The Roller-Coaster Ride of Strategic Leadership

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BUMPY RIDE AHEAD

So, you have successfully ridden the corporate escalator. Years of hard work, shrewd judgement and a well-regulated appetite for risk have paid off. You have risen to the top of the organisation. You run the whole enterprise; you are a strategic leader. It is day one. The afterglow of success generated by beating the competition for the appointment has worn-off. You feel slightly daunted by what lies ahead. You can see a slight uphill path to the near horizon but, given your experience, you know that you will be able to cope. The journey starts as predicted but, gradually, the near horizon gives way to a different picture: a cliff edge beyond which is the abyss of the unknown. You know that before long, you are going to be accelerating earthwards in that abyss, grasping for anything that might represent a parachute. In short, you are about to experience the roller-coaster ride represented by being a strategic leader.

In this article, I shall give a practitioner’s view on why strategic leadership can be as stomach-churning as a fairground ride by looking at the differences both in context and competencies of leading at the highest level. Strategic leaders need a range of enhanced competencies when compared with those required at lower levels of leadership. But my analysis points to the additional need for the ability to deal with ambiguity and chaos. I will propose a developmental process aimed at reinforcing this competency so as to generate expertise in strategic judgement. I will also look at the place of trust in strategic leadership and underline the importance of adhering to an accepted framework. I do so from my own experience of riding that roller-coaster as a military officer. An experience that has included both fundamental and fast-moving organisational change, and the less common standpoint of someone who has lead his country’s armed forces in war. I do not do so from the position of an exemplar, nor from an academic platform, although I have a long-standing interest in the underpinning concepts of leadership fuelled by the need to design development programmes for senior personnel. I also possess the natural inquisitiveness that arises from doing an MBA.

WHERE ARE THE DIFFERENCES?

So what are the differences inherent in leading at the strategic level. The first must be that of scale, often termed span of control. The term ‘strategic leadership’ is itself fraught with tautology. The word ‘strategy’, now taken to mean anything from a cunning plan to a long-term road map to a distant vision, comes from the ancient Greek word strategos derived from stratos meaning ‘army’ and agos meaning ‘lead’. The ancient Greeks would have termed this generalship. The convergence of this all-encompassing type of leadership and military affairs is unsurprising given that, the only functioning organisations of any size were armies. The word strategic was progressively used to describe the role of a commander-in-chief. Just as now, that role would have called for hard skills such as planning (the strategy), organisation, direction and monitoring. It would also have included vital soft skills like the ability to inspire and motivate. But the key point is that strategic leadership is about leadership of the whole organisation across all its functions, from the cutting-edge deliverers to the more distant support aspects. It is most definitely not about focusing on those things that you find interesting, or worse, easy.
The second difference recognises that strategic leaders are very much more at the mercy of the external environment than those at lower levels in an organisation. They are required to steer the organisation through all the ambiguity and complexity that now characterises the modern world. I will not rehearse all the contextual factors that contribute to this reality but would emphasise just two. First, modern communications cause events to move quickly, in turn, calls for rapid decision-making, often on the basis of imperfect information. Secondly, both the information itself and the resulting decisions have become much more transparent than of old. Legislation provides greater freedom of information that, among other things, feeds the modern media machine. Also, much tighter governance requirements, following some spectacular corporate failures, places an additional spotlight on those at the top of organisations.

By way of example, let me draw on some comments that I wrote in my ever-present notebook – I did not keep a diary – during the Iraq War. The date was 26 March 2003, seven days into the war, and I was standing in Southern Iraq making my assessment:

This is the original ambiguous battlespace. It is hard to interpret because many things are going on simultaneously at many levels. This is perhaps made more confusing for many people elsewhere because of the reports from the embedded media without any contextual backdrop.

