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# **WORKING PAPERS**

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## **Defining a New Type of Organizational Leadership: The Heroic Leader**

by

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**DEFINING A NEW TYPE OF ORGANIZATIONAL LEADERSHIP:  
THE HEROIC LEADER**

**By**

**Ira J. Morrow, Ph.D.**

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## **ABSTRACT**

In this paper, the concepts of leadership and heroism are defined, discussed, and compared. The concepts are then integrated to form an orientation toward leadership known as heroic leadership. A model of heroic leadership consisting of five major dimensions including character, work orientation, risk-taking and reward orientation, relating to others, and organizational impact, is then presented and discussed. Major sub-elements for each dimension are also identified and examined. The implications for leadership in non-heroic organizational settings are highlighted.

## **INTRODUCTION**

This paper defines and explores the parameters and the relevance of an under-examined perspective toward organizational leadership. It takes as its inspiration a comment made by a participant at a conference on leadership:

I couldn't help but take note of the fact that this conference on leadership took place in San Antonio, the location of one of the most heroic acts in U.S. history — the defense of the Alamo. I'm troubled by the fact that no one...speaks of qualities such as willingness to work hard, self-sacrifice, dedication, personal integrity, optimism — and yes, perhaps even heroism — when we write about and talk about leadership. Without these qualities, where will our leaders be taking us?...Continuing with the Alamo metaphor, when it became obvious that General Santa Anna's army was going to vanquish the Alamo, legend has it that William Travis drew his fateful line of commitment in the dirt and said, "Those prepared to give their lives in freedom's cause, come over to me." In other words, he was already over the line and serving as a role model and inspiration. Are there any leaders out there today who demonstrate qualities of self-sacrifice and heroism? How are these qualities manifest in large, bureaucratic organizations and in smaller, entrepreneurial organizations? Who are our leadership heroes and what can we learn from them of relevance to today's organizations? How do we inspire people, or create vision, if the corporate or bureaucratic goals are rather mundane, such as to capture another 5 percent of market share, or to improve the efficiency of a work team or a military squadron by x percent? I don't know the answers, but when it comes to future leadership research and conferences, let's all try to "Remember the Alamo!" (Clark and Clark 1990)

The concept of leadership examined here, referred to as Heroic Leadership, attempts to merge two similar yet distinct concepts that are generally not linked together in the literature, namely leadership and heroism. It is hoped that such a linkage will enrich our understanding of leadership, and that a new model or guide for more effective leadership in organizations may emerge.

### ***Defining Terms***

By defining leadership and heroism, we can identify noteworthy differences and commonalities, clarify what one term includes that the other omits, and identify potentially fruitful ways that a marriage of the terms can engender an interesting, new concept.

## **LEADER AND LEADERSHIP**

Although numerous definitions exist (Yukl 1998), leadership is frequently defined as the ability to exercise influence over others toward the attainment of a goal. The ability to exert such influence can derive formally from one's position, office, title, function, control of resources, control of rewards and punishments, or role; or informally from one's abilities, skills, experience, expertise, behavior, style, charisma, charm, or attractiveness. A given leader may have at his/her disposal either or both formal and informal sources of influence.

A leader with access to more sources of potential social influence can be expected to exert greater influence over others than those with fewer sources of influence. In any case, no matter what sources of influence the leader possesses, a social relationship between the leader and others exists. Leadership does not exist in a social vacuum, but rather is socially defined and determined in terms of one's influence on others. Leadership only exists if there is someone to be led who accepts the leader's influence in order to attain a goal.

This social basis for leadership has profound implications. Leaders are commonly seen as being in control and providing leadership for followers who are merely the passive recipients of social influence. However, if followers determine acceptance of the leader's social influence attempts, then, in a sense, it is they who are really in the driver's seat. Followers may be seen as using leaders in an instrumental manner in order to attain certain outcomes. The leader then is just a tool to help take people where they wish to go. If this instrument no longer does the job, or if another may do the job more effectively or efficiently, the individual's tenure or survival as a leader may be short-lived or tenuous. In a sense then, followers are ultimately in charge of the relationship between leaders and followers.

An interesting state of affairs exists between leaders and their followers that can be thought of as a complex dance. To be a leader, a person must possess certain qualities or certain sources of influence that other group members do not possess or readily have access to. In a sense then, a leader is someone who somewhat differs from the followers. If the leader was just the same as everyone else, in what sense is he/she a leader? What sets a leader apart or what does he/she bring to the table? However, leaders must in another sense resemble their followers and represent their qualities and aspirations. So, leaders must perform a very difficult balancing act, to be like their followers, but also to behave differently than their followers. Expressing this balancing act in a somewhat different manner, a leader must be in front of followers, taking the group where they think they wish to go. A leader cannot lead from behind. However, a leader cannot afford to get too far out in front of the group, or be perceived as being too different than the group or too radical, or their leadership will no longer be accepted.

