

# “Leadership entrapment: the other side of discretion”

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## SECTION 4. Practitioner's corner

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### Leadership entrapment: the other side of discretion

#### Abstract

Despite the challenge of precisely defining the nature of entrapment, this paper seeks to collect contrasting perspectives of this less attractive side of leadership and sets out to find a cure, or rather prevention, for falling into its grasp.

Following a literature review of the entrapment to which leaders succumb, the results of a focused and intimate case study based on the experiences of highly respected leaders highlight four approaches by which they have been entrapped.

Extracts of interviews with an international sample of chief executive officers (CEOs) reveal a distinctly human experience of these study participants from which no one is exempt. The idiosyncratic nature of response to entrapment positioned each study participants' experience as unique. The paper concludes that leaders need to adopt specific measures in order to control and reduce the darker human tendencies.

This paper combines the experiences of study participants into a four-part case study, providing insight into their experiences whilst also protecting their identity. The authors drew study participants from a sample of global manufacturing companies. The concepts will require validating in other organizations of different demographic profiles.

The paper presents a leadership entrapment model that provides the reader with insight into the entrapment process. Insight enables the authors to then offer suggestions on possible strategies leaders can adopt to guard against entrapment.

**Keywords:** leadership, entrapment, temptation, discretion, dark-side, leadership entrapment.

**JEL Classification:** M14.

#### Introduction

People in both ancient and modern times have practiced the old craft of entrapment. Entrapment refers to situations where a person induces another to commit a morally undesirable act, such as corruption, which the person otherwise would have not committed. From the legal perspective, one can claim entrapment if the person had no inclination or "predisposition" to undertake a morally undesirable act (Dworkin, 1992). Materialist philosophy reveals the predominant symbol of entrapment hidden behind western morality and law. This influences subsequent culture which promotes recurring problems of social honesty and self-articulation. For example, western society greatly values high individual and organizational performance. It often attributes it to sound leadership and organizational culture. However, both leadership and organizational culture can easily undermine performance, if and when a leader transgresses on important performance issues and entraps him/her in unfortunate courses of action from which he/she cannot easily disengage.

Rubin and Brockner (1975) position that entrapment decisions are the result of a field of force that includes the approach to goal accomplishment as well as avoidance of past losses or wasted investment. Brockner and Rubin (1985) define entrapment as a special kind of escalation in which there are competing pressures for withdrawal and for remaining in a

situation over time. They argue that entrapment is a decision-making process whereby individuals escalate their commitment to a previously chosen, though failing, course of action in order to "make good" on prior endeavours. Parties negatively perceive retreat from an entrapment situation that would "lose face" or jeopardise their reputation (Brockner and Rubin, 1985; Zartman and Faure, 2005). There are many instances in which individuals can feel vulnerable or locked into a costly and/or undesirable course of action (Staw, 1981). Moreover, Staw (1981: 577) noted "because it is often possible for persons who have suffered a setback to recoup their losses through an even greater commitment of resources to the same course of action, they can produce a cycle of escalating commitment". How easily can forces that spiral beyond their control entrap leaders? There are many entrapment approaches, methods and tools, ranging from smiling innocently at dinners, exchanging favours, and succumbing to temptations, seduction and outright corruption.

This article presents episodic narratives that illustrate the process of leadership entrapment, the escalation of a leader's commitment, as well as often conflicting determinants present in situations, through four case examples. The cases illustrate how people entrap leaders who are also leaders, albeit often of more powerful status, whether through power, position or wealth. First, we offer an overview of critical literature, followed by a description of the methodology scholars adopted dur-

ing the study. We then present four mini exemplary cases which illustrate each four entrapment situations. A discussion of results shows the overarching dimensions of entrapment that emerged from the analysis and the categories of entrapment we consequentially identified. The article then moves on to discuss how to cope with each category of entrapment, making suggestions as to possible strategies leaders can adopt to guard against entrapment. The article concludes with a summary of the study's main findings.

## 1. Relevant literature

Adam Smith's (1776; 2003) economic analysis of market endeavors identifies at least two instances of discretion: (1) the exchange process of mercantilism; and (2) moral discretion that guides the direction of moral agency that we find in market discretion. The idea of discretion assumes an action based on rational decision-making and also as a scarce quality as it assumes the virtues of care and prudence (i.e., enduring humanity and/or an ongoing concern) (Barnard, 1938a).

In the pursuit of an organizational and social endeavor, an individual in a leadership role enters into complex relationships between its organizational members as well as between organizational decision-makers and the company's stakeholders. Navigating these relationships require an individual to read context (Kakabadse and Kakabadse, 1999). Each party to the complex network of relationships needs to engage first in self-analysis of values and then agency in applying these values, thereby making individual choice understood as the autonomous expression of human self. That is the power to affect decision-making by distinguishing between specific qualities using discretion to make inferred choices amongst a number of qualities that present themselves. As such, responsible leadership encompasses discretion and the quality of choices in decision-making.

