



**Unfortunately, this common-sense approach would choke off a comfortable living for an army of business writers, consultants**

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## Torture in the boardroom

Welcome to the real world of mean leaders and tough talk. Or maybe you are there already and wondering when reality will catch up. Until now all the focus has been on the heroes, not the villains.



**Hitler and adoring**  
" "

So we have had lots of good words written about Alexander the Great, Ernest Shackleton, Jack Welch and even Sir Clive Woodward. Follow their example, stir in a dash of Steven Covey's Seven Habits and you are surely on your way to stardom.

Less often do you hear about Hitler, Stalin, Idi Amin or Radovan Karodvic. Or Al "Chainsaw" Dunlap of Sunbeam and various other destruction targets, Ken Lay of Enron, Dennis Koslowski of Tyco, Jean-Marie Messier of Vivendi, Robert Maxwell or Lord Black.

And yet the 'bad guys' had long reigns as leaders and managed to attract huge numbers of followers. Was what they practiced worthy of the term "leadership" at all? "Where is this line of thought taking us?" you may be asking.

We start with the inevitable academics. One has just published a book with the arresting title, "The Allure of Toxic Leaders: Why We follow Destructive bosses and Corrupt Politicians - and How We Can Survive Them". Jean Lipman-Blumen makes the rather obvious point that leadership should be seen as an interaction - between leaders and followers and goes on to list types of follower.

She then asks why we allow ourselves to be carried away by toxic leaders, and even to conspire to keep them in office. If endless power corrupts endlessly, then leaders should always be confined to one, short term in office before reverting to a period of followership for reality and reflection. Just imagine if this idea were ever to gain credence in corporate governance or parliamentary democracy!

Barbara Kellerman's title is "Bad Leadership: What It Is, How It Happens, Why It Matters". She suggests that bad leaders behave in the way they do to protect themselves against the anxiety of disorder and chaos. She draws the distinction between being an effective and a beneficent leader, and sets out seven categories of bad leader: incompetent; rigid; intemperate; callous; corrupt; insular, and evil.

Juan Antonio Samaranch of Olympics fame gets the prize for incompetence; Mr Dunlap is callous; Mr Karadzic is cruel. Experience of other leaders would

suggest that these seven categories are hardly singular or watertight. Some leaders might well score on two or three at least, and yet are effective in maintaining a followership for a relatively long time.

The motivation of followers is tackled by Michael Maccoby, a psychoanalyst and management consultant writing in The **Harvard Business Review**. According to him, followers could be the prisoners of the Freudian transference of childhood relationships into their adult life. Ah well... The probability of courses and surveys on followership looms large.

Another business book has created a stir even before its publication this autumn: "Hardball". The authors are a senior partner in the Boston Consulting Group and the CEO of GE02, a car engine technology outfit. They argue that what really matters are the profits and sheer pleasure to be gained from making your competitors suffer.

What's novel about their line is that they don't suggest using "massive and overwhelming" force against rivals. Because of the US approach to bankruptcy, killing a competitor outright gives them a chance to return with the slate wiped clean. Witness the absurdity of several major US airlines flying on in a desperately

overcrowded market when they should have been consigned to history and the Californian desert. Instead, the authors argue for reducing your competitors to near death and then pinning them there in prolonged torture. How? By luring them into less-profitable areas of business, stealing their ideas, and consistently undercutting their most profitable products or services. The 1990s notion of "competitive advantage" gets translated as "unfair advantage", but, before publication, is watered down to "decisive advantage". Apparently, some of the BCG offices in Europe fear that the book is potentially too nasty for the cultured boardrooms this side of the Atlantic.

**Shackleton**



Is all this talk of bad leadership, pathetic followers and tortured rivals just another turn in the wheel of fashion? Or is something else going on? Could it be that a necessary reaction is setting in against the soft and squishy side of leadership? We in kha think it is a bit of both. What does kha have to say about leadership as we approach 2005? Leadership has to be linked to performance, which means knowing when to be tough or tender. On a lighter note, we offer a quote from the latelamented Brian Clough, a highly successful English football manager, on counselling his players: "We talk about it for twenty minutes and then decide I was right".

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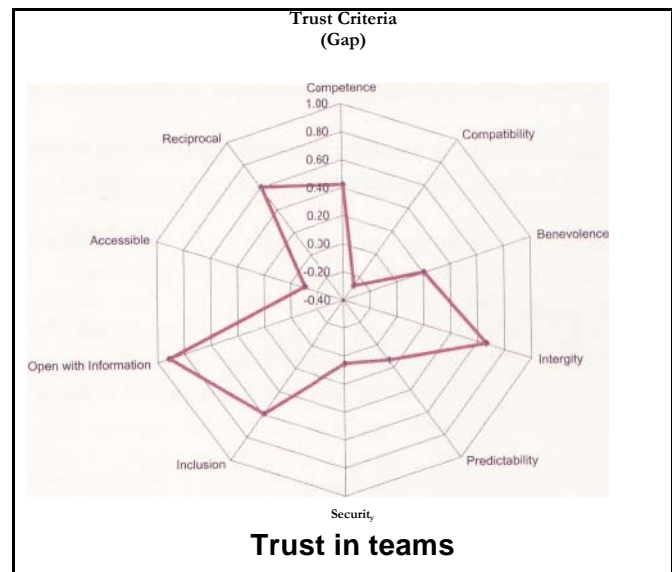
### Take it on trust

Also, the fluidity of teams forming and re-forming around new projects can make it harder to sustain trust.

