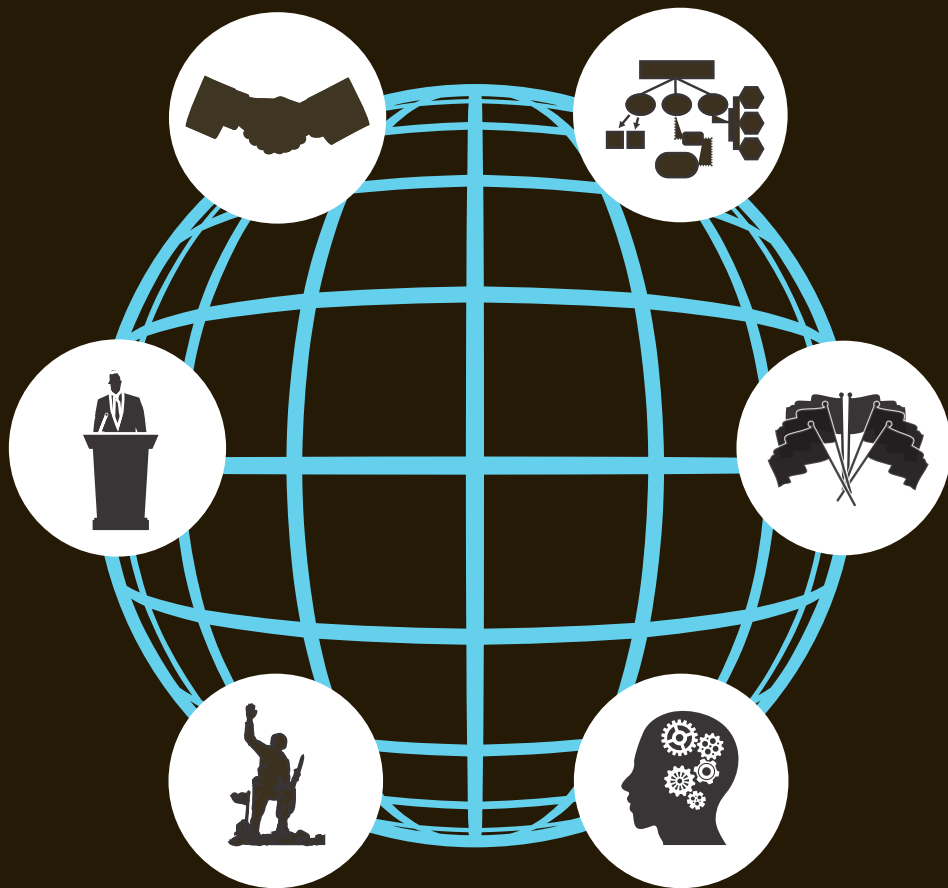# STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP

PRIMER FOR SENIOR LEADERS

FOURTH EDITION

DEPARTMENT OF COMMAND, LEADERSHIP, AND MANAGEMENT

UNITED STATES ARMY WAR COLLEGE

STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP

Primer for Senior Leaders
4th Edition

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Foreword

John S. Kem

Leadership is not easy, and there is no magic recipe for successful leadership. That is why there are so many business books about leaders and leadership traits. In the military, we focus on leader development at the very beginning of service, in basic training, and at pre-commissioning . . . every Soldier is a leader. While the principles of tactical leadership are not always easy to do and are certainly aspirational, they are fundamental in nature; provide clear vision and intent, develop mutual understanding and trust, build cohesive teams that work together to achieve decisive results in line with our professional ethic, and provide orders and guidance that develop initiative and focus on what to do and for what purpose, rather than emphasizing the how.

These concepts also apply at more senior levels; however, the challenges at the strategic-enterprise level are very different. The Army inherently knew this but did not formally establish a framework for leadership and command above the direct, tactical level until 1987 with the publication of FM 22-103, *Leadership and Command at Senior Level*s. The transition from tactical to operational leadership is far easier than the transition to strategic leadership. That is why the transition to strategic leadership is central to our efforts at the U.S. Army War College, and why we strive to "produce strategic leaders and ideas invaluable to the Army, the Joint Force, and the Nation." This fourth edition of the *Strategic Leadership Primer* is designed to facilitate that transition for every student.

Many leaders who are successful in early-mid career fail to make the second transition to the enterprise level effectively. Part of their struggle is typically tied to a lack of understanding of the strategic competitive environment where problems are far more complex and previous experiences, while important, are insufficient to solve multi-domain, joint warfighting level challenges. This environment often rewards clarity and punishes those who wait for certainty.

In addition to the increased complexity of large organizations, many leaders fail to understand how leading these organizations is different from leading at the brigade/battalion level and below. They are prisoners of their experiences. The formal and informal channels of the organization, the interplay of control, communication, and structure, and how the leader operates (both internally and externally) are all different.

Larger organizations require strategic leaders with additive skills, knowledge, and behaviors. One size fits all leadership will not work. True leaders communicate effectively by reaching across the organization to every person they work with, adapting their leadership style to them. They lead far more by influence, where empathy, the art of asking questions, the art of story and engagement, and the science and art of forming effective teams are critical. Instead of being the expert, effective senior leaders bring together and lead teams with expert knowledge and collaborate internally and externally to develop innovative solutions. The word solutions is important. It drives the "why." Success is not just strategic direction through strategic vision and plans; success requires effective enterprise execution and adaptive management—getting both the unit and the organization from idea to impact.

Finally, strategic leaders must exercise moral judgment. We are the stewards of our profession. We must have the moral character and passion for life-long growth and development. Otherwise, how will we be ready for the difficult art of leadership on the battlefield—or wherever else the nation demands our service. I know this *Strategic Leadership Primer* will help!

John S. Kem
Major General, U.S. Army
51st Commandant of the U.S. Army War
    College

Preface

Tom Galvin and Dale Watson

Most U.S. Army War College ("War College") students begin their resident or distance education programs already having significant knowledge and experience in leadership. If asked, they would likely present their own personal definitions of it—combining power and influence over others, positive personality traits, capacity for developing a vision and leading change, decision making, and other skills, knowledge, and attitudes present since one's days as a lieutenant or ensign. However, attaching the word *strategic* adds particular meaning. It represents the application of leadership in a context qualitatively different from those familiar to most students—such as direct leadership over units, organizational leadership in the positions of staff officer, or operational leadership in combat environments.

In the past, the transition to strategic leadership was considered significant and the War College assumed most of its students had little prior experience at the strategic level. War College graduates were far more likely to see the strategic environment as foreign. The student body included officers who excelled in the standard unit-level career path with only occasional (if any) broadening assignments, and there were few interagency students or international fellows attending with them. Entering the strategic environment required skills and knowledge that students were much less likely to have developed. This became the impetus for the Primer's 1st Edition of 1998. This simple introductory guide to the strategic environment and competencies of strategic leaders helped students prepare for duties in what was a foreign environment for much of their careers. The sentiment *what got you here won't get you there* pervaded the War College's approach to educating its students on leadership, and persisted through the first three editions of the Primer.

This 4th Edition takes a different view based on changing demographics and experiences of incoming War College students

and new research in leader development. First, today's War College students are far more familiar and experienced with strategic matters and their implications for the defense enterprise than in the past. Many have experience in heterogeneous units of military, civilians, and contractors or served extensively in non-traditional unit environments. They have been accustomed to attending professional military education with international fellows from around the world and fighting in joint, interagency, and multinational operations.

A meta-analysis of development research shows that as leaders successfully advance from junior to senior levels, they do not replace old competencies with new ones.[1] Rather, they adapt and grow their existing competencies while acquiring new ones experientially based on the leadership context they are in. In other words, there is growth both quantitatively and qualitatively. All leaders, for example, require the ability to analyze the environment, think critically, learn, make decisions, and communicate with others. Such competencies grow in strength and scope as the leader moves to higher levels, where more advanced skills such as negotiation, consensus building, and frame of reference development become more important. Meanwhile, other competencies are much less salient at the junior levels—such as resource and personnel management, envisioning the future and leading change, and political competence—but become critical at the strategic level. Leaders must develop those competencies at more accelerated paces.

Alignment of one's competencies to the demands of the environment is vital. The consequences for strategic leaders failing to develop and grow the right competencies are clear. They are unable to adapt to the strategic environment, are unprepared mentally and spiritually to make decisions, narrow their scope and attention to familiar and comfortable matters, and are liable to default to 'tried and true' methods appropriate for more junior levels.

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[1] Troy V. Mumford, Michael A. Campion, and Frederick P. Morgeson, "The Leadership Skills Strataplex: Leadership Skill Requirements Across Organizational Levels," *The Leadership Quarterly 18*, no. 2 (2007): 154-166.

