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# IMPROVING THE AIR FORCE SQUADRON COMMAND SELECTION PROCESS

by

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## Biography

Lt Col Terence Taylor is assigned to the Air War College, Air University, Maxwell AFB, AL. Lt Col Taylor is an Air Force Special Operations pilot whose experience spans a wide variety of operational functions and duties at staff, theater, and unit levels, to include the U.S. Department of State's Bureau for Counterterrorism and command at the Air Force Squadron level. Lt Col Taylor was commissioned with a degree in Computer Science in 1997 via the Air Force Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) at the University of Virginia. He holds a Master of Arts degree in National Security Studies from American Military University, and has accumulated 1,800 combat flight hours and 4,800 total flight hours in eight different aircraft. He has completed 12 deployments in support of overseas contingency operations supporting the United States Special Operations Command.

# Abstract

This work presents an improved methodology for assessing and selecting Air Force squadron commanders, and subsequently paring them with the organizations they are best suited to lead. It argues that while leadership, environmental factors, and organizational culture are each important aspects of organizational effectiveness, it is the often-overlooked interaction between these three facets that has just as great an influence on an organization's success or failure. Additionally, these interactions influence leadership performance, from exemplary to toxic. It is these interactions and influences among and between the leader, environment and organization that play just as great a role in leadership performance as individual personality traits, education or life experiences. Understanding the leader's key role in organizational effectiveness, and given that the choice in squadron commander selection is the most variable of the three components, this study seeks to provide a recommended process that will improve upon the current paradigm of squadron command selection in the Air Force. The ultimate goal is a more informed process for pairing those most suitable commander candidates with possible units by utilizing predictive analytics and the Person-Environment Fit Theory to aid in selection.

# Introduction

Organizational effectiveness is an area that is studied often. Much of the literature regarding this topic tends to center around the impact of leadership, and to a lesser extent, the influence of external factors or the effects of organizational culture. Notable authors and researchers such as John Kotter, Stephen Covey, Jim Collins, John C. Maxwell and Edgar Schein are but a few that have contributed to the study of leadership and organizational management. This paper argues that while leadership, environmental factors, and organizational culture are each important aspects of organizational effectiveness, it is the often-overlooked interaction between these three facets (termed the L-E-O triad) that has just as great an influence on an organization's success or failure. Additionally, these interactions influence leadership performance, from exemplary to toxic. It is these interactions and influences among and between the L-E-O triad components that play just as great a role in leadership performance as individual personality traits, leadership education or life experiences. This paper provides a recommended way forward in selecting individuals for Air Force squadron command, and pairing those most suitable commander candidates with possible units by utilizing predictive analytics and the Person-Environment Fit Theory to better inform the pairing process. The ultimate goal of research such as this is to provide a foundation for further study that will lead to a more objective process that creates the most appropriate fit of potential squadron commanders with units they will lead.

# Measuring Organizational Effectiveness

Without a doubt, our goal is successful mission execution. This is true at all levels, from the Commander in Chief to the smallest organizational levels of each of the service components. Overall mission success, the goal that we all work toward, is dependent upon successes at lower levels with smaller scopes. These lower level successes are a direct result of the effectiveness of the respective organizations. Just as lifestyles are a collection of daily habits over time, success at the enterprise level relies on success and effectiveness at lower levels. Defining success at the organizational level can be difficult, however.

Over the years, the U.S. Air Force has used many metrics to judge an organization's success, and oftentimes by extension, performance of the organization's leader. These metrics have varied widely, dependent upon specific mission taskings, operating environments, and other factors that have been deemed appropriate measurement characteristics. For example, dollars saved, enemy killed or captured, sortie rates, or students trained could each be seen as appropriate metrics depending on the unit mission at a given time. But are these tangible measurements truly an effective measurement of organization effectiveness?

Measuring organizational effectiveness is difficult, not only in the military, but in other sectors of society as well. The need for improving results, from business to education and other areas, has spurred study of the factors that drive effective organizations, and of mechanisms for measuring these results. Of the many theoretical models available to assess organizational effectiveness, perhaps the goal model is the most applicable to a military organization. The goal model "views effectiveness in terms of achievement of specific goals and objectives. The focus

is on productivity and outputs."[1] Going back to the premise that our goal is successful mission execution, this gives us a large part of the answer in determining organizational effectiveness. Joseph Matthews also defines several models in an attempt to frame organizational effectiveness constructs.[2] One can draw commonalities throughout some of his work. In simplifying his examples, there tend to be two components of organizational effectiveness: drivers (or enablers) and results. Applying this logic to our attempt to define a way to judge effectiveness of a military organization, our two aspects of people (as the drivers and enablers) and mission outcome (as the result), fit this paradigm nicely. These components also align with the standard "mission and people" mantra echoed throughout the military services.

