

“IS KINDNESS AN
UNDERRATED VALUE IN
LEADERSHIP?”

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Executive Master Thesis

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Abstract

Kindness and empathy are two universal and innate values that human beings can draw on in their journey to grow at a personal and professional level, and in their effort to communicate amongst each other in a stronger and more effective manner. With regards to the quality of leadership, as it is in everyday life, kindness can be a major source of strength in reinforcing the leader-follower relationship, as well as that of the institution they are striving to build.

Yet for some reason, individuals tend to shy away from this natural, hard-wired resource in their professional circles – which attests to the fact that kindness continues to be an underrated value, at a time when fully empowered cooperation has become the ultimate building block for the transformational leadership approach that every collective entity seeks to achieve.

The following thesis seeks to highlight the relationship between the use of kindness in leadership and the safe attachment theory pioneered by Bowlby and other researchers, before addressing the practical reasons behind either championing or stalling kindness, and the circumstantial parameters that govern the attitude of business leaders towards the issue.

Lastly, it offers a number of recommendations aimed at exploring a new approach to this issue, based on cognitive coaching and the use of a kindness-in-leadership-compass (KLC).

Key words: Kindness – leadership – attachment – balance – inner compass

Introduction

A successful leader is one who inspires others to action by example, with authority and through kindness.
Gandhi

Transformational leadership has become one of the hottest topics nowadays, as attested by the vast amount of studies offering new perspectives and findings on the issue.

The most factual and forceful statements are the phenomenological examples, which include: in the political sphere (Gandhi / Mandela), the social sphere (Schweitzer / Mother Theresa) or in the business sphere (Howard Schultz / Richard Branson). These are examples of transformational leaders, individuals whose success was founded on their empathy for the people around them, and their efforts to help them develop and grow, without necessarily expecting anything in return.

These leaders were precursors of change, leaving behind their imprint through teachings or writings. They were mainly recognized and appreciated for the wisdom, care, and nobility they showed through their thinking, deeds and emotions, and sometimes even abnegation.

Their followers don't just remember their personality, pictures or moments of glory, but also, they remember their own victories which they were able to achieve, thanks to these very leaders who tried, and often succeeded in helping others become better, and transform them into leaders themselves rather than maintain them in the status of followers.

Traditional leadership on the other hand is generally embodied by a person who has a vision and a sufficiently strong personality to issue orders around. Most of the time, that person is egocentric and aggressive, who manages to impose his/her will onto others, and that is what makes them lead the type of followers seeking that kind of guidance: People who want to remain followers, and are secured by this link of dependence. Their main recollection of their leader in this case are generally the leader's stands and moments of glory and the feeling of satisfaction of being led by him.

As an optimist, sometimes idealist voluntarist, who strongly believes in exploration, gratitude and connectivity between people as the constructive way forward,

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I cannot but ask myself the question: Is natural kindness a source of strength or is it a sign of vulnerability? In the context of the famous “name it, claim it, tame it” maxim, many managers *feel they suffer from it*, and try to suppress it under a layer of aggressive, sometimes abrasive behavior. But is that truly the way to go?

Research objective

The objective of this master thesis is to explore and understand whether natural kindness is an impediment for becoming a strong and respected leader or whether it represents a key point of strength that should be nurtured in seeking to attain transformational leadership.

Research context: Executive coaching cases coupled with interviews of 20 business leaders and supported by a literature review.

Literature review

I have built my review on psychodynamic literature about transformational Leadership, historical reviews of key leaders in the political and business context, as well as Business and behavioral articles published on the topic in academic reviews.

In the psychodynamic literature and theoretical background on leadership, I based my research on the findings about “charisma and transformational leadership” by Burns as well as House, the work of De Vries in “reflections on character and leadership” and “the leadership mystique”, and the publication on “leading with kindness” by Baker & O’Malley.

As far as historical reviews of key leaders, I based this research on one example of a peaceful figure with “Gandhi CEO” by Axelrod, and another of a martial character, with “It worked for me” by Colin Powell.

Concerning the latest studies about followers’ motivations, leadership capacities and the relationship between both, I referred to articles by Barbara Fredrikson on *the Broaden and build theory of positive emotions*, Ofra Mayseless on *the leader-follower relationship*, Popper and Amit on *the influence of attachment style on major psychological capacities to lead*, the work of Berson, Dan and Yammorino on *the attachment style and individual differences in leadership perceptions* as well as the article by Davidovitz, Mikulincer, Izsak, Popper and Shaver on *leaders as attachment figures*.

Last but not least, and for documentation on the identified current trends on that front, linking the desire to improve on leadership and build a better bond with people, I referred to “the EQ edge” by Stein and Book, “Daring greatly” by Brene Brown, as well as *Using the attachment theory in coaching leaders* by David B Drake.

Here is a quick recap of what this review shows.

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THE NEW LEADERSHIP DYNAMICS

A leader is one who knows the way, goes the way and shows the way.

John Maxwell

Kets de Vries (2009) has identified a shift from the traditional model of Control Command and Compartmentalize (C.C.C.), to a new more engaging combination of Inform Innovate Inspire (I.I.I), suggesting how much new leadership dynamics are migrating from the traditional transactional “DO IT” motto to the transformational “FOLLOW ME”.

Northouse (2001) defines transformational leadership as the combination of charisma, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation and individualized consideration; while House (1991) describes supportive leadership behavior as one directed towards the satisfaction of subordinates’ needs and preferences, such as displaying concern for subordinates’ welfare and creating a friendly psychologically supportive work environment.

Baker and O’Malley (2008) claim that if a leader achieves his aims but kills the capacities of others to feel and appreciate, it cannot be good leadership: Good dictators get results ... good leadership meets us where we are!

They think that leadership is about keeping passion alive, the ability to help others remain interested in, and receptive to what leadership has to offer...

Business scholars and practitioners alike know that performance is maximized when people feel supported, and are motivated through positive means – namely kindness:

They add that kind leaders are framers, interpreters and enablers who set clear expectations, provide honest feedback and promote growth.

THE NEW ETHOS OF LEADERSHIP IN ORGANIZATIONS

We must become the change we want to see in the world.

Gandhi

While Kets de Vries (2009) starts by observing cynically that it’s always easier for leaders to change *people* rather than *change* people, he quickly resumes with a first given that leaders, in order to be successful, must understand action as well as theory, stating that with less hierarchy and flatter, more organic structures, today’s leaders need to pay

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attention to processes implying improved relationship building and cross-functional teamwork.

He adds that in the absence of a genuine display of empathy, organizational cynicism and alienation go on the rise, as does turnover at all levels...

...which is why organizational leadership, now more than ever, needs to:

1. Find ways to bind people to the organization.
2. Build a culture that achieves the needs for attachment / affiliation and exploration / assertion.

De Vries claims that this can happen by crafting a set of Meta values that echo those needs, as a way to help employees develop a sense of collegiality, belonging and enjoyment and feel free to exercise the need for exploration and assertion.

Many organizations are now recognizing the importance of emotional intelligence and soft skills in driving that paradigm shift.

He resumes that in order to maximize the positive effects and minimize the negative ones, we need to become adept at recognizing emotions and expressing them constructively; and as leaders, we need to be able to help people do the same. In this light, emotional management stands out as a vital asset that any leader would need, bearing in mind that emotional energy is present and active only if leaders are successful at cultivating it.

The author concludes with a number of tips, which he believes are key to highly effective leadership:

- Taking time to listen to subordinates and making their opinion count
- Caring about people who work for you, and be ready to help if personal problems or doubts arise
- Set a good example of what is expected, by walking the talk
- Creating stretch opportunities for staff, and supporting their personal growth and development
- Encourage explorers by giving them praise and recognition when warranted
- Keeping people informed by creating transparent organizations

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A clear agenda for leaders who want to be successful, with and through their followers, via caring, expressing it and acting upon it.

Now is the time for a couple of illustrations, live examples that can shed more light on the practical aspect of this concept in leadership.

EXAMPLE OF KIND LEADERS

I suppose leadership at one time meant muscles, but today it means getting along with people.
Gandhi

The two examples I chose, of leaders who considered kindness as a central asset in their daily life come from two totally different backgrounds and worlds. But they both believed in the same philosophy: Mahatma Gandhi, initiator of the non-violence movement, and General Colin Powell, senior military leader during two wars fought by the U.S. army.