The pursuit of this alignment is an individual journey. There are broad classes of competencies common among successful strategic leaders, but each leader develops them in his or her own way. This edition of the Primer is a guide along that journey. It begins with an understanding of how the environment differs from the organizational to the strategic levels, then follows with the differences in roles and competencies that strategic leaders require. It concludes with a way ahead for leaders to establish their own professional development plans. It is useful as a resource for both War College students to learn about entry into the strategic level, and for graduates immersed in the environment who need a tool to get past the tyranny of the inbox and think longer-term, as strategic leaders should.

There are seven chapters in the 4th Edition.

- **Chapter 1. Leadership at the Strategic Level.** Silas Martinez and Tom Galvin define the key terms of this Primer. With Dwight Eisenhower as an exemplar, they define *strategic leadership* and describe key differences from the organizational context (e.g., significantly increased complexity and importance of leading in teams) prevalent through the rest of the Primer. They also define two strata of leaders who practice strategic leadership – the *strategic leaders* who serve the enterprise in executive-level capacities, and *senior leaders* composed of military and civilian leaders from the grades of O-6/GS-15 and above who run the enterprise on a daily basis.

The next three chapters present the strategic environment with two chapters on the external and internal contexts, integrated in the following chapter on competitive strategy. The increased complexity of the strategic environment and the pressures it induces on leaders will be a constant theme.

- **Chapter 2. The Competitive Environment.** Andrew Hill and Dale Watson present the external context of the organization, describing the environment as dynamic, complex, competitive on many fronts, and characterized by deep uncertainty. The ultimate competition for military organizations may be on the battlefield, but that is far from the only form of competition senior leaders

face. Leaders must reconsider 'winning' as the goal, as in this environment, there are no 'winners.'

- **Chapter 3. Leading Large Bureaucratic Organizations.** Kristin Behfar and Dale Watson present the internal context of the defense enterprise, which is very large and complex. Very large organizations experience natural tensions such as long-term goals versus short-term needs that leaders must balance while also navigating a complicated network of formal and informal organization. What are the levers available to leaders to accomplish the organization's mission, improve organizational performance, and sustain member commitment?

- **Chapter 4. Competitive Strategy.** Andrew Hill, Douglas Douds, and Dale Watson show how competitive systems require strategies for making choices. This chapter examines the broad characteristics of these strategies, and describes the range of strategic choices and opportunities available to leaders.

So how can senior leaders succeed in such environments? The next three chapters focus various qualities and capabilities that senior leaders should possess.

- **Chapter 5. Senior Leader Roles**. Craig Bullis presents how senior leaders engage with the internal and external environments by drawing on seminal works in management science and leadership studies at the U.S. Army War College. What are the unique roles they play and why are they important to military organizations? Moreover, how do they differ in complexity and scope to similar roles these leaders play at more junior levels?

- **Chapter 6. Senior Leader Competencies.** Based on these roles, Douglas Waters discusses the skills and knowledge that leaders require—conceptual, technical, and interpersonal--to be successful. Leaders use their conceptual competencies to make sense of the environment, technical competencies to mobilize resources and develop plans, and interpersonal

competencies to build and sustain networks, negotiate, and communicate.

- **Chapter 7. Senior Leader Character.** Maurice Sipos, Nate Hunsinger, and Pete Sniffin discuss the personal resources senior leaders rely on to succeed professionally and personally at the strategic level. It addresses traits, attributes, and ethical reasoning that senior leaders should personally develop, while also covering derailers to avoid. The goal is to sustain the trust and confidence conferred by national leaders and affirmed by organizational members.

The final chapter provides the takeaways for the leader. How does the leader plan and implement a development program to make the transition to strategic leadership, fully prepared to engage on national security challenges facing the military today and in the future?

- **Chapter 8. Senior Leader Development.** Michael Hosie concludes this Primer by showing how development should be continuous and lifelong. He offers ideas and guidance on how to prepare for and implement the transition to strategic leadership. It includes concepts for developing one's senior leader identity, forming and strengthening one's senior leader competencies, and building senior leader character.

Each chapter in the Primer also includes suggested further readings. These are tremendous resources readily available for readers to learn more about strategic leadership in the military.

Chapter 1. Leadership at the Strategic Level

Silas Martinez and Tom Galvin[1]

Many people know that when World War II started in Europe Dwight David Eisenhower was a Lieutenant Colonel, but perhaps not as many are aware that he was promoted three times in one calendar year. Those rapid promotions put him in the position to be selected to lead America's contribution of troops to the war effort in Europe in 1942. It is clear that it wasn't Ike's success at commanding troop units that accounted for his meteoric rise—until World War II, he never commanded past the rank of Major. An entirely different set of skills put him on the fast track. His ability to scan the environment and align his organization with it brought about continuous mission success. He thus gained the confidence of other very influential officers.[2] He also proved his ability to communicate to broad audiences during the Louisiana Maneuvers, experiments to test new concepts for mechanized warfare, making him a darling of the newspapers and bringing him to the attention of George Marshall.[3] His ability to build consensus, enable adaptive and innovative unit culture, and lead outside of his organization[4] made him the choice to command the U.S. European Theater of Operations,[5] Operation TORCH in Africa, and Operation HUSKY in Sicily. Finally, all those strengths combined with his grasp of the complexity of the Allied undertaking led to his selection as Supreme Allied Commander, Europe for Operation OVERLORD—the cross-channel invasion of Europe.[6] In short, Eisenhower embodied the qualities required of a strategic leader.

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[1] Portions of this chapter are drawn from Stephen J. Gerras' "Chapter 1. Introduction," from the 3rd Edition of the Strategic Leadership Primer.

[2] Douglas Kinnard, *Eisenhower: Soldier-Statesman of the American Century*, Military Profiles (Dulles, VA: Brassey's, Inc., 2002), 12-13; 16-19.

[3] Ibid., 26-27.

[4] Michael R. D. Foot, "Eisenhower and the British," in *Eisenhower: A Centenary Assessment*, ed. Günter Bischof and Stephen E. Ambrose (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1995), 45.

[5] Ibid., 41.

[6] Kinnard, *Eisenhower*.

What is Strategic Leadership?

We define *strategic leadership* as follows:

Strategic leadership is the process of <u>aligning</u> people, systems, and resources to achieve a <u>vision</u> for the enterprise while <u>enabling</u> an adaptive and innovative culture necessary to gain an advantage in the competitive <u>environment</u>.

Embedded in this definition are two aspects of the temporal nature of strategic leadership. First, today's organizational climate and culture are a result of its history, so *aligning* and *enabling* activities must account for that past. Second, strategic leadership is concerned with achieving a *vision* of the future well beyond the time horizons considered by tactical or operational leaders—nearly always far beyond a strategic leader's own tenure.

Strategic leadership differs from unit leadership. To succeed at the strategic level, leaders must: (1) understand the breadth, scope, and complexity of the environment in which they operate; (2) appreciate the magnitude of the potential costs of their decisions; (3) leverage senior leadership teams, and (4) operate as stewards of the profession, embracing both their responsibilities to lead the profession and manage the profession's bureaucratic arm. Each of these are addressed below.

Breadth, scope, and complexity of the strategic environment

Strategic leaders operate in a competitive environment whose very nature resists conclusive analysis and defies permanent solutions. As Chapter 2 will show, the competitive environment is a network of complex, adaptive systems that involve deep uncertainty resulting from the interconnections of systems, subsystems, and their agents. Complicating the environment further, is that the interconnections between systems and subsystems are not fully known. Consequently, small actions can have massive, unpredicted effects on the entire environment, and make assessing true risk difficult.

Consider Eisenhower's decision to launch the Allied invasion of Normandy. At first glance one might think that the primary systems in competition were the Germans and Allies. Within the

German system, leaders were concerned about the amount of men and materiel that they could generate over a protracted war. Their research and development had been very successful, so the Allies believed that the Germans would eventually develop and employ new weapons against the Allied forces massing in England. The Allies wanted to attack before it was too late.

Within the Allied system, leaders had to pause to generate the combat power necessary, especially men and naval forces, for a cross-channel invasion. They had to prioritize and coordinate operations to create and sustain a deception system that would cause the Germans to spread their forces among the likely invasion sites rather than concentrating at Normandy.

Climate was another important factor. The Allies needed the right mixture of calm seas, moon, tide, and time of sunrise to attack. Consequently, the first realistic launch window for the Allied attack was June 5-7. A delay beyond this window would likely mean a loss of surprise. A premature decision to launch would likely mean a loss of the naval, air, and ground assets needed for a second attempt. Thus, failure to secure an adequate beachhead on the first attempt would make a second attempt even more difficult than the first.[7] Eisenhower's decision of whether or not to launch on June 6, 1944 is one of the best examples of leading in the competitive environment in modern history. Unit leaders contend with the consequences of the decisions made by strategic leaders, but they don't often contend with the complexity of the D-Day decision.

