Also important is understanding the part our brains play in the process of exercising moral courage and, ultimately, how we can overcome our neurological biases. Dr Matthew Anderson examines the subject of neurology and human biases in his paper and provides some illuminating answers.

One method of overcoming our bias against moral courage is through defining our purpose, or purposes, in a broad enough way to allow us to make sense of the moral dilemmas we face. Conflicts between our personal, professional, organisational and societal purposes often lead to moral conflicts; recognising these as choices between conflicting but important internal values can help us choose to act in a way that is morally courageous – by understanding what the most important purpose is and aligning our actions with that. In fact, when wrestling with moral dilemmas even the act of identifying them as moral choices allows us to argue rationally about what is right and wrong. The skill of identifying your purpose and using rational argument to identify the moral course of action is one of the exact topics that the Rt Hon Jack Straw also examines in his paper. Explaining to the family of kidnap victims the rational morality behind not negotiating with kidnappers is a visceral example of this.

## 3. What is the risk to me?

## 4. Am I the best person to take this stand?

## 5. Am I prepared to endure the consequences?

The last three questions cut to the heart of the conference’s topic; not, per se, how you exercise moral courage, but rather how you encourage others to. Kidder’s last three questions ask ‘what are the costs?’

It is wrong to think the negative consequences of acting with moral courage are solely a function of the leader. They are also a function of the climate of the organisation and the



values of the team in which one works. It is clear, however, that a leader helps create the climate and values of the team they lead and therefore the leader has the most significant effect on the consequences that affect morally courageous actions.

How leaders create (or undermine) a culture of moral courage by setting the consequences of morally courageous action are well described in Prof Dennis Tourish's paper on hubris in leadership.

Hubristic leaders assume they know all and are all-powerful. When a hubristic leader decides their values are the only values that matter they create a strong set of consequences that mitigate against morally courageous acts. Equally, toxic leaders – narcissistic, manipulative, intimidating and overly focussed on success at any cost – create a set of consequences that make moral courage difficult to act upon. Prof Tourish and WO1 Haughton's works are complimentary. Prof Tourish offers a compelling view of how to shut down moral courage and the consequences. WO1 Haughton discusses how structures in the Army help foster poor leadership, potential solutions for this and the critical importance of bringing soldiers into the leadership discussion.

As well as the distinguished speakers, the conference held a panel session that brought together members from varied backgrounds. Maj Anthony Todd, a Royal Gurkha Rifles officer, summited Everest in 2017 with a cross-rank military team, but was returning after a failed attempt in 2015 when the team were instead forced to recover mountaineers after an earthquake struck Nepal. Lord Ian Blair of Boughton, former Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police, was instrumental in challenging the way the police viewed rape cases as a junior officer. Lt Gen Sir John Lorimer, a former Chief of Joint Operations, spoke eloquently on his experiences of encouraging subordinates to act with moral courage on operations. Mr Steve Coles, CEO of the Spitalfield Crypt Trust, brought his perspectives on moral courage and love in the charitable sector. While not gathered in these proceedings, their views and comments added depth to the conference.

Finally, as already mentioned, the delegates took part in a series of focus groups led by staff from the Royal Military Academy's Department of Communications and Applied Behavioural Sciences. The focus groups examined a series of questions about moral courage. They considered the concept of 'doing the right thing' to be founded on shared values and standards, although morally courageous actions could only be indoctrinated through repeated exercise and practise. In some cases, the focus groups thought it would take a significant negative event to force an organisation to confront a lack of courage being displayed within its ranks. The findings of the focus groups are shared at the end of these proceedings.

The conference provided a cross-sector view of moral courage and a leader's role in encouraging it. It is hoped that these proceedings provide a valuable insight to those with an interest in the development and practise of morally responsible leadership. While there is still room for further study, these proceedings will doubtless assist a leader who is asking themselves 'why do my followers not act with moral courage and what should I be doing about it?'



# Introduction

By Major General Paul Nanson

(Commandant of the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst and  
Director of Leadership)

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I'm delighted to welcome you to the Centre for Army Leadership. This is our first conference of a series. It is only a year, surprisingly, since we opened the British Army's Centre for Army Leadership, the first of its kind here in the UK. It is designed to professionalise our learning and study of leadership. One of the aims was to support and excite people within the Army about the study of leadership by reaching out into our units across the Field Army. The Centre has been reaching out to activists, to champions, getting them to start talking and discussing the leadership issue that we all live with. Discussing them, bringing them forward to forums such as this and then working out how to tackle these complex leadership issues.

But it was also to do more. If I have one criticism, perhaps observation, about the Army over the last number of years is that we've been pretty insular in our study of leadership. What the Centre for Army Leadership is doing is encouraging us to look up and out at other organisations that have the same issues as us, largely, and reach in and share best practice, share the study of leadership, share some of the knowledge we both have.

That's what today is about. This conference is about bringing us together, to work together, discuss, challenge and take away something of value to us all. Therefore I'm delighted that you've all come here from far away, in some cases from as far as the US, and from many organisations.

I'd also like to say thank you. The first thank you is to the team from the Centre of Army Leadership. It has been a great deal of hard work setting up this conference. I'd also like to thank the Inspirational Development Group for supporting the event. Finally, I'd like to thank, in advance, the number of distinguished speakers and panellists who have given up their time today who have come to be part of this.

I hope you all have a great day today and that you learn great deal. I'm sure we all will.



# Building Morally Responsible Leadership

By Dr Deborah Goodwin OBE

(Head of the Department of Communication and Applied Behavioural Science, the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst)

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Today we will be exploring many aspects of leadership, particularly concentrating on behaviours and moral thinking. What I would like to do now is explore an aspect of personal behaviour and character which might not be as powerful now as it should be, or as it has been in the past.

As you can see from the title of my presentation I would like to contend that moral responsibility is a quality that is vital in leadership behaviours and decision-making, but it can be argued that it is something that has been eroded across society for a variety of reasons that we will explore. It is also my contention that morally responsible leadership is made up of several core value and behavioural strands that combine to create a confident and more assured leader. Through this presentation we will build up a working model of these which should also give us much to discuss throughout the day. I will also offer up several crucial 'Thinking Points' for us to reflect upon both in this session and later.

Let's start with a global perspective. Deloitte's 'Global Human Capital Trends' for 2017<sup>3</sup> continues the story of previous years where leadership is cited as 'important or very important' by 90 per cent of respondents. Despite the clear priority, leadership also represents the largest capability gap in the same report (the difference between how important specific challenges are to companies set against how ready they are to meet those challenges) and, according to Deloitte, the "capability gap for building great leaders has widened in every region in the world" covered by their survey.

So, this begs a very big question, and to try to answer it we need to examine crucial qualities we need in our leaders in order to move forward.

A little while ago, I wrote this statement:

**"The ways in which we handle challenges that face us every day are the true indications of our ethical thinking and behaviour."**

I started thinking this due to a concern that too much emphasis is placed on 'one-off' significant moral judgements in high context situations, worthy as they are. What is more powerful in a leader is knowing that, each day, that leader seeks to face any challenges and situations with the same level of ethical thinking and behaviour that they would use in a high context situation.

<sup>3</sup>Deloitte University Press, 2017 Deloitte Global Human Capital Trends (2017), <<https://www2.deloitte.com/uk/en/pages/human-capital/articles/introduction-human-capital-trends.html>> [Accessed 8 Nov 17]

However, I have a sense that fewer people might be thinking this way, or even that there is a lack of encouragement to think this way across society. Why might this be? Let's start our consideration with an example.

There is a tale told about an event that took place in 1777 when British troops had recently landed at Chesapeake Bay and were marching through Pennsylvania toward the patriot capital of Philadelphia. Covering their flank, a detachment of British marksmen hid in the woods along Brandywine Creek and kept a lookout for American forces led by General George Washington. Suddenly a cavalry officer dressed in the uniform of a European hussar rode into their view, followed by a very senior American officer wearing a high cocked hat. Captain Patrick Ferguson, reputed to be the finest shot in the British Army, commanded the British marksmen. He whispered to three of his best riflemen to creep forward and pick off the unsuspecting officers. But before the men were in place he felt disgust at the idea of such an ambush and quickly ordered them not to fire. Ferguson then shouted to the American officer, who was riding a bay horse. The American looked his way for a moment but turned to ride on. Ferguson called again, this time levelling his rifle towards the officer. The American only glanced back before quickly riding away. A day later, after he had been seriously wounded himself, Ferguson learned that the American officer he let ride off was most likely General George Washington. 'I could have lodged half a dozen balls in or about him, before he was out of my reach,' Ferguson recalled, 'but it was not pleasant to fire at the back of an unoffending individual, who was acquitting himself very coolly of his duty - so I let him alone.'

Now, some doubting scholars have maintained that the near-victim of Ferguson's marksmanship could not have been Washington. They asserted that no commanding general would have been riding without armed escort so close to the enemy. But later research has found a letter from Washington's headquarters to Congress confirming that 'His Excellency' was 'out reconnoitring and busily engaged' on that day. And that Polish Count Casimir Pulaski, recently arrived from France, did in fact dress as a hussar and was with Washington as an aide de camp at this time.

But this is not my point. If we take Ferguson's comment at face value and not as a hindsight excuse, then his decision not to ambush or fire reveals strong personal responsibility supported by ethical concerns. It was a surprising decision given the circumstances. However, it suggests that Ferguson had a clear understanding of how he should think and act, driven by an ethical code. He stated that he did not regret his decision and believed he behaved responsibly.

## Thinking Point One: Individual Responsibility

This brings to our first Thinking Point: That responsible leadership is underpinned by a firm acceptance of individual moral responsibility. But taking individual responsibility at all times can result in several tough home truths: individual moral responsibility means facing things you would rather not, but knowing you must. Human interaction in itself necessitates having to face distasteful or personally challenging circumstances. Individual responsibility is also about not offloading blame and fault.

I do not intend to have a lengthy debate about the modern blaming culture, but we only need to consider the volume of adverts to encourage us to seek compensation to recognise a lack of individual responsibility in society. I could add the mass of keyboard warriors on social media at every turn and the encouragement to place fault in others and not ourselves.

I suggest that this prevalent ethos has eroded our sense of individual moral responsibility in a substantial way. To balance this contention though, I can recall an incident that also sharply illustrated the lack of individual responsibility and place blame on someone else. [Graves'] divided nature betrays itself in vacillation about killing. Sniping from the support lines, he sees, through his telescopic sight, a German soldier taking a bath. To shoot a naked man seems distasteful, so he does not fire. However, he hands the rifle to his sergeant, who does.<sup>4</sup>

In the Communication and Applied Behavioural Sciences Department we use this decision as a discussion point with the cadets. What appals them is his order to the Sergeant to fire on the German soldier. A clear lack of individual moral responsibility, which haunted Graves all his life. As Peter Drucker says: 'The leader sees leadership as responsibility rather than as rank and privilege.'<sup>5</sup> I think that is rather a powerful statement that also supports what we are looking at too.

## Thinking Point Two: Success and Failure

Our next Thinking Point concerns the issue of failure or success. The drive to succeed is strong, and often cultivated as part of core leadership essentials. Less of a focus is placed on the way to handle failure. Actively learning from failure builds awareness, knowledge and energy to re-evaluate and change. But being open to thriving from failure also requires some personal and professional humility, and some can find this too much of a personal challenge or professional risk.



