



Hubris in leadership: A peril of unbridled intuition?

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Abstract:	<p>Research attests to the perils of hubristic leadership in politics, the military and business organizations, however whilst researchers have identified hubris' correspondences with personality disorders and various organizational and individual level factors, the cognitive and affective antecedents of hubris have been largely overlooked. In this paper we argue that intuition, existing as it does at the nexus of cognition and affect, is a central factor and that when intuition becomes misunderstood, unchecked or unbridled within the 'cognitive economy' of a powerful individual hubristic behaviour is more likely to appear. In what follows we will: review the concepts of hubris, Hubris Syndrome and intuition; propose intuition as an overlooked cognitive and affective source of leaders' hubris; discuss the relationship between unbridled intuition and hubris; suggest how the perils of hubristic leadership stemming from unbridled intuition might be avoided or mitigated.</p>

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1. Background

Hubris has been described as an occupational hazard for political, military and business leaders. Hubris Syndrome - possibly an acquired personality disorder - develops when individuals find themselves in positions of substantial power, without any previous history of psychiatric illness (Owen and Davidson, 2009). Hubris in the business, political and military arenas has been characterized as excessive self-confidence, exaggerated self-belief, and contempt for the advice and criticism of others. Overall, hubris is associated with an absence of humility and a sense of being 'intoxicated by power' (Russell, 2011). The consequences of Hubris Syndrome for political leaders such as Tony Blair and Margaret Thatcher were seen widely as profound and ultimately self-destructive in that their terms of office were ended prematurely by their own Members of Parliament. Similarly, business leaders' hubris has been shown to have deleterious consequences for individuals themselves for example losing their jobs, as well as their organizations losing market share (Hayward, 2007; Li and Tang, 2010). Hubris is one of a number of 'darker-side' leadership traits (see: Collinson, 2012; Conger, 1990; Hoogenboezem, 2007; Higgs, 2009; Judge, Piccolo and Kolsaka, 2009; Padilla, Hogan and Kaiser, 2007). Given the impact that hubristic leadership can have on both political and organizational cultures and institutions, there is a pressing need for a better understanding of the phenomenon: how it arises; why some but not all leaders develop hubris; how the risk of its development can be reduced; how to manage it more effectively when it occurs; whether Hubris Syndrome abates when power is lost.

2. Rationale and aims

Previous research on hubris has tended to tackle the subject from a variety of different directions. Some researchers have focused their attention 'downstream' from leaders' hubris,

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3 exploring the ways in which hubris manifests in actions such as reckless risk-taking, rash merger
4 and acquisition behaviours, and the concomitant effects on firm performance (e.g. Takacs,
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6 Haynes, Campbell and Hitt, 2010; Li and Tang, 2010). Others have attempted to explain various
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8 ‘upstream’ factors in an individual’s history, context or personality that predispose them towards
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10 hubris (Hayward and Hambrick, 1997; Hayward, Shepherd and Griffin 2006, Hiller and
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12 Hambrick, 2005; Kroll, Toombs and Wright, 2000). These factors include individuals’
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14 attributions of causes of previous organizational success, media praise, self-importance
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16 (Hayward and Hambrick, 1997), narcissism and a sense of exemption from rules (Kroll, Toombs
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18 and Wright, 2000), socially-constructed confidence (Hayward et al., 2006) and inflated core self-
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20 evaluation (CSE) rooted in the traits of self-esteem, emotional stability, generalized self-efficacy
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22 and locus of control (Hiller and Hambrick, 2005).
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30 Much of this previous ‘upstream’ work at the individual level of analysis has focused
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32 largely on leaders’ and CEOs’ personality traits and related constructs such (e.g. narcissism,
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34 hyper-CSE). However, the cognitive and affective factors associated with leaders’ hubris are
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36 less well-documented or understood but it is precisely these elements which form our conceptual
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38 and theoretical anchors and informed our research aims rather than the more widely-researched
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40 Freudian personality-related variables such as narcissism (see Pullen and Rhodes, 2008).
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42 Moreover, since hubris is implicated heavily in the issues of leaders’ judgment and decision
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44 making there is also a pressing need to scrutinize the real-time psychological processes which
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46 may underpin the manifestation of hubris in leadership. This is the focus of our discussions and
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48 the core contribution of our argument.
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54 We will draw on theoretical resources from the psychological sciences to explore the
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56 cognitive and affective processes that may ‘go awry’ and lead to the hubristic traits noted above.
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3 In particular, we will argue that the *functioning of intuition* is a central cognitive factor, and that
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5 when intuition becomes misunderstood, unchecked or unbridled within the ‘cognitive economy’
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7 of a powerful individual hubristic behaviour is more likely to appear.
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10 **3. Hubris, nemesis and the ‘Hubris Syndrome’**

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12 In ancient Greece ‘hubris’ (ἕβρις) described behaviour in which a leader or other
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14 powerful individual who was intoxicated with excessive pride, unfaltering self-belief and
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16 overweening self-confidence treated others with disregard, disrespect and contempt. The
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18 classical narrative is moralistic in that power and unremitting self-regard eventually ‘go to the
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20 head’ of a hubristic leader to the extent that s/he misperceives, misinterprets and misjudges the
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22 realities of the situation and make serious and fatal errors of judgment (e.g. the Dædalus-Icarus
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24 episode in the *Metamorphoses*¹). A fall from grace and retribution in the form of nemesis (after
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26 the Greek god Némesis) follows, construed as punishment and revenge for the individual’s
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28 having had the temerity to assume ‘god-like’ powers and thereby attempting to usurp the
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30 authority of divine beings.
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37 Although hubris may be associated with leaders’ personality traits such as narcissism
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39 (including grandiosity, see Pincus and Lukowitsky, 2010) which have been widely documented
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41 and researched in management and organization studies (e.g. Galvin, Waldman and Balthazard,
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43 2010; Maccoby, 2000; Pullen Rosenthal and Pittinsky, 2006), Owen specifically describes
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45 Hubris Syndrome as a unique and acquired disorder that develops only after a leader has held
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47 power for a period of time, moreover it is only applicable if there is no history of psychiatric
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49 illness. The 14 symptoms for Hubris Syndrome, proposed by Owen (2008) after studying illness
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51 in heads of government who held office over a period spanning a hundred years, included: a
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53 narcissistic propensity to see the world as an arena for the sufferer to exercise power and seek
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3 glory; exaggerated self-belief bordering on a sense of omnipotence; and accountability only to a
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5 'higher court' such as history or God. These symptoms were mapped by Owen and Davidson
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7 (2009) against the American Psychiatric Association *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual for*
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9 *Mental Disorders 4th edition (DSM IV)* criteria for narcissistic personality disorder, antisocial
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11 personality disorder, and histrionic personality disorder (see Table 1) and serves to distinguish
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13 Hubris Syndrome from other seemingly related disorders².
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22 To validate these diagnostic criteria, Owen and Davidson (2009) considered the
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24 leadership behaviours of the 18 US Presidents and the 26 UK Prime Ministers who have held
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26 office since 1908 against these criteria. They concluded that it was possible to ascribe Hubris
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28 Syndrome to at least one US President (George W. Bush) and four UK Prime Ministers (David
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30 Lloyd George, Neville Chamberlain, Margaret Thatcher and Tony Blair).
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34 Owen (2011) speculated on the psychiatric and neurobiological bases of Hubris
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36 Syndrome. First, he noted that Hubris Syndrome shares common elements with narcissistic and
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38 sociopathic personality disorders (e.g. poor decision making, impulse control and modulation of
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40 aggression, and lack of appropriate empathy). Second, he hypothesized that deficiencies of
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42 serotonin (which is involved in the regulation of decision making and punishment-related
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44 information) could be implicated in Hubris Syndrome. Third, he suggested that the
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46 neurobiological effects of conscious expectation observed in laboratory studies mirror the
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48 conscious exhilaration and intoxication associated with Hubris Syndrome. Finally, Owen noted
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50 that dopaminergic receptors facilitate the type of addictive behaviour which may be associated
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52 with the 'high' that accompanies the influence of power, and also may underpin tendencies
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54 towards grandiosity and associated impairments to risk appraisal and the ability to foresee
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3 undesirable outcomes. It is interesting that recent evidence examining the role of the endocrine
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5 system in financial risk-taking has found that the cognitive and behavioural effects of
6
7 testosterone and cortisol may shift traders' risk preferences towards taking ever-higher risks and
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9 also deleteriously affect their ability to engage in rational choice (Coates and Herbert, 2008;
10
11 Coates 2012). In sum: whilst management and organization researchers have studied the
12
13 psychiatric and personality-related antecedents and correlates of Hubris Syndrome, they have
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15 neglected its relationships with cognition and affect (including intuition, which exists at the
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17 nexus of these processes, see Sadler-Smith, 2008).
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22 **4. Hubris in business leadership**