Magnitude of potential costs of one's decisions

Making the decision to execute a military operation of any magnitude in which human lives are at stake is one of the toughest decisions any leader must make. Those decisions are made by all leaders at all levels.[8] However, the potential costs in blood and treasure of the decisions that strategic leaders make is so much higher, that failure can completely change the nature of

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[7] Ibid., 62-69.

[8] Department of Command, Leadership, and Management, "The Strategic Leader and the Human Dimension of Combat," *Strategic Leadership Primer*, 3rd ed., ed. Stephen J. Gerras (Carlisle Barracks, PA: U.S. Army War College, Department of Command, Leadership, and Management, 2010), 55-57.

a nation's or its armed forces' participation in future conflict. Consider Eisenhower's decision to include an airborne operation as part of D-Day. His Air Chief Marshal, Leigh-Mallory was certain that Ike was committing two airborne divisions to destruction. On May 30, 1944, Leigh-Mallory requested that Ike cancel the jump on the grounds that the unsuitable terrain and German resistance was too great to give the airborne troops any chance of survival.[9] Despite all the planning already invested and preparatory actions initiated, Eisenhower continued to wrestle with the decision.

> *I went to my tent alone and sat down to think… I realized, of course, that if I deliberately disregarded the advice of my technical expert on the subject, and his predictions should prove accurate, then I would carry to my grave the unbearable burden of conscience justly accusing me of the stupid, blind sacrifice of thousands of the flower of our youth. Outweighing any personal burden, however, was the possibility that if he were right the effect of the disaster would…spread to the entire force.[10]*

History bore out Eisenhower's decision to include the jump on D-Day, but the magnitude of the potential costs of his decision—a unique burden of strategic leaders—stayed with him.

Use of senior leadership teams

According to Gary Yukl, the use of senior leadership teams becomes increasingly important in a complex, rapidly changing environment that places many external demands on the leader.[11] There are four types of senior leadership teams that strategic leaders should consider.[12] *Informational* teams provide a single venue where the strategic leader can gather all the necessary information to facilitate environmental scanning and ensure alignment of the organization's people, processes, technology, and structure. Examples of recurring informational teams are

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[9] Kinnard, *Eisenhower*, 63-65.

[10] Ibid., 65.

[11] Gary Yukl, "Strategic Leadership," in *Leadership in Organizations,* Global Edition (Essex, England: Pearson Education Limited, 2013), 288-89.

[12] Ruth Wageman et al., *Senior Leadership Teams: What It Takes to Make Them Great* (Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Publishing Corporation, 2008), 36-39.

groups preparing and delivering routine reports and briefings, as such products help strategic leaders' abilities to scan the environment. *Consultative* teams advise leaders about key decisions they must make. For example, strategic leaders may create a consulting team spanning multiple functions to help them decide upon the purpose and content of a command strategy or plan. *Coordinating* teams are empowered to coordinate as they execute important initiatives for the strategic leader. For example, J-4s play important roles in allocating materiel across coalition task forces to ensure adequate sustainment of operations. Finally, *decision-making* teams are responsible for enabling executive decisions affecting the entire organization into the future. The Joint Requirements Oversight Committee (JROC) exemplifies the decision-making team. The Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staffs runs this committee on behalf of the Chairman to determine what resources requested by the services and combatant commanders are, in fact, valid requirements. This important team prioritizes resource allocation to ensure that the armed forces can maintain the appropriate balance of manpower, modernization, and readiness in support of the Chairman's vision.[13]

Strategic leaders use senior leadership teams to facilitate succession management. Service on senior leadership teams helps current strategic leaders select future strategic leaders based on their demonstrated performance and potential. Senior leadership teams expand the capacity of strategic leaders. They help them see the environment, determine whether or not the enterprise is aligned with the vision, identify and define problems, outline possible solutions, and execute solutions within their purview. Given the complexity of the competitive environment and the breadth of their responsibilities, effective strategic leaders rely upon senior leadership teams.

Stewardship of the profession

Former Secretary of Defense Robert Gates stated that professionalism and sound ethical judgment are vital for the Department of Defense's (DoD) ability to perform its mission and

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[13] Douglas E. Waters, "National Challenges Affecting Defense," in Thomas P. Galvin (ed.), *Defense Management: Primer for Senior Leaders* (Carlisle, PA: U.S. Army War College, 2018), 23-32.

maintain the trust and confidence of national leaders.[14] Professionalism governs DoD's sustainment of expert knowledge, certifications of skills and knowledge, and rules for behavior.[15] As leaders within a profession, all military leaders must act professionally, which is to say that they must act in accordance with their service ethics.[16] However, Strategic Leaders have a further responsibility—they must be *stewards of the profession*. Army doctrine classifies this as an added responsibility to ensure the present and future effectiveness of the Army.[17] Each service may view professionalism and the roles of stewardship differently, but the concepts apply across all the services and DoD.[18]

One aspect of ensuring the military's effectiveness is fostering the trust granted to the armed forces by the American people and their government.[19] This trust is rooted in decades of professional engagement in civil-military engagement, and includes providing apolitical, military advice to support the policy-making process of our government as well as healthy interaction with the media.[20] Former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Martin Dempsey classified the strategic leaders' responsibility for stewardship of the profession as the requirement to maintain balance.[21] First, strategic leaders must balance the force's expertise against the potential future operating environment. Second, they must balance between the organizational culture and its institutional practices. Failure to do so, could mean that

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[14] U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO), *MILITARY PERSONNEL: Additional Steps are Needed to Strengthen DoD's Oversight of Ethics and Professionalism Issues*, GAO Report #15-711 (Washington, DC: GAO, September 2015), 1.

[15] Don M. Snider, "The U.S. Army as a Profession," in *The Future of the Army Profession*, 2nd ed., ed. Lloyd J. Matthews (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2005), 17-21.

[16] Ibid.; Richard M. Swain and Albert C. Pierce, *The Armed Forces Officer* (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press, 2017), 29-42.

[17] U.S.Army, *The Army Profession,* Army Doctrine Reference Publication No. 1 (Washington, D.C.: 2015), 1-5. Hereafter *ADP 1.*

[18] Carnes Lord, "On Military Professionalism and Civilian Control," *Joint Force Quarterly* 78 (Summer 2015): 70-74.

[19] Martin E. Dempsey, "America's Military - a Profession of Arms White Paper," (2012), http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/concepts/white_papers/cjcs_wp_profession.pdf.

[20] *ADP 1.*

[21] Martin E. Dempsey, *An Army White Paper: The Profession of Arms* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Army, 2010), https://www.army.mil/e2/rv5_downloads/info/references/profession_of_arms_white_paper_Dec2010.pdf (accessed 22 June 2018).

the nation would lack the military capabilities needed to succeed. But, success is not enough. Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Joe Dunford addressed the U.S. Army War College class of 2018. He encouraged the class to make sure that in future assignments they did everything in their power to provide the joint force with the right inventory of capabilities to ensure that our men and women would never have to face a fair fight.[22]

General Dunford stated that strategic leaders have equal responsibilities to lead both the warfighting side of the profession and the profession's bureaucracy. Fulfilling both responsibilities is vital for the U.S. maintaining its competitive advantage in the face of aggressive global competition. However, competitive advantage is itself difficult to measure precisely. For example, the U.S. may spend three times as much on defense as its leading competitors, but that is no guarantee of sustaining overmatch. [23] Thus, leading the bureaucracy entails communicating clear priorities and ensure the proper and efficient application of resources to provide trained and ready forces for war.

Stewardship is therefore not about the military organization serving its own ends but those of the nation being served. Military leaders would no doubt desire to have the most robust, capable force possible, but the nation cannot afford it. Thus, decisions to allocate resources are difficult and involve risk. Should DoD focus on sustaining current readiness or invest more in new capabilities? Should DoD increase end strength at the expense of modernization? Should DoD develop a new capability internally or rely on the private sector or allies and partners? Do changes in national security strategies necessitate changes in DoD programs and activities already underway? These are the types of hard questions that strategic leaders continually face.

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[22] Joseph F. Dunford, lecture, U.S. Army War College, Carlisle Barracks, PA, December 7, 2017, cited with permission from General Dunford.