## **HERO AND HEROISM**

Historically, heroism has generally been associated with qualities of courage, determination, gallantry, altruism, risk-taking, and self-sacrifice. A hero is distinguished in these qualities, and admired by others. In addition, a hero is often seen as embodying the ideals of a given society or institution, and as one who has done something that others have not done but perhaps aspire to, at least in their hopes and dreams. Heroes engage in unusual or exceptional actions. They often act alone, but they act on behalf of others, and they assume unique burdens for themselves. Heroes may be seen as such during their lifetimes or long after their lives have ended. Their exploits often become the source of moral teachings or institutional legend. Heroism is generally seen as emerging within a set of conditions that are potentially catastrophic, dangerous, or risky.

### ***Similarities Between Leadership and Heroism***

Both leadership and heroism rest upon a foundation of social comparison and social acceptance. In terms of social comparison, leaders and heroes are in some sense different than followers in one case or the non-heroic majority in the other. In terms of social acceptance, leaders and heroes are perceived as accepted by others. However, in mentioning social acceptance, we must make note of its limitations. Leaders and heroes exist within the eye of the beholder. For example, one's hero may be another's villain.

### **DIFFERENCES BETWEEN LEADERSHIP AND HEROISM**

Leadership and heroism are dramatically different concepts, with leaders and heroes having distinct relationships with others. In referring back to the earlier description of the relationship between leaders and followers, it is apparent that both parties are caught up in a dynamic and ongoing relationship, with each offering direction and establishing parameters to their ongoing relationship. There is an implicit contract between leaders and the individuals or group they lead. When this contract is broken, the relationship may deteriorate. However, there is no dynamic relationship or contract existing between heroes and those who perceive such individuals to be heroic. Their relationship is remote and abstract and can exist over chasms of immense distance and time.

These distinctions are further illustrated by examining the antonym of each term. The opposite of a leader is a follower. These two terms indicate a direct and complimentary relationship between the two parties. However, the opposite of a hero is a coward. These two terms are independent of each other, and the existence of a hero is not based on the complimentary existence of a coward, nor a coward based on the existence of a hero.

There are four possible combinations of a leader/hero: an individual can be neither a leader nor a hero; an individual can be a leader but not a hero; an individual can be a hero but not a leader; and an individual can be both a leader and a hero. In other words, not all leaders are heroes, and not all heroes are leaders. A leader can lead without acting heroically or being perceived to be a hero, and a person may be heroic without ever leading anyone. The concepts are so different that we really do not expect leaders to be heroes, or heroes to be leaders. A more extreme version of this statement would be that leaders are rarely heroes, and heroes are rarely leaders. However, exceptions to these generalizations are certainly possible.

We expect or hope to find leaders in almost all organized endeavors or institutions, particularly when a new direction or initiative is sought. However, our expectations for heroism are confined to more unusual or restricted settings and endeavors including the military, police, fire fighting, rescue work, or dealing with emergencies. Heroism is generally thought of in terms of potentially great personal risk or loss. The risks are high, and the ultimate sacrifice may be expected. Leadership, however, is expected in more routine and mundane settings found in everyday life. The risks of failed leadership are possibly serious for the leader including loss of prestige, power, income, title, authority, and position, but pale in significance to the risks assumed by heroes. Because of the dynamic relationship between leaders and their followers, the

risks of failed leadership are shared by all parties. Everyone in the institution or group suffers to a certain extent when leadership is absent, weak, or lost.

However, since heroism tends to be unexpected and a surprise when it occurs, the perception of its absence is less likely to occur to anyone. Moreover, the risks of failed heroism are assumed primarily by the heroic individual him/herself. If or when heroic behavior leads to the ultimate sacrifice and loss by the hero personally, this does not necessarily diminish their stature as a hero. In fact, this may be the very outcome that makes elevation to heroic stature possible. The hero will not personally benefit from an elevation this extreme; however, she/he may benefit if they survive their heroic behavior. Specific individuals often benefit directly when heroism has been demonstrated, or indirectly by being inspired or energized by the hero's example. Interestingly, the specific objective of the hero's heroic behavior may not have been accomplished and he/she may still be perceived to be heroic merely for what they attempted to do. For example, if someone rushes into a burning building to save someone, but their rescue attempt fails due to inability to see anyone in the smoky conditions, they are heroic merely because of what they attempted to do. However, we tend not to be so generous in according leadership status to failed or unsuccessful leaders. Nevertheless, when a leader is successful, not only may the leader benefit from increased stature, power, influence, and authority, but everyone being led may benefit directly or indirectly, sooner or later, as well.

### **INTEGRATING THE CONCEPTS**

The question posed here is whether the mundane concept and practice of leadership can be enriched by incorporating into it some of the qualities and expectations that are often associated with heroism. Can these two concepts be merged in a potentially fruitful manner? Can some of the heroic elements of those who act alone be brought to bear on those who must exert social influence on others in an ongoing social relationship? Expressed differently, but perhaps more dramatically, can ways be found to incorporate qualities generally associated with military, quasi-military, and rescue exploits into the way leadership is expressed, for example, in a business organization? Is there a place for the hero in a non-heroic, even bureaucratic setting?