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24 Research has yet to formally establish the incidence of Hubris Syndrome *per se* amongst
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26 senior business leaders. However it seems likely that the power and status associated with senior
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28 executive positions in organizations could be a fertile breeding ground for this condition to
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30 develop and proliferate, with damaging consequences on a scale similar to those seen in politics.
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32 Hayward (2007) suggested that such figures as Warren Buffett, Steve Jobs and Jack Welch
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34 appear to have developed hubristic traits at various stages of their careers. From the perspective
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36 of behavioural decision theory (BDT) (see Gilovich, Griffin and Kahneman, 2002; Henrion and
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38 Fischhoff, 2002) hubristic CEOs possess a degree of certainty about the accuracy of their
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40 judgments exceeding the accuracy of their predictions (see Hayward, 2007). CEO hubris
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42 amounts to one form - albeit with major real-world implications - of cognitive bias and is worthy
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44 of the attentions of decision researchers.
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51 In the business world, the 'hubris hypothesis' was first posited by Roll (1986) in a study
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53 of corporate mergers and acquisitions. Roll suggested that bidding-firm managers make
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55 mistakes in evaluating the worth of target firms, but undertake the acquisitions anyway with the
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‘overbearing presumption’ that their valuations are correct but which results in them paying too much for their targets (Roll, 1986, p.200; Seth, Song and Pettit, 2000). Serial (we might say compulsive) acquisition behaviours have been taken as a potential indicator of hubris by Sonnenfeld (2011). He suggested that CEO intuitions have a habit of over-riding rational analyses particularly where a successful but hubristic CEO (such as former Vodafone boss Chris Gent) had a track-record of gambles that happen to have paid-off to their credit (Smit and Moraitis, 2010).

Researchers have suggested two main mechanisms that might underlie this kind of over-confidence and propensity to risk taking. First, hubristic CEOs may over-estimate their own problem-solving capabilities and their company’s resource capabilities, second, they may tend to underestimate the resources required and the uncertainties faced (Kahneman and Lovallo, 1993; March and Shapira, 1987; Shane and Stuart, 2002) and thereby present themselves with a simplified and optimistic picture of the situation they face. Li and Tang (2010), for example, found a positive relationship between CEO hubris and risk taking in Chinese firms amplified by market complexity, an abundance of intangible resources, when the CEO chairs the board, and when the CEO is not a political appointee.

Shipman and Mumford (2011) found that over-confidence and incautious risk-taking is not necessarily disastrous (indeed high levels of confidence are vital in business leadership, Hayward, 2007), but it does lead to greater variation in performance (see the Lehman Brothers example in Table 2 below). Chatterjee and Hambrick (2007) found that CEO hubris is associated with firms paying higher premiums (though more recently Chatterjee and Hambrick (2011) ‘resist’ the use of the term ‘hubris’ in their research), missing their own forecasts on earnings (Hribar and Yang, 2006) and undertaking more value-destroying mergers (Malmendier

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2
3 and Tate, 2006.). Hayward, Shepherd and Griffin (2006) argued that even though many business
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5 founders are aware that most ventures fail, hubristic entrepreneurs are often quite unshakeable in
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7 their beliefs that *they* are the ones who can beat the odds to the extent that they seek out and
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9 underestimate risk. Hayward, Shepherd, and Griffin, (2006) attribute this risky behaviour to
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11 hubristic entrepreneurs' over-confidence in, and over-estimation of, their knowledge, predictive
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13 skills and personal abilities.
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18 Leaders, CEOs and entrepreneurs by virtue of their position and power do not have as
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20 many 'social correctives' as do other employees: they are, in their relative isolation, especially
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22 vulnerable to hubris (Dunning, Heath and Suls, 2004). When Fred Goodwin (formerly 'Sir Fred
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24 Goodwin'), ex-CEO of the Royal Bank of Scotland, proposed buying the Dutch Bank ABN-
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26 Amro (a deal which went ahead, but eventually back-fired disastrously) there were sceptics
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28 within the organization but Goodwin choose hubristically to ignore them (Birkinshaw, 2012). A
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30 further example is to be found in Richard Fuld's leadership at Lehman Brothers (see Table 2).
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32 Corporate hubris can also operate at company level where leaders can 'infect' the organization in
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34 which they work. This notion has been developed by Owen (2009a) in his updated
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36 autobiography, drawing on his recent experience of international business and citing Enron,
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38 HBOS and BP. We will return to the issue of the social moderation of hubris in a later section.
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45 [TABLE 2 HERE]
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49 Hayward and Hambrick (1997) identified four sources of CEO hubris:

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52 1. A track record of recent organizational success. While this is obviously no bad thing in itself,
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54 it runs the risk of fuelling hubris when such successes are credited exclusively to CEOs when
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56 in fact they could be more objectively attributed to extraneous factors. Moreover a
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presumption that ‘successes breed successes’ may lead to an over-reliance on simplistic formulae (akin to cognitive heuristics and, as we argue below, intuitions) for managing complex situations. Such beliefs become self-serving and uncritical, exacerbating over-reliance on convergent thinking whilst diminishing experimentation (and thereby militating against creativity, see Amabile, 1998), and inflating CEOs’ self-belief both in their abilities and expectations of success;

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2. Media praise and ‘celebrity status’ of a CEO creates a romantic, larger-than-life and heroic aura of talent and invincibility that CEOs themselves may eventually come to believe. Part of this mystique often involves the myth of an infallible intuition. CEOs are often depicted as ‘in control’, highly efficacious, ‘macho’ leaders who can ‘manage from the gut’. For example, *Straight from the Gut* is the sub-title of the best-selling CEO biography of Jack Welch, considered by some to have been infected by hubris at various points in his career. Interestingly though, Welch exhibited self-awareness and discernment when he referred to confidence as being a “razor’s edge”, recognizing its ‘dark side’ (see Conger, 1990), which may lead to bosses getting ‘too full of themselves’ and falling victim to hubris (Hayward, 2007, p.14);
 3. CEO’s systemically inflated views of their own abilities and skills due not to demonstrable accomplishments but to inflated ego and self-importance (to the point of delusions of grandeur);
 4. Weak board vigilance often associated with a powerful CEO as board chair, a high proportion of ‘insiders’ on the board, and small levels of company stock holdings by outside members of the board. The deleterious effect of this is that any restraints on CEO hubris that