It is challenging to measure the people that serve as the backbone of our operational capability in the military. While one can measure organizational effectiveness through the metric of meeting goals, measuring people proves to be much more difficult. Outcome and performance based metrics are often used to rate military members, but neither of these truly measure an individual's motives, desires, aptitude for success, or even how effectively the individual performs. The reason is because there are a myriad of inputs, processes and outputs that are unique to each individual. For this reason, the military understandably measures outcomes and performance at lower levels as they serve to indicate outcomes and performance at higher levels of mission execution.

The two-component metric of military organizational effectiveness can further be defined as successful mission accomplishment, coupled with an organizational environment that fosters fairness, productivity, and a sense of purpose within the people serving in the organization. Each

1. Joseph R. Matthews, "Assessing Organizational Effectiveness: The Role of Performance Measures," *The Library Quarterly: Information, Community, Policy* 81, no. 1 (2011): 84.

2. Ibid., 91-92.

of these components of mission and people are necessary in a truly effective organization. As we will later see, less than optimal conditions in either of these categories can result in mission failure in the short term, organizational demise in the long term, or both.

**The Air Force Squadron**

In discussing organizational effectiveness within the military, there are almost infinite levels of application. This study will focus attention at the Air Force squadron level for several reasons. As Air Force Chief of Staff, General David Goldfein has aptly noted, our "squadrons are the basic, building block organizations in the Air Force, providing a specific operational or support capability."[3] As a previous squadron commander, I too realize the critical importance of this organizational construct to our service. Squadron command is typically the first level at which leaders are put in an official command authority role (designated by the issuance of G-Series orders). It is at the squadron level that leaders have the most direct interaction with airmen executing the mission, and arguably, the most direct impact on airmen at a very personal level. The Air Force squadron is, frankly, the level where we must "get it right." General Goldfein eloquently makes this point through the key focus areas he defined soon after assuming the position as Air Force Chief of Staff.

> The squadron is the beating heart of the United States Air Force; our most essential team. We succeed or fail in our missions at the squadron-level because that is where we develop, train, and build Airmen. Our service culture and traditions manifest themselves in the squadron because our Airmen most readily identify with this core fighting unit. Squadrons are the engines of innovation and esprit de corps. Squadrons possess the greatest potential for operational agility. Squadron commanders, civilian leaders, superintendents, and first sergeants have the most profound and lasting impact on Airmen and families. They set and enforce standards, create the environment where the right things are fostered (warfighting excellence, esprit de corps, thriving Airmen and families)…and are

3. Chief of Staff United States Air Force. General David L. Goldfein. "Letter to Airmen." August 2016, 1.

the first line of defense against behaviors we find unacceptable (a toxic work environment, sexual assault, suicide, domestic violence).[4]



4. Chief of Staff United States Air Force. “The Beating Heart of the Air Force...Squadrons!” August 2016, 1-2.

## Components of Organizational Effectiveness: Leader, Environment, Organization

In a 1986 article published in the *Management Science Journal*, Management and Organizations Professor Kim Cameron of the University of Michigan, expanding on previous research, categorized predictors on the effectiveness of colleges and universities into five categories: the external environment, institutional structure, institutional strategy, institutional demographics, and institutional finances.[5] While there are many differences between higher learning institutions and the military, the categories of external factors, organizational structure, strategy and demographics are common to the military institution as well. This lends credence to the construct proposed here for defining the factors that contribute to organizational effectiveness at the Air Force squadron level. The characteristics associated with each of the three elements of leader, environment, and organization, later referred to as the L-E-O triad, each play a role in how effective a squadron is over a period of time.

