DECONSTRUCTING MORAL LEADERSHIP:
LESSONS FROM ENDURANCE IN ANTARCTICA

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Abstract. *Across the private, public, and nonprofit sectors, complex situations and challenges constantly test leaders' ethical boundaries. Scholars, policymakers, and opinion leaders are increasingly asking the hard question: what constitutes moral leadership? This article aims to provide a potential answer by using the case study research method to deconstruct the leadership model of Sir Ernest Shackleton, the commander of the Endurance expedition (1914-1916). On October 27, 1915, Shackleton ordered his crew of 27 men to abandon Endurance. Due to unfavorable weather conditions, the ship they had boarded in South Georgia for a most ambitious endeavor – crossing Antarctica on foot – was crushed under "ten million tons of ice," leaving them stranded at the South Pole. Through the end of August 1916, for over two years since sailing from England, Shackleton led his men through a series of critical decisions, eventually bringing all of them to safety. This article evaluates two of these decisions in depth, drawing several lessons about Shackleton's moral leadership and reflecting on his legitimacy/authority and the role of moral luck. It also examines the portability of his model beyond the extreme, specific context of the Endurance polar expedition. The conclusion is unequivocal: Sir Ernest Shackleton was a moral leader, a pragmatic utilitarian ready to make quick, critical choices, but nonetheless showing deep deontological concerns, and also a communitarian who placed the group's collective needs above personal goals while protecting his people's most essential human right – the right to life. The role of luck in the morality of his actions remains limited, while Shackleton's unique leadership model was perfectly suited for the particular context Endurance faced. Through this systematic assessment, Shackleton becomes a role model for current and future aspiring moral leaders.*

Keywords: *moral leadership; leadership style; leadership theories; management; skills; case study research; context dependent.*

Introduction

"In memories we were rich. We had pierced the veneer of outside things. We had suffered, starved and triumphed, groveled down yet grasped at glory, grown bigger in the bigness of the whole. We had seen God in His splendors, heard the text that nature renders. We had reached the naked soul of man." (Sir Ernest Shackleton in Shackleton, Hurley & Fergus Fleming, 2004, p. 200).

The importance of ethical leadership can hardly be overstated. Despite a growing literature on leadership over the past decades and an increasingly prominent public discourse on the need for authentic leaders (George & Sims, 2007), today there is no

shortage of individuals failing to fulfill their responsibilities, across the public, nonprofit, and private sectors (Brown & Treviño, 2006; Wray-Bliss, 2013). The aim of this article is to assess a historic example and, on the basis of available qualitative data, deconstruct a particular leadership model. The selected case study is Sir Ernest Shackleton, the leader of the South Pole *Endurance* expedition (1914-1916). While sometimes cited in business school lectures and management magazines, Shackleton's example has not been assessed systematically through ethical paradigms. This article fills this gap and, based on a historical example, draws lessons that are widely applicable to current and future aspiring moral leaders.

This case study merits attention for three primary reasons: first, as leader of his crew, Shackleton faces exceptionally tough circumstances and decisions; second, the entire expedition is incredibly well documented by primary sources (e.g., diaries, books, photographs as reproduced within this article, etc.); last but not least, Shackleton is proved to be a quintessential moral leader and hence a potential role model for current and future generations of leaders. An extensive literature shows that moral leadership deeply impacts organizational culture by providing a "patterning" or "role modeling" process through which ethical behavior becomes the norm (Gini, 1997). In this sense, the case study method is ideal for assessing and promoting a moral leadership model through the in-depth exploration of an individual's decisions and their consequences.

This article begins with a brief description of the *Endurance* expedition. The second section defines ethical leadership, states the research questions, and explains the methodology. The next two sections evaluate Shackleton's leadership model based on an in-depth assessment of two daunting situations. The fifth section reflects on Shackleton's leadership legitimacy and authority. The sixth section evaluates the role of luck, including whether outcomes matter when determining the morality of particular actions. The last part concludes, reflecting on the replicability of Shackleton's leadership beyond the context of the *Endurance* expedition.

