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STRATEGIC LEADER COMPETENCIES

BY

Colonel Michael K. Corbell
United States Army

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STRATEGIC LEADER COMPETENCIES

AN INDIVIDUAL STUDY PROJECT

by

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ABSTRACT

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Strategic Leadership is about shaping the vision, values, and culture of organizations and individuals and generating action to reach long term objectives. The complex environment and demanding duties of leadership at the strategic level are fundamentally different than those of lower levels requiring unique skills and capabilities (competencies). This paper discusses the nature of those special competencies required for success at the strategic level. An analysis of environment and duties, as well as a distinction between personality traits and competencies is made to build a frame of reference from which competencies can be examined. Current research in the field is compared and relevant groupings of competencies are reviewed to expand the frame of reference. A grouping of competencies by technical, communicative and conceptual skills is found to be especially valuable in identifying those capabilities which demonstrate clear differences between superior and average performers at the strategic level. Finally, conclusions are reached as to the importance of accurate perceptions concerning strategic leadership competencies for training, development, and selection.

STRATEGIC LEADER COMPETENCIES

INTRODUCTION:

Richard Neutadt and Ernest May in their book Thinking In Time: The Uses of History for Decision Makers relate a remarkable story concerning General George C. Marshall as he was giving guidance to MG John Hildring in the spring of 1943. World War II was far from over but MG Hildring had been given the responsibility to organize military governments for liberated or conquered countries. Hildring reported this account of General Marshall's instructions to him:

"I'm turning over to you a sacred trust and I want you to bear that in mind every day and every hour you preside over this military government and civil affairs venture....we have a great asset and that is that our people, our countrymen, do not distrust us and do not fear us. Our countrymen, our fellow citizens, are not afraid of us. They don't harbor any ideas that we intend to alter the government of the country or the nature of this government in any way. This is a sacred trust that I turn over to you today....I don't want you to do anything, and I don't want to permit the enormous corps of military governors that you are in the process of training and that you are going to dispatch all over the world, to damage this high regard in which the professional soldiers in the Army are held by our people, and it could happen, it could happen, Hildring, if you don't understand **WHAT YOU ARE ABOUT**"(emphasis added).'

Understanding what strategic leaders like George C. Marshall "are about" is at the heart of the intent of this paper (In fact, one of the crucial skills or competencies of effective strategic leaders is their ability to clearly understand what they,

themselves are about). The duty environment of these leaders is extremely complex and demanding. Great pressures and expectations (internal and external to their organization) press upon them. To succeed, degrees of skill and capability quantitatively and qualitatively greater than those possessed by the vast majority of "experienced" leaders are required. These skills and capabilities can be categorized as strategic leader competencies. One premise of this paper is that any serious study to understand strategic leadership and the development of strategic leaders must include an examination of the competencies required to perform and succeed at this level.

To conduct this examination some groundwork or construction of a "frame of reference" would be helpful. Hopefully our frame of reference will serve as a mental road map helping to make sense of of a complex subject. Included in this frame of reference should be answers to such questions as: What is strategic leadership? What is different about the strategic level of leadership from subordinate levels? What environments do strategic level leaders operate in? What exactly does a strategic leader do? In short, what insights can the environment, the activities - the accomplishments and failures of leaders at this level give us that are useful in identifying strategic leadership competencies?

Having established a broad working frame of reference for strategic leadership and it's environment, we will turn our attention to competencies. What is meant by the term strategic

leader competency? What useful grouping of competencies can be made to provide a separate but related frame of reference for common understanding and discussion? Finally, what insights can be drawn from this brief inquiry that may assist in personal and organizational development?

LEADERSHIP AT THE STRATEGIC LEVEL:

DEFINING STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP:

What do we mean by strategic leadership? Many refer to supervision at this level as "executive leadership", the CEO level of a large organization. But there is much more to this concept and role than simply being at the top rung of a large organizational ladder. Colonel George B. Forsythe in his article, "The Preparation of Strategic Leaders" asserts that strategic leadership is "qualitatively different" from the duties of lower-level managers and thus, deserves a unique emphasis. He explains, "Strategic leadership involves the building of understanding and commitment among followers... leaders at the top of an organization direct demanding systems in the context of complex, dynamic, and uncertain environments."² Carl Builder stressed the crucial role of strategic leadership as, "the creative process of defining and effecting relationships between means and ends."³ General Maxwell Thurman described strategic leadership as, "Getting culture, values, and vision aligned to get the entire organization moving in a common direction."⁴ During his February 1991 address to the United States Army War College (USAWC) Conference on Strategic Leadership,

General Thurman provided an authoritative characterization of a military strategic leader as:

"A three or four star general officer who is held accountable by the institution for:

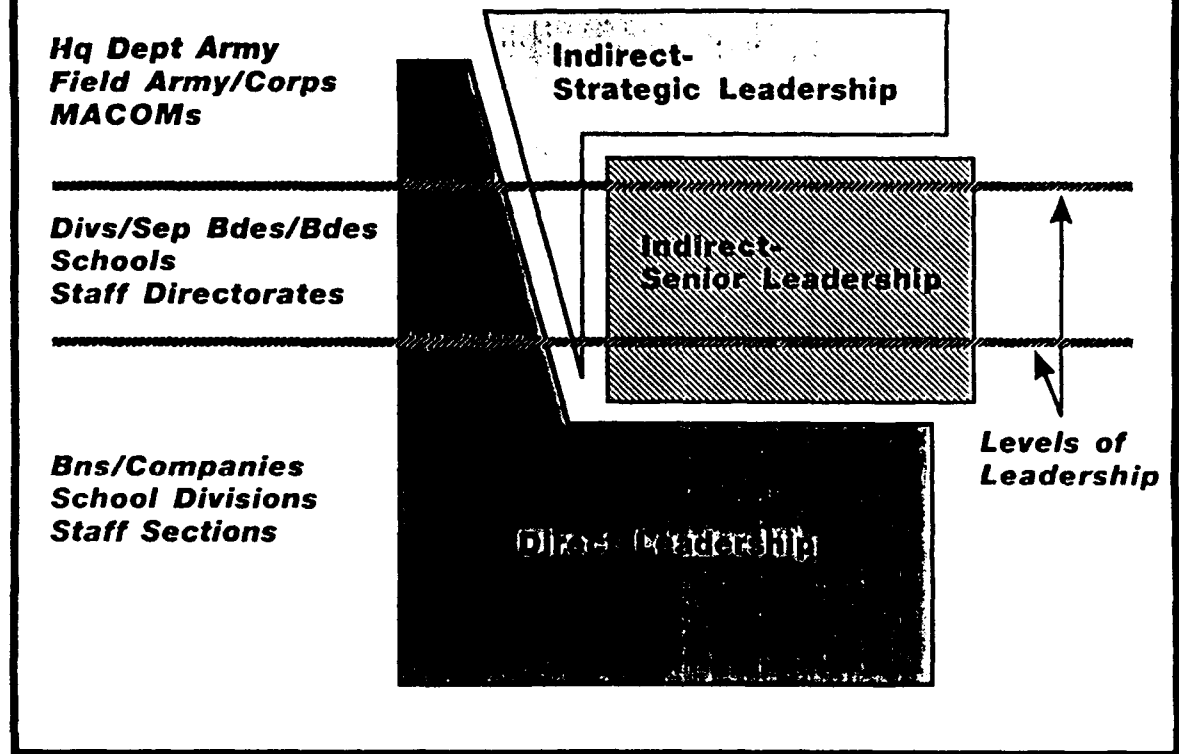
- The output of his entire organization
- Getting that organization to follow along with him in a common direction
- Getting his people to operate innovatively and creatively within proper limits while expressing their full individual capability"⁵

