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Choices: A Decision Framework
for Aspiring 'Lebowski Young
Achievers'

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**The Logic of Fateful Leadership Choices:
A Decision Framework for Aspiring 'Lebowski Young Achievers'**

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Introduction: The World According to the Big Lebowski

The Coen brothers cult comedy classic, 'The Big Lebowski' (Coen and Coen, 1998) presents a few days in the life of a loveable anti-hero and 1991 refugee from the hippie era, the 'Dude' (aka 'Jeffrey Lebowski', 'Your Dudeness', 'Duder' or 'El Duderino - if you are not into that whole brevity thing') played by Jeff Bridges. The madcap adventures of the Dude provide a notable interlude or interruption in his Zen-like life of 'abiding' to which he is happily restored at the end of the movie.

During this interlude, the Dude enters the world socially constructed by the 'straight establishment' to seek recompense for the soiling of his favorite rug ('it really ties the room together') by a pair of goons employed by 'known pornographer' Jackie Treehorn, played by Ben Gazzara, who have mistaken him for establishment notable, the 'real' or 'Big' Jeffrey Lebowski, played by David Huddleston, married to 'young trophy wife, Bunny', played by Tara Reid.

The Big Lebowski explains to the Dude the key contours of the world, as the establishment sees it, in the following scene:

LEBOWSKI

Are you employed, sir?

DUDE

Employed?

LEBOWSKI

You don't go out and make a living dressed like that in the middle of a weekday.

DUDE

Is this a--what day is this?

LEBOWSKI

But I do work, so if you don't mind--

DUDE

No, look. I do mind. The Dude minds. This will not stand, ya know, this will not stand, man. I mean, if your wife owes--

LEBOWSKI

My wife is not the issue here. I hope that my wife will someday learn to live on her allowance, which is ample, but if she doesn't, sir, that will be her problem, not mine, just as your rug is your problem, just as every bum's lot in life is his own responsibility regardless of whom he chooses to blame. I didn't blame anyone for the loss of my legs, some chinaman in Korea took them from me but I went out and achieved anyway. I can't solve your problems, sir, only you can.

The Dude rises (Coen and Coen 1998).

The world according to Big Lebowski is populated by two broad categories – ‘bums’ and ‘achievers’. He clearly identifies with, and sees himself as an exemplar of, the latter category while swiftly consigning the Dude to the former.

That this world is full of self-serving myths is later revealed by his cynical daughter, Maude, played by Julianne Moore. She reveals to the Dude the myth that lies at the heart of her father's vanity:

MAUDE

I am one of two trustees of the Lebowski Foundation, the other being my father. The Foundation takes youngsters from Watts and—

DUDE

Shit yeah, the achievers.

MAUDE

Little Lebowski Urban Achievers,
yes, and proud we are of all of them.

...
I keep telling you, it's the
Foundation's money. Father doesn't
have any.

DUDE

But your father--he runs stuff, he--

MAUDE

We did let Father run one of the
companies, briefly, but he didn't do
very well at it.

DUDE

But he's--

MAUDE

He helps administer the charities
now, and I give him a reasonable
allowance. He has no money of his
own. I know how he likes to present
himself; Father's weakness is vanity.

The central issue the movie portrays the Dude, the Big Lebowski and Maude as being 'ultimately concerned' with (see Tillich 1952) is the meaning of 'achievement'. For the Dude, the concept of achievement has no meaning outside the blissful (perhaps timeless) state of 'abiding' from which he occasionally ventures and to which he seeks to return. He cannot imagine himself experiencing regret as he reflects on missed opportunities to achieve from this state. Perhaps the only regrets he will experience will relate to the time wasted not abiding. Regret at missed opportunities in his outer world is an alien emotion to him and in this sense he is profoundly alienated from the 'world according to the Big Lebowski'.

For the Big Lebowski, achievement in his world is a state charged with meaning. He will eventually withdraw from this world to a private life of retirement from which he hopes to look back on a 'life of achievement, on challenges met, competitors bested, obstacles overcome'. The positive emotions he can imagine such reflection inducing will relate to both the intrinsic satisfaction he derives from choosing worthwhile goals and realizing them and the external endorsement, the public recognition, he receives from being given credit for their realization.

He faces two problems: (a) he may not make the most of the opportunities he is given to achieve and can imagine experiencing regret as he engages in *ex post* reflection on this possibility; and (b) he may be exposed as somehow inauthentic by a skeptical observer such as Maude and can imagine experiencing (perhaps unacknowledged) shame as he is, at some time, confronted by an interpretation of his life story that calls into question the clarity of his self-concept, the self-concordance of his goals (is he 'motivated by goals that represent his actual passions as well as his central values and beliefs') and the self-expressiveness of his behavior (see Shamir and Eilam 2005).