Background on *Endurance*

Sir Ernest Shackleton, the leader of the *Endurance* expedition, is widely regarded as a hero. In 1914, at the height of European competition for geographical conquest, he set out for a most-daring expedition: crossing Antarctica from west to east, on foot (Lansing, 2007, p. 11). For Britain, success was a matter of national prestige, having recently lost to Americans and Norwegians the races for the North and the South Pole. Shackleton himself badly wanted to succeed: victory implied a higher status of social and economic well-being and would have been a well-deserved comeback after his 1907 expedition had taken him within only 97 miles of the South Pole.

The "Imperial Trans-Antarctic Expedition" was possibly too ambitious or ill-fated, as unprecedented weather conditions precluded Shackleton from even setting foot on the continent. On December 5, 1914, the *Endurance* departs the Grytviken whaling station (South Georgia Island). By January 18, 1915, huge blocks of ice trap the ship in the Weddell Sea, making sailing impossible. Unable to count on outside help for their rescue, they become stranded under conditions of great hardship (extreme temperatures, lack of food, etc.), hundreds of miles from civilization. Shackleton and

his crew of 27 men first decide to camp on the ship, waiting for warmer weather and hoping that the *Endurance* will survive the pressure of millions of tons of ice.

Figure 1. The Endurance got trapped between "ten million tons of ice"
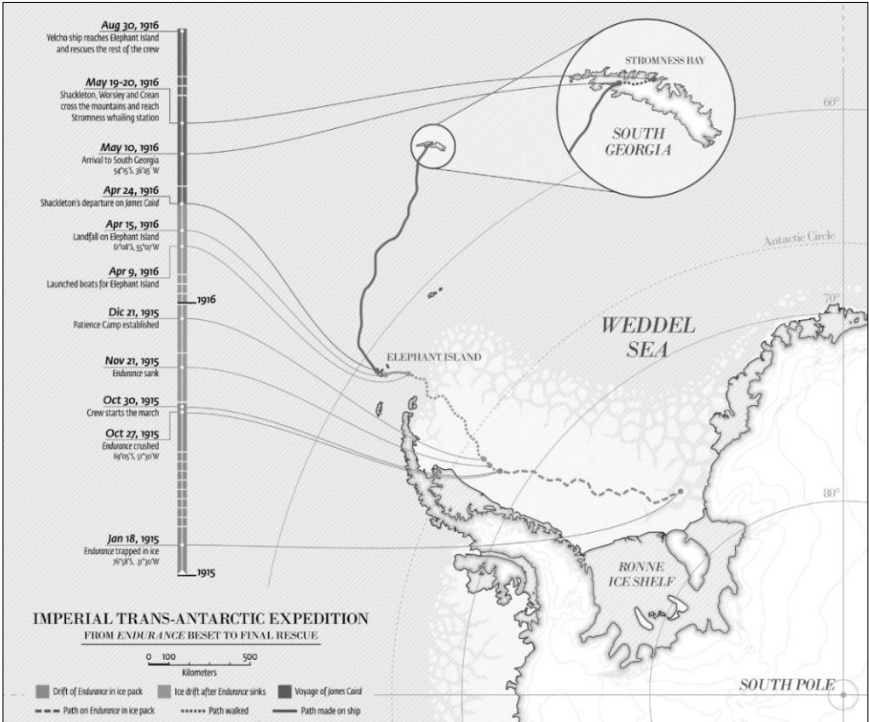*(Source: Wikimedia)*

Figure 2. The map and timeline of the Endurance expedition
(Source: Wikimedia)

On October 27, 1915, "the Boss" orders the crew to abandon *Endurance* after the ship was crushed by ice (Figure 1). After camping on unstable ice floes for five months, constantly facing death, the crew takes advantage of the warmer weather and sails

three small lifeboats in search of land. Within seven days, they reach Elephant Island, a deserted place far off normal shipping routes. They have no hopes of getting found by other ships.