Gandhi, who preached self-realization through the quest for truth for himself as an example to others, worked hard to become a master in the art of persuasion through suasion, building his leadership on deep sympathy with the needs of those to be served (Gandhi CEO, Alan Axelrod; 2010).

As a matter of guiding principle, he claimed that “Power was of two kinds, one obtained by the fear of punishment, the other by acts of love... and the second is a thousand times more effective and permanent than the first”.

Ghandi was convinced that sheer force was highly ineffective at motivating people. To him, the most powerful source of inspiration was to be self-sustaining and depend on the application and growth of internal force.

To him, the first thing a leader needs to do is to prove that the change he seeks benefits the followers: “Give them a stake in your goals”.

“A leader is a role-model, a mentor who teaches by example and begins by taking sole responsibility for his values and actions offering them for emulation”.

Gandhi strongly believed that “by giving service, a true leader gets the benefit of creating, guiding and nurturing an enterprise that serves all whom it touches, including

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of course himself. What he gives is returned to him, and the organization, in a far greater and more valuable form”.

He also stated that “the greatest virtue of any worthwhile enterprise is the opportunity it provides each member to achieve self-satisfaction by creating a benefit for the entire organization, where the well-being, livelihood and future of each individual is dependent on the performance, behavior, caring and good faith of all... and this is what a leader should focus most at. This is his purpose and should be his ethos”.

Leadership is about how we touch and are touched by the people we meet. It's all about the people.
Colin Powell

General Powell is a firm believer that ‘it’s not organizations, plans and programs that get things done, but people; and organizations, plans and programs can either help or hinder people”.

To him, “the core idea when interacting with people is to acknowledge the fact that every member of an organization has values and wants these recognized. People need recognition and a sense of worth, as much as they need food and water. Prizes, promotions and bonuses are fine, but to really reach people, you need to touch them”.

The role of a leader as such, is to give purpose to his/her team, give it structure, standards. That leader should be able to nurture that team, and be someone that followers can look up to. In this sense, General Powell believes that leaders must build a natural connection and affinity to others, skills that are encouraged and developed by early caretakers, such as parents and teachers, and then crafted by experience, training and mentoring.

His advice is to gain the respect of followers by understanding, knowing and respecting them through your own competence and personal example: “Followers want leaders who inspire them to be their own role-model, and liking has to come from respect, not from the leader trying to be a nice guy or a buddy to the followers”.

This is an interesting testimony about the kind of kindness in leadership that seeks to provide followers with “what they need rather than what they want”. Of course one could argue about whether leaders know better about what followers need, and wonder whether there isn’t an unconsciously devious temptation to play with people’s

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destiny. But on the other hand, it may be a faculty of reading/ an intuitive faculty which a closely-involved leader can develop, when connected with his followers in a two-way communication channel. We shall come back to this point later with the research findings.

At this stage, we shall assume that the leader will develop the empathy and emotional skills to detect, understand and act upon his/her followers' needs, be it latent or explicit.

Back to Powell, he clearly sets the tone when he writes: "Being kind doesn't mean being soft, it's not a sign of weakness but of confidence, and if you have developed a reputation for kindness and consideration, then even the most unpleasant decisions will go down easier because everyone will understand why you are doing that; they will realize your decision must be necessary and is not arbitrary or without empathy."

He further adds, "kindness like calmness reassures followers, and holds their confidence. It connects you with another human being in a bond of mutual respect, and since every one of your followers is an essential member, everyone wants to be viewed that way."

"You can never err by treating everyone with respect, thoughtfulness and a kind word, or a well-done, provided one on one is the way you share credit, you appeal to the dreams, aspirations, anxieties and fears of your followers...

...Don't just show kindness in passing or to be courteous, show it in depth, with passion and they will reciprocate and care for you...

...They will not let you down or fail, accomplishing whatever you have put in front of them, they will keep on pushing you, picking you up when you fall, believing in you".

He concludes with a very operational warning: "The day soldiers stop bringing you their problems is the day you have stopped leading them. They have either lost confidence that you can help them, or concluded you don't care. *Either case is a failure in leadership...*".

Therein lies the heart of any leader-follower relationship, a relationship built on trust and credibility.

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THE LEADER-FOLLOWER EQUATION

Nobody cares how much you know, until they know how much you care. Theodore Roosevelt

In her article about leader-follower relationship, Ofra Maysel (2010) states that: “Results from several studies indicate that secure individuals tend to be nominated as leaders, and that leaders’ attachment security is associated with pro-social and follower-empowering leadership styles, leadership effectiveness and positive outcomes for followers”.

Popper and Maysel (2009) confirm that the “realization that leader-follower relationships also involve important affective components paved the way for application of attachment theory to the study of leadership”.

We will discuss the attachment theory more at length further below, but before, it seems important to mention an observation that came from the field: indeed, several interviewees compared the leader to a parent: a father or a mother alike (equal ratings, so thankfully there is no debate here...).

Like Freud, Popper and Maysel suggested that “leaders often function as attachment figures, whose role includes guiding, directing, taking charge and care of others, serving as a secure base and a safe haven”.

Mikulincer and Shaver (2007) write that “to play that role, and foster a sense of closeness and proximity that encourages attachment dynamics, leaders use various measures to bridge the distance between them and their followers, and thus must be self-confident, empathic and caring, all qualities associated with a secure attachment style”.

Maysel states that based on attachment-related interactions with sensitive and available caregivers, individuals internalize a model of themselves as worthy of love and protection and a model of others as sensitive, reliable and protective.

This statement underscores the comments made by a number of participants to the studies conducted on this topic, in which they compare leaders with parents saying that close, affectionate relationships with caregivers *and low psychological control* by the latter, were associated with transformational leadership.

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Popper, Maysless and Castelnovo (2000) have examined associations between styles of attachment and transformational leadership qualities in three studies of men in a military context, and found that it was characterized by vision, inspiration, consideration for others and intellectual stimulation.

Maysless (2010) concludes that a major factor in the ability to lead and in followers' perceptions lies in the manner with which these leaders developed their care-giving systems, and the motivations to assume such leadership roles. She also suggests that the study of these systems, and how they may be influenced by specific age-related transitions (Erikson), will undoubtedly become important questions in the future.

In this context, a question springs to mind when thinking about trainings in kindness currently taking place in the US, as reported in an HBR article : Why do we need to train, to recover natural strengths, and should we be less wary about showing them and acting upon them?

But it might be too early to cross that bridge, and before we tackle the leader's potential, capabilities and growth opportunities, let's take a closer look at the followers themselves and their own motivations for adhering to a specific leader.

THE FOLLOWERS' NEW PRINCIPLES?

A leader is a dealer in hope.

Napoleon Bonaparte

“The mission of positive psychology is to understand and foster the factors that allow individuals, communities and societies to flourish” Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000).

In her article about “the Broaden and Build theory of positive emotions”, Barbara Fredrikson tries to demonstrate that “experiences of positive emotions broaden people's momentary thought-action repertoire which in turn serves to build their enduring personal resources, ranging from physical and intellectual resources to social and psychological ones”.

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Positive affect, according to numerous theorists, facilitates approach behavior (Cacciopo, Gardnes, Bernston 1999; Davidson, 1993; Watson, Wiese, Vaidya & Tellegen, 1999) or continued action (Clore, 1994).

From this perspective, Fredrikson states that “experience of positive affect prompts individuals to engage with their environments and partake in activities, as positive emotions are vehicles for individual growth and social connections, and by building peoples’ personal and social resources, positive emotions transform people for the better ...

... thus inspiring and experiencing positive emotions are fundamental human strengths that yield multiple, interrelated benefits – they are essential elements for optimal functioning”.

She further notes that this theory makes the bolder prediction that experiences of positive emotions might also build psychological resilience, that is to the extent that, while they can undo lingering negative emotions, positive emotions broaden the scope of attention, cognition and action, enabling flexible and creative thinking and augmenting peoples’ enduring coping resources, as well as building physical, intellectual and social resources.

As a matter of example: interest, a phenomenological distinct positive emotion, broadens by creating the urge to explore, take in new information and experiences, and expand the self in the process (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Izard, 1977, Ryan & Deci, 2000; Tomkins, 1962).

Creating interest and nurturing it is one key motivator for people to follow a leader they can feel attached to or relate to, but the question that arises here is:

Do we tend to value kindness more as a receiver than as an initiator? Is it more appreciated than exhibited?

One thing seems sure in Fredrikson’s conclusion: Positive emotions are worth cultivating, not just as an end in itself, but also as a means to achieve inner growth and improved well-being over time.