The challenge here would appear to be the non-heroic and routine nature of everyday life in most institutional settings found in today's economy. In other words, it is not the existence of bureaucracy per se that makes heroic behavior problematic, for if this were the case, we would expect to find little or no heroism in the most bureaucratic of institutions, namely in military and quasi-military institutions. However, it is precisely in these most highly bureaucratic institutions that we are most likely to find behavior that is commonly felt to be heroic. It is the danger, risk, and potential sacrifices called for that make these behaviors heroic, and these institutions have been highly bureaucratized in part due to the extreme risks associated with their institutional missions. Therefore, it is the mundane, non-threatening nature of contemporary institutional life that precludes heroic behavior from our thinking and expectations.

This paper contends that the concepts of leadership and heroism can be fruitfully merged, and that this may enhance the quality and practice of leadership in our society. The sorry state of leadership in many of our institutions certainly suggests that traditional expectations and

leadership practices are inadequate. Too few people are following leaders, and too few leaders seem to know where they want to go or why they want to go there. In addition, too few people are willing to be taken, while many remain skeptical, cynical, and uninspired.

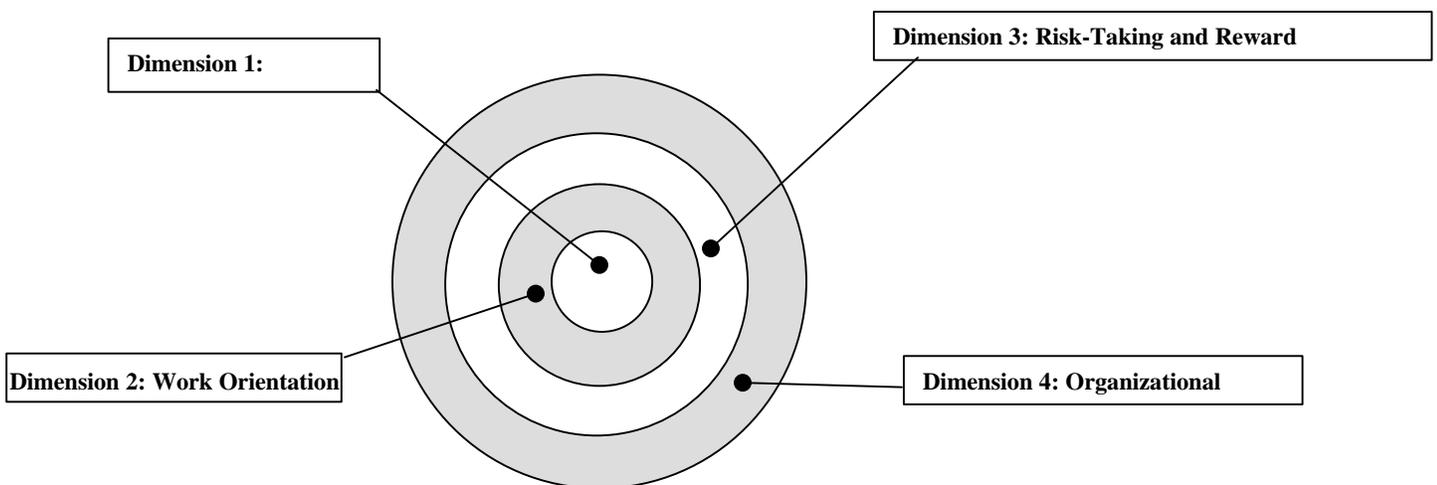
### **A MODEL OF HEROIC LEADERSHIP**

A model of Heroic Leadership (HLM) is presented to stimulate thinking and discussion about what leaders ideally should be doing as opposed to what leadership often consists of today. The model contains several elements, the sum of which will constitute an ideal type, the Heroic Leader. Very few people may be able to reach this ideal level of leadership, or perform in this manner consistently over an extended period. However, this should not be a cause of frustration or generate feelings of self-defeat or low self-esteem among aspiring leaders. Instead, the model provides a possible stimulus for gradual change toward heroic leadership. One can begin to act heroically by trying.

#### ***The Major Dimensions and Elements of the Heroic Leadership Model***

The HLM begins by focusing on the individual's character. Next it addresses the individual's orientation to his/her immediate environment including work, risk-taking, and rewards. It then expands outward to consider the individual's relationship with others, and the person's impact on the organization. These major dimensions each contain several constituent elements that are discussed in detail below.

#### **DIMENSIONS OF THE HEROIC LEADERSHIP**



## **DIMENSION 1: CHARACTER**

The individuals' own character is the bedrock upon which Heroic Leadership (HL) rests. Without appropriate character, it is difficult to conceive of HL taking place.

