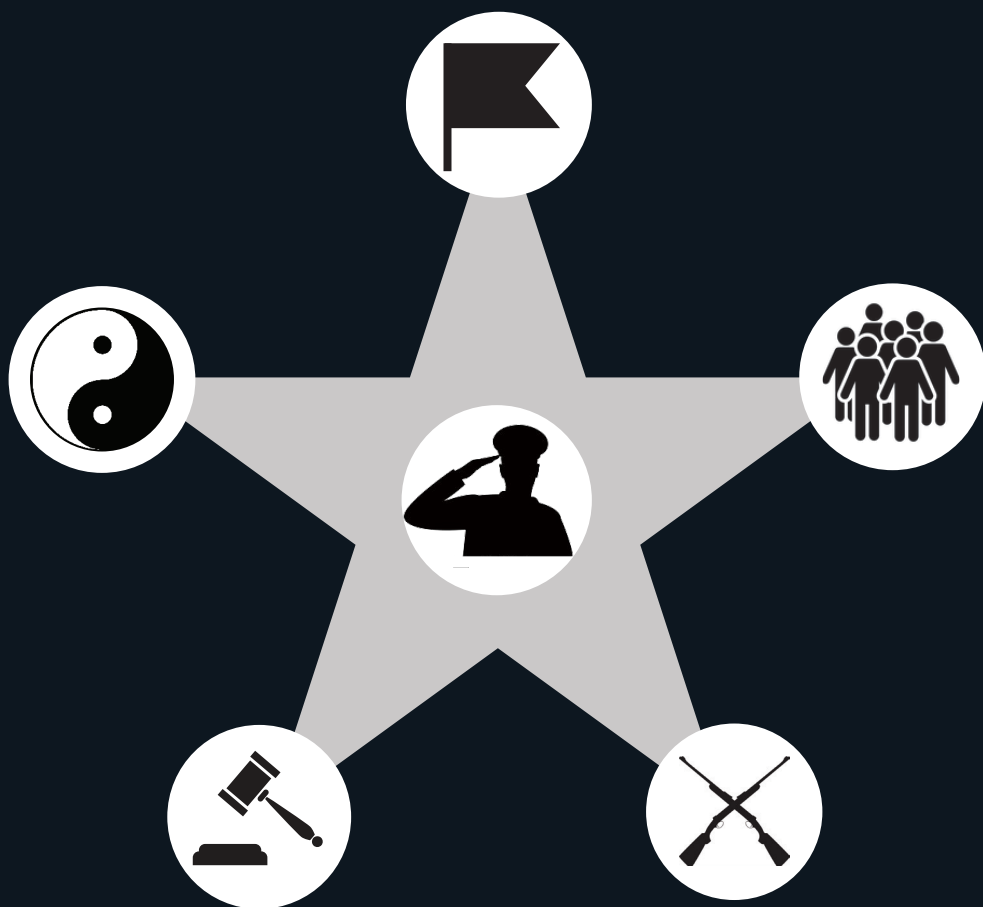# RESPONSIBLE COMMAND

PRIMER FOR SENIOR LEADERS

FIRST EDITION

DEPARTMENT OF COMMAND, LEADERSHIP, AND MANAGEMENT

UNITED STATES ARMY WAR COLLEGE

Responsible Command

Primer for Senior Leaders
1st Edition

TOM GALVIN

WITH CON CRANE
PAUL T. MIKOLASHEK

FOREWORD BY PAUL T. MIKOLASHEK

DEPARTMENT OF COMMAND, LEADERSHIP, AND MANAGEMENT
SCHOOL OF STRATEGIC LANDPOWER
U.S. ARMY WAR COLLEGE, CARLISLE PA

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Foreword

Paul T. Mikolashek

When I was a Captain, I was called into the Brigade Commander's office to talk about taking over a company. I remember a few things about that meeting, but one thing he said has stuck with me ever since. As he was talking, he paused a bit and said, "this command business…it's a tough thing." He did not have to elaborate further. With the assumption of command comes with it a daunting responsibility. This is true today as it was then and holds true at every level and only increases the higher up you go. It is exactly the notion of responsibility vested in the commander, that at least from his perspective, makes it a "tough thing."

The purpose of this primer is to stimulate thought about command in its own right. More than any other leadership book, it seeks to fill a gap between Colonel-level command and what lies beyond. It is a supplement and complement to other U.S. Army War College primers: Strategic Leadership, Defense Management, Leading Change in Military Organizations, and Communications Campaigning. It is distinguished from those primers as its focus is on the aspects of leadership that apply to command, not only including inherent legal obligations, but the responsibilities all commanders bear as the moral and ethical leader of their organizations. These important attributes are revealed through the use of historical examples and the observations of those who have taken on the tough jobs of command.

This primer is designed not to rest on bookshelves but to be used actively as a tool for commanders to develop a personal campaign on how command is to be exercised. It should be used as a guide in developing leaders for higher level command. It is one resource to enable emerging commanders to build on that unique experience with an eye toward the more complex realm beyond the tactical level. Transitioning from the tactical to operational and strategic levels of command is significant and not

an arithmetic progression. This primer provides a great framework for future commanders to chart their course to these important levels of command.

Command in its own right demands attention distinct from leadership because of the specified and inherent responsibilities. Command is not a subset of leadership; rather it is an application of leadership in a very specific role. The responsibilities at the strategic level demand additional and broader experiences and the investment of time, energy, and intellectual effort in the study of command. The authors have taken an approach that provides an historical and intellectual framework for the study of responsible command along an azimuth directed at command of strategic level organizations.

The result of the study reveals five findings or themes that fill out that framework for understanding, study, and development: clear command and control and strategic direction; commanders as the focal point of the defense enterprise; setting a climate for lawful action; mastering complexity; and, the commander as the needle of the moral compass. These offer a clear focus for study and understanding of the essence of what it means to be a responsible commander.

The U.S. Army War College has long been committed to responsible command; Elihu Root, the "father" of the Army War College viewed responsible command as his greatest problem. As you delve into this primer you will find it a rich source for thought, and ideally a prompt for further research and study. It should guide your experience and your self-assessment as you prepare yourself, and others, for strategic level command. Dr. Tom Galvin, you have done a masterful job of tying history and research into exactly what a primer should do, be the first thing you read.

I encourage you to dive into this primer, refer to it frequently, and you will find it will be a valuable tool as you take on this "tough business."

Paul T. Mikolashek
Lieutenant General (Retired), U.S. Army

Preface

Tom Galvin

Throughout my 29 years of service as a military officer, the Army reinforced in my mind that *command* was a special form of leadership, and being a *commander* was the pinnacle, the great highlight of one's career. Company command was special – a successful company command tour was a rite of passage that separated those on the up-and-up and those who needed to consider other career options. Leading soldiers was what being an officer was all about!

At the senior levels, whether a division or corps, service component commander, training or recruiting commander, combatant or multinational force commander, it was the same. Multiple four-star generals I served under held very strongly that command was a perishable skill -- that officers should stay in command continuously from their first star to their fourth if they were in line for the position of service chief or one of the major Army commands. Stepping out of command for too long (more than a year?) would make it impossible for them to be effective commanders again without significant re-greening.

Yet, from the beginning of professional military education and all the doctrine I learned and read along the way, command is often treated synonymously with leadership. Sure, there are pre-command courses at various levels, but command as an institution under itself gets only faint mention in the leadership manuals. The senior leader competencies listed among the four editions of the *Strategic Leadership Primer* at the U.S. Army War College do not separate leadership from command, either. What gets occasionally mentioned is the commanders' authorities and responsibilities in relation to the Uniformed Code of Military Justice, but otherwise there is little separation.

But then later, as I learned the ropes of serving as a U.S. Army War College faculty instructor, I encountered those often-cited words of Elihu Root from February 1903. In the ceremonially laying of the cornerstone of the War College, he issued as part of

his charge to the College that it must address the problems and challenges of *responsible command*.

Ever since, I puzzled over what those two words really meant, and why was it called "responsible" command and not just command? Was responsible command the same thing as *command responsibility*, or was it something else? If it was a term so important to have been used at the cornerstone laying, why was it no longer used by the institution?

And I recalled all my experiences with commanders from captain to general – good and less so – and recognized in my own experience that there was a qualitative difference between command and leadership, and between commanders and other officers. But what about civilian directors, are they not "responsible" in their own way? What about deputies or chiefs of staff or command sergeants major? Was responsible command just about the commander or was it about whole leadership teams?

Turned out I was not alone. Others inside and outside the War College shared the view that command was unique, special, and vital for the Army. Such views also contributed to arguments at Army level during various sexual harassment and assault controversies that command authority must be preserved. This was captured well in the following passage from the Department of Defense's 2019 internal investigation into the efficacy of reforms enacted earlier in the decade to improve investigative processes and overall accountability:

> *The Commander stands at the center of the military justice system. The Commander, regardless of Service, is responsible for the health, welfare, and discipline of every Service member in his or her Command. … The **role** of the commander was studied … and determined that removing the Commander's authority within the military justice system would not improve the quality of investigations and prosecutions … .[1]*

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[1] Elizabath P. Van Winkle (project director), *Sexual Assault Accountability and Investigation Task Force* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Defense, April 2019), 13-14. Emphasis added.

This added to my curiosity, however, as command was being discussed as a role – a combination of authorities, responsibilities, and the identities of those exercising them – rather than merely a title, institution or construct differing from leadership. Without a clear definition of command beyond that of a set of specific formal authorities, it was hard to see how one could rationally defend it.

Therefore, I undertook a study -- which makes up the center of this book -- to contribute to a definition and understanding of responsible command against ordinary leadership and against command that is perhaps not responsible or less so. Determining what skills, knowledge, and attributes commanders require over others would help improve professional training and education of future commanders and the staff officers and subordinate commanders who would follow them. It would also remove some of the mystery behind the cultural view that certain officers are cut out to be commanders while others are not.

This book is divided into three parts. Part I provides two chapters with two distinctly different purposes. Chapter 1 expands on this Preface and details the issues and concerns about the conflation of command with leadership in military education and the historical origins of *responsible command* in the laws of land warfare. Chapter 2 is a case study in responsible dissent by prominent military historian Con Crane who tells the story of General Matthew Ridgway and his opposition to the "New Look" strategy by President Eisenhower. The case study illustrates the meaning of responsibility extending beyond that of command positions and the commanders that hold them.

Part II is the study itself. The overview in Chapter 3 describes the research questions, methodology, and a summary of the results detailed in Chapters 4 through 8. The study uncovered five major themes that explain qualitative differences between command and leadership and possibly allow for comparing the responsibility exhibited between commanders. The five themes also showed how responsible command leaders organizations to fight lawfully in land combat by showing how commanders must: (1) establish clear formal command and control, (2) serve as the focal point of the overall defense enterprise, (3) establish climates that support lawful action, (4) master complexity and complex

environment, and (5) serve as the "needle" of the organization's moral compass.

Part III provides the implications for leader development. Chapter 9 discusses the commander as an individual and how one's personality, preferences, and long-term aspirations influence the organizations they will command over time. This is called the commander's *professional campaign*. The chapter lays out a simple set of questions that allow commanders to evaluate how their near- and long-term goals and understand the potentially negative, even hostile, media and community environments they may assume over the course of their senior leader careers.

The book concludes in Chapter 10 with a discussion of the commander's philosophy for the specific organization they will command. How do they identify and address the differences between their personal campaign from Chapter 9 with the culture and climate of the organization they will command? How can they prepare an actionable vision statement and set clear strategic direction, so to develop the organization that will fight and win honorably and lawfully, or provide honorable and lawful support to those who fight?

The study and associated findings in this book were eye-opening, allowing me to understand command in ways I never knew despite my military service. It also helped me understand what separated the best general-officer commanders from the rest of the pack. As nearly all War College graduates will find themselves working for or with general-officer commands, this book is for everyone, not just those who would take command in future. After all, responsible commanders not only develop their subordinates but, as I would learn, are developed by them.

I hope you find this book interesting and helpful.

Tom Galvin

Part One:

On Responsible Command

CHAPTER 1. THE ROOTS OF RESPONSIBLE COMMAND

Tom Galvin

It is the design [of the U.S. Army War College] that the best men shall be graded up to the post-graduate course of the war college, there to study and confer upon the great problems of national defense, of military science, and of **responsible command**. [2]

The above quote is one of the most often-cited from U.S. Army War College lore. It was an important point in Elihu Root's direction for the College's establishment. However, the phrase *responsible command* does not appear elsewhere in the speech and is left undefined.

This definitional gap means that while the term responsible command has been around for a long time, its meaning has evolved. In some instances, the *responsible* in responsible command is taken as a substitute for *good*, *effective*, or *efficient*. Commanders who completed a successful command tour were, or supposedly were, responsible commanders (implying that not having been responsible would have gotten them fired).

But responsible command does have a specific meaning, and it is rooted in the laws of land warfare and the emerging slate of international agreements defining them around the turn of the 20th century. Responsible command constituted a precondition for a military force to be considered a lawful combatant, with the expectation of acting lawfully in combat. In this chapter, I will show how this may differ from the commonly held view about command. This provides the basis for the study described in Part Two of this Primer.

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[2] *Ceremonies at the Laying of the Corner Stone of the Army War College Building at Washington Barracks with the Addresses and Invocation Delivered on the Occasion* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1903), 11, https://ia600205.us.archive.org/29/items/ceremonieslaying00unit/ceremonieslaying00unit .pdf, 11. Emphasis added.

Conflating Command with Leadership

When one thinks of *command* and *commanders*, what comes to mind first? Most likely exceptional individuals whose capabilities to lead in combat made lasting impacts in the ongoing war and the peace that followed. The names springing to mind could be a *who's-who* of military prowess and achievement – from the great campaigners of Alexander the Great and Napoleon to outstanding tacticians like George Patton.[3] One could easily assemble a list of positive qualities and attributes they exhibited – a strong intellect, boundless energy, battlefield awareness, and so on.[4] If one were to study those attributes, it would seem straightforward to develop today's officers into commanders of equal capability, right?

Unfortunately, this is not so simple. First, the positive qualities expressed above can be applied to any leader. Since 1998, with the publication of the first *Strategic Leadership Primer*,[5] the U.S. military places significant emphasis on developing the right skills and competencies in its senior leaders for service in service, joint, or Defense-level organizations. The skills and competencies listed in the *Primer* and the three editions since are applicable to any senior leader regardless of position. The message has been that being a leader is sufficient for being a successful commander.

Intuitively, this is not true, but the fixation on brand-name individuals could be taking leaders and professional military education down the wrong path. For example, research has repeated shown that many people conflate confidence with competence. Thus, those viewed as having leadership 'potential' and being competitive for command positions are more likely to

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[3] Consider, for example, popular lists of great military leaders, such as Brian Sobel with Jerry D. Morelock, "Top 100 Greatest Generals of All Time," HistoryNet, retrieved February 10, 2020, https://www.historynet.com/top-100-greatest-generals-of-all-time.htm that prominently display Napoleon despite the controversy surrounding his legacy, such as explained in Brian Eads, "Why Napoleon's Still a Problem in France," Newsweek, May 8, 2014, https://www.newsweek.com/2014/05/16/why-napoleons-still-problem-france-250223.html.

[4] Montogomery C. Meigs, "Generalship: Qualities, instincts, and character." *Parameters* 31, no. 2 (2001): 4.

[5] Roderick R. Magee II, *Strategic Leadership Primer* (Carlisle, PA: U.S. Army War College, 1998). Now known as the "1st Edition." Subsequent editions dated 2004, 2010, 2018.

exhibit narcissistic or self-centered behaviors.[6] Certainly not a formula for success as a commander today.

Also, perceptions of competence are also influenced by context. Are Alexander, Napoleon, and George Patton the true exemplars of command? Alexander developed a penchant for acting as a deity and ordered the killing of his own generals who developed a desire to assassinate their young emperor.[7] Napoleon was a great tactician but less so as a diplomat or statesman, and these ultimately contributed to his rapid downfall after conquering much of Europe.[8] And of course, there are those who today would view Patton as a toxic leader and ill-suited for command,[9] citing noxious episodes such as his infamous slapping of a hospitalized soldiers as evidence.[10]

Our understanding of command is also influenced by context. People perceive that victors on the battlefield are better commanders than the losers, in part because victors tend to have greater influence over how the story of the war is told[11] (but not always[12]). Naturally, this is not a proper measuring stick as many effective commanders suffered defeats, such as Robert E. Lee in Gettysburg.[13] If context does indeed matter, the unique duties and responsibilities associated with command suggest that some good leaders would not perform well as commanders and vice versa.

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[6] Tomas Chamorro-Premuzic, "Why do so many incompetent men become leaders?" *Harvard Business Review Online*, August 22, 2013, https://Hbr.org/2013/08/why-do-so-many-incompetent-men.

[7] "Alexander the Great," History.com, August 23, 2019, https://www.history.com/topics/ancient-history/alexander-the-great.

[8] Akhilesh Pillalamarri, "Waterloo & Beyond: 5 Mistakes That Doomed Napoleon," *National Interest*, June 14, 2015, https://nationalinterest.org/feature/waterloo-beyond-5-mistakes-doomed-napoleon-13109.

[9] Michael Piellusch, "Toxic Leadership or Tough Love: Does the U.S. Military Know the Difference?" WAR ROOM, August 25, 2017, https://warroom.armywarcollege.edu/articles/toxic-leadership-tough-love-u-s-military-know-difference/.

[10] Joseph Couch, "The Day Gen. Patton Slapped a Soldier," Washington Post, June 3, 1979, https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/opinions/1979/06/03/the-day-gen-patton-slapped-a-soldier/0603b5fd-e99b-49c6-9235-065eacd57a3f/?utm_term=.c017160a3036.

[11] Matthew Phelan, "The History Is Written by the Victors," Slate, November 26, 2019, https://slate.com/culture/2019/11/history-is-written-by-the-victors-quote-origin.html.

[12] Sabrina Tavernese, "When History's Losers Write the Story," New York Times, September 15, 2017, https://www.nytimes.com/2017/09/15/sunday-review/civil-war-statues-losers.html.

[13] Tavernese, "When History's Losers."

This seems intuitive enough, but the question is why? That command is an elevated leadership form of leadership does not seem satisfying. In other words, one takes the general responsibilities of leaders and increases the scope, adds the requisite formal authorities solely afforded to commanders, and conducts the commensurate training for a seasoned leader to expand their existing skills and knowledge to fill the gap, and one could theoretically allow any senior leader to command. This, in effect, aligns with contemporary approaches to command preparation, where a short period of dedicated training or education (e.g., a mandatory course) is deemed sufficient to transition a senior officer into the command role.[14]

As the study in Part Two will show, there are strongly held views that command is qualitatively different from leadership. Command is therefore not something that officers can move in and out of easily or quickly, but that the skills and knowledge required to serve in command are special and perishable. The requirements to prepare soldiers to fight and die honorably in combat required something much more than ramping up one's leadership acumen. But many of the terms used to describe success in command sound similar to what is expected of leaders in general – selflessness, setting the example, caring for soldiers, instilling discipline and resilience, among others. As stated in the Preface, these represented powerful myths that senior commanders passed on to their subordinate commanders for decades. Was this a self-fulfilling prophesy or was there something to these myths?

From the Laws of Land Warfare …

The concept of the lawful conduct of war is as old as the nation. "The law of war is part of who we are," wrote DoD General Counsel Stephen Preston in the Foreword to the 2019 edition of the DoD Law of War Manual.[15] The specific reference

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[14] Iftikhar Ahmed Khan, "Command, Leadership or Management? An Enigmatic Triad," MBA Depot, June 16, 2014, https://www.mbadepot.com/command-leadership-or-management-an-enigmatic-triad/.

[15] Office of General Counsel, *Department of Defense Law of War Manual*, updated version (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Defense, December 2016), ii, https://dod.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/DoD%20Law%20of%20War%20Man

to *responsible command* in Elihu Root's charge to the Army War College is aligned with what was written in the 1899 Hague Convention, Article 43, which reads in full:

> *The authority of the legitimate power having actually passed into the hands of the occupant, the latter shall take all steps in his power to re-establish and insure, as far as possible, public order and safety, while respecting, unless absolutely prevented, the laws in force in the country.*[16]

Responsible command is the 'legitimate power' referenced, in which the occupant, or soldier occupying a foreign land, would act within the norms established in the convention and would therefore be a *privileged belligerent.*[17] This was subsequently repeated in the 1907 Hague Convention[18] and other land warfare treaties that followed, and later summarized as a doctrine of responsible command that defined the character of command responsibility relevant for conducting lawful warfare:

> *Operating under responsible command is an essential requirement to qualify as a lawful combatant and is also central to the criminal accountability doctrine of command responsibility. This reveals the indelible link between the role of the commander and the effective implementation of the law of armed conflict.*[19]

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ual%20-%20June%202015%20Updated%20Dec%202016.pdf?ver=2016-12-13-172036-190. Hereafter *DoD Law of War Manual.*

[16] Convention (II) with Respect to the Laws and Customs of War on Land and its annex: Regulations concerning the Laws and Customs of War on Land, 29 July 1899, https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/applic/ihl/ihl.nsf/Article.xsp?action=openDocument&documentId=7194 AF23A72A3BA5C12563CD00515F47.

[17] Geoffrey S. Corn, "Contemplating the True Nature of the Notion of 'Responsibility' in Responsible Command," *International Review of the Red Cross* 96 (2014), https://international-review.icrc.org/sites/default/files/irrc-895_896-corn.pdf.

[18] Convention (IV) respecting the Laws and Customs of War on Land and its annex: Regulations concerning the Laws and Customs of War on Land, 18 October 1907, https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/applic/ihl/ihl.nsf/Treaty.xsp?action=openDocument&documentId=4D4 7F92DF3966A7EC12563CD002D6788.

[19] Geoffrey S. Corn, "Contemplating the Meaning of 'Responsibility' in Responsible Command," *SSRN.com*, January 22, 2015, https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2546594.