What we have is some serious high-intensity warfare – the conventional line of operation – mixed in with classic counter insurgency activity against the paramilitaries – the unconventional line of operation – plus the need to deliver humanitarian aid – a peacekeeping activity. But just like in Bosnia in the early days, because of the paramilitary activity there is no universal peace to keep. All these aspects keep moving, changing in texture, changing in intensity and changing in location. It’s rather like looking into a kaleidoscope and turning the end seeing the patterns merge and change. Our job is to stop the kaleidoscope turning so a single pattern emerges. We will then see a pathway through it and make things more manageable. High on that list is the delivery of humanitarian aid. All the classic ingredients are here where the weak suffer at the advantage of the strong. We are doing our best in the face of difficult circumstances. People should not have zero defect expectations though. The world is just not like that.

This exemplifies that roller-coaster ride or the headlong dive into the abyss understood by many a strategic leader. There are plenty of alternative and equally daunting examples in the business world:

Sizeable chunks of market share have gone to bigger Japanese competitors. The economy is beginning to slide and there are growing redundancy levels among blue-collar workers, our key customer group. Consumer credit interest rates are sky-high.

Our manufacturing systems and build quality is inadequate to meet world-class competition. The product line is seriously out of date and the products themselves are stereotyped with a rough, tough image. Our Japanese competitors are flooding our domestic market with a huge range of products in direct competition to us. Their products are cheaper and of better quality.1
This was the analysis by the 13 Harley Davidson executives who paid £81.5 million for the company in a management buy-out in 1981. Yet Harley Davidson is now an iconic brand which has just celebrated its 100th birthday among much worldwide acclaim.

These examples provide five pointers about the challenges of strategic leaders. First, the difficulty in analysing ambiguity which is frequently dynamic in nature rather than static; that is, the variables are not only in constant motion but they continually change in their order of importance. Secondly, this degree of ambiguity and chaos means that common interpretation between individuals is problematic. Thirdly, the need, intellectually, to stop this ever-varying kaleidoscope to identify patterns is a conceptual activity requiring much rightbrain thinking. Fourthly, there is significant difficulty in identifying the journey through these patterns in communicating the resultant plan in a way that is digestible to those who cannot conceptualise the problem in the same way. Lastly, all this has to be conducted in an environment in which there are high expectations over results.

COMPETENCIES TO MATCH?

In seeking to segment the potential of high-performance senior leaders, I look for four basic attributes that should be relatively easy to identify as individuals climb the organisational escalator. These go beyond the obvious traits that we might regard as the universal skills of leadership. However, this analysis might be skewed by the military environment in which I operate in that individuals are confronted by leadership challenges on a daily basis. It is our ‘stock-in-trade’. It is not a bundle of competencies that we occasionally take out of the cupboard and dust off. Our training and development, our appraisal system and, most importantly, the context within which we operate makes it so. Neither is leadership in the military environment about rigid discipline and directive control. Rather, it is about self-discipline and what we call ‘mission command’. This encapsulates the notion of telling subordinates what you want them to achieve not how to achieve it. In spite of the temptations, senior commanders simply cannot wield the long screwdriver in a high tempo campaign with lots of moving parts. In many ways, this flies in the face of the way many institutions are currently moving in the UK. The increasing expectation of a risk free, zero defect world has led us into increasing regulation and the micro management of outputs by over-detailed and granular target setting. Ultimately, this constrains creativity in organisations and prevents effective delegation. There is simply no other way to fight a modern war successfully other than by delegation and empowerment.

The four competencies concerned are, first, depth of intellect coupled with innate creativity. This is the raw material by which we can develop the ability to deal with chaos and find those elusive pathways through it. Secondly, to communicate effectively the intangible roadmap that results, strategic leaders need empathy with their people. They need to understand what energises and motivates an entire organisation while, at the same time, understanding the uncertainty and fear that decisions might generate in some parts of the organisation. Thirdly, strategic leadership is intellectually and physically taxing, much more so than at lower levels. If they are to remain with the pace and constantly communicate, strategic leaders need high levels of energy. They
must also feel deeply passionate about their role and have the dynamism to convey that passion. Fourthly, although strategic leaders occupy the perch at the very top level of the organisation, they cannot assume that they know all the answers. Thus, they need the humility to say, “I don’t understand” or “does anyone have any other ideas?”. Success often breeds arrogance but a strategic leader’s role is to boost the self-esteem of others for the benefit of the organisation. In plunging earthwards down that abyss, it is often the people around you who represent your parachute!