For the purposes of General Thurman's discussion then and this paper now, executive military leadership normally resides at the four star level. It is true some lieutenant generals are strategic leaders due to a combination of abilities, duties and environment; and many other officers working on high level staffs are involved in strategic level work. Generally however, strategic military leaders are four star officers.⁶

THREE LEADERSHIP LEVELS:

The art and science of military leadership has long been a central part of the formal and informal training for all United States officers. In recent years, scholars have identified three distinct leadership levels each with a unique environment requiring a different mixture of skills.⁷ Figure 1 depicts these three levels under the title, The Leadership System. Notice how each levels includes some properties of the other two levels, while maintaining an overall character of it's own.

The Leadership System



Cadets and newly commissioned officers are introduced through formal training to the key concepts and competencies of **DIRECT LEVEL LEADERSHIP** - the "Be, Know, and Do" foundation of our Army values and performance standards. These concepts are codified in FM 22-100 Military Leadership. Later, captains and majors begin to take in the concepts and breath of **SENIOR LEVEL LEADERSHIP** and the complexity of large organizations with missions in support of even larger teams. Through on-the-job training and formal schooling (branch advance course, Command and General Staff College, etc.) a frame of reference for the duties and skills of senior leaders from Brigade to Division is developed. However, with all of the study

and historical reflection on the subject of leadership, only recently have we really begun to identify and study the significant differences in the skills and qualifications (competencies rather than traits or activities) required for effective leadership at the **STRATEGIC LEVEL.**

SEARCHING FOR STRATEGIC LEVEL COMPETENCIES:

Several explanations exist as to why the competencies required for success at the strategic level are not as clearly documented as are the competencies, traits and activities of direct and senior leaders - or as recognized as the personalities and accomplishments of historical strategic leaders.

One simple explanation is that few officers are called upon to serve at the strategic (or executive) level. Therefore, there are fewer to observe and study than direct or senior level leaders. For example, on December 31, 1991 only 13 of 103,951 active duty army officers were four star generals (46 three stars).⁸ However, closer reflection quickly reminds us that an abundance of knowledge exists concerning historical and serving strategic leaders (military and civilian). We know a great deal about what they have done but still have difficulty agreeing on what makes them effective.

Perhaps more pertinent is the observation that great strategic leaders (almost without exception) possess very strong personalities. Accordingly, our scrutiny and historical recollections tend to focus more on their personality traits and

activities rather than requisite competencies. In fact, personality traits frequently overshadow all other observations in a casual analysis. A significant ensuing difficulty exists with using personality traits to gain insights. Simply stated, conflicting personality traits can be found in all our examples of great strategic leaders. For example: Lincoln, Grant, Lee, Pershing, Roosevelt, Marshall, Eisenhower, and McArthur were all successful strategic leaders with vastly different personalities. Therefore, personality trait studies give us little real insight into the underlying competencies required to succeed at high levels.

Finally, it is simply easier to identify the environment of the strategic leader and what these leaders accomplish or fail to accomplish, than it is to clearly identify the skills and capabilities required to operate at this level. Once again, the compelling narrative of the deed and the situation overshadow the basic skills (competencies) necessary to succeed.

This is not to say a study of the environment and undertakings of strategic leaders is not useful in identifying and understanding the requisite competencies required. In fact, it is a reference point from which much, if not most, research in this area has begun. A review of the strategic leader's circumstances and endeavors will underscore many abilities required for mastery at the executive level. For our purposes,

an appreciation of the environment and tasks is critical to an understanding of the requisite strategic leader competencies.

Strategic Level Environment and Duties:

Previous study and reflection has shed considerable light on the environment and activities of the strategic leader. Lieutenant Colonel Robert J. St Onge's (USAWC Class of '91) advance course paper entitled The Environment of Strategic Leadership represents a clear and concise discussion of these subjects. Figure 2 (What The Strategic Leader Does) provides a quick, but useful overview of the key descriptors of environment and duties found in St Onge's article.⁹ To assist our frame of reference, the figure also orders the tasks according to the internal, external or both environments. Notice that despite the grouping, there is a great deal of connectivity between tasks and among environments.

Figure #2

WHAT THE STRATEGIC LEADER DOES

"Primary task of strategic leader is to relate his organization and its needs to the environment in which it exists and with which it interacts"¹⁰

REGARDING THE INTERNAL ENVIRONMENT:

PROVIDES FOCUS, DIRECTION AND PURPOSE THROUGH THE EXPRESSION
OF A SIMPLE, CLEAR, AND COMPELLING VISION

ARTICULATES A SIMPLE, CLEAR, COMPELLING VISION OF WHAT THE FUTURE
CAN AND SHOULD BE (I.E.: AIRLAND BATTLE)

DEFINES, SHAPES AND SUSTAINS THE ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

PLAYS A KEY ROLE IN SHAPING AND SUSTAINING THE ARMY CULTURE

Figure 2 Continued

DEFINES AND ARTICULATES ORGANIZATIONAL VALUES

(I.E.: GEN. WICKHAM'S ARMY VALUES: COMMITMENT, COMPETENCE, CANDOR, AND COURAGE)

DEVELOPS, COACHES, MENTORS SUBORDINATE LEADERS REGARDING CAPABILITIES TO BECOME FUTURE EXECUTIVE LEADERS

DESIGNS SOUND ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURES

STRUCTURES COMPLEX WORK THROUGH THE DIVISION OF LABOR AMONG SUBORDINATE ORGANIZATIONS, BUT TASK ORGANIZES AS REQUIRED

ACQUIRES NECESSARY RESOURCES: PEOPLE, WEAPONS, EQUIPMENT, FACILITIES, AND FUNDING FOR LONG TERM REQUIREMENTS

ACTS ON MAJOR, COMPLEX LOGISTICAL AND RESOURCES ISSUES

DEVELOPS FORCE MODERNIZATION & QUALITY OF LIFE PROGRAMS

ASSESSES AND BALANCES VARIOUS ORGANIZATIONAL CONSTITUENCIES

DEVELOPS A LEADERSHIP CLIMATE THAT IS ENABLING AND PRODUCTIVE

EXERCISES LESS DIRECT, INTERPERSONAL LEADERSHIP AND MORE INDIRECT LEADERSHIP

CREATES CONDITIONS THAT ENABLE SUBORDINATES TO OPERATE EFFECTIVELY

RELIES LESS ON COMMANDING AND MORE ON NEGOTIATING, PERSUADING, AND BUILDING CONSENSUS DUE TO THE JOINT, COMBINED, UNIFIED AND POLITICAL NATURE OF HIS DUTY ENVIRONMENT