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3 an effective board ought to provide are diminished or remain in in abeyance until a crisis
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5 occurs.
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8 In relation to Hayward and Hambrick's fourth point, recent British experience where
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10 hubristic leaders have not been controlled by their Chairpersons means the assumption that
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12 corporate governance is better assured through splitting, rather than fusing, the role of CEO and
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14 Chairman of the Board (the so-called 'CEO duality', see Rechner and Dalton, 1991) needs at
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16 least to be reassessed. Perhaps much depends on the personalities of the individuals concerned:
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18 some personalities are capable of combining the role whilst others work better where there is a
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20 split, and that the shape of the Board of a public company (i.e. in the UK a company that has
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22 issued securities through a public offering on a stock market) is better varied in the light of
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24 circumstances.
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30 Finally, we also note Hiller and Hambrick's (2005) linking of CEO hubris to the
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32 construct of 'core self-evaluation' (CSE). CSE comprises self-esteem, self-efficacy, locus of
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34 control and emotional stability. Hiller and Hambrick hypothesized that CEOs with high levels of
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36 CSE (referred to as 'hyper-CSEs') are likely to engage in non-inclusive, fast and centralized
37
38 strategic decision making in the context of large-scale, high-stakes initiatives that deviate from
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40 industry norms. Such individuals will pursue these initiatives with persistence that leads to
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42 extreme performance (including errors). Hayward (2007) offers numerous examples of such
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44 behaviours and their consequences.
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49 **5. Intuition and hubris**

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51 Having explored hubris and Hubris Syndrome, we now turn to the second of our two
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53 guiding concepts, intuition, which we argue is of central relevance to understanding the cognitive
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55 and affective processes which, when they go awry, may contribute to hubristic leadership and
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3 which have been neglected thus far in leadership research. Intuitions are “affectively charged
4 judgments that arise through rapid, non-conscious and holistic associations” (Dane and Pratt,
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6 2007, p.40) which emerge as a combination of cognition and affect (Hodgkinson, Sadler-Smith,
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8 Burke, Claxton and Sparrow, 2009). Such intuitive promptings may come with a degree of
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10 tentativeness (sometimes referred to as ‘hunches’, ‘vibes’ or ‘inklings’, see Epstein, Pacini,
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12 Denes-Raj and Heier, 1996) or with a stronger feeling of value or correctness (referred to as
13
14 ‘inspirations’, ‘brainwaves’ or ‘insights’, see Dörfler and Ackermann, 2012). Intuition involves
15
16 a mental leap. It is not part of a logical continuum, or the steady application of reasoning ending
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18 with a commonsensical judgement. The leap is often ascribed to being one of experience,
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20 instinct or faith. As well as varying in intensity, they may also vary in their valence (positive
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22 signalling ‘attraction’; negative signalling ‘avoidance’, see Sadler-Smith, 2010). It is the feeling
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24 of certainty or validity without explicit justification that becomes inflated in hubris. Even though
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26 intuitions have been disdained (Bonabeau, 2003; Miller and Ireland, 2005) senior professionals
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28 are often quite happy to admit in private that they treat their intuitions as a valued resource
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30 (Burke and Miller, 1999; Hensman and Sadler-Smith, 2011).
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39 The use of intuition, and the openness about its use, is positively associated with
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41 seniority, and concomitantly power, in business organizations (Allinson and Hayes, 1996;
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43 Hodgkinson and Sadler-Smith, 2003). Unlike hubris which has clearly negative connotations,
44
45 intuition has recently come to be viewed as a positive management and leadership attribute to the
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47 extent that ‘gut instinct’ or ‘gut feel’ is considered to be as important and an asset as rational
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49 analysis (Hayashi, 2001; Hodgkinson et al., 2009; Sadler-Smith and Shefy, 2004). Gardner
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51 (2006) summarized leadership intuitions as the “*feeling* for the right move in a particular
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53 situation” (p.110 emphasis added).
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3 In the arena of political leadership, the word 'intuition' is increasingly, but questionably,
4 cited as a hallmark of good leadership (see Board, 2012 for a review). The UK Labour politician
5 and one of the architects of the 'New Labour' project Peter Mandelson (2010) reported the view
6 that Prime Minister Tony Blair held of his Chancellor of the Exchequer (and ultimately his
7 successor) Gordon Brown:
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15 Whilst Gordon had the intelligence, and the ideas, the drive and the determination to
16 make a success of government, 'none of that is the most important thing for a
17 politician. It is intuition - what to do, when to do it, how to say it, how to bring
18 people along' (Mandelson, 2010: 10).
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22 Mandelson agreed with Blair's criticism of Brown noting that: "Intuition, of course, was a
23 political gift that Tony himself had in spades, and it helped guide *every step* the three of us
24 [New Labour 'spin doctor' Alistair Campbell being the other] had taken in the long
25 campaign to make Labour a party of government again" (Mandelson, 2010: 10 emphases
26 and brackets added). Interestingly, Blair himself in his autobiography *A Journey: My
27 Political Life* made not dissimilar comments about George W. Bush and his preferences for
28 intuition over analysis:
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40 "George Bush was straightforward and direct. The stupidest misconception was that
41 he was stupid. He also had (has) great intuition. But his intuition was less - as in the
42 case of Bill [Clinton] - about politics and more about what he thought was right or
43 wrong. This wasn't expressed analytically or intellectually. It was just stated. ... I
44 would be at a press conference with him, in the epicentre of those world-changing
45 events, and I would think 'George, explain it; don't just say it'" (Blair, 2010, p. 5)
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48 A different perspective is provided by Paul O'Neill, an industrialist who for 14 years had
49 been head of Alcoa before becoming George W. Bush's Secretary of the Treasury. In his
50 book *The Price of Loyalty* Ron Suskind (2004) describes how O'Neill saw Bush as being:
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3 “caught in an echo chamber of his own making, cut off from everyone other than a
4 circle around him, that’s tiny and getting smaller and in concert on everything, a
5 circle that conceals him from public view and keeps him away from the one thing he
6 needs most: honest, disinterested perspectives about what’s real and what the hell he
7 might do about it.” (Suskind, 2004, p 293)
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11 In Bush’s case isolated ideology and gut instinct appears a more accurate description than
12 the expert type of intuition which Nobel laureate Herbert Simon referred to as “analyses
13 frozen into habit and the capacity for rapid response through recognition” (Simon, 1987,
14 p.60). About politics in general and himself in particular Blair writes: “You have to feel it
15 to succeed in politics. That’s where the instinct comes from, the emotional intelligence.
16 By and large I do feel it, and so, on most issues I get it” (Blair, 2010, p.305). In so far as
17 hubris in leadership is concerned, we propose that intuition is an ‘animating force’.
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28 Intuitive decision-making can be a double-edged sword for, even though based on
29 reasoning or perception (albeit ‘compressed’ or ‘frozen into habit’), it still has a leap of the
30 imagination within it which may compound but also confound reason, thereby rendering it
31 both powerful and perilous (Myers, 2002). To someone with a wealth of experience, the
32 vague feeling that something in a situation ‘doesn’t stack up’ or is ‘out of kilter’, for
33 example, often leads to appropriate and effective action before any more conscious or
34 rigorous analysis is available. Not only have such actions been shown to be prescient and
35 wise (Klein, 2003; Simon, 1987), in the realm of creativity the value of intuition is widely
36 recognized (Bowers, Rehegr, Balthazar and Parker, 1990; Claxton, 1997, 2005; Klein,
37 2013; Policastro, 1995). Many Nobel laureates in science, for example, claim to have
38 relied on intuition as part of their cognitive repertoire (Fensham and Marton, 1992). Thus,
39 even it was possible for leaders to be completely rational it would not necessarily be
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3 Yet on the other hand intuitions are also notoriously fallible – as gamblers and
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5 romantics can regularly attest (Myers, 2002) and, interestingly there is also a relationship
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7 of intuition to gambling (Owen and Davidson, 2009). In laboratory settings intuitive
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9 judgements have been shown to be systematically wrong (Gilovich, Griffin and Kahneman,
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11 2002) but nonetheless they are ‘rarely in doubt’ (Griffin and Tversky, 2002) therefore an
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13 uncritical or hubristic attitude towards one’s own hunches and inspirations can be perilous
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15 (Bonabeau, 2003; Miller and Ireland, 2005). Broadly, it seems as if an attitude of
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17 ‘sceptical heed’ towards such intuitive promptings offers a middle way for the intuitively
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19 intelligent decision-maker to adopt. If intuition is simultaneously both invaluable and
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21 untrustworthy in real-world decision-making situations (Kahneman and Klein, 2009)
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23 political and business leaders should be wary of its powers and its perils.
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31 5.1 Sources of intuition in hubris