### ***Elements of Character Relevant to HL:***

#### *Element 1: Bravery*

*"I wish to have no connection with any ship that does not sail fast for I intend to go in harm's way."* (John Paul Jones, November 1776)

Heroic leaders demonstrate qualities of bravery. In a military or quasi-military context, there are often opportunities, particularly in wartime or during an emergency, to demonstrate or fail to demonstrate this quality. Moreover, it is also generally obvious to others who have acted in this manner, with rewards in the form of medals, ribbons, and citations readily allocated to commend brave or gallant behavior. On the contrary, opportunities to demonstrate qualities of bravery are fewer in most institutional and organizational settings. We therefore need to consider how bravery is relevant to and manifest in other organizational settings such as in business firms.

For our purposes, bravery may be defined as one's willingness to tackle tough, sensitive issues and problems, taking a firm stand or position on a controversial issue, or confronting difficult people. Bravery may also include speaking up when others are afraid to, trying something new, different, or unknown, or breaking through rules, policies, and obstructions in order to get things accomplished. In addition, bravery may encompass defending the weak and less powerful or challenging established and commonly accepted institutionalized practices that become incorrect or ill advised. Heroic leaders are perceived to be brave and this in turn may encourage others to demonstrate the same quality. Heroic leaders are valued because they draw out qualities of bravery in others, which in turn reinforces heroic leaders to continue acting bravely. However, bravery should not be confused with recklessness, self-destructive behavior, stubbornness, obstinacy, or merely an attempt to get attention and stand in the spotlight. Ideally, it should be based on a mastery of facts and issues, careful deliberation, intelligence, an appreciation of the consequences, and sincere belief.

#### *Element 2: Honesty and Integrity*

Heroic leaders are honest with themselves and with others, they tell it like it is and have little patience for telling people what they want to hear. They do not play wasteful, time-consuming games with others. When on the receiving end of communication, they expect others to give it to them straight, and they do not punish people for doing so. Honesty and directness with others, however, never takes the form of brutality or insensitivity toward others. When bad news or negative feedback must be given, it is provided privately and with empathy and respect for the recipient. Public humiliation or embarrassment of others is not done or tolerated. They may not have much patience for rules and regulations that are perceived to be trivial or meaningless, but they are scrupulous in the handling of all important assets and resources, particularly people and money.

*Element 3: Principled, Yet Flexible*

Heroic leaders adhere to values and principles that they consider important, and they remain committed to them through good and bad times, and in the face of rejection and criticism. However, they are not obstinate, rigid, inflexible, or dogmatic. They are willing to change because they keep an open mind. They are aware of and are sensitive to new ideas and perspectives, and they encourage others to bring these forward.

It may appear contradictory to be both principled yet flexible. However, it is not contradictory if the underlying principle remains the same, but the way it is expressed in a particular situation is adjusted. In other cases, the principle itself may change over time and be replaced by a new one when it becomes clear that the original principle is no longer valid or relevant. Such changes however, do not come easily to heroic leaders since they are not merely pragmatists looking to gain a short-term, situational advantage. Moreover, new principles are adopted when the heroic leaders are truly convinced of their long-term efficacy. It is this serious and sincere approach toward adopting principles that in turn elicits others' trust. When people see that a person takes on and discards principles lightly, based for example on the latest public opinion polls, fads, or fashion, that person will be viewed by others as not very heroic.

When heroic leaders change their principles, it is a serious process that will probably occur slowly and infrequently. Others in turn appreciate that heroic leaders stand for something, and this encourages them to also have a set of strongly held principles and values, however, these principles do not necessarily have to be the same or consistent with the principles held by heroic leaders. Heroic leaders accept and appreciate the strongly held principles of others, and do not feel threatened by them.

*Element 4: Inspires Trust*

Heroic leaders do not engage in trickery and political gamesmanship, and this elicits trust from others. This feeling of trust helps others be more open and honest in their interactions with heroic leaders, and over time, perhaps with others as well. Heroic leaders tend to bring out the best qualities rather than the worst in people.

**DIMENSION 2: WORK ORIENTATION**

The elements of character discussed so far are necessary, but not sufficient, for heroic leadership. Character is critical, but simply not enough if it does not lead to the accomplishment of goals. Eventually, leadership is evaluated in terms of one's impact on work, task performance, goal-attainment, and impact on the environment.

***Elements of Work Orientation Relevant to HL:***

*Element 1: Does It First/Leadership by Example*

“Follow me!” (Motto of commanders in the Israeli Defense Forces, Katz 1989) Heroic leaders do not lead or command from the rear, they lead from the front where the action is thickest and the risks are greatest. They are visible not only to the adversary, but more importantly to one’s own men and women, thus, they set an example for others, and they inspire others through their own actions. By doing tasks first, heroic leaders demonstrate initiative and a willingness to commit to taking a firm stand. Heroic leaders do not wait to be told what to do, or needlessly refer matters to their superiors. In addition, they do not passively accept situations or events as a given, rather, they like to determine whether, where, and when things will happen. They are aggressive in relation to their environment, and do not feel comfortable in a static, defensive posture.