This article is based on the proposition that the world constructed by the Big Lebowski is not that different to that 'inhabited' by other 'young achievers' such as aspirant leaders engaged on MBA programs or 'high potential' employees selected by their employees for participation in leadership development courses. Moreover, as they imagine opportunities for leadership opening up for themselves in the future, they may 'savor in advance' the positive and negative emotions they could experience as they engage in *ex post* reflection on, and are subjected to a public evaluation of, their conduct in response to these opportunities.

The paper will argue that there is a logic to the fateful choices such young achievers or aspirant leaders can make as they ponder what can kind of leader they want to be or what kind of

leadership they want their behavior to express. Two main theoretical streams will be drawn on in elaborating this logic.

The first is social constructionism. Following its seminal formulation by Berger and Luckman (1967) who disputed the essentialist nature of reality and proposed, instead, that it is constructed through a socially interactive process of communication, social constructionism has developed into a body of theory with considerable possibilities for application in the human and social sciences, in general and, in leadership studies, in particular, where it permeates the work, for example, of Fairhurst (2007), Graen and Uhl-bien (1995), Grint (2005), Heifetz and Linsky (2002), Meindl and Ehrlich (1987) and Ospina and Foldy (2010) as well as the burgeoning field of ‘appreciative inquiry’ (Cooperrider and Srivastva 1987; Srivastva and Cooperrider 1990; Whitney and Trosten-Bloom 2003; Bushe 2007). Insights from this literature will be drawn on to explain the different ways ‘senior authorizers’ (SAs) can interpret the choice opportunities they authorize young achievers (YAs) to address and how YAs can socially construct the hopeful discourse through which they engage other members of the system to address these challenges with them.

A second stream of literature that will be drawn on is the economic revisionism found the work of Shackle (1973); Ferejohn and Fiorina (1974), Sen (1977), Hirschman (1982), Elster (1998) and Wallis, Dollery and McLoughlin (2007). They have advanced broadly similar arguments that the type of fateful choice described in this paper cannot be modeled according to the principles of constrained utility maximization since *homo economicus* is a ‘rational fool’, without the reflective capacity to form a ‘second order’ evaluation or ‘metapreference’ about what she wants her preferences to reveal. By contrast, the type of YAs described in this paper are not only capable of imaginatively projecting themselves to a future time when they

reflectively evaluate their fateful choices but can ‘savor in advance’ (Hirschman 1982) emotions such as hope and regret that would be evoked by such an evaluation.

The paper is structured into four further sections. In the next section, both social constructionist and economic revisionist streams are drawn on to model typical YA responses to choice opportunities interpreted for them by their SAs as being ‘wicked’, ‘tame’ or ‘critical’ problems. The following section will then draw from the field of appreciative inquiry to explain how hopeful discourse can be socially constructed to bias YAs toward using ‘leadership’ rather than ‘management’ or ‘command’ in response to these problem interpretations. The next section will reflect on my own practice in the areas of leadership education and training to evaluate some of the methods used to focus YAs on the qualities of adaptivity and authenticity they seeking to develop in their own lives. The concluding section recapitulates, in brief, the main contribution made by the paper.

The Basic Framework

This section elaborates a decision framework for a YA seeking to prepare herself for the type of choice opportunities she envisages SAs providing her with in the future. On each such occasion, the YA imagines herself and the SA being ‘socially embedded’ (Granovetter 1985) in a particular system. This may be a bounded organization or a boundary-spanning network whose members share common goals, values or interests. The system can be seen as a source of both formal and informal authority and an arena for member engagement by the YA.

From a social constructionist perspective, how the YA imagines herself responding to a SA’s authorization of her pursuing a particular choice opportunity will depend on how it is interpreted by the SA. Grint (2005), for instance, has posited that problems can be interpreted as

‘wicked’, ‘tame’ and ‘critical’ to respectively legitimate ‘leadership’, ‘management’ and ‘command’ responses to them. Moreover, each response can be associated with a certain of type of authority. A fateful choice to exercise leadership will thus be dependent on *referent authority* derived from those leader characteristics or behaviors that elicit respect, attention and admiration. By contrast, the choice to exercise management will draw on the *expert authority* derived from being seen to have managerial expertise while the choice to command will ultimately be based on *coercive authority*.

The key dimensions of this type of fateful choice are shown in Figure One.

[INSERT FIGURE ONE HERE]

By interpreting a problem as ‘wicked’, the SA can be seen as legitimating the engagement of an *effective following* by the YA to address it. This is apparent in the following formulation of the link between wicked problems and catalytic leadership by Keith Grint (2005, p.1473):

A Wicked Problem is complex, rather than just complicated, it is often intractable, there is no unilinear solution, moreover, there is no 'stopping' point, it is novel, any apparent 'solution' often generates other 'problems', and there is no 'right' or 'wrong' answer, but there are better or worse alternatives. In other words, there is a huge degree of uncertainty involved and thus it is associated with Leadership. The leader's role with a Wicked Problem is to ask the right questions rather than provide the right answers because the answers may not be self-evident and will require a collaborative process to make any kind of progress. Examples would include: developing a transport strategy, or an energy strategy, or a defence strategy, or a national health system or an industrial relations strategy; and developing a strategy for dealing with global terrorism.