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33 The cognitive substrates of intuitive expertise are thought to be deep, experience-based
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35 knowledge structures referred to by Dane and Pratt (2007) as ‘complex domain-relevant
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37 schemas’ (CDRSs) as opposed to generic notions of ‘common sense’. This view has led to the
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39 coining recently of the terms ‘intuitive expertise’ (Kahneman and Klein, 2009) and ‘expert
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41 intuition’ (Salas, Rosen and Diaz Granados, 2010). We suggest that it may be fruitful to think of
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43 these structures as composed of some explicit (verbalized) knowledge and reflection, mixed-in
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45 with the rich and extensive mental residues of unarticulated, and sometimes non-conscious,
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47 experience. When novel configurations of these residues are activated by a combination of new
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49 problems, unprecedented experience, and/or creative trains of thought, they may resonate with
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51 problem representations, but not be in a form that is amenable to immediate and direct translation
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53 into conscious ideas. Nevertheless, the resonance between these rich schemas and the problem
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3 specification may be sufficiently strong to create some more indirect, imagistic or visceral kinds
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5 of perturbation in conscious awareness – it is these that we call ‘intuitions’, ‘gut feelings’ or
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7 ‘hunches’ (Claxton, 2005). For example, Franklin D. Roosevelt’s political leadership had an
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9 “unscripted side to it” (Hoogenboezem, 2007: 138), which Jenkins (2003: 2) referred to as
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11 ‘improvisatory’, but which perhaps is better described as intuitive and insightful: “Then one
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13 evening he suddenly came out with it [the Lend-Lease plan] – the whole program. He didn’t
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15 seem to have any clear idea how it could be done legally. But there wasn’t any doubt in his mind
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17 that he’d find any way to do it” (Harry Hopkins cited in Hoogenboezem, 2007: 138-9).
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23 Damasio and colleagues’ Somatic Marker Hypothesis (SMH) (Bechara and Damasio
24
25 2005; Damasio 1994) and the associated program of research (see Dunn, Dalgleish, and
26
27 Lawrence (2006) for a review) has provided compelling physiological evidence for the essential
28
29 role of visceral (‘gut feel’) affective responses in decision making under uncertainty and risk.
30
31 There are several salient features of the SMH. First, certain emotional regions of the brain, e.g.
32
33 the ventro-medial pre-frontal cortex (VMPC), and amygdala, work in concert with higher
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35 cortical regions in the processes of decision making, especially in the assessment of risk (i.e.
36
37 decision making is not purely cognitive). These emotional evaluations may frequently be made
38
39 in advance of conscious deliberation or even awareness. Second, impairment of functioning of
40
41 the relevant neural circuitry as a result of injury or disease may have deleterious consequences
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43 for individuals’ economic choices and behaviours. Even though such individuals are otherwise
44
45 cognitively unimpaired, they signally fail to actively avoid choices that lead to loss and continue
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47 to make disadvantageous (i.e. high-risk) choices in laboratory studies “until they go broke in a
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49 manner that is very similar to how they behave in real life” (Bechara and Damasio 2005, p.346).
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51 In a lecture Owen (2009b) suggested we could perhaps elucidate more about the SMH from
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3 studies about the secondary prevention of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) by the
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5 immediate treatment with the beta-blocker propranolol.
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8 5.2 Intuition checked

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10 Recently, several theorists have suggested that it is precisely because of this valuable-but-
11 unreliable nature of intuition that we have developed (or co-evolved) other social and cognitive
12 systems to complement and sometimes impose ‘checks’ on intuitive ways of knowing. Most
13 common amongst these complementary cognitive systems is that associated with conscious
14 reason and deliberation. Intuition and reason are no longer seen as ‘locked in mortal combat’,
15 but as being yoked together in a mutually advantageous partnership. ‘Dual-process’ theories
16 were described by Evans (2003: 454) as essentially positing “two minds in one brain” and
17 encapsulate the complementarity between the two systems in a number of overlapping ways: for
18 example, rational vs. experiential, associative vs. rule based, intuitive vs. analytic, or reflective
19 vs. reflexive, etc. Essentially, what has come to be called ‘System 1’ relies on processes that are
20 context-dependent, automatic, largely unconscious, associative, intuitive, implicit, and fast, while
21 ‘System 2’ processes are context-independent, analytic, rule-based, explicit, and relatively slow
22 (Stanovich and West, 2000).
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40 Reason and intuition tended previously to be depicted as alternatives rather than
41 complementary, thus suggesting that one could function in either mode but not both (Allinson
42 and Hayes, 1996). The dual systems’ view allows for the possibility that both can be fully active
43 at the same time and hence the coupling of high levels of intuition simultaneously with high
44 levels of analysis (Hodgkinson and Clarke, 2007; Hodgkinson and Sadler-Smith, 2003). Louis
45 and Sutton (1991) referred this as the capability to ‘switch cognitive gears’ whilst Hodgkinson
46 and Clarke (2007) labelled it ‘cognitive versatility’, see Figure 1a.
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[FIGURE 1 HERE]

The regulatory or modulatory influence of analysis (a ‘System 2’ process) on intuition (a System 1 process) is, in most of these models, seen as both vital and problematic. The two systems may operate harmoniously, but they may also compete for overall control (Epstein et al., 1996). The strong valence associated with ‘gut feel’, ‘hunch’ or ‘vibe’ serves as a fast and efficient marker as to whether to trust, select or approach a particular situation, or to distrust, reject or avoid it. Such intuitive reactions effectively narrow down the range of options, making decision-making easier and faster. This can be advantageous when speed is of the essence, and when the markers themselves are trustworthy. However, in the highly complex and uncertain environments in which many political and business leaders operate, reflex reliance on such compelling markers, without checking their validity, can have negative consequences (Bonabaeu, 2003; Miller and Ireland, 2005). The relative ‘power’ of the two systems, in the overall cognitive economy of an individual, may not be immediately obvious. “The experiential [intuitive] system (System 1) may continue to influence the rational system (System 2) no matter how much a person attempts to be completely rational” (Pacini and Epstein, 1999, p.477). In other words, rationality becomes not a genuine check *on* intuition, but merely a rationale *for* it. For example, recent research in the field of intuitive ethics indicates that post-hoc rationalizations are often used to justify moral judgments arrived via intuition as opposed to rational analysis (Haidt, 2012; Reynolds, 2006). It might not therefore be surprising if such after-the-fact justifications occurred in other decision making realms.