From basic officer training, through the stages of professional military education that span an Air Force officer's career, we are taught that the Air Force squadron commander, as the organizational leader at that level, has the most profound effect on organizational outcomes. This individual is often viewed as a quarterback of sorts, making adjustments as necessary, and working to ensure the many capable components of the team operate in unison toward a common goal. As individuals, personal experiences define and shape leaders, while personality traits associated with genetics, upbringing, and exposure to life's circumstances all contribute to an individual's psyche. Training factors, both formal and informal, help develop the technical

5. Kim Cameron, "A Study of Organizational Effectiveness and its Predictors," *Management Science* 32, no. 1 (1986): 95.

expertise needed to understand the intricacies associated with tasks at lower levels. The leader's training and education also contribute to expectations of this individual, from subordinates, peers, and supervisors. Finally, experiences outside and within the Air Force help shape the leader's mindset and provide a backdrop for comparison of situations and people. Any one of these three categories of personality, training, and experiences could vary vastly from one individual to the next, but even subtle differences in any of these areas can lead to variations in leadership styles, preferences, and decision-making. This fact is partly responsible for the difference between an exemplary leader and a toxic one.

The external environment can play a large role in squadron effectiveness as well. One need only consider the mindset shift between an era of long-term conflict and one of relative peace. Crisis and war place unique stressors on an organization. In his book, *Leadership*, Rudy Giuliani discusses some of the differences in leading the city of New York during the crisis of September 11, 2001 and in the more deliberate aftermath in the months that followed. Certainly, the need for prioritization and the characteristic of limited time are two factors to consider in crisis situations. Additionally, the command climate affects a unit, either positively or negatively. Higher headquarters organizational construct, broader organizational culture, leadership emphasis at these higher levels, disciplinary climate and freedom to maneuver all play important roles in defining how a squadron operates. Even factors outside of the control of the higher headquarters, such as fiscal constraints, serve to define left and right boundaries when it comes to squadron operations.

Squadron, or organizational, characteristics related to people and the mission are a critical component of a unit's effectiveness. The culture of the unit is the sum of all these traits. It includes personnel factors such as a unit's size, rank distribution, levels of experience and

maturity in the unit, selectively-manned versus non-volunteer members, and individual motivations. These characteristics work in conjunction with the many mission variables associated with a given squadron. These include whether a unit is thought to be operating within or outside the scope of the unit charter, previous unit performance, and consideration as to whether the unit is in a particular time of change or instability. These, and other factors combine to shape the culture of any given unit. It is the variability and sheer number of factors that make organizational culture hard to predict, yet vital to organizational success. Edgar Schein, renowned scholar in the fields of organizational development and culture, writes, "The most important conclusion to be derived from this analysis is that culture is a multidimensional, multifaceted phenomenon, not easily reduced to a few major dimensions."[6]

We can see that leadership traits, the external environment, and organizational characteristics all play a role in overall organizational effectiveness. This is true in any organization, but a critically important point in the area of mission accomplishment at the Air Force squadron level. Understanding this reality, we can now turn to the fourth, and often overlooked, component of organizational effectiveness – that of the relationships between the L-E-O components and the effects of those interactions on mission success or failure.

6. Edgar H. Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, 4th ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010), 91.

## The Effects of the L-E-O Components on One Another…and the Squadron

In this section, we explore how the L-E-O components affect one another, and the subsequent effects on the organization. These three, two-way relationships (L-O, O-E, and L-E) affect Air Force squadrons in different ways and serve to provide both capability and constraints. We start with the relationship between the leader and the organization to determine the nature of the connection between these two components.

### The Leader and the Organization

An effective squadron commander must ensure both operational effectiveness and a positive work atmosphere. The commander must keep the long view in mind, not just the short term, first-order effects of a decision. Leading people involves caring, understanding, helping to promote, train and advance others, and taking a personal stake in the well-being of those the leader serves – the squadron members.

*Does having an effective commander mean that an organization will be effective?* No. A number of other factors such as low manning, skill level, and other organizational culture components can derail squadron effectiveness. A good leader, while doing his best to promote a positive work environment, and while striving to be as effective at accomplishing the mission as constraints allow, will always be bound or influenced by other factors associated with the external environment and organizational culture.

*Does having a poorly performing squadron commander mean an organization will perform poorly?* In the short term, a unit can effectively accomplish the mission despite poor leadership, as long as organizational culture and the external environment are conducive. Over time however, consistently poor leadership will have an adverse effect on overall mission

effectiveness. This specified time can vary from one unit to the next, and is due to the fact that prolonged poor leadership eventually becomes a part of unit culture and helps shape this culture in a negative way.