That positive conjunction of care giving and kindness can play best in leadership.

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INFLUENCES ON THE CAPACITIES TO LEAD?

The more you extend kindness to yourself, the more it will become your automatic response to others.

Wayne Dyer

Example isn't another way to teach, it's the only way to teach.

Albert Einstein

Kets de Vries (1988) writes that “The emphasis in the writings on leaders is mainly on observable variables (e.g. behavior, actions) and not on intra-psychic psychological variables that raise the overt expressions of leadership”, adding that “people in a position of authority have an uncanny ability – without conscious awareness - to reawaken transference processes in themselves and others”.

He lists the following as key factors to leadership:

- **Self-confidence** : reflected by low trait anxiety and general self-efficiency
- **Future orientation**: the ability to point to a new way to transmit inspiring messages, hold a future orientation, and formulate it as a vision (Bennis & Nanus, 1985)
- **Initiative**: a leader is said to be an initiator of actions, improvement and change
- **Openness to experience**: among the factors directly correlated to leadership (Judge & Al., 2002), also reported to be essential to the development of leaders (Popper and Amit, 2005)

In their article about the influence of major psychological capacities to lead, Popper and Amit conducted comparative studies on the presumed differences between leaders and non-leaders, and found that leaders had lower levels of trait anxiety which is the tendency in a person to find expression in a wide variety of situations (Spielberger, 1972).

Individuals with low trait anxiety are assured to function more successfully in changing, fluctuating and stressful situations, and as such, are able to impart more confidence to their followers.

Popper and Mayseless (2002 -2003) argue that the wealth of psychological knowledge that has accumulated about the influence of early childhood on the development of the individual is relevant and applicable to probing the development of psychological substructures required for leadership in every day's life.

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They state that secure attachment style affects the potential to lead, and that capacity is essential in leadership as measured by rankings obtained in a study conducted based on **J. Bowlby's theory**.

This leads us to a more in-depth examination of the capacities to lead.

CAPACITIES TO LEAD

Everything that irritates us about others can lead us to an understanding of ourselves.
Carl Gustav Jung

Bowlby's theory assumes that, from infancy onward, children form an internal working model which includes internalization and representations of major aspects of their attachment relationships with their first caregivers (Bowlby, 1969; Bretherton, 1985).

These aspects include perception of the self as (un)worthy of love and attention, and perception of the attachment figure as (un)willing or (un)able to cope with attachment needs when they arise.

This internal working model guides the interpretation and planning of interpersonal transactions with the caregivers, and later with other important figures, becoming part of the child's developing personality and turning into a more abstract, generalized representation of the self and others (Bretherton, 1985).

Based on this idea, Ainsworth, Bleher, Waters and Wall (1978) identified three attachment styles, also valid in adulthood (Solomon and Georges, 1999);

1. Secure / safe attachment
2. Insecure ambivalent / anxious
3. Insecure / avoidant

The internal working model of secure individuals includes a basic trust in their caregiver, and confidence that he / she will be available, responsive and helpful when needed. With this assurance, they are bold in their explorations of the world, and able to both *rely on themselves as well as turn to others when in need*.

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The internal working model of the ambivalent/anxious pattern is characterized by uncertainty as to whether the caregiver will be available, responsive or helpful when called upon.

Insecure / avoidant is a pattern in which individuals have no confidence that they will receive care when they seek it; on the contrary they expect to be rebuffed.

Hazan and Shaver (1987) found that people with a secure attachment style were more capable of intimacy and closeness in relations than those with insecure styles.

Davidovits, Mikulincer, Shaver, Iszak & Popper (2007) Popper and Mayseless (2003) Popper & Al. (2000) suggested that because the attachment theory deals with the quality of relationships, it could also be applied to leadership.

These researchers proposed that, similar to security enhancing attachment figures, effective leaders are likely to be available and responsive to their followers' needs, provide advice, guidance as well as emotional and instrumental support, to help followers develop their autonomy and build their sense of self-worth, competence and mastery (Bass, 1995; Howell, 1988, Shamir, House and Arthur, 1993).

Thus individuals identified as having a secure attachment style were judged as more suitable for officers' role in the military (Mikulincer & Florian, 1995; Popper & Al., 2000). This research applied to the military resonates well and complements Daniel Pink's theory with "the surprising truth about what motivates others", with the three key factors: Autonomy, Mastery and Purpose.

This can also take us to the theory of fair process, whereby leaders "kindly" let their followers know what is expected of them, hold them accountable, help them take ownership of the process as well as make them feel that they have a stake in the purpose.

But back to the attachment theory, an interesting factor analysis carried out in various studies help explain individual differences in attachment, avoidance and anxiety (Shaver, Belsky and Brennan, 2000):

- The anxiety dimension is characterized by constant worry over relationships, fear of loneliness and abandonment (leading to unbalanced **over-reliance on kindness?**)

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- The avoidance dimension is characterized by a feeling of discomfort with closeness and dependence, as well as the avoidance of expressing one's emotions and reliance on others (resulting in **unbalanced, lessened kindness?**)
- Data shows that secure individuals, when assuming a role of parents, romantic partners or community volunteers, have the ability to focus more on other peoples' needs, without feeling deflected by personal distress or a lack of empathy (Collins & Feeney, 2000; Mikulincer, Shaver, Gilloth & Nitzboy, 2005). Must we add, without feeling the anxiety to suppress their natural empathy and kindness?

PERCEPTION OF THE LEADER TO BE

Waste no more time what a good man should be... Be one!

Marcus Aurelius

The link between the attachment theory and the famous transactional analysis appears quite straightforward at this point, in as far as an individual tends to communicate either as a parent, child or an adult depending on the nature of the relationship to the other. Both influence and govern the communication skills that are central to leadership.

But rather than delving further into this hypothesis, it nonetheless seems quite daring to assume that people / leaders who suffer no insecurities and can act and communicate on an adult mode are able to be secure and kind leaders. Popper and Amit claim that "secure peoples' positive mental representation of self and others seem to sustain sensitive, responsive and effective care giving while in contrast, insecure people have difficulty organizing and enacting sensitive responsive care of others ... therefore, secure individuals are well equipped to occupy the role of leaders that meet their followers' needs. But key questions remain:

1. What role does the environment play?
2. How do such leaders cope with the different cultural or developmental backgrounds of their followers?

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3. Would such an approach succeed in contexts where societal forces drive people to claim what they think they want, versus what they don't know they actually need?

Berson, Dan and Yammorino (2006) raise the question about whether "individuals' approach to relationships, expressed in terms of attachment styles are related to how they view ideal leadership and to their degree of tendency to emerge as leaders".

Lord and Mahler (1991) suggests that "leadership prototypes develop on the basis of previous leadership-related experiences" while Xeller (1999) found that implicit leadership perceptions reflect personality traits such as agreeableness, openness and self-monitoring. She also draws a link between parental traits and implicit leadership perceptions, saying that idealized leadership perceptions mirror parental traits even if parents were seen as tyrannical, domineering or manipulative!

Hanges & Al. (2000) offers a connectionist network model for leadership perceptions: "Leaders behavior impact followers' perceptions by activating an entire constellation of psychological variables, moreover, other factors such as the followers' level of affect, personal values and self-concept may influence these schema and explain links between individuals' implicit leadership perceptions, and their attachment styles or orientation to relationships with others".

Therein lie two more questions:

4. Do we relate more to people who share with pride our own strengths?
5. Does this connectedness with others affect the way we deal, subjectively, with followers we appreciate more?

Bowlby claims that humans have a survival need to be attached to a caregiver who can provide security - and that this is a life-long need characterized by individual differences. . This internal working model includes representation of the self in a relationship, and the role of potential partners, regardless of whether they are accepting, procuring confidence or are likely to be responsive.

This could be the focal point that may trigger a leader's choice between a transactional approach and a transformational one, when interacting with his/her followers.

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These internal models are relatively stable and operate automatically without the need for conscious appraisal (Bretherton 1985; Crowell & Al., 1999); however, a critical life event such as a new significant relationship can lead to the construction of a new mental representation that could add a new constant across all, caring that stems from natural kindness and perceived to characterize “adult leaders”.

According to Hazan and Shaver (1987, 1999), secure adults emphasize trust and comfort with closeness; they enjoy a positive sense of worth and hold the expectation that others are accepting and supportive of them. They have high self-esteem (Collins & Read, 1990), and function better as a support to others who may be in distress (Crowd & Al., 1999). Finally they seem to better integrate the notion of power of vulnerability as a key source of strength, to consolidate relationships and foster a more balanced leadership.