Because the term is rooted in military law, the capabilities to exercise responsible command appear as a long and exhaustive set of legal requirements. The aforementioned Law of War Manual, for example, contains over 1200 pages and is very detailed. It includes the DoD's conceptions of military necessity, humanity, proportionality, distinction, and honor. It is under *honor* that the term responsible command first appears in paragraph 2.6.3.2:

> *Honor also reflects the premise that military forces area common class of professionals who have undertaken to comport themselves honorably. Honor thus animates the rules that determine who qualifies for privileges of combatant status. For example, an armed group must, inter alia, be organized under a responsible command and conduct its operations in accordance with the law of war in order for its members to be entitled to [Prisoner of War] status during international armed conflict.[20]*

Other references in the Manual elaborate on the specific legal requirements of responsible commanders, including taking the necessary precautions to protect civilians,[21] policies and procedures to ensure proportionality of potential military actions,[22] properly oversee prisoner-of-war camps to ensure their humane treatment,[23] and assess military necessity of seizing and destroying enemy property,[24] among others.

The most important provision is the description of the commander who exercises responsible command in paragraph 4.6.3, reproduced below in full:

> *The armed group must be commanded by a person responsible for his or her subordinates; the armed group must have a commander with effective authority over the armed group. This requirement helps ensure that the armed group has sufficient discipline and organization to conduct its operations in accordance with the law of war.*

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[20] *DoD Law of War Manual*, 102.
[21] *DoD Law of War Manual*, 194.
[22] *DoD Law of War Manual*, 248.
[23] *DoD Law of War Manual*, 600 (note 494).
[24] *DoD Law of War Manual*, 806.

The commander may derive his or her authority over the armed group by a regular or temporary commission from a State. However, a commander may derive his or her command from another position or authority. For example, the armed group may be formed informally and may have elected the commander as its leader. In practice, a State may provide members of the armed group with certificates or distinctive badges to show that they are officers, or military personnel responsible to higher authority, and not private persons acting on individual initiative.

The authority of the commander over his or her subordinates gives rise to a corresponding duty to ensure that the armed group's members conduct their operations in accordance with the law of war.[25]

For its part, the U.S. Army updated its own law of land warfare manual in 2019, mirroring many of the DoD provisions.[26] Given that it superseded a 1956 field manual, there was much to update including addressing joint warfare and incorporating treaties signed since that time.[27] While these may describe what responsible command looks like, they do not necessarily answer the difficult ethical questions that commanders and their national leaders will face. Is it best to win the war at all costs, at the risk of possibly losing the peace? When is it best to surrender when the war is potentially lost so to minimize human loss?

… to the Individual Soldier

But thus far, this chapter has focused solely on the perspective of the leadership who must provide responsible command. What does this mean to the led, the individual soldier?

While all soldiers will receive training on ethics and laws of land warfare at some point in garrison, pre-deployment, or major

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[25] *DoD Law of War Manual*, 121.

[26] U.S. Department of the Army, *The Commander's Handbook on the Law of Land Warfare*, Field Manual 6-27 (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Army, 2019 version), '1-8' & '6-14', https://armypubs.army.mil/epubs/DR_pubs/DR_a/pdf/web/ARN19354_FM%206-27%20_C1_FINAL_WEB_v2.pdf.

[27] Joseph Lacden, "Army update Law of Land Warfare Doctrine to Increase Guidance, Clarity," U.S. Army Website, January 27, 2020, https://www.army.mil/article/231892/army_updates_law_of_land_warfare_doctrine_to_increase_guidance_clarity.

combat training event environments, not all will capture its meaning. The training is not enough to prepare soldiers to answer the tough questions in combat. *What is the right and wrong thing to do when me or my buddy is under fire? What am I <u>allowed</u> to do and what am I <u>forbidden</u> from doing, and under what circumstances? When I see a fellow soldier do something wrong, what happens if I report it?* These are the sorts of questions that soldiers should readily be able to answer, as a result of the climate and culture instilled by responsible command. Such a climate fosters moral clarity in the minds of soldiers to do the right thing at all times, knowing that all within the command are confident in each others' willingness to fight lawfully.

But as the study in Part Two shows, responsible command applies to far more than just combat situations. Other questions that soldiers ask are for the enterprise to answer, in effect, to relieve commanders of undue burdens. *When is the next meal coming, or the fuel truck, or repair parts? What will we do with all these prisoners of war, and with what? What unit or capability has my back as I move forward? Who's taking care of my family?* And perhaps the most vexing question of all: *Are my leaders committed to victory?* In essence, responsible command is as applicable to readiness as it is to operations and sustainment. The inverse is therefore also true. Just as ruthless commanders treating enemies as subhuman can encourage their soldiers to commit atrocities, so too can atrocities occur when disengaged enterprise leaders sends forth unprepared and unsustained forces, leaving them to fend for themselves.

The case study of Matthew Ridgway in the next chapter will demonstrate this. His actions while Chief of Staff of the Army reflect how one serving outside a command position influences enterprise decisions that ultimately impact the environment within which soldiers will be asked to fight lawfully.

Chapter 2. Case Study: General Matthew Ridgway And Responsible Dissent

Con Crane

"It is easy to gamble with other people's money, and sometimes easier still with other men's lives, particularly when your own is in no great danger. You remember the commanders' conference prior to one of the big offensives of World War I, when a corps commander — whose command post was miles behind the front — spoke out during a lull in the meeting, saying: "I'd give 10,000 men to take that hill And a liaison officer from a frontline infantry unit remarked to a brother officer standing beside him in the back of the room: 'Generous, isn't he?'

The military services deal harshly, as they should, with failure to carry out orders in battle. The commander present on the scene is entitled to full, instant, and enthusiastic execution by subordinates. Yet when faced with different situation from those anticipated, as well as in the transition from plans to orders, there sometimes comes the challenge to one's conscience, the compelling urge to oppose foolhardy operations before it is too late, before the orders are issued and lives are needlessly thrown away."

Matthew B. Ridgway, "Leadership," Military Review (October 1966), 44.[28]

No general officer in American history was more competent at every level of command than Matthew B. Ridgway. On D-Day, he jumped into Normandy with his 82nd Airborne Division, which then stayed around to serve as the "fire brigade" to help preserve the whole US beachhead during the critical first weeks of the invasion. During the Battle of the Bulge he commanded the XVIIIth Airborne Corps that sent troops to save Bastogne, grew to

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[28] Also cited in U.S. Department of the Army, *Army Leadership*, Army Doctrinal Reference Publication 6-22 (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Army, August 2012), '11-4'.

over five divisions in size, and secured the north shoulder of the German penetration to include key positions at St. Vith and Elsenborn Ridge. In 1951, his transformational leadership of a defeated Eighth US Army in Korea is one of the most remarkable command performances in military history. He later replaced Douglas MacArthur as commander of Far East Command, served as Supreme Allied Commander Europe, and eventually became Army Chief of Staff in 1953.

In an address to the Army War College in 1966 that was eventually turned into a *Military Review* article, the retired general expounded upon his philosophy of leadership and command. He emphasized the three C's of *character*, *courage*, and *competence.* His talk is filled with valuable insights about the burdens of command. Ridgway conducted the last significant relief of American field commanders as part of his restructuring of Eighth Army in 1951, and offers three points to consider before making such a drastic move: "Is your decision based on personal knowledge and observation or on secondhand information? What will the effect be on the command concerned? …. And finally, have you a better man available?"[29]

The most provocative section of his address deals with the topic of **Opposition to Orders**. He states "It has long seemed to me that the hard decisions are not the ones you make in the heat of battle. Far harder to make are those involved in speaking your mind about some harebrained scheme which proposes to commit troops to action under conditions where failure seems almost certain, and the only results will be the needless sacrifice of priceless lives." He described two tactical situations in Italy where he felt compelled to protest "harebrained schemes." One was a proposed drop of his 82nd Division on Rome to support the landings at Anzio. Ridgway took his complaints all the way up to the Theater Commander. His view of dissent in such critical cases was that it did not end just because a decision had been made. While dutifully carrying out all his orders, he continued his fight right up until he was loading on the aircraft to make the drop. At

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[29] Matthew B. Ridgway, "Leadership," *Military Review* (October 1966): 40-49, 47.

the last minute, the mission was cancelled and the division was saved from what would have been certain annihilation.[30]

In his 1956 memoirs, Ridgway states that the Rome drop was one of two actions contributing to the sentiment that "when the day comes to meet my Maker and account for my actions, the thing I would be most humbly proud of was the fact that I fought against, and perhaps contributed to preventing, the carrying out of some harebrained tactical schemes that would have cost the lives of thousands of men."[31] The second was at a much higher level of war, a proposal for American intervention in Indo-China in 1954, and it reveals much about Ridgway's views about responsible command at the most senior heights. Though stakes are greater, the basic duty to avoid the useless waste of blood remains at the core of his command philosophy.

RIDGWAY AS ARMY CHIEF OF STAFF

Ridgway's style of dissent made his two-year term as Chief of Staff very contentious. The Army Organization Act of 1950 and resulting service regulations eliminated all references to a "command" role for the CSA in deference to civilian authorities, though he was still directed to "supervise the operations of the Department of the Army and the Army."[32] Ridgway took those duties very seriously, both in regard to his responsibilities to the service and the nation. After retirement, he told the Saturday Evening Post that when he arrived in Washington, he was shocked to find "that no matter how strongly my views might differ from higher authority it was not expected that I would let my nonconcurrence publically be known." That did not mean he was going to run to the press, but he again emphasized his right to point out to superiors missions that seemed too difficult or dangerous. "That the authority to issue such orders lay with the SecDef [and President] I did not disagree with, but the responsibility for such actions, I felt, must also be theirs." Consequently he always submitted his dissent in writing.

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[30] Ridgway, "Leadership," 44-46.

[31] Matthew B. Ridgway and Harold H. Martin, *Soldier: The Memoirs of Matthew B. Ridgway* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1956), 278.

[32] James E. Hewes, Jr., *Special Studies: From Root to McNamara – Army Organization and Administration* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, 1975), 214.

"Throughout my tour there was never any lack of willingness on the part of DoD to exercise full authority. Frequently though, this was not accompanied by an equal willingness to assume full responsibility for actions taken."[33] For Ridgway, both ingredients were necessary for responsible command.

Ridgway declared that if his "deep convictions" forced him to take an opposite view to his civilian superiors, he would not change his mind until "purely military considerations proved me wrong," even if such opinions were deemed "politically detrimental to the administration." He expected civilian leaders to respect the integrity and intellectual honesty of the officer corps, and believed "Any effort to force unanimity of view, to compel adherence to some politico-military 'party line' against the honestly expressed views of responsible officers is a pernicious practice which jeopardizes rather than protects the integrity of the military profession." Political leaders could expect "loyal and diligent execution of their decisions" from their military subordinates, "but under no circumstances, regardless of pressures from whatever source or motive, should the professional military man yield, or compromise his judgment for other than convincing military reasons."[34]

Opposing Eisenhower's "New Look"

Ridgway's primary disagreement with the administration centered around President Eisenhower's New Look defense policies which put additional reliance on the nuclear capabilities of air and sea forces while reducing the Army and Marines. He saw this approach as a grave risk for national defense. When asked his opinion in Congressional testimony, Ridgway would state that he would loyally execute the budget he was given to achieve, but he felt free to express his disagreements with the overall policy. He was nonplussed by President Eisenhower's statement in his 1954 State of the Union address that his defense program for 1955 was "unanimously recommended" by the Joint

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[33]Ridgway's post retirement thoughts are presented in a series of articles in the *Saturday Evening Post* written with Harold R. Martin that are entitled "My Battles in War in Peace." On this topic, the first is in the January 21, 1956 edition, the second in the edition of January 28, 1956.

[34] Ridgway, "My Battles."

Chiefs of Staff. Ridgway certainly did not endorse it, and saw such actions as "a deliberate effort to soothe and lull the public by placing responsibility where it did not rest, by conveying the false impression that there was unanimous agreement between the civilian authorities and their military advisers on the form and shape the military establishment would take."[35]

Eisenhower gave Admiral Arthur Radford, chairman of the JCS, responsibility for implementing New Look policies, and he rankled Ridgway with the often imperious way the chairman tried to enforce the New Look. By 1954 Ridgway did not trust him, and this fractured relationship would have significant influence on the course of JCS response to French pleas for assistance in Indo-China. When a French delegation arrived in Washington in March, the main Viet Minh offensive against Dien Bien Phu had begun. Radford held a barbecue in his backyard attended by his French counterpart, General Ely, along with Vice President Nixon, Allen Dulles from the CIA, and Ridgway. Late in the gathering Radford tried to sum up discussions with the French by asking if they just needed more air power for success. Ridgway immediately jumped in to challenge that position. He had a very frustrating experience in Korea in 1951 trying unsuccessfully to win the war or influence negotiations primarily with air attacks, and declared "The experience of Korea, where we had complete domination of the air and a far more powerful air force, afforded no basis for thinking that some additional air power was going to bring decisive results on the ground."[36] He immediately realized that a much larger military commitment would be required to save the beleaguered garrison and the French in Indochina.

That is not all Ridgway did. When Radford convened the JCS a week later to present his proposal to send air support to the French, he found all the chiefs arrayed against him. Besides organizing that resistance, Ridgway had his capable G-3, Major General James Gavin, dispatch a team to Southeast Asia to evaluate the situation on the ground and logistical requirements. As was his habit, Ridgway prepared a detailed written

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[35] Ridgway, *Soldier,* 288-289.
[36] Matthew B. Ridgway, Memorandum of Conversation at Home of Admiral Radford, March 22, 1954, in *The Papers of Matthew B. Ridgway*, US Army Heritage and Education Center, Carlisle, Pennsylvania (Hereafter *Ridgway Papers*).

explanation of his differences with Radford. The Army chief of staff agreed that keeping Indo-China out of the Communist orbit was of grave concern for the United States. However, he did not think the nation could or should afford to pursue such a course alone, and even a multi-national effort would have difficulty achieving any success without somehow destroying or neutralizing the source of Viet Minh military power in Communist China. That would require a dangerous strategic diversion of US military capability to a non-decisive theater that would provide an opportunity for exploitation by both Communist China and the Soviet Union.

His proposal was to give an ultimatum to the Chinese to cease supporting the Viet Minh, but if that failed and saving Indo-China remained a vital interest, then the United States would need to mobilize and maximize support from its allies for the necessary military requirements that would be far beyond a bit of airpower. His opinion was eventually submitted to the Secretary of Defense. Army estimates of requirements increased even more after Gavin's team returned, describing the woeful conditions in the theater. They concluded that any commitment of air assets would soon require strong augmenting ground forces, with all kinds of strategic spillover around the world. Eventually the summary of what would be required to really preserve Indo-China became characterized as "ten divisions and ten years," and then only without Chinese intervention. [37]

In the meantime, Ridgway worked to keep a united front against Radford and monitor increasingly desperate pleas from the French. He used his connections from his days as SACEUR to keep abreast of traffic coming thru the embassies in France. He was especially concerned about General Nathan Twining, USAF chief, and plans for Operation VULTURE, the aerial assault to save the French. Ridgway cooperated with Senator Richard Russell, head of the Senate Armed Services Committee, who also

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[37] Arthur W. Radford, Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff to Secretary of Defense, March 31, 1954, Indo-China Situation (Washington, DC: March 31, 1954), *Ridgway Papers*; 6 April 1954, Matthew B. Ridgway, Chief of Staff of the U.S. Army to Joint Chiefs of Staff, undated, Indo-China (Washington, DC: undated), *Ridgway Papers*; James M. Gavin, Major General to Chief of Staff of the U.S. Army, undated, Military Consequences of Various Courses of Action With Respect to Application of U.S. Military Forces in Indochina, *Ridgway Papers*.

was strongly against any unilateral action in Indo-China. In May, Dien Bien Phu fell, and when Ely came back to Washington for another plea in June, Ridgway, still not trusting Radford, got the other chiefs to support prohibiting the Admiral from meeting with Ely by himself.[38]

Despite his success within the JCS, Ridgway knew that the final decision about intervention would be made by the President, so he maneuvered to get his opinion beyond DoD. He approached Army members of the National Security Council to propose a briefing on Gavin's findings, and suggested that the President also attend. That session occurred in June, and an article soon appeared in *US News & World Report* describing "What Ridgway Told Ike." The presentation emphasized the logistical difficulties in the distant and austere theater, along with the manpower and mobilization requirements to be successful there. The massive resulting increase in the defense budget was also covered. The article declared the operation would be "tougher than Korea." The material was probably given to the press by Eisenhower's staff. By then the President had decided not to provide more military aid to the French, and revealing the stark realities of war in Indo-China from a highly respected combat leader like Ridgway would have made that decision more palatable to an anti-Communist public.[39]

Aftermath

How much Ridgway actually influenced the final decision is unclear, but his open dissenting style did not endear him to a President who expected public loyalty. As a result, Ridgway's tenure was not renewed in 1955 and he was replaced by another airborne veteran, General Maxwell Taylor. The new CSA also did not like the New Look, but rather than exhibit open dissent himself, he appeared to be supportive in public while fostering a clandestine cell of colonels in the Army G-3 who worked to

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[38] Matthew B. Ridgway, Memorandum for Record, April 28, 1954, *Ridgway Papers*; Matthew B. Ridgway, Chief of Staff of the U.S. Army to Joint Chiefs of Staff, June 7, 1954, Projected Conversations Here with General Ely, French Army, *Ridgway Papers*; Conrad C. Crane, *American Airpower Strategy in Korea, 1950-1953,* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2000), 179-180.

[39] Matthew B. Ridgway, Memorandum for Record, May 17, 1954, *Ridgway Papers*; "What Ridgway Told Ike," *U.S. News & World Report*, June 25, 1954, 30-32.

undermine the program with press leaks and critical articles. When they were discovered Taylor was able to disavow all knowledge and avoid blame, while still rewarding the officers with plum follow-on assignments. As a result, he was able to keep his position within inner decision-making circles.[40]

Ridgway's style of responsible command might have prevented disasters in Rome in 1943 and Indo-China in 1954, but when another president faced similar challenges in Vietnam a decade later, the only way Matthew Ridgway could try to affect the decision-making process was by writing a memoir about Korea warning about the perils of optimistic thinking concerning the utility of military force in Southeast Asia.[41] Instead, the respected advisor with the president's ear was Maxwell Taylor, whose advice would help propel the United States into the very quagmire Ridgway and Gavin had foreseen.[42]

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[40] David T. Fautua, "The Inconsonant Culture: Ridgway, Taylor and the Proper Role in Civil-Military Relations," paper presented at the Conference of Army Historians, June 19, 1996.

[41] Matthew B. Ridgway, *The Korean War* (New York: Doubleday, 1967).

[42] For thorough coverage of Taylor's key role encouraging escalation in Vietnam, see George C. Herring, *America's Longest War: The United States and Vietnam 1950-1975* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1986).

Part Two:

A Study on Command Responsibility and Its Implications

Chapter 3. Overview of the Study

Tom Galvin

Preliminary discussions on the project pointed to the need for study into the meaning and functions of responsible command of a military organization as different from ordinary conceptions of good leadership or management. To that end, the author examined available oral histories from the Army Heritage and Education Center. The histories covered the backgrounds and experiences of senior leaders (mostly senior general officers) who served in high-level commands or equivalent positions. The author then conducted several supplemental interviews for clarification and expansion of the preliminary findings.

In addition to reinforcing previously established qualities of good leadership and management, it identified five unique aspects of command. These were: (1) the central roles of commanders in establishing command and control relationships, (2) the functions of commanders being the primary focal points (i.e., customers) of the defense enterprise, (3) the vital role of commanders setting climates for lawful action, (4) the developmental need for commanders to continuously navigate paradoxical tensions, and (5) that commanders must serve as the figurative needless of the moral compass of their organizations.

Introduction

As explained in Chapter 1, there has not been a systematic study done to elaborate on the construct of *responsible command* beyond its legal foundation. Laws, policies, and doctrine all point to the critical importance of responsible command to ensuring an armed force acts lawfully in combat, but far more has been written about what differentiates lawful from unlawful actions than, for example, describing what conditions must be set in an organization for it to operate lawfully.

Moreover, there is the myth or ethos of command espoused by some senior leaders that suggests command is itself a critical domain of skills and knowledge distinct from other forms of leadership. Such skills and knowledge of command are presumed to be perishable. The suggestion is that officers must acquire and

sustain command positions on a continuous basis lest they lose currency, and that one cannot so easily move from command to non-command positions and back. For the present study, the concern is the impact of insufficiently valuing command experience on the capabilities of the commander and the lawful climate built in the unit. Therefore, the two research questions were:

a. To what extent does responsible command differ (or extend beyond) from good leadership, using the U.S. Army War College's *Strategic Leadership Primer*[43] as a base?

b. Are there particular targeted development needs of potential commanders at the senior levels not presently addressed in the *Strategic Leadership Primer*?

METHOD

The study was conducted in two phases. First, the author conducted a qualitative document review of 13 oral histories provided by the Army Heritage and Education Center. Emphasis was placed on portions of the text discussing matters specific to the environment of command or skills leveraged while in command. The second phase included interviews with officers and sergeants major to elaborate on the results and contextualize them for the contemporary era.

The oral history review required multiple passes on each document, first to identify passages of significance related to the research questions. This was necessary as the histories included stories of the entire life history of most subjects (some were limited to exit interviews of their final few years) and included large sections irrelevant to the research question.

The histories mainly comprised broad stories and experiences over long periods of time, rather than detailed retellings of specific actions. Therefore, the author chose coding methods most applicable to analyzing stories and vignettes. *Process coding* (Saldana, 2014: 96-100) is action-oriented, and therefore expresses

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[43] Tom Galvin and Dale E. Watson (Eds.), *Strategic Leadership: Primer for Senior Leaders*, 4th ed. (Carlisle, PA: School of Strategic Landpower, 2019).

the text as a series of actions and decisions. This puts the text in terms of what the subjects did rather than what they say. Thus, the majority of codes are written as gerunds (except for conflicts and obstacles reflecting conditions rather than the actions of others).