<sup>4</sup>Robert Graves, *Good-bye To All That*, 2nd edn (London: Anchor, 1958).

<sup>5</sup>Peter Drucker, *Managing for the Future*, 1st edn (London: Routledge, 2013), p.102.

Responsible leadership thus requires a growth mind-set, as described by Carol Dweck<sup>6</sup>. A growth mind-set helps someone to continually reflect, develop and thrive in different situations. Situations where we have failed are the most powerful. But if we seek to avoid failure at all costs (which is nigh on impossible) then we could be blinkered to the growth opportunities that it can bring

### Thinking Point Three: ‘The Social Proof’ Generation?

This brings me to the third thinking point which links to the perception of failure and our role.

We have already discussed the possible reduction of individual moral responsibility in society and this could also be linked to what I term ‘the social proof generation’. As a broad explanation, the ‘Social Proof Generation’ have an automatic tendency to think and act as others around them think and act. So, collective thinking. Much of our lives are dominated by working and socialising in groups and, as human beings are essentially herd animals.

There is nothing new in this observation. But I am arguing that the requirements on younger generations to be an accepted part of groups from childhood onwards has reached a significant state given the transparency of the ways lives are lived now. You may have read in the last few weeks of children and teenagers panicked at the thought of not being able to tweet or use Facebook for a while when flying off on holiday, or even worse, the rise in cyber-bullying because someone is deemed different. So, conforming and being part of those around you is very powerful, as is buying in to the way the group acts and behaves rather than striking out on your own.

Seeing this trait in a positive light though suggests that this generation will be more team focussed and prefer consensus. Keeping things in perspective is also important: in the 1920’s the Dallas Morning News described the youth of the day as not caring about people, not ‘having any sense of shame, honor or duty.’ In 1967, Time Magazine ran an article about the ‘hippies’ (the later-baby boomers) stating ‘to their deeply worried parents throughout the country, they seem more like dangerously deluded dropouts, candidates for a very sound spanking and a cram course in civics.’ All of this is a wry warning to social scientists not to drum up broad stereotypes!

Let me show you another quote:

“...Older Baby Boom managers are frustrated with Gen Y, feeling they demand that everyone change to accommodate them. In reality, Gen Y demands only that the workplace reflect their values - personal growth; work that is meaningful and family first. Gen Y love their parents... prefer to work in teams not by themselves and they hate conflict. Gen Y are not complainers, nor act like victims. They are hard workers and want to have work that is challenging.”<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup>Carol Dweck Mindset: The New Psychology of Success, 1st Edn (New York: Random House, 2006).

<sup>7</sup>Ray Williams, Millennials Poised To Take Over the Workplace,

<<https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/wired-success/200906/millennials-poised-take-over-the-workplace>> [Accessed 8 Nov 17].



What is being said here is that a younger generation of leaders are putting a priority on their values, personal growth and work that is meaningful. They prefer to work in teams, not by themselves, and dislike conflict.

Okay, great. But where does morally responsible leadership fit in with this ethos or this definition? We are already arguing that the responsible leader is individually accountable and not afraid to stand alone. They face up to grim realities. They learn and grow from failure and see other perspectives. Let's just consider the social proof generation.

I'd start by examining a piece of recent research. Researchers examined 72 studies of students from 1979 to 2000, all of whom had taken the 'Davis Interpersonal Reactivity Index Test', which looks at empathetic concern, an emotional response to distress to others and the ability to imagine another person's perspective – often expressed as 'being in other person's shoes.' The researchers found that, when compared to college students of the late 1970, the current generation are '40% lower in empathy than their counterparts of 20 or 30 years ago.' If these findings hold true, then I suggest we are facing some looming issues across the board. I am not going to provide an answer to that one. I will leave that one hanging.

So are we facing then a workforce that demands fulfilling employment and constant investment? They want professional mobility, they want a sensible work/life balance and they have a preference to work in teams. Now these aspects are quite interestingly and are supported by the more recent findings by Deloitte.

For example, Diagram 1 shows the ideal working environment. On the left you can see people working at the things we just said; more meaningful work, positive environments. On the right, there is a powerful need to trust in leadership. Equally, these generations are becoming those leaders.

## Deloitte.



An important question remains. How are morally responsible leaders from this very different working generation being nurtured to fill the leadership gap that Deloitte talked about just this year? This, I would suggest, is a key question for us today. How do we build morally responsible leadership behaviour for those who are professionally mobile and possibly less personally committed to an organisation? If we allow more risk aversion and fear of being held accountable for our actions, then this does not bode well for building morally responsible leadership.

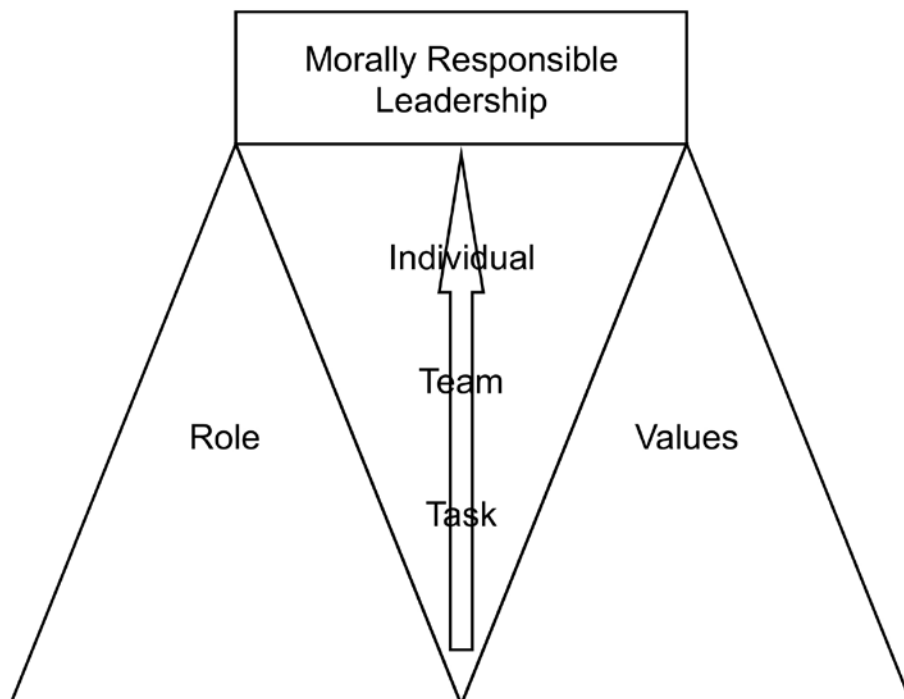
The real difference between being responsible or irresponsible is how effectively we manage a lives where the opportunities to make good or bad choices regularly present themselves. Accepting responsibility both direct (personal) and indirect (team) responsibility is one of the most important factors in defining a leader's true character. When that responsibility moment comes, what you do or don't do is an indication of the type of leader you really are.

## Summary

I like this quote which I think is plainly about what we are discussing here this morning.

“Every human has four endowments – self-awareness, conscience, independent will and creative imagination. These give us the ultimate human freedom... The power to choose, to respond, to change.”<sup>8</sup>

So let's draw these thoughts together. I compiled a model of morally responsible leadership few years ago and I am still working and thinking about it. It is shown in Diagram 2. As you can see the model combines the multiple elements that we have started to consider this morning.



I would also contend that moral responsibility is essential to the Army Leadership Code. The Army is responding to the change in roles that this century demands and addressing pressures on personnel to think and act in complex and often unexpected situations. Linked with all of these demands is personal responsibility, values and standards, the responsibility one has to the team around them, responsibility to the task at hand and to those you serve. And, of course, a responsibility to those who are affected by your choices and actions.

As such, this model may be a handy visual prop. Models such as these (and others that we can use) can be built up piece by piece so that the components make up responsible moral leadership. Importantly, they can also be explained clearly to answer the vital 'so what?' questions for the leadership practitioner.

To summarise, we have briefly explored crucial aspects and challenges of building morally responsible leaders

I have argued that there are three foundations that must be in place:

- Individual responsibility, which includes personal characteristics such as self-awareness and awareness of others.
- A growth mind-set that does not feel attacked by criticism or failure but seeks to reflect and grow.
- A clear perception of one's role and values, which nests within those of the organisation or team.

I have also indicated on the slide the drives of our younger generation of leaders and how we could harness three of their characteristics to enable a growth of responsible leadership.

How can all this be achieved? Reliance on people falling naturally into these three important leadership strands will be optimistic to say the least. Rather, organisations need to actively plan and structure training to build each of the strands. This should be complemented by adding relevant mentoring and coaching for young leaders. In a modern, mobile and personal-growth hungry workforce, we still need to generate responsible leaders. Investing in the development of our potential leaders in these explicit areas will prove to be invaluable for them and also for us.

# Moral Courage in Politics

## By Sir Anthony Seldon

(Vice-Chancellor, the University of Buckingham)

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Due to its content, Sir Anthony Seldon requested that his presentation to the conference was not recorded, published or otherwise made public.

# The Dangers of Hubristic Leadership: Lessons from the Finance Sector

By Professor Dennis Tourish

(Professor of Leadership and Organisation Studies,  
the University of Sussex)

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I want to share with you the results of some work I have been doing, looking at hubris in the banking and finance business. I have looked at how powerful people work in inappropriate ways and how they are driven to do so by the confidence they have in themselves, acquired as a result of having power. I suppose I should of course advertise a bit and say that if you want to look at the dark side of leadership you can read my book<sup>9</sup> which, among other things, looks at how simply having power has, on most of us, more negative than positive effects.

We know for example that when people get a little bit of power they are more inclined to condemn cheating, but only in other people. They're more inclined to endorse it when they themselves engage in it. When people are given a little bit of power they are less likely to seek advice from other people, even though you could argue that that is precisely the point where they need it more. They are also less inclined to consider evidence when they are making major decisions; again when you might suggest that they need to do so more than ever. In other words, having power in itself seems to generate an excess of self-confidence and of self-belief. The corollary to this belief is that followers have less wisdom, and less to contribute, to the decision making process than is actually the case.

My study has been in the banking sector, funded by the Daedalus Trust. The banking sector has had a very bad press in the last number of years. To be honest, so has corporate leadership in general. That well-known Marxist magazine *The Economist* had a cover a couple of years ago called 'Banksters', published immediately after the LIBOR scandal, drawing attention to the dysfunctional leadership behaviours and the greed and avarice that was common within that sector.

What I did was track down and interview around about twenty seven people, including three former CEOs (one of a bank, two of financial institutions other than banks) and several senior managers. I talked to them about what their experience of hubris was and in particular what type of behaviours that people displayed that amounted to what we describe as hubris. And I'll share with you some of the stories and experiences that they shared with me. I'll try and draw out from that some general lessons both about how we can recognise the development, the beginnings, of hubris in other people and perhaps what also we can do to prevent its emergence.

<sup>9</sup>Dennis Tourish, *The Dark Side of Transformational Leadership*, 1st edn (London: Routledge, 2013).