Mikulincer and Florian (1995) highlight the positive connection between secure attachment and peer evaluation, while Popper and Castelnovo (2000) establish the positive associations between leaders’ secure attachment styles, and multiple sources of transformational leadership ratings. This can suggest the following simple equation: Leaders who provide their followers with a sense of security will gain the latter’s positive perception of their leadership, and be able to carry out a more effective transformational role. It all boils down to the level of security they seek to establish.

Insecure individuals will view an ideal leadership as less relationship-oriented, as they exhude more anger, resentment and suspicion, all while suffering from a relatively low self-esteem. Furthermore, they tend to be defensive and destructive in conflicts (Sharfe & Bartolomew, 1995).

With regards to autonomous or self-managed teams that have no assigned leader, Berson, Dan and Yammorino (2006) argue that securely attached individuals show more confidence, are more helpful to others and tend to be interdependent and trustworthy, and thus are better able to negotiate a leadership role than insecure individuals who either prefer to avoid societal interactions or have a tendency to engage in dysfunctional conflicts.

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LEADERS AS ATTACHMENT FIGURES

He, who wishes to secure the good of others, has already secured his own. Confucius

Hazan & Zeifman (1994) claim that the attachment theory may be applied to any adult relationship, as long as it fulfills the following three criteria;

1. Maintenance of proximity: Prefers to be close by in times of stress / need
2. Provision of a safe haven: Relieves distress and provides support / comfort
3. Provision of a secure base: Sustains exploration, risk taking and self-development

Just as attachment needs and behavior are activated by stress and distress (Bowlby 1969/1982; Mikulincer, Gilloth and Saver 2002), research has shown that the need for a strong leader arises in times of personal and collective crisis, trauma and uncertainty. But what exactly characterizes a strong leader? Should one go back to Ghandi's statement about love versus muscles? Is it the calm, parental, wise figure who inspires followers with their quiet strength, or is it the impetuous, domineering leader?

A sensitive, responsive leader is able to initiate in followers what Mikulincer and Shaver (2003, 2007) have called a broaden-and-build cycle of attachment security, including a series, or cascade of mental processes that facilitate personal growth and adjustment, including feelings of esteem and acceptance, increased confidence in one's coping and interpersonal skills, in addition to increased devotion of mental resources towards creative exploration and skill acquisition. The opposite seems to hold as well: leaders' inability or unwillingness to respond sensitively to followers' needs may foster a sense of insecurity and low morale, triggering psychological defenses that strongly interfere with performance and growth.

Popper, Mayseless and Castelnovo (2000) focus on the distinction between transactional and transformational leaders, and whether the attachment style influences the likelihood of becoming one or the other:

- Transactional leaders encourage followers to perform assigned tasks, by way of offering immediate rewards for positive performance
- Transformational leaders are interested in empowering followers and promoting their personal growth and development

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Popper & Al. (2000) found that more secure leaders were rated by instructors and followers alike as possessing more transformational leadership qualities, ex: treating each follower as a special and valuable individual. They have linked attachment style to two constructs of leadership taxonomy:

1. Personalized leaders put their own interests ahead of their followers' needs, and pursue a dictatorial style that includes belittling followers and ascribing maximum importance to themselves.
2. Socialized leaders use power to assist and empower others, align their own vision with followers' needs and aspirations, while respecting their rights and feelings.

Popper (2002) found that avoidant attachment was associated with lower levels of socialized and higher levels of personalized leadership, whereas Johnston (2002) found that insecurely attached managers were less likely to delegate responsibility and power, and more likely to create centralized authority structures.

Although the caregiver or leader can have an important effect on the mental state and performance of followers, the way in which the latter appraises his leader can also affect the quality of the relationship in a two-way self-fulfilling prophecy, in sync with the famous Pygmalion effect; for example an untrusting follower who finds his leader to be too intrusive, challenges his guidance, establishing a poor relational climate that interferes with efficient leadership. It's also worth noting that a negative climate can also result from over dependent and needy followers being chronically dissatisfied with their leader's behavior.

MOTIVES TO LEAD:

Treat a man as he is and he will remain as he is,

Treat a man as he can and should be

And he will become as he can and should be.

Goethe

According to Collins and Read (1994), individuals with differing attachment styles also have varying objectives when engaging in social interaction:

- Individuals who have high attachment anxiety levels are expected to seek the role of leaders, as a means to satisfy a frustrated need for attention and acceptance.

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- Individuals who have an avoidant attachment style are expected to maintain their distance from followers, and view leadership as an opportunity to demonstrate strength, toughness and independence.

Both types have difficulty organizing and enacting sensitive responsive care of others.

Theoretically, leaders with a secure attachment style should feel more confident and skillful in occupying the role of the stronger and wiser caregiver, promoting a sense of competence in their followers, and contributing to a better functioning and adjustment.

How secure are we vs. our own natural kindness?

According to their research conducted among military units, Davidovitz, Mikulincer, Iszak, Popper and Shaver (2007) have found that followers' appraisals vary according to the attachment orientation of their leaders:

- Soldiers in units led by an avoidant attachment officer tend to appraise him as exhibiting a less socialized leadership style, and report serious doubts about his efficiency in emotion-focused situations.
- Soldiers led by an attachment anxious officer appraised him as exhibiting a more personalized leadership style, but report serious doubts about his leadership efficiency in task-focused situation.

In light of this, how does one find a satisfactory middle ground? And is it something that can be worked on to improve leadership skills, whilst integrating emotional intelligence?

Does a leader need to understand himself better, in order to name, claim and tame his areas of growth?

A final interesting insight into attachment styles states that an individual with an attachment anxious personality, self-preoccupied with perceived personal threats and frustrated needs, struggles with empathically attending and responding to followers' needs. Anxious leaders may intrude upon, or attempt to coerce followers, and exaggerate their needs, even if they don't even require assistance, as a means to justify and entertain

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their own need for approval, love and security. Their emphasis on emotional closeness and interdependence helps followers become, in turn, emotionally involved and interpersonally close, unfortunately at the expense of instrumental performance – an example where this type of kindness can be detrimental.

By the same token, avoidant leaders seem to view their role as an opportunity to demonstrate their superiority, ignoring the supportive and socio-emotional aspect of leadership; their lack of comfort with closeness and interdependence, as well as their negative mental representations of other (Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991)) are likely to interfere with accurate and empathic perception of their followers' needs and concerns, together with the dismissal of their own. Because they maintain a tight control over the experience and expression of emotions, they are likely to concentrate on the task at hand rather than get involved in nurturing and supporting their followers, and thus are viewed by the latter as unable to provide a safe haven and a secure base – an example where lack of kindness can be crippling.

Researchers found these associations in leaders' self-reports, followers' appraisals and commanders' assessments. In other words, attachment-related leadership qualities are evident in behavior, and are detected by followers and superiors alike – and more importantly, they impact the mental health and performance of followers.

Description of the research setting

I first became interested in this topic when I came to closely examine the realm of family businesses in the Middle East. I realized that those businesses that were led by women were more successful in prepping the CEOs of the future, than the businesses led by their male counterparts.

The initial reaction to this was to speculate whether there was a potential link between an inherent maternal nature, and the aptitude to nurture leadership within other people, whilst helping them grow and develop – and this, therefore, being the main source of accomplishment and self-fulfillment. rather than trigger the perception that they could be stealing the thunder and overshadowing their tutors.

Do women have a stronger natural propensity to be transformational leaders? This hypothesis seemed like a too general and obviously gender-biased statement to make, which brought me to shift the question to the following:

“Is the faculty of caring one of the main characteristics of transformational leadership “?”

Another interesting insight came from the wrap-up sessions which I had to conduct for several coaching alliances, with a couple of peculiar cases about managers who wanted to work on their aggressive and sometimes abrasive conduct with their teams.

Upon doing their strength surveys, these coachees had identified, to their surprise, “kindness” as a key strength they had.

And then, as we ventured further into our discussions, they made a conscientious observation that it wasn’t much of a surprise, as they somehow admitted their fear of having their natural kindness being too visible and taken advantage of by their peers and colleagues.

Thus, their desire to build a defense mechanism in the form of a visible shell of aggressiveness and even, rudeness.

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As if they sometimes feel imprisoned in, whenever their natural authentic selves feel the need to come up to the surface and motivate or empower a promising colleague, someone they care to help and develop.