RIDING THE ROLLER-COASTER - DEVELOPING THE KEY COMPETENCIES

So, how do we take the raw materials of intellectual agility and creativity, empathy with people, energy and passion, and humility to produce a truly competent strategic leader? Before answering, we do need to recognise the importance of a further ingredient – experience. This is the bedrock on which any developmental process sits from both an internal and external perspective. Internally, our own experience of successful approaches gives us confidence to extend our horizons, confront complexity and potentially arrive at novel solutions. Externally, experience as ‘track record’ defines the intangibles of credibility, integrity and style. Let us assume that experience represents the foundation stones and the process itself consists of three pillars. The capstone on what amounts to a Greek portico (Figure 1 - page 6) is the confidence of a strategic leader.

The first pillar is the undoubted need to have technical ability in your chosen field. Previous experience leads to understanding and expertise but this needs to be updated continually. We all do this in various ways: basic courses on professional advances, seminars on legislative changes, reading professional journals are some examples. Generally, this is linear or left-brain activity that is not generally seen as stimulating development by senior leaders but it is what keeps us out of trouble on a day-to-day basis. But alone, it is insufficient to allow us to operate successfully in our ambiguous and chaotic environment. More is required.

So secondly, we need to develop the ingredient of intellectual agility to generate the confidence to view strategic issues from unexplored angles and conceptualise the problem. Perhaps more of an art than a science, we need to learn to explore intellectually, to take risks and to use intuition. Given that intuition is an intangible blend of intellect and experience, in many cases, an intuitive approach does not come easily until individuals have amassed considerable senior experience of their own. But we can all gain vicarious experience through reading case studies and the like and discussing our understanding in small, facilitated groups of individuals at the same stage of development but, preferably, the members should be from diverse backgrounds so as to avoid group-think. This activity needs to take place in an external ‘safe’ environment where people will feel free to experiment and lay open their views, free from the competitive and judgmental atmosphere that would be generated in all but the most creative of organisations were it conducted internally. Collectively, such a group gains the confidence from each other that it is acceptable to think outside the accepted norms. They will find that others share their views on the need to focus on unexplored perspectives.
on complex issues that, in turn, lead to hitherto unimaginable, creative solutions. An easy starting point is the consideration of each other’s professional dilemmas. This pillar represents right-brain activity and, for most senior people, is seen as stimulating and rewarding. A peer-group network that works in this way is a very powerful development tool.

Finally, we need to blend technical competence, intellectual agility, and experience together to generate our emotional maturity as leaders. This has resonance, though not total convergence, with Daniel Goleman’s seminal work on Emotional Intelligence. Common ground exists on the need for empathy, self-awareness and recognition that leadership is not domination, nor should confident strategic leaders display arrogance. But our requirements go beyond emotional intelligence. The ancient Greeks recognised the concept in their word ‘phronesis’. But the concept also goes deeper than words. It enshrines the notion of developing practical wisdom by blending intelligence and experience with character, which itself encapsulates aspects such as trust, integrity and moral courage. It perhaps recognises that few problems have a straightforward answer; dilemmas abound with black and white solutions giving way to varying shades of grey. Against this backdrop, we might contrast the twin notions of ‘good leadership’ and ‘leadership for good’. As we descend into our abyss of ambiguity and chaos, we will meet situations to which we cannot know the answer but we still have to face the problem. Phronesis, or practical wisdom, is the tool we use to decide what rules to break so that we can serve the common good. The related development activity is very personalised and is best conducted through one-to-one coaching. The need to lay bare your soul in terms of how you have recently surmounted dilemmas, how you would change your approach in future and how you may have failed to take your team with you, is best conducted on a confidential basis behind closed doors. Such an approach instils the twin disciplines of honesty and reflection, therefore adding to reserves of practical wisdom and generating the necessary strategic judgement by which to develop the confidence of the strategic leader.