## What is Hubris?

So what is hubris? We could talk about this all day. Our early notions of hubris go right back to classical Greek mythology but in the interest of time I'm not going to go that far back and simply say that most of us today think about hubris in these kinds of terms:

- Over-confidence
- Taking in positive information in uncritical fashion
- Untenable faith in one's ability to achieve goals
- Exaggerated decisiveness
- Impulsivity/need for power
- Spontaneous risk taking
- Denial of reality
- Pursuit of simplistic formulas for success

Put another way: when people agree with us or offer us evidence that seems to support the conclusions that we have already half formed and we typically don't interrogate that information enough. We accept it at face value and I'm sure that Jack Straw here might agree that there were some elements of that around the time of the decision to invade Iraq. 'Dodgy dossiers', or whatever, were accepted much more uncritically than retrospective thinking would suggest was right.

Hubristic individuals end up, in a way, like this: we may see relatively ordinary looking phenomenon, they see something else. I think that the world of business is full of people who think they are charismatic visionaries but everybody else just sees a boring person in some kind of a dull business suit – what I like to think of as the 'David Brent Syndrome'.

## The Effect of Hubris

Unfortunately, it's not just a question of individuals developing these traits and we find it all a bit disagreeable. When people in positions of authority acquire hubris it really does have a very serious, immediate organisational effect. We know for example that people in the banking and finance area exaggerate the advisability of acquisitions. They tend to overpay for them. They have grotesquely overambitious visions. Let me give you one example of this: You remember Enron, which went bankrupt in 2001? Up until Lehman Brothers went bankrupt a few years later it was the biggest bankruptcy in U.S. corporate history. One of its two top people is still in prison. The other managed to avoid prison by dying before he could be sentenced. But just a few months before they went bankrupt they had a big banner outside their headquarters: 'The world's leading energy company'.

They then announced that they had a new vision, beyond that, to become the 'world's leading company'. Not just in the energy sector but full stop: The world's leading company. A hopelessly over-ambitious vision by any standards. Now if we go back to banking, the Royal Bank of Scotland (which has been to date the biggest bankruptcy in the UK corporate history) spent 24 billion Euros acquiring ABN AMRO in the months leading up to the final breakdown of that particular bank. This is an example of the exaggerated advisability of acquisitions in action. So confident were Fred Goodwin and

his colleagues that this made sense that they did not even do proper due diligence. They did what they described as 'due diligence-lite'. In other words they barely looked at what it is that they were buying, a little bit like you deciding to buy a house on the basis of looking at a photograph in an estate agent's magazine. Or deciding that we've identified our future wife or husband on the basis of an internet dating profile. This is more or less what happened in that particular case.

## Hubristic Leadership in Action

The people that I talked to gave me multiple examples of these dynamics in action. One woman that I interviewed, for example, described how her CEO (who was also a female) had the lifts engineered in the building so that she could put a key into the button panel when she got in it so that it would not stop at the floors below or any floors with access down to the basement. She did not, therefore, have to interact with the other 'drones' who were there in the workplace. On one occasion she forgot to activate the key. Somebody stepped into the lift and they were immediately asked by this woman to leave: she couldn't bear the thought of interacting with them in that way. My interviewee also told me that she met this woman at the checkout counter at Marks and Spencer and simply passed the time of day with her on one occasion. The following day her line manager brought her into his office and reprimanded her for speaking to the CEO in public!

These are good examples of hubristic behaviour, I think: a feeling that the individual concerned is superior to, different from, anybody else; is entitled to special treatment of some kind or another; and shouldn't really be bothered with the everyday details of life that the rest of us have to pursue. Likewise many of these individuals frequently engaged in relentless pursuit of acquisitions and mergers, in the process decrying, denigrating and rejecting advice that they received that these acquisitions were in error. One interviewee remembered a colleague of hers who sat down with the CEO and said 'Look, members of the team starting this acquisition just don't think that it makes sense. We should not proceed pursue it.' The CEO paused for a moment, thought for a few seconds and then said 'Right you're fired. I want you out of the building by the end of today and if you ever tell anybody about this then I'm going to sue you to hell and back for the rest of your career.' It's an example of that ludicrous overconfidence that one individual possesses all the wisdom that they need to make these kinds of big, big decisions.

And of course no one individual is like that. No one individual knows everything. If you think about it hard, most of us barely know what's going on in our own families! Let alone what's going on in big organisations. Where are your children right now, for example? What are they doing? Do you trust them? But what does it feel like to try and manage in minute detail an entire organization of the kind we are talking about? Frequently my interviewees described to me a culture of not just recklessness, but the denigration of any critical feedback that they received. Of an atmosphere, for example, of barely disguised contempt for regulators. Regulators were viewed as not very impressive individuals, people who were seen as not really having the resources, the expertise, or the insight to guide 'wiser' people or guide what banks should do.

One individual that I interviewed was a former banking CEO. He talked about being in a major dinner in Germany with Gerhard Schroeder who at that time had become Chancellor of Germany. This CEO was there with a number of bankers from the UK. He told me that they basically spent the dinner insulting Schroeder, saying to him 'why did you make these decisions?' and this, that and the other. 'Are you stupid, or what?' They had more or less forgotten who they were talking to and it became a grotesque kind of spectacle.

Another incident of abusive behaviour. A lot of people talked to me about this, about a culture of abuse, of foul language and macho bluster on the part of people within various banks. In this instance this individual was the head of human resources at a major bank. He went to see another senior manager, I think it was the head of marketing, and the head of marketing was trying to explain to the person concerned that something he wanted to do could not be done. Now the individual had a reputation for always beginning in a charming way and he did so on this occasion. 'Don't worry we'll work something out. This can be sorted out.' The guy kept saying 'No, no, no. This is not going to work.' Then the behaviour escalated to foul-mouthed abuse. 'You 'effing stupid little what-ever. It will be done, it will be done my way' and so on. The guy still kept saying 'No, it can't be done.' Well the man concerned had two baseball bats in his office. So he then picked up a baseball bat and began to wield it in a threatening manner. 'This will be done my way.' It turned out, however, that this head of marketing had been an amateur boxer in the past and he simply stopped the guy and said 'If you lay a finger on me I will put you in hospital.' Whereupon the other guy immediately stopped and started saying 'It all was just a joke. Don't worry I didn't mean any of it.'

Now what is very interesting in this particular case is that my interviewee and the head of marketing went to see the then bank CEO to complain about his behaviour and they both assumed that he would be let go. In fact, he went on to become Bank CEO himself within a couple of a couple of years! Now in his particular case it all led to Nemesis because other bad behaviour that he then engaged in did lead to his resignation under adverse circumstances.

Another interviewee told me about his CEO. He was a great fan of Starbucks coffee but didn't want to go out to get any, for example. He didn't like people going for his coffee either, so he had a little Starbucks area built in the corner of his office and he had someone who then went and brought the coffee to him. But he had to have the coffee facing him in a certain way so he could see the logo when he was drinking his cup of coffee! So it's behaviour born of different things that really, in classical terms, lead to the wilful abuse of other people. Often, abuse of power in gathering more and more of the resources of the organisation just for oneself.



## Inflection Points and Organisational Dynamics

I think that we can understand this a little better by what I might describe as 'inflection points'. I think we have a number of behaviours that characterise hubris but I also think that there are a number of dynamics that many organizations unleash which then reinforces them. Some people, of course, are innately predisposed to this. It can be a personality trait. I view hubris as a behavioural manifestation of narcissism.

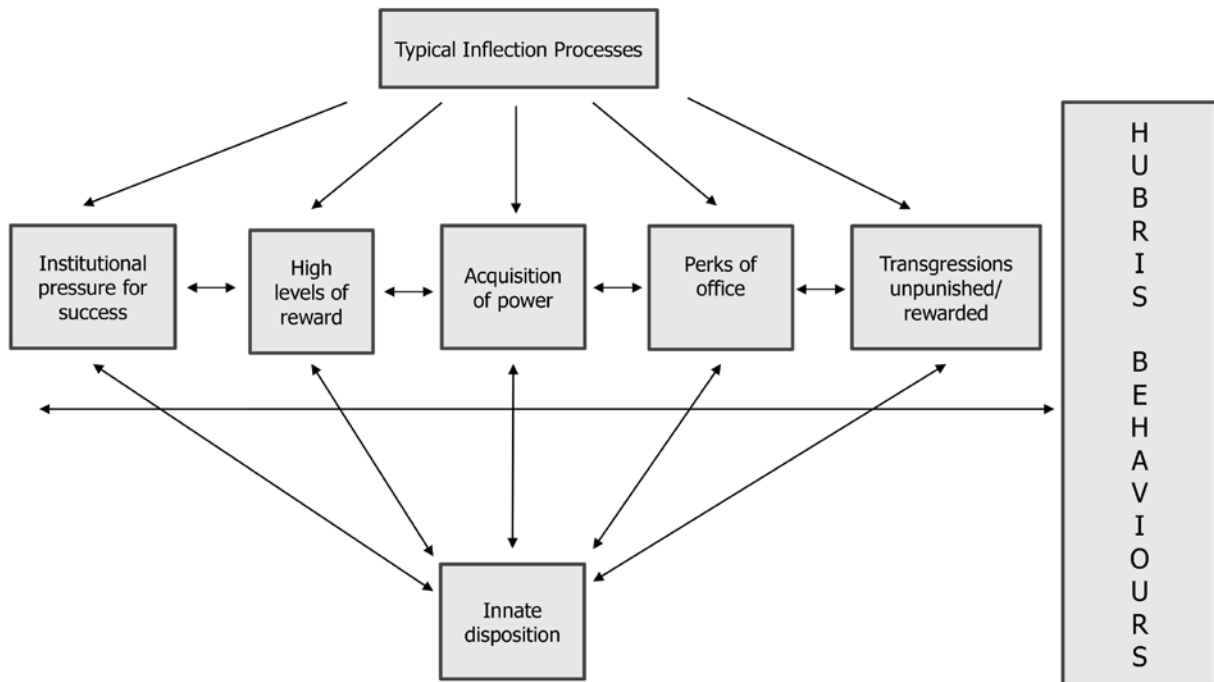
In the banking and finance sector people described to me the enormous institutional pressure for success. Huge rewards if you achieve success but success defined pretty much by narrow financial terms. 'If we carry out this merger, this acquisition, or do these acts we will all get terribly rich'. I think for example when the Royal Bank of Scotland acquired the NatWest bank back in the 90s the people involved got bonuses close to one million Pounds for successfully carrying this through. So you can see the incentive there to go in that particular direction: high levels of reward, which is always associated with the acquisition of power.

As I said at the very beginning, acquiring power tends not to bring out the best in most of us. It was Lord Acton who famously said that 'Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely'. He might have argued in the banking and finance sector that 'Absolute power is even nicer than power', such was the way in which people coveted it.

We then of course have all these perks of office that people become attached to. The ability to have a Starbucks building your office being just one example. Another person told me about the chairman of a bank that he sometimes had to go and see. Apparently, you would arrive at the headquarters of the bank order to see the chairman. When people knew that that was who you were meeting, you were ushered off to a private lift at the side which was curtained off. You then you went up to his floor where, if you were having lunch, some butler would arrive and serve a private lunch for both of you. My interviewee told me that on one occasion he said to the individual concerned 'Well, let's go for a walk' and instead the guy said 'No let me get the car to take you back to your work'. And the car, of course, was a chauffeur driven Rolls-Royce ... which even in the British military I think is uncommon behaviour on the part of leaders! It is it certainly isn't in the academic environment that I am part of, anyway!