The strength of a commander's leadership does not necessarily correlate to mission effectiveness in the short term because other factors of organizational culture and external environment also play a role in mission success. Good leadership does however, *increase the likelihood* of organizational effectiveness. The converse is also true…an effective organization can have a positive effect on an individual's leadership capability and capacity. For example, strong organizations that possess a high level of maturity among members allows leaders to devote attention to larger problems and issues. Similarly, a solid staff of strong Senior NCOs, NCOs, and younger officers free up the commander to address issues of greater importance and avoid minor distractions. This support network also improves a leader's performance through mentoring, if the commander is receptive of it.

It is important to note that organizations with multiple problems can present severe leadership challenges, thereby negatively affecting one's ability to command and effectively execute the mission. It is clear that the connection between the leader and the organization is a mutually dependent one, bolstered by synergy or hampered by interdependency. This relationship is a critical component of organizational effectiveness.

In short, the leader serves the organization, sets left and right boundaries, provides direction, and either constrains or enables the organization. The organization follows the leader's direction, influences the leader, and weighs into what the leader can or cannot perform. The relationship is symbiotic. Success in one component increases the probability of success in the other. As Edgar Schein writes, "…the unique function of leadership that distinguishes it from

management and administration is this concern for culture. Leadership begins the culture creation process and, as we will see, must also manage and sometimes change culture."[7]

**The Organization and the External Environment**

Unlike the relationship between the leader and the organization, the environment/organization relationship is not one where effects flow both ways. The environment shapes the organization, and the organization responds to external environmental factors. Cases of an organization affecting the external environment do exist, but these cases are rare. An example of this may be the implementation of best practices from an exemplary organization that are applied at a higher level and propagated throughout a Group, Wing, or Major Command. I've witnessed several process and performance inspections where best practices were identified at the unit level and subsequently adopted and implemented by a higher headquarters element to other units in the command. An example of this is a particular method of tracking crewmember flight evaluations with a spreadsheet developed by a unit member, that is later shared and implemented at the Group level. By in large, however, the effects between the organization and the external environment flow one way as external factors determine how an organization operates.

The primary ways in which the environment affects organizations at the Air Force squadron level is through the presence or absence of stressors. Combat vs. peacetime environments, and deployed vs. home station conditions are two examples. Overbearing productivity demands can decrease squadron effectiveness while the correct amount of challenging tasks can improve overall effectiveness. Fiscal constraints can breed creativity or

7. Ibid., 195.

cause frustration and poor performance. The higher headquarters organizational climate can be one of “this is why we can’t” or “this is how we can.” Each of these factors and more all serve to challenge squadron operation in a positive or negative way.

**The Leader and the External Environment**

The external environment has a similar effect on the leader. The environment provides the “givens” for any particular situation. It is the hand the leader is dealt. The leader must then manage these environmental influences. The environment serves to define boundaries and set constraints. The individual components of the L-E-O triad *and* their interactions are important. It is with this in mind that we turn our attention to altering the variables and interactions that we can affect, in an effort to maximize productivity and improve mission effectiveness across squadrons in the Air Force.

## Changing the Way We Select Squadron Commanders

### What Can We Affect?

External environmental factors are largely beyond the control of those directly responsible for mission success at the squadron level. Organizational climate and culture are more likely to change, but neither of these components change quickly. The single factor that we can most immediately affect is the organizational leader – the squadron commander. The ability to remove, select, or replace squadron leadership provides the most immediate effect on the relationships between leader and organization, and between the leader and the environment. It is important to note, however, that there is an unpredictable consequence of changing leadership. The relationships and interactions between the leader and the other components also change, and can subsequently change an organization's effectiveness for better or worse. Similar to the environmental shift that necessitates adapting on the part of the strategic leader depicted in Browning's strategic leadership model,[8] a change in leadership can serve to reset the game board for organizational effectiveness. This underscores the importance of placing the right individuals in command of Air Force squadrons.