Over time, one mode may come to gain habitual control or dominance, manifesting as a ‘chronic preference’ (Betsch, 2004) or an embedded ‘cognitive style’. This stylistic preference or dominance may become consolidated to an extent over the life span, but it may also oscillate

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3 in particular situations or contexts and are be more state- than trait-like (see Zhang and
4
5 Sternberg, 2005). For example, in the arena of political leadership Tony Blair - adjudged by
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7 Owen and Davidson (2009) to have developed Hubris Syndrome as Prime Minister by 2001 -
8
9 said that when he was younger he paid more regard to 'intellect' (rational analysis) than
10
11 'judgment' (intuition) but as he became older he gave greater regard to the latter. Wheatcroft,
12
13 writing in 2004, also observed that Blair's disposition during his Prime Ministerial years was
14
15 'intuitive rather than analytical'. This resonates with recent findings reported by See, Morrison,
16
17 Rothman and Soll (2011) in which it was found that power can exacerbate tendencies for people
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19 to overweigh their own initial judgment to the extent that the most powerful decision makers can
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21 also be the least accurate.
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27 We propose that System 2 is not the only system that has evolved to check the potentially
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29 seductive appeal of the intuitive System 1. Claxton (1997, 2005) has suggested that we are also
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31 able to invoke a 'contemplative mode' in which we restrain the fast intuitive impulse and allow a
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33 slower and broader evaluation of potential consequences or pitfalls to emerge into conscious
34
35 awareness. To use a neural metaphor, it is as if we are able to dam the flow of neural activation,
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37 temporarily interrupting its progress towards action, and allowing activation to build-up and
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39 potentially spill over into other neural pathways that would not have become activated otherwise.
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Experientially, this process of 'mulling', 'pondering' or 'ruminating' is not accompanied by explicit, rational trains of thought, but allows a wider set of considerations to 'come to mind' and thus contribute to the decision-making process. Whereas System 1 tends to take its first suggestion for granted, by invoking the contemplative mode we are able to say 'Not so fast', thereby providing an additional set of checks and balances that might prevent hasty, partial or biased decision-making.

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Finally, we might note that there is also a social or interpretive mode - that of public or private discussion, dialogue and debate to check intuitive certainties. For example, returning to the case of Roosevelt, Owen (2008: 368) attributes Roosevelt's misjudgement in the packing of the Supreme Court in the summer of 1937 to the death in April of the previous year of his 'indispensable adviser' Louis Howe who saw his job as providing the 'toe-holds' for Roosevelt. Howe was Roosevelt's 'balance wheel' in the same way that Bonar Lloyd held Lloyd George's hubris in check as did Willie Whitelaw with Margaret Thatcher's. Whereas Systems 1 and 2 and the internal dialogue of the contemplative mode are psychological or 'intra-psychic', the social or interpretive mode sends candidate decisions out into the 'air-waves' and invites scrutiny through external rather than internal dialogue. At an informal level in the business world we might just use a trusted close colleague as a 'sounding board' or 'devil's advocate' for our developing ideas whilst more formally we might cite board meetings in a company or the workings of parliamentary democracy as requiring institutionalized checks of intuitively-generated propositions.

5.3 Intuition unchecked

Our proposal is that when leaders come to over-estimate the reliability and validity of their intuitions, and progressively dispense with the vital checking processes afforded by the complementary System 2 and social processes of reason, contemplation and debate, their decision-making is more likely to have developed Hubris Syndrome, see Figures 1b&c. Understanding the interlocking functions of these different mental modes, it behoves those whose decisions affect the lives of others to be on-guard against the perils of unbridled intuition – whilst, at the same time, not neglecting or disparaging the potential value that intuition may bring. A well-orchestrated balancing act is required to be as wise and 'practically intelligent' as possible (Sternberg and Wagner, 1986). On the other hand hubristic individuals may become

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3 reckless if they dispense with this delicate system of checks and balances. When leaders'
4 intuitions are given free-rein and go unchallenged by other senior members of the leadership or
5 management team, and when leaders are starved of feedback on the consequences of their
6 actions (see Hogarth, 2010), their intuitions are likely to be deployed more indiscriminately and
7 inaccurately, thereby fuelling hubris. When they are acquired, honed and exercised under
8 constraint in situations where there is good feedback, naysayers have a voice, challenge is
9 welcomed, and devil's advocacy is listened to tendencies to hubris are moderated. There is an
10 extensive literature on 'employee voice', dissent and the value of critical upward feedback (for
11 example, Morrison and Milliken, 2000; Morrison, 2011; Tourish and Robson, 2006). Powerful
12 leaders can constrain the opportunities for critical constructive feedback; this can have negative
13 consequences both for the individual and the organization³. Since hubristic leaders do not self-
14 check their intuitions it is not enough to say that leaders should be reflective when making
15 decisions, followers potentially are the most potent of sounding boards and followership (See
16 Crossman and Crossman, 2011) and co-leadership (Heenan and Bennis, 1999) can bridle and
17 check the perils of intuition and resultant hubris

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There are many examples of this epistemic breakdown. The late Steve Jobs was undoubtedly one of the most brilliant business leaders of his generation. Tina Redse, who lived with Jobs for five years until 1989, and about whom Jobs said "I don't know that anyone will ever understand me better than she did", after reading a psychiatric manual about narcissistic personality disorder (NPD) felt Jobs perfectly met the criteria: "it fits so well and explains so much of what we had struggled with, that I realized expecting him to be nicer or less self-centred was like expecting a blind man to see...and the capacity for empathy is lacking" (Isaacson, 2001: 263-266). Hayward writing in 1997 considered that Jobs displayed overweening pride (one of