[23] Peter G. Peterson Foundation, "U.S. Defense Spending Compared to Other Countries,"*PGPF.org,* May 7, 2018, https://www.pgpf.org/chart-archive/0053_defense-comparison (accessed on December 12, 2017); Central Intelligence Agency, "The World Factbook. Field Listing::Budget," https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/fields/2056.html (accessed December 12, 2017); Alex Lockie, "China Held a Massive Military Parade Showing Off Its Might—and It Could Surpass the US by 2030," July 31, 2017, linked from *Business Insider Home Page* http://www.businessinsider.com/china-military-parade-superior-to-us-by-2030-2017-7 (assessed December 12, 2017).

Two U.S. Army War College professors wrote, "We cannot assume that command experience alone prepares leaders to be effective senior managers. We must develop the skills and knowledge officers require to be effective as executive-level managers."[24] For the military to achieve the balance General Dempsey prescribes or General Dunford's mandate to allow no fair fights, strategic leaders must embrace and continuously work to improve the military bureaucracy's effectiveness. This is an essential stewardship role only they can perform.

Who is a Strategic Leader?

Strategic leaders are the most senior leaders in the organization—the four-star commanders or civilian agency directors and their deputies and command teams. Below them are the large unit leaders and division chiefs within staffs (roughly O-6 or GS-15) who are *senior leaders*. This primer is aimed primarily at the latter population, residing in the upper echelons of organizations and vested with personal responsibilities for exercising leadership on behalf of strategic leaders.[25] To be clear, our definition of strategic leadership excludes those who may have fleeting strategic impact on the organization. Consider the "strategic corporal," a junior member of the organization whose actions may influence the environment and disrupt the intent and actions of leaders.[26] Such members may bring world-wide attention to the armed forces, but lack the capability and capacity to bring about long-term influence over their organizations.

Senior leaders monitor and analyze the environment; assess implications, risks, and opportunities; and communicate advice, ideas, recommendations, plans, strategies, and decisions. At the tactical level, the leader directs and followers follow. However, at the strategic level, senior leaders shape and execute decisions that

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[24] Andrew A. Hill and Thomas P. Galvin, "In Defense of Defense Management," *War on the Rocks,* July 5, 2016, https://warontherocks.com/2016/07/in-defense-of-defense-management/ (accessed October 31, 2017).

[25] Though this Primer is intended primarily for Senior Leaders, we use the term Strategic Leader throughout the manuscript to reinforce the idea that Senior Leaders must constantly strive to see the environment and act from the perspective of the Strategic Leader for whom they work.

[26] Charles C. Krulak, "*The Strategic Corporal: Leadership in the Three Block War*," Marines Magazine, 83, no. 1 (January 1999): 18-22.

impact the entire defense enterprise. Below, we introduce how senior leaders contribute to the work of strategic leadership, and these are elaborated in subsequent chapters.

Providing vision

The best strategic leaders craft visions that describe idealized pictures of what their organizations should strive to become. But they do not do this alone. They rely on contributions from senior leaders within the organization who help scan the environment and provide awareness of societal, international, technological, demographic, and economic developments impacting the organization. Interpreting the environmental scan identifies the important elements of both the environment and the organization that are not congruent with the vision. Moving the organization from where it is to where it should be demands strategy supported by alignment and enabling. Chapter 3 refers to alignment as the goal of formal aspects of the organization, while enabling refers to the informal aspects of the organization that must change to achieve the vision.

Aligning people, systems, and resources

Alignment encompasses actions internal to the organization and external to the organization that strategic leaders take to posture organization to enact the strategy and to interact with the environment. Internally, strategic leaders must explicitly align ends (objectives), ways (concepts and methods), and means (resources) to ensure commitment in a manner that allows the organization to succeed in its current and future environments—in short—to enact the vision. Again, they do not do this alone. In very large and complex organizations such as militaries, senior leaders develop and implement the processes, technologies, and structures necessary to enact the vision.

Often the environment poses challenges that must be addressed if the organization is to achieve its vision. To shape the environment, strategic leaders must also work outside the organization to influence stakeholders (who are often senior in rank or hold significant power), allocate resources to help achieve the vision, and remove or mitigate obstacles. To do so, they depend on their senior leaders to provide the internal context of

the organization, such as the state of military readiness or the capabilities required to properly resource war plans or theater strategies.

Enabling an adaptive and innovative culture

Strategic leaders must take deliberate actions to create an adaptive and innovative culture. The actions, called *enabling actions*, are typically aimed at the informal aspects of the organization and help create conditions that encourage coordination and the sharing of information and ideas among stakeholders.[27] As with alignment actions, how well the leader communicates the organizational values and beliefs will help people understand how their efforts align with the strategy. Similarly, where strategic leaders spend their time will signal to the organization which acts, attitudes, and processes have strategic importance. So, when leaders spend time focusing upon and rewarding adaptation and innovation, they enable an adaptive, innovative culture. When, for example, they punish failure, they stifle innovation. Strategic leaders must use both aligning and enabling actions to achieve their vision.

The desired culture is built both top-down and bottom-up. Straddling the strategic and organizational environments, senior leaders play a critical enabling role. They must enact the military's professional values and beliefs to ensure their organizations are aligned with the strategic leader's vision and performing their missions effectively and efficiently. However, they must also not allow the existing culture to stifle innovation..[28] Senior leaders should instead be the "innovation center of gravity," constantly looking to improve their organizations and fighting complacency.[29]

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[27] Mary Uhl-Bien, Russ Marion, and Bill McKelvey, "Complexity Leadership Theory: Shifting Leadership from the Industrial Age to the Knowledge Era." *The Leadership Quarterly* 18, no. 4 (2007): 298-318.

[28] Tim Kane, "Why Our Best Officers are Leaving," *The Atlantic* 307, no. 1 (January-February 2011): 80-85.

[29] Richard T. Brown, "Staff Colonels are Army's Innovative Engines," *ARMY* 66, no. 12 (December 2016): 8-10.

Implications

Though there is some overlap of required skills, we have articulated that strategic leadership is, in fact, different from unit leadership and below. To be successful, strategic leaders and the senior leaders who serve with them must play interpersonal, informational, and decisional roles reinforced by interpersonal, conceptual, and technical competencies. These are the topics of later chapters.

To Learn More

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Chapter 2. The Competitive Environment

Andrew Hill and Dale Watson

Competition pervades the national security leadership environment. This competition is dynamic, characterized by persistent change as competitors strive to obtain and sustain competitive advantage. A competitive advantage in national security and defense may manifest itself as a unique or primary claim to valuable resources, control of or decisive influence over a crucial decision, or the power to destroy, coerce or compel an adversary. Competition in national security occurs both outside and inside security organizations--in peace and war, and in cooperation and competition. Successfully competing requires more than just a well-considered plan; it requires constant strategic adaptation in anticipating and responding to other competitive, adaptive actors.

This chapter explores the competitive context in which organizations develop and execute strategies, and examines the challenges that complex, dynamic competitive environments pose to senior leaders in national security. Strategic competition occurs in complex, adaptive systems (CAS) that resist conclusive analysis and defy permanent solution. These systems are structurally complex and dynamic, and behaviorally adaptive. This means that the same attempts to influence the system will exhibit different results over time, and that key behaviors in the system are entirely outside of the control of any actor trying to direct it.[1]

Strategic competition has three crucial characteristics:

1. It involves unresolvable uncertainty, meaning that crucial system behaviors and the actions of agents within the system cannot be described through stable or reliable measures of risk.

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[1] Structurally complex systems typically have a large number of diverse agents (decision nodes) interacting in densely connected networks that produce both reinforcing and balancing feedback cycles. Structurally dynamic systems have changing and porous boundaries enabling the entry and exit of both actors and resources, and changing network structures that create and eliminate connections in the system. In behaviorally adaptive systems, agents compete for scarce resources in the system, and this competition causes agents to abandon some old behaviors and experiment with and adopt some new ones.

2. National security competition takes diverse forms, and occurs both inside and outside organizational boundaries, such as violent competition in battle, or competition for money in the federal budget process.

3. Participants have a role in shaping the terms of competition — i.e., the rules, boundaries, players, and resources are not merely given by nature but also by the players' choices.

This chapter explores complexity, competitive advantage, and each of the above characteristics.

Complexity and the Search for Competitive Advantage

Strategic competition is dynamic and complex, and permanent solution is neither a natural state of such competition nor a legitimate goal of strategy. Americans famously have a *can-do* attitude. Indeed, the great lesson of American history may be that if we get together and apply enough energy, intelligence, creativity, good political sense, and money (usually a lot), any problem can be solved. The invention of the U.S. constitutional government? Check. The opening of the West? Check. The industrialization of the country during the gilded age? Check. The mobilization during World War II? Check. The Apollo program? Check. Thus, it is tempting to see American history as a long series of triumphs of management, engineering, or good old individual grit and ingenuity. American history becomes *progress* from lower to higher states of living, in economic, moral, and political terms.