**WHAT THE STRATEGIC LEADER DOES
REGARDING THE EXTERNAL ENVIRONMENT:**

EFFECTIVELY INTERFACES WITH THE EXTERNAL ENVIRONMENT

WORKS IN PRIMARILY IN EITHER JOINT, COMBINED, OR UNIFIED COMMAND ENVIRONMENTS

WORKS IN THE INTERNATIONAL ARENA

INTERACTS WITH NATIONAL POLITICAL LEADERS, CONGRESS, AND OTHER GOVERNMENTAL AGENCIES

ACTS ON MAJOR, COMPLEX LOGISTICAL AND RESOURCES ISSUES

Figure #2 Continued

HAS A JOINT PERSPECTIVE (ADAPTS TO DIFFERENT LANGUAGES, SERVICE CULTURES, AND DOCTRINE)

IN COMBINED COMMANDS:

POSSESSES AN INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

(I.E.: GEN. SCHWARZKOPF IN THE GULF WAR)

IS KNOWLEDGEABLE OF ECONOMICS, POLITICS, CULTURES AND INTERESTS OF NUMEROUS OTHER NATIONS

REGARDING THE NATIONAL POLITICAL STRUCTURE:

ADVISES NATIONAL LEADERS
TESTIFIES BEFORE CONGRESS AND HOSTING DELEGATIONS
DEALS WITH DEMANDS OF OTHER AGENCIES AND DEPARTMENTS
SOMETIMES SERVES AS EXECUTIVE APPOINTEE OUTSIDE DOD
(I.E.: GEN. POWELL AS THE NATIONAL SECURITY ADVISOR)

WHAT THE STRATEGIC LEADER DOES

REGARDING THE EXTERNAL ENVIRONMENT (CONT.):

REACTS TO SPECIAL INTEREST GROUPS (VETERAN, INDUSTRY,
ENVIRONMENTALISTS, ETC)
UNDERSTANDS AND HANDLES DEMANDS OF THE MEDIA

REGARDING SOCIETY:

UNDERSTANDS COMPETING REQUIREMENTS FOR NATIONAL
SECURITY AND SOCIAL PROGRAMS (BATTLE FOR FUNDING)
DEFENDS THE NEED FOR MILITARY SPENDING BUT UNDERSTANDS
COMPETING REQUIREMENTS
IS SENSITIVE TO THE DEMANDS OF SOCIETY IN THE MANAGEMENT
OF RESERVE COMPONENTS
DEALS WITH CULTURAL DILEMMAS: (I.E.: RACE RELATIONS,
SINGLE PARENTS, WOMEN IN COMBAT, HOMOSEXUALITY, ETC.)

BALANCES THE EXTERNAL INFLUENCES OUTLINED UNDER SEVEN GENERAL
ENVIRONMENT AREAS IN THE USAWC REFERENCE TEXT ENTITLED ARMY
COMMAND AND MANAGEMENT: THEORY AND PRACTICE. THESE EXTERNAL
INFLUENCES ARE:

CULTURAL (LOBBYISTS, INDUSTRY, SPECIAL INTEREST GROUPS,
MEDIA, RETIREES, ETC)
HISTORICAL (EVENTS, COMMITMENTS, AND PRECEDENTS)
POLITICAL (EXECUTIVE BRANCH, CONGRESS, COURTS, ETC)
PUBLIC OPINION
ECONOMIC (DOMESTIC AND GLOBAL)
TECHNOLOGY
MILITARY

REGARDING BOTH ENVIRONMENTS:

WORKS WELL WITH CIVILIANS IN AND OUT OF THE MILITARY
UNDERSTANDS AND RESPECTS CIVILIAN LEADERSHIP AUTHORITY
ADDRESSES PROBLEMS WHICH HAVE DO NOT HAVE "RIGHT" ANSWERS
TAKES RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE FUTURE - MAKES HARD DECISIONS
FROM AMONG CONFLICTING IMPERATIVES
ENVISIONS THE LONG-TERM FUTURE OF THE MILITARY AND SETS IN
MOTION PROGRAMS AND POLICIES TO REALIZE THAT FUTURE

**SOURCE: THE ENVIRONMENT OF STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP by ROBERT J. ST. ONGE, JR.
24 APRIL 91**

In his address to the USAWC, General Thurman reinforced this concept of the strategic level environment and duties. First he outlined three main responsibilities of strategic leader work:

"Promulgate a strategic vision of where the organization is going and what it might look like in the next 10-20 years

Create an institutional culture that provides the necessary conditions for encouraging everybody:
to move in a common direction
to operate at their full individual capacity
to do so willingly and enthusiastically

Articulate and institutionalize a set of values that reinforces the above conditions"¹¹

Undoubtedly drawing on his own experiences, General Thurman further described "General's Work" (specifically that of a CINC) in three broad categories summarized below:

Work Personally Done by the General:

Resource allocation
Corps and above doctrine writing
Institutional values and morale
Campaign plan concept

Work to Assist the Chief, Secretary, and Chairman:

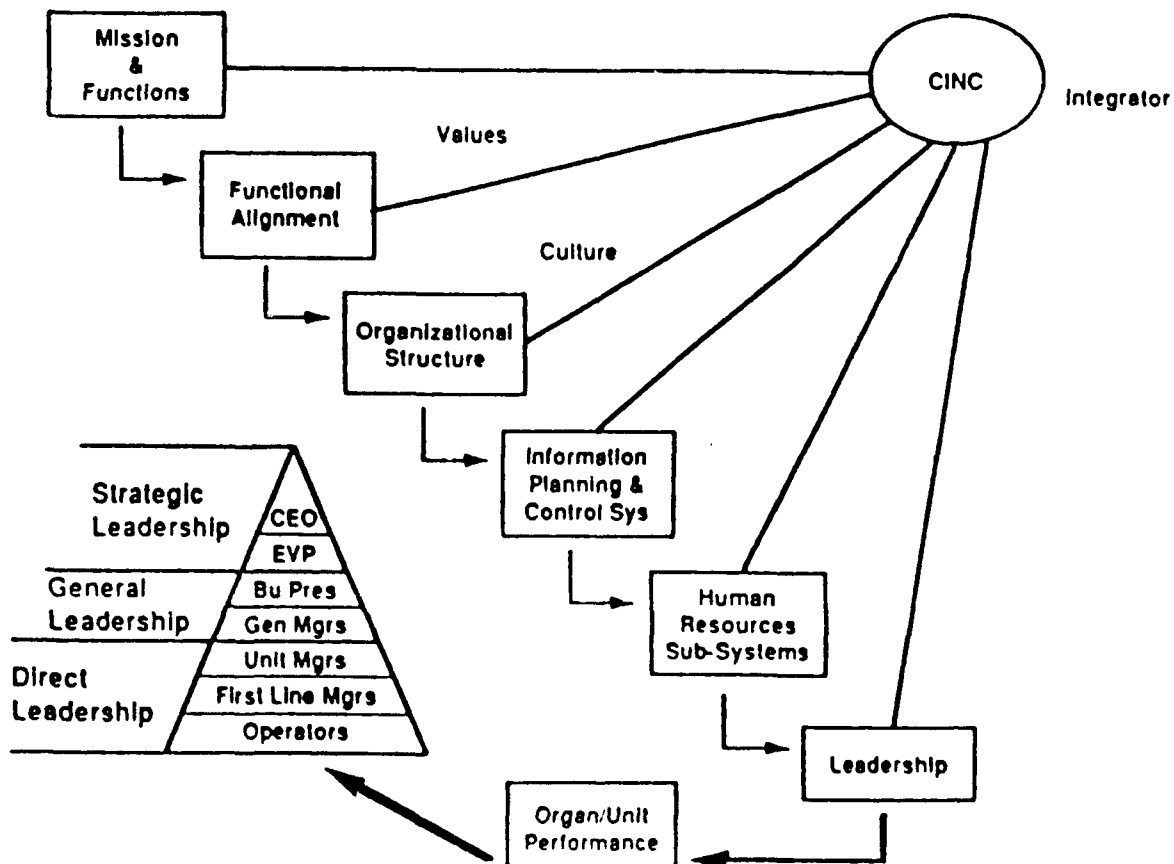
Long range research/development/acquisition and
program objective memorandum creation
Writing doctrine for Unified/Joint Operations
Theater Strategy, Campaign Plans

Work that is Delegated Downward:

Execute Training
Run posts
Division and below doctrine writing
Carry out campaign plan elements¹²

Although these duties overlap and most often are accomplished simultaneously, it is helpful to the enlargement of our frame of reference to view them in separate categories. However, it is also critical to note a strong responsibility of the GENERAL AS INTEGRATOR in each and between each category. Figure 3 used by General Thurman in his presentation is similar to the one found in DA Pam 600-80 Executive Leadership entitled "The Executive Leadership System".¹³ It depicts the strategic leader (CINC, SA/CSA, etc) as the "integrator" of complex systems with a high degree of interdependence. Note the creation and communication of values and culture, the overall responsibility for unit and organizational performance, and the tie in with the three levels of leadership (Note also that the general leadership level is the same level we have described as senior level leadership above).

Figure 3 - "6 Steps to Sound Organization & Leadership"



Dr. T.O. Jacobs (Chief of the Executive Development Research Group, Army Research Institute), together with Dr. Elliott Jaques and others have used this same discernment of three distinct leadership levels (domains) in summarizing the general tasks requirements necessary for each of the U.S. Army's seven organizational leadership layers (see figure 4). In part this diagram speaks to what Jacobs and Jaques term stratified systems theory.¹⁴ Note that many of the duties and environment descriptions found in Colonel St Onge's research and General Thurman's experience can also be found in this summary.

Figure 4

GENERAL PERFORMANCE REQUIREMENTS BY ORGANIZATIONAL LEVEL

STRATUM	TIME SPAN	GENERAL TASK REQUIREMENTS	TOE GRADE	DOMAIN
VII	20+ YRS	CREATES COMPLEX SYSTEMS ORGANIZES ACQUISITION OF MAJOR RESOURCES; CREATES POLICY	GENERAL	SYSTEMS/ STRATEGIC
VI	10+ YRS	OVERSEES OPERATION OF SUB- ORDINATE SYSTEMS; APPLIES POLICY	LT GEN	
V	6+ YRS	DIRECT OPERATION OF COMPLEX SYSTEMS	MAJ GEN	GENERAL COMMAND
IV	2+ YRS	TAILOR RESOURCE ALLOCATIONS TO INTERDEPENDENT SUBORDINATE PROGRAMS OR UNITS	BRIG GEN/COL	
III	1+ YRS	DEVELOP AND EXECUTE PLANS TO IMPLEMENT POLICY/ASSIGNED MISSIONS	LT COL	DIRECT COMMAND
II	3+ MONTHS	DIRECT PERFORMANCE OF WORK; ANTICIPATE/SOLVE REAL TIME PROBLEMS	CPT, LT	
I	LESS THAN 3 MONTHS	HANDS-ON WORK PERFORMANCE USE PRACTICAL JUDGMENT TO SOLVE ONGOING PROBLEMS	NCO/SM	

Part of what makes Jacobs and Jaques findings so beneficial is that they are the result of extensive studies of very senior general officers. One significant aspect of these studies is the discerning concept that the most critical leadership tasks at various organizational levels are unique to those levels. Not surprisingly, these tasks also build on lower levels and/or draw on higher levels. In other words, these leadership tasks "added value" to the entire organization when required and applied at their specific level. Further advancing this research, Jacobs and Jaques determined each level of leadership (direct, senior and strategic) possessed requirements for unique skills or competencies.¹⁵ It is to those unique competencies essential to leadership at the strategic level that we will now turn our attention.

COMPETENCIES AT THE STRATEGIC LEVEL

To this point we have asserted that strategic leadership is the top level of three leadership domains; that it is conducted as a result of and in response to an extremely complex and demanding environment; and that skilled execution of numerous sophisticated tasks is crucial to the success at this level. But if what the strategic leader does is so consequential, what are the requisite competencies he must personally possess to be successful? Fortunately the expanded frames of reference we have built (environment, duties, levels) provide insight to address this

issue. Using them we can gain a clearer understanding as to what the strategic leader "is really all about".

DEFINING STRATEGIC LEADER COMPETENCY:

Our first step in this process is to make clear what is meant by "strategic leader competencies". We have previously referred to them as degrees of skill and capability quantitatively and qualitatively greater than those possessed by the vast majority of experienced leaders. However, greater exactness is needed. Dr. T. O. Jacobs describes a leadership competency as: possessing a clear distinction between attributes of jobs (tasks) and of individuals (competencies); being behaviorally specific; and at the strategic level, possessing an observable difference between superior and average performers¹⁶. Thus, we must distinguish between what a strategic leader does and the competency (skill, proficiency, mastery, adeptness, capacity, knowledge, genius, etc) that allows him to achieve success.