Which is probably the reason they wanted to work on their abrasiveness : the need to shake off the stressful yoke they had imposed onto themselves and liberate their inner values

This raised the question as to **“why would someone actually worry about expressing kindness in a business environment?”**

With both these questions in mind, I have sought to take this issue further, and try and understand whether it is social norms that induce us to smother our natural instincts, in an environment that focuses all too much on competitiveness and short-term performance. Also, whether people who enjoy a balanced and self-confident personality, and who are brave enough to rebel against these norms and open the space to the faculty of kindness, actually succeed better at being a transformational leader.

While we are familiar with the relationship between traditional followers and traditional leaders, we have yet to better understand what cements transformational leaders with their followers. What is the main drive? Is it will, vision, resilience, indirect covert manipulation? Is it a pure, emotional bond akin to a parental relationship, whereby parents want their child to get the best to the point of even surpassing them in terms of qualities and success?

Or can it be a positive, respectful connection built on caring and kindness?

One theory could be that it all depends on the context, the environment, the social evolution of people around the leader, and the latter's stage of economical and intellectual development.

From a leadership perspective, the stages of evolution in a society of followers can be simplified according to the following “pyramid of needs”:

- Stage 1: People are on a survival mode, they want to be defended and protected. That situation calls for traditional leadership. A chief
- Stage 2: People are on an “expand and conquer” mode, a “they want” stage that calls for a controlling leadership. A manager or a captain

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- Stage 3: People are on a rise, shine and join mode, a “they need” stage calls for a transformational leader: A guide or a teacher/coach

In this last stage, in which people need to find the best in themselves, nurture it and claim it (v/s the part others would like to see), where they need to be freed of their own chains, in order to create room for improvement, would kindness and caring be key characteristics for a leader ?

Can they be a clear substitute to the criteria of traditional leadership?

What would it need to be balanced with, to result in an efficient, fruitful guidance?

Kindness is the golden chain by which society is bound together.

Goethe

An article in Harvard Business Review by Gill Corkindale: “The Importance of Kindness at Work” received considerable amounts of comments, shares and tweets as it seems that kindness at work – *or the lack of it* – is a widely disputed popular topic.

Certain schools of thought believe that kindness should be promoted and justified as a strategy to increase productivity; others are even integrating it into best Business practices.

Does this mean that one needs to acquire something that is initially spontaneous and heartfelt, even more, a philosophy of life in interactions with the other?

Is it turning into a tool to learn and become a better manager?

I strongly believe this would defeat the purpose of expressing and nurturing this spontaneous asset, and leveraging it with objectivity and simplicity for an improved leadership approach.

“Kindness is commonly linked with empathy, and lots of experts in the field state beyond a reasonable doubt, that we’re hard-wired for empathy; our natural tendencies to feel the feelings of others are innate, but they can also be nurtured to allow us build the social skills that make modern societies possible.

Just as we are hard-wired toward understanding and acting with compassion towards others, social scientists are finding that those impulses can get blocked when our attention is over-focused on ourselves, our problems or crisis.

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We can blame a harsh and uncivil vision of the world for our aloofness and cynicism, it finally comes down to us - to the moment by moment choices we make “to look away – or extend a hand.”

An even stronger impediment to certain workplace social norms is the fact that kindness can sometimes be confused with lack of firmness, and worse, weak personality - the ultimate anti-leader characteristic.

In a context in which managers are expected to be fast, sharp, and competitive, natural kindness can be perceived as a handicap one needs to suppress and conceal.

This perception opens the space for extreme aggressiveness and abrasiveness that can sometimes spin out of control, and turn into a straightjacket that limits our margin of maneuver and our ability to improve our leadership skills.

In the case of both coachees, and this is probably the case with many other like-minded managers, their awakening came with the desire to bring things back under control, with the objective of a slight adjustment.

Ultimately, what started as a fine-tuning exercise, gradually morphed into a deep self-exploration and a clear confusion as what to do with that “burden” discovered when stones were unturned.

Is natural kindness a burden or is it an asset?

Is kindness underrated in leadership?

Data gathering and analysis

Following the literary review and the findings from my coaching alliances with those leaders, who were unconsciously undergoing the stress of acting out against their instinctive nature, I sought to gather more data focused on executives' perspectives on the topic, the principles they like to follow in their methods of management, and inspirational models they adhere to.

I thus conducted 20 interviews with 10 women and 10 men executives, who all lead teams composed of 50 and more people. The questions were the following:

1. What are the top 3-5 strengths of a leader, according to you?
2. What are the top characteristics motivating followers to adhere to their leader?
3. What is the first image that springs to your mind when we mention the notion of kindness in leadership?
4. What is your understanding of that term?
5. If kindness is one of your own strengths, would you consider it as an impediment or an enhancer to your leadership skills?
6. How would you use it? And with whom?
7. Can you think of an instance in which kindness hindered your ability as a leader?
8. An example where you believe it helped you lead a challenging character?
9. An example where it helped you nurture a person with high potential into a leader?
10. Can you think of an inspirational leader who wouldn't even come close to showing kindness?
11. Another who would have been a more efficient leader, had he not displayed kindness?
12. Your observations / comments

Findings and discussion

Respondents' answers to the first question, about **the top 3-5 strengths in a leader**, can be grouped in five building blocks, which constitute the key factors for an efficient leadership. Interestingly enough, and across these clusters of strengths, there were qualities that are directly or indirectly linked to and influenced by empathy, caring, kindness or safe attachment (in italics below).

The five clusters as identified with their verbatim:

A- Emotional intelligence

- Charisma to be liked and convince
- Insightfulness / intuition
- *Empathy and caring*
- *Listening to the team and living alongside them*
- *Being in touch with the organization*
- *Spotting and developing talents*
- Knowing your communication skills and the way to interact with them
- *Capacity to motivate* and give a sense of purpose

B- Capacities for change management

- Understanding the context: Looking at the big picture and an eye for details
- Having and *sharing a vision*
- Taking decisions
- Setting the course and driving action
- Building and maintaining a clarity of purpose
- Strategic integration *and enlisting others*
- Continuous improvement on performance and efficiency

C- Credibility

- Build expertise
- Be on top of the business
- Ability to be well surrounded *and foster trust*

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- *Empower colleagues and hold them accountable*
- How to make people receptive to persuasion-at all levels

D- Resilience and grit

- Determination
- Always get perspective
- Perseverance
- Navigating v/s various pulses and conflicting interests
- *Knowing who you are and be comfortable with it v/s playing a role*

E- Ability to be a role model – with values...

- Model the way, lead by example and walk the talk
- Myth is needed for a leader
- Drive a culture to protect your assets; Performance, attitude, values
- *Be secure and safe*
- *Be true to yourself and live your values*
- *Develop and energize people*
- *Inspire your colleagues and make them dream*
- *Feel your impact on others, monitor and develop it*
- *Fairness*
- *Humbleness and selflessness*

Concerning **the characteristics that would motivate followers to be led by such a leader**, answers can be clustered into three groups (qualities or factors related to the topic are in italics below):

I. The degree of openness and proximity

- Being approachable and clearly accessible
- Closeness – open door policy
- Listening, understanding, caring
- Kindness... but it doesn't mean you can't be tough once the relationship is established
- Communication skills

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- Fairness, genuineness, humanistic approach
- Liking the character v/s competencies

II. The quality of the interaction / inspirational parameters

- Charisma
- *Allows followers to spread their wings*
- *Growing together*
- *Positive influence*
- Appraising efforts and recognizing them
- *Be able to project them as future leaders*
- *Being an enabler*
- Feeling accountable and responsible in building the organization
- Being involved in decision making and construction of the dream

III. Credibility

- Seeing a conductor who is visible to his orchestra
- Integrity
- Clarity of direction / competence
- Walks the talk
- Achiever with tangible concepts for closure
- Being on purpose and achieve something beneficial
- Trust
- Direction for the long term
- Believe in him and his vision
- Having the skills and capabilities in the field = Credibility + added value

With regards to the third question, about **the first picture that comes to mind when evoking kindness in leadership**, the results were all about positive, comforting images, with two exceptions. The images can be grouped into four subgroups:

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A role model

- A parental image
- A smiling lady
- Jesus Christ
- A father of a nation : Gandhi , Mandela

A situation

- Family
- Nature
- A smile
- Someone at ease: fun but taken seriously
- Relaxation
- Irish people: with their motto “It’s nice to be nice – costs nothing”
- Compassion
- **Could be a weakness**

A symbol

- An open door
- **A balance: Does Kindness contradict assertiveness?**
- **A double-edged sword**
- A nurturing animal

A color

- Pastel: Mild soft comfortable situation
- Blue : Long term relaxing horizon
- Green: Life, family, nature
- Yellow: Light
- White: Transparency, care, authenticity

When asked **how they would view the term kindness in leadership**, the answers were a little more polarized and sometimes skeptical. The responses are the following:

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Rather negative

Could be more skewed towards weakness

Risk-free balance

I see it ranging from extreme over kindness being negative to optimal kindness being inspirational.