Meanwhile, *dramaturgical coding* identifies story elements according to the first-person perspective of the subject, and is used for studying intrapersonal and interpersonal elements of an experience. Saldana (2014: 123-127) identifies categories of codes about how the individual relates to the experiences. The author employed the following categories of codes as they were most relevant and useful for analysis.

- Objectives or motives within each story. These included first-person and third-person stories from the perspective of the subject.

- Conflicts or obstacles. These were challenges in the environment or faced by the subject, again either first-person or third-person

- Tactics and strategies. These included qualities or actions of the individual that help overcome challenges, leverage opportunities, or otherwise are worthy of emulation

- Attitudes toward the experience and emotions. These included personal opinions and orientations, more about who the subject is and how the subject felt rather than what the subject did.

- Additional findings were identified when subjects discussed the potential developmental needs of new generations of senior commanders. This was rare, however.

The resulting codes were then thematically analyzed to generate the findings. The Phase Two interviews were conducted using the findings as a start point of conversation. Additional findings from the interviews were integrated into the outcomes of the study as presented in this chapter.

Oral History Subjects

Subjects were chosen from among the oral histories on file within the Army Heritage and Education Center. The primary criteria were: (1) the investigator had no prior direct association with the subject, such as serving in the role of subordinate, (2) subjects served in command roles at least once at the general officer level, or civilian equivalent, or as a senior enlisted leader under a general officer, (3) subjects should come from diverse backgrounds including combat, combat support, and combat service support if possible, (4) subjects should be demographically diverse (was successful in terms of racial minorities but there were no female subjects available), and (5) the histories were released for academic use. A condition of their use was that the subjects had to be anonymized, as authorities for use in academic studies did not equate to authorities to quote any subject.

A – Retired as 3-star. White. Outbrief -- discussed only Army command at the 3-star level. Did not include full history.

B – Retired as 4-star. White. Full history – culminating as combatant commander, overseeing combined joint forces in wartime operations. Commanded at all levels.

C – Retired as 4-star. White. Full history – culminating as service chief. Commanded at all levels.

D – Retired as 4-star. White. Outbrief – discussed primarily command at service component and operational combined-joint levels (especially latter).

E – Retired as 4-star. White. Full history – culminating as commander of two major service commands. Commanded at all levels.

F – Retired as 3-star. African-American. Full history – culminating as commander of a branch center and school. Commanded signal units. Included prior enlisted time.

G – Retired as 4-star. Eastern European. Full history – command through corps, culminating as CJCS.

H – Retired as 4-star. White. Full history – culminating in command of a combined-joint force in peacetime operations. Also included school commandant and division and corps commands.

I – Retired as 3-star. White. Full history -- culminating in command of a combined force during operations. Included commands at brigade and division.

J – Retired as 4-star. Middle Eastern. Outbrief – discussed primarily combined and combatant command experiences. Did not include full history.

K – Senior Enlisted Leader. White. Outbrief – discussed primarily impressions and thoughts on a 37-year career. Little details on history and experiences.

L – Civilian, former USG Agency director, left military service as Army Reserve colonel. White. Full history – culminating as Director of the VA. Included service as Chairman of a political party.

M – Retired as 2-star. African-American. Full history – culminating as commander of a branch center and school.

Follow-On Interviews

The follow-on interviews were targeted to allow additional perspectives, mainly from noncommissioned officers (NCOs). The interviewees received a summary of the overall findings from the histories and underwent structured questioning to elaborate on or critique the themes. The NCOs also added their personal experiences working with senior level commanders. The following were the participants in this phase:

N1 – Retired as 3-star. White. Held several commands as a general officer. Career culminated as a principal staff officer on the Army Staff.

N2 – Active duty command sergeant major. White. About to retire. Military career will culminate with an assignment as senior enlisted leader to a 2-star command.

N3 – Retired as command sergeant major in the National Guard. White. Military career culminated with assignment as a

National Guard command sergeant major reporting directly to a state Adjutant General.

N4 – Retired as command sergeant major in the active component. African-American female. Military career culminated with service as the senior enlisted leader to an Army 3-star.

N5 – Retired as command sergeant major in the reserve component. White. Military career included service as senior enlisted leader for a 3-star command and under an assistant secretary of the Army.

Results

In the first phase, the oral histories produced four themes that emerged from stories in at least six of the histories with several providing multiple discrete examples. It is worth noting that the themes were consistent between stories involving named commanders and others acting in the capacity as top executive in an organization (e.g., civilian agency director, service chief or Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff). The interviews mainly provided additional supporting evidence for the four themes while adding a fifth theme. The themes are presented here and elaborated upon in subsequent papers in this series.

Theme 1. Commanders Must Establish Clear Command & Control and Strategic Direction

The most common theme among the histories was the critical importance of the commander in establishing command and control relationships, including advocacy for rules of engagement and other formal enablers and constraints from the national level. In essence, commanders alone are postured to establish the framework upon which their organization can act lawfully. Other senior leaders may influence command and control decisions but cannot authoritatively act in this arena.

Theme 2. Commanders Must Be the Focal Points of the Defense Enterprise

Another common theme was the special role that commanders perform as leaders within the enterprise. This gets into staff-line relationships as defined in organization theory,

between parts of the organization chartered with performing the core mission of the organization ("line") and parts that play a supporting or peripheral role ("staff"). The notion of appropriate staff-line organizational relationships is a feature of the organizational development literature. The type of organization determines how best to draw the line. Military organizations clearly favor having staff elements in a strictly supporting/enabling role, and normally avoid becoming involved in line functions.

As the figurehead and chief executive of the organization, commanders are postured to serve as a sort of customer of the enterprise. They are singularly responsible for establishing requirements for the enterprise to fill and to distribute the resources received to the organization. Although they routinely delegate this function to other leaders in the organization, the commander has ultimately authority over the business rules the organization uses.

Theme 3. Commanders Must Establish Climates for Lawful Action

The oral histories and interviews both expressed command climates in terms of discipline, which is not surprising. However, the stories reflected strong differences between conceptions of toxic leadership and what others have described as "tough love." Soldier satisfaction is not a true indicator of command climates that encourage lawful action, rather the opposite is closer to true. Strong commanders appear better at differentiating risk reduction from risk aversion before-the-fact, exercise discipline without resorting to authoritarianism necessarily, establish and enforce consistency of climates between peacetime and war, and show caring for soldiers through personal action and intervention.

This theme is interrelated with the previous two. On staff-line relationships, effective commanders genuinely place the soldiers first and in turn can be hard on their staffs and advisors whose sin may be little more than following the rules and regulations in place. To address the special needs of soldiers, commanders are uniquely postured to rearrange bureaucratic relationships that staff members are unable to change, at least without the top cover of their commander.

Theme 4. Commanders must Master Complexity

Commanders must be capable, willing, and comfortable navigating paradoxical tensions, and they alone must establish the path to clarity. This follows from organizational development literature that suggests paradox is an inherent part of large, complex organizations. Commanders who fail are among those who are uncomfortable with paradox or who are unable to deal with the resurgence of presumably resolved issues. Their organizations risk becoming confused or passive, effectively waiting for guidance.

This represents a foundational skill that enables commanders to align with the first three themes. Commanders who develop this skill are more likely to excel in command at successive levels versus those who falter when addressing issues of C2, organizational structures & behavior, and climate.

Theme 5. Commanders Must Be the Needle of the Organization's Collective Moral Compass

In the oral histories, there was little that distinguished the operational aspects of climate from its moral aspects. But the interviewees made a clear distinction, particularly the NCOs who felt strongly that the moral dimension of climate was distinct from its ethics. The distinction was both in personal conduct, which is already emphasized in leader development, and the collective conduct of the senior leadership team or the "command team" (i.e., a commander and the senior enlisted advisor or command sergeant major). At junior levels, commanders could exemplify moral conduct individually because of their presence. At senior levels, the commander's presence was insufficient because of limited contact with the organization. The commander's representatives had to be fully trusted to personally conduct themselves as having the voice of the commander without the commander's authorities. The commander also had to take swift action against those whose actions, whether intentional or unintentional, upset that moral authority.

IMPLICATIONS

One implication is that senior level command is qualitatively different from unit-level command. The differences all relate to

the commander's capacity to deal with complexity, internally and externally, and align the organization with the environment. While the skills required to do so are consistent with those of any senior leader, the context differs significantly from serving as staff officers or other members of senior leadership teams. These particular skills are difficult to acquire and risk atrophy if not used, which is why several oral history subjects emphasized how officers operating very successfully in staff positions can make ineffective commanders.

A second implication is definitional, that command is qualitatively different from leadership or management beyond the establishment of formal authorities. Exercising command means serving as the number one in the organization, regardless whether it is a command or agency or other designation. Therefore, responsible command applies to top leaders of enterprise organizations just as it does operational units. The sense of command responsibility also transcends internal boundaries or stovepipes. The collective moral compass of one organization is networked with the moral compasses of others.

Chapter 4. On Command & Control and Strategic Direction

Tom Galvin

Theme 1. Commanders Must Establish Clear Command & Control and Strategic Direction*. Commanders alone are postured to establish the framework upon which their organization can act lawfully. Other senior leaders may influence command and control decisions but cannot authoritatively act in this arena.*

The most prevalent story among the oral histories reviewed were problems, challenges, and compelling success stories about the external context that manifested itself in command-specific ways – external mandates, strategic direction, and command and control (C2) relationships. Negative stories outnumbered the positive, with most regarding restrictions or prohibitions issued from higher authorities that commanders strongly disagreed with. The stories normally ended with commanders developing durable informal mechanisms to overcome them. However, some commanders found themselves in the positions of those higher authorities and lamented having to impose similarly uncomfortable restrictions over their own subordinates.

The commanders' own choices for establishing internal C2 and providing strategic direction reflect the commanders' own identities. While all leaders maintain and sustain networks of interpersonal relationships, C2 adds layers of formal authorities and situational responsibilities that extend these relationships across the entire organizational context. In the absence of other formal and informal cues, it defines how both commander and the organization conduct business—because or in spite of the authorities and responsibilities defined from above.

More than any other leadership skill or competency, the ability to forge and sustain C2 is unique among commanders. Deputy or interim/acting commanders are not able to do this as they lack the formal authority of command. Instead, when holding command positions temporarily, they may make minor

adjustments but are generally limited to sustaining C2 established by the incumbent.

Introduction

The first theme that emerged from the study can be characterized as how commanders operationalize and re-shape or work around the formal structures in their environment. W. Richard Scott (2014) defined formal structures of organizations as those that operate equivalently as laws or rules, compelling behaviors and actions of those subject to them.[44] Military culture, with its high regard for good order and discipline and its alignment with public-sector bureaucracy, views compliance with the rules as tantamount to professionalism. Norms and workarounds can be seen as aberrant or unethical (even immoral), if not explicitly illegal.[45]

Although member of military organizations are afforded some autonomy to get missions accomplished, they still operate within the boundaries of what is considered legitimate activity. At some level, military organizations need leaders postured to adjust or re-write the rules to some extent. Based on the study, only commanders can do this effectively.

This may seem counterintuitive given the emphasis placed on any senior leader having the responsibilities to innovate, lead change, push boundaries, and do whatever it takes to improve organizations. Failure to enact such improvement is tantamount to failure as a leader. But there is an important caveat – absent command authority, senior leaders do not have the full freedom to bend the rules as they see fit. They are constrained unless they have supervisors who underwrite any risks the organization potentially incurs. Evidence from the study showed that only commanders have the needed legitimacy to assess the risk so to underwrite it and therefore protect their subordinates. They are also the only ones who can assert the latitude to bend, break, or re-write those rules themselves.

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[44] W. Richard Scott, *Institutions and Organizations: Ideas, Interests, and Identities*, 4th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2014), 60-61.

[45] For example, the following is a common meme that junior officers might hear as a caution, "*Don't do ____ or you will go to jail.*"

Formal Tools of Command

Formal responsibilities of command, as expressed in Hartle (2004), include: (a) understanding and supporting political goals so to effectively coordinate policy and strategy, (b) choose the proper military objectives, (c) allocate and prioritize resources, (d) conduct war so to sustain domestic support, and (e) balance application of violence with the value of the political goal.[46] Each of these has an important moral component, which describes how these responsibilities *ought* to be fulfilled to ensure the lawful conduct of those serving under the commander.[47] These would include principles such as: (a) clear and common understanding between civilian leaders and their military commanders, (b) "sound planning" that ensures members of the commander understand the intent, and (c) the ability to deal with tensions and conflict.[48]

The emerging operational environment make adherence to these principles more difficult. During the late 2010s, for example, the U.S. Army developed a series of concepts on multi-domain operations that presumed future operations would include competition across all domains (e.g., land, sea, air, space, cyber) and that a range of factors such as technology, non-state actors, urbanization, and others would make future battlefields more complex.[49] Clear and common understanding in single-domain battles was already challenging enough. In multi-domain operating environments, the challenges are potentially many times greater.[50]

The professional and bureaucratic characters of militaries grew more complex over the 20th century and into the 21st. Thus, formal mechanisms to (at least ostensibly) aid the commander

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[46] Paul L. Miles, quoted in Anthony E. Hartle, *Moral Issues in Military Decision Making,* 2nd ed. Revised (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2004), 14. This quote is also found in Roger H. Nye, *The Challenge of Command* (Wayne, NJ: Avery, 1986), 31.

[47] Hartle, *Moral Issues,* 82.

[48] Gary Sheffield, "The Challenges of High Command in the Twentieth Century," in *The Challenges of High Command,* eds. Gary Sheffield and Geoffrey Till (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 8.

[49] For example, U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command, *Multi-Domain Battle: Evolution of Combined Arms for the 21st Century: 2025-2040* (Fort Eustis, VA: TRADOC, 2017), 5.

[50] For example, U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command, *The U.S. Army in Multi-Domain Operations 2028,* TRADOC Pamphlet 525-3-1 (Fort Eustis, VA: TRADOC, 2018), vi-xii.

have evolved and became more prominent. Three such tools were discussed among many of the study's participants, and the results show skepticism as to the US ability to employ these tools effectively. These were: (1) command and control (C2) relationships, (2) commander's strategic direction, and (3) rules of engagement. Each has a role in helping the commander fulfill both the responsibilities of command and adhere to its principles.

Each is also a *formal* structure that, on its face, is coercive for the commander when handed down by civilian leaders. Commanders must abide by C2 established by the nation as it provides the protocol upon which operations, particularly multinational, are to be conducted. The commander must follow the strategic direction of civilian leaders or be held accountable, no matter how vague or self-contradictory. And, the commander must abide by the rules of engagement, no matter how constraining. Yet, despite the formality, there is always wiggle room, a path to negotiation with civilian leaders or ways to normalize other avenues for getting the mission done without taking excessive risk against external mandates.

From the Histories

The oral histories were replete with examples of how commanders, and commanders alone, had to navigate difficult tensions between the letter and spirit of C2, external mandates, and rules of engagement. While the formal direction always took precedence, commanders established the rules on how their organizations would bend the rules. Most of the stories resulted favorably, in that the result was a tension adequately resolved. But not all had happy endings, and the implications for the military profession could have been significant.

The section is mainly divided by context, rather than by the tool, as the context was what drove the stories.

Challenges in Multinational Operations

Unsurprisingly perhaps, the subjects gave many stories about C2 relationships within multinational settings. The rules of engagement at the heart of the stories were directed from above and served known or perceived political interests. Most stories were negative, especially when commanders had no voice in their

development or felt that the resultant rules and structures were too constraining. Sometimes in the subject's minds, these rules made no practical sense – meaning they were unclear, infeasible, or unenforceable on the ground. In other cases, the subjects were aware of how the C2 relationships came about and therefore were prepared to accept what they deemed to be suboptimal solutions. However, they were not happy about the situation.

Most histories included lengthy stories about C2 in multinational operations – one a success story while others were not. Four representative stories follow. *B*, *D*, *I*, and *J* experienced lack of clarity from their respective political leaders, but only *B* was postured to overcome it. The others found themselves having to make the best of a bad situation. In *D*'s case, not only did the organization lack a clear external mandate, none was expected or "seemingly desired." This was partly attributed to the difficulties in reconciling vastly different political interests of the troop contributing nations. The context of the area of operations comprised sectors that were at relative peace while others were active in combat. According to *D*, some nations were happy to show they were contributing but preferred to emplace their forces in the peaceful sectors and keep them out of harm's way. Thus, there was little appetite on their part to join any broader, more aggressive mandates. Meanwhile, the coalition could not afford to have such nations withdraw and therefore had to be suitably vague about the coalition's purpose.

I echoed some of the same sentiments in the context of an externally mandated drawdown of forces in theater. In effect, the officially espoused mandate of performing the mission took a back seat to the unofficial mandate of rapid, perhaps precipitous, withdrawal. This was enhanced by underlying tensions between the US and other coalition leaders, and between the Department of Defense and State. In effect, *I* laid blame on the United States as much as on coalition partners for the lack of clear strategic direction given.

J's case was even more difficult. *J* led a U.S. command in a multinational situation where NATO and the U.S. had very conflicting ideas about the mission and purpose, even to the point of differing and irreconcilable perspectives of the threat. In that case, the only option was to establish a sharp boundary between

the missions of the extant U.S. and NATO commands. *J*'s preferred approach would have been to dual-hat a single commander responsible for both U.S. and NATO contingents.

The relative success story was that of *B*, whose multinational environment was more permissive. Rather than operations taking place within the host country, *B*'s forces were postured outside the area of operations, which made relations with the host country critically important. *B* was able to leverage prior contacts with the host nation to help with developing a dual chain of command structure that allowed the host significant say in the operations while also preserving US interests in the mission – not least of which was the US reluctance to fall under a foreign command.

B benefitted from a somewhat clearer external mandate than either *D*, *I*, or *J*; but that did not mean *B* faced no difficulties. For example, *B* lamented that at times strategic direction came bottom-up rather than top-down. For example, *B* would send up recommended strategic guidance, which "Washington" would "rubber stamp" and issue back down. While this proved effective in gaining legitimacy from higher authorities, the burden of generating the needed strategic direction fell to the commander's own staff rather than that of the civilian leadership.

Several other subjects gave similar stories about challenges with external stakeholders, and their resolutions were commensurate. It took the commander to personally intervene in the situation and provide clarity where there was little. One interesting approach was suggested by *A*, who found himself leading a multinational command operating with an unclear mandate. Rather than attempt to clarify 'who we are,' he found it easier to first address 'who we are *not*.' It proved an effective way of initiating communication with members of the command.

Challenges Within the Organization

High-level commands, whether joint or service-specific, are often comprised of many diverse organizations. Sometimes (e.g., *F*) the forces faced challenges of fighting in environments or conducting missions to which they were unaccustomed. Or perhaps there were internal conflicts and tensions that precluded unity of effort (e.g., *B* and *M*). In all such cases, the subjects all

affirmed the need for strategic direction coming from the commander.

F's case was compelling as it came as a time when the parent service component command was undergoing significant transition in the post-Cold War environment. Under the broader tensions of pursuing the "peace dividend" while increasing engagement in peace support operations, *F* oversaw the establishment of combat support in unfamiliar locations performing missions of which the units were not trained. Among the key actions that helped the joint force commander was clarifying the rules of engagement and ensuring all soldiers were fully trained on them – when to use lethal force and when not to, what to do about civil disobedience, and how to aid in disarmament of the population.

B's greatest problem in assembling an effective joint fighting force came from (at the time) unresolved joint-service tensions. There were arguments concerning some of the C2 terminology as one service repudiated the ideas of "operational command" and "operational control" and would not abide by them. Service chiefs were also reluctant to allow *B*, a joint commander, to communicate with component commanders and treat them as subordinates. The service chiefs were concerned about having their perspectives undercut. *B* stressed the importance of personal communications and maintaining journals to keep track of such issues and not allow them to detract from the effort.

Some internal C2 challenges resulted from dual-hatting commanders—which was not confined to operations. *M* showcased examples where dual-hatting led to direct conflict between the two parent organizations whose interests and missions were largely independent from each other. The guidance and priorities naturally conflicted, leading to soldiers making mistakes.

Challenges Specific to Rules of Engagement

Two subjects discussed rules of engagement (ROE) explicitly. *D* discussed it in the context of aforementioned differences between the US and international actors. In effect, the lack of single mandate for operations resulted in different ROE.

The other story was unique, however, and highlighted the risks that commanders can assume when interpreting ROE. *C* relayed a perspective on the Vietnam War case of U.S. Air Force General Lavelle, who exercised a liberal interpretation of infeasible ROE rather than fight to change it.[51] The ROE in question regarded when pilots were allowed to engage enemy surface-to-air missiles. The ROE required that the missile be fired, where General Lavelle allowed pilots to engage once tracked by the site. Although his decision ultimately spared his own pilots, it had the effect of breaking the command climate. Personnel under Lavelle's command began falsifying operational reports, which eventually led to an inspector general investigation and Lavelle's relief of command.

In Vietnam at the time, *C* and a close colleague apparently debated over whether Lavelle was right or wrong. The colleague was very clear – Lavelle violated orders from Washington and deserved to be punished for it. *C*, on the other hand, did not agree and felt that the problem was a lack of clarity over the meaning of "being under attack." *C* sympathized with Lavelle as the risks to the pilots brought about by the ROE were not well understood by the civilian leadership. *C* wrestled with the issue for a while afterward but came to see his colleague's view.

Interviewees had their own stories to tell about the challenges of fixing bad ROE, including those where the warfighting commanders ended up going directly to the President to get them fixed. *N1* explained that blanket arbitrary ROE serving narrow political purposes are the most difficult cases, and said that a sign of a good ROE is one that relieves the burden on the ground to make good decisions.