That's the 'theory' and commonsense of trust: how about trust in practice? Earlier this year kha was working with an international manufacturing company who were looking for what they described as a "new way of working". Essentially, they wanted to change their culture from being functionally and geographically driven to one that was more open and innovative. They had a specific issue of a head office that was seen as insensitive to local market needs - at times xenophobic - and local offices who felt their views weren't taken seriously. Their solution was to set up several project teams to tackle real business issues, and to demonstrate the benefits of the new way of working.

By design, the teams were geographically dispersed and operating in completely different time zones. They also covered a very broad spectrum of disciplines and experience. For a large part of their working life as teams they would have to be virtual. At the outset, they set up dedicated intranet sites to hold data on meetings, market research, calendar items and allow voting on issues. Most communication was via these sites and by pre-arranged conference calls.

However, we recommended face-to-face meetings; a kick-off session and one or two further working sessions. This was a very significant investment in time and money. The first session typically spent time working through the key roles of Project Leader and Project Facilitator and ensuring that everyone had a complete and rigorous understanding of the issue. In one case, it soon became apparent that the issue, as originally defined, was actually far broader than anyone expected. Each team also produced their own charter of behaviours that would define the way they worked together and supported each other.



The teams started work enthusiastically and then some signs of tension and stress began to emerge. Coincidentally, our partners in *Worldwork* had just put the finishing touches to something called Trust in Teams. This measures the level of trust on 10 dimensions and compares what people are getting with what they actually want. We ran this diagnostic with each team and then presented the findings at their next face-to-face meetings. By looking at the biggest gaps between 'getting' and 'wanting' we were able to focus on specific things to be addressed. In this case, it was *openness* with information, and fairly easy to fix.

However, it also gave the members of the team a framework to articulate other individual concerns - in other words, 'get things off their chest', including a more demanding and tougher stance for the team leader. For this team, the second biggest gap was integrity, which meant 'doing what you said you would do' or not letting the others down. As it turned out, this dimension was even more useful in anchoring the desired behaviours within the team - and in getting results. One of the teams has already presented to the Board and is in the process of restructuring itself to implement most of its recommendations. They also feel confident that they have modelled the new way of working successfully, and have a solid

platform to spread it more widely in the business.

So trust can be measured - and developed - to make a profound difference to the leadership-followership equation.

## Virtual Leadership... or Virtual Twaddle? air David Smith

This was our topic for a recent private dinner at One Aldwych. Has the latest technology changed the way we lead? Has it created new opportunities and/or added new pressures?

Our guests had plenty of examples of the developments in computing and telecommunications changing all our working patterns. For example, more dispersed teams; home-working becoming commonplace; 'hot desking'; and cripplingly high volumes of email. And, the paperless office remains a pipe dream. With a wry smile, they noted that anyone in their 20s is likely to find texting completely unremarkable, and yet they regretted that speed and superficiality were squeezing out the richness and context of more traditional communication.



**David Smith**

In one sense we have more freedom now: a multiplicity of channels to communicate through, and more flexibility and choice in the time and place we choose to work.

Our guests were adamant that the fundamentals of leadership haven't changed. Leaders still need regular face-to-face contact with their teams; leaders are responsible for the team having a clear purpose; leaders have to win and maintain trust. And, effective leadership has to be underpinned by effective management i.e. the mission and vision stuff are fine but you still have to set and meet performance standards.

If the new way of working has had an effect on leadership, then it simply puts more stress on having clear, shared objectives, good and timely conflict resolution and a more planned and deliberate approach to communication. Several people observed that in their organisations multinational teams often come together to tackle projects - and this poses special challenges for leaders. For example, how does a leader from a normally blunt and tough culture deliver difficult messages to team members from a more courteous and context-rich culture or vice versa? And how do large organisations ensure that they set targets that have meaning all the way through the enterprise, and avoid manipulation by middle management? Our guests were clear that technology is no substitute for the visible, 'walk the talk' style of

The basics haven't changed. It's not the medium - it's the message.

**If you would be interested in *joining* us at one *of* our forthcoming private dinners at One *Aldwych* then do *let us know*.**



We are delighted to announce that Aurelie Sauvant joined our team as Customer Support Manager in May. She has a degree in Physics from Claude Bernard University, Lyons and is a native of that city. Aurelie has lived in London for 7 years. She is responsible for all support activities and administers our psychometrics.

If you would be interested to learn more about kha please do call us or email us as we would love to hear from you.

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