On April 24, 1916, Shackleton takes five of his men and begins a most daring journey in the *James Caird*, a small open-boat rescued from the *Endurance*. They then sail in some of the world's most dangerous waters for an incredible distance of 800 nautical miles to finally reach South Georgia Island on May 10, 1916. Ironically, after all that, they are forced to land on the uninhabited south-western side of the island, facing the prospect of crossing through completely unchartered and very dangerous terrain. After another 36 hours of hiking mountain ranges and glaciers, Shackleton and two crewmembers accomplish the first know crossing of South Georgia to reach the Stromness whaling station. They then recover the three men on *James Caird*, and on August 30, 1916, rescue the rest of the crew on Elephant Island (Figure 2). Every single member is saved and survives the incredible two-year-long journey. Perhaps this fortunate outcome and Shackleton's own merits in securing it justified one of his men calling him, unapologetically, "the greatest leader [who] ever came on God's earth, bar none." (Lansing, 2007, p. 13).

Defining moral leadership

One classic definition of a leader is someone who "induces followers to act for certain goals that represent the values and the motivations – the wants and needs, the aspirations and expectations – of *both leaders and followers*" (Burns, 2012, p.4). As Brown et al. (2005, p.120) argue, ethical leadership can be defined as "the demonstration of normatively appropriate conduct through personal actions and interpersonal relationships, and the promotion of such conduct to followers through two-way communication, reinforcement, and decision-making." Further inquiries by Treviño et al. (2003) into the characteristics of ethical leaders reveal that honesty, integrity, and trustworthiness, along with principle-based decision-making, are often associated with *a moral person*. The authors also determine that ethical leadership requires *a moral manager*, e.g., leading by example, holding others accountable, etc. The key insight is that a moral leader must be both a moral person and a moral manager (Treviño et al., 2003). At the same time, several scholars believe that the only kind of leadership possible is righteous leadership: "leaders are people who do the right thing; managers are people who do things right" (Bennis, 1989, p.18).

This article deploys the case study research method to help deconstruct the concept of moral leadership by assessing the vivid facts of the *Endurance* expedition. The case study method is widely used in the literature on leadership, as it allows for evaluating very specific examples of typologies and decisions that can then be emulated by aspiring leaders (Wills, 1995). In the case of the current article, research questions include: Did Shackleton demonstrate true moral leadership? How consistent was it across time and what were its core elements? How did he establish legitimacy to lead and how did he exercise authority for over two years, under conditions of extreme distress? And, finally, what role do context and luck play, if any, in the ultimate evaluation of moral leadership?

Instead of a broad assessment of Shackleton's model, this study answers these complex questions by focusing in depth on two specific instances. First, early on in the journey, Shackleton placed the safety of the entire crew above everything else, compromising his personal ambition of crossing Antarctica. Until the end, he refused to leave anyone behind and proved that he valued every life equally, despite obvious differences in people's character and in their individual contribution to the mission. Second, on January 2, 1916, while they were waiting at "Mark Time Camp" after yet another failed attempt to march toward Paulet Island (the initial target of the crew after the *Endurance* sunk), Shackleton ordered his people to stop gathering more food, arguing that supplies were plentiful. This created significant tension among crewmembers. Both episodes deserve special attention, and the next two sections respectively test the moral righteousness of Shakleton's decisions against multiple schools of thought.

Adaptive goals: All Will Be Saved

With the benefit of hindsight, Shackleton's early choice to give up the nominal goal of crossing Antarctica may seem obvious. *Endurance* had been surrounded by think ice and efforts to escape into open waters proved futile. Furthermore, the terrain ahead was potentially dangerous and the dogs were weak and untrained. But by February 1915, southern currents had brought Shackleton's team to only about 60 miles from Vahsel Bay, the first planned stop on the Antarctic continent. Attempting to reach it with a smaller team was not far-fetched, particularly for a man who thrived on challenges. Moreover, supplies laid by "the Ross Sea party" were likely waiting all across the southern part of the continent, as laid out in the expedition's initial plan (the supplies were meant to sustain Shackleton's group while crossing Antarctica on foot). Later on, after *Endurance* sunk, Shackleton again could have split the group and pushed forward with a team of his strongest toward Antarctica or toward the safe harbor of Paulet Island. But time and again he resisted this idea, deliberately changing the original plan to do everything in his power to save *everyone*.