IMPLICATIONS

So are commanders bound to the formal mechanisms of command? Are C2 structures and ROE just starting points? Present-day conceptions of *mission command* push for more powering-down of decisions and exercising trust in subordinate

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[51] Lee E. DeRemer, "Leadership Between a Rock and a Hard Place," *Airpower Journal* (Fall 1996): 87-94.

commanders.[52] However, modifying these structures carry risk, as the Lavelle case shows. The second-order effects of a decision, no matter how justifiable, can lead to climates where unlawful or unethical conduct pervades. Command ceases to be responsible.

The challenge for senior level command is when where commanders are dealing more closely with civilian leaders, whose understandings of the military situation and political interests come into conflict with the military's desire for clarity and simplicity. Although the oral histories primarily focused on operational challenges, interviewees stressed that this was endemic to garrison situations as well.

As multiple interviewees affirmed, commanders must be educated on how to efficiently develop C2 and ROE. This is a high-priority that must be accomplished as quickly as possible and then articulated to the command. If left unresolved or contentious, the lack of formal structure can severely disrupt unit cohesion.

Commanders may find themselves not only having to bend the rules, so to speak, but to develop meta-rules about how the rules are to be bent and communicate those meta-rules clearly up and down the chain. Uncertainties about the formal rules are multiplied many times over once the workarounds start emerging, potentially creating confusion in the organization. It takes significant command energy to prevent that from happening.

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[52] Department of the Army, *Mission Command: Command and Control of Army Forces,* Army Doctrine Publication 6-0 (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 2019).

Chapter 5. As Focal Points for the Enterprise

Tom Galvin

Theme 2. Commanders Must Be the Focal Points of the Defense Enterprise. *Commanders are postured to serve as a sort of customer of the enterprise. They are singularly responsible for establishing requirements for the enterprise to fill and to distribute the resources received to the organization. Although they routinely delegate this function to other leaders in the organization, the commander has ultimately authority over the business rules the organization uses.*

In the U.S. system, the purpose of the defense enterprise is to develop and provide trained and ready forces to combatant commanders, who in turn employ them to satisfy assigned missions. Much of the literature focuses on the top-down character of this relationship – that the commander executes the missions that civilian leaders assign with the resources that the enterprise provides. The present study showed that the commander's role is understated, as is the role of the enterprise operating in service to the commander.

This chapter presents several vignettes highlighting this shortfall. It also presents ideas and concepts from industrial sociology—particularly understanding so-called staff-line relationships – to better understand the commander's roles that cannot effectively be delegated to others.

Introduction

A *defense enterprise* is a "political-military activity whose purpose is to generate and sustain capability to meet national security requirements."[53] The enterprise comprises the secretariat, defense-level (or ministerial) agencies; joint and service staffs and activities; the services and their subordinate commands; and all other organizations (public or private) contributing to the

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[53] Thomas P. Galvin, "What is the 'Defense Enterprise?'," in *Defense Management: Primer for Senior Leaders*, ed. Thomas P. Galvin (Carlisle, PA: Department of Command, Leadership, and Management, 2019), 16.

mission, such as the defense industrial and sustainment bases.[54] They are by definition very large and complex. Defense enterprises develop and provide trained and ready forces to warfighting commanders, who in turn employ them to satisfy assigned missions.

How does a defense enterprise operate? While the answer may depend on the nation in question, enterprises in democratic societies function as public-sector bureaucracies. They establish organizational structures, processes, and norms associated with the efficient allocation of resources to generate the capabilities required in support of national security strategies and plans. The field of civil-military relations studies the relationship between civilian and military leaders in negotiating the strategies and the resources required to develop requisite capabilities. However, in practice, the emphasis in the literature has a top-down quality. The civilians establish the requirements and provides the resources, the military executes or raises questions when the strategies and resources do not align. From a bureaucratic standpoint, the commanders are mainly responsible for execution. Their inputs to the enterprise may be bounded or constrained in favor of what the bureaucracy requires to support the senior military leaders' continuous negotiations with civilian leaders.[55]

The present study raises questions as to the extent the commander's roles in the enterprise are underrepresented. Several of the oral histories demonstrated that commanders face continuous challenges regarding the very definitions or identities of their organizations. They alone take responsibility for determining what the core function of the organization is, what is peripheral, and how that translates into requirements – and demands – of the enterprise. In effect, the planning, programming, resourcing, and implementation of organization's strategy rests with the commander and cannot be delegated. What is an open question is the extent to which the bureaucracy supports the commander's role or intrudes upon it. A natural persistent tension exists because ultimately the prevailing

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[54] Galvin, "Defense Enterprise," 17.
[55] Galvin, "Defense Enterprise," 15-30.

strategic direction is top-down, placing pressures on the enterprise to deliver the demanded goods and services, and these pressures trickle down.

This chapter highlights how organization theory and management science explain this so-called *staff-line* tension and suggestions they have for commanders. It then presents three interesting examples of staff-line tensions from the study, followed by overall implications and points of discussion for commanders.

Staff and Line

This phenomenon is well understood in industrial sociology. Several classic works in the study of industry addressed tensions whereby the core function of the organization – the actual good or service produced – can become secondary to administrative and other peripheral requirements or missions.

Joan Woodward, a prominent organization theorist and scholar, defined *staff-line organization* as a division of labor whereby *line* organizations are those most responsible for delivering the end result (i.e., the good or service in question) and *staff* organizations advise and support the line managers.[56] Militaries share this construct, as their organizational structures from small unit to whole enterprise normally include separate line and staff elements. A brigade combat team commander has line units assigned or attached – including two to five battalions, cavalry, field artillery, engineer, signal, and others all responsible for the mission. The brigade staff's mission is to support the commander and the line unit.

There is a potential downside to this structure. According to Douglas McGregor in the classic work *The Human Side of Enterprise*, too frequently the division between line and staff gets blurred. Managerial control results in staff intruding upon or taking over line authorities and responsibilities. Errors and crises can lead to efforts to expand staff authority to monitor and report,

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[56] Joan Woodward, *Industrial Organization: Theory and Practice*, 2nd ed. (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1965), 102; also Talking About Organizations Podcast, "Contingency Theory – Joan Woodward," Episode 60, January, 14, 2020, https://www.talkingaboutorganizations.com/e60-contingency-theory-woodward/.

or possibly subsume, line functions. The staff thus becomes the actual source of power in the organization, not the line.[57]

Military organizations may potentially follow this same reactive behavior, spurred by various problems such as ineffective information flow, mission failures and other crises, and times of uncertainty. These can cause commanders or their superiors to impose greater controls over the organization, with staff channels assuming enforcement responsibilities.[58] Obviously, a healthy relationship between staff and line elements is desired, but memories of negative experiences can make corrective actions difficult unless commanders get directly involved.

From the Histories

Eight of the 13 oral histories alluded to these tensions, with four subjects identifying them as dominant throughout their senior command experiences. The three subthemes that emerged were: (1) tensions over the organization's identity and purpose, (2) tensions over organizational designs established by the bureaucracy, and (3) tensions over information flow.

Tensions over Purpose and Identity

Albert & Whetten (1985) established the construct of organizational identity as the combination of claims regarding: (a) the *central character* of an organization, (b) how it is *distinct* from other organizations, and (c) how it sees itself in relation to its *history*.[59] All organizations project this identity into the environment through their words and actions.[60] However, identity claims are subjective to a degree and may not accurately reflect reality. For example, an organization may claim a central

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[57] Douglas McGregor, *The Human Side of Enterprise,* Annotated Edition (New York: McGraw Hill, 2006), 199-209; also Talking About Organizations Podcast, "Theory X and Y – Douglas MacGregor," Episode 59, December 12, 2019, https://www.talkingaboutorganizations.com/59-human-side-of-enterprise-douglas-mcgregor/.

[58] MacGregor, *Human Side of Enterprise*, 205.

[59] Stuart Albert and David A. Whetten, "Organizational Identity," in *Research in Organizational Behavior*, eds. L. L. Cummings and B. M. Staw (Greenwich, CT: JAI Press), 263-295.

[60] Dennis A. Gioia and Kumar Chittipeddi. "Sensemaking and Sensegiving in Strategic Change Initiation," *Strategic Management Journal* 12, no. 6 (1991): 433-448.

character of being highly professional when in fact its internal climate may be compromised by fraud and waste. Internally, an identity can be divided among members belonging to different parts of the organization or performing different tasks requiring specific knowledge shared among other members (e.g., chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear, and high-yield explosives [CBNRE] experts). Stakeholders may disagree with the organization's identity claims or be ambivalent about them, leading to external pressures for the organization to change.

The actions of the subjects in this study each saw sustaining and maintaining the organization's identity as one of their primary responsibilities. If the organization faces a dual-identity problem from persistent tensions between two competing subgroups or missions and functions, then the commander alone establishes the synthesis between them. This was exemplified in the case of *M*.

Subject *M* was a former commandant of the Military Police (MP) Corps who throughout the military career faced an on-going tension over the primary purpose for military police – law enforcement or rear area operations? Of course, the answer was a mix of both, however the culture of the MP Corps favored law enforcement activities while *M* wanted to emphasize the less-glamorous rear area operations mission. *M* would eventually prevail but not without having to overcome tremendous resistance over an extended period of time. Decades after *M* retired, the author attended a lecture by a contemporary MP senior leader who stated that the underlying tension between law enforcement and rear area operations continued to be a central point of discussion when it came to strategic planning.[61]

Other subjects discussed related challenges regarding an organization's purpose, showing that it is the commander's direct responsibility to arbitrate external threats to an organization's identity. *F* had a signal background and discussed natural tensions between highly-technical and specialized strategic communications (e.g., satellite systems and network backbones)

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[61] U.S. Army Military Police Regiment, *United States Army Military Police Force Modernization Strategy* (Ft. Leonard Wood, MO: U.S. Army Military Police School, November 2019).

and the decidedly lower-tech but vital tactical signal mission. *I* served in a coalition environment and faced challenges stemming from external pressures to downside prematurely. Both showed how competing perspectives contributed to identity crises within the force as units faced increased tensions. In *M*'s case, it was marginalization of a vital part of the organization. For *F* and *I*, the problem was continuous mission creep.

However, an important implication of this finding is how staff-line relationships in military organizations are relative, rather than absolute. What is a core mission for one organization could be peripheral to another. For example, the Army's core mission is fighting and winning the nation's wars through the exercise of landpower. The line organizations that perform the core mission most directly are the combat arms. Combat support is vital, but is a comparatively peripheral mission from the standpoint of the combat unit. Yet within the combat support branches, the provision of such support to the combat arms may be their core mission or may be peripheral to a different core mission entirely (*F*'s example of how tactical comms support took a backseat to the more prestigious strategic comms support). This leads to a complex landscape of clashes in purpose and identity among different groups. *M*'s solution to change his branch's identity from law enforcement to rear area operations may have endeared the warfighting community, but not without pushback from within the MP Corps.

Structures from Above

A key function of a defense enterprise is to aid senior leaders in developing the right force to meet national strategy requirements. In addition to having required capabilities on hand, sufficient capacity must be ready (i.e., on-hand, available, and postured) for mission. Leaders determine the requirements; the enterprise constructs and sustains them. While it sounds like a fitting arrangement, the danger is when the enterprise leans toward top-driven solutions, either at the expense of bottom-up innovation or in ignorance of the lower-level contexts.

Because militaries must maintain adequate readiness today while also preparing for future operations, opportunities for large-scale transformations are limited. Moreover, militaries

greatly value interoperability, which naturally leads to the enterprise developing singular standardized solutions for needed capabilities. The risks of standardization are straightforward. Adversaries who determine the vulnerabilities can exploit them against the entire force. But for present purposes, the risks are the muting of the commander's voice when it comes to determining the requirements or suggesting solutions. Moreover, enterprise solutions could be very effective in development but unsuitable or unacceptable when fielded or employed on operations. On the other hand, fielding is most efficient and has greatest chance of success given all the complexity involved in developing new systems.

The histories gave stories of good and bad with respect to top-fed solutions, although most were negative. *B*, for example, told stories about reserve component "round-out" units during the 1980s. According to *B*, the concept of "round-out" came from an Army decision to address a readiness problem in the reserve component. Rather than continue the practice of wholly separate formations between active and reserve and to address the problem of insufficient end strength to full all active divisions in the force structure, the Army elected to create round-out brigades – a reserve component brigade that would serve as a third maneuver brigade of an active division. As *B* explained (and is corroborated in separate literature[62]), the concept assumed that should the division be called to mission, there would be adequate time and opportunity to mobilize and prepare the round-out brigade. This proved a poor assumption during the Persian Gulf War and active divisions had to divert precious resources to train and equip their round-out units.

Doctrinal concepts can also be problematic if their vulnerabilities are only clear to front line units. For example, *E* strongly questioned the purpose of an airmobile infantry during the Vietnam War. While the concept of airmobility certain seemed attractive – transport infantry by air quickly to engage the enemy – in practice, the airmobile units did not have the capabilities to orient and move rapidly on the ground after being dropped.

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[62] In particular, the Army would substitute some round-out brigades with active Army brigades for DESERT STORM. See Ellen M. Pint, et al., *Review of Army Total Force Policy Implementation* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2017), 37.

Instead, *E* felt that more robust ground units were better able to read the situation on the group. *E*'s history concluded with a lament that the "airmobile infantry mentality" was making a comeback in the Army, and that the past lessons learned would be learned over again, at the expense of soldier lives.

Other structural points involved desires for autonomy to adjust the structures and processes locally within available resources. A unit-level example came from *I*, who spoke of a division commander who disliked the doctrinal conception of a main and rear command post and internally reorganized to establish two "assault" CPs. Others were individual-level, one pushing change while the other enforced the structure as given. *C* talked about the creation of a deputy chief of staff position in one headquarters. *D* discussed the creation of senior enlisted advisor positions that were not in the organizational structure but proved to be needed capabilities within the headquarters. *H* talked about a combined US-Korea staff in which the G-3 was Korean but who would insist on sending his Amercian deputy on any coalition business. *H* forced the Korean to exercise G-3 responsibilities as codified.

These findings are analogous to the first theme on the commander's individual responsibilities to establish clear command and control relationships. In the present cases, the differences were structural rather than political. While the commander has a voice in the development of the doctrine, organizational structures, and implementation, senior leaders have to make sense of the potential hundreds (or thousands) of different ideas and perspectives on how to perform the core mission. Once the decision is made, commanders should still have sufficient autonomy to align the enterprise's answer with the situation at hand, while also recognizing that localized solutions carry their own risks.

Ensuring Information Flow

Naturally, there is an expectation that information flows appropriately up and down, especially regarding ordinary or routine enterprise functions. Because the enterprise makes extensive (and usually justified) information demands of units, commanders often trust their staffs to provide accurate and timely

information, injecting by exception but personally certifying what is most important.

However, sometimes the information does not flow as it should. For example, *H* discovered that in one unit the organization was not being fully truthful in readiness reporting. The problem was both structural – regarding what information was being asked – and cultural – regarding the perceived consequences of telling the uncomfortable truth. *H* had reason to question the operational readiness rate presented by the staff and demanded that the full fleet be put into the field for verification. Upon doing so, *H* uncovered extensive problems. However, because the unit faithfully followed reporting procedures, it was difficult to blame the organization. *L* faced a similar problem in a large civilian agency, citing perverse incentives that encouraged subordinate leaders to "cook the books" and provide untruthful glowing reports on performance to make themselves look good and sustain their performance bonuses.

I told a similar story about operational readiness rates of helicopter units during TEAM SPIRIT, a now-defunct annual exercise that promoted cooperation between the South Korean military and United Nations coalition forces. Aviation units deploying to Korea were required to disassemble and pack the helicopters for shipment rather than the stevedores. This manpower-intensive effort meant several added weeks of being considered non-mission capable, which *I* explained resulted in a big "hit" in joint readiness.

Ordinarily, professional norms would take precedence and the commander should present a fair and objective accounting of their situation. What is unique about the commander versus other leaders is the stewardship role of fixing the command channels when they are functioning improperly. Both *H* and *I*, for example, made a point of not only setting the records straight but also pursuing fixes to the underlying structure so other commanders would not have to face the same issues.

OTHER IMPLICATIONS

One interviewee said that the "commanders' best staffs are their subordinate commanders." He warned against the tendency

of staffs to exercise matrix relationships that encourages negotiated solutions. Commanders have to be free and willing to engage the issue and make demands of the enterprise – and leaders cannot let the enterprise dictate commander's business.

It is worth considering the extent to which military organizations at any level should be command-centric. The oral histories arguably had a command-centric bias given that each had served as commander at various levels. However, formal accountability supported the idea that the commander alone had to be the final arbiter of matters dealing with the enterprise. Commensurately, several subjects stated or implied that they saw their subordinate commanders as the most important staff officers, rather than their assigned headquarters' staff elements. The pace of information flow may be greater than during the times that these histories were conducted, but taking the subjects' perspectives one must assume that this only changes the character of the internal and external relationships, not their nature.

Meanwhile, military culture has a strong affinity for its professional character while it dislikes or distances itself from being a public-sector bureaucracy.[63] However, senior leaders at all levels recognize that the military cannot perform its mission without the support of the enterprise that brings the nation's resources to bear in the interests of national security. Trust between commanders and the many agencies and commands providing vital combat support or services is important. Many histories highlighted instances where command-enterprise relationships were frayed due to misunderstandings or conflicting perspectives like the vignettes expressed in this paper. However, this does not excuse commanders for maintaining antagonistic postures toward enterprise organizations. The demands of an increasingly complex global security environment make trust between commanders and the enterprise that much more important.

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[63] Don M. Snider, "The U.S. Army as a Profession," in *The Future of the Army Profession*, 2nd ed., eds. Don M. Snider and Lloyd J. Matthews (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2005), 14.

Chapter 6. Sustaining Climates for Lawful Action

Tom Galvin & Paul Mikolashek

Theme 3. Commanders Must Establish Climates for Lawful Action. *Soldier satisfaction is not a true indicator of command climates that encourage lawful action, rather the opposite is closer to true. Strong commanders appear better at differentiating risk reduction from risk aversion before-the-fact, exercise discipline without resorting to authoritarianism necessarily, establish and enforce consistency of climates between peacetime and war, and show caring for soldiers through personal action and intervention.*

The first two themes reflected how the commander navigated the external context. This third theme focuses on the internal context. Adherence to the laws of warfare have traditionally required that fighting units answer to responsible command. However, as several of the study's subjects suggested, responsible command is not confined to war. Training as one would fight extends to the idea that lawful actions in wartime are more likely to occur when lawful climates exist in garrison.

Lawful climates are those by which members adhere to established professional norms. At lower levels of command, commanders are more likely to instill such climates through personal presence and involvement. At higher levels, this is much more difficult due to the increased external demands on the commander, the great power distance between commander and members, and the strong desire not to intrude upon subordinate commanders.

While the skills and competencies required of all senior leaders (per Strategic Leadership Primer) were reinforced in the study, most subjects alluded to the need for enhanced skills and competencies specific to commanders.

Introduction

Command climate is widely understood as important but is not well-defined as a construct.[64] That appropriate command climates are vital for organizations to act lawfully in combat is commonly understood. That it is very difficult to build and sustain such climates in wartime is also well known.[65] Unfortunately, the organizational literature does not provide a single unifying framework or set of attributes that explain and measure what a lawful climate is, much less how to build one.

This is made more challenging in the military literature where climate is often described rather than defined, which allows a multitude of different conceptions of proper climates to spawn.[66] There are common elements, such as a mission orientation, adherence to standards, open and transparent communication, fairness, diversity, camaraderie, and both joy and honor in being members of their organizations.[67] Most of all, good climates operate in environments of trust. Command philosophies such as *mission command* are intended to foster and reinforce trust, especially among assembled forces for an operation. All these factors, however, include a certain sense of subjectivity. At lower levels of command, this is less bothersome as the commander enjoys greater ability to see the battlefield and therefore has a better pulse of the climate. At senior levels, with the added power distance from leader to led, command climate is harder to analyze. Consequently, high-level commands tend to rely more on proxy measures such as surveys that look for potential issues or challenges in a command's climate.

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[64] Andrew Bell and Kurt Sanger, "We Need to Understand What We Mean When We Talk about Command Climate," Best Defense, May 30, 2013, https://foreignpolicy.com/2013/05/30/we-need-to-understand-what-we-mean-when-we-talk-about-command-climate/.

[65] Joseph Doty and Joe Gellinau, "Command Climate," ARMY (July 2008): 22-23, https://www.usmcu.edu/Portals/218/Command%20Climate%20%28Doty%20and%20Gellneau%29.pdf.

[66] Walter F. Ulmer, Jr., "Leaders, Managers, and Command Climate," in *Military Leadership: In Pursuit of Excellence*, 5th ed., eds. Robert L. Taylor and William E. Rosenbach (Cambridge, MA: Westview Press, 2005), 144.

[67] Ulmer, "Leaders, Managers,…"; Bernd Horn, "Command," in Bernd Horn and Robert W. Walker, *The Military Leadership Handbook* (Kingston, Ontario, Canada: Canadian Armed Forces Press, 2008), 107-108; Mike Jackson, "The Realities of Multi-national Command: An Informal Commentary," in *The Challenges of High Command*, eds. Gary Sheffield and Geoffrey Till (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 139-146.

More readily measurable are broken climates, such as those organizations operating under *toxic leadership*[68] or other destructive forms of leadership.[69] From poor morale and low commitment to the organization to acts of misconduct and ethical violations, evidence of a poor climate "can be quite visible. However, separating pervasive problems from the one-off instances can be difficult, and external stakeholders may be quick to improperly judge commanders based on bad news, when in fact the commanders' actions were prudent.

This leads to a question as to what constitutes the desired climate for lawful action. As one interviewee put it, there are three general classes of climate, and military organizations need but one. *Negative climates* are those characterized by poor discipline resulting from uncaring leadership. Negative climates are to be eliminated. But also undesired are *comfortable climates* under which the leadership fails to adequately challenge the organization. Leaders do not develop subordinates to fulfill their warfighting responsibilities and otherwise exercise risk aversion. Comfortable climates are an insidious problem by comparison because the veil of adequacy masks the problems in the organization which may only appear when crisis happens. *Positive climates*, that include disciplined leadership and the proper development of subordinates for warfighting, are the goal.