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2
3 the signs of hubris), and argued that during his failed sojourn at NeXT, Jobs “relied too heavily
4 on his own gut, rather than get the right help or seek external feedback” (p.72). In Jobs’ own
5 words “you always have to keep pushing to innovate”. That ‘push’ may have stemmed in large
6 part from a visit Jobs made to India in 1974 and discovering Zen Buddhism which had a deep
7 influence on him throughout his life: “He attributed his ability to focus and his love of simplicity
8 to his Zen training. It honed his appreciation for intuition, showed him how to filter out anything
9 that was distracting or unnecessary, and nurtured in him an aesthetic based on minimalism”
10 (Isaacson 2011: 564).
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22 In terms of the three modes which may serve as checks on intuitions (i.e. rational
23 analysis, contemplation, and external dialogue) a number of things can go wrong and lead to the
24 development of hubris. Reasoning may be ignored, or perhaps more commonly its function is
25 perverted, to the extent that instead of acting as a check it may be recruited post hoc to
26 rationalize decisions already arrived at in a cognitive economy in which analysis is ‘crowded
27 out’ by intuition, see Figure 1b. The correctness of intuition is taken for granted and rationality
28 is deployed to concoct biased justifications rather than honest evaluations. (See the example of
29 the Iraq War ‘Dodgy Dossier’ Table 3). We would expect leaders who have high levels of faith
30 in their intuitions and for whom intuition and analysis have become de-coupled, to call upon
31 rational analysis to support opinions *already* arrived intuitively. This is analogous to the post
32 hoc rational moral reasoning referred to earlier (see Haidt, 2001; Reynolds, 2006): analytical
33 reasoning is used to support intuitively- or reflexively-determined choices. The contemplation
34 mode may simply be swept aside in a rush of righteousness, and an exaggerated and visceral
35 sense of urgency, which preclude any time to reflect. Doubt itself becomes a luxury which, in
36 the cognitive economy of the hubristic person, appears unaffordable. The debate mode may be
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3 put into abeyance as the hubristic leader surrounds her/himself with ‘yes persons’, or treats any
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5 attempt at questioning or challenge as a sign of disloyalty.
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9 [TABLE 3 HERE]
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12 A more nuanced approach to intuition than is witnessed in the cases above may be
13 detected in recent decisions by President Obama. When questioned by CBS news on the
14 decision to approve the raid to kill Osama Bin-Laden, the President stated: “the thing about gut
15 instinct is if it works then you think, ‘Boy, I have good instincts.’ If it doesn’t, then you’re
16 gonna be running back in your mind all the things that told you maybe you shouldn’t have done
17 it. Obviously I had enough of an instinct that we could be right, but it was worth doing”⁴.
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21 Although in a very different context, Obama’s comments on the Bin-Laden raid mirror those of
22 Bill Gates made during an interview with CNN⁵:
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26 *CNN*: Do you have some sort of sounding board you use, for when you see
27 something that strikes maybe you as a good idea, but you’re not really sure if this is
28 going to catch on, or is this really gonna be the big idea. Who do you ask?
29

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31 *Gates*: Well, if I think something’s going to catch on, I trust my own intuition.
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34 *CNN*: And you’re never wrong?
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37 *Gates*: No, I’m often wrong, but my batting record is good enough that I keep
38 swinging every time the ball is thrown.
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41 In this exchange, Gates clearly has a high opinion of his own intuition, but this is
42 tempered with a realistic assessment of his own ‘track record’ over time. However, in the
43 extreme hubristic case, certainty in one’s own intuition may become so strong that that even the
44 need to rationalize it, or to ‘massage the facts’ to fit the intuitive hunch, is discarded. For
45 example, George W. Bush’s decision to invade Iraq may be a case in point. Paul Wolfowitz’s
46 attributed comments (he was at the time Deputy Secretary of Defence) on Bush’s decision to
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3 invade Iraq are instructive: “His gut told him invading Iraq was the right thing to do. So he was
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5 able to make his decision without getting bogged down by CIA reports questioning the existence
6
7 of WMD.” (Ruprecht, 2007: 72). Although Owen and Davidson (2009) considered that seven
8
9 US presidents of the last 100 years exhibited hubristic traits (T. Roosevelt, Wilson, F.D.
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11 Roosevelt, Kennedy, Johnson, Nixon and G.W. Bush) only Bush is identified as being affected
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13 by Hubris Syndrome because, apart from Franklin Roosevelt whose hubris was constrained, the
14
15 others had medical conditions which excluded Hubris Syndrome: bipolar disorder (Teddy
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17 Roosevelt and Lyndon Johnson) Addison’s Disease (Kennedy); and alcoholism (Nixon).
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19 President Bush’s decision making was perhaps more ‘unbridled instinct’ than ‘unbridled (expert)
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21 intuition’ exercised with little recourse (consciously or unconsciously) to experiences, reasoning,
22
23 contemplation or debate. Intuition and analysis did not function as complementary modes of
24
25 information processing, nor was rational argumentation subservient to an intuitive judgment call.
26
27 To the extent that intuition is given free rein (see Figure 1c) intuition and analysis were ‘de-
28
29 coupled’. A further potential consequence of the de-coupling of intuition from the other systems
30
31 is that hubristic leaders’ ‘feeling of rightness’ becomes no longer attached to particular decisions
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33 and judgments: it becomes generalized and construed instead as a fundamental personal trait, i.e.
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35 ‘it feels right’ (intuition) becomes aggrandized to ‘I feel right’ (hubris). For example, Sir Fred
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37 Goodwin, the former CEO of the Royal Bank of Scotland, was described by one financial
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39 journalist as ‘arrogant’ and ‘delusional’ to the extent that he always ‘knew better’ than anyone
40
41 else (Brummer, 2009).
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51 More dangerously still, ‘gut feel’ and ideology may become conflated so much so that
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53 hubristic leaders become indifferent or impervious to relevant information and intelligence
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55 which does not support the ideology driving their intuitive judgements (Suskind cited in Owen,
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3 2012, p.110). Wheatcroft (2004) described Tony Blair as ‘Antinomian’⁶, so convinced of his
4 moral rightness and his “inner virtue [which] justifies whatever means he chooses to employ”.
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6 In the political arena the unbridling of intuition resonates with piousness, moral rectitude and a
7
8 messianic vision to ‘put things right’. For example, the complexities of managing a post-war
9
10 Iraq were subordinated to the purpose of deposing a ‘devil incarnate’ in the fight against ‘evil’ in
11
12 what amounted to a ‘moral crusade’: “Blair seemed wholly uninterested in Iraq as a complex and
13
14 puzzling political society, wanting confirmation merely that deposing Saddam Hussein would
15
16 remove ‘evil’ from the country” (Tripp, 2007: 30). Taking this argument a step further provides
17
18 a link to superstitious reasoning, including beliefs in the paranormal (Peltzer, 2003) as well as
19
20 transcendent, non-scientific forms of knowing (e.g. those associated with religious beliefs,
21
22 Armstrong, 2009) which are widespread and enduring in human society (King, Burton, Hicks
23
24 and Drigotas, 2007). Faith in intuition has been found to be related to superstitious reasoning
25
26 (Aarnio and Lindeman, 2005; Epstein et al., 1996; Wolfradt, Oubaid, Straube, Bischoff and
27
28 Mischo, 1999; Sadler-Smith, 2011; Svedholm and Lindeman, 2013). The experiential (intuitive)
29
30 system is thought to be “crucial to the emergence of paranormal and superstitious beliefs and the
31
32 persistence of these beliefs in the face of contradictory information (King et al., 2007, p.907).
33
34 Furthermore, Epstein (1994, p.712) argued that religion is “better suited” than analytical thinking
35
36 for communicating with the experiential (intuitive) system and does so through narratives (e.g.
37
38 emotionally-charged parables and stories) and images (in a variety of modalities including
39
40 visual, aural and olfactory) which appeal directly to intuitive processing.
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51 As far back as 2004 religious motivations appeared to be guiding Bush’s attitudes to war
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53 in the Middle East. Commentators observed that an ‘instinct’ told him that ‘God’ had given him
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55 a mission to rid the world of Al-Qaeda and Islamic fundamentalism, hence it was acceptable to
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3 dispense with analysis and ignore inconvenient facts (Suskind, 2004). When current US Vice-
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6 President Joe Biden expressed his concerns about the situation in post-war Iraq directly to the
7
8 President shortly after the 2003 invasion:
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11 “Bush, Biden recalled, just looked at him, unflappably sure that the United States
12 was on the right course and that all was well. “‘Mr. President,’ I finally said, ‘how
13 can you be so sure when you know you don’t know the facts?’”. Biden said that
14 Bush stood up and put his hand on the senator’s shoulder. ‘My instincts,’ he said.
15 ‘My instincts’” (Suskind, 2004)
16