Available glimpses into Shackleton's gestures and thinking suggest that he was deeply frustrated with the expedition's failure. After all, this was his shot at glory as an opportunity to go further than anyone else before him. Shackleton had spent years on preparations, including fundraising, contracting a ship, and recruiting the crew. Once they set sail, "only one real task remained – the achievement of the goal" (Lansing, 2007, p.12). Additionally, Shackleton is portrayed as generally unwilling to accept defeat, having "a monstrous ego and implacable drive" (Lansing, 2007, p.13). It must have been extremely hard for this purposeful individual to abandon the initial mission, particularly because he also felt a duty to further Britain's national interests. This is evident in his symbolic gesture of unloading much of his weight to travel faster but keeping the one page of the Bible that contained the Queen's personal encouragement. His failure could become, in that sense, a national embarrassment during a critical time in the empire's history.

Despite all this, by October 1915, Shackleton's supreme goal had become very clear. He wrote in his log: "I pray God I can manage to get the whole party safe to civilization" (in Lansing, 2007, p.65). How was this fundamental shift in Shackleton's mindset even possible? Simply put, he recognized the situation as a challenge between right and wrong. From a *Kantian* perspective, his primary moral obligation was to ensure all

crewmembers' survival. Their lives took precedence over all other duties, whether toward Shackleton himself, his family, or England. Although formally he enjoyed full authority – his nickname was "the Boss" and he had binding contracts with all crewmembers – he could not leave *any* of them behind. Doing that would have implied treating them as mere means and violating their autonomy, since no one would have willingly consented to die for the rest to survive. Intentions also matter and all evidence suggests that Shackleton was struggling to save his men for the sake of this moral obligation, not for expected glory or financial rewards. In fact, he was completely and selflessly dedicated to his people. The great power of that type of attitude comes precisely from sacrificing own goals for the betterment of the lot.

A *rights-based* approach also legitimizes Shackleton's actions. He demonstrated great caution in ensuring that crew members received by-and-large similar treatment and enjoyed equal survival rights, as reflected in the food and water rations received. The Boss himself refused to accept special benefits and sometimes gave part of his share to those who were unwell. This attitude is also moral from a *communitarian* perspective. Shackleton more than anyone else struggled to preserve the group's unity and morale, at any personal cost. While some may argue that the crew was not a community in its own right, it is reasonable to believe that the extreme circumstances they were facing quickly turned survival into a collective goal, which further shaped their norms, values, and actions. This is why, for instance, when First Officer Greenstreet spilled his rationed milk, everyone in his tent contributed to compensate the precious loss. Also from a pragmatic standpoint, the Boss knew that a united group increased every individual's chances of survival, so he cultivated that collective culture primarily as a means to an end.

A *utilitarian* assessment of Shackleton's decision to save the entire crew is more complex, but ultimately positive. He could have led a small team and pushed far enough south to reach adequate supplies and get help from the Ross Sea party, returning later to save the rest of the *Endurance* crew. Still, utilitarianism is about probabilities: given the rough terrain and the uncertainty surrounding those left to camp on the floe, continuing with the initial mission seemed extremely risky. Similarly, maybe fewer, stronger people could have been better fed and able to move faster toward safety. But keeping people together for as long as possible was beneficial in its own right for sustaining morale, making game spotting and hunting easier, and having more rested rowers available to battle the raging seas during the open-boat voyages.

An important point concerns the adaptability of the leader's tactics based on actual conditions on the ground. If the Boss would have stayed adamant about staying together as a group, the chances of surviving the trip from Elephant Island to South Georgia in three ill-equipped small boats would have been much lower. In that instance, splitting the group actually served its interests better and served the ultimate goal of ensuring the best chances for everyone's survival.

Two things above all had helped Shackleton make the right moral choice in seeking to save the entire crew. First, he had gone through a formative experience in his 1907 expedition, which got closer to the South Pole than any other before it, but was forced to turn back due to lack of supplies. Shackleton's actions proved that the lives of his fellow explorers mattered more than being the first to reach a point on the globe. That earlier decision helped trigger a similar response after eight years, although

Shackleton could not entirely hide his frustration of having failed twice in fulfilling the mission. Second, *Endurance* is about human engagement, the basic foundation of solid moral relationships. The Boss developed close ties with crewmembers, from the moment they enlisted to the long nights spent playing cards on the stranded boat and the subsequent success of the open-boat voyages. These individuals were more than just employees bound by strict contracts, but people with basic rights and needs. Taking his crew back to safety thus became Shackleton's supreme moral imperative, rightfully taking priority over the rest of his commitments to his own ambitions, to his country, etc. (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Part of the Endurance crew that stayed on Elephant Island was also saved by Shackleton