*Element 2: Takes Action*

Closely related to their desire to do it first, heroic leaders do not just talk, they act. They “put their money where their mouth is,” and believe that actions speak much louder than words. They are prone to action, willing to roll up their sleeves and get their hands dirty. They want to be “in the trenches” with their colleagues to apperceive what they are experiencing. Heroic leaders thereby demonstrate that they do not ask anything of others that they are not willing to do themselves, and this inspires others to do the same. Moreover, by taking action, heroic leaders convey that the action is worthwhile and important, and this inspires others to invest the effort to do the job right.

*Element 3: Works Hard*

Heroic leaders are energetic and work above and beyond the call of duty. They put in long hours and work very hard, sometimes harder than anyone else around them, when necessary. They do more than is asked of them, and more than is expected. They want to take pride in their results, and they want to share these feelings of pride and accomplishment with those they work with. Because they work hard, others are willing to do so as well.

*Element 4: Shares Tasks and Delegates Authority*

Management practice has traditionally stressed the importance of delegation. A good manager, it is thought, is one who knows how to delegate as much as possible in order to have more time available to focus on truly important issues and decision-making that cannot be delegated. This propensity to associate effective management with delegation can be taken too far and become counterproductive. In part, the message being conveyed when one delegates a task to someone else is that this task does not warrant my attention. This can send a negative message about the manager’s assessment of either the importance of the task, the ability of the subordinate, or both.

Heroic leaders do not delegate tasks just to be rid of them. Heroic leaders share work with others in order to get things done. This demonstrates a willingness to do it themselves and serves as a role model for others to emulate. Heroic leaders try to convey that all tasks relevant to obtaining an objective, whether the task is seemingly simple or complex, are important. A vivid example of this orientation is found in the film *Patton*. In one scene, the Allied advance is snarled by a colossal traffic jam that is exacerbated by muddy terrain. After observing the situation for a short while, General George S. Patton, Jr. got out of his jeep, stood in the mud, and directed the traffic himself until the situation was resolved and the advance could continue. In this case, we see that the Commander of the Third Army was willing to serve as a traffic cop, and to let his men see him doing it if it meant moving ahead to attain the ultimate objective of victory. By demonstrating a willingness to do anything that needs to be done, others in turn are more willing to do anything, even if it does not appear to be part of one's job description. Others will be more inclined to ask for and grab work away from the heroic leader.

Heroic leaders are not inclined to delegate tasks out of laziness or the feeling that my time is worth more than yours. When delegating, their inclination is to consider how this assignment will help to develop the subordinate's skills, knowledge, experience, decision-making, problem solving, exposure to different issues or to different people. A heroic leader is in the business of grooming future leaders and is not intimidated by others' untapped or unrealized leadership potential. By sharing work, teaching, inspiring, showing the way, and delegating authority, heroic leaders are empowering others. They recognize that others will make mistakes, but that people have the capacity to learn from their mistakes and triumphs and to develop over time into future heroic leaders.

### **DIMENSION 3: RISK-TAKING AND REWARD ORIENTATION**

All activities, including leadership, entail a degree of risk-taking and potential reward. Leaders are responsible for achieving results to their objectives. They are validly or invalidly given credit for success and assigned blame for failure, even when these are partly or largely beyond their control or influence. What is the orientation of a heroic leader toward risk-taking and reward?

#### ***Elements of Risk-Taking and Reward Orientation Relevant to HL***

*Elements 1, 2, and 3: 1) Assuming risk; 2) For Others; 3) In a Non-Calculating Manner*

Heroic leaders assume personal risk. They do not ask others to take any risks that they themselves are not willing to take. By speaking up for someone when no one else does so, or by taking the lead for a new initiative despite existing obstacles and forces, heroic leaders demonstrate to others that they are willing to take risks. When they assume risks for themselves, they share risk with others, and cushion others from risk they might otherwise be exposed to. They are risk sharers and risk absorbers, not merely risk takers, risk creators, or risk observers. When others in turn see that heroic leaders are willing to share or absorb risk for them, their willingness to take risks and assume risk for others is likely to be augmented.

McClelland (1971) demonstrated that people with a high need for achievement tend to be attracted to tasks with a moderate degree of risk, rather than to those with very low or very high risk. Very low risk tasks that are routine and uncomplicated do not provide a feeling of achievement. Very high risk tasks that tend to be non-routine and complex, are likely to lead to failure rather than to the sense of achievement sought by those who have a strong need in this direction. Even when success in a high risk task ensues, an individual with a high need for achievement might be inclined to attribute this merely to luck or chance rather than to personal achievement, thus still not satisfying their need for achievement. The right combination of challenge yet likelihood of success if one works hard is found for such individuals in moderately risky tasks.