However, even more clarity is often needed. In his paper "Strategic Leadership Competencies", Dr. Marshall Sashkin (a senior associate in the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education) states that, "Competency approaches have typically failed to distinguish among behavioral skills, knowledge, and personal characteristics or traits. This is a critical flaw; skills and knowledge are, for the most part,

learnable, often with relatively little effort, while characteristics may or may not be modifiable and traits are typically thought of as relatively fixed aspects of individuals' personality structures."¹⁷ In addition, as we have previously mentioned, using personality traits (i.e. introversion vs extraversion) to explain successful leadership often produces confusion and reaches insupportable conclusions. -- Having added that bit of clarity (or perhaps confusion) to this discussion, let's turn to other observations we can support.

COMPETENCY LISTS:

In his USAWC presentation (previously referenced), General Thurman stated that there is no shortage of competency lists. Indicating there were as many as 300 such lists, he also remarked that with regard to military leaders none of them may be exactly right.¹⁸ However, such lists, especially those backed by sound extensive research or strategic level experience, are useful to our discussion.

Let's begin with four competency listings mentioned by General Thurman. A firm called DDI developed the list at figure 5 while constructing leadership assessment models for ROTC use.¹⁹ Figure 6

depicts a list drawn from FM 22-100, Military Leadership.²⁰ More recent research by Jaques and Clement resulted in the list at **figure 7**.²¹ Finally, consider the highly perceptive and richly developed list put forth by General Thurman himself (**figure 8**).²²

In reviewing these lists, note that the contrast between what the leader does and the skills required for him to take action is not always obvious. For example, a strategic leader builds teams, but team building can also be called a strategic level competency. Once again, for our framework, the key is to focus on the skills required to operate successfully not the tasks.

Figure 5

STRATEGIC LEADER COMPETENCIES

BY DDI:

COMMUNICATIONS

- ORAL
- WRITTEN

ADMINISTRATIVE SKILLS

- PLANNING AND ORGANIZING
- DELEGATING
- CONTROL

MOTIVATIONAL

- INITIATIVE

DECISION MAKING

- PROBLEM SOLVING
- JUDGEMENT
- DECISIVENESS

INTERPERSONAL

- SENSITIVITY
- INFLUENCE

SMALL UNIT OPERATIONS

- TECH COMPETENCE
- STAMINA

Figure 6

FROM FM 22-100:

COMMUNICATIONS	SOLDIER TEAM DEVELOPMENT
TEACHING AND COUNSELING	SUPERVISION
TACTICAL AND TECHNICAL PROFICIENCY	USE OF AVAILABLE SYSTEMS
	ETHICS

Figure 7

BY JAQUES AND CLEMENT - '91

PLANNING	TASK ASSIGNMENT
PERSONAL EFFECTIVENESS APPRAISAL	BUILDING TEAMWORK
TRAINING	COACHING
ENUMERATION	RECOGNITION AND PENALTIES
SELECTION	INDUCTION
DESELECTION, RETRENCHMENT, DOWNSIGNS	

Figure 8

STRATEGIC LEADER COMPETENCIES
FROM GENERAL MAXWELL THURMAN:
(Lecture USAWC, Feb 1991)

COMMUNICATION

- PUBLIC SPEAKING - PERSUASIVENESS - LISTENING

OPPORTUNITY RECOGNITION

INTEGRATION/SYNTHESIS

VISUALIZATION

2nd ORDER CONSEQUENCE MANAGEMENT - 10 yr. HORIZON

RESOURCE TRADE-OFF ANALYSIS

MENTOR THE INSTITUTION

CONTINUE TO LEARN

INSTITUTIONALIZATION

SET THE TONE - MORALLY, ENTHUSIASTICALLY, ENERGETICALLY

...from another slide on strategic leadership framework:

CONFIDENCE

PERSISTENCE

COMPETENCY GROUPINGS:

As observations, research and experiences have accumulated and existing frames of reference have been enhanced, a number of groupings of competency listings have emerged. Because competencies interconnect, overlap, and often build on each other, groupings can help us to identify patterns and improve our understanding. For example, notice the McBer grouping (figure 9 as presented by General Thurman)²³ and an arrangement of nine competency categories developed by Clement and Ayres (figure 10)²⁴. Both lists appear to group competencies into task related areas. Klauss delineates a dissimilar grouping for Senior Executive Service Competencies (figure 11)²⁵.

Figure 9

STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP COMPETENCIES

BY McBER:

(as cited by Gen Thurman, Feb '91)

GOAL AND ACTION MANAGEMENT

- EFFICIENCY ORIENTATION
- PRODUCTIVITY
- PATTERN RECOGNITION
- CONCERN FOR IMPACT

LEADERSHIP

- CONCEPTUALIZATION
- ORAL PRESENTATION
- SELF CONFIDENCE

HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT

- MANAGING

FOCUSING ON OTHERS

- PERCEPTUAL OBJECTIVITY
-

Figure 10

STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP COMPETENCIES

BY CLEMENT AND AYRES:

COMMUNICATION

- INTERPERSONAL
- ORGANIZATIONAL

MANAGEMENT SCIENCE

- PROCEDURES
- PROCESSES

HUMAN RELATIONS

- INTERGROUP RELATIONS
- INTRAGROUP RELATIONS

DECISION MAKING

- CLIMATE VARIABLE
- CONCEPTUAL ABILITY
- PROCESS & PROCEDURES

COUNSELING

- PERSONAL
- PERFORMANCE

PLANNING

SUPERVISION

- PROCEDURE
- TECHNIQUES

ETHICS

- INDIVIDUAL BEHAVIOR
AND VALUES
- PROFESSIONALISM
- ORGANIZATIONAL
RESPONSIBILITIES

TECHNICAL

- SPECIFIC CONTENT AREA
- PROCEDURES, TECHNIQUES, PRINCIPLES
- FOCUS ON MOTOR SKILLS

Figure 11

BY KLAUSS: -- SES COMPETENCIES

EXECUTIVE ROLE ORIENTATION	INTERPERSONAL DYNAMICS & GROUP MANAGEMENT
- SYSTEMS VIEW	- SENSITIVITY TO PERSONAL STRENGTHS, WEAKNESSES, AND BIASES
- STRATEGIC FOCUS	- SUPPORT FOR STAFF
- PROACTIVE-ANTICIPATORY STANCE	- MANAGING DIVERSE INTERESTS
- NETWORKING	PERSONAL PREDISPOSITIONS/ CHARACTERISTICS
PROBLEM DIAGNOSIS AND RESOLUTION	- RISK-TAKING
- CONCERN FOR BROAD-BASED INFORMATION SOURCES & FACTS	- INTEGRITY/CREDIBILITY
- OPENMINDEDNESS	- TENACITY
- MARKETING & SELLING	- SELF-AWARENESS/ SELF-CONFIDENCE
- HELICOPTER MANAGEMENT	
MISCELLANEOUS	
- ENTHUSIASM	- CAPACITY TO SHIFT ROLES
- CREDIT GIVING AND GETTING	- SENSE OF HUMOR