Two qualities would seem to make the potential followers a leader seeks to engage in ameliorating wicked problems effective (see Kelley 1992). The first is a capacity to contribute to the collaborative process of ‘learning through’ the issue. The second is a willingness to commit scarce resources such as time, effort and emotional energy to this process as an expression of a shared hope in its advancement. Such a hope will be based on a belief in both the worth and possibility of advancing this process (Snyder 2000; Wallis *et.al.* 2007, 2009). To believe such a process is worthwhile is to believe it is ‘worthy of pursuit in a special way incommensurable

with other goals we might have' (Taylor 1985, p.135). Such a belief would have to be derived from a second-order meta-preference that views being an effective follower as expressive of the 'kind of life I want to live' or the 'kind of person I want to become'. In addition, effective followers must believe in the possibility of ameliorating wicked problems. This prospect does not have to be probabilistically calculated. It is sufficient for it to be imagined (Shackle 1973).

To the extent that a YA is able to actually engage an effective following to address a wicked issue, she will be rewarded with greater referent authority as followers look to this person to provide, and seek to give her credit for, continued leadership. The 'hope-authority curve' (HAC₀) shows the nature of the positive relationship the YA may imagine to exist between hoped-for levels of authority and system engagement. It is drawn on the following assumptions:

- Even if the YA fails to engage any effective followers, the SA will give her some credit and legitimated referent authority for trying to do so. HAC₀ is thus shown as having a positive intercept on the vertical authority axis;
- As the percentage of the system the YA hopes to engage increases, the authority she will be given for realizing this aspiration becomes successively greater to reflect the rising difficulty of engaging increasing less receptive members (See Casson 1991). HAC₀ is thus drawn as a non-linear curve up to EL₁ reflecting the assumption that, up to some limit, hope is an increasing function of engagement.

The following proposition can now be made:

Proposition One: The interpretation of a problem as 'wicked' will be seen by aspirant leaders as legitimating their exercise of leadership according to the percentage of the system's potential membership they hope to be able to engage as effective followers.

Alternatively, if a SA interprets the problem as ‘tame’, he is could be seen as signaling a willingness to confer a certain amount of expert authority on the YA provided she seeks a *managerial* solution to the problem. According to Grint (2005, p.1473):

A Tame Problem may be complicated but is resolvable through unilinear acts because there is a point where the problem is resolved and it is likely to have occurred before. In other words, there is only a limited degree of uncertainty and thus it is associated with Management. The manager's role, therefore, is to provide the appropriate processes to solve the problem. Examples would include: timetabling the railways, building a nuclear plant, training the army, planned heart surgery, a wage negotiation - or enacting a tried and trusted policy for eliminating global terrorism.

Up to some level, the engagement of system members with complementary expertise will enhance the YA's expert authority, but beyond this level it will be diluted as more system members compete for being credit for exercising the managerial expertise thought necessary to solve a tame problem. These ideas are reflected in the management authority curve (MC0) shown in Figure One. It is drawn on the following assumptions:

- The YA will retain a measure of expert authority with zero engagement. MC0 is thus shown as having a positive intercept on the vertical authority axis;
- With increasing engagement, expert authority will first rise and then fall. MC0 is thus hump-shaped, with maximum expert authority being attained at E_M .

This curve indicates the level of regret a YA can imagine experiencing as they reflect on choosing to ignore the SA's interpretation, exercising leadership and thereby foregoing the authority they could have derived from exercising management. Up to E_{L2} , the maximum authority associated with exercising management, A_M , is greater than that foregoing from ‘selling out’ on the autonomous hope placed in leadership as indicated by HAC_0 . The mini-max regret criterion could thus be applied to predict that for hoped for levels of engagement less than E_{L2} , management will be chosen and for those greater than E_{L2} leadership will be chosen. The following proposition can thus be made.

Proposition 2: The interpretation of a problem as ‘tame’ will preclude all but the most hopeful aspirant leaders from exercising leadership rather than management.

A third way in which a problem could be interpreted is as *critical*. According to Grint (2005):

A Critical Problem, for example, a 'crisis', is presented as self-evident in nature, as encapsulating very little time for decision-making and action, and it is often associated with authoritarianism - Command Here there is virtually no uncertainty about what needs to be done - at least in the behaviour of the Commander, whose role is to take the required decisive action - that is to provide the answer to the problem, not to engage processes (management) or ask questions (leadership). Of course, it may be that the Commander remains privately uncertain about whether the action is appropriate or the presentation of the situation as a crisis is persuasive, but that uncertainty will probably not be apparent to the followers of the Commander. Examples would include the immediate response to: a major train crash, a leak of radioactivity from a nuclear plant, a military attack, a heart attack, an industrial strike, the loss of employment or a loved one, or a terrorist attack such as 9/11 or the 7 July bombings in London.