The study illuminated the central role of the commander in analyzing and addressing matters of command climate, despite the uncertainties in defining it. This is where the commander's personal presence becomes important as the complexities of high-level command and the exigencies of public-sector bureaucracy can provide many opportunities for organizations to settle into comfortable climates rather than pursue positive ones. Can commanders overcome the temptations that allow organizations to become dangerously complacent?

Driving this theme were stories that provided insights on how senior commanders judged who was prepared to follow in their

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[68] George E. Reed, *Tarnished: Toxic Leadership in the U.S. Army* (Lincoln, NE: Potomac Books, 2015), 11.

[69] Art Padilla, Robert Hogan, and Robert B. Kaiser. "The Toxic Triangle: Destructive Leaders, Susceptible Followers, and Conducive Environments," *The Leadership Quarterly* 18, no. 3 (2007): 176-194.

footsteps. What separated future commanders from ordinary-but-effective senior leaders? Subthemes included the commander's efforts to: (1) reduce the difference between operational and garrison mentalities, (2) exercise discipline without resorting to authoritarianism, and (3) overcome of power distance through personal and decisive intervention on behalf of members. A fourth subtheme regarded perceptions of risk, and how to develop a level of risk tolerance that instilled confidence in the organization without allowing it too much freedom to break the rules.

From the Oral Histories

Rooting out factors that create negative climates was treated by the subjects as a given. Bad commanders should be weeded out, and good commanders must be empowered to do the weeding. All senior leaders should play a part in identifying unethical behaviors, and so on.

It was the prevention of comfortable climates, of those that avoided being prepared for war or developing their people in favor of complacency, that separated command from ordinary leadership and good commanders from weak ones at senior levels. Key was how the commander was able to maintain effectiveness and instill climates for lawful action once they transitioned from tactical command (i.e., brigade or below) to higher level command. Most of the subjects acknowledged the challenges of increased isolation from the members or insulation imposed by the commander's own inner circles of personal staffs and advisors.

A caveat to this theme in the study is that the subjects are telling their own sides of the story, and it was assumed that their side would be told more positively than negatively. However, all the subjects showed candor and were willing to admit their own mistakes.

Mentality of Persistent Readiness

The phrase *train as you would fight* is a mantra for commanders at all levels. But what does this mean at the senior level or among organizations whose primary mission *per se* was not fighting? The answer for most subjects was to reduce the culture of separation

between operational and garrison environments – perhaps *do everything as if you were fighting*. For example during routine training exercises, *F* brought the entire unit to the field and neither left rear detachments nor remained involved with garrison operations. If a new soldier arrived to in-process, it was accomplished in the field. Extending this idea across components, *H* treated supporting reserve component elements the same as the active elements. As a corps commander, in Europe, *H* stressed that reserve logistic units had to master the warplans as well as the combat forces. *B* echoed this point while reflecting on the experience of onboarding a National Guard element that was not ready for operations, causing *B*'s combat units to expend significant energy getting them ready.

Subjects also felt it was not enough for the commander to instill the need for a readiness mentality through words, but to demonstrate it by example. *E*, who served often in Germany during the Cold War, placed a premium on subordinate commanders being masters of the sector where their units would fight. *E* would bring commanders on terrain walks and expect them to show how they would array their units and conduct the battle. *E* further expected that they would in turn do same with their subordinate commanders. *B* and *C* made similar point, stating that commanders had to be the leading experts on their assigned areas of operations. As a branch chief of a technical field, *F* said same about being expert about the equipment and services provided by the unit.

Meanwhile, *I* mentioned that the commander's philosophy could not change between garrison and operations – that is, commanders must avoid the traps of treating the two as distinct environments. *C, E,* and *H* suggested that units should spend far more time in the field doing training, effectively limiting the amount of time in garrison so to avoid the temptations of garrison mentalities.

Professional military education was also mentioned by *M*, who indicated concerns about the distance between the "schoolhouse" and the field. *M* was explicit in valuing "street smarts" over "book smarts."

Disciplined but not Authoritarian

Subjects recognized that they had to be tough on others to get the mission done. Several of the subjects were known to have developed reputations for aggressive and demanding behaviors. Therefore, particular attention was paid to how subjects described and justified actions that might have strained relations within the organization.

One subtheme was justification in the eyes of the ordinary soldier. *B* was one such example who was aware of a bad reputation among direct reports, but who countered with statements by soldiers who affirmed loyalty. An explanation for this is given in a story whereby *B* found one soldier in a state of severe distress due to bureaucratic red tape that inhibited the soldier's ability to care for the family. *B* made it a personal mission to address the soldier's needs and took the bureaucracy head on. As a result, *B* was lambasted by the senior leadership team but loved by the soldiers, who eagerly spread the word about *B*'s personal intervention. *F* avowed a similar justification for the need to become a "thorn in the side" of higher-level command staffs and fight continuously for the soldiers' needs.

Meanwhile, several subjects were concerned over the abilities of their subordinates to withstand the rigors of combat. *E*, for example, stated that "standards can never too high," and felt that higher-level commanders should push their charges more. According to *E*, a battalion commander in constant combat must be able to last about eight months before becoming spent. *G* was concerned about how stress and lack of discipline could one day lead to soldiers committing atrocities. He stated that commanders had to "come down hard" on perpetrators and their supervisors.

Together, the subjects generally saw their actions as promoting discipline in the unit, rather than seeing themselves as authoritarian. Some subjects said that the difference between discipline and destructive behaviors was whether the purposes behind the behaviors supported the members or the commander, respectively. For example, *E* accused several newly-promoted general officers (and some two-stars as well) who soon acted like they "made it" and began acting arrogantly. *E* then told a story of a lieutenant general who had been relieved of command for lying

and micromanaging his whole organization. *H* made similar accusations, saying that some general officers made rank at the expense of their subordinates. *G* described how important it was for commanders to assume that members had the best intentions of the unit in mind, but that some officers clearly held suspicious views of others, which infected the command climate.

Proactive About Reducing Risk

It is assumed that members of organizations with healthy climates trust each other. Leaders to the led, among peers, and external contacts all operate from positions of trust. While the philosophy of mission command can describe the vital importance of such trust within organizations, building trust takes personal energy and commitment.

The question was the extent to which the commander enabled or inhibited trust over and above what any other leader would be expected to do. The going-in thought was that a commander's words and actions were the key factors, that somehow what the commander did and said elevated those words and actions above what any other leader in the organization could do. The histories suggested that building trust was as much a function of using words and actions for a specific purpose – to reduce risk without risk averse, and specifically to shoulder that risk personally before passing it on to others. Commanders were then personally invested in reducing risk in advance of taking action. The willingness to assume personal risk allowed commanders to be seen as fighting for the troops. Conversely, commanders who did not reduce risk and failed to communicate the reasons were more likely to see command climates suffer as a result.

At a tactical level, *E* provided an excellent example in one battle as a brigade commander. *E* felt it was important for the commander to be on ground and out front of the formation to maintain detailed situational awareness. Two fellow commanders had tried to operate more from a distance; both failed. One operated from a bunker but lost control of the battle. The second attempted to command from the air but was shot down. Ironically, *E* was so close to the front lines that the division commander was set to relieve *E* rather the other two!

E followed this story with his concern about selection boards. who favored officers who were either risk averse or otherwise had "clean sheets" (i.e., an unblemished performance record). This was because they operated in safe staff positions that did not require them to take risks.

Not all such stories involved the commander being in personal danger, but at least demonstrating that the commander was doing everything possible to reduce the risk to others. *I* told about a series of high-risk high-priority aviation missions that he had to personally oversee due to prevailing weather conditions. Higher commands demanded "zero aviation accidents," which could have been taken as requirements to reduce mission. But through personal energy and involvement, *I* reduced the risk to the pilots and there were no accidents despite the sustained higher operations tempo. *L* and *M* carried these sentiments to the strategic level, where the risk in question was in one's own reputation. Both expressed concerns that tactically-minded officers were prone to be coerced into risk aversion when dealing with strategic matters, but those were the issues where telling truth to power was most important.

IMPLICATIONS

Each of these had implications for the establishment and sustainment of lawful climates. The soldiers needed to know that, despite the extensive power distance from the commander, that commander had their backs. While the study showed only the commander's side of the stories, there was a consistent focus on how commanders had their soldiers' interests in mind. They were tough on their own staffs because they had a soft spot for soldiers. Passing excessive risk downward, maintaining personal distance from the front, and acting in accord with one's own personal convenience pushed undue pressures downward, leading to potential unlawful behaviors on the part of the troops. Ironically, the commanders themselves could bend or break the rules without violating the soldiers' trust so long as they shouldered the risks of doing so themselves and did not pass the risks to others.

Ultimately, this theme is most suggestive of the budding commander's needs for self-awareness before taking command. The fairness built into the bureaucracy carries a risk that the so-

called Peter Principle—that promotions typically occur up to the point of exposing one's incompetence—can come into play.[70] The outcome risks saddling organizations with mediocre or poor commanders.

This was highlighted in a vignette from *E* while serving as a corps commander. He told of a "career staff officer" who excelled in every staff job before being selected to command a battalion. However, the officer did not actually wish to command. He accepted the position because it was the proper thing to do to advance his career (e.g., get promoted to colonel, attend the War College, and so on), but was not comfortable in the role as commander and looked forward to eventually getting back into the staff environment. However, once in battalion command under *E*, he discovered that he was fully out of his element and unable to bear the additional responsibilities of command. He was marginally successful as commander, but his conscience was bothering him. After receiving a mediocre efficiency report, he finally stepped forward and admitted he was not the right person for command. After a lengthy conversation with *E*, the officer resigned and left military service. *E* admired him for coming forward and admitting the problem.

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[70] Lawrence J. Peter and Raymond Hull. *The Peter Principle* (London: Souvenir Press, 1969).

Chapter 7. Commanders as Masters of Complexity

Tom Galvin

Theme 4. Commanders must Master Complexity. *Commanders must be capable, willing, and comfortable navigating paradoxical tensions, and they alone must establish the path to clarity. Commanders who fail are among those who are uncomfortable with paradox or who are unable to deal with the resurgence of presumably resolved issues.*

This theme looks at what subjects identified as an important development need for commanders – mastering complexity. Although all senior leaders require capabilities for critical and systems thinking, commanders alone are looked upon as the organization's GPS. Staff and others on the leadership team may provide analysis of the environment and interpret its signals. However, the commander alone has the responsibility to explain the situation to the organization and establish the roadmap to navigate through it. This includes explaining certainties and uncertainties, facts and assumptions, and possible barriers and opportunities.

Systems thinking alone is insufficient. As the study suggests, commanders require advanced communication skills, greater comfort dealing with uncertainty and risk, and the personal energy to contend with the exigencies of routine complex adaptive behavior. This includes the willingness to revisit the same problems or challenges over and over as they recur. Throughout, they must somehow stay effectively one step ahead of the opponent – whether that is an enemy on the battlefield, one's own bureaucracy or, in some cases, the very members of the commander's own organization.

Introduction

In many ways, the oral histories reinforced each of the senior leader competencies, ethics, and developmental needs expressed in the *Strategic Leadership Primer*. This was a positive finding, as existing leader development therefore contributes to the development of future senior-level commanders. But was there a

different or enhanced skill set or competency that senior-level commanders needed? The oral histories suggest one such skill – the ability to master complex environments.

The word *master* is key. All senior leaders are expected to operate in environments of high complexity. The fourth edition of the U.S. Army War College's *Strategic Leadership Primer* devoted two full chapters to the nature and character of this complexity – of dynamic, competitive systems external to the organization and within large bureaucratic organizations characterized by persistent tensions.[71] It subsequently provided insights on developing strategies to influence such environments toward conditions that satisfy organizational interests, and listed the competencies senior leaders need to develop.[72] The first three themes of this study – on command and control, driving enterprise decisions, and establishing climates for lawful action – reflect the presence of dynamic, competitive environments and organizational (or bureaucratic) behaviors in response. All three themes show that only the commander has the ability and the need to establish and articulate the organization's path to success in these areas. Therefore, the commander's personal mastery of complexity is vitally important to success. Failure to properly navigate complex environments and provide clarity to the organizational membership will create confusion and disruption to the organization's mission. Delegating such responsibilities would not work due to the lack of commensurate authorities vested in the rest of the senior leadership team, even in an interim capacity.

The stories contributing to this theme suggested, however, that this need for mastery of complexity extends beyond those holding the title of command and includes anyone with responsibility as the top leader in an organization. This includes agency directors, service chiefs, or the Chairman of the Joint

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[71] See Andrew Hill and Dale Watson, "The Competitive Environment" and Kristen Behfar and Dale Watson, "Leading Large Bureaucratic Organizations: The Internal Environment," in *Strategic Leadership: Primer for Senior Leaders*, 4th ed., eds. Tom Galvin and Dale Watson (Carlisle, PA: Department of Command, Leadership, and Management, 2019).

[72] See Andrew Hill, Douglas Douds, and Dale Watson, "Competitive Strategy" and Douglas E. Waters, "Senior Leader Competencies," in *Strategic Leadership: Primer for Senior Leaders*, 4th ed., eds. Tom Galvin and Dale Watson (Carlisle, PA: Department of Command, Leadership, and Management, 2019).

Chiefs of Staff. Mastering complexity was a necessary requirement for exercising command of the situation, even when one was not technically a commander. Yet, even among these other leadership positions, delegating this responsibility was not possible.

From the Oral Histories

The oral histories were replete was stories of commanders demonstrating a mastery of complexity and succeeding or failing due to an inability to properly cope with complex problems. In the latter case, they watched (sometimes helplessly) as their soldiers paid the price for the commander's failure. The stories showed common subthemes regarding the commander's personal presence and how they intervened in complex situations and set conditions for the organization to successful navigate them.

Putting Eyes-On-Target

That the commander should be out front and be personally aware of and postured to influence the situation is hardly new. This has been taught to leaders at all levels of professional military education. It was therefore not surprising to find several oral histories contain formative stories of an officer's early career emphasizing personal presence, particularly in battle, that carried through to later years as a senior operational commander. *E*, for example, talked about terrain walks as a tool for visualizing how to fight in the assigned sector in Europe during a Soviet invasion. *E* repeated the use of terrain walks in subsequent assignments all the way to corps command. *E* also criticized commanders who tried to control the battlefield from helicopters rather than controlling from the ground.

This first-person perspective subtheme was tempered by recognition of one's own limits and therefore the need to incorporate others into a sensory network. For example, *G* provided a caution that one's "own vision" can be misleading. In Vietnam, there were significant differences in the situation just fifty miles apart, such that the commanders could not allow themselves to become isolated in their own view and not see what others see. *B* shared a story about how one's personal network

may atrophy under the wrong conditions. The perceived oncoming end to a conflict caused the premature reallocation of resources to other theaters, which limited the information available to *B* regarding when conflict would actually end. *B* therefore clamored for more intelligence analysis being done in theater rather than back in Washington. A personal network may also prove unreliable compared to other sources. For instance, *C* shared a story about acquiring better intelligence from a prisoner of war than from *C*'s own division's G2 and G3.

These stories support another subtheme that views trusting those with first-hand knowledge of a situation over others whose knowledge was more distant. For example, *E* was influenced by contact with an Israeli officer who at the time had recently fought in the Yom Kippur War. *E* was thus inspired to conduct further research, leading to the formation of new operational doctrine for the Army. *H* presented a negative experience from dealing with the press. When a reporter visiting Vietnam challenged *H*'s casualty numbers, *H* stopped the press briefing, brought the reporter on a helicopter, traveled to a battle site, and showed the reporter the bodies, making the reporter count them. In addition to proving *H* right, the experience instilled a (rather pointed and unsettling) lesson to the reporter about believing those with first-hand knowledge.

This same subtheme also suggested the importance of cultivating purposeful relationships outside the organization to metaphorically extend one's own eyes and ears. *D* referred to this as "battlefield circulation" but it applied more broadly to all command engagements. In multinational settings, the commander found it personally valuable to reach out to a counterpart, even if only once, sent powerful signals. *A*, *D*, *H*, *I*, and *M* each had stories about the need for close coordination and cooperation with foreign counterpart units such that the commander alone had to build the communication link that others would leverage. *K* gave similar stories about the commanders' roles in civil relationships with the host city of a military base.

Failure to maintain personal situation awareness could also lead to difficulties. *E* told the story of a so-called Dial-a-CINC[73] hotline in Europe intended to provide the combatant commander the ability to address systemic problems in the organization. Unfortunately, because the commander had not built a strong rapport with the soldiers, most of the calls that came in were fraudulent. NCOs thought the hotline idea was ridiculous and were pulling the CINC's leg, but the CINC became despondent over the volume of calls. Several subjects agreed in principle and expressed concerns about "desk commanders" (*M*), being "tethered" to secure video teleconference (*D*), or dealing with the "8,000 mile" (*B*) or "10,000 mile screwdriver" (*D*). These were challenges that commanders had to overcome to be successful through sustaining the "right information on the ground" (*D*).

Clarifying the Complex

The histories suggest that commanders must frequently deal with apparent *no-win* situations, indicative of the presence of dynamic, possibly paradoxical, tensions. These tensions were clearly severe enough that the commander could not simply choose one option or the other, nor could the commander count on any particular decision being durable. It was incumbent on the commander to define the tension, analyze the situation as presented, find a synthesis within the tension to pursue as a solution or decision space, and ultimately provide unifying direction to the organization.[74] This begins first and foremost with the ability to make sense of the situation in one's own mind.[75]

Multinational operations were rife with situations involving difficult tensions that the commander alone had to resolve. Some of these were related to the command and control issues discussed in Chapter 4, but there were others. *A* had a particularly thorny situation regarding the development of a partner military force – whether it was more important to provide excessive support to demonstrate 'success' or grant the partner freedom to fail? The

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[73] CINC refers to Commander-in-Chief, now called a *combatant commander*.

[74] Andrew H. Van de Ven and Marshall S. Poole, "Explaining Development and Change in Organizations," *Academy of Management Review* 20, no. 3 (July 1995): 510-540. It is also noteworthy that study subject *A* made direct and extensive reference to Ronald A. Heifetz, *Leadership Without Easy Answers* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994).

[75] Karl E. Weick, *Sensemaking in Organizations* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1995).

tension was between political and professional interests, which also mirrored a conflict between the short-term and long-term perspectives. While *A* did not elaborate on specific instances, the implication was that this was a running tension that required a string of decisions and actions. *A*'s approach was to assemble teams of senior leaders as each situation arose and deliberate on the matter. Then, *A* established a roadmap for how the organization would deal with the situation – determining who would make which decision and what would be the overall narrative. It was important that *A* personally established what would be delegated or not, so while decisions were made at lower levels, the overarching narrative and coordination was established solely by the commander. *B* included a salient point about the commander's role. The commander must have control over the objective truth and be prepared to leverage it.

A point made in Chapter 4 about commander's not receiving adequate strategic direction also applies. In part from this tension, *B* found himself facing an unusual case of catastrophic success soon accompanied by a loss of control over the battlefield and the premature entry of large numbers of nongovernmental organizations. It became the commander's personal responsibility to define where the campaign was and communicate it to a wide range of audiences. *A* and *D* echoed similar views.

Communicating Clear Paths through the Complexity

Strong oral and written communication skills are important for any leader.[76] However, one of the challenges of being a senior-level commander is how to translate one's own sensemaking into sensegiving to others.[77] Communication skills are in of themselves insufficient. One can write and speak clearly and show empathy for the other party, but the subjects identified many barriers and traps associated with communication that commanders should be mindful of.[78]

J addressed this from a civil-military perspective. While it is generally recognized that military leaders and their civilian

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[76] Waters, "Senior Leader Competencies."

[77] Gioia and Chittipeddi, "Sensemaking and Sensegiving,"

[78] Bob Johansen. *Leaders Make the Future: Ten New Leadership Skills for an Uncertain World* San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2012), 57.

masters do not often share a common language, seemingly clear and unambiguous military advice can be well-received and accepted yet be completely misinterpreted in practice. *J* suggested that military leaders must recognize the limits of others' perspectives and not treat communication as final. Military leaders need to help their civilian masters see the bigger picture if they do not.

D shared a similar story about the re-establishment of the Tripartite Commission in Afghanistan, that bringing parties to the table may be useful as an end, but understanding and communication cannot be equated to coordination and cooperation.

C not only affirmed the top-down need to communicate clarity but also the bottom-up. This was crucial during circumstances where a situation appears to be "unraveling" and the commander must intervene to stabilize the situation.

Implications

N1 stated that managing complexity is a skill that can atrophy, a notion that has support from scholarship on leading in complex enviroments.[79] This should not be surprising, given that our social skills are developed largely on the basis of linear casuality (P causes Q) whereas complex systems invoke circular causality and feedback loops (P causes Q causes P), making it difficult to trace indicators of problems back to their root causes.[80] System skills are therefore neither easily developed nor maintained.[81]

This may explain a central challenge for non-commanders seeking command. While uncertainty, ambiguity, and complexity are salient for any senior leader, non-commanders lack the requirement to immerse themselves in the same tension-filled environments that commanders cannot avoid. The result is the ability for non-commanders to address only those problems

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[79] Christoph Mandl, *Managing Complexity in Social Systems Leverage Points for Policy and Strategy* (Cham, Switzerland: Springer, 2010), 206.

[80] Ludwig Von Bertalanffy, "General systems theory and psychiatry—an overview," *General Systems Theory and Psychiatry* 32, no. 4 (1969): 33-46.

[81] Mandl, *Managing Complexity*, 206.

within the scope of their prescribed duties, and push problems outside that scope to others. At some point, commanders assume the responsibilities and risks associated with problems that no one else is postured to handle. This reinforces the point in earlier papers regarding how officers in staff positions may not exercise sufficient systems thinking and risk-taking over time to become well-suited for senior-level command.