Too much

Optimal

Lack of assertiveness

Inspirational

Too lenient

Top engagement

Not taking decisions

Top performance

Not holding people accountable

Fairness

What it's not

It's someone who is not shouting. It's not weakness.

Positive

It's about fairness and respect, being human and feeling with others, taking the initiative of doing something you don't have to do. It's about being nice and reassuring.

Very high

Great connotation of empowering, nurturing and long-term efficient building. It's underrated, and today still unfortunately out of the equation.

Most respondents who considered **Kindness as a leadership enhancer** sometimes went even further, stating that it's a career enabler, with a few observations standing out to highlight the "buts" and the conditional efficiency of claiming their natural kindness in their daily leader's routine.

It is interesting to note however that, while the majority of interviewees clearly state that they consistently resort to this asset **with the objective of empowering their followers**, they are more comfortable and efficient when they use it with people whom they perceive are actually appreciating it.

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Their natural kindness is a good asset to bring people where they want them to be, except when it meddles with ethical issues.

Another, smaller, group maintains the same idea overall, in as far as they perceive kindness as an asset to leadership. Conversely however, they prefer to underplay it, in order to avert **the risk of** seeing followers take advantage of it and perceive it as softness.

In short, the notion of kindness in leadership, while claimed as an unconditional strength, is in fact only applied in a contextual manner, with three major warning signals:

1. Short-term kindness may be harmful in the long run, if it is used simply to gain the positive perception and affect of followers.
2. It can be a serious hindrance if it becomes a way of accepting things and taking alternatives other than the firmer decision – that would mean being in trouble as a leader.
3. It needs to be downplayed and replaced with signs of a “strong personality” when it is abused.

Hence, this appears to be the first point of interaction between the declared conviction regarding kindness as an asset, and its actual application in the realm of their leadership experience.

Upon being asked how they would use their kindness and with whom, the array of answers was broader and included new parameters, that sought to:

1. *Pre-empt the context*: scan the grounds and see if they are compatible with their authentic kind selves and allow an unwarranted display.
2. *Proctor the reactivity*: Of the follower, and assess whether that kindness is well placed or taken advantage of.
3. *Fine-tuning*: To adjust the dynamics and make sure damages can be limited or advantages optimized.

So, while a majority of the leaders interviewed confirmed they would resort to kindness as a general way of being through words and deeds, since they view their ethos, as leaders, in spending time with people to help them grow and give honest feedback as

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well as opportunities, they all added that they needed to make sure people wouldn't take advantage of the situation.

They clearly consider kindness and empathy as a way to attract, retain, build trust, open up, anticipate and avoid conflict with direct subordinates, peers or line managers. Through their answers, they appeared convinced that the lack of confidence in followers' capacities is often misplaced, and bad leaders constrain their colleagues and weaken resources to a large degree, whilst every human being needs to feel your kindness in the balance, and if you're really there for them, they will never try to cross the limit.

So, their aim is to use their kindness all the time and with everybody, unless it becomes disabling or if the receiving party seems indifferent. In the latter case, they try to understand whether the follower is uninterested, or simply not engaged, in which case, they would re-evaluate the situation for possible wrongdoings, admit these and adjust.

To cater to that, most interviewees rely on their insightfulness and perception of the follower, using their intuition as a compass to see things that are not easily perceived and make sure their kindness is not misinterpreted or misused.

At this point, we add the key concepts of compass and balance to decide, guide and adjust what appears to be a natural authentic asset, in accordance with the circumstances.

These exploratory and corrective faculties were seen to be crucial, to palliate for negative experiences **when using kindness had downplayed them.**

Most of the respondents confirmed that these negative experiences did not deter them, but rather helped them develop a finer intuition at identifying the right circumstances, as well as the proper context to be themselves and remain comfortable with it.

Backlashes experienced ranged from being betrayed, deceived or disappointed by followers who turned their back on them, to being perceived as non-confrontational by a superior or in a negotiation process; but the most serious threat was the potential negative impact it would have on their image as a leader.

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And in business, there is a ruthless attitude towards leaders; people tend to not forgive if leaders are perceived to have taken the wrong decision. In this case, that would be the worst spinoff of kindness.

So, on one side there is the need to protect, preserve and grow their momentum and credibility as leaders, and on the other, the openness and flexibility not to clam up as a consequence of negative experiences, so that they can still tap into their natural resources.

Interviewees unanimously maintained that they perceive this natural resource as a formidable agent for change, that can help leaders positively influence people around them. They agree that the most efficient way to integrate it into their leadership approach was through a tactful, humble manner that serves to build a lasting, trustful cooperation, whilst gaining the respect and support of their teams, and helping everybody grow and develop in a common bid to reach new heights – heights that cannot be expected in a context of traditional leadership, let alone a transactional management.

Examples of **inspirational leaders who wouldn't even be close to showing kindness** went from perceived ruthless iconic industry captains like Jack Welch, Prince Walid Bin Talal or Steve Jobs and whose efficiency as a head of business was unquestionable but who could run the risk of leaving behind them withered organizations, with no real succession nurtured as they help followers go beyond their limits, but drain them out.

Also mentioned were destructive organizations like nihilists or even the unfortunately numerous dictators, who have mesmerized their people and run their nations with a fist of iron, but left them in total shambles.

As for the opposite example of **inspirational leaders who could have been more efficient, had they not displayed that much kindness**, the examples were taken from the religious, social sports or humanistic realm of all the famous people who gave without counting in the short term, and whose memory will be more honored in the long run, when the world seizes their legacy more appropriately.

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From the new generation of sports coaches like Guardiola or Klopp, who pioneered a new “follow me” approach in empowering and inspiring their teams, to fathers of nations like Mandela, Luther-King and Gandhi who were among the examples of those leaders we would like to mention, but whose steps we believe are hard to follow.

As an overall conclusion, all interviewees were adamant that kindness tailored to the sake and wellbeing of followers, and that develops their potential, is a leadership-enhancing strength. But it can only be optimal when equipped with the right information, and coupled with the proper intuition and attitude as to where, when and at whom it can be geared. The key findings here are balance and inner compass.

Future research

Future research on this topic could focus on a more qualitative approach, that integrates new elements such as the specific context of followers, while offering a more substantial roadmap to leaders such as identifying those milestones that can help leaders take relevant decisions in a more systematic manner, and recommend ways to harness their natural kindness, and balance it to optimize its impact on the people around them, their relations with them and the effect on the organization as a whole.

By the same token, similar to the measurement tools that are available for resilience, grit, conceptual leadership or operational leadership, it could be useful to try and come up with a kindness scale or kindness-meter, that would help leaders benchmark themselves against that given context and their own capabilities, to evaluate the space for development and the efforts needed.

This could help make the famous kindness workshops springing in the US, and reported in HBR's article, a more widely and systematically used tool for talent development.

Conclusion

*I hear and I forget, I see and I remember, I do and I understand.
It's never too late to be what we might have been.*

*Confucius.
George Elliot.*

THE COACHING GATE

David B. Drake (2007) says that in connecting the working models they use as adults, with the cognitive and interpersonal patterns they developed as children, attachment theory provides an important lens on development and change in leaders.

The next section will try to show that, as for emotional intelligence that can be enhanced, attachment style can be worked out in function of a leader's objective, and his perception of the type of leadership he would like to establish within a certain followers context; once he has set an objective for his personal and professional development to enhance his leadership skills, he can enter into a coaching alliance with a change agent who will provide a safe space, a container, in which the leader can experience himself at his best, discover new ways of perceiving himself and relating to others.

Thanks to cognitive, narrative or solution-focused coaching, a coachee can understand that, beneath the iceberg and current model of the world, lies a strong link to past events, which impact present relational situations with avoidance, distance, stress or empathy.

As explained at length by Albert Ellis and Bowlby, behavioral patterns appearing in a leader's life can often be vestiges of pattern of attachment from childhood, and having reached the adult age, it becomes quite difficult to spot those hindrances that meddle with his personal growth, let alone ask for help in uncovering and dealing with them.