Self-reliance vs. overconfidence

The *means* for achieving the new objective – of saving everyone – are, however, less consistent in terms of their moral dimension across different schools of thought. Perhaps Shackleton's most puzzling decision in the entire expedition was stopping Orde-Lees, the storekeeper on *Endurance*, from bringing back to camp three additional seals. This order seemed "foolish" and particularly strange coming from someone who was known as "Old Cautious." Although Shackleton claimed that they had enough supplies to last a month, less than ten days later they were facing acute food shortages and had to shoot some of the dogs. First Officer Greenstreet blamed the Boss in his diary for "his sublime optimism" (Lansing, 2007, p.105). It was a rare moment of quiet revolt, which indirectly suggested that Shackleton's commanding order eroded some of the group's morale, creating doubts in people's minds regarding his abilities. The Boss himself seemed regretful of that decision, although only privately, complaining about the strain of previous months: "I long for some rest, free from thought" (Lansing, 2007, p.104).

Was his decision morally defensible? In purely utilitarian terms, Shackleton had to weigh the benefits of having additional food against the risks entailed in gathering it. Just the day before, in that same area, Orde-Lees was nearly killed by a sea leopard. The ice was soggy, increasing the danger of men falling through. Despite risks, Orde-

Lees went on his own and killed three seals. The simple suggestion that they should bring them in was to Shackleton's mind "an act of disloyalty" (Lansing, 2007, p.104). As their leader, he could not condone rash actions. His pragmatic calculations of expected risks and benefits often proved more conservative than anyone else's, which explains why he reacted cautiously and with restraint to most events, displaying skepticism that *Endurance* could survive the pressure or that the ice would take them in the right direction. At the same time, stockpiling significant resources implied that the party resigned itself to spending the polar winter stuck on the floe. That was a dangerous, albeit real, thought to entertain: in Shackleton's view, complacency followed by hopelessness was a far greater danger than temporary hunger.

Instead, by betting on their good fortune of being able to move and find a new game within a month, he hoped to mobilize the crew around shared optimism for the future. The downside of that strategy was that if predictions failed to materialize groundless optimism would backfire and demoralize people even more. If Shackleton, whom they trusted completely, could make such mistakes, how positive could they be about survival? And if his decisions did not tolerate even the slightest opposition, how could they help him avoid similar mistakes in the future? This apparently minor decision is indicative of deeper tensions that required Shackleton to constantly balance top-down and inclusive leadership styles. This was especially challenging in a setting where speedy decisions were vital to ensure survival, as was the concentration of authority in the hands of one leader.

Again, it is useful to analyze this conflict from the perspective of Shackleton's duties to himself and to his crew. First, the Boss had to stay true to his deeply held belief that he was a natural leader apt for exercising authority and convinced about "his own invincibility" (Lansing, 2007, p.128). This confidence bordering arrogance explains why he had devised such a daring expedition, to begin with. It also explains, however, much of his success. Leaders with only moderate levels of self-confidence would have likely collapsed under the huge pressures of uncertainty and the repeated defeats inflicted by the uncontrollable forces of nature. Second, Shackleton strongly believed that he was acting in others' best interest, and had complete faith that things would turn out well *because* his actions were fundamentally moral. He set implicit decision-making rules: when a situation required swift responses, he would have full control; whenever possible, he would bring along trusted advisors, based on their specific expertise: Worsely, Wild, and Hudson for all navigation purposes; McNish for carpentry; James for medical issues; etc. In that sense, Shackleton often also fulfilled his duty toward his people, involving them in essential decisions that ultimately affected their lives.

In that sense, the Boss was never a purely autocratic leader, although generally, he did not welcome feedback, which he took as destabilizing to his control over the situation. He was obsessive about this and for good reason. During those same months, hundreds of miles to the south, the Ross Sea Party that was supposed to place supplies for *Endurance* across Antarctica was struggling with deep leadership conflicts. The results were tragic: three men from that expedition died, two of them because they had stormed off and separated from the group. Perhaps Shackleton erred in the opposite direction, as his self-reliance risked slipping into overconfidence.