These ideas are implicit in the shape of the ‘command-authority curve’ (CAC0) which is drawn vertically alongside the authority axis up to A_c which indicates the authority delegated to the YA to implement a command solution to the critical problem without seeking any follower engagement.

This vertical curve indicates the level of regret a YA can imagine experiencing as they reflect on choosing to ignore the SA’s interpretation, exercising leadership and thereby foregoing the authority they could have derived from exercising command. Up to E_{L3} , the maximum authority associated with exercising command, A_c , is greater than that foregone from ‘selling out’ on the autonomous hope placed in leadership as indicated by HAC_0 . The mini-max regret criterion could thus be applied to predict that for hoped for levels of engagement less than E_{L3} , command will be chosen and for those greater than E_L leadership will be chosen. The next proposition can now be made.

Proposition 3: The interpretation of a problem as either ‘tame’ or critical will preclude all but the most hopeful aspirant leaders from exercising leadership rather than management or command.

The preceding analysis suggests that two factors are important in shaping the fateful choices that can be made by YAs with respect to the problems they are authorized to solve. The first is how the problem is interpreted by the SA: is it wicked, tame or critical? The second is the hopefulness of the YAs with regard to the level of follower engagement they believe it is worthwhile and possible to seek. This may be sufficient to over-ride the effect of the SA interpreting the problem as tame or critical but in most cases such interpretations could be seen as effectively discouraging leadership. In the next section, I will suggest how the practice of either adaptive or authentic leadership can augment this hopefulness.

Hopeful Discourse and the Practice of Adaptive and Authentic Leadership

From the social constructionist perspective advanced by Ludema et.al. (1997), Barge (2001) and Di Virgilio and Ludema (2009), hope is not so much ‘a psychological concept that emphasizes positive expectations for goal attainment’ (Barge 2001, p.64) as a ‘discursive practice’. According to Ludema et.al. (1997, p. 1021) any inquiry about ultimate concerns is generative of *hope*:

Not all human vocabularies have an equal capacity to inspire hope. Hope is generated and is sustained when people, facing the mystery of the future, dialogue about.... ultimate concerns.... Inquiry into ultimate concerns generates a vocabulary of hope and possibility that serves as a potent "life-giving" force for transforming social and organizational relationships. This vocabulary allows people to live beyond current circumstances, transcend the status quo, and transform present reality into one of greater aliveness by placing it in the context of broader and deeper possibilities.

I would propose that two ‘ultimate concerns’ leadership educators and trainers can draw YAs into an inquiry about are: (a) the nature of authentic leadership; and (b) the nature of the challenges authentic leaders may seek to engage followers in pursuing.

Both are what the practitioners of appreciative inquiry would call ‘affirmative topics’. Their selection is ‘fateful’ – perhaps as fateful as the choice of leadership over management or command – since they can steer potential leaders and followers away from a ‘deficit-oriented’, ‘critical’ or ‘diagnostic’ inquiry toward one that is ‘appreciative’, ‘positive’ or generative of hope (See Whitney and Trosten-Bloom 2003; Bushe 2007).

Deficit-oriented leadership discourse could, for example, be driven by questions such as: ‘In what ways can leaders potentially disappoint followers?’; ‘Is leadership an “alienating social myth” that “induces massive learned helplessness” among members of a social system?’ (see Gemmill and Oakley 1992); or ‘Why (do) transformation efforts fail?’ (Kotter 1995). By contrast, inquiry into the aspects of adaptivity or authenticity found in ‘best leadership practice’ may generate inspiring stories that highlight exceptional cases of what Sternin and Choo (2000) called ‘positive deviations’ that are generative of hope.

Drawing from self-determination theory (See Gagne and Deci 2005), Di Virgilio and Ludema (2009) have argued that leader life-stories can generate hope where they highlight instances where the leader in question has displayed qualities of *autonomy*, *competence*, or *relatedness*. Their concept of autonomy as ‘an inner endorsement of one’s actions’ such that the ‘more autonomous the behavior, the more it is endorsed by the whole self and is experienced as action for which one is responsible’ correlates closely with the quality of ‘authenticity’ formulated by scholars such as Shamir and Eilam (2005). When combined with narrative references to the competence such leaders derive from ‘having the skills, abilities, and capacity

to be successful' and 'sense of relatedness' that 'they are making a contribution to the greater whole, and that the greater whole is making a contribution to them' (De Virgilio and Ludema, 2009:78-79), such leader-life stories can evoke images that, without compromising their own authenticity, inquirers can reproduce these qualities in their own lives.

Moreover, the positive energy produced by this hopeful discourse will tend to be reinforced and strengthened through mutual stimulation between those drawn into appreciative inquiry (see Collins 1993; and Di Virgilio and Ludema 2009) so that they have a greater tendency to make the spontaneous commitments that can be associated with effective and engaged followership.