So these are some of the processes that build hubris but they don't exist only in banking and finance. Think about Kim Jong Il. In every picture you see he is always surrounded by individuals taking notes. It's a habit that began with his grandfather who, the view at his time was, knew everything about everything. So whatever piece of trivia the leader says must be written down by the individuals around them.

## The Flow of Hubris



Imagine what that does to the egos of the individuals concerned, being surrounded and pampered in that particular way! The consequences in organisations include the development of an enormous suspicion of dissent on the part of leaders. This is precisely the opposite of what we need. I was very struck by Jack Straws comments this morning, where he talked about the need to openly ventilate and express different opinions, especially when huge decisions like the war in Iraq are being contemplated. And yet somehow in many organisational contexts a culture has grown up where the opposite is the case; whereby individuals are suspicious of dissent and where they disregard it. They do not encourage it sufficiently.

We could talk about this all day, but I think that that's one of the most fundamental mistakes of leadership that is made by most of our organizations, especially when combined with the view that we exaggerate what leaders can accomplish. They are appointed with huge fanfare, they're given golden handcuffs, and they almost inevitably develop an inflated view of what they can deliver. Worse, we encourage that.

I printed out this from Harvard Business Review just yesterday: the current issue. It has an article by the CEO of General Electric: 'How I Remade General Electric'. I am instantly suspicious of any leader who says I remade an entire organization. There are tens of thousands of people in this company. Surely they had something to do with remaking it? Surely every decision didn't come from the CEO? But that is not the model of leadership that we are encouraged to adopt. We need something slightly different.

## Ingratiation Theory and Sucking up to the Boss

I will simply and briefly point out a major source of error that we all face. Winston Churchill summed it up very well in 1931 when he was writing about a major military disaster, in the First World War I think. It is a lovely quote.

“The temptation to tell a Chief in a great position the things he most likes to hear is one of the commonest explanations of mistaken policy. Thus the outlook of the leader on whose decision fateful events depend is usually far more sanguine than the brutal facts admit.”

Academics have a grander name for it, inevitably: ‘Ingratiation Theory’, colloquially known as ‘sucking up to the boss’. When we have a difference of power between two people, the individual who has less power usually exaggerates how much they agree with the leader to acquire influence over them. Does that sound like a familiar dynamic? Or as that great philosopher Homer Simpson once put it, when he was given Bart some career advice, ‘Bart, always remember to say ‘good idea boss!’

Most of us are experts at this! The evidence is that when we are flattered in this way we suck it up. We enjoy it. We believe that it is true. We are inclined to become like a rock star surrounded by a sycophantic entourage. On the other hand, when we receive criticism we instinctively rejected it: It feels inappropriate and wrong to us. This is called the ‘Automatic Vigilance Effect’: any criticism feels slightly wrong to us. I know that today, when I am away, my wife is visiting the hairdresser. I know when I go home that she will ask me a question. ‘What do you think of my hair?’ And you know what my answer will be as well!

We learn these dynamics very well, unfortunately. In business organizations when we have flattery CEOs develop even more favourable views of their expertise than is warranted and hubris begins to develop.

## So What is the Solution?

All of which begs the question: what can we do about it? Well, I think that we need to rethink our view of leadership. We need to avoid looking upon leaders as corporate saviours. We need to avoid thinking that we should concentrate reward, and all power of decision making, in the hands of one or two people. I think we also need to stop expecting leaders to make a difference instantly. There are books out there with titles such as ‘the first 90 days’. They say that in the first 90 days you must do something radical.

I disagree. I think in the first 90 days you’re still struggling to find your way to the bathroom. In most cases you’re still learning, or you should be learning, before you make drastic decisions. I think we need leaders who scrutinize positive feedback much more intensely than they do negative feedback. At the moment it is the other way round. I think when we get positive feedback we should stop. I think we need to develop systems among our leading teams where we institutionalized dissent into the decision making process.

We need to appoint formal devil's advocates when big decisions are being made. We need to ask people to express doubts. We need to role model that by expressing doubts or selves.

Ultimately leadership is 90 percent example and unless we, and people in authority, role model that acceptance of dissent other people will not take it seriously.

We need to lead with questions and not answers. We don't have to pretend to have all the answers when we are in positions of authority. We need to use that magic phrase 'I do not know.' There are many historical examples that show the value of that kind of approach. I think we have drifted away from it. We need to go back to it.

We need to embrace loud debate, heated discussions and healthy conflict much more than we do. Uniformity and conformity are the enemy of rational decision making, even though it is appealing to us when we are in positions of authority. There is only one organizational context that I know of where everybody is in agreement with everybody else all the time on all important issues. That is a graveyard. Beyond that we all have heated opinions about everything. I think the job of leadership is to bring that much more to the fore and in doing so to strike a blow against dysfunctional leadership in general and hubristic leadership in particular.

# Can We Prevent the Growth of Toxic Leaders in the British Army?

By WO1 (Army SM) Glenn Haughton  
(The Army Sergeant Major)

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I'll confess. I've tweaked the title slightly. I think in your program it talks about toxic leadership. So if I'm not talking about what you want me to talk about, I apologise but you're trapped now, you're going nowhere and you've got to listen to me regardless!

Some of you might be wondering what I do. The majority of the audience know but for anyone that doesn't, I describe myself as three things. For CGS I'm a thermometer, a translator and a courier. I'm a thermometer because I check the temperature of the Army to find out what's hot what's cold, what's good and what's bad. I'm a translator because I translate 'general speak' into 'normal human being speak' and I'm a courier because I deliver things to CGS and deliver things from CGS down to the soldiers.

I sit in the four-star space in Army Headquarters. The job is fantastic, it's amazing and if the Army Sergeant Major role has made a difference to one person since it's been established then we're doing the right thing. So long may it continue.

Some of you might be thinking 'what gives him the right to be here to talk about leadership' and to discuss leadership issues with you. Well I've been a soldier. I still am a soldier. I've led soldiers on operations, in barracks, on training and on everything else that we do for 28 years of my 30 years' service; for the other two years I was the soldier. I've done that in every single rank and every appointment and I've thoroughly enjoyed it. I've had a fantastic time and I am also now in a unique position as the Army Sergeant Major in that I get to see the whole of the Army. I had a really blinkered view of the Army before this job because, well, I was in the infantry for the best part of 25 years before I saw the rest of it!

The position I'm in, and what I've seen and learnt over the last two and a half years in that position, has been fascinating. The breadth and the depth of the talent we've got in the British Army is absolutely amazing.

So, for the next 20 minutes I thought I'd talk to you about what I studied in my MBA dissertation. The question in my dissertation was 'Can Army leadership prevent the growth of toxic leaders or toxic leadership within the British Army'. It was a really fascinating question. I was in a prime position as the Army Sergeant Major to do my studies. It was around the time of the Leadership Code coming out. There was lots of stuff being done on leadership. I had access to all areas, to ministers, to the Executive Committee of the Army Board, to anybody I wanted and it really facilitated my studies. So the question was absolutely brilliant and what I'm going to try and do is talk to you

over the next 20 minutes not about toxic leadership, but about the findings of my studies, based on answering that dissertation question. I'll tell you about the findings that I got from the cast of interviewees, from the people that I spoke to. I'm also going to just mix it up with a few of my personal thoughts, having been a soldier for so long. I'm going to try to split it down into four areas.

First I'm just going to touch on toxic leadership, just to set the context. Then next I'm going to talk about British Army leadership over the last 80 years, pre-2015. Then I'm going to talk about 2015 to now; what we've done over the last couple of years. Finally I'm just going to wrap up and finish off with some of my own views and some other findings from my research into how we can better ourselves even further as we go forward in the Army.

## Toxic Leadership

So, toxic leadership. I'm not going to go into detail. Many people in here may know a lot more about toxic leadership than I, some of you might have studied it and all of you will have your own views. It's one of those subjects that we could discuss for absolutely hours. But what I do know is I find it really interesting. It was the driving force behind doing my studies because I was fascinated by it. I've actually learned a huge amount from the US Army because they've tackled the issue of toxic leadership over a good 10-15 years. They've actually done something about it and they still do things to prevent toxic leadership.

After a couple of years of looking at it I now find the term rather unhelpful. I don't think toxic leadership is a good term. I think it's a fashionable term. I think a lot of people in the British Army use it and bandy it around as an excuse to cover up things that they don't want to do, or to put down people that they don't like. I think toxic leadership is a term that refers to a much bigger issue: bad leadership.

I think toxic leadership is within bad leadership, although that's just my own personal view. And this was the driving force behind my study.

Although most of my findings were about how to prevent it, there are some other areas that I just want to focus on first.



Major General Paul Nanson introducing the conference



The Rt Hon Jack Straw speaking on his personal reflections on moral decision making in government





Dr Deborah Goodwin speaking on building morally responsible leadership



Sir Anthony Seldon speaking on moral courage in politics





Professor Dennis Tourish speaking on hubristic leadership



Delegates discussing the lessons of the conference



## Army Leadership Pre-2015

My literature review of my studies was based around this question: What leadership thinking have we done for the last 80 years, since the year 1947? If you look in the Sandhurst library I think there's something like 1061 publications within the library with leadership in the title. But if you actually take the number of books with leadership in the title that the Army has produced to teach leadership, well you can count them on your fingers.

We just haven't written much in the last 80 years which I find absolutely fascinating. I just couldn't believe it. I've been at Sandhurst as an instructor, so I know the publications that I've just used my fingers to count because I've read all of them. I thought there might be a few more, some that I'd missed, but there aren't. I find that really interesting.

The first time the British Army published a book on leadership was in 1947 when it published *Serve to Lead*.

For anyone that doesn't know *Serve to Lead*, it's a little red book that every single Officer Cadet has had issued since 1947 as they come through this establishment. Every Officer Cadet will have it on their bookshelf and there'll be hundreds and thousands of other *Serve to Lead* books in the thatched cottages of Devises, in the bookcases and on the shelves of all our retired officers. The retired officers still keep it, they refer to it and it's still issued today.

The only other publications that have come since then are minimal. There is another one that's come from Sandhurst. It's called *The Junior Officers Guide to the Queen's Commission* and is a guide to junior officers. There's another one called *Developing Leaders* which I'll touch on in a bit. All of them focus, quite rightly and for a reason, on officership. At no stage in the last 80 years up to 2015 have we particularly focused on soldiership, if you like, or teach formal leadership to soldiers. It's all been based around our officers – and for good reason. But most of us know that these books, such as *Serve to Lead* and *The Junior Officers Guide to the Queen's Commission*, are full of quotes and vignettes of very brave generals and officers who have conquered the world. Very few of them refer to signs of weakness, failure, losses and all that sort of stuff. They're really nice reads and they're really good to refer to and dip back into and get some inspiration from when you're a young officer. I've read them and I like them but I'm not entirely sure that we've done enough publishing over the last 80 years to teach leadership.