Scholars have addressed leadership's positive impact from the micro perspective (the individuals within the organization) (Goldman and Kernis, 2002; Luthans, 2002; Avolio and Luthans, 2006; Luthans and Avolio, 2009), and have formed a macro perspective (the behavior of the organization) (Cameron et al., 2003; Cameron and Caza, 2004; Yammarino et al., 2008). Notwithstanding the responsible leader's positive impact when using his/her discretion to make good quality choices in decision-making, leadership can also have a negative impact (Kakabadse et al., 2007; Neider and Schriesheim, 2010), simultaneously at individual, group, organizational, community, and societal levels. These vary from abusive attributions, dysfunc-

tional and/or destructive behavior (including narcissistic, psychopathic and Machiavellian behaviors), social exclusion, public and private deviance, instrumental counter productive behavior and leadership temptation (Neider and Schriesheim, 2010).

In the corporate arena, leaders endeavour to achieve high performance and use individual discretion granted in their role to affect means at their disposal for achieving corporate ends. As such, they are accountable for their decisions within institutional relationships and economic and social arrangements in society which entail corporate social responsibility and moral practice. They often do so at their perils with undesired consequences for themselves and others.

Ancient Greeks knew the importance of leadership impact as they valued the leadership virtue authenticity (Ferrara, 1994). Leader authenticity (the idea of "being oneself" or being "true to oneself") or leader ability take responsibility for personal discretion and organizational and social obligations in a way that leaders will construct choices by themselves and want others to view them as moral individuals (Kakabadse et al., 2009). Barnard (1938a) argued that the authentic capacity of a leader to balance responsibilities for private freedom and public obligation is a salient and important quality in leaders. The concept of authentic leadership has developed to encompass self-awareness, relational transparency, internalised moral perspective, and balanced processing (Luthans and Avolio, 2003) amongst other attributes such as self-knowledge, self-concept clarity, self-concordance, and person-role merger, and the extent to which the leader expresses self-concept in his/her behavior (Shamir and Eilam, 2005; George et al., 2007).

For some, leadership begins and ends with authenticity (George et al., 2007). Leadership authenticity, in particular, implies ethical intensity as a major role in the leaders' ability to recognize moral issues and the ability for the actual engagement of ethical decision-making processes instead of other decision-making schemata (Trevino, 1986; Trevino et al., 1998). Trevino et al. (1998: 470) found that the organization's ethical context is linked with employee attitudes and behavior. Increasingly, studies are drawing associations between individual virtuousness such as integrity (which manifest through maintaining consistent standards, trustworthiness, and displays of honesty – authenticity) and performance (Harter, 2002; Clifton and Harter, 2003; Emmons, 2003).

In behavioral economics, the endowment effect (or divestiture aversion) suggests that people value

goods or services more once they establish their property right. This means that endowment effect does not reflect wealth, transaction costs or emotional attachment since the effect is both instantaneous and those who buy and sell for a living also experience it (Thaler, 1980; Thaler and Williamson, 1994; Miller and Rodgers, 2001). Rather, once one owns something, one places a higher value on it than one did when one acquired it – the “endowment effect” (Thaler, 1980). This ownership bias shares some similarities with commitment, attachment and bonding (Miller and Rodgers, 2001).

Whenever individuals invest resources, whether financial, emotional or time in an endeavour that does not turn immediately into the success, they tend to respond by committing to additional investments in order to achieve set goals. Those who seek to entrap others invest their time, and over time an increasing level of both emotional and financial resources in their endeavour. It is the human tendency to respond by committing additional resources in order to achieve a goal that constitutes escalation, and it is this escalating endowment that paves the road to entrapment (Rubin and Brockener, 1975; Staw, 1976; Teger, 1980; Arkes and Blumer, 1985).

Kirshner (1995) observed that once entrapment emerges and unless somebody immediately defuses the issue, leaders on the other side are forced to respond in increasingly contentious ways, otherwise they risk appearing weak to their counterpart, which is the logic of entrapment. Hence, this reinforces the basic premise that organizational context influences management behavior (Trevino et al., 1998; Kaplan, 2001; Valentine et al., 2001). As entrapment events unfold, those involved perceive them as a high stakes “game”. Leaders face a choice between giving in and appearing to having capitulated to the other side or pushing forward in ways that further raise the stakes, making it still more costly to back down later (Kirshner, 1995).

## 2. The study

At a time of business scandals and fallen business heroes, we aim to understand key mechanisms leaders use to entrap others. Our interest is to examine the entrapment process, particularly amongst leaders who act as distinct role models and ultimately set an example for others to follow. In effect, our analysis focuses on the chief executive’s (CEO’s) role. We adopt the Aristotelian position (Aristotle, 1911; box XIII, 1086 a 25ff) that “universals do not exist independent of particulars, but in particulars as features of them”. Hence, we do not assume a universal code of moral behavior for CEOs, but rather, we attempt

to capture the experiences of particular CEOs in order to appreciate the nature of their code(s) of moral behavior and further examine whether certain common themes emerge. Thus, we make a Hegelian distinction (Hegel, 1931) between “understanding” of CEOs’ temptations and the “reasons” for CEOs’ (in)action in response to their entrapment and highlight such distinction through dialectical reasoning.