Caring / kindness will help people feel in a safe place, and come to terms with their attachment dynamics. According to Siegel (2007), an attuned communication with a secure caregiver enables the individual to develop a source of resilience as well as the capacity for engagement with others in empathetic exchange. On the other hand, researchers have noted that the more threatened an individual (or leader) feels, the more regressed becomes the style of thinking and behaving, which might be translated into defensive or resistant behavior like abrasiveness versus colleagues, or avoidance of

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emotional bonding, to preserve a certain distance and protect the defensive fortress this leader might want to live in.

Mikulincer and Shaver (2007) claim that reliance on secondary defensive strategies is required when a person is unable to build the secure foundation necessary to be clearly mindful of events. A coaching alliance can help the leader, first to see the defenses that were erected around him, most of the time unconsciously, determine their boundaries, understand their function and then provide an opportunity to come out and adjust his models in order to improve the capacity for closeness, maturity and safe relational building. Since securely attached adults learn that distance and autonomy can be compatible with closeness and reliance on others (Mikulincer and Shaver 2007), they have a greater cognitive capacity for, and experience with, receiving or giving empathy. They develop what Cozolino (2002) describes as emotional memory, that functions to a high degree in engaging in new, growth promoting, self-expanding experiences and address existential concerns rather than having to be perpetually on guard. A coach can help those adults complete the level of coherence in their stories, by uncovering the missing parts and linking past, present with future, to enhance their level of security and autonomy, allowing them to live fully, un-impeded by troubles of the past and worries about the future. Filling the gaps with their coach will help leaders bridge the deletions in their stories, and have a more linear narrative that renders them more available to themselves and consequently to others. Hilman (1983) claims that the task is not breaking down defenses and overcoming resistance, as it is one of rediscovering the necessity of these maneuvers which are the psyche's very responses to its weakness.

Gagan (1998) claims that defenses work on our behalf, altering reality by creatively rearranging conflicts into more manageable situations; the resulting distortion in perception gives up time to adapt until the anxiety of the threat can be borne; and here comes the role of the leader for the follower, or the coach for the leader, in helping people understand the reasons for those defenses, be aware and reminded of the role they were asked to play, and see the self-determined, self-decided reasons to stand up and venture outside in order to meet others where they are; in our topic, embracing one's natural kindness can and should be done convincingly, intrinsically.

In an article in Harvard Business Review, the top two motivations for being coached are "readiness to change" and "active engagement", revealing that real results

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only happen when the objectives are self-determined. While this stage of preparation is solely dependent on the person, Dougherty and West (2007) have made an extremely motivating claim when they share that current neuroscience research indicates that overreliance on early defense structure tends to interfere with the development of more complex neural networks; a strange reminder of the survival of the fittest theory, and the necessity to change in a dynamic equilibrium rather than establish defenses in a static one.

Coaching builds its *raison d'être* on the strategy of supporting coachees to find their own way of reframing their resistance, discovering new boundaries to be explored, and improving on their attachment status to make room for more awareness, progress and personal growth. This shows the need for an increased facing of reality as the basis for change. Fulton and Siegel (2005) say that many leaders have been acculturated to “get over it” in the face of difficulty or grief, such that elements of their authentic personalities and true potential are posed aside ... As a result they devote energy in protecting those aspects of themselves, around which they feel less secure, but these defenses prevent them from seeing clearly and restrict their range of affect and action. Dougherty and West (2007) point out that the very essence of what is needed for transformation and individualization in order to become more authentic leaders lies in our very own character structure..

AUTHENTICITY AND WHOLEHEARTEDNESS

Tenderness and kindness are not signs of weakness and despair but manifestations of strength and resolution.

Khalil Gibran

Courage starts with showing up and letting ourselves be seen.

Brene Brown

In her book about the power of vulnerability, Brene Brown (2012) explains at length about the sense of worthiness that drives the wholehearted people to live their lives with courage, and believe they are worthy of love and belonging. She claims that human beings are hard-wired for connections and can enhance further this innate gift by being courageous (to be imperfect) and compassionate (to be kind to themselves first and then to others). She labels those wholehearted people as willing to let go of who they thought they should be for the ones they really are, flashing for the first time the badge of vulnerability like a medal of honor.

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For those people who are afraid to show their natural kindness, we can list the guideposts she has defined for wholeheartedness:

1. Cultivating authenticity: letting go of what people think
2. Cultivating self-compassion: letting go of perfectionism
3. Cultivating meaningful work: letting go of self-doubt

According to her, and while “connection is the energy that is created between people when they feel seen, heard and valued, when they give and receive without judgment”, we have come to the point where, rather than respecting and appreciating the courage behind vulnerability, we let our fear and discomfort become judgment and criticism.

This trend is especially true in shame-prone cultures, whether groups, organizations or nations that are deeply rooted in comparison and benchmarking with others. The major challenge for leaders in such institutions is to inspire and motivate people to cultivate the courage to be uncomfortable, of accepting who they are as part of growth, and an incentive for creativity, innovation and learning. Such leader is someone who holds him or herself accountable to finding potential in people.

A WHOLE NEW EVER-CHANGING WORLD

There is great hope, provided action is taken, worthy of the opportunity. Winston Churchill

Seven billion people sharing the same resources, and living in a more global, connected, disputed or celebrated village. Times in which, in many countries, organizations and individuals alike are more attuned to corporate social responsibility, and in which people want to do more charity work in their forties and young graduates are more and more attracted by jobs where they can give vs. receive, following the principle of “from greed to generosity”.

Technology and information moving faster than the speed of thought, challenging leadership in all kinds of institutions, to foster higher communication skills, inspiration, innovation and have the courage for more proximity and connection with the followers, to earn that cooperation, that is given, not delivered upon demand and can certainly not be taken for granted.

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De Vries (2006) states that “Leadership resting solely on authority can never create the degree of cooperation required to produce sustained excellence; seeking a higher level of organizational performance can only happen through building that cooperative spirit that must be earned, by respecting followers, listening to them, engaging them and rewarding them so that they feel they have a significant stake in the enterprise”. He continues with “only an organization built on voluntary compliance, in which the leaders earn the privilege of leadership every day from the consent of those they lead, is built to endure and prosper; not just an ideal condition of leadership, a necessary one”.

And here is where emotional intelligence will be playing a central role, mainly through the nurturing of empathetic perceiving, understanding and interacting with our environment.

In the “EQ Edge”, Klein and Book (2006) say that “Empathy is an extremely powerful interpersonal tool, when you make an empathic statement, even in the midst of a tense or antagonistic encounter, you shift the balance. A contentious, uneasy interchange becomes a more collaborative alliance; when a relationship is an effective collaboration you maximize your ability to get what you want or need. Every time others feel as if you’re in tune with them, they feel validated.”

De Vries confirms that transformational leaders know how to harness the affectionate and aggressive energy of their people:

- They are good in expressing affection when needed
- Would be active listeners
- Excellent interpersonal skills

And as a result, get the best out of their people (and may we add the best for their people?). He concludes with the “teddy bear factor” which certain distinguished leaders enjoy: something in them and the way they operate that helps people manage their anxiety and work creatively.

So we’re back to the famous equation of the type of leaders, the type of followers who would like to be led by them, and their current context of individual and societal development.

IS KINDNESS UNDERRATED IN LEADERSHIP?

A multiplex situation that calls upon the leader's emotional intelligence, attachment style, communication skills and will to enhance his relational skills.

A whole program that has to start with the inner leader.

THE INNER LEADER

The speed of innovation / discoveries keeps us in a state of growing and continuous maturation i.e. in need of time, care giving and kindness, to be able to absorb, organize and acquire new interfaces between our internal world and our environment. Balance is key.

Any situation or environment that encourages us to solely look outward and compare ourselves to others leaves us in a state of dependence similar to a child / adult relationship; this is valid for individuals, groups, organizations or nations.

And the reverse is true. Any situation that keeps us looking only inward isolates us from the dynamic change morphing our world. To navigate safely between those two extremes, we are required to build and maintain our proactive inner compass that will give us the sense of orientation we need, depending on the context, nature and the stage of societal development we are in.

Someone once said that winds are always changing and you have to adjust your sails accordingly; in this case of kindness in leadership, the sails are there, authentic natural kindness, and considering the quasi-majority of interviewees who believe kindness is a leadership enhancer, the question remains: how can we unfold those sails and dare greatly to make them visible, and central to our leadership?