Thoughtful people of course will recognize the gross simplification in this account. Even the most patriotic Americans know that the nation's history is not uninterrupted progress. But the broader point remains valid: *Americans believe in solving big problems.* The trouble is that "solve" is the wrong word to use in connection with complex, adaptive systems. We need to alter our language when we articulate our goals for dealing with them. We do not "solve" competitive problems at the strategic level, we manage them.

Consider public health. Within the broad sphere of public health there have been notable victories such as the eradication of

smallpox through the World Health Organization's global vaccination campaign in the sixties and seventies, but the competition between public health and disease continues. Its basis in the developed world has shifted away from infectious diseases and towards problems such as obesity and tobacco-related cancers. The late scientist Andrew Spielman observed how the philosophy of managing competitive conditions works in public health, "We deal with populations over time, populations of individuals…Our first goal is to cause no outbreaks, no epidemics, to manage, to contain the infection."[2] These same dynamics operate in other complex, competitive systems: law enforcement and crime; capital markets (incl. borrowers and lenders) in financial systems; and adversaries in war.

Complex, adaptive systems (CAS) can generate tremendous adaptation to changing competitive conditions. When pressured, systems and subordinate organizations will fight to remain competitive by exploiting their resources and those advantages they hold over their competitors, such as material, location, human capital, reputation, and more. The greater the scarcity of said advantages, the greater the competitive pressures to adapt. Furthermore, constant adaptation creates opportunities for new paths to competitive advantage. The idea that there are many paths to reach an outcome or goal, or *equifinality*, is both an asset and liability for strategic leaders in a competitive environment. [3] On one hand, leaders have many options to establish and maintain an advantage over competitors (i.e. adaptation). On the other hand, an existing advantage becomes more difficult to maintain, and the actions of competitors are harder to predict.

The complexity of competitive systems arises from their structural and behavioral features. They tend to be big — in population and geography—with diverse resources and agents (i.e., decision-makers). The boundaries of CAS are usually porous, enabling the entry and exit of both resources and agents — enabling the constant change of the shape and composition of the system. Elements of CAS are interconnected, usually exhibiting a dense, highly networked structure, allowing resources such as

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[2] Malcolm Gladwell, "The Mosquito Killer," *The New Yorker*, July 21, 2001.
[3] Daniel Katz and Robert L. Kahn, *The Social Psychology of Organizations*, Vol. 2 (New York: Wiley, 1978), 32.

energy or information to follow many different paths through the system, and for agents to correspond with a wide variety of other actors in them. Furthermore, agents can be network *entrepreneurs,* constructing new ties to other actors in the system, developing connections when none existed before. The aphorism "all models are wrong; some are useful," applies with a vengeance in complex, adaptive systems. Any model of the system is a necessarily simplified representation and will exclude key components or behaviors. Because of this complexity and adaptive capacity, **there are no winners in strategic competition; only leaders, laggards, and losers.**

Strategic competition is unending, and the position of competitors is subject to sudden and significant changes. At the strategic level, there are no permanent winners, all victories are temporary, with some more short-lived than others. As in the evolutionary competition of biological systems, strategic competition features *leaders*, *laggards*, and *losers*.[4]

Leaders are those actors whose choices and resource endowments put them in an advantageous position relative to competitors. Leaders may have easier access to scarce resources, and the ability to shape collective understanding of the rules of the game, even though such rules may hold only insofar as we can persuade competitors of their power and efficacy. In the current international security environment, for example, the U.S. and its key European and East Asian allies are clearly leaders, working within a system that benefits and reinforces their competitive position.

Laggards are competing from a position of relative weakness, but they may be gaining ground, maintaining their position, or falling further behind.

Losers are out of the race — extinct, in evolutionary terms.

Note a crucial difference between evolutionary competition and national security competition: a species that loses goes extinct, never to return. A political entity (e.g., state, party, or

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[4] Charles Gati, "If Not Democracy, What? Leaders, Laggards, and Losers in the Postcommunist World," in Michael Mandelbaum (ed.), *Post-Communism: Four Perspectives* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 1996), 168-198.

ideology) that loses, such as the Nazi party in 1945, can rise from the dead. Thus, even "losing" can be a temporary condition in strategic competition.

Crucially, leaders and laggards interact in a competition that never ends. It merely progresses from one condition of relatively stable but impermanent equilibrium to another, and that progression may feature a dramatic change of the pre-existing order of the competition. The dinosaurs were earth's dominant land species for almost 200 million years, but their genetic legacy today is limited to birds. Mammals have become dominant. Such disruptions extend not only to the re-ordering of competitors, but to the transformation of competition itself.

Strategic competition is unlike any sport or game. If it were, it would feature spontaneous shifts in the rules and objectives – foot races with well-established packs of leaders and laggards would suddenly become rugby matches, before transitioning to boxing, and then to cycling. Because these contextual disruptions are so traumatic to the established order, they tend to have higher costs for leaders, and offer more potential benefits to laggards.

Unresolvable Uncertainty

Strategic competition involves unresolvable uncertainty; over time, the system as a whole and the behaviors of agents within it will not adhere to stable measures of risk.[5] The term "unresolvable uncertainty" refers to the lack of known (or knowable) probability distributions.[6] For example, the risk of rolling a six on a six-sided die is knowable: one-sixth, or a probability of .1666. In contrast,

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[5] The phrase "deep uncertainty" has been used to describe a specific type of uncertainty that is a common feature of competitive systems, and to differentiate it from traditional concepts of risk. According to scholars advancing the concept, deep uncertainty exists, "when parties to a decision do not know, or cannot agree on, the system model that relates action to consequences, the probability distributions to place over the inputs to these models, or which consequences to consider and their relative importance." Setting aside the "cannot agree on" condition of that definition, deep uncertainty is a core feature of competitive systems because of the way in which the behavior of agents in the system changes based on an evolving understanding of other agents' actions and competitive schema, as well as the adaptive behavior of the system as a whole. See Society for Decision Making Under Deep Uncertainty, http://www.deepuncertainty.org/ (accessed February 5, 2018).

[6] Andrew Butfoy, "Offence-Defence Theory and the Security Dilemma: The Problem with Marginalizing the Context," *Contemporary Security Policy*, *18*, no. 3 (September 2007): 38-58.

the risks that a monetary crisis or major terrorist attack on the United States will occur in the next year are not knowable. History can tell us something about how often such events have occurred in the past, and under what conditions, but these and other phenomena are subject to the influence of human decision-makers who get to decide whether that history is even relevant.

To say that competitive uncertainty is unresolvable is not to say that we should not try to manage it. Indeed, good competitive strategies reduce uncertainty. Nevertheless, risk reduction is not elimination, and we must study the sources and characteristics of competitive uncertainty, which arises from two elements of strategic competition: complexity and adaptation.

Complexity makes certainty in competitive decision-making impossible. Herbert Simon described the human constraint of *bounded rationality*, which he offered as a corrective to the notion that people could make utility-optimizing, perfectly rational economic decisions. According to Simon, optimization requires three conditions that cannot be satisfied in reality, especially in highly complex competitive environments.[7]

- Optimization requires a perfect knowledge of the consequences (effects) of our decisions (causes). We have only a partial understanding of the consequences that follow our choices.

- Optimization requires a perfect understanding of the utility we derive from various possible future states, in order that we prioritize accurately. Our present decisions are guided by future conditions that we seek to obtain or avoid. However, because we are not experiencing those future conditions now, our decisions must be justified by how we *imagine* that we will feel in the future. The values that we assign to those imagined states are often inaccurate.

- Optimization requires an exhaustive awareness of present options. That is, to know that we have chosen the best option, we must know all possible options.

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[7] Herbert A. Simon, *Administrative Behavior* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2013), 93-94.

> This is impossible. There is always something that we have not considered, a possible choice that could be discovered (or created) given more time and effort.

Given the impossibility of optimization, Simon coined the term "satisficing" to describe the *good enough* criteria that tend to drive decision-making in the real world. Satisficing is an artifact of the uncertainty that we cannot eliminate from strategic competition: we can never know what choice is best in a given situation, so we settle for a good enough choice. "Good enough" is about as good as we can hope for in complex competitive environments.

The **adaptive** behavior of competitive actors in the system also makes certainty an impossibility in competitive decision-making. Leadership scholar Ronald Heifetz categorizes two kinds of problems that leaders confront in these conditions. *Technical problems*, according to Heifetz & Laurie, may be difficult, but are susceptible to solution through expertise and good management.[8] Technical problems often feature significant risks, but the risk distribution is knowable beforehand. Endeavors like the Manhattan Project to develop the atomic bomb, and the Apollo program to send manned missions to the moon, are examples of significant technical problems.