Relatively few qualitative studies explore CEOs’ entrapment due to the difficulties and challenges researchers face in gaining access to these often high profile and always busy individuals (McNulty and Pettigrew, 1999) or academics’ preference for quantitative measures. A sample of five leading CEOs, each leading organizations that operate globally in a single manufacturing sector, participated in this study by recounting their memorable entrapment experience. We chose the narrative approach to capture the humanness of the subjects, as well as to illustrate their particular decisions and dilemmas. This would highlight the many levels and facets of entrapment and any influence of emotions and environment in the arising conflicts.

The narrative approach allows for a creative retelling of the world such that hidden patterns and until now unexplored meanings can unfold and recognize that “all behavior is historical” and that such behavior “takes place over time and in particular contexts” (Zald, 1996: 256). As a result, we can use the narrative approach “to examine how people in organizations represent and construct their lives” (Zald, 1996: 254). Thus, we use this “everyday” understanding of CEO discretion that scholarship often does not consider to explore leadership entrapment which individuals in leadership roles need to consider and analyze in order to further understand the complexities of leadership discretion.

We base our findings on the participating CEOs’ narratives. During the study, we interviewed five CEOs on three separate occasions. Each interview focused on a different entrapment experience. Consequently, this paper reports findings based on 15 CEOs’ narratives. We derive these from hand-coded data based on the expressed desires and values that the participants highlighted as giving rise to entrapment.

Because of the sensitive nature of the subject matter, the CEOs only participated if we could assure them confidentiality, with no chance of anybody able to link narratives back to them. Interestingly, simply changing names was not enough for participants because of the ongoing impact of the entrapment events. In response to the study participants’ concerns, we took the unusual step of combining the participants into a single composite character. The

composite character embodies common characteristics of the CEOs involved, but is not recognisably any one of them. We present an exemplar story that illustrates each category of entrapment against which we analyze participants' experiences in order to gain rich insights (Dyer and Wilkins, 1991: 613, 617).

### 3. Discussion of results

Although entrapment comes in many forms and often in combination with temptations, desires, gifts and other intervening variables, all of our study participants conveyed to us that they felt entrapped by particular methods. Two overarching dimensions to entrapment emerged from the data analysis: (1) action; and (2) temptation that we used in combination to identify the method used to entrap the study participants (see Figure 1). Participants identified action as the approach by which those seeking to entrap them pursued their objective. The action could either be overt or covert, known as leader's "latitude of action" (Hollander, 1978; 1995) or "field of action", where a leader shares his/her experience, "a voyage through time", where a major component of the voyage is leader's perception (Hollander, 1995: 55). Hence, consistent with an entity perspective, this model describes processes that are located in the perceptions and cognition of the individuals involved in the relationship. Participants identified temptation as that which they desired to have or do that they knew they should avoid (Kakabadse et al., 2007). Temptation could be either direct or indirect. We used these two dimensions to define four approaches of entrapment to the study participant:

1. The obvious approach: overt action and direct temptation.
2. The set-up approach: covert action and direct temptation.
3. The "hot buttons" approach: covert action and indirect temptation.
4. The bespoke approach: overt action and indirect temptation.

The obvious approach is a blatant attempt at entrapment that lacks subtlety. The set-up approach requires more time and effort than the obvious approach, but still assumes that the target of entrapment efforts will be easily compromised by those seeking to entrap them. The "hot buttons" approach occurs as a consequence of a realization that entrapment is not going to be easy; the individual seeking to entrap his/her target needs an approach that plays on the target's known weaknesses. The bespoke approach utilises gathered intelligence during previous approaches to ensure that entrapment efforts play to a spectrum of weaknesses in the tar-

get. If a "predator" is willing to invest the time and effort, he/she needs to entrap his/her "prey", which we associate with the bespoke approach. The danger lies in the predator compromising the prey irrespective of his/her strength of character.

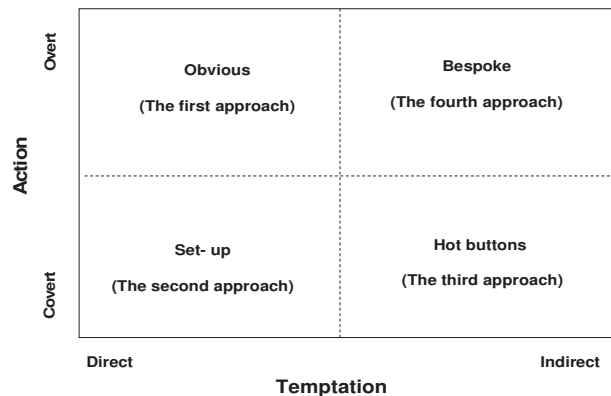


Fig. 1. Leadership entrapment model, conceptualising the approaches leaders take to entrap others

The above model of entrapment both applied to the experiences of the study's participants and also constituted a hierarchy of endeavour. Those seeking to entrap a study participant would initially try overt action and direct temptation. If that failed, they would move on to more covert action, still with direct temptation in an attempt to give their subject more freedom to, in one study participant's words, "take enough rope to hang themselves with". If this second approach failed, they would move on to a third, covert action and indirect temptation. This time the objective was gathering data on specific weaknesses other than entrapment. Having learnt the study participants' specific weaknesses, the approach would move on to overt action and indirect temptation. Those seeking to entrap now tailored the overt action to play on the specific weaknesses of the targeted individual without overstating the temptation involved.