**THE STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT PILLARS**

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**FIGURE 1**

THE STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT PILLARS
TAKING THE BUMPS OUT OF THE RIDE – TRUST

According to a MORI poll in the UK, eight people in ten do not believe that "Directors of large companies can be trusted to tell the truth." Research from the Committee on Standards in Public Life conducted in September 2004 revealed a widespread lack of trust in holders of public office. Conversely, a more recent YouGov poll shows that, in spite of the damning verdict for the BBC of the Hutton report on the lead-up to the war in Iraq, the BBC is still the most trusted news network, showing a five-fold advantage over its rivals. Clearly, populations have a capricious view on trust but, in the UK, there is a danger that we have entered a downward spiral within which it is not easy to judge cause and effect. There seem to be three variables in this unstable equation. The first is the level of general scepticism or even cynicism that public bodies and some professions are not to be trusted. As a result, and this is the second variable, there is a move towards other measures to ensure accountability, which is aimed at placating an ever-increasing array of stakeholders, stringent professional codes, regulatory bodies, granular and detailed performance targets, and league tables that name and shame. As for the third variable, against these metrics, there are bound to be imperfections and failures. These in turn are reported - and sometimes hyped - by the media, and what trust remains is further eroded thus starting the cycle all over again.

Much of this was superbly exposed in Onora O'Neill's 2002 Reith lectures. She points out:

"Some sociologists have suggested that the crisis of trust is real and new because we live in a risk society. We do live among highly complex institutions and practices whose effects we cannot control or understand, and supposedly see ourselves as subject to hidden and incomprehensible sources of risk. It's true that individuals can do little or nothing to avert environmental risks, or nuclear accidents, or terrorist attacks. If the developed world is the paradigm of a 'risk society', risk societies must be characterised simply by their perceptions of and attitudes to risk, and not by the seriousness of the hazards to which people are exposed, or the likelihood that those hazards will actually harm them."

Against this backdrop, Onora O'Neill points out that:

In many parts of the public sector, complaint procedures are so burdensome that avoiding complaints, including ill-founded complaints, becomes a central institutional goal in its own right. We are heading towards defensive medicine, defensive teaching and defensive policing.

Strategic leaders therefore face a challenge, given that they head these institutions whose functions are hard to understand. In addition, this 'risk society' now embraces a new culture of understanding over 'rights'. Yet increasingly, we seem unable to balance 'rights' with the duties and obligations that go with them. Meanwhile, the consumer is more empowered than at any time in the recent past and the move from a deferential to a reference society means that few in authority are given the benefit of the doubt. This all sits badly with the two-way street suggested by the contract of trust and the danger of an organisational siege mentality is ever present.

In analysing the required response, we could see the problem on four dimensions. The first two represent the credibility in terms of trust of the
individual strategic leader himself, or herself, both internally within the organisation and externally. The second two represent the reputation of the organisation both internally and externally. In the most dire of situations, it is likely that these four dimensions would be synchronised but, in other circumstances, they can be remarkably misaligned. A strong organisational identity can work wonders in recovering from the departure of an inept chief executive. But the strategic leader’s challenge, where trust is concerned, is to generate both a personal and corporate reserve on which to draw when the going gets tough. In other words, we should visualise a bank account into which we continually pay. Our deposits arise from the actions of our everyday leadership, but how will we be judged?

**FIGURE 2**
THE SEVEN PRINCIPLES OF PUBLIC LIFE

**The Seven Principles of Public Life**

**Selflessness**
Holders of Public office should act solely in terms of the public interest. They should not do so in order to gain financial or other benefits for themselves, their family or their friends.