This presents a developmental challenge. Educational programs can provide fundamental knowledge and understanding of systems thinking and managing complexity, but they cannot substitute for experience and self-development activities. Stakeholders exhorting bold action and innovation of subordinates may not help, either. This can result in recklessness if the individuals lack tools and experience to appropriately analyze the context.

Chapter 8. Needle of the Collective Moral Compass

Tom Galvin

Theme 5. Commanders Must Be the Needle of the Organization's Collective Moral Compass. *The moral dimension of climate was distinct from its ethics. The distinction was both in personal conduct, which is already emphasized in leader development, and the collective conduct of the senior leadership team or the "command team." The commander's representatives had to be fully trusted to personally conduct themselves as having the voice of the commander without the commander's authorities. The commander also had to take swift action against those whose actions, whether intentional or unintentional, upset that moral authority.*

This theme did not emerge initially from the reading of the oral histories because, in the written words, the moral aspects of leadership were not obviously distinct from that of technical aspects. This may have been because of a natural limitation on using oral histories – they are autobiographical and retrospective in nature. They may have either portrayed moral issues as more clearly good vs. bad than the reality, or they may have been less willing to discuss them if the issue reflectively negatively on the officer. Some histories did include passages of tremendous introspection, but even in those, the focus was more on the process of making and justifying the decisions made and less so on the internal moral struggles leading to those decisions.

It was also not clear how the effects of the commander's ethical or moral leadership differed from what was addressed in Chapter 6 of this book -- the need to establish climates for lawful action. There, the first-person perspectives of the histories addressed justifications for what the commanders *did*. They pursued a persistent state of readiness through actions so that the unit would be mentally and spiritually prepared to sustain lawful conduct in war. They exercised discipline through the proper and appropriate enforcement of rules and norms to allow members of the unit to act both lawfully and autonomously as they found

themselves under the stress of combat. Finally, commanders acted in proactive ways to reduce risk so to protect the soldiers in their formations, which in turn encouraged lawful behavior. The histories were generally limited to retrospective understanding and assessment of why, such as how factors in their upbringing or experiences with good (or poor) mentorship influenced them, but it was less apparent what an equivalent proactive ethical or moral orientation (beyond following established ethical rules and norms) might be.

Enter the noncommissioned officers who participated in the interview phase of the study. Subjects *N2* through *N5* exercised a second-person perspective through direct and personal engagements with senior commanders that offered insights on how commanders projected their ethical and moral decisions onto their units. The NCOs captured the *shared understandings* among members of the organization, seeing more objectively how the commander's espoused ethics and morals translated into the attitudes and behaviors of soldiers. Thus, whereas the prior four themes reflected the intentionality of commanders, this fifth theme reflected how members enacted them.

This was interesting because such shared understandings can easily depart from the commander's intent if the commander's words and actions are not morally clear. The traditional view of a commander's moral leadership is that the leader's morality, expressed through personal example, should result in moral action. Indeed, the stories in the oral histories aligned with such a rational, deterministic view. However, moral conflict with members may neither be visible nor apparent to the commander, especially in circumstances where significant physical and power distances exist. Myths and stories surrounding the commander may be shared and may overtake or circumvent the commander's intentions. In particular, the separation between the senior leadership and the membership may preclude a commander's moral example from permeating the organization and enacting the desired culture and climate for lawful action.[82] Therefore, not

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[82] Signs of this occurring may appear in the use of dysphemisms, disparaging words or phrases used colloquially as a substitution for the name of the headquarters such as "head shed" or "puzzle palace." These terms are understood and shared, often seeking to dehumanize or distance the speakers from the other person or object.

only must a commander exude a proper moral example but must also provide moral clarity such that the membership accepts and enacts the commander's intentions and directions. Unlike the other four themes, part of the burden here is placed upon the followers who must recognize and strive to overcome any moral conflicts with their commander.

This chapter first explores the challenge of shared understandings and how they may interfere with a commander's moral leadership. It then examines the stories and comments made by the interviewees on how the commander must not only provide the proper example but also present moral clarity that allows for the commander and members to develop common shared understandings of situations and decisions so that mutual empathy is not only possible but rewarded.

Varieties of Moral-Focused Leadership

Moral leadership is typically discussed as a moral-focused construct of leadership. Three prominent examples are: (1) ethical leadership, (2) authentic leadership, and (3) servant leadership.[83] Each of these were indirectly referenced among the histories.

Ethical leadership focuses on the appropriateness of a leader's conduct and the promotion of such conduct among others.[84] This aligned both with the stories about personal conduct referenced above but also with the subtheme of putting eyes-on-target from Chapter 7. The willingness to put oneself at personal risk to sustain full awareness of situation and demand that subordinates do same is another example of this type of leadership in practice.

Authentic leadership is focused inward on how self-awareness and "self-regulated positive behaviors" result in greater transparency.[85] Most of the oral history subjects espoused

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[83] James G. Lemoine, G., Chad A. Hartnell, and Hannes Leroy, "Taking Stock of Moral Approaches to Leadership: An Integrative Review of Ethical, Authentic, and Servant Leadership," *Academy of Management Annals* 13, no. 1 (2019): 148-187.

[84] Michael E. Brown, Linda K. Treviño, and David A. Harrison, "Ethical leadership: A Social Learning Perspective for Construct Development and Testing," *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes* 97, no. 2 (2005): 117-134, quoted in Lemoine, Hartnell, and Leroy, "Taking Stock."

[85] Fred Luthans, and Bruce J. Avolio, "Authentic leadership development," in *Positive Organizational Scholarship: Foundations of a New Discipline*, eds. Kim Cameron, Jane E. Dutton

transparency in their stories and placed high value on open and consistent communication with internal and external stakeholders. Moreover, this form of leadership emphasizes how being a leader is a "central component of their self-concept," such that they desire, are capable, and are willing to allow that self-concept to naturally communicate their goals and harmonize them with the personal behavior. This was less obvious from the oral histories. While they offered some insights on the extent subjects internalized the role, their first-person perspective may have biased toward a self-promoting view.[86]

Servant leadership sees the leader effectively subordinating oneself to the needs of the membership and encouraging their growth.[87] Care and development of subordinates are essential.[88] This form of leadership was easiest to glean from the histories as several offered stories of how commanders put the needs of their soldiers first, subsequently resulting in the spreading of stories enhancing the reputation of the commander and the prestige of belonging to the commander's unit.

From the Member Perspective

All three forms of moral-focused leadership ostensibly contribute to better outcomes in the organization such as enhanced member satisfaction and commitment, creativity and innovation, and reduced deviance from desired behaviors.[89] However, as the interviewees pointed out, just because the leader is acting morally does not necessarily mean commensurate moral behaviors and attitudes follow.

Noncommissioned officers (NCOs) are uniquely positioned in military organizations to objectively observe and describe disconnects between a commander's perspectives and that of the members. NCOs in the U.S. military perform a wide variety of

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& R. E. Quinn (San Francisco, CA: Berret-Koehler Publishers, Inc., 2003), 258, quoted in Lemoine, Hartnell and Leroy, "Taking Stock."

[86] Glenn A. Bowen, "Document analysis as a qualitative research method," *Qualitative Research Journal* 9, no. 2 (2009): 27-40.

[87] R. K. Greenleaf, *Servant Leadership: A Journey into the Nature of Legitimate Power and Greatness* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1977).

[88] M. G. Ehrhart, "Leadership and Procedural Justice Climate as Antecedents of Unit-Level Organizational Citizenship Behavior," *Personnel Psychology* 57, no. 1 (2004): 61–94.

[89] Lemoine, Hartnell, & Leroy, "Taking Stock."

important roles in personally enacting and enforcing standards and discipline in the unit while preparing individual soldiers for combat.[90] Related to the prior four themes, they: (1) enable the commander's vision and strategic direction as applied to individual soldiers, and (2) advise the commander on matters of command culture and climate, including morale, welfare, and discipline. These roles have expanded qualitatively and quantitatively over time, enhancing both their capacity to monitor the moral climate of the organization and their voice in bringing problems and concerns to the commanders' attentions.[91] Of relevance to the promulgation of a leader's moral leadership are the following three issues, the first of which presents a significant yet common moral dilemma between commanders.

"Us" Versus "Them" – Vertically

It is well known that hierarchical organizations like militaries experience tensions between higher and lower echelons. The interviewees highlighted some common indicators of such tensions in superior-subordinate relationships – perceptions of lacking trust in either direction, micromanagement, and excessive demands for information. They highlighted how the Army's *mission command* philosophy[92] was to provide commanders with tools and ideas on how to combat these problems.

Interviewees also pointed toward supporting-supported relationships as common sources of tension. *N4* told a story in which an organization (in this case a medical unit) provided regional support in a combat theater. The unit established multiple medical facilities, each in direct support to a combat unit. A conflict arose when the medical unit needed to move assets in theater to better support the overall medical mission, however the supporting commander (who significantly outranked the medical

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[90] Christopher J. Menton and Stanley J. Balcer, "The Professional NCO," NCO Journal, January 2018, https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Portals/7/nco-journal/docs/2019/Leader-to-Leader/the-professional-nco.pdf.

[91] Jim Garamone, "Noncommissioned Officers give big advantage to U.S. military," Department of Defense, November 7, 2019, https://www.defense.gov/Explore/News/Article/Article/2011393/noncommissioned-officers-give-big-advantage-to-us-military/.

[92] Interviewees were specifically referring to U.S. Army doctrine. See U.S. Department of the Army, *Mission Command*, Army Doctrinal Publication 6-0 (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Army, 2019).

commander) refused to allow it. That commander viewed the hospital as effectively belonging to the supported unit. The dilemma was one of risk in which both commanders recognized the same hazard -- having an imbalanced force posture raised the possibility of not having the assets available to handle anticipated casualty load – but from separate perspectives.

Ordinarily, one would presume that unity of command and unity of effort should drive the two commanders to produce a negotiated solution. After all, there were common interests in ensuring adequate access to emergency medical care while both sides were probably aware that medical assets were limited (*N4* did not explicitly mention the other commanders' position other than refusing to allow the move). However, this story was but one example of a pattern of such conflicts between medical units and the commands they supported. *N4* explained that similar situations occurred with respect to medical evacuation and provision of mental health services, the latter of which was badly underresourced. *N5* gave similar patterns of behavior in matters of transportation and logistics in conflict with operational commanders; *N3* on building partner capacity in conflict with a geographic combatant command.

Each of these fostered the development of "Us versus Them" cultures. This fosters both sides taking an initially defensive approach to new communications between commands. Complicating matters is that many of these conflicts, per *N2*, are things that senior-level commanders would not ordinarily become involved in as, culturally speaking, they should be addressed at lower levels – *N2* described it as "empower[ing] subordinates to clear the ankle-biters."

While it is appropriate to push such responsibilities downward, one would anticipate that the presence of appropriate ethical and moral leadership should enable and encourage the breaking of boundaries. Unfortunately, according to the interviewees by and large, this is not the case.

"Us" Versus "Them" – Horizontally

At the strategic level, the differences between a vertical hierarchical relationship and a horizontal peer one can be fuzzy.

A Defense agency may reside at a higher echelon than a service agency, but in practice may resemble more of a peer relationship (in part because of the fact that many resources flow through the services and not through the defense and joint structures). This can be a source of tension according to the interviewees.

N4 told of how cross-functional working groups and other efforts at collaboration can be undercut by interpersonal or interorganizational competition. Informal hierarchies often form when there are differentiated roles – such as how a team of medical professions comprised of physicians, physicians assistants, nurses, and other providers might naturally develop informal hierarchies due to expertise and the situation behind the need to form such teams (e.g., specific patient's condition). But in instances where roles and missions are being transformed or transferred among organizations, resistance can arise amid competition over the resulting distribution of resources, power, authorities, influence, and prestige. *N4* cited discussions involving the establishment of the Defense Health Agency and commensurate realignment of service medical responsibilities. *N3* discussed the evolution of a joint task force to train and equip a partner nation's army. *N5* presented stories of the "FOB tax" in Afghanistan, on how tenant organizations in forward operating bases were forced to negotiate (sometimes acrimoniously) the borrowed personnel requirements for base functions while trying to accomplish their primary operational missions. In each case, the parties involved were expected by operational leaders to balance competing demands on their own without the need for guidance. After all, operational leaders had larger issues to contend with.

Personality Traits of Commanders

The NCO interviewees held a common view that "introversion" was a negative trait. *Introversion* in this context did not mean the psychological trait of introversion as defined in the literature but a combination of behavior traits that appear to limit the quantity and clarity of communication emanating from the commander – both in words and presence. Each of the NCOs placed a premium on the ability to "connect" (*N2*, *N4*) with the commander, and this was emphasized at all levels of command

and among civilian leaders (e.g., agency directors and assistant secretaries at the Department level).

For senior-level commanders (and above-mentioned civilian leaders), the NCOs paid particular attention to those who established strong relationships with the senior enlisted leaders. Each had their own stories, but *N5* went further and discussed how the contrast among multiple succession of commanders who *N5* served as senior enlisted leaders impacted the organization. One case was in support of two successive military commanders. *N5*'s relationship with the first was very close, acting as a confidante and travel partner. The relationship with the second was not as close as the commander was more withdrawn. These characterized the commander's relationships with others, and as a result the accomplishments of the first were far superior. *N5* experienced a similar swing of relationships with a succession of assistant secretaries while serving in the Pentagon. The first two were retired military officers who were accustomed to close relationships with NCOs and who replicated such with *N5*. Their respective military experience also made it easier for other military members to engage with them. In contrast, the third was a pure civilian who was a political appointee with no prior military experience. This assistant secretary sustained a close inner circle built from prior political connections and did not leverage the military members ("shunned to the side"). This made it far more difficult for members to understand and support intent.

The Collective Moral Compass

In her book, *Morality and the Regulation of Social Behavior* (2017), Naomi Ellemers complains that much of the scholarship and practice in matters of morality focus on individual-level concerns.[93] However, groups play a significant role in justifying and enacting moral and immoral behaviors. Negative examples are fairly easy to come by, from how high school sports teams can

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[93] Naomi Ellemers, *Morality and the Regulation of Social Behavior: Groups as Moral Anchors* (New York: Psychology Press, Routledge, 2017), 23.

encourage bullying or how group beliefs on the morality of an action can cause members to ostracize those who challenge it.[94]

In each of the vignettes discussed above, there were two dimensions of group morality at play – *intragroup* and *intergroup.* Interestingly, because each vignette involves elements within the Department of Defense, they are all technically intragroup matters, but intergroup morality is involved because groups at the defense and service levels, for example, have relatively little regular or spontaneous interaction and therefore the greater DoD whole may be less salient.

Conflicts and tensions of a moral nature in such large heterogeneous groups, according to Ellemers, can be characterized as one or more of the following. Intragroup tensions can exist either: (1) between the group as a whole, and (2) among individual members or subgroups. Intergroup tensions exist between independent groups. Either of these classes of tensions can be intractable or paradoxical, meaning that they might be resolved or mitigated for a period of time but can never be resolved permanently.[95]

The ways in which the larger organization (i.e., the lowest-level parent organization that owns all associated groups) ordinarily deals with these tensions, hopefully in a constructive and professional manner to resolve them or synthesize common interests, will be referred to as the *collective moral compass*, an analogue of an individual's moral compass that refers to the ability to judge right from wrong and act accordingly.[96] The following are considerations, not to be considered comprehensive.

Morals of loyalty and acceptance (intragroup)

Intragroup moral tensions regard who is 'in' or 'out' of the group. This need not be a binary relationship, as individuals or subgroups can be more 'in' or 'out' relative each other. C. S. Lewis, in *The Inner Ring*, discusses how being further 'in' represents

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[94] Ellemers, *Morality,* 27.

[95] C. S. Lewis, *The Inner Ring* (speech, London: Logres Press, 1966), https://www.lewissociety.org/innerring/.

[96] *Oxford English Dictionary,* s.v. "Moral Compass," accessed November 3, 2020.

greater access to power and prestige and that individuals may be drawn to compete to get into the inner circles of the leader. Although this paints the act of seeking the inner ring as potentially morally corrupt, a healthy competitive for ideas and resources can provide adequate moral justification. *N5*'s stories about the close relationships between commanders and their senior enlisted leaders represents a moral imperative – that the commander must maintain strong situational understanding of the organization's culture and climate and should rely on the best available sources.

However, at the strategic level, intragroup morality of this sort is complicated by the movement of members across the defense enterprise. An example from outside the study is a subject from Galvin (2015) on identity transition where one of the subjects was responsible for developing a modernization plan for a service's vehicle fleet. The subject was a logistician who moved from a logistics command to the Army staff when assuming responsibilities for this project. However, the subject was forced to take and maintain a position that disadvantaged (and therefore angered) the logistics command. After serving on the Army staff, the subject returned to that same command in a different position, only to be relegated to the out-group in retribution for supposed disloyalty.[97]

One could claim that the right moral framework is one promoting the needs of the larger group (i.e., the Army) over that of the smaller group (i.e., the logistics command). But what about cases where the identity of either group is at stake, as it was with *N4*'s story of the conflict over the forward-based hospital? The choice to move or not move presented unacceptable risk to both the warfighting and medical commanders! Absent a collective moral compass, actors may default to rules of protocol (e.g., seniority of rank, bigger unit trumps smaller unit) whose result may be inconsistent with what is optimal or appropriate for the situation at hand.

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[97] Thomas P. Galvin, *A Phenomenological Study of Identity Construction among Military Officers Promoted from the Middle Ranks to the Roles of Senior Leaders*, Doctoral Dissertation (Washington, DC: The George Washington University, 2015).

A related moral claim is that selfless service is a virtue at all levels, and that the retribution against the supposedly disloyal logistician is clearly wrong. The former is straightforward while the latter is more challenging because in the end the unit did experience some degree of harm. Therefore, one can expect that members of the unit will sanction the logistician in a direct or indirect way. Because the needs of the Army as a whole are potentially greater than that of the unit, the unit's treatment of the individual should be deemed as unacceptable as it repudiates the norms of the profession as a whole. One would therefore wish to preclude local norms reinforcing group membership and identity at strategic attempts to establish broader ideals.[98]

Morals of eliminating systemic problems (intragroup)

Ellemers contrasts the approach to dealing with and eliminating so-called *bad apples* from *corrupting barrels*. Achieving the former is simple compared to the latter.[99] The "bad apple" perspective views individual misconduct as being the shock to the system that precipitates banishment. The bad apple member had a flaw, whether overlooked or possibly hidden, which somehow became exposed or highlighted at a later time. Reliefs for cause, the removal of commanders due to poor performance or poor judgment, are examples of removing bad apples.

However, when the flaw is unclear, perhaps nonexistent or belonging to someone else, the organization risks pursuing the morally weaker approach of *scapegoating*. Ellemers describes the tactic of scapegoating by which the sins of the collective are passed onto a possibly undeserving individual. The scapegoat is thus banished, leaving the rest of the collective intact. An example of this is when a lower commander is relieved when the actual source of the problem cause may rest on a higher authority's shoulders, such as when a subordinate commander blows the whistle on a broad systemic problem negatively influencing the unit but is relieved due to loss of trust and confidence by higher headquarters without acknowledgement of the systemic problem. As Chapter 7 also suggests, a strong moral framework in the

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[98] Ellemers, *Morality,* 149.
[99] Ellemers, *Morality,* 156.

organization discourages temptations to reduce the scope of corrective actions taken down to only removing easy targets and instead encourages the identification and analysis of systemic problems as a matter of course.

The "corrupting barrels" approach is to look at how the organization socialized and reinforced poor behaviors in members that eventually lead to misconduct. Enablers include climate factors such as disregard for the moral components of routine decisions, improper moral explanations for otherwise undesired behavior, systemic injustice or marginalization of certain subgroups (e.g., demography such as race and gender, units performing non-combat or non-core functions), and the ineffective responses to past transgressions (e.g., denial, shifting of blame). These are the types of intragroup behaviors that are difficult to detect and pin down to specific causes. In effect, all members are potential culpable for allowing such conditions to prevail. For example, codes of silence, emphasizing loyalty and acceptance, might preclude members from speaking up when they experience something wrong in the organization.

The development of corrupting barrels in subordinate organizations can be an unintended outcome of improperly exercising mission command, such as when higher delegation is taken as higher disinterest, or *benign neglect.*[100] *N2*'s dealing with the ankle-biters turns into keeping a happy face on problems so as not to provoke higher headquarters, who in turn takes the position of *action-passed-action-resolved* and stays out of the way.[101] A proper moral framework recognizes the natural tension

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[100] Linda K. Treviño, and Michael E. Brown, "Managing to be Ethical: Debunking Five Business Ethics Myths," *Academy of management perspectives,* 18, no. 2 (2004): 69-81, 72, quoted in Ryan S. Bisel, *Organizational Moral Learning: A Communication Approach* (New York: Routledge, 2017).

[101] In the author's experience, *action-passed-action-resolved* was a term used by commanders to push unwanted tasks to subordinates expecting the tasks to be completed unless the subordinate comes back to the commander to say otherwise. Ostensibly, the phrase invokes *command be negation*, that superiors would delegate a task to subordinates who in turn would execute the task as they fit [as defined in Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Maritime Operations*, Joint Pub 3-32 (Washington, DC: Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2018), xiii]. However, in practice, action-passed-action-resolved carried the risk of tasks being forgotten or neglected due to subordinates anticipating that superiors would not follow up.

between higher oversight and subordinate autonomy, and that these are a false dichotomy.

Morals of fairness and meritocracy (intergroup)

Fairness at the individual level are relatively easy to grasp. When considering talent management, one would expect any process regarding recruitment, selection, promotion, assignments, compensation, and so on to be *fair*, which is to say that any two individuals with equivalent skills who make equivalent contributions to the organization are treated equally. Any differences in treatment are based on a reasonable comparison of the individuals' contributions to the organization. This is not just a procedural matter; it is a moral imperative in that failure to strive for fairness results in a talent management system that members and commanders alike may not trust.