The four approaches to entrapment constitute a hierarchy of effort on the part of those wishing to entrap a study participant. The second approach requires more effort than the first, the third more than the second and so forth. Not all study participants experienced the third and fourth approach, either because it was not necessary – approach one or two had worked – or because the benefit of entrapping them did not warrant the effort associated with the third and fourth approach.

For those who did experience the latter approaches to entrapment, all four approaches constituted separate interventions, sometimes over a period of years. Again, to preserve the anonymity of the study participants, we captured the four approaches to entrapment by creating a composite character narrative

that embodies, but does not detract, from the study participants' experiences.

The case study showcases the composite character Harry, a self-starter with great leadership capability. Energetic and youthful, this 42-year-old CEO has a reputation for relentless effort. From a modest background, but well educated, Harry actively supports causes concerning equality and social justice. Shareholders and media view Harry's company as ethical and one that cares for its employees and society, particularly through its investments in the community.

#### 4. Leadership entrapment: the obvious approach

The first approach to the entrapment of others is the obvious approach. The approach lacks subtlety and a common theme to emerge from study participants was that it occurred following an evening, where they "let their guard down" and had one more drink than was prudent.

**Case study one: after dinner drinks.** The young and newly appointed CEO, Harry, arrived after the overnight flight from London. He had slept little on the plane and faced a day of negotiations to finalise the terms on his first big contract as CEO. The day was long and difficult, but successful, and as the evening approached, his host increasingly pressured him to join them for dinner. He was able to fend them off with a blunt refusal and insistence that he return to the hotel.

The following day was more relaxed. Harry resolved the difficult issues and spent the day visiting the client's facilities. Having slept well the previous night, Harry accepted his host's invitation for dinner. It would be an opportunity for him to meet their CEO. Dinner was excellent and as they left the restaurant there was no specific discussion about where they were going, but banter in the car was generally good natured. After about 30 minutes Harry realized they were not returning to the hotel. "We are going to another place," informed his host.

The other place was in a lively part of town. It could have been a bar, but negotiations with the door man indicated that this was a club. Harry did not see any money change hands; however, after about five minutes, escorts ushered Harry and his host into the club and a ravishing beauty promptly served drinks.

The club seemed normal enough, with the exception of a stage filled with an unusually large number of very attractive young women, each clad in little more than a bikini. More drinks arrived and Harry found himself engaged in conversation with a group of young women who quickly proved not only attractive, but also highly tactile.

The stage now became the scene for a live sex show. More drinks and some time passed until the evening was coming to an end. Harry's host pulled him to one side and offered to pay for the prostitute, or prostitutes if he preferred, informing him that his predecessor had never been slow to accept. Harry was not so affected by the evening's entertainment to fail to see the significance of this revelation. His host might be telling the truth, or might not. The fact was that what ever happened, it would not remain a private matter. Much to the disappointment of all, Harry insisted on returning to the hotel alone.

Reflecting on the events described in the case study, Harry was not able to say if his ultimately moral action resulted from his moral compass or a realization that what ever happened would be public knowledge.

*"The evening started out well enough and there was no reason not to accept the invitation to "go to another place" for one or two drinks. I would like to think that as the reality of what was unfolding became apparent, I put my foot down because it was the right thing to do. I am left wondering, however, how I would have behaved if my host had been a little less direct or obvious in his attempts to compromise me. If I had felt a little more in control of the situation would I have pulled back? I like to think I would have done, but would I? In all honesty I don't know"* (Harry).

The case study illustrates that even the most routine of evenings can spiral out of control. Harry initially compromised himself as a consequence of losing control of the situation before he arrived at the club because he did not know he was going. Although in this example entrapment efforts ultimately failed, a common theme to emerge from study participants was that even such obvious attempts to compromise them did not always fail.

**4.1. The set-up approach.** The second approach to entrapment is indicative of more thought and effort. The approach is more subtle as the overt attempt to entrap has failed and consequentially, there is a realization that one will need to covertly combine entrapment efforts with overtly innocent actions to achieve the desired outcome.

**Case study two: a quiet night in.** The following day in the office nobody mentioned the previous night's entertainment and as the day progressed, nobody mentioned plans for the evening. As the day eased into late afternoon and then early evening, Harry thought to himself that perhaps his host had abandoned attempts to compromise him; he was unwavering in his moral principles.