Marshall Sashkin (previously mentioned) has developed his own grouping of competencies in line with his "visionary leadership theory." His concept draws extensively from sound, quantitative research and social learning theory. A key element of Sashkin's theory identifies and distinguishes between "behavioral skills" required at the highest leadership levels and "personal capabilities" as leadership competencies. Figure 12²⁶ (next page) portrays a synopsis of Sashkin's strategic leadership competencies (note this figure uses several Sashkin quotes to assist conceptualization). Sashkin sees the three personal capabilities as prerequisites to the successful application of the five behavioral skill competencies. In turn, the behavioral

skill competencies constitute expertise applied to implement strategies to achieve the leader's vision for the organization.²⁷

Sashkin's delineation is very useful in helping us to both differentiate between and see the relation among personal capabilities and behavioral skills as competencies. However, for the practitioner attempting to grasp and utilize such a highly complex concept, Sashkin's approach is perhaps too academic. Somehow we must assimilate this knowledge with our own experience and frames of reference. To attempt this let's examine one additional grouping.

Figure 12
STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP COMPETENCIES
Drawn from Marshall Sashkin

I. THREE PERSONAL CAPABILITIES AS LEADERSHIP COMPETENCIES:

- drawn from theory and research....Consistent with broad groups of personality characteristics identified by Stogdill (1948)
- Capabilities rather than traits...."Improvable in degree if not changeable in underlying structure"²⁸
- enables strategic leaders to embed in organizational cultures and instill in organizational members the values and belief that make possible the realization of their visions

A. COGNITIVE COMPLEXITY

- "THE PERSONAL CHARACTERISTIC REQUIRED TO EFFECTIVELY CARRY OUT TASKS AT THE VARIOUS ORGANIZATIONAL STRATA...
- a key element of stratified systems theory...individuals differ with regard to the scale and scope of (social) system that they can conceive of in a practically manipulable manner"²⁹
- a means for constructing social systems

B. SELF-EFFICACY

- STRONG SENSE OF INTERNAL CONTROL OR DIRECTION
- (from social learning theory - a requisite motivational factor)
- "Refers to one's belief in one's self as an effective agent in (and on) one's environment"³⁰
- "concept...is deeply interwoven with that of self-fulfilling prophecy....

- More than simple self-confidence, it is a consequence of action--study--for which belief in the possibility of success was prerequisite"³¹

C. POWER MOTIVE

- NEED FOR POWER DIRECTED IN A SOCIALLY PRODUCTIVE MANNER
- "Wants to lead, wants power and influence in order to empower others and thus achieve certain effects through their committed actions..."³²

II. FIVE BEHAVIORAL SKILL COMPETENCIES:

- from empirical studies of specific exceptional leadership actions and more theory-based leadership activity examination
- Skills that are applied "to define, embed, and reinforce values...only sure means for implementing strategies and tactics needed by visionary leaders"

A. FOCUSING ATTENTION

B. EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

C. TRUST - The result of consistent action over time

D. RESPECT

E. RISK - Ability to create new opportunities

"The embodiment of empowerment through leadership action"³³

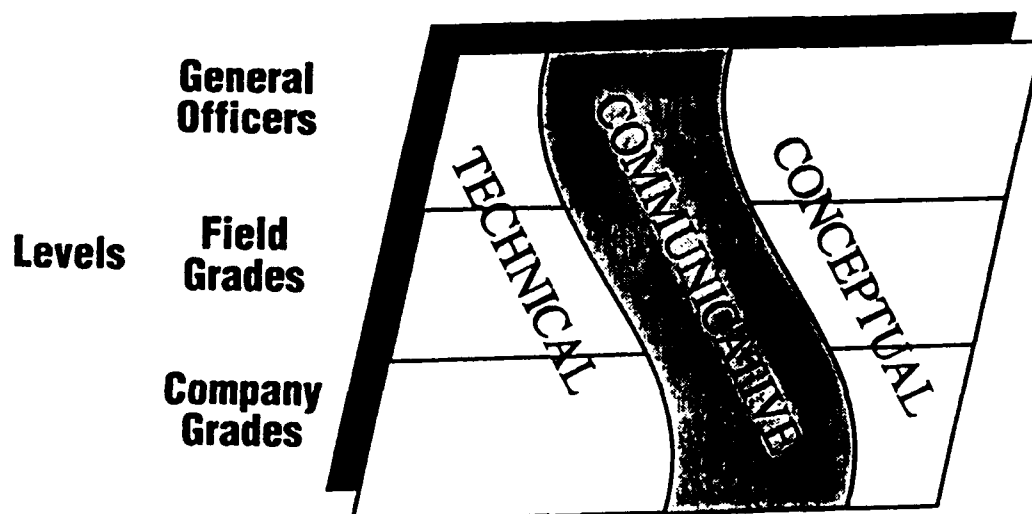
COMPETENCIES IN THREE BROAD AREAS:

Department of the Army Pamphlet 600-80, Executive Leadership outlines a grouping of competencies which complements our existing frame of reference regarding the three leadership levels. Underpinning this grouping is the conviction that, "leaders at all levels require skills and abilities in three broad areas: technical knowledge and skills; interpersonal/communication knowledge and skills; and conceptual skills".³⁴ A critical theorem of the grouping is that tasks and the balance between skill (competency) areas change from level to level. In short, the myriad of tasks to be done and the environment in which they must be accomplished in large part determine the mixture of competencies required.

Figure 13 portrays these three broad competency areas and the changes in requirements/demand across the three leadership levels.³⁵ Notice that the need for technical competencies in relation to communicative and conceptual skills decreases as the leader moves from the direct to strategic organizational level. (This relative decline in need for technical skills should not be confused with the quantity of, quality of, or the capacity for technical competency possessed by the strategic leader.) At the same time the demand for conceptual skills dramatically increases (in quantity, quality and capacity for). The need for communicative skills remains relatively stable. However, communicative skills will be very sophisticated at the strategic level. The final outcome of this developmental process requires that a strategic leader possess a much richer, much more complex set of competencies to succeed.

Figure 13

LEADERSHIP COMPETENCIES



Having observed the utility of groupings, let's generate our own template using the background of duties, environment, and competencies we have discussed and the three competencies areas in figure 13. If we overlay the competencies drawn from the various listings and groupings we have examined onto the areas of technical, communicative, and conceptual skills we can formulate a listing of competencies depicted at figure 14. The scholars from whose work we have garnered bits and pieces of insight might well disagree with the placement of specific items. However, the arrangement can prompt new perspectives and/or support previous observations by cross-walking from source to source.