**Integrity**
Holders of public office should not place themselves under any financial or other obligation to outside individuals or organisations that might seek to influence them in the performance of their official duties.

**Objectivity**
In carrying out public business, including making public appointments, awarding contracts, or recommending individuals for rewards and benefits, holders of public office should make choices on merit.

**Accountability**
Holders of public office are accountable for their decisions and actions to the public and must submit themselves to whatever scrutiny is appropriate to their office.

**Openness**
Holders of public office should be as open as possible about all the decisions and actions that they take. They should give reasons for their decisions and restrict information only when the wider public interest clearly demands it.

**Honesty**
Holders of public office have a duty to declare any private interests relating to their public duties and to take steps to resolve any conflicts arising in a way that protects the public interest.

**Leadership**
Holders of public office should promote and support these principles by leadership and example.
A BENCHMARK FOR TRUST?

If we are to avoid trial by the media, we need to adopt standards by which we might regain the confidence of our stakeholders and give ourselves some internal resilience during this bumpy ride. In the UK, the seven Nolan Principles, now known as the Seven Principles of Public Life (Figure 2 - page 8) have been tested to examine the extent to which they succeed in articulating the public’s expectation about those who hold public office. They are thus worth examining and in so doing, I shall test them for relevance against the backdrop of my world as a military leader, particularly when working in a coalition. By this process, I shall raise them from the individual to the collective.

They start with **Selflessness.** “**Holders of public office should take decisions solely in terms of the public interest. They should not do so in order to gain financial or other material benefits for themselves, their family or their friends.**” This is often the media’s start point for an onslaught on the trustworthiness of an organisation because ‘material benefits’ are open to interpretation. The tools of the trade, such as a car or an executive jet, are easy to turn into tomorrow’s tabloid headlines. Corporately, this is more about motives and the degree to which the legitimate interests of stakeholders have been considered in the decision-making. In the military world, the theme of motives also applies. It is the mandate given by the electorate that gives governments the authority to use military force, but they are of course accountable to parliament. Such accountability includes not only responsibility for the level of risk with which a nation’s forces are confronted but also for the nature of the conduct of war itself. Also, in military operations, it is likely that many a soldier, sailor or airman will be selfless in facing danger. It is our duty as military leaders to ensure that credit is placed where it is due. Not taking credit for someone else’s actions, be they on the battlefield or in the boardroom, is fundamental to selflessness and a key element of generating and maintaining trust.

Next we have **Integrity.** “**Holders of public office should not place themselves under any financial or other obligation to outside individuals that might influence them in the performance of their official duties.**” The survey on public attitudes to these principles pointed less to concerns over financial propriety – a result perhaps of improved standards of corporate governance – but more towards honesty in its broadest sense. This embraces the concept of telling the whole truth, rather than being economical with information so as to cloud imperfections. In military circles, there is a constant dilemma between responding to the legitimate expectations of the public in terms of the democratic principle of the right-to-know on the one hand, and the need to preserve operational security over combat capabilities and future battle plans on the other. The same might be true in the corporate world in balancing expectations between shareholders and say, the parties in a merger. In both cases, it is probably true to say that someone in the process will be dissatisfied. The complexity in adhering to this principle of integrity, therefore, comes not from the prospect of ‘sweeteners’ leading to the award of a contract, because that would be too black or white. Rather, it arises from varying perceptions as to the weight that should be given to the views of the different stakeholders. In this respect, some would say that one of the necessary competencies required of a strategic leader is cunning. Militarily, it is self evident that, in war, we seek to outwit our enemy. More broadly, I do not regard ‘cunning’ as sitting well with integrity in the generation of trust. So, there is a balance to be struck between
Moving on, there is **Objectivity.** “In carrying out public business, including making public appointments, awarding contracts or recommending individuals for rewards and benefits, holders of public office should make choices on merit.” While making choices on merit has universal support in the UK, 68% of the respondents surveyed felt that cronyism prevailed in selection for public office. Again, there was less concern over the more tangible aspects of contracting, where audit trails are available whether they are initially transparent or not. More broadly, at the strategic level, objective decision-making between imperfect options on the basis of almost imperceptible differences in merit is problematic. Even judging how to assess the relevant merits of a suite of options can be hugely complex. The same applies in military planning where we often select the measure of merit as the degree of risk involved. A daring plan that sees us taking advantage of fleeting opportunities is fine but, in wars of choice where vital national interests are not involved, risk becomes the key arbiter, both for commanders and for governments. In coalitions, different nations have different appetites for risk and applying objectivity in reaching a consensus can be difficult.