### Application

The realities of the many factors associated with the L-E-O triad, and the resulting interdependencies create a dilemma for Air Force senior leaders. As those who choose future squadron commanders, senior leaders must use their best judgement to determine which individuals are qualified to command at the squadron level. There are several improvements that

8. Browning, J.W. *Leading at the Strategic Level in an Uncertain World*. (Washington, D.C: National Defense University, Dwight D. Eisenhower School for National Security and Resource Strategy, 2013), 42.

could be made to this approach. First, though we say that promotion to the ranks of field grade officer and selection to command are based on an individual's capacity to lead (versus performance to date), there is no effective measure of future capacity to lead when placing these individuals. The choices, although determined by a board, are subjective. Senior leaders are forced to use their best judgement and an individual's past performance as the best available predictor of success. But as was stated earlier, placing a successful leader in a different organization or environment does not guarantee the same results. Secondly, there is no effective way to document and learn from mistakes when the wrong individual is selected for command. Every incident of toxic leadership or removal for cause has varying circumstances, and there is currently no toxic leader database of sorts that captures the key details and characteristics of each situation. If such a database did exist, it would serve to mitigate the turnover in resident knowledge of senior leaders who make the decisions to remove toxic leaders from command.

What is needed are ways to more accurately predict the likelihood of leadership effectiveness through selection of the right person for the job, and a process for capturing both positive and negative traits of leaders, their organizations, and the environments they operate in. Improvement in these areas would move the Air Force away from the narrow scope of simply choosing squadron commanders based solely on subjective opinions and past performance. A highly capable individual who may excel in one scenario could flounder, or even become a toxic leader given a different scenario. Objective data on the individual, coupled with objective data that paints a picture of the culture of a unit in particular, could allow us to more aptly pair squadrons with squadron commanders. Through better-informed and proper pairing of leaders with units, we increase the likelihood of effective units and, by extension, create a more capable Air Force.

**Application of this Concept in the Civilian Sector**

It is not uncommon for civilian advances in the fields of leadership and organizational effectiveness to precede forward movement in the military. Oftentimes, this is driven by the need for increased profits in companies and industry. Utilizing human capital is no different. The fields of Person-Environment (PE) Fit and predictive analytics are not new, and these fields have created a boon of sorts in industry and sports.

Person Environment Fit Theory, which dates back to 1974,[9] is the concept of looking beyond the technical skills of an individual, to traits that are harder to measure, and then pairing individuals using this broader whole-person concept with organizations (or environments) that best blend with the individual. The company or industry defines what type of person they are looking for, based not on the skills they possess, but on how they align with the company's culture. The premise is that skills can be taught, but alignment with a company's culture is something that one either possesses or does not.

> Conventional selection practices are geared toward hiring employees whose knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) provide the greatest fit with clearly defined requirements of specific jobs. Traditional selection techniques rarely consider characteristics of the organization in which the jobs reside. Traditional techniques also ignore characteristics of the person that are irrelevant to immediate job requirements. In common management parlance, the organization hires new "hands" or new "heads" – that is, parts of people. A new model of selection is emerging, however, that is geared toward hiring a "whole" person who will fit well into the specific organization's culture. It reflects a fundamental reorientation of the selection process toward hiring "people," not just KSAs, for "organizations," not just jobs.[10]

9. Robert D. Caplan, "Person-Environment Fit Theory and Organizations: Commensurate Dimensions, Time Perspectives, and Mechanisms," *Journal of Vocational Behavior* 31, (1987): 249.

10. David E. Bowen, Gerald E. Ledford, Jr. and Barry R. Nathan. "Hiring for the Organization, Not the Job," *The Executive* 5, no. 4 (November 1991): 35.

"Predictive analytics is the use of data, statistical algorithms and machine learning techniques to identify the likelihood of future outcomes based on historical data."[11] This concept was made popular in mainstream vernacular through its application in major league baseball, the movie *Moneyball*, and the subsequent depiction of the story of the 2002 Oakland Athletics. With a minimal payroll budget of one third of what the highest payroll budgets in major league baseball were at the time, the Athletics managed to be as successful as higher priced teams by focusing largely on the factors that led to team runs scored, versus traditional factors of individual performance. "Today, every major professional sports team either has an analytics department or an analytics expert on staff."[12]

**Military Examples**

In 2015, a U.S. Army Human Dimension Capabilities Development Task Force produced a study analyzing person-organization fit and its application to mission command. With a focus on mission command, this study sought to inform the discussion on organizational effectiveness and appropriate applications of leadership. Three of their recommendations include: assessing the overall work environment, inferring the type of person required, and reinforcing person-organization fit at work.[13]

11. "Predictive Analytics: What It Is and Why It Matters." SAS.com. http://www.sas.com/en_us/insights/analytics/predictive-analytics.html# (accessed February 1, 2017).