Thus hopeful discourse over the course of engaging followers in pursuit of a particular challenge could pivot the HAC curve upwards from HAC₀ to HAC₁ in the manner shown in Figure Two.

[INSERT FIGURE TWO HERE]

This could have two effects. Firstly, since the rewards expected from legitimated referent authority will be enhanced to a rising degree at every positive level of follower engagement, YAs will have a greater incentive to exercise leadership in response to the SA interpretation of the problem as wicked. This would not be an insignificant outcome since as Grint (2005, p.1476) has observed:

Herein lies the irony of 'leadership': it remains the most difficult of approaches and one that many decision-makers will try to avoid at all costs because it implies that:

- 1) the leader does not have the answer;
- 2) that the leader's role is to make the followers face up to their responsibilities (often an unpopular task) (Heifetz, 1998);
- 3) that the 'answer' to the problem is going to take a long time to construct and that it will only ever be 'more appropriate' rather than 'the best'; and
- 4) that it will require constant effort to maintain.

Secondly, even if SAs interpret the problem as tame or critical, the range of hoped-for engagement over which the YA imagines regretting the exercise of either management or command rather than leadership will expand, possibly increasing the pool of autonomously (or stubbornly) hopeful YAs. Proposition 4 follows.

Proposition 4: The incentive to exercise leadership when a problem is interpreted as wicked and the likelihood that leadership will be exercised even when it is interpreted as tame or critical will be increased by appreciative inquiry that is generative of hope.

Two streams of the leadership literature can be drawn on to elaborate this process. First, there is the burgeoning literature on *authentic leadership* (Bennis and Thomas 2002; George *et.al.* 2007; Shamir and Eilam 2005; Sheldon & Elliot, 1999; Sheldon and Houser-Marko, 2001; Swann *et.al.* 1992; Van Heerden 2010). This provides some useful guidance on how reflection on practice (Schön 1983; Brookfield 1995; Reynolds and Vince, 2004) can inform the type of fateful choices discussed in this paper. In particular, where times of difficulty, disappointment or conflict are interpreted as ‘crucible experiences’ (Bennis and Thomas 2002) in the life-stories of aspirant leaders, the hope they find in the narratives of their positive responses to these experiences can enable them to ‘engage others in shared meaning’ (p.45). This could thus be a factor shifting the HAC curve in the manner shown in Figure Two.

Another factor could be the YA’s autonomous framing of the ‘challenge’ she is seeking to address. Ronald Heifetz, Marty Linsky and their collaborators (Heifetz 1994; Heifetz and Laurie 1997; Heifetz and Linsky 2002; Heifetz, Grashow and Linsky 2009) have made a name for themselves as proponents of the practice of ‘adaptive leadership’. They recommend that aspirant leaders closely observe system dynamics (to get what they call a ‘balcony’ perspective on the ongoing ‘dance’ between system members) in order to autonomously intervene to

reframe, where possible, problems as ‘adaptive challenges’. This should not only be done with respect to critical and tame (or ‘technical’ as they call them) problems. It should even be done with wicked problems in order to shift from a deficit or problem-oriented focus on aspects of the system ‘DNA’ that need to be dispensed with to a more appreciative focus on what needs to be preserved or even created to enhance the system’s capacity to ‘thrive’. They also posit what Cooperrider and his collaborators would call a set of ‘provocative propositions’ to provide the framework for the generation of adaptive leadership practice within and across organizations.

These include:

- Testing the boundaries of your authority;
- ‘Auditioning’ your interpretation of the adaptive challenge – “Get in character by fully investing in your view when you offer it. Then pull yourself out of that role and watch and listen for other members feedback on your interpretation’ (Heifetz et.al. 2009, p.145);
- Regulating distress to keep discomfort within the ‘productive zone of disequilibrium—enough heat to gain attention, engagement and momentum, but not so much the system explodes’ (Heifetz et.al. 2009, p.162);
- Demonstrating empathy to disarm resisters by ‘uncovering values’, ‘acknowledging loyalties’ and ‘naming the losses at risk’; and
- ‘Connecting to purpose’ through the meaning drawn from reflection on crucible experiences and the worth of the adaptive challenge ahead.

There would thus seem to be considerable overlap between the practices of authentic, adaptive and appreciative leadership. Although they apparently developed independently, they all seek to provide frameworks within which hopeful discourse and a greater intrinsic incentive to exercise

leadership can be generated. The impact of their application in the classroom and training seminar will be considered in the next section.

Reflection on Practice

For a number of years I have been involved in delivering leadership modules at both MBA and executive education level at an American-style university in the Middle East. While there is diversity among the participants in terms of gender and ethnic background, they have some of the characteristics of ‘young achievers’ described in the previous sections:

- Their median age ranges from 26 to 33 years;
- They typically have had some work experience they can reflect on;
- Most have had opportunities to exercise leadership at some period of their lives;
- They characteristically have strong aspirations to be given successively more challenging leadership opportunities in the future.