What can be expected of heroic leaders in terms of the degree or nature of the risks undertaken? Do they resemble people with a high need for achievement in this regard? It is likely that there will be important distinctions between heroic leaders and people with a high need for achievement as far as risk taking is concerned. People with a high need for achievement are focused on attaining objectives, but they are not really leading anyone. They tend to enjoy achievement for its own sake, for the intrinsic joy of achieving objectives. These objectives are not necessarily for a group or institution and may be purely personal. They may impress and inspire others, serve as positive role models, and create outcomes that benefit others directly or indirectly, but they are not leading others and may have no formal followers. They are often “in it” for themselves.

Heroic leaders, on the other hand, are not in it merely for themselves, but for others as well. Rather than deriving satisfaction from achieving, they are satisfied by leading, sharing, and absorbing risk. Their sense of achievement is fulfilled not by attaining personal objectives, but by encouraging others to take risk. For heroic leaders, empowering others comes easily and is the natural consequence of leading heroically. The gains sought are for others rather than for themselves.

Moreover, when people with a high need for achievement undertake tasks having a moderate degree of risk, they do so in a rational manner entailing at least the implicit weighing of potential risks and rewards. McClelland indicates that people with a high need for achievement are attracted to entrepreneurial activities. When an entrepreneur with a high need for achievement starts a new business, he/she calculates the risk in terms of potential costs and benefits, and decides to commit to a new venture based on the implicit calculation that the potential rewards outweigh the risks. To commit to the new venture if the rewards do not outweigh the risks would be foolish and irrational. However, when heroic leaders assume risk, they often do not have the inclination to calculate the risks so carefully. They are more likely to act on the basis of consistency with their strongly held principles (see earlier discussion) than on the basis of rational or mathematical calculation of the odds of success. Consequently, heroic leaders are likely to assume a greater variety of risks, ranging from low to moderate to high risk. This may seem impulsive on the part of heroic leaders, however, although heroic leaders may be unpredictable in terms of the degree of risk they assume, they are consistent in terms of their commitment to their values. The common thread for the risks assumed, whether low, moderate, or high is their relevance to heroic leaders' strongly held beliefs.

Those who engage exclusively in low risk tasks or actions, are not likely to be viewed by others as being very heroic. Heroic leaders will therefore be seen as at least occasionally engaging in actions entailing moderate or high risk. However, one's capacity to function as an effective leader is less likely if they function exclusively at a high-risk level. This high-wire act is too difficult and exhausting for anyone to maintain over an extended period of time. They may function like most other people a good deal of the time, and engage in low to moderate risk tasks with the demonstrated capacity to assume high risk for others when necessary. Heroic leaders do not enjoy taking high risk merely for the excitement, to attract attention, or out of curiosity. They take high risks only when necessary, or when important principles or the welfare of others are at stake.

Hogan et al. (1990) and Howell and Avolio (1992) have discussed the so-called "dark-side" of charismatic leadership where leaders exert a tremendous degree of influence over others on the basis of their personal qualities and take a group in a destructive direction. History has provided all too many examples of this type of leadership. In terms of our current analysis, it can be argued that, whereas heroic leaders assume and absorb risk for others, dark-side charismatic leaders generate increased risks for others. Individuals such as the late Rev. Jimmy Jones of the People's Temple cult, and on a much more gargantuan scale, Hitler and Stalin, were risk creators and generators, whose actions entailed significant costs and destruction for others with no concern for the consequences.

#### *Element 4: Intrinsic Reward Orientation*

In considering the rewards sought by heroic leaders, it is necessary to distinguish between intrinsic or internally mediated rewards, and extrinsic or externally mediated rewards. Heroic leaders certainly have nothing against obtaining extrinsic rewards such as promotions, raises, stock options, and bonuses. However, there are limitations to the power and effectiveness of extrinsic rewards for heroic leaders. Extrinsic rewards are not their primary goal, and they cannot be motivated solely or even primarily by extrinsic rewards. Since heroic leaders are internally motivated, extrinsic rewards have a limited affect on further motivating them.

Extrinsic rewards are likely to serve as indicators of success and appreciation, such as a way of keeping score, rather than as the main attraction for heroic leaders. Moreover, to the extent that heroic leaders are acting primarily to obtain extrinsic rewards, to that extent will their perceived heroic qualities be perceived as being diminished. If an executive's actions are primarily motivated by a desire to increase the value of his/her stock options, this is a valid source of motivation, but it is not likely to engender perceptions of heroic leadership by others.

### **DIMENSION 4: RELATING TO OTHERS**

Heroic leadership that is built on a firm foundation of character and manifests in one's orientation toward work, risk-taking, and rewards, is perhaps most dramatically expressed by the way that one relates to others.