Adaptive challenges, however, change as we interact with them, and defy solution. Consider the game of "chicken," which involves two cars speeding head-on towards each other. The loser of the game swerves first, thus embarrassing himself in front of his peers. But an even worse outcome exists if the cars hit each other, killing or maiming both drivers. What is the optimal strategy? None exists.[9] No matter how many times you play the game, each instance involves a new set of calculations of risk, and the reliability of those calculations varies depending on the players and the circumstances.

The competitive dynamics of the national security environment make adaptive challenges the norm in strategic

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[8] Ronald Heifetz and Donald Laurie, "The Work of Leadership," *Harvard Business Review 75*, no. 1 (January-February 1997): 124-134.
[9] Not even the *throw the steering wheel out the window after you start driving* strategy is optimal. What if your opponent does the same?

leadership. National security competition is not a game with set rules, equipment, boundaries, participants, and outcomes that are unambiguous and understood by all players. Human beings learn and change all the time. When a behavior that used to work stops working, people change it. When resources that people seek are not available in one place, they either look elsewhere, or they adopt a different resource. A further catalyst for adaptation and change is the way that people's sense of equity and justice, and their development of choices and preferences, are shaped by information they receive about events occurring elsewhere. This has always been the case, but with today's ever-accelerating creation and dissemination of information, it happens faster now than at any time in human history.

A clear implication of unresolvable uncertainty is that more resources (money or time) will not eliminate the analytical and strategic challenges posed by complex adaptive systems. No future state of the competitive environment is guaranteed by current conditions. No matter how likely a future condition seems, the system has the potential to diverge from it due to adaptations in behaviors. History does not ride on rails. You do not arrive at a guaranteed vision of the future simply by pouring more money or time into analysis. More analytical or operational resources may reduce the range of predicted outcomes but will never produce certainty.

Competition creates change and adaptation, and the appropriate role of risk management in complex, adaptive systems is not to eliminate risk, but to understand it and reduce it where possible. Furthermore, risk management in strategic competition must acknowledge the possibility that the distribution of risk may differ significantly from the past, or from what we think it is. Prior to the 2008 financial crisis, many bankers asserted the inviolability of the rule that people in financial distress stop paying their mortgages only after they have stopped paying for everything else, and history supported this view. But the bankers were wrong.[10] People's behaviors adapted (rationally,

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[10] Peter J. Wallison, "Dissenting Statement," *Financial Crisis Inquiry Commission Report* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2011), 460-462, https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/GPO-FCIC/pdf/GPO-FCIC.pdf (accessed November 2, 2018). See also, John Duca, "Subprime Mortgage Crisis," *Federal Reserve History*, November

one may argue) in the face of new circumstances, and millions of home-owners defaulted on their mortgages, precipitating the largest financial crisis since the Great Depression.

Varieties of Internal and External Competition

Competition in national security is exceptionally diverse, occurring both inside and outside organizational boundaries. All the diverse types of competition in national security involve contests to claim scarce resources. This scarcity is the one essential characteristic of all competition. Make an important resource more abundant, or create an effective substitute, and competition wains. Make it scarcer, or remove substitutes, and competitive pressures build. Even ideological competition involves competition for scarce resources: an ideology is competitive when it seeks to control political power through electoral success, policy changes such as the redistribution of wealth, or revolutionary upheaval. All involve competition for scarce resources (votes, tax revenues, or dominance in war).

National security competition includes (but is not limited to):

Violent competition with opposing forces. Military forces compete with adversaries to establish dominance on the modern battlefield, a sort of Darwinian competition in which the fit survive and the unfit are destroyed or compelled to surrender.

Roles and missions competition within the military and across the government. The U.S. Armed Services (Army, Navy, Air Force) compete for roles and missions that support the national security goals of civilian leaders. That is, they vie with each to provide attractive options to policy makers. This competition also occurs in the Department of Defense (DoD) as it competes with other elements of the U.S. Government to provide options that support the strategic objectives of the President. The U.S. Armed Services collectively engage in a disjunctive symbiosis, in which they rely on each other in joint operations and co-evolve to face common threats yet compete among themselves for limited resources.

22, 2013, https://www.federalreservehistory.org/essays/subprime_mortgage_crisis (accessed July 9, 2018).

Budget competition within the DoD and across the government. The Armed Services also vie for a greater share of the budget within the DoD. Similarly, DoD competes with other elements of the U.S. government for a greater share of the Federal budget.

International competition. National security leaders take part in high-level competition between states and systems. Nations compete for influence and allies, economic resources, access to markets, and human capital. Nations are also often proxies for ideological and cultural competition, with broader political, economic, or religious systems vying to govern and influence societies and individuals.

Whether competition arises from internal or external sources, it affects the organization in different ways. The sub-units in an organization rarely work harmoniously toward superordinate goals. Internal competition is ever-present and affects resource allocation decisions, power dynamics, access, control, and influence in the organization. Leaders must be attuned to these competitive dynamics to build effective relationships and a cooperative climate. Therefore, "internal competitions" affect decisions for structuring and aligning people, processes, technology, and resources to achieve a strategic vision.

Similarly, external competition within the national security environment drives policy and decisions on the use of different instruments of national power to safeguard national interests and competitive standing.

The Flexible Terms and Boundaries of Strategic Competition

The terms of strategic competition are remarkably flexible. *In strategic competition, leaders affect basic questions of competitive identity and involvement, as well as the boundaries and rules of competition.*

Identity concerns whether to approach another entity as a competitor, partner, or something else. Adversaries can become allies, and vice versa. On the eve of the Second World War, representatives of the German and Soviet governments agreed to a non-aggression treaty, partitioning Poland between them and allowing Germany to focus its attention on the later conquest of

Western Europe. At the time, the treaty shocked observers, not least because of the rhetorical and physical hostility that had characterized Nazi-Bolshevik relations up to that point.[11] The German government had ruthlessly suppressed communists at home, and the Soviets had matched Nazi brutality. Now, the nations were suddenly great friends, at least until the German Army launched *Operation Barbarossa* in June, 1941.

Involvement concerns whether to compete, exit, or something in between (monitor, for example). Participation is seldom required, and players can exit from competition either through disengagement or a shift to cooperation or collaboration. Key actors can exit the competition, or re-enter later. The U.S. did so when, after joining the victorious allies of the First World War, it refused to ratify the League of Nations and absented itself from great power relations for twenty years, only to find itself entering another European war.

Finally, the rules and boundaries of competition are decided both by natural conditions and by the choices of participants. What is allowable is constantly in flux, as are the actions and entities considered in or out-of-bounds of competition. Examples include the evolution from 1941 to the present of American policies of violence against civilians, from the indiscriminate strategic bombing of Japan and Germany to the intense care given to avoiding non-combatant deaths today.

Conclusion

Strategic leaders operating in complex, adaptive systems must concern themselves with obtaining and maintaining advantage, not with achieving a permanent solution or winning, per se. What does this mean for how leaders formulate and implement competitive strategy?

First, it means that all advantages are provisional. What makes us special now — exquisite defense platforms, for example — may make us an endangered species tomorrow. Competitive leadership means different things at different times. Consumers

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[11] Richard J. Evans, *The Third Reich in Power: The History of the Third Reich* (New York: Penguin Books, 2006).

may not always want a physical print of an image, but Polaroid failed to recognize this and missed moving to digital photography.[12] General Motors failed to recognize how the design of a car may not always be more important to customers than things like safety, reliability, or fuel efficiency.[13] Supremacy of the sea may not always be determined by the navy with the most capable battleships. This places a premium on a leaders' ability to think in time and innovate faster than competitors, lest their organizations become laggards in vital areas of security.

Second, in recognizing the ephemeral character of competitive advantage, leaders must confront the fundamental paradox of organizational leadership in competitive environments: organizations exist to routinize the assumptions and activities that help them succeed, and those assumptions and activities sustain success until they no longer fit the competitive environment; then they become weaknesses. The ability of leaders to create reliable organizational behaviors is therefore a great asset or great liability, depending on the alignment with competitive requirements. Leaders must somehow maintain the efficiencies that are sources of competitive advantage, while simultaneously challenging the assumptions that are the basis of that advantage. This requires persistent investment to increase internal efficiencies, and continued attention to building significant capabilities in scanning the external, competitive environment. An organization that recognizes that every one of its competitive assumptions may be invalidated at any time is more likely to pay attention to what is going on outside of it, avoiding the trap of self-obsession that afflicts many successful organizations.

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[12] Andrea Nagy Smith, "What was Polaroid Thinking?" *Yale Insights,* Yale School of Management, November 4, 2009, https://insights.som.yale.edu/insights/what-was-polaroid-thinking (accessed April 5, 2019).