So why didn't we write more? Why didn't we bother coming up with doctrine? Why has it taken until 2015 to launch a Code, write Leadership Doctrine and create this Centre for Army Leadership? And why did we never capture the essence of good leadership? Why do we never write it down and why did we never formally teach it to everybody?

I think it's because (and these are the findings of my research and not just my own perceptions) we've always had a presumption that we're just 'bloody good at leadership' because we're British.

Now some of this genuinely is true. We are good at leading and we always have been good at leading. But we've known it and so we've never bothered to do anything more to make ourselves better! To encapsulate it, capture it and make ourselves better.

2014 saw something different. *Developing Leaders* was published by Sandhurst. For Sandhurst, written by officers, for officers. It was something new. It was modern, it was refreshing, and it was glossy. It looked the part, it had modern pictures. It had some new vignettes and some new quotes in it; not just Slim, Montgomery and Hackett and all these other great names. It had some modern people in it. It was a really good publication. Officer Cadet's got it. It was publicized but not many people knew about it. There wasn't much of an uptake for it. Not many people outside of Sandhurst in the wider Army took up *Developing Leaders*.

You can work out why that was. Generally, it's because everybody in a position of leadership thinks they don't need a book called *Developing Leaders* because they are already a great leader! Why would they need that book?

That's the sort of mindset I'm talking about. We've always presumed that we're good at leadership. So the only people that would need a *Developing Leaders* book are surely the Officer Cadets because they're thinking about being developed into leaders! The uptake wasn't great even though it was the first modern thing we've published on the subject within those 80 years.

I think there was very good reason that the focus has always been on officership but I think we recently realised we are missing a trick regarding our soldiers. Now this isn't a pitch for soldiers. I was asked to give the 'soldiers view on leadership' and that's what I want to try and do. So please don't think I am I'm giving the officer corps a hard time! I'm not, I'm just trying to focus on the areas I think we might have missed: the 'soldier corps', if you like.

I think we've definitely missed a trick regarded soldiers and Non-Commissioned Officers in the leadership development process and I'll come on to that now.

## Officership, Leadership and 'Other Ranks'

A general once told me that officers have the brains to plan the road and soldiers have the brawn to build it. A simplistic quote but I do think it's a good quote that makes a good point. Long may our officers continue to be the educated and qualified ones to be able to plan the road for the soldiers to build.

But I think much has changed since Wellington's famous quote that our Army is made up of the 'scum of the earth'. If you go into the Sandhurst Officers' Mess there is a picture up on the wall of a load of officers and their horses. It basically suggests that officers should treat their men like they do their horses, in terms of grooming and feeding all that sort of stuff. It's a historical picture and it's up there for a reason. But it says something about the relationship between officers and soldiers. I think it's funny how we still refer to soldiers as Other Ranks as opposed to soldiers. If you look at the Oxford Dictionary quote



for other it says 'a person or thing that is different' but we still refer to all of our soldiers as Other Ranks. If you ask them they're not bothered. They're quite proud of their background and why they're called Other Ranks but it's just interesting that we still refer to them as such.

There is a cultural mindset in the British Army that (and I'm just generalizing of course) soldiers don't read, they're not bright, they don't think and all we do is lay the road that has been planned by the officers. Now we all know that that's very different to reality. Going back to the road analogy; we now have soldiers that are pretty much planning those roads as well. It's not just the officers that are planning. We've got some very bright, talented individuals that are up to that.

In my research, in all the books I read on leadership published over an 80 year period, I could only find one article written about leadership by a soldier. It was by a Warrant Officer and it was in the British Army Review Leadership Special Report. Actually was a bit of a scathing report on the relationship between soldiers and officers. It was in reference to operations and it was very frank and very honest. But it was the only one I could find about leadership that was written by a soldier, which I found really disappointing. I thought was going to find a few more than that, but no. It was all written by officers, for officers.

That's funny, I think. When you think about it, who actually leads our soldiers more than anybody else within our hierarchical structure? Who is the person that goes to breakfast with them? Who is the person that goes on parade with them? Who is the person that goes to the bar with them? Who is the person that is with them 24/7? It is the Non-Commissioned Officer and that person is the one we have asked least about leadership. Yes, our officers lead. Yes, our officers are in charge. Yes, they are in the position at the top of the chain of command. But there are lots of other people within that chain of command that are in the face of those soldiers much more often. We could have captured a lot more!

We employ and trust our Non-Commissioned Officers to lead soldiers into battle and in harm's way on operations from the age of 18 years old. We've got Lance Corporals leading people on operations at 18 years old.

No other organisation in the world does that. So why on earth have we never listened to, got views from, captured or examined the information and the experiences of everyone down to the lowest of our soldier cohort? I just think we've missed a massive trick over the last 80 years. So just to close this section, I'm not being negative but I'm highlighting an opportunity that is out there, untapped.

One of the areas people highlighted in my interviews, one that they think the key reason that has led to poor leadership behaviour over the last 80 years, is the Army's hierarchical structure. The British army has a hierarchical structure. It's one that works for us. It's worked for the best part of 300 odd years. But it could play into the reason why we've not valued our soldiers as much as we could have done in terms of leadership over the last 80 years.

Also, and this came from a lot of civil servants I spoke to in my interviews, people are flabbergasted by the subconscious British class system that is in play in the British Army. Now I hadn't really thought about it. But think about it. I'm not necessarily saying it's a bad thing; it's just a reflection of the way we do our business. But while there is there is no written class system in the Army there certainly is a class-like, stereotypical, system in the Army. We are very stereotyped.

Of course there's a reason why we all wear the same clothes. There's a good reason many of our kids go to boarding school. There is a reason why we get married at a certain age. There is a reason why we go to ICSC(L) at a certain age. But there is a class system and the civil servants were just amazed by how powerful it is within our organisation and within the way we do our business.

Also, one of views that I gleaned from people in the interview process was a view that there was a lack of trust and empowerment within the organization. Now I genuinely disagree with that view but I'll come onto that a little bit.

So that takes me up to 2015 when the Army Leadership Code was launched.

## Army Leadership Post-2015

So what have we done about the lack of leadership focus over the last 80 years? Many in this room know what we've done. We realised that we had been presuming we're good for far too long. It's now time for some new quotes and vignettes! We realised we had to do something about it, hence why CGS launched the Army Leadership Code after 10 years of the Army only teaching Values Based Leadership to the British Army's instructors.

So we still know that we are good but the important thing now is that we know we've got to get better at leadership. I think the most important thing is our soldiers also now realise they need to get better at leadership, that it's not just for our officers. Leadership is now on the map for all ranks. Soldiers know this, which is great. We have realised that we can actually teach formal leadership to not only officers but to everybody. We know that we can make people better leaders.

Sure, we love our Field Marshal Slim quote that 'leadership is simple, it's just plain you' but around the same time Montgomery also noted that leadership could be taught. It's arguably taken us 80 years to realise this! We're now capturing experiences, learning from each other and writing stuff down. We are listening to our Non-Commissioned Officers and we are valuing what they have to offer. We are searching for continuous improvement just like the All Blacks and other high performance sports teams. We can't just say we are good at leadership and leave it at that. We've got to keep striving; better never stops. We've got to keep going and continue to make ourselves better.

We have our values and standards. Other organisations, as Mr Straw highlighted earlier, haven't got such a thing. We've got a Leadership Code. We've got Leadership Doctrine. We've now got a Centre for Army Leadership; although it took us 80 years we've got one

now and we are now talking about leadership every single day. Everywhere I go it's part of the chit chatter, the lesson plans and on noticeboards. It's just constant now, which is great.

We're starting to live and breathe it and not just put it on a poster on a wall. Cultures take a long time to change. A climate, well you can change that pretty soon. A culture takes years to change and so we've got to give ourselves time to allow that change to happen. A culture also won't change until those in leadership positions within the organisation change as well.

## Making Ourselves Better

So the last bit. What have we got that can we do better? This, again, this isn't just my thoughts. The first couple points I'm going to touch on are about toxic leadership. I could go on about toxic leadership; much my research was about the mechanisms of it and how to prevent it, but I'd need hours to explain fully.

So in a nutshell: I do genuinely believe that we behave the way we do because of the organisational systems in the Army. I talked earlier about hierarchical structure and our subconscious class system that we've got. I think that shapes the way we do our business.

Another thing that fuels toxic leadership, or bad leadership, within the organisation is the way that we report. Our reporting system is very good. But we have a tendency to 'report to promote'. We don't 'report to develop'. We have one development tool which is the Mid-Period Appraisal Report, the MPAR. Most people here would agree that not everyone does the MPAR the same. Not everyone does it correctly so we don't develop people as much as we should.

So our reporting system could encourage bad leadership. The reporting system also encourages upward not downward looking behaviour. I think this could lead to some of our moral courage dilemmas.

Many of you will have heard about 360 feedback. I did a lot of research into it in the study and not everyone necessarily agrees that 360 feedback is the answer to preventing bad leadership. But I do and most of my findings were that, in fact, almost every single person I interviewed agreed that the British Army should really consider bringing in upward feedback. It is something we've never done in our organisation. We do it informally in that a Platoon Sergeant will quite happily tell a Company Commander or Platoon Commander how he thinks they are doing or give them some informal advice on their leadership. But no one ever formally gives good feedback upwards and it may be something to look at in the future.

## Summary

I do know that we are already on the way to making leadership better. But we can still do more. We've talked about culture and I generally believe there is much more we can do on culture. We need to change the mindset, particularly in the combat arms, of encouraging our soldiers to think, to read, to write and to contribute towards leadership in particular. Focus groups, debates and forums are things we need to do more of for soldiers. I never used to agree with them before I was Army Sergeant Major. I thought we had a chain of command in position for a reason and the chain of command should be how we raise issues. But now I've seen forums, debates and focus groups at work. Now I use them. I've got a huge amount from them.

Soldiers want to be heard and they want to feel valued. They have a huge amount to offer and we as an Army could draw a huge amount from them if we just give them a voice. Ok, we do need to be careful about how much of a voice we give them! We also need to change the mindset that the Army Leadership Code is not for officers and Senior NCOs but is just for the junior ranks. Speak to WO1 'Des' Desborough, he gets around a lot and he'll confirm this. Many in our organisation believe that it's not for them because they're too senior. I reiterate the point I made earlier: I'm already a leader, why do I need the Army Leadership Code? So we need to be aware that you can put the seven leadership behaviours under your signature block on your email but if you don't live by them then it's a pointless exercise.

We must display moral courage and, as CGS always says, the standard that you walk past is the standard that you accept. There is a lack of moral courage, I believe, in the Army and a fear of confrontation. Some of it is societal. Some of it is because everybody wants to be everybody's friend, and I genuinely believe it starts in our officer corps. It's in soldiers too but our officers are our leaders and as long as officers continue to fail to display moral courage and the leadership qualities that they should be displaying, then funnily enough those that follow them will do exactly the same. It's a simple concept and the one we continue to get wrong.

Since being involved in the recent changes to Army leadership from the start, I genuinely believe that we have come on leaps and bounds in the last two years. My research has proven it, although it's only an academic paper. The proof is in how it changes things in practise. There are still areas of concern and it's still hard to measure success, if success is something that we want to measure and record. In this case I'm not sure measuring is the answer. But as we know, leadership is for everybody and no one in command is any better a person than those that they lead. They are merely entrusted to lead them. We can learn much from each other and must continue to do so, be it as an officer or a soldier.