***Elements of Relating to Others Relevant to HL:***

*Element 1: Altruism/Service to Others*

Heroic leaders have an unselfish devotion to the interest of others. Their mission is to energize other people, and to bring out the best in them. Further, heroic leaders view themselves as an instrument for helping others attain goals, satisfy needs, and reach their potential. They put others before themselves except when there are potential risks or losses. Then, heroic leaders put themselves first.

Heroic leaders do not feel that others are supposed to be providing a service to them, but rather, that their job is to provide service to others. They see themselves as building bridges both to others, and for others to cross over, and are not interested in building their own empires or in self-aggrandizement. They are not oriented toward trying to enhance their own power-base, but rather in empowering others.

*Element 2: Visibility*

Neither leadership nor heroism exists in a social vacuum. They are both socially defined based on others' perceptions. It is unlikely that either quality will be perceived when leaders are not visible to others. Heroic leaders do not hide behind closed doors, nor do they communicate with others primarily by memo or e-mail. Instead, they look for opportunities to meet with others and to make themselves available to discuss issues and concerns. They are also visible in the sense that they stand up for their beliefs, decisions, and actions, as well as for their people. They do not cower behind others when issues become messy or complicated, but make sure that people know where they stand. They are willing to "sign" their actions and behaviors, just as John Hancock was proud to sign the Declaration of Independence. The only time they will hide their own contribution is to allow others to get the credit. In addition, they never take credit for others' contributions, and they feel successful when the success of team members and subordinates are recognized and celebrated. To the heroic leader, this means that they are doing their job well.

*Element 3: Serves as a Model*

Heroic leaders recognize that due to their position or visibility, people take notice of their behavior. They understand that actions speak louder than words, and that every action or inaction is a potential teaching lesson for others to emulate or model themselves after.

*Element 4: Makes Others Feel Special*

Heroic leaders recognize the individuality of each of their team members and value each person as a unique resource. Heroic leaders do not view themselves as being special, or particularly brilliant, or talented, but feel that other team members have these potentialities. Heroic leaders take the time to get to know people, and do not view this activity as a waste of time or hassle. They strive to build others' sense of importance, to offer them a vision of what is

possible for them to do and accomplish, and to activate their desire to accomplish great things. Heroic leaders groom future heroic leaders.

*Element 5: Win-Win Orientation*

Heroic leaders do not compete with their own team members. They are not interested in getting ahead at the expense of their colleagues. They do not view every interaction as an arena for proving their worth by denigrating the worth of others. Heroic leaders approach inevitable conflicts by seeking win-win rather than win-lose outcomes. They do this by searching for ways to address the mutual and superordinate needs of all conflicting parties so that all can come away feeling like winners. Heroic leaders view their organizations as being teams that are playing on the same side, for the same ultimate goals. They feel that if there is a weak link anywhere in the organization, it weakens the entire team and therefore, that it is then to everyone's benefit to help strengthen this weak link rather than trying to look good at its expense. For them, the motto of The Three Musketeers, "All for one, and one for all," is not just a nice memory from their childhood reading, but the embodiment of how they function as heroic leaders.

**DIMENSION 5: ORGANIZATIONAL IMPACT**

As previously argued, the perception of heroic behavior is not related to whether or not the heroism demonstrated resulted in a successful outcome either for the hero or for others. However, this is more likely to be the case in the military and quasi-military arenas where heroism is often clearly obvious when it occurs, and where its expression can be glorified in order to inspire others. However, in other, less dramatic settings, heroic behavior is subtler and may not be clearly evident or agreed upon by others. The actual demonstration of heroic behavior may never be acknowledged, let alone glorified, if there are no concrete results to show for the effort. The bottom line for heroic leadership in most organizational settings is that it must lead directly or indirectly, sooner or later, to some impact on results. Ultimately, heroic leadership in the business world, for example, is defined as successful heroic leadership. Unsuccessful heroic leadership, if acknowledged or recognized at all, may actually lead to a lesson about how not to function as a leader.

Heroic leaders may do everything right in terms of their character, their orientation to their work, to risk-taking, and to rewards, and in terms of how they relate to others, but they may still fail. There are no guarantees in the leadership field, even if the leader is heroic. Conversely, non-heroic leaders may be quite successful, at least in the short-run or in terms of accomplishing particular goals.

What complicates outcomes for leaders are the many factors over which they ultimately may have little control. These may include basic issues such as the composition of teams based on their talents and abilities, changes in the environment including steps taken by competitors and suppliers, the nature of the economy, changes in technology and legal requirements, new consumer trends and demands, financial or budgetary constraints, etc. Leaders may do everything wrong, but still be considered successful due to their luck in being in the right place at the right time, for example, being responsible for marketing a hot, new product that everyone wants

anyway. On the other hand, a heroic leader may do everything well, yet still fail because of these uncontrollable factors. Since luck and uncontrollable factors partially determine outcomes, it is hard to predict what will work in all or even most cases. However, it is probable that the success of non-heroic leaders or the failure of heroic leaders is not due to their leadership style, but rather to other outside factors and forces.