While adjusting them to the environmental winds so that we keep a consistent course.

And here's where the balance between internal and external world is important, for a constructive evolutive dynamic equilibrium. Any push attitude can only make one of these worlds overtake the other, causing damage and dysfunction.

IS KINDNESS UNDERRATED IN LEADERSHIP?

A PATIENT GRADUAL BLOCK-BUILDING PROCESS

A legend tells the story of a man who was hunting a wolf across the forest; totally focused on their deadly challenge they suddenly both fall into a large deep hole and are stuck several meters below.

The hunter looks at the wolf, puts his rifle on his shoulder and prepares to aim, when the wolf tells him: “What’s the use of killing me if you can’t get out of this trap and take back the trophy with you?”

The man thinks about it for a moment and then replies: “It’ll be easy, I’ll either jump very high or shout for help and it’ll come”, and he starts by showing his future prey how high he can jump, only to prove to himself that these vertical leaps can only result in a more abrupt, equally vertical fall; then he starts shouting for help, but they’re in the middle of a wide forest and deep below the surface.

Discouraged by the useless efforts, the man sits down in distress when the wolf tells him: “If I show you the way, would you quit chasing me and we call it a tie?”

Upon the hunter’s positive nod, the wolf starts carving a slightly ascending, spiraling slope running along the walls, deep enough to allow passage and inclined enough to progress upwards, and after patient hard work he reaches the surface, smiles at the man and tells him “It’s only a matter of patience, logic, commitment and knowing how to optimize your set of skills ... Good luck!”

That little Roman legend is the perfect example of how a leader who is willing to enhance his natural kindness and empathy should view the coaching alliance enabling to do that: A patient, gradual, block-building process. The wolf could symbolize our natural kindness and the hunter our acquired defenses aiming at protecting ourselves.

And here, I can suggest a road map that can guide the leader along the way from the starting point to the desired destination, of course in function of their followers’ context.

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THE NEW MULTIPLEX EQUATION

LEADER-LED RELATIONSHIP MATRIX: THE NEW MULTIPLEX EQUATION

LEADER STYLE			
Anxious-attached	Weakness Lack of Assertiveness	Lack of firmness	Lack of Direction
Safe-attached	Fairness Firmness	Kindness	Inspiration TRANSFORMATIONAL COOPERATION
Avoidant-attached	Firmness TRANSACTIONAL ORGANIZATION	Fairness CORPORATION	Selfishness Single-mindedness
FOLLOWERS CONTEXT	want to be protected by a chief	want to expand and conquer with a captain / manager who shows a better tomorrow	want to self develop with a leader coach / guide

In a nutshell, an anxious attached leader who over-displays kindness can be perceived as weak and lacking assertiveness in a context where followers need a chief, as lacking firmness when they want a captain / manager and as lacking direction when they are looking for a guide. As such, this type of leader needs to strengthen their firmness as a means of complementing and optimizing their natural kindness.

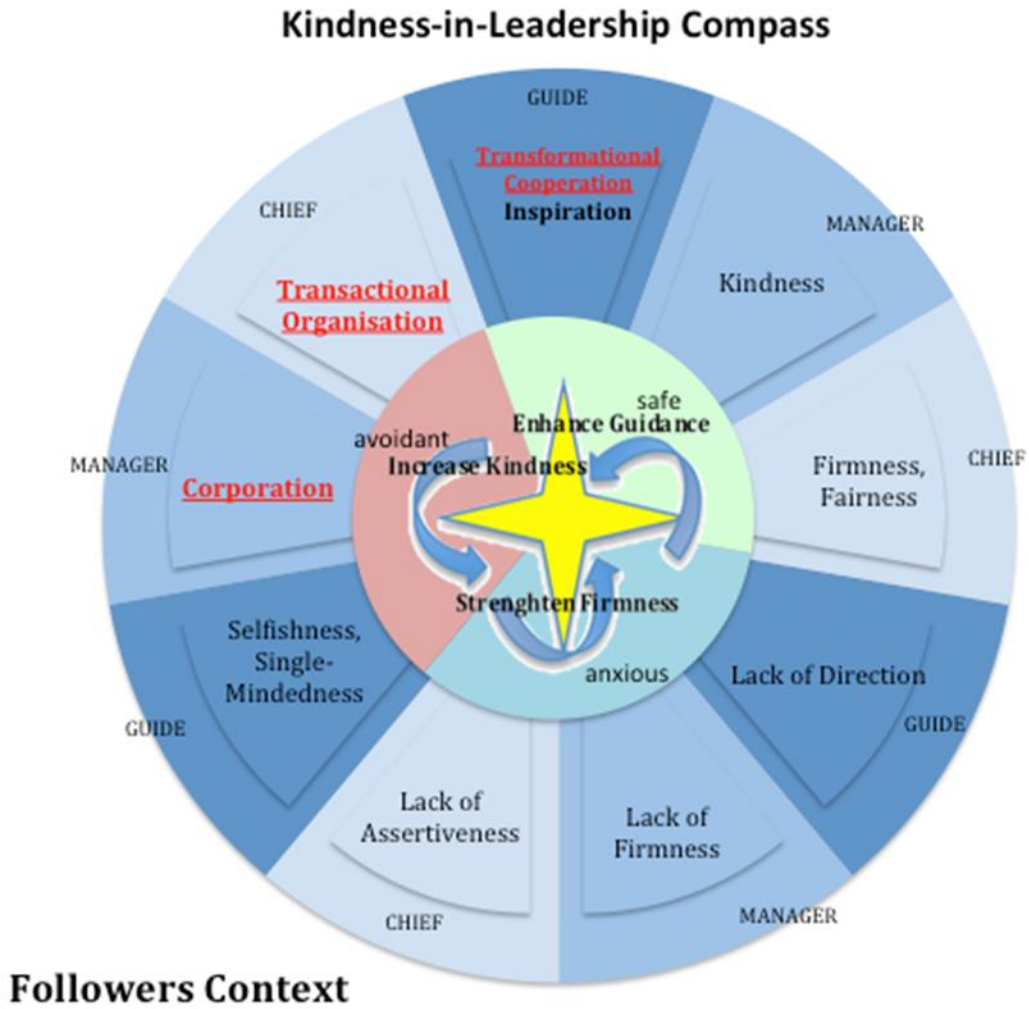
By the same token, an avoidant attached leader needs to tap more into their natural kindness to balance firmness with followers needing a chief and expected fairness when they need a captain. Both relations are viewed respectively as a **transactional organization** for the first, and a **regular corporation** for the second.

Last but not least, a safe attached leader comfortable in displaying their authentic kindness can actually reach the “leadership Eldorado” with followers looking for a guide: **Transformational cooperation.**

IS KINDNESS UNDERRATED IN LEADERSHIP?

The KLC aims at illustrating the different situations with the required enhancements the leader can operate and the resulting relationships with his context

KINDNESS-IN-LEADERSHIP COMPASS



IS KINDNESS UNDERRATED IN LEADERSHIP?

FLASH NEWS

As I come to the conclusion of this thesis, I find it interesting to be witnessing a “live” example unfolding before our eyes, and initiated by a very old institution that has apparently decided to take a pioneering stand on this front of leadership.

I am referring here to the Catholic Church and its new governance with Pope Francis. The incoming Pope is consistently represented in the media with a strong emphasis on his Jesuit background and approach of a servant leader, insisting on meeting people where they are, and communicating the pastoral role model driven by kindness and connection.

The amazing speed at which his deeds and speeches are spread, with detail and symbolism, contribute to a fast growing popularity that shows how people today are yearning to feel that they are led by someone righteous, close to them and kind... A leader they take pride in.

Church, an overly traditional thought-to-be archaic organization, seems to have been among the first to grasp the new deal in leadership: and it is interesting here to refer to De Vries’ listing of the four principles guiding the Jesuits in their actions for servant leadership.

1. Self-awareness: Understanding your strengths, weaknesses, values and world view
2. Ingenuity: Confidently innovating and adapting to embrace a changing world
3. Love: Engaging others with a positive supportive attitude
4. Heroism: Energizing yourself and others by embracing ambitions, goals, and a passion to excel.

*I shall pass through this world by once
any good therefore that I can do or any kindness that I can show to any human being, let me
do it now.*

Let me not differ or neglect it, for I shall not pass this way again.

Gandhi.

IS KINDNESS UNDERRATED IN LEADERSHIP?



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