# Moral Courage: Behind the Magic of Leaders Making the Right Choices

By Dr Matthew Anderson

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Let us first look at what it means for leaders to make the 'right' choices.

Managers are people who do things right and leaders are people who do the right thing.<sup>10</sup> This common idiom is used often – for instance within leadership training interventions – to describe a categorical difference between what managers and leaders do. It reveals a causal explanation for differences in judgement, decision-making and action selection of managers and leaders. It reveals what kind of choices they are comfortable and uncomfortable making.

Between doing things right and doing the right things, we are trapped in a paradox, where on one side doing things right all of the time is the obvious ideal. Indeed, if we did all things right all of the time we would maximally appropriate our expertise and know-how to sufficiently perform any given thing we face. We could be trusted to 'get things done'. And would this not ultimately secure our personal integrity and credibility with our followers, peers and superiors? Surely it would. And, would one not be fast-track promoted to higher echelons of management? Well, of course.

We might call this pursuit the 'Ideal-Right'<sup>11</sup> – managing to do things right all of the time. However, reality reveals we often face unfamiliar challenges and difficulties in sustaining the Ideal-Right. These challenges – such as dishonesty, bullying, harassment and discrimination – are habitually discomfoting to us, yet despite this, they must be overcome in order to make progress. These 'Obstacle-Things' are not ideal at all, but undesirable and unsafe for the manager or leader: full of treacherous ambiguity and personal risk.

Back to the paradox; in a management paradigm, 'Obstacle-Things' threaten the 'Ideal-Right' – that is to say, the comfortable world of the known, in terms of technical skill, knowledge and experience. If the 'Ideal-Right' provides a clear route to personal success and advancement, 'Obstacle-Things' represent a threat to personal comfort-zone and self-preservation. They reveal a struggle of manageable versus potentially unmanageable things.

In a leadership paradigm, 'Obstacle-Things'<sup>12</sup> must be overcome and resolved, despite uncertainty and personal risk: physical, emotional and professional. To get this right requires a touch of magic, an acuteness of inspirational character that appeals to a higher order of integrity, and measures itself against an alternate criterion of success; something

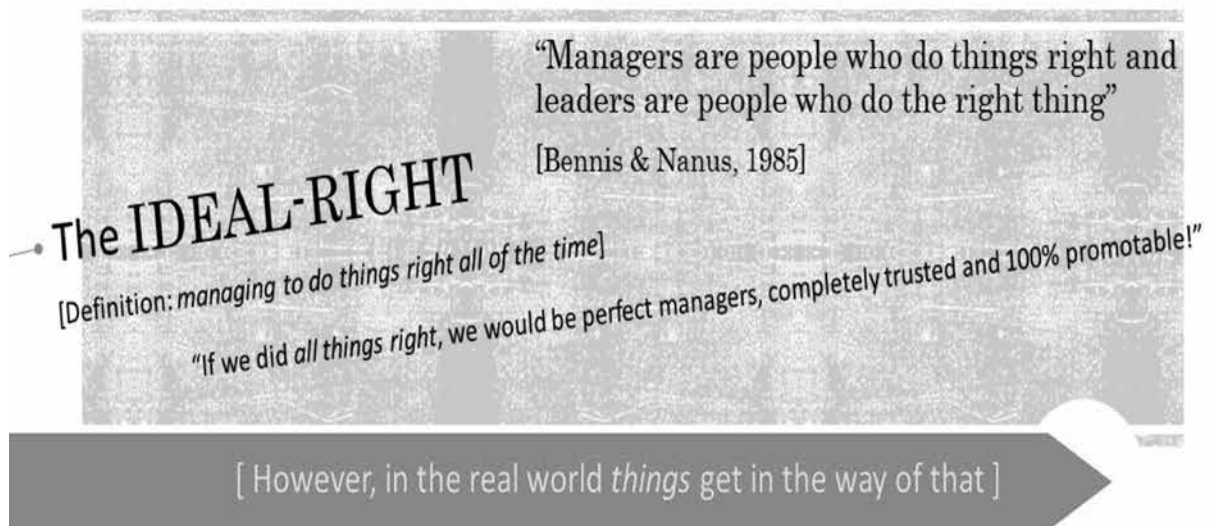
<sup>10</sup>W Bennis and B Nanus, *Leaders: The Strategies for Taking Charge*, edn 1 (London: Harper and Row, 1985), p. 21.

<sup>11</sup> 'Ideal-Right' definition: managing to do things right all of the time

<sup>12</sup> 'Obstacle-Things' definition: unfamiliar challenges and difficulties that undermine sustaining the Ideal-Right

beyond the 'Ideal-Right'; beyond doing things right all of the time. It is precisely in this wicked space of 'Obstacle-Things', and a higher order of integrity, that we find moral dilemmas and moral courage.

## WHEN LEADERS MAKE THE RIGHT CHOICES



## — OBSTACLE-THINGS

To use a metaphor, imagine an object – a water bottle or small golfing trophy – resting on a table, and you wish to knock it over, for whatever reason, and in your possession you have a ping-pong ball and a tennis ball. You have a choice of either ball to carry out the task; but you are aware the ping-pong ball is insufficient, as it is simply too light to knock over the object. The most it can do is swerve around the object, and maintain the status quo. Only the tennis ball is sufficient in corpus and gravitas to execute this task. The ping-pong ball represents the management paradigm, and its desire to sustain the ‘comfort zone’ by swerving the wicked issue; the tennis ball characterises leadership and its obligation to remove the obstacle by means of ‘magic’; by the nimblest actions and substantive chest.

In such a way, managers may avoid ‘Obstacle-Things’ – such as moral courage – whereas leaders are compelled to make deliberate choices to tackle ‘Obstacle-Things’ head-on, and in doing so, disregard self-comfort and self-protection. Certainly, these choices are tough ones to make; and water will be spilled and trophies broken: but leaders do the right thing.

## Behind The Magic of Moral Courage

So, proposing that morals and moral courage are ‘Obstacle-Things’ – which only leaders must act upon – what is meant by morals and moral courage? What is, and where can we find, a baseline of what is ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ that it should influence leaders’ actions?

Well, spanning time and contexts – even allowing for cultural<sup>13</sup> or factual differences<sup>14</sup> – what we regard as morality is pretty consistent: that is, be of good character and ethically virtuous, upholding truth and justice, through kindness, honour, integrity, magnanimity and defending the weak and powerless. We all know this, we experience it every day when driving in our cars or replying to emails, even when we chose not to make the right choices. Such morality represents an abstraction and objective standard,<sup>15</sup> which has been widely referred to over history as: *ordo amoris* (St Augustine), *ordinate affections* (Aristotle), *beyond existence* (Plato), the Law (the Jews), the Rza (the Hindus), and the Tao (the Chinese). Some may regard these concepts as ‘merely quaint or even magical’;<sup>16</sup> however what is common across them is that they propose objectivity: that they are really true. This moral realism is not necessarily committing us to a theistic explanation; it could equally be attributable to an evolutionary mechanism that creates the hard-wiring for preservation of the social collective. Regardless, morals in an objective sense, should not be confused with mere corporate values (which may include management concepts like efficiency and profitability); but rather held up as virtues or laws, which are neither political nor affected by popular trends. Morality is blind to skin colour and gender, as morals cannot discriminate. Morality represents all. Morals, like justice and fairness, simply put, are universal and timeless.

Clinical Psychiatrist and author Iain McGilchrist identifies an important conflict between moral realism and the Ideal-Right perspective discussed earlier: ‘Moral values are not something that we work out rationally on the principle of utility, or any other principle, for that matter, but are irreducible aspects of the phenomenal world, like colour’.<sup>17</sup> Thus, morals are neurologically irreducible and accountable only on their own terms.<sup>18</sup> They are not deliberative, but unconscious and intuitive, bound up with emotional functionality in the right-hemisphere of our brains; in the opposite side of the brain to where sustaining the Ideal-Right is primarily processed – the left-hemisphere.<sup>19</sup>

Neuroscience provides valuable insights into where morals and moral courage originate in our conscious experience. There could even be a neuro-physiological home for moral courage; an assemblage of neural networks within which it occurs. Moral values are bound up in the cognitive capacity for empathy – not reasoning – and, utilise a complex right-hemisphere network, involving the right prefrontal cortex and specifically the right ventromedial frontal and right orbitofrontal cortices, for making moral judgments. For example, evidence of moral values and brain functionality are found in linkages between a sense of justice and the right dorsolateral prefrontal cortex.

<sup>13</sup>e.g. L Jackson and others, ‘Cultural differences in morality in the real and virtual worlds: A comparison of Chinese and US youth’, *CyberPsychology & Behavior*, 11.3 (2008), pp.279-286.

<sup>14</sup>e.g. B Liu and others ‘What Dilemma? Moral Evaluation Shapes Factual Belief’, *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, 4.3, (2012), pp. 316 - 323.

<sup>15</sup>For evidence of moral realism see arguments for “Epistemic Realism”: T Cuneo, *The normative web: An argument for moral realism*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

<sup>16</sup>CS Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* 1st edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press,1943), p.29.

<sup>17</sup>Iain McGilchrist, *The master and his emissary: The divided brain and the making of the western world*, (London: Yale University Press, 2009), p.86.

<sup>18</sup>M Scheler, *The nature of sympathy*, 1st edn (London: Routledge & Kegan Press, 1970)

<sup>19</sup>Iain McGilchrist, *The master and his emissary: The divided brain and the making of the western world*.

It is the right frontal lobe where we acquire a capacity to see the other's point of view: as it is the home of social and empathic understanding.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, we know the right frontal lobe inhibits our self-centred impulses – for our self-centred impulses, which trigger self-control and restraint to self-risk, proceed from the left-hemisphere; and it is via right-hemisphere neural activity that our brains are freed from this.

But, why is it important to understand neurologically where moral courage comes from? Because a marked consequence of the sort of world we presently find ourselves within is that we are inclined to value more the rational capabilities of the left-hemisphere. There exists what we call hemispheric rivalry, and the left-hemisphere is winning the cognitive battles. We seek logic and linear rationality in all we do; through fixed and isolated facts and evidence; lifeless (that is to say, emotionless) decontextualized sense-data, and information reduction downwards into discrete manageable orders; rather than working upwards from order towards increasing complexity and ambiguity. We thus have a cognitive bias to seek to 'do everything right', and with single-mindedness pursue the 'Ideal-Right'.