The next principle is **Accountability.** “Holders of public office are accountable for their decisions and actions to the public and must submit themselves to whatever scrutiny is appropriate to their office.” Advances in corporate governance and the post Enron fall-out places high priority on accountability. But in many corporate, public sector and not-for-profit management structures, aligning accountability with authority remains a challenge. This problem comes to the fore when the impact of not acting is misunderstood, and those gatekeepers with the authority to prevent a decision being enacted but no accountability for the outcome, become dominant. In the military world, commanders are accountable to Ministers. However, the conduct of modern war requires Ministers to delegate certain decisions and actions to those in the field. Clearly, in Nelson and Wellington’s time, there could be no other way. The nature of communications would not allow governments to wield the long screwdriver. Even passing back the news of victory was a tortuous process. Success in the Battle of Waterloo took 72 hours to reach London from the place that is now only 2 ½ hours away by Eurostar and but nano-seconds away in terms of modern communications. But while, understandably, it might be tempting for governments to want to capitalise on modern real-time communications so as to control the conduct of war at the highest level, it could simply not be made to work in practice. The same technological progress that has given us a revolution in communications has also given us a revolution in the nature of war. Precision weapons, reconnaissance sensors that are impervious to weather and communications networks that can distribute vast amounts of fused data, all combine to increase exponentially the tempo of warfare. There are thus now many, many highly agile moving parts. This calls for continued delegation from Ministers to military commanders. This delegation is founded on a contract of trust underpinned by accountability. In brief, it requires you to do what you said you were going to do, in the way that you said you were going to do it.

Next comes **Openness.** “Holders of public office should be as open as possible about all the decisions and actions that they take. They should give reasons for their decisions and restrict information only when the wider public interest...”
demands.” I have already touched on transparency in relation to some of the earlier principles and noted the strong public demand in the UK for being told the whole truth. Of interest, the survey underpinning these principles indicates that the UK public is influenced more by TV and newspapers than personal influences such as friends and family or (rather surprisingly) their own experience. We therefore need a brief look at the modern media. If we are to meet the public’s aspiration for openness, we need to be able to rely on the media – and mostly the editors – to treat the subject (be it military operations or any other aspect of life) on the basis of fact, knowledge and balance. Given the hugely competitive nature of the modern media environment, where being first with the story is seen as being vital for success, openness is often the first casualty when inaccuracy, conjecture and bias creep in. In military operations, openness suits us in that we need to demonstrate that we are operating within the law of armed conflict and, if necessary, that the other side is not. So openness is very much a supporting facet of the generation of trust between a nation and its armed forces and between the commanders of those forces and their government.