12. Steinberg, Leigh. "Changing the Game: The Rise of Sports Analytics." Forbes.com. http://www.forbes.com/sites/leighsteinberg/2015/08/18/changing-the-game-the-rise-of-sports-analytics/#29c9f8a131b2 (accessed February 1, 2017).

13. Human Dimension Capabilities Development Task Force, Capabilities Development Integration Directorate, Mission Command Center of Excellence. "Person-Organization Fit and Mission Command," September 2015. 9.

Personal experience has served to inform my opinion on the utility of PE Fit and predictive analytics as well. My experience as a squadron commander in a selectively manned organization allowed me to hand-pick candidates for hire. These decisions were informed with a multitude of candidate tests, analysis of individual personalities, consideration given to the specific work environment in which they'd be asked to serve, and ultimately advised by a robust, continuously updated predictive analytical model built with several years of data. The results of this data currently show that of all individuals who have served in the organization since data collection began (a 555-person sample size), the analytical model used to predict individual success has been 91% accurate. Similarly, of those who did not do well in the organization, the analytical model accurately predicted 94% of these individuals. The utility of a predictive tool such as this is priceless. In this particular example, mission success, high morale, and high retention rates clearly exemplify the effectiveness of such a selection process with respect to organizational culture. When compared with the results of an Army study showing that 80% of members polled had observed toxic leadership and 20% had worked for a toxic leader,[14] it is easy to see how the application of a more objective selection process can reduce incidents of toxic leadership.

It is difficult to objectively predict leadership performance, which may be one reason why application of this approach is not widespread. Having squadron commander candidates take a series of leadership and personality tests may be a step in the right direction, helping to identify variables such as psyche, propensity for stress, and adaptability. But simply assessing the would-be commander is only part of the equation. A comparative analysis of traits such as personal alignment and motivation for the unit's mission, the leader's ability to relate to the

14. Joe Doty, PhD and Jeff Fenlason, "Narcissism and Toxic Leaders," *Military Review* 93, no. 1 (Jan/Feb 2013): 55.

members in an organization, and common fundamental beliefs between the leader and subordinates are possible areas to consider. Each of the traits listed here are simply informed opinions, however, and are not much different than subjectivity in the current Air Force approach used to select commanders. Instead of opinions, the Air Force should invest in available tools that allow for data collection, analysis, and application to create a process that continues to adapt and refine commander selection. The process should start with a comprehensive review of current and recently graduated commanders, their performance, characteristics of their organizations and of the operating environment. Data collection will be continuous, making the process more sound and robust over time. This data should then be analyzed, by automated means, to create a continually improving assessment of the possible fit between commander candidates and their potential units.

## Recommendations: Implementation Mechanisms to Improve the Pairing Process and Enable Continued Improvement

An implementation process for applying PE Fit and predictive analytics in Air Force squadron command selection should begin with an assessment of fundamental traits we value in Air Force leaders. Several obvious areas come to mind:

- Moral characteristics: Derived from the Air Force Core Value of *Integrity First*, individuals should possess a fundamental base of morals and ethical values.
- Leadership aptitude: A learned trait, measured by past performance and a review of training and experience.
- Motivation and attitude: Garnered from personal interviews combined with psychological testing. Personality tests such as the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, Judgement Index, Emotional Intelligence, Strategic Leader Self Awareness Scale, and others can all help paint a picture of strengths, weaknesses, and propensity to respond to different levels of stress. Air Force mental health specialists have a number of personality assessment tools at their disposal. Many of these tools and personality tests are conducted in a way that minimizes skewing by the individual or testing method. The use of different types of tests can help refine the assessment process and account for weaknesses of any particular test.
- Adaptability: The abilities to both recognize when self- or cultural change is required, and the propensity to adapt to those situations by altering leadership style, even when natural or inherent tendencies tend to override.

This step should be the first in a series of data collection milestones used to build a database of reference points to later inform prediction. In addition to the traits listed above,

extensive interviewing and testing of current and recently graduated squadron commanders is also necessary. This will serve to point out common traits that have not yet been identified through subjective means. A significant step in this area is to capture exit data on departing squadron commanders. Official assessments completed by supervisory Group commanders, coupled with Leadership 360 surveys can highlight areas of success or areas where improvement is needed. Key questions to consider include:

- Was the organization successful during this commander's tenure?
- Is the organization postured for continued success?
- Did the leader play a positive or negative role in organizational performance? If negative…
    - Was it a failure of identifying potentially negative traits in this individual beforehand?
    - Was it a failure in preparing the leader for command?