At 7:00 p.m., Harry was about to return to his hotel when the client CEO approached him. After some introductory pleasantries, he asked Harry if he would join him and his wife for dinner at his apartment. His wife would like to give Harry a small gift for his wife. As it was clearly time for dinner and refusing to accept the gift would suggest a lack of gratitude, Harry accepted. After all, Harry thought to himself, how much trouble can I get into an apartment with the boss and his wife?

When Harry and the CEO arrived at the apartment, it was immediately clear that this was one of the best apartment blocks in town. After passing security, the CEO parked in an underground garage full of cars you only see in glossy magazines. Harry and the CEO took the elevator and emerged into a luxurious penthouse with a breathtaking view of the city from the terrace. The CEO's wife, a well-known model, emerged from the kitchen.

The CEO's wife introduced Harry to her model friend who was helping assist with dinner. The meal was very good and the company was entertaining as the CEO's wife and friend engaged Harry in conversation to help them improve their English. Handing Harry a glass of exceptionally fine cognac, the CEO's wife then presented him with a necklace for his wife. It was difficult to say what it was worth, but this gold pendant encrusted with diamonds looked expensive.

Despite a moment's hesitation, Harry accepted the gift as all four moved out to the terrace. Smoking fine cigars whilst two exceedingly beautiful women ensured that their cognac glasses remained full was not so tough to take. The CEO drove Harry back to his hotel very late, suggesting that pickup wouldn't be until 10:00 a.m. the next morning.

Reflecting on the events in the case study, Harry could not reconcile in his own mind if he had done anything wrong by accepting the gift.

*"I still have no idea how valuable that necklace is. I should get it valued for insurance purposes, I suppose, but in truth, I don't really want to know. Let's be clear, the CEO is very wealthy, and so the cost would not have been significant within the context of his personal wealth. I do, however, recognize that it is not the point. On the one hand, I did not take the opportunity to get to know the "friend" better; however, I recognize that the way in which they offered the gift did circumnavigate my defences. I would have refused a gift for me in the office. This was not entrapment in an overt sense, but it did bind me to the CEO in a way that I now see enabled other doors to be opened – other doors that in retrospect, I think would have been better left shut"* (Harry).

The case study illustrates that apparently innocent suggestions can facilitate events that escalate in ways that we cannot easily foresee. Although, in this example entrapment efforts were only partially successful, a common theme to emerge from study participants was that the road to entrapment was invariably littered with material incentives of one form or another.

**4.2. The "hot buttons" approach.** The third approach to entrapment is indicative of a realization that entrapment will not be possible using an obvious or set-up approach. Direct attempts, associated with the first and second approach, have largely failed and so, the entrapper needs an approach that exploits specific weaknesses. Entrappers use apparently innocent action as cover to establish indirectly specific weaknesses and in doing so, gain insight into the type of temptation into which the individual might be entrapped.

Everyone has specific weaknesses. However peculiar one's "hot buttons" may seem to others, they are, nevertheless, important to them. Pushing an individual's "hot buttons" also provides an opportunity for one to gather data on the other, thus better unveiling hidden weaknesses that one can exploit later. The third approach constitutes an exploitation of already known weaknesses, plus intelligence gathering to help plan future action.

**Case study three: home by the sea.** Harry started to think about the safety of the British Airways flight back to London. The week had not been easy and it would be a relief to escape. However, as Harry started to relax, his phone rang. A problem required that he attend a meeting in New York at 8:00 am Monday morning. Flying back to London and then to New York would involve spending the entire weekend in transit or in airports. To make matters worse, the flights he needed were full.

As Harry attempted to reschedule, his host became aware of the situation and after ten minutes the CEO approached Harry. As Harry had checked out of his hotel, the CEO suggested that Harry spend the next couple nights with him and his wife at their weekend seaside home. It is a one hour drive from both the office and the airport and there is a direct flight to New York on Sunday morning. The CEO phrased the request in a way that would make refusal seem ungrateful and Harry was in a tight spot. On balance, this seemed like a pretty good solution given the alternatives.

The CEO drove Harry to the coast. The resort was a strange mix of outrageous luxury and absolute poverty only found in third world countries. As they ate lunch on the beach, the CEO invited Harry to jet ski.

Harry and the CEO raced around the bay on ridiculously powerful jet skis for a couple of hours. Undoubtedly, Harry was enjoying himself. As the light started to fade, they returned the jet skis and headed to the apartment in good spirits.

On a high hill overlooking the bay, the apartment was also a penthouse suite – a 5000 square foot internal space with a 5000 square foot outside space comprising a terrace, pool, a sun bathing and viewing platform. Harry did not know that money could buy such things. The view was breathtakingly beautiful and the apartment stunningly luxurious.

Later that evening they met with the CEO's wife and her friend for dinner. The lively and engaging conversation focused on the future, Harry's interests and future aspirations. Harry was having so much fun that before he knew it, Sunday morning rolled round. The others were still asleep after another very late night as Harry met his driver who whisked him to the airport. Checking in and having to deal with reality again was a rude shock. Harry could grow accustomed to that other life style very quickly.