FIGURE 14
STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP COMPETENCY BY AREA

TECHNICAL

INTERNAL ENVIRONMENT:

ALLOCATES RESOURCES
 CREATES CORPS AND ABOVE DOCTRINE
 INSTITUTIONALIZES VALUES AND MORALE
 DEVELOPES THEATER STRATEGY AND CAMPAIGN PLAN CONCEPT
 INSTITUTIONALIZATION - THURMAN
 TASK ORGANIZES AS REQUIRED
 ACQUIRES AND ALLOCATES NECESSARY RESOURCES:
 PEOPLE, WEAPONS, EQUIPMENT, FACILITIES,
 AND FUNDING FOR LONG TERM REQUIREMENTS
 CREATES CONDITIONS THAT ENABLE SUBORDINATES
 TO OPERATE EFFECTIVELY - ST.ONGE

EXTERNAL ENVIRONMENT:

EXTENSIVE KNOWLEDGE OF ECONOMICS, POLITICS, CULTURES AND
 THE INTERESTS OF NUMEROUS OTHER NATIONS
 POSSESSES AN INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE - ST.ONGE

BOTH ENVIRONMENTS:

CONTINUES TO LEARN - THURMAN
 EFFICIENCY ORIENTATION
 PRODUCTIVITY - MCBER
 SYSTEMS VIEW
 MANAGING DIVERSE INTERESTS
 CONCERN FOR BROAD-BASED INFORMATION
 SOURCES AND FACTS - KLAUSS

COMMUNICATIVE

INTERNAL ENVIRONMENT:

SET THE TONE - MORALLY, ENTHUSIASTICALLY,
 ENERGETICALLY MENTOR THE INSTITUTION
 ARTICULATES AND INSTITUTIONALIZES A SET OF VALUES
 THAT REINFORCES THE VISION AND THE CULTURE
 DELEGATES TRAINING EXECUTION, RUNNING POSTS,
 DIVISION AND BELOW DOCTRINE WRITING,
 AND CAMPAIGN PLAN EXECUTION - THURMAN
 ARTICULATES A SIMPLE, CLEAR, COMPELLING
 VISION OF WHAT THE FUTURE CAN AND SHOULD BE
 ARTICULATES ORGANIZATIONAL VALUES

 DEVELOPS, COACHES, MENTORS SUBORDINATE LEADERS REGARDING
 CAPABILITIES TO BECOME FUTURE EXECUTIVE LEADERS
 DIVIDES LABOR AMONG SUBORDINATE ORGANIZATIONS, TASK
 ORGANIZES AS REQUIRED
 NEGOTIATES, PERSUADES, AND BUILDS CONSENSUS
 DUE TO THE JOINT, COMBINED, UNIFIED
 AND POLITICAL NATURE OF HIS DUTIES - ST.ONGE

EXTERNAL ENVIRONMENT:

EFFECTIVELY INTERFACES WITH THE EXTERNAL ENVIRONMENT
 INTERACTS WITH NATIONAL POLITICAL LEADERS, CONGRESS,
 AND OTHER GOVERNMENT AGENCIES
 RESPECTS CIVILIAN LEADERSHIP AUTHORITY
 ADVISES NATIONAL LEADERS
 TESTIFIES BEFORE CONGRESS AND HOSTING DELEGATIONS
 DEALS WITH DEMANDS OF OTHER AGENCIES AND DEPARTMENTS
 REACTS TO SPECIAL INTEREST GROUPS (VETERAN, INDUSTRY,
 ENVIRONMENTALISTS, ETC)
 ADDRESSES DEMANDS OF THE MEDIA
 DEFENDS THE NEED FOR MILITARY SPENDING - ST.ONGE

BOTH ENVIRONMENTS:

COMMUNICATION
 - PUBLIC SPEAKING
 - PERSUASIVENESS
 - LISTENING - THURMAN
 ORAL PRESENTATION - MCBER
 NETWORKING
 SENSITIVITY TO PERSONAL STRENGTHS,
 WEAKNESSES, AND BIASES
 CREDIT GIVING AND GETTING
 SENSE OF HUMOR - KLAUSS
 EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION
 TRUST
 - THE RESULT OF CONSISTENT ACTION OVER TIME
 FOCUSING ATTENTION
 RESPECT

 WORKS WELL WITH CIVILIANS IN AND
 OUT OF THE MILITARY - SHASHKIN
 - ST.ONGE

CONCEPTURAL

PERSONAL:

CONFIDENCE
 PERSISTENCE - THURMAN
 SELF CONFIDENCE

FIGURE 14 CONT.

PERCEPTUAL OBJECTIVITY
ETHICS

- MCBER

INDIVIDUAL BEHAVIOR AND VALUES
PROFESSIONALISM
ORGANIZATIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES

- CLEMENT & AYRES

PROACTIVE-ANTICIPATORY STANCE
STRATEGIC FOCUS
RISK TAKING
INTEGRITY/CREDIBILITY
TENACITY
SELF-AWARENESS/SELF CONFIDENCE
ENTHUSIASM FOR ACTION
OPENMINDEDNESS

- KLAUSS

INTERNAL ENVIRONMENT:

"PROMULGATE A STRATEGIC VISION OF WHERE THE
ORGANIZATION IS GOING AND WHAT IT MIGHT
LOOK LIKE IN THE NEXT 10-20 YEARS"

- THURMAN

"CREATE AN INSTITUTIONAL CULTURE THAT PROVIDES THE
NECESSARY CONDITIONS FOR ENCOURAGING EVERYBODY TO:
MOVE IN A COMMON DIRECTION
OPERATE AT THEIR FULL INDIVIDUAL CAPACITY
DO SO WILLINGLY AND ENTHUSIASTICALLY"

- THURMAN

CREATES FOCUS, DIRECTION AND PURPOSE THROUGH THE EXPRESSION
OF A SIMPLE, CLEAR, AND COMPELLING VISION
DEFINES, SHAPES AND SUSTAINS THE ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE
HELPS DEFINE THE ARMY CULTURE
DEFINES AND ARTICULATES ORGANIZATIONAL VALUES
STRUCTURES COMPLEX WORK THROUGH THE DIVISION OF LABOR AMONG
SUBORDINATE ORGANIZATIONS, BUT TASK ORGANIZES AS REQUIRED
CONCEIVES:

DEVELOPS FORCE MODERNIZATION
& QUALITY OF LIFE PROGRAMS
DEVELOPS A LEADERSHIP CLIMATE
THAT IS ENABLING AND PRODUCTIVE
DESIGNS SOUND ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURES

DECISIONS:

ACTS ON MAJOR, COMPLEX LOGISTICAL AND RESOURCES ISSUES
ASSESSES AND BALANCES VARIOUS ORGAN. CONSTITUENCIES

- ST.ONGE

EXTERNAL ENVIRONMENT:

HELPS CREATE LONG RANGE RESEARCH/DEVELOPMENT/ACQUISITION
MEMORANDUM, PROGRAM OBJECTIVE MEMORANDUM, AND DOCTRINE
FOR UNIFIED/JOINT OPERATIONS - THURMAN

DECISIONS: ACTS ON MAJOR, COMPLEX LOGISTICAL
AND RESOURCES ISSUES

DEALS WITH CULTURAL DILEMMAS: (IE RACE RELATIONS, SINGLE
PARENTS, WOMEN IN COMBAT, HOMOSEXUALITY, ETC.)