Ultimately, there are multiple possible justifications for his decision to stop gathering food, and a final verdict is impossible without knowing more about his inner thought process. What remains certain is that he always needed to make the hardest decisions and be solely responsible for them. Final outcomes usually validated his decisions, such as when he decided to ignore captain Worsley's suggestion about abandoning the ballast on the bottom of the *James Caird*, on their open-boat journey from Elephant Island to South Georgia Island (Figure 4). Hours later, the crew survived a huge wave because of Shakleton's decision. He had realized that the only way to test Worsley's theory was to abandon the ballast, an irreversible decision that he wisely avoided. The same goes for the decision to stop gathering food: events later proved it was probably the right thing to do.

Figure 4. Launching the James Caird for the 800-nautical-mile voyage for rescue
(Source: Wikimedia)

Legitimacy and authority

Drawing on lessons from the two instances above, it is useful to assess the process by which Shackleton exerted authority over his crew. Something deeper than legal threats was needed under extremely stressful conditions, in the middle of nowhere. Indeed, leaders only exist in relation to their followers and as a result of their consent, as conceded by Machiavelli in *The Prince* (2003).

For one, the Boss enjoyed high *procedural* legitimacy, as conferred by his rank and through the formal contracts that included a special clause placing the entire crew under his absolute command, "on board, in the boats, or on the shore [they would do] as directed by the master and owner" (Lansing, 2007, p. 95). Shackleton proved prescient when he included this provision, although the only act of outright defiance was when McNeish refused to keep pushing a lifeboat. The Boss promptly responded by calling everyone and reading the legal contract aloud. He also gave the carpenter time to reflect and rest, a wise alternative to harsher punishments that risked provoking more unrest among crewmembers. By the following morning, McNeish was back at his regular duties, acknowledging that he needed to contribute his fair share of work. Machiavelli applies a similar principle in urging his audience to refrain from actions that inspire hatred among people – usually fear is better than love, but deep hatred is unsustainable (2003, p.61).

Shackleton's ability to earn *technical* legitimacy was equally impressive. He already had a great reputation for caring about his 1907 voyage's crew. With the exception of a few early setbacks – *Endurance* sinking, the failed crossing toward Paulet Island, etc. – he demonstrated an exceptional ability to anticipate and respond to events. Part of the reason for this was, again, his unmatched sense of responsibility, which often kept him alert. For instance, around 11 pm on April 9, 1916, he suddenly became "strangely uneasy, so he dressed and went outside" (Lansing, 2007, p.182). Within moments, the floe cracked right underneath No.4 tent, causing Holness the stoker to fall into freezing water. Seconds after Shackleton pulled him up the floe closed under them. This example, albeit one of the most dramatic moments of the trip, shows that accomplishing the goal of saving *everyone* required the Boss' constant vigilance. Importantly, such interventions helped reinforce his technical legitimacy, as did countless other moments where waiting or proceeding with the open-boat voyage literally meant the difference between life and death.

Finally, Shackleton also had a tremendous amount of *moral* legitimacy. His objective was noble by protecting everyone equally. His motives were entirely pure at this stage, making the initial desire to acquire wealth as a result of the expedition seem irrelevant. His means were varied and deserve a closer look. On many occasions, the Boss insisted on equal treatment applying to him too. A leader by example, he was the first one to give up gold sovereigns to travel as lightly as possible (Lansing, 2007, p.64). He was essentially *of* and *among* his people at all times, facing the same basic challenges of survival and enjoying similar activities – playing cards, singing, reading, etc. – when distractions from outside conditions were badly needed.

At the same time, and perhaps paradoxically, he remained apart from the group and fundamentally alone in carrying on many of his leadership attributes. Some distance was required not only to protect his authority but also to keep emotions from showing, as when "he was careful not to betray his disappointment to the men and cheerfully supervised the routine of readying the ship for the long winter's night" (Lansing, 2007, p.34). Moreover, he kept certain secrets from the crew, such as the leaving behind a message in a bottle, which could have been interpreted by others as resignation with their imminent death. Strict Kantians may condemn such actions as lies – and indeed there might have been room to tilt the balance more toward openness and inclusive decision-making. But ultimately, Shackleton's decisions were backed by right intentions and based on the underlying assumption that maintaining unity and morale was paramount. As the Ross Sea party's less fortunate fate demonstrates, this hypothesis was correct.