Reflecting on the events in the case study, Harry appreciated in hindsight that he had again put himself into a situation that he should have avoided. He struggled in his own mind to reconcile whether his behavior had been unethical or had compromised him personally.

*“Looking back it is clear to me that I did allow myself to be compromised. That weekend my host learnt more about my private life, what I like to do, what I hope to do, than any of my colleagues. I guess I handed him the bullet to use later, but that is a wide interpretation. Looking at the situation in a more narrow context, I did avoid the cost of what would have been very expensive flight tickets by not returning to London, the two of us did cover business issues that enabled me to avoid a return trip later that year and I was more effective the next week in New York as a consequence of being fresh. Was what I did wrong? Well, I do remember racing around on the jet ski thinking, “I can't believe that I am being paid to do this” and generally, in this life if something seems too good to be true, it is” (Harry).*

The case study illustrates that “good Samaritans” are not always as good as their apparently selfless actions might suggest. Although in this example the foreign CEO's entrapment efforts obviously were not successful, a common theme to emerge from study participants was that when they volunteered apparently harmless personal information, they did not realize they unwittingly were facilitating their own entrapment.

**4.3. The bespoke approach.** The fourth approach to entrapment is a return to direct action, but this time bespoke action construed to meet the deeper needs of the target individual to entrap. Temptation remains indirect, as direct and obvious temptation has historically failed. Temptation, however, comes in many forms and although indirect, is nevertheless real. Those study participants who had encountered the bespoke approach revealed a common theme that invariably involved “back patting”, where people both publically and privately applauded their good character. Participants identified a common failing under these circumstances as a tendency to “open up” to people who flattered them, or arranged situations in which they received public recognition for their good work. Having said too much, they went on to provide the predator with further information on how to compromise his/her prey.

**Case study four: captain of industry.** Asked to serve as a Board member of an organization that regulated the industry in which he worked came as a surprise to Harry. He had no idea that the CEO with whom he had been working over the last few months served on the Board, or that he had nominated Harry. Immediately accepting this honour, Harry recognized the benefit of having this role on his CV.

The Board's next meeting would take place in a part of America unknown to Harry. The CEO called Harry to ask about his travel plans. Would he get in early enough to join him for dinner? Harry checked the available flights, but the closest international airport was two hours away from the hotel and he would not land until 19:00. He would arrive far too late once he cleared immigration and customs and picked up his rental car. “Why not fly to Boston instead?” the CEO asked. “We can then fly up together. I will be flying into a domestic airport 20 minutes from the hotel.” If Harry were honest, he was nervous about attending his first Board meeting and appreciated the offer to travel together.

Harry met the CEO in the Boston airport's international terminal. They then headed to the executive terminal where a corporate jet waited for them. Ten minutes after arriving, the jet was airborne. The two men launched into talking about industry challenges and how the Board should respond to the regulatory environment that the new U.S. administration was intent on bringing into force.

When Harry arrived at the hotel, he was shocked to discover it was one of America's best ski resorts. The following day was an “informal” day, which meant that a new Board member like Harry had nothing to do, as he was not yet involved in any of the



various Board sub-committees. Harry commented to the CEO that it seemed rude not to take advantage of the snow. To Harry's surprise, the CEO agreed. They should go skiing together at 11:00 after he reported to his sub-committee. The next day Harry enjoyed some truly wonderful skiing.

The following evening the Board decamped to the best restaurant Harry had ever experienced. Strolling back to the hotel, the CEO asked, "What time do you need to get back?" Harry thought for a moment, then realized that as he would stay in the airport hotel and board an early flight the following day, he had no particular curfew. "Then we will call the jet for 16:00 so we can hit the slopes early, take a long lunch and then head to the airport at our leisure. What's not to like?" said the foreign CEO.

The next day the skiing was not good, it was great. Harry was relieved that he made it through his first Board meeting without looking like a fool. As a result, Harry was relaxed. The two men had ample opportunity on the slopes, over lunch and in the jet to plan their strategic agenda over the coming three months in preparation for the next Board meeting. Harry was now part of a close team with the CEO. "It's not a problem," he told himself, as the exceptionally pretty air hostess handed him another gin and tonic. "We are working for the good of the industry."

Reflecting on the events in the case study, Harry recognized that election to a prestigious Board position and flying on an executive jet for his first meeting played on two of his weaknesses. He had "champagne tastes, a brown ale pocket" and was also professionally vain.

*"It was very astute to get me elected to the Board. I rather like to think it is not so obvious, but he had clearly worked out that high-status professional recognition is something to which I just can't say no. Also, given my reaction to his apartment in town and home by the sea, it was not difficult to work out that I would just love the chance to fly to that first Board meeting in an executive jet. More than that, the time we spent together and our genuinely similar views about how to regulate the industry, made it all very easy. Since then, however, I have found that it has been impossible to separate concurrence on industry regulatory issues from concurrence on our business issues. On the one hand, that is very positive in that we resolve problems quickly and effectively. On the other hand, his company is making more money out of our joint venture than mine. I guess I sold my soul for a handful of beads"* (Harry).