Although the courses vary in length from 2-3 weekend modules to full credit semester courses, I try to incorporate 2-3 reflective exercises in each one. There is a wide variety of such exercises to choose from among the leadership development courses constructed by universities and consultancy firms. However, those I found particularly helpful are (a) the ‘River of Life’ exercise; (b) the ‘Tale of Two Stories’ exercise that introduces the ‘Giving Voice to Values’ Program developed by the Aspen Institute (see Gentile 2010); and (c) the ‘Adaptive Challenge Plan’. The first two exercises were completed by both MBA and executive students in 2011-12 while the latter was completed by a separate group of MBA students in Fall 2012. Out of an

ethical obligation to preserve confidentiality with the participants, I can make no more than general comments about the content of the reports they submitted for each of these exercises.

For exercise (a) students were asked to draw a 'River of Life' diagram showing the key experiences to date that have formed their leadership approach. They used 'river' images to highlight the different phases (e.g. deep/shallow water, islands, rapids, stagnant waters, wide open courses), present and discuss their river diagrams in class and include a written report on them in leadership journals. This process of reflecting on their life as a whole tends to orient them toward the second order type of evaluation processes that underly fateful leadership choices and enable them to see the potentially transformative effect of crucible experiences in their own lives.

Table One compares the crucible experiences of two groups: (i) a mixed-gender class of 17 students ranging in age from 23 to 29 years who took the 'Leadership and Change Management' course as part of a MBA program in Fall 2011; and (ii) an exclusively male cohort of 10 students ranging in age from 27 to 45 years who did a number of leadership modules in an executive education course that ran in 2011-2012.

[INSERT TABLE ONE HERE]

The types of crucible experience naturally reflected the different median age (26 for the MBA group and 33 for the executive education group) and work experience of the two groups. Within the MBA group, crucible experiences mainly related to the difficulties experienced studying in another culture, returning from that culture back to a more traditional culture in the UAE and finding work, or at least a job that satisfied or challenged them. Only one of these students found himself in the type of challenging situation that seemed to be a normal experience

for the executive group. In the latter group, these situations were seen as ‘crucibles’ in that they had to overcome resistance, interference or conflict emanating either from their senior authorizers or the teams they were working with.

For (b), the ‘Giving Voice to Values’ exercise, students were asked to write two stories. The first concerns a time when their values conflicted with what they were expected to do in a particular situation, and they spoke up and acted to resolve the conflict. The second concerns a similar time where they faced a value conflict but did not ‘give voice to values’. In small groups they then shared their stories and explored both ‘enablers’ – factors that helped them speak out – and ‘disablers’ – factors that inhibited them from doing so. This effectively drew them in the type of conversation about ‘ultimate concerns’ – what is really important to them and how can they realize these values – that according to social constructionists such as Ludema are generative of hope. Table Two summarizes the main concerns that were raised by the two groups in these conversations.

[INSERT TABLE TWO HERE]

A number of comments can be made about the issues raised that are outlined in this table. In both groups the participants had no difficulty in readily recalling and relating incidents where they faced an inner struggle about giving voice. Indeed the similarity of the incidents reported in the two groups, given the differences in their age and work experience, is suggestive of the pervasiveness of personal connections and personal loyalties (what Arabs call ‘wasta’) as a source of external pressure to compromise standards or demonstrate loyalty as opposed to professional or personal integrity, honesty or even empathy. The table thus indicates that both

sources of external pressure confronted participants with an inner struggle to assert their *autonomy*.

What was interesting was that empathy with the victims of the external pressures seemed to provide a stronger 'inner enabler' toward speaking out than the simple internalization of externally imposed standards. For example, one participant voiced strong concern about dehydration of contract workers since 'at this moment I had to voice my concern, since I knew someone will get hurt soon'. Another was moved to advise an older bank client to avoid an unnecessary foreign exchange transaction since 'I thought of this old lady who maybe spent all her life saving this amount of money to spend it when she gets old; she was illiterate and couldn't read or write and asked our help in that too'. A third took the blame for a mistake by a subordinate 'in order not to get her in trouble and possibly get her fired from the organization.'

Although the importance of empathy as a workplace virtue has been highlighted in the emotional intelligence literature (see Goleman 2000), the English word 'empathy' was itself only relatively recently coined in 1909 by the psychologist Edward Titchener in an attempt to translate the German word 'Einfühlungsvermögen' to define an imaginative capacity that had long interested moral philosophers. For example, in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Adam Smith seems to broadly conform to the modern understanding of this capacity when he described how this moral sentiment arises in relation to another when we 'place ourselves in his situation . . . and become in some measure the same person with him, and thence form some idea of his sensations, and even feel something which, though weaker in degree, is not altogether unlike them' (1759, I.I.2).