In addition to gathering data on the leader, organization data must be collected in the areas of mission execution and organizational environment or culture. We can then go further in identifying individual leadership traits that are most applicable for specific organizations. Over time, the data will serve to help create a predictive model that, when leader and organizational data is input, a percentage of pairing success or failure is produced. This will create the ability to apply the rubric of traits required for incoming commanders and the organizations they are best fit to lead.

To be fair, there are downsides to this proposal. They include a tendency, over time, to rely too heavily on the data and remove all subjectivity in assessment. Certainly a balance of each is required, and the data should always serve to inform the decision-maker, not make the

decision. One way the selectively manned unit I served in sought to mitigate this was by having the hiring commander voice his or her intent to hire or pass on a candidate prior to being advised of the recommendation from the automated predictive tool. When the commander's hiring opinion differed from the analytical model prediction of success, further discussion would ensue. The commander always had the final say, however, whether the opinion differed from the predictive model or not. This practice kept the integrity of the human decision-making process, separating the subjective, qualitative approach from the more objective, quantitative tool that was used to augment the human choice.

Another drawback to implementation of this process is the up-front cost in monetary and personnel resources. Predictive analytical software is expensive, and unique training is needed to fully grasp the theory and concepts to best be able to apply them. In the short term, dedicated teams, and likely a component of Air Force A1 will be required over time to manage and ensure integrity in this process.

However, the future potential in such an endeavor far outweighs the short-term costs. Every airman deserves a good commander. By collecting and smartly utilizing individual and organizational data through a "living" system, we can improve the command selection process. This concept can later be scaled (balanced with the appropriate level of resources) to broader areas such as Command Chief, Senior Enlisted Advisor, and Director of Operation selections.

## Conclusion

> Successful organizations are the result of effective leadership and organizational culture. These two elements are interrelated; an organization will always reflect the values and beliefs of its founder(s) since they are the ones shaping the cultural traits of the organization. In time, as the organization evolves and its culture develops, this new culture will shape the leader and will influence his actions.[15]

Although the elements of leader, environment, organization, and the relations among each influence organizational effectiveness, it is the relationship between the leader and the organization that is most variable, most dependent on relationships, and most easily changed. Poor leadership can exist at any level, but it can have the most perverse effect at the squadron level because of the scope of responsibility and the direct impact on airmen. Toxic leadership isn't leadership at all…it is poor execution of an attempt at leadership. When this travesty can be avoided, it should. In order to set our commanders and units up for success, we should make the most informed pairing decisions possible, backed by objective data when possible, through a learned, continuously improving process.

The current mechanism for selecting Air Force squadron commanders has much room for improvement. Let us not be bound simply by what we can comprehend, which is concurrent thought in only a few dimensions. Rather, let us utilize the power of technology, data collection, aggregation, and application to enhance human performance and operational effectiveness. The ever-changing security environment and unknown threats of the future warrant a solid approach to the things we can indeed affect. As Schein notes, "We basically do not know what the world of tomorrow will really be like, except that it will be different, more complex, more fast-paced, and more culturally diverse. This means that organizations, their leaders, and all the rest of us

15. Brindusa Maria Popa, "The Relationship Between Leadership Effectiveness and Organizational Performance," *Journal of Defense Resources Management* 3, no. 1 (January 2012): 123.

will have to become perpetual learners."[16] Given the unpredictability of a complex world, tools such as predictive analytics, and processes such as PE fit can be key in making appropriate command selections. Mission success in this ever-changing environment requires the right leaders, chosen by the most informed methods available, powered by applicable data, and enabled by proper measurement. Former Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld is quoted as saying, "There are known knows; there are things we know we know. We also know there are known unknowns; that is to say we know there are some things we do not know. But there are also unknown unknowns – the ones we don't know we don't know. And if one looks throughout the history of our country and other free countries, it is the latter category that tend to be the difficult ones."[17] The Air Force has a culture of embracing technology to make great leaps in airpower advancement. Let us now embrace the power of technology to invest in our greatest asset, our people, by enhancing the vital selection and pairing of commanders with units, thus changing some of the unknown unknowns to known knows.



16. Edgar H. Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, 4th ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010), 365.

17 "Donald Rumsfeld." wikipedia.com. https://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Donald_Rumsfeld (accessed Apr 18, 2017).

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