The case study illustrates that actions which may appear altruistic to outside observers can, nevertheless, bind people together in ways that result in en-

trapment. In this final example, the foreign CEO succeeded in his entrapment efforts, with a common theme to emerge from the study participants revealing that although they could have disengaged from the situations, they chose to continue participating.

## 5. Coping with leadership entrapment

Many factors influence individual leaders to over-commit to a particular cause of action that leads to entrapment. Moreover, not all causes and drivers are relevant to all case and not all influence situations equally (Staw and Ross, 1988). What one leader finds difficult to resist, others find easy and vice versa. However, considering that entrapment comprises a complex situation that escalates, one needs "moral creativity" (Barnard, 1939b) in order to honorably disengage from the entrapment situation. Barnard (1938b: 264) posited that moral creativity entails finding "some substitute action which satisfied immediate desire or impulse of interest, or the dictates of one's code, and yet conforms to all other codes". Writing about executive leadership, Barnard (1939b) suggested that the moral creativity of authentic leaders commonly comprises three fundamental leader qualities: (1) transparent honesty/character; (2) moral courage; and (3) experience-informed intuition, which are situation-specific as they "depend for their meaning in the specific case upon the situation, not merely the individual, either as interpreted by the actor or leader or others, and his/her interpretation will often differ from different observers' interpretations" (Barnard, 1938b: 102).

Barnard (1939b) reinforced Aristotelian pragmatism that "the nature of the virtues is determined by the practice of the virtues" and that leadership comes from the will of individual leaders to control their own "personal conduct in conformance with their moral codes" (Scott and Mitchell, 1989: 315). We call on the moral character of leaders, whether we perceive it as authenticity or prudence, when a leader faces a conflicting situation by becoming entrapped in moral dilemmas that are imbedded in an increasingly complex leadership context (Cranton and Carusetta, 2004). Smith (1759; 2000: 248) also recognized the value of prudence as a virtue and a duty.

"The common proverbial maxims of prudence, being founded in universal experience, are perhaps the best general rules which can be given about it. To affect, however, a very strict and literal adherence to them, would evidently be the most absurd and ridiculous pedantry."

The obvious approach to entrapment is obvious precisely because one enacts overt action to place temptation directly in the path of the target

individual to entrap. As such, it may seem like a simple matter to “just say no”; however, this is not necessarily the case. Cultures conduct business in very different ways and behavior one regards as morally reprehensible in one culture can be completely normal in another. Staw and Ross (1987: 68) acknowledge that “perseverance is important”, but also warn that “it can also be self-defeating” and suggest that one should know when to “back off” or, in case of a failing project, “pull the plug”. Hence, recognizing an over commitment to the undesirable or lost cause are a first step in dealing with a situation (Staw and Ross, 1987).

Accepting that different cultures conduct business differently does not constitute an acceptance that entrapment is inevitable. For those subject to entrapment efforts by others, they must decide whether their own actions may reduce or increase the effectiveness of entrapment efforts. In essence, the predator’s ability to entrap his/her prey is dependent on the quality of the prey’s decision-making. Discretion on the part of the prey assumes he/she bases his/her action on rational decision-making. However, rational decision-making is a scarce quality as it assumes the virtues of care and prudence (Barnard, 1938a).

When considering the most appropriate response to the obvious approach to entrapment, the individual must balance the need to build working relationships against the need to avoid entrapment. Those in leadership roles enter complex relationships between organizational members, decision-makers and stakeholders. Navigating these relationships requires them to read context (Kakabadse and Kakabadse, 1999). To avoid the obvious approach to entrapment, whilst still building robust working relationships, they must consciously and continuously focus and reflect on the context of the moment. Such insight informs decision-making and in doing so, helps make more rational decisions.

The set-up approach to entrapment constitutes the predator’s escalating and ongoing effort to entrap his/her prey. The predator’s initial attempt has failed and he/she decides to persist with his/her previously chosen, though failing course of action as a consequence of not wanting to lose face (Brockner and Rubin, 1985; Zartman and Faure, 2005).

When considering the most appropriate response to the set-up approach to entrapment, both predator and prey must critically consider their actions in an effort not to jeopardize their reputation. The predator’s decision to persist will result in escalation of entrapment efforts unless the prey is able to inter-

vene in a way that disrupts the dysfunctional dynamic that is in the process of establishing itself. As Barnard (1938a) suggested, a leader must have the moral courage to act if he/she is to be an authentic leader.

It is difficult to be prescriptive as to the precise nature of the most appropriate action one needs to defuse entrapment efforts we associate with the set-up approach to entrapment. The most appropriate action will inevitably be situation specific. In a broad sense, however, a leader’s action comes from his/her will to control his/her own personal conduct in conformance with his/her own moral code (Scott and Mitchell, 1989: 315).