However, whether empathy or some of the other moral sentiments suggested in Table Two motivated the participants to speak out, it was clear from their stories that they saw this primarily as an expression of their *autonomy*. However, the in-class debrief did steer them towards a conversation about the other two components of self-determination: namely, *competence* and *relatedness* (Di Virgilio and Ludema 2009). An important ‘takeaway’ from the ‘Giving Voice to Values’ Program is that value conflicts are ‘normal’ and the dissonance imagined to attend them can be reduced through the development of certain conflict management competencies such as ‘selection and sequencing of audiences’; developing ‘confidence in viewpoints due to securing more information’; ‘starting with questions rather than assertions’; ‘working through incremental steps’ and ‘changing the frame’ (Gentile 2010, p.4). Another is that autonomy does not preclude relatedness. Young achievers can thus seek to build the political and emotional support of allies, mentors and confidantes so they are not overwhelmed by the prospect of facing future inner struggles against external pressures on their own. Moreover, a conversation that draws out ultimate concerns about their autonomy, competence and relatedness seemed to help them ‘discover their authentic leadership’ (George et.,al. 2007) in the midst of these struggles.

Tables Three and Four are also instructive in this regard. Table Three is based on a survey I conducted with another MBA group at the end of the Fall 2012 semester concerning ‘the most valuable things they learned about leadership’.

[INSERT TABLE THREE HERE]

I asked them to assign points on a 5 to 1 scale to each factor. Points were then summed across the class to establish ranking with ‘authenticity’ being given the highest score.

The same group were also asked to identify adaptive challenges they had either faced in a previous work context or could imagine facing in a future one. The adaptive challenges all concerned cultural transformations they thought they should collaborate with other organizational members in striving to advance. They were then asked to complete exercise (c), the 'adaptive challenge plan', by identifying five leadership development priorities that could help them contribute toward this challenge. Table Four indicates the eight types of personal changes the students prioritized in this exercise, with the number of times each was cited being indicated in parenthesis.

[INSERT TABLE FOUR HERE]

The table groups them into the three categories of autonomy, competence and relatedness. It can be seen that the students were motivated to take steps in all three directions with a concern to develop behaviors associated with greater relatedness being listed most often.

In sum, the three exercises seemed to generate the inspirational stories and spontaneous commitments to personal leadership development that a social constructionist perspective on hopeful discourse would anticipate.

Conclusion

A good opening comment in the 'what is leadership' introductory section to the prototypical leadership course is Bryman's (1986) observation (no less true today) that 'there are almost as many definitions as there are theories of leadership'. The instructor or textbook author, as the case may be, then goes on to highlight key elements of an emerging definition around which there is 'increasing convergence' (see Rost 1993, Daft and Lane 2011).

The purpose of this paper is not to build a grand theory on a purportedly converging understanding of leadership. Rather it is draw from elements of economic revisionism and social constructionism to formulate a hopefully simple yet elegant framework to analyze the logic of the fateful leadership choices the type of aspirant leaders who enroll in leadership courses can imagine facing. Moreover it has tried to show how the themes of authentic and adaptive leadership, and some reflective exercises that seek to develop these capacities, can be comprehended within this framework. Above all it has tried to stimulate hopeful discourse about leadership based on an underlying conviction that there is a close connection between leadership and hope. Napoleon Bonaparte has been quoted as saying 'Leadership is the supply of hope'. If this is the case, then the promotion of hopeful discourse on this subject would seem to as good a way as any of facilitating its continued future supply.

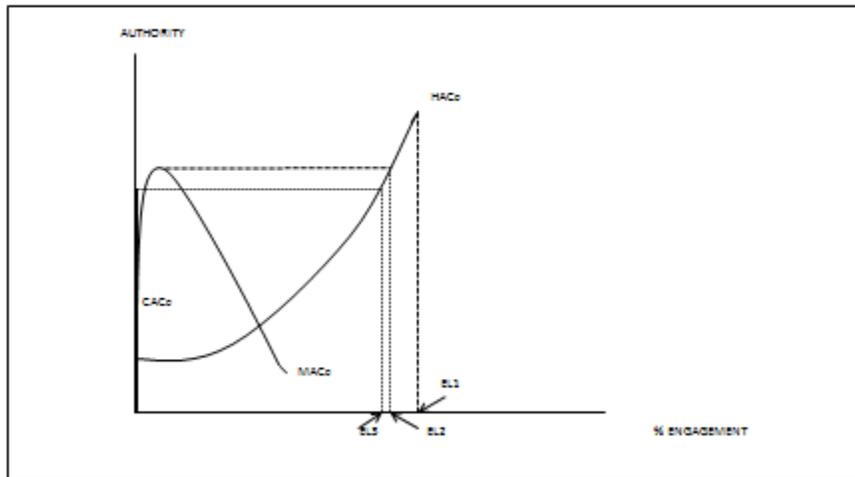
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**FIGURE 1:
MINI-MAX REGRET ANALYSIS OF FATEFUL CHOICE BETWEEN
LEADERSHIP, MANAGEMENT AND COMMAND**