BALANCES THE EXTERNAL INFLUENCES INCLUDING:

CULTURAL (LOBBYISTS, INDUSTRY, SPECIAL INTEREST
GROUPS, MEDIA, RETIREES, ETC)

HISTORICAL (EVENTS, COMMITMENTS, AND PRECEDENTS)

POLITICAL (EXECUTIVE BRANCH, CONGRESS, COURTS, ETC)

FIGURE 14 CONT.

PUBLIC OPINION
ECONOMIC (DOMESTIC AND GLOBAL)
TECHNOLOGY
MILITARY
HAS A JOINT PERSPECTIVE (ADAPTS TO DIFFERENT LANGUAGES,
SERVICE CULTURES, AND DOCTRINE)
UNDERSTANDS THE ROLE AND DEMANDS OF THE MEDIA
UNDERSTANDS COMPETING REQUIREMENTS FOR NATIONAL
SECURITY AND SOCIAL PROGRAMS (BATTLE FOR FUNDING)
UNDERSTANDS COMPETING REQUIREMENTS FOR FEDERAL FUNDING
UNDERSTANDS THE DEMANDS OF SOCIETY IN THE MANAGEMENT
OF RESERVE COMPONENTS - ST.ONGE

BOTH ENVIRONMENTS:

OPPORTUNITY RECOGNITION
INTEGRATION/SYNTHESIS
VISUALIZATION
2ND ORDER CONSEQUENCE MANAGEMENT - 10 YR. HORIZON
RESOURCE TRADE-OFF ANALYSIS - THURMAN

- PATTERN RECOGNITION
- CONCERN FOR IMPACT
- CONCEPTUALIZATION - MCBER

CAPACITY TO SHIFT ROLES
HELICOPTER MANAGEMENT (REACH DOWN TO CRUCIAL
AREA(S) & RETURN TO STRATEGIC LEVEL) - KLAUSS

COGNITIVE COMPLEXITY
- A MEANS FOR CONSTRUCTING SOCIAL SYSTEMS
SELF-EFFICACY
- STRONG SENSE OF INTERNAL CONTROL OR DIRECTION
POWER MOTIVE
- NEED FOR POWER DIRECTED IN A SOCIALLY
PRODUCTIVE MANNER
RISK - ABILITY TO CREATE NEW OPPORTUNITIES - SHASKIN

UNDERSTANDS CIVILIAN LEADERSHIP AUTHORITY
ADDRESSES PROBLEMS WHICH HAVE DO NOT HAVE "RIGHT" ANSWERS
SHAPES THE FUTURE - MAKES HARD DECISIONS
FROM AMONG CONFLICTING IMPERATIVES
ENVISIONS THE LONG-TERM FUTURE OF THE MILITARY AND PROGRAMS
AND POLICIES NEEDED TO REALIZE THAT FUTURE - ST.ONGE

One observation compels special attention. Notice the extensive listings under the conceptual heading. This area is subdivided into cognitive skills dealing with the strategic leader as a person as well as with his internal and external organizational environments. A quick review supports the theory

that cognitive skill requirements are greater (in terms of quantity, quality and capacity for) at the strategic level. This listing can also assist discernment as to where the strategic leader can best "add value" to the organization. For example, notice the frequent references to the strategic leader's role in creating vision, culture, and values in the organization. The preponderance of the skills necessary to this role reside in the cognitive domain. Also wrapped inside these cognitive skills is the ability to know "what one is about". Included in this concept is a real appreciation for one's own abilities, limitation, and potential. - The deductions concerning the power and consequence of the cognitive domain go on and on. Sufficient to conclude at this point that most of the determinants of success at the strategic level abide in cognitive skills.

The framework of competencies we have generated through inquiry, comparison, and analysis is not complete. Many questions remain, and much invites further study. However, it is appropriate to draw some general conclusions about the nature of strategic leadership at this point.

CONCLUSIONS:

If we have not traveled full circle in our quest for insight, perhaps we have made some headway in determining the keys to success at the strategic level. What judgements then can we reach as to what strategic leaders "are about"?

We have concluded that strategic leadership at a minimum is about shaping the vision, values, and culture of organizations and individuals and generating action to reach long term objectives. We determined that the environment and duties found at the strategic level are fundamentally different than those experienced at subordinate levels. The complex environment and the far reaching, extensive and demanding duties combine to require unique skills and capabilities (competencies). Further, an analysis of the environment and duties gives insight concerning the competencies. We also determined that competencies are not to be confused with personality traits.

We have concluded that strategic leader competencies are degrees of skill which are quantitatively and qualitatively greater than those possessed by the vast majority of experienced leaders. This is in part due to the requirements for the strategic leader to "add value" to organizational processes where no subordinate can. Leadership competencies are behaviorally specific and at the strategic level, demonstrate a clear difference between superior and average performers.

We have observed a number of competency listings and groupings. These depictions are useful in providing new perspectives and comparisons. One grouping of competencies into technical, communicative, and conceptual skill areas is especially valuable in focusing on the changing nature of requirements across leadership levels. This grouping also underscores the degree to which success at the strategic level is

dependent upon and determined by cognitive area competencies. Many if not most of the strategic competencies are in the realm of "thinking" skills.

Why are the above conclusions important? Because to the degree we can correctly perceive the requisite competencies for success at the strategic level, they can become the basis for training, development, and selection. If the environment, duties, and skills at the executive level of our Army are crucially different from lower levels, we must focus our efforts on developing and selecting leaders who possess these necessary competencies. If we are unable to identify the specific skills required, we will be unable to deliberately train and select strategic level leaders who are prepared to meet the complex and massive demands of the 21st Century. Fortunately, we have identified many of the requisite skills. However, there is a great deal more to learn. As importantly, we must take significant action concerning the knowledge and capabilities we now possess.

Endnotes

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22. Ibid. (Speech 11 February 1991: "Strategic Leadership Competencies - Thurman 1991").

23. Ibid. (Speech 11 February 1991: Chart: "Strategic Leadership Competencies - McBer").

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25. Ibid. (Chart: "Strategic Leadership Competencies - Klauss SES Competencies").

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32. Ibid. p. 9.

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