The “hot buttons” approach to entrapment is more difficult to evade than the obvious or set-up approaches because the previous approaches have failed. The predator realizes that his/her prey has eluded them: they have been denied. Rubin and Brockner (1975), Staw (1976), Teger (1980) and Arkes and Blumer (1985) observed that whenever an individual invests resources into an endeavour that does not turn ultimately into success, he/she responds by committing to additional investments. As such, in this life one thing worse than having a predator pursue you is to become the predator’s sole focus of attention.

The paramount response to the “hot buttons” approach to entrapment is to disengage without escalating the situation further. Escalation paves the road to entrapment and avoiding it depends upon more than just reading context. To avoid the predator now, the prey must not only read context, but as Barnard (1939a) suggested, have the experienced-intuition associated with the presence of mind he/she needs to find some substitute course of action that satisfies one’s own code of conduct, yet conforms to all other codes.

The bespoke approach to entrapment is indicative of a reality that a leader has not defused issues in a timely manner. This forces leaders on both sides to respond in increasingly contentious ways to avoid the risk of appearing weak to their counterpart (Kirshner, 1995).

The most appropriate response to the bespoke approach to entrapment requires a leader to draw on a fundamental leader quality, namely transparent honesty of character (Barnard, 1938b: 102). In combination with moral courage and experience informed intuition, transparent honesty of character will help those who are the subject of entrapment efforts by others to focus on their own moral compass. In so doing, a leader is better able to draw on his/her moral creativity that, in turn, can facilitate finding

a middle way forward that neither capitulates nor pushes forward in ways that further raise the stakes.

### Concluding remarks

Entrapment is one of the less attractive sides of leadership, but nevertheless is a real issue. It is naive to pretend that there is a cure for entrapment. However, insight into entrapment approaches can assist a leader in his/her efforts to avoid falling into the grasp of others. The findings contribute to leader's greater awareness and appreciation of an increase in scope of leadership responsibilities as one ascends to higher echelons within an organisation. Increasing leadership responsibilities, in turn, requires increased understanding of their unique nature, as well as the trappings and entrapments that may accompany them. One also requires understanding in order to appreciate, understand, resist and influence the challenging and dynamic environment in which one must carry out these leadership responsibilities.

Leadership ability that effectively makes sense of an entrapment situation and/or experience, and the wisdom to make consequential and ethical decisions in the volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous environment, is the test of true leadership. The leadership entrapment model affords insight into the nature of entrapment in two ways. First, we identified four approaches to entrapment. Second, we clarified the process by which entrapment efforts escalate. Knowing that initial attempts to entrap may escalate, insight into the nature of future entrapment efforts provides some protection. Forewarned is forearmed, giving a leader an opportunity to reflect on future entrapment strategies and consequently, the most appropriate response.

To assert that specific responses to entrapment are appropriate in every situation is unrealistic. Despite the caveat that action is inevitably situation dependent, we can draw on the model in this paper and the extant literature to propose four strategies that leaders can adopt to guard against entrapment:

1. Consciously consider, focus and reflect on the context of the moment. Insight into one's context can help inform decision-making and in doing so, help ensure one takes decisions with more care.
2. Decisions a leader takes with due consideration for context are more prudent if a leader recognizes the need to control his/her own actions in conformance with his/her moral code.
3. Escalation paves the road to entrapment. Avoiding escalation requires the experience-

informed intuition a leader associates with presence of mind. He/she requires a substitute course of action that satisfies a leader's own moral code, yet conforms to the code of those seeking to entrap them.

4. To resist the most determined entrapment efforts, a leader must draw on a fundamental leader quality: transparent honesty of character. With moral courage and experience-informed intuition, transparent honesty of character assists a leader in finding a way forward that neither capitulates nor raises the stakes further.

It will never be possible to prevent others from attempting to entrap individuals in leadership roles. Rules and other organizational mechanisms may lean towards constraining a leader's action such that they have more difficulty responding in ways that escalate entrapment efforts. A more effective response for effective governance than rules and regulations is Kakabadse and Kakabadse's (2005) "shared leadership" model. This provides a sound infrastructure, where one individual shares and does not invest power in one individual. It will not eliminate others' entrapment efforts, but should mediate against any abuse of leadership position.

The potential significance of the entrapment process for management praxis is sufficient that it merits further attention. As new theory, the entrapment model offers many opportunities for future inquiry. Whilst the theory presented here is within the context of an individual leader's effectiveness, it remains open to development, offering opportunities for further theoretical elaboration and modification. Specifically, the entrapment model alludes to a link between poor organizational governance and a tendency of leaders to engage in the entrapment of others, but does not clearly establish that link. If scholars could establish a link between poor organizational governance and a tendency of leaders to engage in the entrapment of others, a natural progression would further the study aimed at the establishment of those aspects of organizational governance that are most effective at reducing entrapment efforts.

To date, scholars have used qualitative inquiry methodologies to establish and elaborate on entrapment theory development. Johnson and Harris (2002: 101) observed that quantitative research and qualitative inquiry methods need not live in total isolation from each other. We should not view the two approaches as discrete options; rather, as labels that describe two ends of a continuum. The two methodologies can complement each other, and therefore, further study should consider the various quantitative methodologies available.

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