Heroic leaders may bring out the best in people, but their best may not be good enough if the people lack the talent needed to ensure success, or if the product or service being produced is on its way to becoming obsolete. In most if not all cases, one could argue that the results would probably be even worse if the heroic leader had functioned differently. In this case, there is nothing to lose but perhaps something to gain by functioning as a heroic leader. Conversely, non-heroic leaders may bring out the worst qualities in people, be despised and disrespected, and still be successful if their people are especially talented and effective even when uninspired, or if the product in question is experiencing high demand. However, in this case, the results might have been even more outstanding, if the non-heroic leader had functioned differently. In this case too, there would be nothing to lose, but perhaps much to be gained by functioning as a heroic leader.

In any case, since heroic leadership in inherently non-heroic organizational settings is ultimately judged by its impact on the organization, it is useful to consider how such an impact can best be realized.

### ***Elements of Organizational Impact Relevant to HL:***

#### *Element 1: Doing Something Important and Worthwhile*

Heroic leaders should try to be where the action is not only in terms of leading from the front, but also in terms of what it is they are leading in the first place. Heroic leaders are responsible for accomplishing outcomes that are central to the organizational mission and goals. They are therefore not likely to be found or perceived in peripheral, staff, or support functions. If a leader is in such an area, he/she may be perceived internally by members of the team to be a heroic leader, but similar perceptions by others beyond the immediate unit may not be forthcoming. Heroically inclined leaders would then have several options. These may include transferring to a central organizational function, integrating their current functions with more critical functions in such a way as to increase perceptions of centrality and criticality, or trying to build a strong case to convince important people in the organization that the function is critical. The first option may be easiest for the leader to execute, especially if they are perceived to have been performing well. The leader may get to where the action is, but ironically this comes at the cost of doing something rather non-heroic, namely abandoning the rest of their former team to go elsewhere. A heroic leader would want to make sure that the individual who inherits their leadership position is fully qualified for this task, and that the team will be in good hands. The second option requires the most serious work and effort on the part of the leader and the leader's entire team. In this case, the leader is demonstrating the value added by their assigned function, and perhaps can bring about a state of affairs whereby this perception of value added will be significant. This may be the ultimate form of organizational impact and success for a heroic

leader in a support, staff, or peripheral function. The last option may rest largely on the leader's persuasion and communication skills, if not backed up adequately by the concrete integration discussed under option two. Ultimately, option two has the most substance backing it up and is the way to proceed if at all possible.

*Element 2: Represent What the Organization Stands For*

Heroic leaders embody what the organization currently stands for, and subsequently, the organization's culture. Their values are consistent with those of the organization, and they believe strongly in the organization's goal and mission. In addition, they are familiar with the organization's structure and how and why it takes its current form, how structure is related to organizational goals, and where in the structure their units and teams fall, and they can clarify these points well to others. They fight for their organizations, defend them when attacked, and are disappointed by poor organizational performance and failures to accomplish missions or to manifest values.

*Element 3: Creates a New Sense of Vision and Purpose*

While demonstrating all of the qualities discussed in element two above, heroic leaders also can create and communicate a new vision of their organizations for others. They are not satisfied with the status quo no matter how good it is, and they can appreciate and convey how the organization can be even better than it is. Heroic leaders are skilled in detecting potential risks and challenges for their organizations, particularly when everything seems to be going well. Heroic leaders feel that it is important to be observant, and to scout their environments both to identify potential hazards that can be avoided or eliminated, and to find new paths, trails, passages, and opportunities for bringing their organizations to a new level.

## CONCLUSION

This paper examines the concepts of leadership and heroism as two distinct entities, and considers how to merge these concepts in order to create a new model of organizational leadership. The model of heroic leadership described herein offers a demanding set of standards for effective and inspiring leadership practice in the future. The likelihood of any one individual possessing all of the elements and dimensions of heroic leadership discussed here may be quite remote, but there is merit in the process of trying to implement the model even when it is not totally attainable. No one leadership style or approach will be perfect or suitable in all situations, in all places, for all cultures, and for all times. However, organizations that find value in the HLM and that wish to seriously implement it would have to design their recruitment, selection, and placement procedures in such a way to identify and hire greater numbers of individuals demonstrating such qualities, and to place them in critical functions and areas. Organizational management and leadership development programs would have to be designed along these lines as well, in order to further enhance qualities and behaviors associated with heroic leadership. The organizational culture would have to be gradually changed in order to incorporate the concept of heroic leadership as the way to lead people, and to support manifestations and expressions of heroic leadership. Organizational reward structures would have to be realigned to

reinforce expressions of heroic leadership. In other words, the organization would not only have to express heroic leadership as the desired leadership model, but would have to back up this message in meaningful and concrete ways. Otherwise, organizations run the risk of having heroic leadership be perceived as a just another meaningless motto or the latest management gimmick or fad.

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