In principle, group fairness operates the same way. It is a moral imperative that all groups (whether formally established units or informal communities of practice) are treated fairly. But it is challenging to measure fairness at a group level because moral issues do not influence members of the group equally. Moreover, members may minimally self-identify with a group until a stressor appears, and then group membership becomes highly salient.[102]"

N1 used a moral argument related to this in a criticism against matrix organizations, which occasionally surfaces as a way of incorporating best business practices and eliminating silos, thereby enabling greater cooperation and coordination. The charge was that pursuit of fair solutions must not mask or counter the need for proper dialogue on complex matters. In *N1*'s words, "everything becomes a negotiation" whether deserved or not, which in turn could produce a morally bankrupt view where hard decisions are avoided in favor of keeping everyone satisfied.

A proper moral framework establishes shared understandings of fairness and similar terms such as justice, equity, appropriateness, and so on, to rationalize what is

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[102] David A. Whetten, "Albert and Whetten Revisited: Strengthening the Concept of Organizational Identity," *Journal of Management Inquiry* 15, no. 3 (2006): 219-234.

considered both a justifiable decision and the grounds for which the decision must be revisited. It is suitably pragmatic, recognizing that solutions have shelf lives. However, it also sets conditions by which the re-engagement of a decision should minimize the blind revitalization of old moral arguments. The context of time is important, so that the meaning of fairness is appropriate for the new problematic situation.[103]

Morals of competition amid heightened emotions (intergroup)

Groups will tend to stake out claims of moral distinctiveness, including exceptionalism, and marginalize the moral claims of other groups.[104] This is prominent in politics whereby each political party views their position as morally superior and disparage their opponents on moral grounds.[105] This can become a barrier to cooperation and coordination among organizations whose moral identities are strong. If not handled properly, relationships can degenerate into antagonism such that a group's own moral standing can become corrupt – e.g., that the organization tolerates its own immoral behaviors while casting blame on the competing group.

N4's experiences with the consolidation of services to the Defense Health Agency and overall medical reform is an example, as the service medical communities grappled with the moral imperative to ensure no disruption or gaps to the medical coverage granted to service members. Members of the medical community whose day-to-day operations were comparatively unaffected by the higher bureaucracy became animated and concerned over the impacts of the transformation on their abilities to provide care.[106]

The clear danger is when emotions become heightened and preclude constructive dialogue. Beyond a stalemate where opposing groups may agree to disagree, or simply disagree and

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[103] Patricia M. Shields, "The Community of Inquiry: Classical Pragmatism and Public Administration," *Administration & Society* 35, no. 5 (2003): 510-538.

[104] Ellemers, *Morality*, 182.

[105] Ellemers, *Morality*, 193.

[106] Steve Starnberg, "Military Health System in the Crosshairs," U.S. News & World Report, December 11, 2019, https://www.usnews.com/news/health-news/articles/2019-12-11/military-health-system-in-the-crosshairs.

seek disengagement, these are situations where anger and vitriol become prevalent and the relationship is actively antagonistic.[107] Although modern military professionalism and culture helps keep extreme emotions in check and inhibits violence among subgroups, unfortunately U.S. military history includes negative episodes of this type such as interracial violence during the Vietnam War.[108] Beyond capping the extremes, however, a proper moral framework recognizes the emotional component of moral issues and incorporates them appropriately, seeking to turn negative energy into positive energy. The alternative of suppressing emotions and demanding only rationality drives emotions underground and leads to uncertain and unstable solutions to complex problems. The competition for moral superiority is strong and will influence the acceptability and durability of strategic decisions.

Commanders as the 'Needle'

It is simple to say that commanders who set negative moral examples have a detrimental effect on the culture and climate of their organizations.[109] The causal links may be detectable. However, the inverse is harder to show, because of the many prevalent moral tensions that intervene at echelon between the senior commander and the membership. So, one can argue that simply being a good, honest professional is insufficient on its own to guide subordinates to overcome the above barriers. If one conceptualizes the moral climate to be like that of a compass, then the commander alone must be the needle.

Being the needle means providing the rules of thumb, personal examples, and broad guidance that allow subordinates to address moral tensions as issues arise. For example, resolution of *N4*'s case of the field hospitals should lead to larger discussions about conflicts between supporting and supported perspectives. If the outcome was beneficial or neutral, the example can provide norms to follow and associated stories to share on finding the

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[107] Tom Galvin, *Communication Campaigning: Primer for Senior Leaders* (Carlisle, PA: School of Strategic Landpower, 2019), 41-54.

[108] An excellent rundown on historical parallels between racial violence and war, culminating with Vietnam, is Warren Schaich, "A Relationship Between Collective Racial Violence and War," *Journal of Black Studies* 5, no. 4 (1975): 374-394.

[109] Treviño and Brown, "Managing to be ethical," 73-77.

right path to a workable solution. If the outcomes were negative, the example should lead to systematic reviews of the moral tensions at play for broader resolution so that future commanders are not unduly placed in similar circumstances.

It is taken as given that commanders would prefer not to experience us-vs-them tensions and that unity of command or unity of effort are viable ends in themselves. However, given the persistence of conditions—social and bureaucratic—that foster moral competition between subgroups, commanders must be both persistent and pragmatic. They must demonstrate through words, actions, and decisions the moral justification for breaking barriers and encouraging subgroups to reconsider their own perspectives in pursuit of a greater good. At the highest levels, commanders are less likely to resolve such differences through direct action, and may even make it worse through intervention, driving the competing moral perspectives underground. Instead, commanders should point the way and nudge the organization forward, setting left and right bounds as needed and trusting subordinate commanders to support.

PART THREE:

DEVELOPING RESPONSIBLE COMMANDERS

Chapter 9. The Commander's Professional Campaign

These final two chapters take the study results and suggest ways for leaders taking command or other top position in a military organization to prepare. The focus in these two chapters is about setting conditions that provide *responsible command* over the organization so it may act lawfully in combat or in any other operational or non-operational environment.

This will be a two-step process. Chapter 9 is about self-awareness and what responsible command means to the individual leader. Chapter 10 is about a specific campaign to assume command of a named organization. Much of what Chapter 10 will cover material relevant to serving as the top leader of any type of organization, whether named a command with commensurate command authority or other executive supervisory position such as agency director or division chief in a high-level staff.

The Individual Professional Campaign

First, the following is assumed: that those who would serve as commanders develop unique personal knowledge and expertise related to the five major finding areas in the study. They have observed and participated in matters that address formal command and control arrangements, relationships with the broader enterprise, meanings and shared understandings of command climate, approaches for navigating complexity, and management of the organization's senses of ethics and morality. Some subgroups (e.g., Army branches or communities of practice) may develop common cultural perspectives, but each individual determines what is most salient. This is in part because individual development includes non-military settings. For example, reserve components officers may develop relevant experiences as managers in a civilian firm, while officers may gain valuable experience serving in volunteer organizations or other off-duty

activities. These all contribute to the leader's identity, of which their professional identity is but one facet.[110]

No leader is perfect, and commanders serving at the highest levels have probably deviated from their own ideals on occasion, or that other interpret the leader's actions and decisions incorrectly, leading to myths and stories that perpetuate among service members. Moreover, the context of command is ever-changing – from threats to the environment to what motivates service members to fight. A commander who is unable or unwilling to reassess themselves is more likely to fall out of alignment with the environment and build false ideas about their own efficacy, as demonstrated in the study.

Two areas of development are therefore crucial. One is to better understand one's own professional life. As one moves from assignment to assignment, there are preferences, motivations, and actions that develop both one's own capabilities and capacities and earn one their reputation from others. But to what extent is one aware of each?

Consider a recurring poll by Allen & Bullis (2019) that focuses on interpersonal relationships with senior leaders. They asked War College students to recall general and flag officers with whom they've previously served and place them in four categories, where Category I reflects officers they would serve with immediately to Category IV who officers would avoid at all costs. Over the course of a decade, the authors found that one in six general officers fall in Category IV, with explanation including being self-serving, capable of hiding faults (i.e., "impression management"), oversimplifying the complex, and "tending to substitute action for brains."[111]

For present purposes, the Category I leaders are more relevant as their attributes align well with the desired capabilities. Allen & Bullis noted in the findings that Category I leaders

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[110] Peter J. Burke, "Relationships among Multiple Identities," in *Advances in Identity Theory and Research*, eds. Peter J. Burke, Timothy J. Owens, Richard T. Serpe, and Peggy A. Thoits (Boston, MA: Springer, 2003), 195-214.

[111] Charles Allen and Craig Bullis, "Developing Senior Leaders Who Soldiers Want to Follow," WAR ROOM, March 6, 2019, https://warroom.armywarcollege.edu/articles/senior-officers-who-soldiers-follow/.

"demand high levels of performance, … but also demonstrate genuine care for individuals [and] pay attention to the nuances of climate…"[112] They also emphasized reflection on the leadership behavior over their careers, particularly those that improved an organization's performance and outcomes and the commitment of members.[113]

Trust is also critical.[114] Although one may view trust as an interpersonal characteristic, it is manifest in the way commanders issue strategic direction and interact outside the environment – the central messages of themes 1 and 2. Allen & Braun (2013) describe four components of trust that point to how commanders' actions and attitudes influence the environment and either enable or constrain organizational action and member commitment:

- Credibility of *competence*
- *Benevolence* of motives
- *Integrity* with the sense of fairness and honesty
- *Predictability* of behavior[115]

Without trust, commanders issue strategic direction to their own organizations that constrains rather than enables action. Their may attempt to mask their incompetence in strategic issues rather than engagement experts or gather additional information. Their motives may appear benevolent but may actually be self-preserving. This can also have an impact on one's predictability of decisions. The integrity of the leader also comes into question as inevitably one's self-orientation will be made manifest, making it more difficult for commanders to make forceful moral arguments to their superiors. Integrity is what made Matthew Ridgway's dissent (Chapter 2) so powerful.

Leaders must also maintain trust as they move in and out of command positions over time. Moving from branch or division

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[112] Allen and Bullis, "Developing Senior Leaders."
[113] Allen and Bullis, "Developing Senior Leaders."
[114] Tom Guthrie, "Mission command: Do We Have the Stomach for What is Really Required?" *ARMY* (June 2012): 26-28,
https://www.ausa.org/sites/default/files/FC_Guthrie_0612.pdf.
[115] Charles D. Allen and William G. Braun, "TRUST: Implications for the Army profession," *Military Review* (September-October 2013): 73-85,
https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Portals/7/military-review/Archives/English/MilitaryReview_20131031_art012.pdf.

chief to command is analogous to moving from being an enterprise provider to that of a client. That the needs of unit commanders and the enterprise can come in conflict is a given, as the study showed. But the trust one earns as a senior staff officer, especially in matters of competence and benevolence of motives, contributes to one's ability to move into command. Recall *E*'s story of the highly competent staff officer who left command – the underlying motives and competencies were only compatible with the enterprise environment, not both staff and command.

The remainder of this chapter presents a series of questions that encourage self-reflection on one's life history, which would inform why and how an individual leader. The life history is referred here at the *leader's professional narrative*. It addresses both what the leader has done to present, and what motivates the leader in the long-term – transcending any particular assignment. The narrative also provides opportunities to reflect on what errors and criticisms the leader has faced over time and what may barriers to trust in future.

THE LEADER'S PROFESSIONAL NARRATIVE

A leader's professional narrative addresses who the leader is, what they prefer, and how they see their roles in any given the organization. It also addresses primary motivations for continuing to serve – in uniform to the end of one's military career and beyond, whether as a civilian working within the national security realm in some capacity or utterly detached from it.[116]

Who is the leader?

Leaders experience significant periods of transition throughout their careers, involving major changes in duties, specializations, or duty locations. Previous transitions shape the leaders' approach to assumptions of senior leadership positions later.[117] Each episode of leadership in the organization is an intervention at the personal level, and the leader's own identity

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[116] This section draws extensively from Galvin, *Communication Campaigning Primer*, Chapter 6 – "The Senior Leader's Standing Campaign," 79-94.

[117] Galvin, *A Phenomenological Study of Identity Construction*.

changes as a result.[118] The same thing will occur when the leader departs, potentially to take on a different leadership position in a different organization. Throughout, the leader has likely undergone re-examination of "who am I?"[119]

A systematic review of the leader's autobiography helps capture the "learning about one's own learning" rather than an autobiographical sequence of life events.[120] This constitutes the leader's professional narrative, as it captures how the leader will most likely approach current and future endeavors over the remainder of one's professional life, including all potential command assignments. There are several questions that leaders can use to construct their biographies. It is important that leaders be honest and include both positive and negative attributes – skills, knowledge, and attitudes -- as much as possible. It may be helpful to look at the outcomes of the behavior like that of a job interview – if the leader were a candidate for a command position, how would the leader promote themselves in the interview?

What defines my central character? What are the attributes that are most enduring and important to the leader? Who contributed the most to their development – self or others such as mentors?

What distinguishes me from others? What attributes are unique to the leader that few (if any) others share? Why are those attributes important or vital?

How have I evolved as a leader? What actions and experiences significantly shaped the leader's career? Where did these come from? Upbringing? Education? Professional experiences inside or outside the military?

What is the leader's central motivation?

The next part of the narrative is what the leader sees as their overarching plans to contribute to the enterprise – *what problem(s) do I wish to solve for the Army (or my service or my nation)?*

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[118] Herminia Ibarra, *Working Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Business Review Press, 2004).

[119] Thomas P. Galvin, *Enhancing Identity Development in Senior Service Colleges* (Carlisle, PA: U.S. Army War College Press, December 2016).

[120] Pierre Dominicé, *Learning from Our Lives: Using Educational Biographies with Adults* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 1-5.

Some leaders will have a clear answer to this question, for others it will be less clear. However, there should be an answer that constitutes a primary motivation for continuing service to the enterprise. Otherwise, one's career trajectory may lack direction or coherency, and the leader may be simply taking things one assignment at a time.

A central motivation for service can inspire numerous communications on the leader's vision and strategic direction. It can also connect the experiences of multiple commands as the leader broadens their perspectives and looks to solve problems affecting the whole enterprise rather than just individual units.

What are the leader's perspectives on the five themes?

There are already a number of quality instruments that can measure a leader's preferences when it comes to personality traits. Those aspects are beyond the present scope of this book.[121] This subsection focuses specifically on the study outcomes as the leader's commensurate preferences may influence what they view as responsible command. *How does the leader connect one's preferences in command and control to perceptions that the organization is postured to act lawfully in combat? What about staff-line relationships? Meaning of command climate, and so on?*

When the opportunity to command comes, the five themes from the study represent a number of problem spaces that the leader should potentially address. In all likelihood, the leader has already developed preferences among the five themes and will feel uncomfortable acting outside those preferences. The following represents a number of questions that can help leaders reflect on their experiences. It is important that the leader answers these questions in the general sense and avoids answering with respect to specific organizations. However, leaders should consider if they answer differently among different classes of organizations (e.g., military vs. non-military, service vs. joint,

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[121] The U.S. Army War College's Center for Strategic Leadership includes the Human Dimension Department that conducts research and leader development programs for, according to their site, "enhancing senior leader decision-making skills, self-awareness and resiliency to prepare them to meet the complex and ambiguous demands of strategic leaders within the human dimension of war." More information on the program and points of contact are available at https://csl.armywarcollege.edu/HDD/default.aspx.

service vs. branch, active vs. reserve, operational units vs. enterprise or installation units, etc.)

What command and control structures and relationships do I prefer, or that I cannot tolerate? Obviously, most leaders will view simpler as better, but what about the relationships does the leader consider *simple*? Or *complicated*? How much volatility or uncertainty in these relationships is acceptable? To what extent does the leader prefer to centralize control versus delegate, and under what conditions does this change?

What do I consider to be a proper relationship between my chain of command and the enterprise? Commanders are more likely to favor greater oversight or focus of attention, much like *N4*'s story of the difficulties in balancing theater medical support postures against the desired of the individual tenants. When does a leader draw the red line between conditions that benefit the greater good but put the unit at greater risk and the conditions that benefit the unit first? How do I typically recognize when those conditions occur?

What do I consider to be signals of a healthy, positive climate that would translate to lawful action in combat or other stressors? Also, what are signals indicating the opposite, either negative or comfortable climates as described in Chapter 6? What are signal the leader looks for to determine if the climate is improving or degenerating? What are the tools the leader prefers to use to influence the climate? How does the leader tend to measure the effectiveness of those tools?

What does complexity mean to me, and how do I navigate complex terrain? Are there aspects of complexity that the leader is particularly comfortable or uncomfortable with? How does the leader translate that which is comfortable into solid, actionable visions and strategic direction? What makes the leader uncomfortable and how does the leader cope with it, or help the organization cope? Are there particular methods that the leader prefers to use to initiate organizational change so as to better cope with complex situations?

How does the leader typically set (or reset) the organization's moral compass? What moral imperatives drive the leader's decision making? What personal red lines constrain leader action? What types of organizational issues are the least comfortable for the

leader to deal with? How does the leader address organizational behaviors conflicting with the leader's personal mores? How does the leader cope when the organization's behaviors prevail, justifiably or not?

These are only a sampling of the possible questions. Leaders can interpret the themes in different ways, and it is best for the leaders to develop their own personal narratives based on reflections on the materials in the study. Deterministic treatments should be avoided as the sum of the above questions may not be as salient to leaders as reflection on them in comparison to personal experiences and identity.
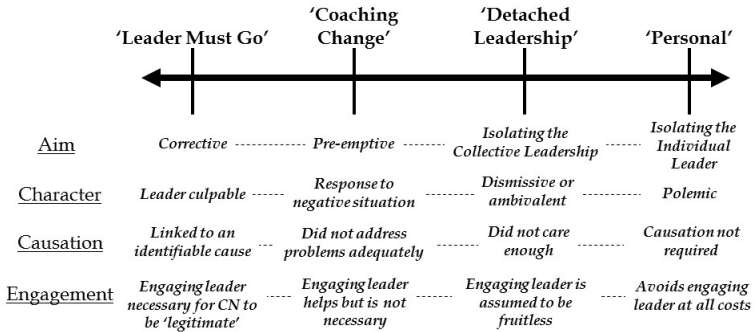
CRITICISMS AGAINST THE LEADER

By virtue of being a leader within an organization, the leader will be criticized. It is natural and must be accepted as an unfortunate reality. Such criticisms may be rationally justified because of past mistakes or disagreements. They may also be emotional in nature, criticizing something about the leader's real or perceived persona. Or, the leader may be a proxy or strawman – criticized for what they represent, such as the Army or the nation. Or, criticisms can be utterly baseless, outright fabrications, or myths. It is important to separate, at least conceptually, criticisms directed at the leader personally versus those directed at the organization itself. For present purposes, of interest are criticisms that are specifically held against leaders that follow them from assignment to assignment. By the time one reaches the level of senior leader, it is likely that the leader's early reputation precedes them on subsequent assignments.[122]

There are two sources of criticisms explored below. The first is relative to the leader's narrative – is there anything about who the leader is or what the leader stands for or has done that generates criticism? The second relates to the construct of trustworthiness – to what extent do others trust the leader?

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[122] In the author's personal experience among several flag-level staffs included a propensity for some staff members to closely follow flag officer assignment pages and "G2" (i.e., research and analyze the leadership styles, temperament, and preferences) incoming commanders and other members of the top leadership team.

Character and intensity of opposing views

Figure 1 shows the levels of intensity that negative criticisms can exhibit. These do not necessarily suggest that the leader is

	'Leader Must Go'	'Coaching Change'	'Detached Leadership'	'Personal'
Aim	Corrective	Pre-emptive	Isolating the Collective Leadership	Isolating the Individual Leader
Character	Leader culpable	Response to negative situation	Dismissive or ambivalent	Polemic
Causation	Linked to an identifiable cause	Did not address problems adequately	Did not care enough	Causation not required
Engagement	Engaging leader necessary for CN to be 'legitimate'	Engaging leader helps but is not necessary	Engaging leader is assumed to be fruitless	Avoids engaging leader at all costs

deserving of the criticisms. Rather they describe differences in orientations and motivations of the critics. These are referred to as the *counternarratives* against the leader.[123]

- *Leader must go.* This is the most logically-driven type of counternarrative. These take specific actions or statements of the leader and suggest they are errors or mistakes, raising questions about the leader's ability to avoid repeating them.

- *Coaching change.* These are also logical, but less likely to pin specific errors on the leader rather than suggest indirect culpability for an organization's supposed failures. This is akin to the idea that a sports team's performance is below expectations, and because

Figure 1. Intensity of Counternarratives Against Leaders

performance is the coach's ultimate responsibility, the coach is scrutinized first even when the players are most at fault. Military culture places similar indirect

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[123] Galvin, *Communication Campaigning,* 83. Also Thomas P. Galvin, "Firing the Coach Instead of the Players (and Other Counternarratives Against Leaders)," March 31, 2020, in *Reflections on Management,* podcast, MP3 audio, 17:35, https://reflections.talkingaboutorganizations.com/4-6-firing-the-coach-instead-of-the-players-and-other-counternarratives-against-leaders/.

responsibilities on commanders who are viewed as responsible for all that happens in their units.

- *Detached leadership.* Rather than identifiable errors or influences on outcomes, criticisms aim at the leaders' identities and raise questions as to their trustworthiness. Using Allen & Braun's trust framework, these criticisms question the leader's competence, benevolence of actions (e.g., the leader acting in a self-serving or self-preserving manner), perceptions of bias leading to inequality or unfairness (e.g., favoritism, nepotism), or unpredictability (e.g., volatility in temperament or exercising disruption for disruption sake). The label *detached leadership* therefore refer to the idea that the leader has not sufficiently subsumed the identity of organizations to which they have belonged and therefore appears less committed to the common goal. In addition to negative perceptions of the leader, these can also arise due to specific episodes involving personality differences or other conflicts and tensions.