[13] John Quelch, "How General Motors Violated Your Trust," *Harvard Business Review,* December 11, 2008, https://hbr.org/2008/12/how-general-motors-violated-yo (accessed April 5, 2019).

Chapter 3. Leading Large Bureaucratic Organizations: The Internal Environment

Kristin Behfar and Dale Watson

The word "bureaucracy" often carries a negative connotation, and it has been satirically defined as "the epoxy that greases the wheels of progress."[1] This raises the question: what does it mean to be an effective strategic leader within a large bureaucracy like the Department of Defense?

There are two important considerations before answering that question. First, despite its pitfalls, there is an actual need for bureaucracy. The multiple systems and processes that make up a bureaucracy are essential for the operation of large, complex organizations like the Department of Defense. Senior leaders depend on these systems because size and complexity preclude their ability to know every part of the organization, to interact with each employee, and to hold people personally accountable. This makes the exercise of direct supervision and real-time situational awareness nearly impossible to obtain and actively manage alone. Administrative structures and systems are necessary to distribute, coordinate, and supervise activities of major sub-organizations across the enterprise, as well as between the different echelons within sub-organizations.

A second consideration is the psychological experience of employees. Bureaucracies are by definition impersonal, favor no one, and seek to create efficiencies for the whole. For many personnel, "standard operating" systems feel impersonal and limit the choice and freedom they have in their jobs. In addition, employees who operate for long periods of time in a resource constrained environment often begin to believe that strategy is driven more by constraints and self-generating bureaucracy than by purpose and vision.

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[1] James Boren, *When in Doubt, Mumble: A Bureaucrat's Handbook* (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, Inc., 1972).

An important role, therefore, for strategic leaders is to design and maintain bureaucratic systems that enable rather than hinder achieving strategic goals. As outlined in Chapter 2, organizations must navigate and respond to a competitive external environment. Making decisions about how to respond internally requires a sophisticated understanding of organization design—or how to internally organize to meet strategic objectives. This has been called "the law of requisite complexity,"[2] or the idea that the sophistication of the internal structure must keep pace with the demands of a dynamic operating environment. Strategic leaders make decisions about how to design bureaucracy. Their words, behaviors, and decisions are what connect and motivate people to pursue ends given the ways and means available to them. This chapter describes how leaders can structure and align large organizations to manage the inherent tensions in bureaucracies.

Organizational Tensions

In any large, complex organization there are persistent tensions that create difficult decisions for leaders. One tension, for example, is between short-term resource needs and longer-term strategy. Balancing the opportunity costs of near-term objectives against more distant goals often focuses attention on incremental process efficiencies over longer-term plans. This tension was felt by the Army in the past decade when focus on near-term readiness of the force came at the expense of modernization efforts. Here, the demands of the external environment (i.e., a persistent conflict) resulted in a prioritization of the ability to "fight tonight" over longer-term capability development. The realities of responding to a dynamic external environment while concurrently posturing the organization for future success is a constant management challenge. Strategic decisions reflect careful thought about how to manage trade-offs and the associated risk they introduce.

There are also persistent tensions between effectiveness and efficiency in operations. For example, the Department of Defense

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[2] Max Boisot and Bill McKelvey, "Complexity and Organization-Environment Relations: Revisiting Ashby's Law of Requisite Variety," in *The Sage Handbook of Complexity and Management*, ed. Peter Allen, Steve Maguire, and Bill McKelvey (London: Sage Publications Ltd, 2011), 279-298.

acquisition process is a complex decision apparatus where leaders need to manage tensions between cost, schedule, and future performance while remaining responsive to the warfighter. Innovative ways to streamline the acquisition process through *urgent operational need* statements[3] and off-the-shelf technologies are examples of how senior leaders have adapted around structural inefficiencies to achieve needed near-term effectiveness.

Another tension persists between the specialized objectives of individual sub-organizations and the overall goals of the enterprise. Sub-organizations have a more specialized focus, which is effective because they develop unique skills and procedures, strong unit identities, and create operational efficiencies.[4] Such specialization is effective because members of sub-organizations share a common language, have practice with understanding and solving similar problems together, and use common processes (e.g., the Army's Military Decision Making Process).

There are, however, two ways that this creates problems for the enterprise. First, if the environment demands the need to quickly integrate specialized units, it takes more effort and time to integrate specialized units. Challenges of interoperability, for example, occur when trying to integrate diverse service functional capabilities. Another source of inefficiency for the enterprise can come from too much administrative or operational redundancy between sub-organizations. This tension is reflected in the recent strategic decision to create CYBERCOM to unify cyber operations under one command, rather than having each service continue to develop its own unique doctrine and concepts. Generally, as the need to manage environmental complexity increases, strategic leaders expend greater energy and resources to coordinate outputs across subunits. This typically means a consolidating control at a higher level over processes in order to integrate sub-

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[3] For example, the Joint Urgent Operational Need (JUON) expedited acquisition process as defined in U.S. Department of Defense, *Operation of the Defense Acquisition System*, DoD Instruction 5000.02 (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Defense, August 2017).

[4] Tom Burns and G.M. Stalker, *The Management of Innovation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961).

organizations. In some cases, this might even mean creating another sub-organizational structure.

Organization Structure

Organizational structure, if examined closely, can provide important insight into how previous strategic leaders have thought about balancing these persistent tensions. By looking at an organizational chart one can quickly recognize, for example, strategic decisions to organize the enterprise by functional purpose (e.g., each service branch), by interdependent operations (e.g., functional combatant commands), and/or by geographic region (e.g., combatant commands). Examining the governing systems and lines of authority in that structure provides important insight into the assumptions made by previous leaders about the best way to integrate versus separate day-to-day operations between subunits. For example, within the Department of Defense the combatant commands employ the force, whereas the functional services train, man, and equip the force. Reporting relationships, responsibilities, and authorities within the Department of Defense structure reflect and reinforce deliberate designs for differentiating and integrating such military activities.

Another example comes from examining the three interdependent decision making processes used to resource the military. These are the planning, programming, budgeting, and execution (PPBE) process, the Joint Capabilities, Integration, and Development System (JCIDS), and the Defense Acquisition System (DAS). These three systems were designed as a way to align military requirements with strategy, to sync with Congressional authorizations and appropriations, and to develop and maintain capability across a massive number of internal and external stakeholders. The design of these three systems represents *robust* formal standardization, likely reflecting a series of decisions over time to centrally manage a wide range of circumstances, including complexities with contracting, managing the industrial base, and multiple ways to avoid fraud, waste, and abuse. The natural outgrowth of such robust standardization is an increased amount of bureaucracy.

The judgment about the effectiveness of organizational structure, therefore, can be summarized by an old management adage: "every organization is perfectly designed to get the results that it is getting." If an organization is underperforming, effective strategic leaders seek, identify, and remedy problems with how work is designed—usually through bureaucratic reform. Strategic leaders, by virtue of their authority, can modify the formal organization structure. They can revise the organization's vision and change the physical arrangement of the formal hierarchy (i.e., a reorganization), they can change functional assignments (i.e., roles and missions), they can modify the processes that guide operations, or they can revise objectives, standards, and measures. These are decisions about how to rationally structure the internal organization given the dynamic operational environment.

A bigger challenge, however, for strategic leaders is to understand the part of organizational structure they *cannot* directly design or control—the informal structure. In contrast to the formal structure that is purposefully *planned and designed* to operate independent of specific people,[5] the informal organization *emerges* from unplanned (often idiosyncratic) patterns of interaction and can be significantly influenced by individuals. As people work within a formal organizational design, they naturally have opinions about policies, procedures, and about one another. Informal relationships create social systems (i.e., the informal organizational structure) that profoundly affect work and how people experience it. For example, social networks are created that transmit information and influence (such as so-called "work-arounds") and employees talk with one another to understand their experiences (e.g., the grapevine, water-cooler talk, and rumors).

The informal organization is an important source of social influence. It not only meets psychological needs of employees by personalizing the bureaucracy, it also fulfills important social needs through friendship and trust networks.[6] In international

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[5] Herbert A. Simon, *Models of Discovery: Boston Studies in the Philosophy of Science* (Dordrecht: Springer, 1977), 245-261.