## BEHIND THE MAGIC OF MORAL COURAGE

[ Moral courage is a problem of *hemispheric rivalry* ]

[ Moral values are bound up in the cognitive capacity for empathy – not reasoning – and utilise a complex **right-hemisphere network** ]

[ The right frontal lobe is where we acquire a capacity to see the other's point of view: it is the home of social and empathic understanding ]

[ It is the right frontal lobe that *inhibits* our self-centred impulses ]

[ The left hemisphere is 'sticky' and has a tendency to *recur* to what it is *familiar* with; it seeks to discover only *what it already knows*; and so returns to a closed system pursuit of the Ideal-Right ]



[ The left-hemisphere is a deft manipulator, and justifies and maintains fallacies with unnerving over-confidence and persuasiveness ]

Intriguingly, the left-hemisphere is a deft manipulator; it can justify and maintain fallacies with unnerving over-confidence and persuasiveness. This would predictably lead to individuals bereft of moral courage being entirely unaware or unaccepting of their injudiciousness. It is perhaps not surprising, but rather disconcerting, that the left-hemisphere has acquired the moniker: 'the God's eye'.<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, the left hemisphere is 'sticky' and has a tendency to recur to what it is familiar with; it seeks to discover only what it already knows; and so returns to a closed system pursuit of the 'Ideal-Right'. Stated otherwise, if not mildly oversimplified, the left-hemisphere is egocentric and the right-hemisphere altruistic, and thus given that moral values are incongruent with egocentrism, to the left-hemisphere, morals may be square pegs for round holes.

This is why language of altruism and selflessness suffuse anecdotes of moral courage. US Army Medal of Honour recipient Sergeant First Class Fred W. Zabitosky, when describing the source of his courage, stated 'there is no such thing as patriotism in a combat situation. You don't think about medals, promotions or even a flag.

You don't think about why you are there or even your family. You think strictly about the people you are with, and what you can do for each other'. This sort of language is recurrently echoed by military bravery award recipients. Simply stated, at its base, moral courage is the will to protect others – vis-à-vis maintenance of the social – through empathising with their dilemma, and subsequently intervening, likely at cost to oneself. There is implicit a personal sacrifice for the social; a death of the ego for the other. And that concept is not at all left-brain. Conversely, a lack of morals are characterised by negative effects on the disempowered, a sense of comeuppance, and an increase in egocentrism and unruliness.

In a recent interview with a Warrant Officer from the Royal Air Force, a simple anecdote was given regarding an Air Commodore who would work in his office late into the evening, supported by a small staff of Squadron Leaders, waiting for him to leave the building, with many of the staff pushing around paperwork or playing solitaire on computers. All of this was at considerable detriment to their family-life and non-work obligations. When the Warrant Officer queried the Air Commodore on the matter of why the staff were still at their desks, he replied 'oh they're waiting for me to leave'.

But is this simple anecdote a minor issue, quite undeserving of any form of courage, let alone moral courage? Well that depends if viewed from the defence of ego (left-hemisphere) or the social-other (right-hemisphere). We know from empirical research that psychological stress, through issues like a lack of work-life balance, is a significant factor in destructive presentism, absenteeism and mental health issues in the workplace<sup>22</sup>. The barracks can be just as psychologically costly as the battlefield. Indeed, the simple challenges of the benign daily routine may contain greater systemic threats to moral integrity than, say, the treatment of prisoners of war in the battle space. Indeed, the silent injustices and abuses may, in fact, be the primary contributors to eroding trust,

<sup>21</sup>Ibid.

<sup>22</sup>C Cooper and P Dewe, 'Well-being – absenteeism, presenteeism, costs and challenges', *Occupational Medicine*, 58.8, (2008), pp.522-524.

goodwill and reciprocity among organisational leadership. Thus, the degree of moral right should not be merely measured by a correlative with the degree of negative public relations and media coverage; it is perhaps the untold stories that are likely the source of organisational cancer.

Other recent interviews conducted by the author with British Army majors and sergeants-major<sup>23</sup> revealed varying perceptions of moral issues, outside of the battle space, that require courageous intervention. Issues like increasing favouritism and nepotism in appointment selection; subjectivity and inaccuracies in annual performance reporting; poor medical statistics linked to certain service provisions; political promises and significant retention challenges; incoherent and poor intelligence-led recruitment strategies, rites of passage and indiscriminate collective punishments, and sanitised fluffy-kid-gloves training environments, were some of the key issues associated by respondents with current moral dilemmas. It was felt these issues must be courageously tackled in order to mitigate perceived negative effects on the workforce (particularly with regards to trust and loyalty).

Interestingly, strong consensus existed among respondents as to what moral courage was, with all definitions including elements of self-sacrifice, dissenting voices, significant personal consequences, social preservation, empathy, setting the example and resistance of peer pressure. So, what might be behind the magic of dealing with moral dilemmas as a leader? And, how might leaders chose to do the right thing, despite risks to personal security, by tackling 'Obstacle-Things' head-on?

It appears the first step is to move away from egocentrism, leading to an increase in social trust,<sup>24</sup> and as self-orientation diminishes, this in turn promotes a permissive psychology for moral courage through an increased tolerance for self-sacrifice.

Second, recognition of the objectivity of moral values facilitates a philosophical justification for making choices that may contradict group-think, peer pressure or 'Ideal-Right' dominance. To appeal to an authority beyond rank and hierarchy, appetite and popularity, is to provide leaders with a higher order of integrity to justify moral actions. This may even involve leaders flying in the face of societal trends, by heading in the opposite direction of travel to the general populace or media, or even their superiors, with their moral discourse and evaluation.

Third, attack the immorality of the position not the person. Ad hominem objections undermine the integrity of all parties and fail to appeal to an objective and consistent standard. It is a universal moral value that has been threatened, not an individual.

Fourth, leaders should encourage greater empathy through open conversation and encourage all actors to share what is on their minds, regarding moral challenges. If empathy is intrinsic to morality<sup>25</sup> – and indeed right-hemisphere emotional functionality – then a socially-constructed narrative about how our tribe views and deals with moral issues will generate greater consensus and permissibility of moral courage.

<sup>23</sup>Ten respondents from British Army operational and training units were interviewed between 28 Aug and 10 Sep 2017. Respondents asked to briefly reflect and answer three questions: 1) What is moral courage? 2) Why is it important? 3) Can you cite any example(s) of moral issues where it is not being applied?

<sup>24</sup>C Green, R Galford and D Maister, *The Trusted Advisor*, 1st edn (London:Simon and Schuster, 2001).

<sup>25</sup>Iain McGilchrist, *The master and his emissary: The divided brain and the making of the western world*.

So how might we encourage greater moral courage among our leaders and what lessons are there in how one might develop it?

## Developing Moral Courage and Leaders with Chests

The author's own research of comparing value-based leadership development in the military and energy sector has considered these sorts of issues, and suggests some areas where progress might be made in developing moral courage.<sup>26</sup>

# DEVELOPING MORAL COURAGE AND LEADERS' WITH CHESTS

[ What lessons are there in how one might develop moral courage in leaders? ]

## [ MORAL: ENFORCEMENT ]

[ Get tougher on moral conduct through reviewing and expanding the role of adherence measures and disciplinary mechanisms to support moral values adherence ]

## [ MORAL: ACTION-LEARNING SIMULATIONS ]

[ Through explicit integration of moral dilemma scenarios into core personnel activities (e.g. recruitment, selection, promotion, training and development) build situational awareness capabilities and moral-muscle-memory ]

## [ MORAL: VALUES-EMOTIONS CONNECTIVITY ]

[ Promulgate moral values within leadership development interventions, for 'deep-seating' moral courage. This fashions an honour-bound code of conduct for tribe members. This tribal identity and preservation supports social and empathic understanding and maintenance ]

First, a key factor in the development of moral courage – and an extremely challenging one, but which may not come as a surprise – is through moral enforcement. By that it is meant, clear linkages must be made between corporate expectations of moral behaviour – supported by, but not exclusive to the organisation's values and standards – and measurements of adherences, so that certain disciplinary techniques and mechanisms be applied to instances of non-adherence. Enforcement equals adherence. A simple metaphor can be found in average speed cameras on highways. My research was unequivocal in this, when leaders are seen to 'swerve' moral dilemmas, there must be consequences and penalties; at the very least they must receive negative feedback. Such enforcement supports internationalisation and application of ethical leadership behaviours, and forces leaders into maintaining commitment and cooperation with moral-bound social norms. Therefore, work should be taken to review and expand the role of adherence measures and disciplinary mechanisms to support moral enforcement. Simply put, we must get tougher on moral conduct.

<sup>26</sup>Matthew Anderson, A Cross Case Thematic Analysis of Systemic Leadership Development, doctoral thesis monograph (Aberdeen: Robert Gordon University, 2016) <<https://openair.rgu.ac.uk/handle/10059/2137>>

To many this sounds like confrontational and negative work. But it seems this might be exactly the sort of thing required to challenge negative cognitive processes when dealing with moral dilemmas. The brain, like any other biological system seeks homeostasis – when movement too far in one direction stabilises itself by self-correction (e.g. thermostat) – however, in the case of the left-hemisphere, it instead promotes further movement in the same direction, by latching onto positive feedback, and not looking back.<sup>27</sup> We see this in alcohol and drug addiction, and in gambling. We also see this in hubris and leadership; where leaders’ latch onto reinforcing positive feedback and make decisions beyond reasonable understanding and capability. But it is through the right-hemisphere that the brain switches direction, and it does this via negative feedback.<sup>28</sup> Neurologically, negative feedback is strongly linked to empathy development, which as we discussed earlier, is linked to sound moral judgements<sup>29</sup> and thus directly to moral courage. This means to develop the right-hemisphere’s cortices – by negative rather than positive feedback – important tools like multi-rater (360) feedback and ‘slate-a-mate’ are useful neurological as well pedagogical tools; and not just for private soldiers, but for sergeant majors, colonels and generals a-like. Negative feedback biologically sets our minds free from left-hemisphere biases.

Second, clear linkages exist between the use of action-learning simulations and values-based leadership development, therefore use of moral action-learning simulations could provide a potent tool for developing moral courage. This would be done through integration of moral dilemma scenarios into human resource activities, like recruitment and selection, promotion boards and training and development. By using action-learning simulations individuals build situational awareness and ‘moral-muscle-memory’, through replicating real-world contextual challenges and allowing the assessment of leaders’ authentic behaviours and reactions to such challenges. It should be recognised that some research suggests that inherent values and morals in individuals are relatively predictable;<sup>30</sup> therefore assessments through action-learning might represent an affirmation process as well as a developmental one. Essentially identifying, is this leader morally sound?

Thirdly, moral values-emotions connectivity between the desired corporate values and standards, and organisational leadership is essential for moral courage. If the values are the conscience of the organisation; the emotions it generates in its leaders represents the collective psychological culture. Do the leaders feel valued and important? Do they feel part of an organisation with noble purposes and aspirations; aligned to greater causes? There must be connectivity and alignment between the emotions generated and the values proposed; as any contradictions cancel out the efficacy of values-based leadership. However, when values-emotions connectivity exists the effect is profound and deep; indeed, this ‘deep-seating’ generates a code of conduct for community members, where they collectively regulate peer and organisational accountability – i.e. they challenge one another in healthy ways. Furthermore, a tribal identity emerges from a sense of exclusivity and solidarity through shared work experiences. This tribal identity and preservation supports social and empathic understanding, which in turn provides a fertile landscape for moral courage. Returning to the army example, soldiers must feel good about what the army stands for in order for moral values to flourish.

<sup>27</sup>P Bartolomeo, S Chokron, E Siéoroff, ‘Facilitation instead of inhibition for repeated right-sided events in left neglect’, *NeuroReport*, 10, (1999), pp.3353-3357.