**FIGURE 2:
EFFECT OF HOPEFUL DISCOURSE ON HAC CURVE**

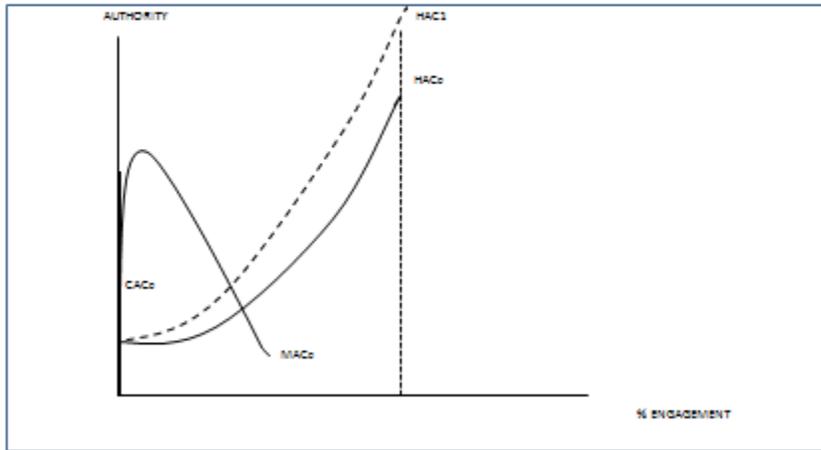


Table One: Crucible Experiences of Two Groups of Participants in Leadership Courses

Crucible Experiences in MBA Group	Number
Study abroad in western country.	4
Difficulty finding job after graduation.	3
Return to UAE after being educated in western country.	2
Loss of job after financial crisis.	2
Unfulfilling first job.	2
Harassment at workplace.	1
Mentoring by new CEO.	1
Assuming family responsibilities after parent's death.	1
Challenging position at young age.	1
	17
Crucible Experiences in Executive Education Cohort	
Responsibility for installing of new production plant.	1
First Emirati working in marketing communication team.	1
Intervention of new Board in management of football team.	1
Cultural change initiative in company.	1
Study abroad in western country.	1
Difficulty re-integrating in family business after studying abroad.	1
Divided loyalties between CEO and Chief Financial Officer at odds over direction of organizational restructuring.	1
	8

Table Two: Key Issues Raised in Giving Voice to Values Exercise

MBA Group			
1. Pressure to Compromise Standards			
Standard	Number	External Pressure	Inner struggle
Safety	3	Senior Authorizer Peers	Professionalism Empathy
Reporting	2	Senior Authorizer	Personal Integrity
Academic	2	Senior Authorizer	Academic Integrity
Employment	1	Senior Authorizer	Empathy
Procurement	1	Senior Authorizer	Risk Aversion
Attendance	1	Peers	Personal Integrity
2. Divided Loyalties			
Issue	Number	External Pressure	Inner struggle
Academic	1	Senior Authorizer	Empathy
Subordinate feedback	1	Peers	Leader Trust
Transparency with clients	1	Peers	Personal integrity
Confidentiality	1	Friend	Professionalism
Use of office supplies	1	Peers	Personal Honesty
Treatment of employees	1	Senior Authorizer	Empathy
Service to clients	1	Senior Authorizer	Empathy
Executive Group			
1. Pressure to Compromise Standards			
Issue	Number	External Pressure	Inner struggle
Reporting	3	Senior Authorizer	Professionalism
Evaluation	2	Senior Authorizer	Personal integrity
Succession	1	Senior Authorizer	Fairness
Attendance	1	Peers	Personal Honesty
Deadlines	1	Peers	Professionalism
2. Divided Loyalties			
Issue	Number	External Pressure	Inner struggle
Emiratization	1	Peers	Vision
Quality	1	Subordinate	Empathy

Table Three: Student Ranking of the ‘Most Valuable Things They Learned About Leadership’

‘The Most Valuable Thing I Learned About Leadership in this Course’ is.....	Points	Rank
The importance of authenticity in both leadership and followership.	78	1
The importance of ‘getting on the balcony’ to observe before intervening in a leadership process.	65	2
The need to find collaborative ways to resolve conflict.	58	3
The importance of humility in the practice of leadership.	56	4
The importance of empathy in the practice of leadership.	50	5

Table Four: Commitments Made in Adaptive Challenge Plans

AUTONOMY (27)
Courageously take risks (12)
Be more authentic (11)
Be less needy for approval (4)
COIMPETENCE (16)
Improve personal discipline (5)
Seek feedback(4)
Develop creativity (7)
RELATEDNESS (45)
Be more collaborative (11)
Cultivate allies (8)
Listen (12)
Connect with heart (5)
Appreciate strengths of others (6)
Be more tolerant (3)