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18 Bush’s approach regarding Iraq was however part of a broader tactic which had become
19
20 all-too-apparent to his cabinet team, including Colin Powell and Paul O’Neill. When members
21
22 of the cabinet asked Bush for explanations for decisions which were inconsistent with the facts
23
24 the retort was often reliance on ‘gut’ and ‘instincts’, and that he ‘prayed over it’, thereby giving
25
26 Bush not only a preternatural certainty but also a wonderment about its source and comfort in the
27
28 easy certainty that it afforded (Suskind, 2004). For Blair there was more to his foreign policy
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30 decisions than religion alone dictated but his views of right and wrong grounded in a religious
31
32 faith appear to have had a bearing on policy (Dyson, 2006) and a conviction that “good must
33
34 prevail over evil” (Burton and McCabe, 2009: 26). In Bush we witness an overt projection onto
35
36 an external agency transcending the individual and attributed in this case to God: faith-based
37
38 humility and intuitively-driven hubris comfortably co-existed.
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44 45 **6. Summary, implications and conclusions**

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47 In management and organization studies many scholars accept that intuition is a valid
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49 component of decision-making if it is grounded in relevant expertise and subjected to appropriate
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51 checks and balances. The educating and bridling of managers’ and leaders’ intuition has
52
53 important practical implications for the governance and management of institutions and
54
55 organizations. When the intuitive and analytical systems are in balance, the feeling of rightness
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3 is subject to analysis and evaluation through conscious deliberation and discussion, quiet
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5 reflection, and debate and public testing (Figure 1a). Judgments are held back while public and
6
7 private appraisal takes place. In Hubris Syndrome the feeling of rightness is self-strengthened
8
9 and operates unchecked. The switching between the reflexive intuitive mode and the reflective
10
11 analytical mode does not take place, self-checking breaks down, intuition ‘crowds-out’ rational
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13 analysis (Figure 1b)., and the leader becomes ‘stuck’ in an intuitive mode in which facts are
14
15 ignored and naysayers dismissed (sometimes literally). At the same time a feeling of rightness
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17 becomes generalized, no longer being attached to specific intuitive judgments, but is construed
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19 as a trait of the actor (*‘I feel right’* rather than *‘it feels right’*).
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25 The reflective analytical mode (which ideally must operate as a check and balance on
26
27 intuitions) becomes misapplied and misappropriated: argument is not used to critique the feeling
28
29 of rightness; instead it is used to justify and protect it. Public dialogue may also be abused, so
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31 that instead of being tested in public debate, ‘discussion’ and ‘dialogue’ is pre-orchestrated,
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33 supported by sycophants and dissenters seen as disloyal, dossiers may be ‘sexed up’ and
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35 unbridled intuition justifies Machiavellianism. Not only do reasoning, contemplating and
36
37 debating break down; the feeling of rightness may also be concealed under a cloak of humility,
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39 sometimes religious humility proffered as deference to and projection on to a higher agent (e.g.
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41 ‘In fighting evil I am doing God’s work’) (Figure 1c).
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46 The potential solutions to the unbridling of intuition and its associated effects on Hubris
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48 Syndrome are both social as well as cognitive. Social solutions include the institutionalization of
49
50 checks and balances on leaders’ decisions to provide a buffer against hubristic leaders who are
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52 excessively controlling of the senior management team, who chair boards or ride rough shod
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54 over cabinet systems of government (the value of followership and co-leadership was noted
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3 earlier). Cognitive solutions include the maintenance of learning environments which support
4 the development of good judgment and militate against the development of bad judgment.
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6 Mechanisms such as dialogue and devil's advocacy (Sadler-Smith and Shefy, 2004), and
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8 balancing reflection with 'reflexion' (Reynolds, 2007) may afford reliable and valid feedback on
9
10 the processes and consequences of intuitive decision making.
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15 Our argument has been that intuition is an under-researched cognitive and affective
16 antecedent of hubris which, if it becomes unbridled, contributes to hubristic leadership. The
17 question of whether leaders' hubris is a state which abates once power is lost (Owen, 2012) or
18 whether it is more like enduring trait (see Antonakis, Day and Schyns, 2011) is a question for
19 further research. Other questions include examining the relationships between Hubris Syndrome
20 and narcissism, narcissistic leadership (Maccoby, 2004), charismatic leadership, Prozac
21 leadership (Collinson, 2012), various 'darker side' leadership attributes and traits (Conger, 1990)
22 as well as its relationship to the various leadership and career 'derailment' factors postulated by
23 Hogan and Hogan (2001)⁷.
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37 A hubristic predisposition allied to ideological instinct or to unbridled intuition is a
38 perilous mix to have at the top of any political institution or business organization. Steps should
39 be taken to safeguard against this situation arising. In general, measures need to be put in place
40 to prevent the various modes of processing that underpin complex decision-making becoming
41 disconnected or unbalanced. Ideally, such measures would ensure that those chosen to lead do
42 not succumb to hubris in the first place; and if it does arise, systems of governance, management
43 and appropriate learning structures ought to be in place to militate against it and its
44 consequences. Holding hubristic leaders to account in the short-term could prevent the longer-
45 term and damaging consequences of their self-serving actions.
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Table 1. Symptoms of Hubris Syndrome and correspondences with personality disorders
(Source: Owen and Davidson, 2009)

Criteria	Unique	Correspondence to personality disorder
1. Narcissistic propensity to see world as arena for them to exercise power and seek glory		•
2. Predisposition to take actions which cast them in a good light		•
3. Disproportionate concern with image and presentation		•
4. Messianic manner and tendency to exaltation		•
5. Identification of self with nation, institution or organization	•	
6. Tendency to speak in third person; the 'royal we'	•	
7. Excessive confidence in own judgment		•
8. Exaggerated self-belief bordering on sense of omnipotence		•
9. Accountable to a higher authority, e.g. history or God		•
10. Unshakeable belief that they will be vindicated in court	•	
11. Loss of contact with reality; progressive isolation		•
12. Restlessness, recklessness and impulsiveness		
13. Moral rectitude over-rides practical or other mundane considerations	•	
14. Hubristic incompetence through overconfidence		•

Table 2. Hubris at Lehmans

Lehman Brothers under the leadership of Richard Fuld is one example of CEO hubris leading to extreme performance. Until the bank's collapse Lehman Brothers had never reported a quarterly loss and profits had risen five per cent to a \$4.2 billion high under Fuld's leadership.

However, independent financial analyst Charles Peabody argued that Fuld, a 30-year veteran of the company, overlooked the potential effects of real estate loans and other toxic assets on the balance sheet with "the typical hubris that and long term CEO has: 'I built this thing, and it's got more value than the marketplace understands'" (Plumb and Wilchins, 2008).

CEOs may be aware of the perils of hubris, but may be blind to it themselves; Delbecq (2008) for example, enquired of a group of NASDAQ CEOs in a workshop 'what was the thing that led to most executive failures?' The unequivocal response was 'hubris'. Ironically Richard Fuld himself commented prophetically to *Euromoney* magazine in 2005 that "I worry that we could get arrogant. If you get arrogant, you lose your way, and start making mistakes." (Partnoy, 2008, cf. Jack Welch's comments quoted in Hayward, 2007: 14).

The Wall Street Journal reported that at one point Fuld had the opportunity to sell the business for \$4-\$6billion to the state-run Korea Development Bank but he balked at the offer because his hubris told him it was far too low and that he 'knew best' - the company's stock subsequently 'zeroed-out' (Plumb and Wilchins, 2008).