The sixth principle is Honesty. “Holders of public office have a duty to declare any private interests relating to their public duties and to take steps to resolve any conflicts arising in a way that protects the public interests.” This is very much about personal conflicts of interest deriving from the pursuit of individual gain. Again though, the concept of complete honesty comes to the fore in the sense of not limiting disclosure in an attempt to obscure the facts. Clearly, our bank balance of trust could be emptied in an instant if we fail to adhere scrupulously to this principle. In looking at this through a military prism, I would substitute ‘national interests’ for ‘personal conflicts’ and ‘individual gain’, and focus on the implications for a coalition of countries engaged in military operations in a war of choice. Gaining consensus in a coalition is a complex business. Structurally, there are bound to be imperfections whenever vital national interests are not at stake. This takes away the ‘glue of fear’ which normally would provide a unifying force. But in an era of wars of choice, other factors come into play. Different governments will have differing degrees of mandate. An individual government with a slender majority and thus a limited mandate, would have less freedom of manoeuvre than one with a huge majority. Different countries have different national ways of warfare and different appetites for risk. They may also have different historical perspectives on the crisis at hand. Taken together, this creates an ambiguous and complex international political environment. To agree on a course of action and put a multinational force together in these circumstances is thus problematic but it is the personal honesty of world leaders that cuts through all this. Even when there is a convergence of intent and interest, there can be disagreement over the methods to be employed. This frequently centres on the judgement over the point at which force, itself a euphemism for military violence, has to used in a developing crisis. These are tough decisions, sometimes requiring national interests to be subjugated in favour of supra-national advantage. Resolving these types of conflict of interest require enormous honesty, not to mention moral courage, if our supra-national organisations are not to be terminally undermined by every crisis. At lower levels, honesty between commanders within a coalition is vital. There must be no surprises and no reversals of intent at the eleventh hour. Being honest about capabilities falls into the same category. As a national commander within a coalition, you have a duty to be
clear about the extent and effectiveness of the forces under your command. You also have to be honest, both within the coalition and with your own people, about the degree of cumulative risk that you are facing. The degree to which that level of risk is acceptable to all parties depends significantly on the level of mutual trust.

Finally, the last principle concerns Leadership. “Holders of public office should promote these principles by leadership and example.” Clearly when it comes to trust, leaders have two responsibilities. First, they must indeed generate the culture of trust within their own organisation. Secondly, they must be exemplars of the generation of trust with stakeholders. Unfounded cynicism over the motives of others can quickly lead to a corrosive relationship. As many will testify, a quiescent substance like trust can take years to build, but can also be lost in the blink of an eye. The bank account is then suddenly empty.

**CONCLUSION**

First, the modern world in which strategic leaders operate is chaotic and ambiguous. In these circumstances, the development of competencies beyond those appropriate to lower levels of leadership is needed. Nevertheless, experience gained earlier is the bedrock on which future development sits. While the generation of deep technical knowledge or professional expertise is relatively straightforward, more is required. Strategic leaders need to develop the confidence to view problems from hitherto unexplored angles, to find patterns in the ambiguity, and then recognise a pathway through it. They also need the skill to communicate a potentially abstract roadmap with the passion that energises and motivates their organisation. But the real challenge comes in generating the subtle blend of intelligence and experience with character to create the type of practical wisdom that overcomes the fuzzy, unbounded problems that the modern world presents. This latter aspect requires self-analysis, reflection, introspection and the assistance of a skilled coach. All three aspects of this development process require self-discipline and determination. It also requires patience to help those whose vantage point does not allow them to see through the chaos and define the journey for themselves. Trust, both within the organisation and between organisations is the fuel that will take us along that journey.

However, trust is a perishable commodity in this modern, chaotic world which is self-evidently too ambiguous to respond to accountability derived from neat performance indicators, regulations and ever more stringent professional codes. Rather, accountability needs to be formulated on the basis of trust. In this respect, it is possible to construct a framework around which to hang the constituent elements which together lead to the generation of the contract of trust. I have used the principles espoused by the UK Committee on Standards in Public Life of selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty and leading by example. But, it is equally possible to build other frameworks to fit a particular context. Though I submit that the core values and behaviours will not be all that much different. In this way, it should be possible to build a truly resilient organisation where the cry of, “trust me I’m a leader” will be met by approval and agreement, not cynicism and ridicule.
REFERENCES:


3. The notion of ‘good leadership’ versus ‘leadership for good’ is enshrined in the mission of the Windsor Leadership Trust: www.windsorleadershiptrust.org.uk. The concept has been articulated by Professor Gillian Stamp, Director BIOSS.


7. BMRB Social Research survey ibid.
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