<sup>28</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup>Iain McGilchrist, *The master and his emissary: The divided brain and the making of the western world.*

<sup>30</sup>RS Hartman, *The Structure of Value: Foundations of Scientific Axiology*, 1st edn (Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1967).



## Conclusion

In conclusion, it is necessary to develop a moral compass and firmly promote its defence – evidenced through moral courage – or we will surely find ourselves facing a moral dilemma where ‘we make men without chests and expect of them virtue and enterprise. We laugh at honour and are shocked to find traitors in our midst.’<sup>31</sup>

Moral dilemmas are clear examples of ‘Obstacle-Things’ which only leadership can tackle through moral courage. To have moral courage is to have leaders who make the right brain choices – on behalf of others – when it’s tough; and in the face of personal insecurity and risk. It is a key catalyst for effective leadership as it maintains social needs and promotes the development of empathic decision making. With it egocentrism diminishes and collectivism is fostered. To reject moral courage is to embrace a deliberate ‘swerve-to-lead’ – a neglect of leadership duties. Moral courage is not a childish notion held by the naïve, troublemakers and unpromotables; but is a vital element in the leadership mortar of team work, discipline and trust, and is explicit evidence of sound character and social capital. Strong leaders shouldn’t shirk at the price of moral courage for without it the social fabric and integrity of an organisation is in danger of decay.

<sup>31</sup> CS Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* 1st edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1943), p.29.

# The Findings of the Conference Focus Groups

By Maj William Meddings and  
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for Army Leadership)

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After the conference presentations the delegates moved into a series of small focus groups examining some of the issues raised during the day. Each focus group was made up of around 10 delegates and was allocated into one of three clusters: two groups of strategic leaders, two groups of organisational leaders and one group of team leaders.

Each group examined four questions, facilitated by staff from the Department of Communications and Applied Behavioural Sciences at the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst.

The following points summarise the discussions from all five groups.

## Question 1.

### How can moral courage be developed?

- The focus groups identified that moral courage is applicable to everyone and not just those in positions of authority.
- Focus Group 1 defined moral courage as; ‘The ability to challenge decisions/directives regardless of the dangers to yourself’.
- Dr Anderson’s presentation, describing the exercise of moral courage being similar to ‘muscle memory’, led several focus groups agreeing that moral courage could only be indoctrinated through regular exercise.
- Several focus groups commented that in most cases the development of moral courage requires a negative event/action that causes organisations to question or reform their moral values. This view links to Dr Anderson’s statements to the same effect.
- All the focus groups concluded that a firm moral foundation based on clear values and standards leads to an understanding of the ‘right course of action’. This consequently encourages individuals to question directives or actions they believe to be harmful or based on inadequate information.

## Question 2.

What role do Values and Standards play in the development of moral courage?

- Focus groups agreed that values and standards form the bedrock for an organisations code of conduct.
- However, underlying the successful enactment of this code is the acceptance of the values and standards and a shared understanding of what they mean.
- They generally agreed that Army's Values and Standards and the Army Leadership Code provide a measure for acceptable and unacceptable behaviour – a metric for moral courage performance.

## Question 3.

'Professionalising' leadership in the Army will require cultural change. How important is this for the development of moral courage?

- The focus groups examined whether military culture can be re-engineered in order to encourage morally courageous acts.
- They acknowledged that cultural change is necessary, indicating that the Army may not currently possess a culture which fosters moral courage.
- Several solutions were presented by the groups including the planned provision of more time for leaders to reflect on their decisions.
- The focus groups indicated that asking for assistance or admitting an inability to complete a task was automatically considered as incompetency. Individuals remain fearful of opening themselves to criticism and the courage to admit failure or an inability to complete a task must be encouraged.
- Mentoring was frequently presented as another approach to improving the development of moral courage and institutionalising morally courageous behaviour.

## Question 4.

How will we know we have achieved improved leadership and moral courage in our organisations?

- Across all focus groups there was agreement that whilst the practical implementation of moral courage remains a challenging issue, the means of measuring its success presents an even greater difficulty.
- It was argued in the focus groups that in many cases organisations will seek to claim that an effective solution has been applied – in this instance the development of moral courage. Groups questioned whether organisations declare success without effectively measuring its impact.
- The groups all highlighted that dual assessment through internal and external scrutiny will be essential to effectively measure success.

# Observations of the Conference

By Major Will Meddings

(SO2 Leadership at the Centre for Army Leadership)

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The speakers, panel members and focus groups discussed many and wide ranging points during the conference. The observations presented here are based on the discussions of the day, the views of the speakers and the consensus of the focus groups.

As such, they are only representative of the views of those present on the day and are without a deeper post-facto analysis of the day's findings. Equally, they do not represent the official views of the MOD or the British Army. Rather, they offer the reader the opportunity to tap into the generally agreed findings of a broad field of leadership academics and practitioners from across the spectrum of military rank and business sector.

# Developing Morally Courageous Leaders

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## Observation 1:

### We must develop leaders who accept individual moral responsibility

Leaders should be developed to understand that responsible leadership is underpinned by a firm acceptance of individual moral responsibility. Doing this may be to fly in the face of the prevalent attitudes in society and so must be a strong foundational principle in educating our junior leaders. Peter Drucker: 'The leader sees leadership as responsibility rather than as rank and privilege.'<sup>32</sup>

## Observation 2:

### We must consider if greater risk aversion and fear of being held accountable for actions will inhibit the growth of junior leaders.

A younger generation of leaders are putting a priority on their values, personal growth and work that is meaningful. They prefer to work in teams, not by themselves, and dislike conflict. This 'Social Proof Generation' have also been conditioned, far earlier in their lives and far more than their predecessors, to think and act as others around them think and act.

Senior leaders should consider whether fear of being held accountable for actions, a tendency towards reputational risk aversion, and difficulty accepting both direct (personal) and indirect (team) responsibility will inhibit the growth of their junior leaders.

Exercises and tools to be used in units or during training should be developed, that reinforce personal responsibility in moral decisions and actions.

## Observation 3:

### We must develop leaders to encourage a 'Growth Mind-set' in order to encourage responsible leadership.

Actively learning from failure builds awareness, knowledge and the energy to re-evaluate and change. Both are pre-requisites for morally responsible leadership. To fail, accept failure and learn from it requires personal and professional humility, especially in an organisation that strongly values success. These skills, which can generally be summarised as 'having a growth mind-set'<sup>33</sup> are skills that we must develop in our leaders.

<sup>32</sup>Peter Drucker, *Managing for the Future*, 1st edn (London: Routledge, 2013), p.102.

<sup>33</sup>Carol Dweck *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success*, 1st Edn (New York: Random House, 2006).

#### Observation 4:

**We must develop leaders with the humility to admit they can still improve as leaders.**

Team leadership requires different skills to organisational and, in turn, strategic leadership. No leader has finished their development yet it can be difficult for intermediate or senior leaders to admit they can still benefit from leader development. We must therefore develop leaders with the personal and professional humility to admit they can still learn more about improving leadership at their level.

#### Observation 5:

**We must develop leaders who scrutinize positive feedback much more intensely than they do negative feedback. 360 feedback may be one mechanism to assist in this.**

Having power generates an excess of self-confidence and of self-belief. This leads to a belief that followers have less wisdom, and less to contribute, to the decision making process than the leader. Together these beliefs inhibit acts of moral courage by followers.

To overcome this, leaders must understand two human behaviours: having your views reinforced by subordinates feels good, and having your views criticised feels like a personal slight. We need to develop leaders who scrutinize positive feedback much more intensely than they do negative feedback.

In addition, the Army's reporting system encourages upward rather than downward looking behaviours. This could reinforce bad leadership behaviours and stifle growth. Using 360 feedback, whether informal or formal but certainly separate from the formal reporting process, may be one manner of reducing this. It will also practice our leaders at receiving, valuing and growing from negative feedback.

#### Observation 6:

**Our leader development programmes must exercise moral courage and morality in the same way they exercise command and tactical judgement.**

There are clear links between the use of action-learning simulations and values-based leadership development. Moral dilemma scenarios must be part of the Army's selection, promotion, training and development. Through replicating real-world contextual challenges and allowing the assessment of leaders' authentic behaviours, individuals can build 'moral-muscle-memory', and learn to reaction to such challenges. The exercise of moral courage is similar to fitness and judgement – it benefits from being exercised under challenging and realistic circumstances.

Examination of mandatory and non-mandatory leadership interventions should seek to identify opportunities to address this.

# Developing Morally Courageous Organisations

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## Observation 7:

**To develop moral courage we must use enforcement and sanctions that create consequences for immorality.**

Confrontational as it may seem, a key factor in the development of moral courage, and an extremely challenging one, is moral enforcement. A leader must make clear linkages between expectations of moral behaviour and measurements of adherence. Leaders must make clear that disciplinary or administrative outcomes will be applied to non-adherence of morality.

This is entirely in keeping with the Army Leadership Code's emphasis on 'Reward and Discipline' as one of its leadership behaviours. Simply put, unless a leader gets tough on moral conduct their followers will not learn to exercise morality. Otherwise we will 'make men without chests and expect of them virtue and enterprise. We [will] laugh at honour and are shocked to find traitors in our midst.'<sup>34</sup>

## Observation 8:

**Leaders must build a link between their followers' values, the organisation's values and the emotions the organisation create.**

Morally responsible leadership requires a clear perception of one's role and values, nested within those of the organisation or team. It is a leader's responsibility to build and clarify the values and role of their team and to help followers' understand how their roles and values nest within this.

However, not only must there be connection between the followers' values and the organisation's values, but there must be connection between the emotions an organisation generates and its values; the leader is equally responsible for creating these emotions. When there is a connection between values and emotions the effect is profound and deep. It generates a code of conduct where community members collectively regulate peer and organisational accountability.

Without doing these things a leader will not encourage their followers to act morally in line with the leader's and organisation's values. In an Army context, soldiers must feel their values nest within the Army's values, and they must feel good about what the Army stands for in order for moral values to flourish.

<sup>34</sup>CS Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* 1st edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1943), p.29.

### Observation 9:

**As well as helping followers understand the organisation's values, leaders must make exercising moral courage less risky to followers.**

If moral courage is 'challenging decisions/directives regardless of the dangers to oneself' it is beholden on the leader to mitigate the dangers of exercising moral courage. While this is uncomfortable, it will encourage morally courageous behaviour.

However, if we consider the Army's value to be somewhat apart from society's in general, this should only be done in concert with building a strong and understood set of values and standards for the organisation. Openly acknowledging good examples of moral courage makes exercising it less risky, and demonstrates its place within the organisation's values.

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### Observation 10:

**Leaders must encourage debate, discussion and healthy conflict.**

Loud debate, heated discussions and healthy conflict create a culture where moral courage can be acted upon. Uniformity and conformity are the enemy of rational decision making and further reinforce that view that there is a single correct view, which is the view of the leader.

Open debate about moral challenges is of particular value – the conversations themselves construct social narratives about how 'the tribe' deals with moral issues. These in turn generate greater consensus and make morally courageous acts permissible.



## The Editor

### Maj Will Meddings

Maj Meddings is an officer in the Royal Anglian Regiment and has commanded on operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. A former Head and one of the founding members of the Centre for Army Leadership, he has researched and published on building trust in the military context.

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