Ultimately, the bank under Fuld's leadership made a series of tragic errors summarized cogently by Gapper (2008: 2 original emphases) thus: "It is also a tragedy for Mr Fuld, in the classical Greek sense. He had devoted so much of his life and his personality into moulding the bank, he could not accept its decline. If he had sold out earlier, Lehman might have survived but he was too proud. It was *hubris*, followed by *nemesis*."

Table 3. Hubris in the case of Iraq invasion of 2003

In the case of the invasion of Iraq in 2003 the world witnessed the use of purported ‘intelligence’ information, gleaned ostensibly through reliable analyses of relevant sources, to support the decision that Blair had already made to support Bush and commit UK forces to the US-led invasion. The so-called ‘Dodgy Dossier’ (February 2003) and ‘September Dossier’ (September 2003) were, in the opinion of many, used *post hoc* to rationalize a decision that had already been arrived at by an increasingly hubristic prime minister.

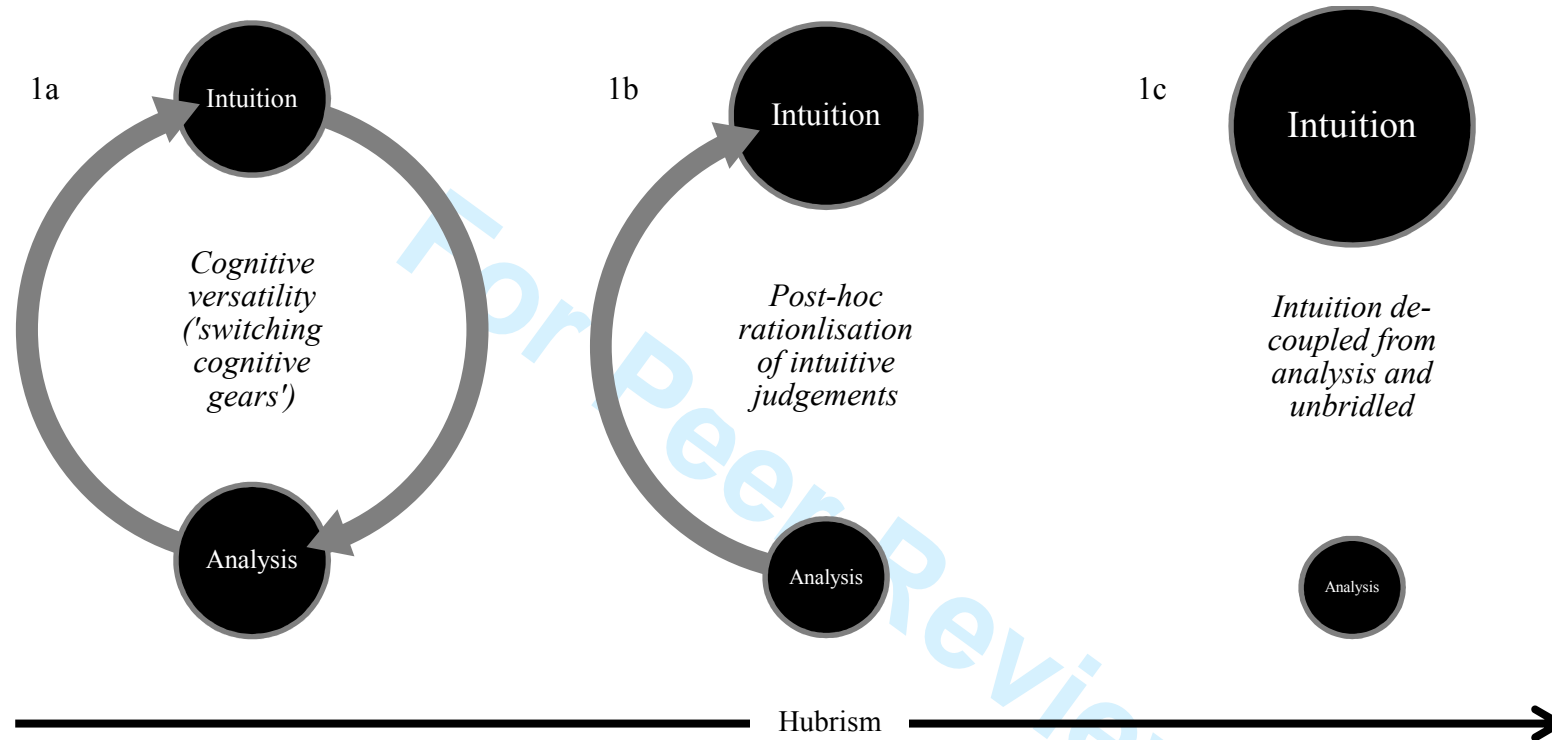
Subsequently a senior British military intelligence official, Major General Michael Laurie, in his hitherto secret evidence to the Chilcot inquiry into the Iraq war stated that: “We knew at the time that the purpose of the dossier was precisely to make a case for war, rather than setting out the available intelligence, and that to make the best out of sparse and inconclusive intelligence the wording was developed with care” (see Norton-Taylor, 2011). The manifest concerns of advisors and officials were ignored by the Prime Minister (Owen, 2007, revised edition).

Similarly, in discussions in Washington in July 2002 Sir Richard Dearlove then head of MI6 reported that intelligence and facts were being made to fit the policy (Danner, 2006). In the burying and political ‘spinning’ of facts leading up to the Iraq war Danner was reminded of Goebbels’ maxim on the subordination of truth to tactics and psychology: “Arguments must [therefore] be crude, clear and forcible, and appeal to emotions and *instincts*, and not the intellect” (cited in Danner, 2006: 26 emphasis added).

In the case of the UK’s commitment to the 2003 invasion of Iraq intelligence and analysis in the view of many were recruited not to critique but to protect and justify the Prime Minister’s intuitive ‘feeling of rightness’ (see Figure 1b).

In the lead-up to these events Owen (2007) reported a personal conversation that took place in July 2002 with Blair who was “unwilling to have any discussion”, “wholly dismissive” and judged by Owen to be “messianic”, “restless” and “hyperactive” (p.48).

Figure 1. The crowding-out and de-coupling of intuition and analysis associated with hubris



ENDNOTES

¹ Icarus had “fallen in love with the sky, and soared higher and higher” until the wax which fastened his plumage was dissolved by the scorching rays of the sun (*Metamorphoses*, Book 8, line 222)

² If Hubris Syndrome emerges ultimately as separate psychiatric disorder it will provide important insights into the nature and dynamics of leadership, if on the other hand it emerges as a subtype of narcissistic personality disorder it will provide “a significant contribution to a fuller understanding of pathological narcissism” (Owen and Davidson, 2009: 1404).

³ We are grateful to an anonymous reviewer of this paper for highlighting this important point.

⁴ http://www.cbsnews.com/2100-18560_162-20060876.html. Accessed 12th February, 2012

⁵ http://articles.cnn.com/2002-02-28/tech/gates_1_microsoft-research-bill-gates-windows-xp/2?_s=PM:TECH. Accessed 13th February, 2012

⁶ Denying universal applicability of moral law (*‘anti-nomos’*) on the basis that faith alone is necessary for salvation.

⁷ We are grateful to an anonymous reviewer of this paper for alerting us to the potential relationships of Hubris Syndrome to the various constructs measured by the Hogan Development Survey (HDS) (Hogan and Hogan, 1997).