- *Personal.* These counternarratives dehumanize the leader and criticize anything the leader says or does, no matter how beneficial or good, often without consideration of the facts. Such counternarratives remove context and insert an alternative context in which the leader is painted in as bad a light as possible. A sign of such counternarratives is that the leader's words and actions responding to criticism only generates more criticism with a shift in focus to something else about the leader. This is often the case with political differences between the leader and critics, whereby the critics' own identities are vested in opposing the leader.

Leaders should also consider the extent to which they are the actual target of the criticism. Questions to consider include *which of these represent the character of criticisms against me personally,* or *am I being judged on my actions or am I a scapegoat for something else?* Common examples in the military include rivalries between major communities of practice such as heavy and light combat forces whereby particular leaders are characterized as one or the

other. Therefore, the counternarrative reflects assumed bias that critics wish to shield organizations against.

Leaders must avoid the potential bias of thinking they are undeserving of the criticism and ignoring it without further thought. The choices of how one deals with adversity should be thoughtful and show empathy toward the critics. *Do they have a point*? The leader should consider whether the best answer, in the general case, is to confront the critics with corrective information, openly acknowledge the criticism and actively work to change, or that deflecting the criticism is the best answer.

Trustworthiness of the leader

Leaders should also be their own toughest critics. As the Allen & Braun construct shows, *trust* is not a binary variable but reflects different ways that one is perceived in interpersonal relationships. While the answers to the below questions may not rise to the level of open criticisms as expressed in the previous subsection, they do manifest themselves in how readily others engage with the leader. Consider the following questions.

Under what circumstances do people consider me more competent, or less? No leader is competent in everything and not all situations require high degrees of competence in one's assigned duties. Rather, competence can be reflective of one's ability to adapt to the situation or redefine the situation, of one's ability to research issues or be creative, or one's openness about one's strengths and weaknesses. In contrast, unwarranted pride, lack of humility, or concerns over other actors in the environment can cause one to feign competence or overstate one's capabilities.

To what extent do others question my intentions? Cynically, there are actors in the environment who are naturally suspicious of the good intentions of others, asking questions such as *does the leader want something in return?* But in ordinary dealings with others, leaders will naturally judge and be judged based on whether one's motives are benevolent and put the organization first. Motives of commanders who immediately undermine the policies and initiatives of the predecessor can be perceived as careerist – the supposed need to make one's own mark. Should the leader be mindful of such perceptions, and if so, how to avoid them?

To what extent do others consider my decisions fair and just? Integrity is not necessarily binary, although it can be lost when leaders commit unprofessional acts. Others may to trust a leader's decisions when they understand their justifications and are convinced they are reasonable based on subjective values such as fairness and equality. However, leaders often must make tough decisions with incomplete information. While some parties may acknowledge and forgive this, not all will. What does this suggest with respect to future decisions the leader might make?

To what extent am I predictable? Some leaders are uncomfortable with the idea of being predictable and prefer to maintain a sense of autonomy (even mystery). Also, leaders do not always feel the need to communicate a full justification for everything they decide, even though this may raise doubts or concerns over those decisions. Leaders should consider the extent to which they withhold information or preclude others' getting ahead of their decisions.

ASSEMBLING THE PROFESSIONAL NARRATIVE

It should be apparent that the above process is not specific to commanders but leaders assuming top leadership responsibilities in any organization. They apply to agency directors, branch or division chiefs, and anyone else serving in the number one leadership position of a military organization.

The final step is to assemble the answers to the above questions into an unfinished professional narrative – one that captures both the past and the anticipate future. The result of the above reflection and analysis should converge on three major themes that transcend any assignment – *Who am I and how did I get here? What are my long-term aspirations for the military and how am I contributing to them? What are the barriers I am overcoming or must overcome?* The outcome is an incomplete story of the leader's professional journey. It is not necessary to write out the story in prose, although this is recommended. Bullet points, journals, or any other media will work. However, the leader should put this narrative into some form of writing and commit to it. This will help the leader develop a tailored responsible command philosophy upon being notified of selection for command.

CHAPTER 10. CRAFTING A RESPONSIBLE COMMAND PHILOSOPHY

This final chapter focuses on the act of taking the top leadership role of a specific unit – whether that is named as a command or a similar role such as director or chief. This is where the rubber meets the road, where command is put into practice. Establishing and promulgating a *command philosophy* is a common method of connecting the commander to the unit. Each commander expresses their philosophies differently, but they often include such elements as a personal introduction, a vision for the organization, a strategic direction for pursuing that vision, and various preferences on how the commander wants things done.

But none of these elements assure the organization of instilling responsible command such that members understand the expectations of acting lawfully in combat or providing lawful support to fighting forces. As the study results suggest, responsible command applies to all contexts in the defense enterprise. Thus, commanders should consider how to incorporate, as appropriate, the five themes into their command philosophies.

As the context of the organization matters significantly, the five themes can help inform commanders of what to prioritize as they learn about their command responsibilities. For examples, commanders can explore questions like the following:

- *What are the formal arrangements and authorities under which the organization was formed and currently operates?*
- *How well does the climate align with lawful conduct of operations?*
- *How effectively does the organization respond to complex, dynamic situations?*

Lines of inquiry such as this can uncover competing demands or mandates that places the organization in difficult positions, potentially leading to norms and behaviors promoting questionable workarounds. While the initial command philosophy might address the commander's preferred approaches to deal with such potentially conflicts, the actual

approaches put in practice may deviate from such preferences. Left unresolved, these deviations can call the philosophy into question and contribute to members feeling unclear and uncertain about the commander's actual intentions. It is this lack of clarity that can contribute to the degeneration of a proper moral climate.

The preceding chapter helped with reflecting on one's personal experiences and lifelong professional aims. It also encouraged reflection on what the study's five themes of responsible command mean to the individual leader as applied to any current or potential future position. Once the leader is identified as taking command of a given unit, it is time to fill in the details – connecting '*Who am I?*' with '*Who is the organization I will lead?*' Doing so will allow the incoming commander to understand alignment and potential misalignments between self and the unit that may lead to conflict.

This is not always easy. As one rises in rank and assumes top leadership in ever larger, more diverse, and more distributed organizations, knowing the organization becomes more challenging and time-consuming. One's alignment becomes more difficult and less reliable. Incoming leaders must balance what strategic direction they must articulate early on versus what should wait until they can form a fuller picture of the organization. External stakeholders and the environment may influence such choices.

The initial communications by the commander may explain their interpretation of command duties, the outcomes they want, and their preferences.[124] Commanders should be transparent about those elements most likely to remain constant and context-independent, expressing them as early as possible so to set some initial expectations and reduce potential confusion or anxiety among members.[125] As the philosophy emerges and the commander is prepared to release it as a formal communication or document, they should summarize (perhaps bulletize) relevant

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[124] Harry C. Gardner, "Developing an Effective Command Philosophy," *Military Review* (September-October 2012): 75-81, https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Portals/7/military-review/Archives/English/MilitaryReview_20121031_art013.pdf.

[125] U.S. Department of the Army, *Army Handbook for Leader Transitions* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combined Arms Center, n.d.), 11, https://usacac.army.mil/sites/default/files/documents/cal/LeadershipTransition.pdf.

points from the professional narrative, informed as much as possible by knowledge of the unit and its context.[126]

The approach of this chapter is to enhance, rather than replace, conceptions of a good command philosophy. It specifically leverages the five themes of the study. The purpose is to help commanders develop philosophies tailored to organizational contexts in ways that specifically encourage lawful conduct under responsible command, regardless of the type of unit. The locus of change regards how commanders learn about their organizations and express three things – *vision*, *intent*, and *strategic direction* – regarding where the commander wishes to take the organization, how the commander plans to do it, and what the commander wishes organizational members to do in the short and long terms.

Organizational Vision, Intent, and Strategic Direction

As components of a unit-specific philosophy; vision, intent, and strategic direction can sometimes be used interchangeably.[127] In this Primer, the three will be treated separately for purposes of analysis and contribution to addressing the five themes.

Vision (and Vision Statement)

The *vision* is a mental image of the desired end state at some point in time.[128] Ordinarily, visions are expressed as long-term goals. They can be transformational, reflective of significant changes in the organization's roles, missions, identity, or culture; or may be reinforcing of attributes already existing in the organization that the leader wishes to keep for continuity.[129] Key is that the vision is likely more complex than the commander can express succinctly in words.

Therefore, the commander's *vision statement* is a symbol that represents the vision. The purpose of the vision statement is to aid in the sharing of the mental image among members, stakeholders,

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[126] Gardner, "Developing an Effective"; *Army Handbook for Leader Transitions.*

[127] Personal experience of the author.

[128] John P. Kotter, *Leading Change* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Business Press, 1996), 71.

[129] Galvin, *Communications Campaigning*, 9-10.

and others (e.g., clients, peer organizations). Naturally, vision statements lack the detail of the commander's mental image and therefore represents an incomplete communication. The emphasis on the vision statement is clarity that allows members to orient the organization toward a goal. Statements of intent and strategic direction help narrow that orientation.

Intent

The intent is a declaration of how the leader wishes the vision to be achieved or the organization to behave. Components of an intent include what is known in military organizations as a *concept of the operation* that describes how organization will the vision or specified shorter-term outcomes, *key tasks* that the leader wants the organization to accomplish, *coordinating mechanisms* that encourage disparate parts of the organization to work together toward the vision, and *end state* which expresses how the organization knows it achieved the vision. The end state may include qualitative or quantitative measures that the leader expects the organization to monitor or collect data on.

The commanders' intent should reflect alignment between commander's preferences for action and the organization's culture and climate. Organizational change literature shows that the preferred methods of achieving change leads to vastly different ways of prioritizing actions and measuring progress toward a goal. The following is based on a review of hundreds of change methods and case studies that showed four dominant change strategies. Although in practice, leaders enact change through some combination of the below, they and the organizational culture tend to favor one:[130]

- *Incentives* – Preference for using rewards and sanctions (*carrot-and-stick* approach). Progress toward the goal is based on the effects that the reward system has on behavior. Among the vulnerabilities are how incentives

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[130] Robert Chin and Kenneth D. Benne, "General Strategies for Effecting Changes in Human Systems," in *The Planning of Change*, 4th ed., eds. W. G. Bennis, Kenneth D. Benne, and Robert Chin (Fort Worth, TX: Harcourt, 1985), 22-45.

can have second- and third-order effects or how the incentives may not lead to the desired results.[131]

- *Training* – Preference for using training and education, relying on expert knowledge to change behavior. Progress toward the goal is based on how well the training or educational activities influence behavior. Among the vulnerabilities are training ineffectiveness and retention, lack of suitable expertise, and possible lack of impact on behavior.

- *Empirical Data* – Preference for using empirical data (i.e., the "numbers") to measure progress and make decisions. Among the vulnerabilities are making decisions based on "numbers," gaps between what the numbers represent and the desired goals, and development of counterproductive norms oriented on improving numbers.

- *Socialization* – Preference for seeking bottom-up acceptance and compliance, measuring progress through how much of the organization is "on board" and working autonomously toward the goal. Among the vulnerabilities are the diffusion of events and the perceived slow speed toward the goal.[132]

The intent should therefore include references to the preferred methods for achieving the vision. In particular, differences between the commander and the organizational culture should be highlighted as these may represent different moral perspectives that could result in climates questioning the leader's prerogatives and motivations, both very important elements of trust as described in Chapter 9.

Strategic Direction

Statements of strategic direction help operationalize the intent, particularly with respect to priorities between what must change and what must continue. They allow members to

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[131] Steven Kerr, "On the Folly of Rewarding A, While Hoping for B," *Academy of Management Journal* 18, no. 4 (1975): 769-783.

[132] Tom Galvin, "Planned Change and the Story of the Four Commanders," September 15, 2019, in *Reflections on Management,* podcast, MP3 audio, 14:40, https://reflections.talkingaboutorganizations.com/s03-e01.

understand what requires the commander's personal involvement and what is delegated. Commanders may be open and transparent about their direction. This has the advantage of narrowing the organization's focus and clarifying priorities, while having the disadvantage of potentially marginalizing whole segments or functions in the organization. Clarifying priorities also carries the risk that the organization will overcommit to stated priorities to reduce the risk of marginalization, complicating the commanders' abilities to make decisions based on those priorities. Commanders desiring to avoid this may instead be less transparent about their preferences and broader in their perspective. This may allow all elements of the organization to perceive themselves as on equal footing. But, this can risk confusing members about the commander's true priorities.

When crafting these elements, commanders should consider possible gaps, inconsistencies, and conflict between their professional narrative -- what they are comfortable doing -- and the situation in the organization. For example, an organization that significantly values bottom-up initiatives and innovations may be less comfortable with a commander who prefers quantification and measurement. While the commander may value participatory activities to socialize and shared new ideas, preferences for using data as tools to measure progress are likely to dominate the commander's thinking, potentially creating tension with members.

The Commander's Personal Example

In addition to the written text of command philosophies, commanders must also consider how their personal examples demonstrate commitment to the organization and to the vision itself. This is very important for senior commanders who may depend on word-of-mouth to spread the commander's messages, particularly in units where the commander devotes extensive effort to external engagements and the rest of the senior leadership team must share the message.

Commanders exhibit four communication roles in and for an organization. Although a commander may incorporate these roles into the initial command philosophy, they evolve over time. The

first role is *embodiment of the organization.*[133] How does the commander plan to represent and embody the organization, and how will this contribute to both the reputation and prestige of the organization and perceptions of it being trustworthy in combat? The commander's personal example extends the ideas of trust as expressed individually, but how trust in the commander supports similar trust in the organization – internally among members and externally with stakeholders and other audiences.

The second roles for the commander is to *steward the organization's narrative.*[134] Whether or not they agree with the organization's story, commanders own it. They therefore have the final word over what needs to change and what should remain constant or continuous. The commander's intent and strategic direction must explain the balance of continuity and change, so that members understand the rationale and can incorporate it into lower-level decisions and action. This is especially important as the commander evaluates the on-going change efforts in the organization spearheaded by the preceding commander. The temptation to cancel or downgrade inherited change efforts in order to make room to 'make one's own mark' should be avoided.[135]

Commanders also serve as *governors of the organization's climate and culture*, yet many will do so effectively in absentia, delegating day-to-day responsibilities to a chief of staff or equivalent. Commanders are ultimately responsible for the formal and informal processes of the organization, regardless of how much they exercise personal control over it. They must account for how organizations ordinarily engage with their environments – formally and informally.[136] Commander messages to the organization should align with the espoused

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[133] This duty is a combination of the *figurehead* and *spokesperson* roles described in Henry Mintzberg, *The Nature of Managerial Work* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1973).

[134] This duty is derived from the work of Don M. Snider in relation to stewardship of the profession. See Snider, "The U.S. Army as a Profession."

[135] Thomas P. Galvin, "Entering into the Middle of the Story: Inheriting a Change Effort," April 7, 2020, in *Reflections on Management*, podcast, MP3 audio, 16:07, https://reflections.talkingaboutorganizations.com/4-7-entering-into-the-middle-of-the-story-inheriting-a-change-effort/.

[136] This combines Mintzberg's decisional and interpersonal roles in driving the organization's culture and internal processes. However, in military organizations this duty is often delegated to a deputy or chief of staff.

processes of communication. A philosophy of delegation to the members must be supported by commander's messages that omit anything indicating a lack of trust or desiring micromanagement.

Finally, whatever it is that commanders want to change in the organization, they must either drive the change personally or support members chartered with enacting change. Commanders must be the *champions of organizational change.* As such, commanders should demonstrate commitment to change on the basis of their personal example, both words and actions.[137] Commanders demonstrate how on-going deliberate change efforts and innovations lead toward the vision, and encourage members to share the commander's messages among others.

Philosophies of Responsible Command

With these elements, attention now turns to how commanders can incorporate the five themes of responsible command into unit-specific command philosophies. The presumption is that the commander has the opportunity to learn sufficient details about the organization's mission, purpose, climate, and culture during the initial period of command – current U.S. Army doctrine identifies 90 days as a target.[138] The following points are thus based on the premise, *given a more detailed understanding of the organizational context…*

What is the target command & control relationships and other formal structures? The answer encompasses how the commander assesses the complexity and conflict of existing structures, the harm or confusion it causes the organization, and the risks of the organization using improper norms and habits to undermine them – thereby risking the organization developing a penchant for circumventing lawful action. The commander alone determines the harm and risks involved, as some structures may be unchangeable, or the risk is tolerable and change unneeded. The commander must champion changes to such structures requiring external stakeholder involvement, while providing clear strategic direction to the members how to address issues and

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[137] John P. Kotter, "Management is (still) not leadership," *Harvard Business Review*, January 9, 2013, https://hbr.org/2013/01/management-is-still-not-leadership

[138] *Army Guide for Leader Transitions.*

concerns as they arise so as to remain in compliance with lawful intent.

What are unit's critical capability requirements, and what must the unit divest? Capabilities are more than just new equipment or weapons systems – they reflect any system, process, technology, methodology, or manpower (e.g., skills, knowledge, attributes) needed by a certain time frame that the unit requires to perform its mission effectively, efficiently, and lawfully. They also reflect considerations for the enterprise to feasibly and suitably satisfy the requirements. For example, the commander should not establish requirements that cannot be satisfied without putting the enterprise in a moral bind – for example, in a position of having to circumvent safety requirements to meet the requirement at the designated timelines. For the commander to advise the enterprise on the capabilities that the organization requires, it is incumbent on the commander to articulate the requirements for change to both stakeholders and members. Requirements must be articulated in terms of competitive advantage gained – how will satisfaction of the requirements enhance the organization's story and posture it for mission success commensurate with legal, ethical, moral considerations?

What are the <u>systemic</u> internal problems that must be addressed to ensure a positive climate? At senior levels, this can be a difficult question to answer due to the comparative lack of direct personal engagement between the commander and the formation. Given the climate responsibilities vested in subordinate leaders, senior commanders must look at climate as a system and analyze the differences between problems that reside at local levels versus those indicative of broader organization-wide issues, while assuming that unresolved local problems can become systemic. The character of the problem should determine the character of the solution, but one must never presume that climate issues are 'resolved,' particularly if they reflect challenges in broader society. Commanders must deliver words and actions to address the problem *and* better posture the unit to act appropriately to address or prevent new problems.

This is where commanders can operationalize trust among members. Internal problems stemming from challenges of competence may reflect both a requirement for change, as above,

and a mitigating action to relieve tension among members caused by lack of competence. If the problem demonstrates a tendency to question the benevolence of one's actions, the commanders actions may aim to improve transparency and openness. Key is for the commander to consider how internal tensions can manifest into severe climate problems in combat environments where trust among members is paramount. At the same time, corrective actions also consider the impacts of trust between commanders and subordinates or the noncommissioned officer chain of support. Correcting climate issues should consider how to set conditions to correct other climate issues.

How can the unit deal with complexity? In a 1997 National Defense University symposium on the impacts of complexity and national security, John F. Schmitt wrote that it is impractical to seek perfect plans, and that the way to succeed in complex environments like war is to begin at the small-team level. Units must be conditioned to do this.[139] Therefore, preparations to cope with the uncertainty and dynamics of competition in garrison will help prepare members to address similar conditions in the combat environment. The commander's personal example and ability to explain complex matters in appropriate (not necessarily simple!) terms are the goal. Vignettes or general guidance embedded in the philosophy may provide helpful cues to members on the expected responses to anticipated issues. This helps members make reasonable decisions in the absence of direct access to command guidance. This will also help with developing both rules of engagement and established norms for conducting lawful combat operations.

How do I make my personal example the truest example possible? In large, distributed organizations, the presence of the commander may well be limited to the command photo hung on the 'chain of command' wall. A senior commander's mere presence in a subordinate's area could be a significant disruption as members work rapidly (sometimes unnecessarily) to make the area look good, despite the commander's protestations of wanting to see the area *as is*. It is also not unusual that commanders will only

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[139] John F. Schmitt, "Command and (Out of) Control: The Military Implications of Complexity Theory," in *Complexity, Global Politics, and national Security*, eds. David S. Alberts and Thomas J. Czerwinski (Washington, DC: National Defense University, 1997), 110-111.

personally see or interact with certain members of the organization once – whether it is the junior soldier out on an exercise, a junior staff officer delivering a high level briefing to the commander (with the entire chain of command present and sitting around the table), or a civilian whose perspectives on military leadership differ from their uniformed teammates. Such limited interactions can have powerful impacts on the individual members and those serving closest to them.

Because of the significant demands on commanders, especially at the high levels, each engagement with a member sets an ethical and moral standard. Pressures can preclude the commander's abilities to disengage from one high-priority problematic situation or ongoing difficulty with a stakeholder before engaging with a member or outside audience whose pending interaction with the commander may be the only one they will have. While these are concerns that leaders should address through self-awareness, the organizational context and its unique attributes may place commanders under pressures different from their experiences. Just as the commander serves as the needle the organization's moral compass, the commander follows that same needle and leads the organization forward.

Incorporation of the above ideas will help personalize the command philosophy for members by placing the organization first. The command philosophy is thus less about the commander and more about the commitment to the mission of its members.

While the command philosophy should stabilize over the course of the commander's tenure, it should remain a living document. As the organization navigates operational and political challenges and crises, the commander will learn more about the extent to which the organization would adhere to the laws of land warfare as part of a national war effort. Such episodes may reinforce the commander's preferences or may cause the commander to adjust and change. Openness, transparency, and the commander's authenticity (i.e., continued alignment with the individual professional narrative) will foster successful communication of revised command philosophies.

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The United States Army War College educates and develops leaders for service at the strategic level while advancing knowledge in the global application of Landpower.

The purpose of the United States Army War College is to produce graduates who are skilled critical thinkers and complex problem solvers. Concurrently, it is our duty to the U.S. Army to also act as a "think factory" for commanders and civilian leaders at the strategic level worldwide and routinely engage in discourse and debate concerning the role of ground forces in achieving national security objectives.

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