Moral luck

Machiavelli argues that leaders are often judged by results. He also contends that fortune – good or bad – "is the arbiter of half the things we do, leaving the other half or so to be controlled by ourselves" (2003, p.79). This rule of thumb may have been overly optimistic for Shackleton and his crew, given the extreme conditions they faced. In this context, how much credit does the Boss ultimately deserve for the final outcome?

In some ways, the question itself is misleading. It is impossible to estimate the role luck played in the saving the entire *Endurance* crew. Some examples suggest that their fate was completely out of their hands, starting with the news about extreme icy conditions arriving at South Georgia two hours too late to stop the expedition and ending with Shackleton's crazy idea of sliding down a mountain for several thousand feet, tied to Worsely and Crean, just before their final rescue on that same island. How would posterity have even recorded anything about the *Endurance* if at that moment the three men would have perished, burying with them the rescue hopes of twenty-five other people? In hindsight, climbing across the entire South Georgia Island on foot, as tired as they were after the long journey, seems nothing short of miraculous.

But placing the operation's success on luck would be grossly misleading and unfair. After all, even at the end, Shackleton climbed with his two colleagues on two mountains that were deemed too dangerous to attempt a descent. It must have been tempting to try and, given his severe exhaustion, it is incredible that he kept a cool head. Even before deciding to slide down the third peak, Shackleton made a persuasive case that they had no other option. They could take their chances diving into the abyss or wait and freeze to death at high altitude. Similarly, they may have gotten lucky when the huge wave did not flip the *James Caird* over, but again the Boss was cautious enough to leave the ballast there, despite the dizzying motion it imprinted on the small boat. Numerous other instances prove that the crew did have leverage over its fate.

Above all, Shackleton's proverbial prudence and his unique gift for situational awareness played a huge role in keeping the crew safe. He knew when to abandon ship; what the vital supplies were; which floes were safe to camp on; when to cheer his people up with a warm meal and a supplement of meat; etc. He was purposeful from the start, picking the right crew, and his intuition did not fail him. Subsequently, after *Endurance* was abandoned and their situation was getting increasingly desperate, he identified the two biggest potential troublemakers and sacrificed himself by sharing a tent with them instead of choosing a more pleasant company like as his old friend Wild. These intentional actions proved critical.

***Figure 5. Sir Ernest Shackleton, second from left to right, on board the Endurance
(Source: Wikimedia)***

Conclusion

What matters for the purposes of this analysis is that Shackleton passes the test of a moral leader, with exceptional consistency throughout the expedition's two long years. The story of *Endurance* is in many ways extreme (Figure 5). One can only imagine Shackleton sitting in a small boat, in the middle of the ocean, during some of the coldest nights on this planet, close to the point of physical and mental collapse, fearing that at any given moment a floe or a berg would bring an end to his life *and*, probably an even scarier thought, to the lives of all those who depended on him.

Perhaps the greatest lesson taught by the men of *Endurance* and their heroic leader is that different circumstances require different types of moral leaders. As Lansing notes, Shackleton was, in ordinary situations, "[like] a Percheron draft horse harnessed to a child's wagon cart" (2007, p. 13). The same author later quotes an equally telling tribute: "For scientific leadership give me Scott; for swift and efficient travel, Amundsen; but when you are in a hopeless situation, when there seems no way out, get down on your knees and pray for Shackleton" (2007, p. 14). Indeed, it is impossible to rank moral leaders. Their ultimate success depends precisely on the fit between their skills and the situation at hand.

One of Shackleton's core beliefs was that everything will turn out fine provided he acts morally. This was the essence of his leadership's cautious optimism, and ultimately what saved the crew of *Endurance*. He was the right leader at the right place and the right time. That, indeed, was no accident of fate, but the result of moral leadership exercised throughout a remarkable career.

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