[6] Henry Metcalf and L. Urwick, Eds., *Dynamic Administration: The Collected Papers of Mary Parker Follet* (Oxford: Taylor & Francis, 2003).

staffs, for example, informal groups often coalesce around shared language or cultural customs. It can be a powerful tool to motivate innovation and change, to disseminate information, and to gain access to decision makers—alternatively, it can be a powerful form of resistance and political maneuvering.[7] In this sense, a key insight for leading effectively in a bureaucracy is to recognize that the accomplishments of any single leader are bounded by what the formal organization enables, as well as what the informal organization collectively supports.[8]

An important indicator of strategic leadership success, therefore, is reflected in how much alignment, or positive interdependence, there is between an organization's formal and informal structures. If they do not positively reinforce one another, patterns of behavior, assumptions, and beliefs about the "way things really work" (e.g., avoiding conflict, maintaining the status quo) become routine and engrained in the organization's culture.[9] Military leaders, for example, who have rotated on 2-3 year assignments often encounter personnel who have learned to "wait it out" rather than embrace new change initiatives.

Negative cultures are typically a symptom of weak alignment between formally prescribed structures/processes and the attitudes and beliefs of the people needed to achieve objectives. A lack of alignment can show up in many ways: When responsibility and authority do not overlap; when the people that do the work are not the people who get credit for the work; when one behavior (e.g., innovation and merit-based achievement) is desired but another behavior (e.g., promoting for tenure) is rewarded;[10] when toxic leadership persists over time, or when operating requirements create conditions where it is (informally) agreed upon to violate requirements (e.g., see Wong and Gerras

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[7] David Krackhardt and Jeffrey Hanson, "Informal Networks: The Company Behind the Chart," *Harvard Business Review* 71, no. 4 (July-August, 1993): 104-111.

[8] Mary Uhl-Bien and Russ Marion, "Complexity leadership in bureaucratic forms of organizing: A meso model," *The Leadership Quarterly* 20, no. 4 (2009): 631-650.

[9] Christopher Argyris, "Reinforcing Organizational Defensive Routines: An Unintended Human Resources Activity," *Human Resource Management* 25, no. 4 (1986): 541-555.

[10] Steven Kerr, "On the folly of rewarding A, while hoping for B," *The Academy of Management Executive* 9, no. 1 (1995): 7-14.

"Lying to Ourselves"[11]). Effective strategic leaders quickly recognize the root cause of these frictions and thoughtfully apply their authority to modify the administrative aspects of the system to encourage desired behaviors. They also recognize that they need to do so at a pace that allows the informal organization to respond and align. Many leaders find this is an incredibly difficult balance to strike—and this balance is at the heart of what it means to be an effective strategic leader in a complex bureaucracy.

Strategic Leadership: Levers of Control

Senior leaders in a bureaucracy, therefore, often find themselves in a paradoxical position: they have a great deal of power (e.g., large spans of supervisory control, greater ability to direct resources, and authority to change priorities), yet the resistance to change and routines of bureaucracies are typically difficult to directly control. Most leaders inherit structures rather than build them from scratch. Thus, when a system has been in place for some time, there is institutional momentum around how things are done—for better or for worse.

One way that leaders can change the organizations they inherit is by using a mix of "levers of control."[12] This metaphor is sometimes used to describe how leaders can balance their approach, or pull on multiple power bases, to enact change through direct and indirect methods.[13] The levers framework describes four concrete ways for leaders to adapt organizations and enable change, and also emphasizes the importance of the interplay between the four levers rather than overreliance on just one. [14]

The first two levers draw on formal position power and can be described by the old management adage: "you get what you permit and what you promote." These levers tie behavior to specific consequences through the use of control systems like

[11] Leonard Wong and Stephen Gerras, *Lying to Ourselves: Dishonesty in the Army Profession* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 2015).

[12] Robert Simons, *Levers Of Control: How Managers Use Innovative Control Systems to Drive Strategic Renewal* (Boston: Harvard Business Press, 1994).

[13] Robert Quinn and John Rohrbaugh, "A Spatial Model of Effectiveness Criteria: Towards a Competing Values Approach to Organizational Analysis," *Management Science* 29, no. 3 (1983): 363-377.

[14] Simons, *Levers of Control*.

rewards, punishments, or evaluations. *Boundary levers* are those that rely on formal authority to change the reporting relationships, authorities, and/or the formal processes that guide operations. These decisions impose or literally re-draw boundaries around who makes decisions and how resources/rewards are allocated. This includes, for example, enforcing existing doctrine, denying a promotion to an errant subordinate, making changes to formal decision support systems such as the PPBE, or issuing new doctrine and guidance. This lever can be used to change decision authority and ensure compliance. Leaders can also formally control behavior with *diagnostic levers*, or by changing what is measured, adjusting milestones, or by revising standards. Diagnostics provide incentives to redirect efforts, and also provide feedback about where results are not being achieved—and where a leader may need to intervene (or apply a boundary lever). These two levers use formal position power to shape operational standards and define how to measure success.

As a complement, the remaining two levers represent the application of a more indirect form of control—to inspire people to follow rather than compel them. *Belief system levers* directly address *why* people believe in the organization and *what* they believe about how it works. Leaders impact beliefs via the consistency in their own behaviors that model and communicate the core values and vision of the enterprise. If, for example, a leader claims to be open to input but then "shoots the messenger" delivering bad news—he or she will reinforce negative perceptions and invite resistance and suspicion. On the other hand, if the leader behaves consistently with mission and vision statements, and uses them authentically in speeches or conversations, it is a powerful way to connect what people experience daily with a clearer path toward the desired result.[15] Similarly, by choosing to interact more around certain issues than others, leaders send direct and indirect messages about priorities. The *interactive lever* refers to the idea that every action or inaction of a strategic leader is interpreted by those below them in the

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[15] David Nadler and Michael Tushman, "A Model for Diagnosing Organizational Behavior," *Organizational Dynamics* 9, no. 2 (1980): 35-51.

hierarchy.[16] Where and when strategic leaders decide to become personally involved, and what they focus on, shapes and focuses the attention of efforts across the enterprise. By providing consistent focus on core values and mission objectives, leadership sets the tone that inspires positive followership—and standards for how their subordinate leaders should behave and engage.[17]

A key point of this chapter is to emphasize that leaders should carefully consider the *mix* of levers they choose to pull. Position power and personal power tend to have different purposes: using position power creates an obligation to comply, while using personal power presents a set of choices and helps shape possible alternatives. Both are effective when applied appropriately.[18] One problem is that bureaucratic leaders often over rely on formal levers or use them in a reactionary way. For example, generally, a bureaucracy's response to a crisis is to create more bureaucracy. Creating new regulations or changing metrics in reaction to critical incidents rather assessing a more comprehensive response across the formal and informal organizations is one way that bureaucratic systems create "administrative tyranny" and invoke frustration. When used in conjunction, the four levers described in this chapter help leaders to leverage formal position power to influence decisions about programs, systems, and formal structure in a top-down manner, while simultaneously using indirect or personal power to motivate bottom-up dialogue and participation with stakeholders in the informal organizational networks. This has been called "creating adaptive space" for innovation to emerge within the bureaucracy.[19]

Implications

Strategic leaders are stewards of the enterprise and the sub-organizations that operate under their direction. One goal of this

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[16] Bardard Bass and Ralph Stogdill, *Bass & Stogdill's Handbook of Leadership: Theory, Research, and Managerial Applications* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1990).

[17] Melissa Carsten, Mary Uhl-Bien, Bradley West, Jamie Patera, and Rob McGregor, "Exploring Social Constructions of Followership: A Qualitative Study," *The Leadership Quarterly* 21, no. 3 (2010): 543-562.

[18] Mary Uhl-Bien and Michael Arena, "Complexity leadership: Enabling people and organizations for adaptability," *Organizational Dynamics* 46, no. 1 (January-March 2017): 9-20.

[19] Gary Yukl, "How Leaders Influence Organizational Effectiveness," *The Leadership Quarterly* 19, no. 6 (2008): 708-722.

chapter is to highlight the agility and endurance required of leaders to satisfy the "law of requisite complexity," or to ensure that internal operations are effectively aligned to meet strategic objectives in a dynamic environment. Strategic leadership of a complex system requires a depth of patience, resilience, foresight, and the character required to look beyond immediate events and to anticipate how decisions will be received by diverse stakeholders. This requires sophisticated intellectual understanding of second- and third-order consequences of decisions, and highly refined communication skills to meaningfully explain the trade-offs in decisions that may favor some groups over others yet move the enterprise toward strategic objectives. Strategic leadership is an exercise in nuanced analysis, intellectual agility, and the development of creative solutions. These practices are critical to align the organization and to de-conflict the legitimate competing interests that will persist over the lifetime of any complex system. A skilled leader will recognize both the root causes of these tensions, as well as how their decisions directly or indirectly resolve or exacerbate these tensions. For those preparing to assume a strategic leadership position, or to advise strategic leaders, it is wise to become a student of organization design and the ways that power and influence flow through the formal and informal structures within bureaucracies. It is not straightforward to create tangible results out of intangible assets such as people, processes, and systems. The ways and means that strategic leaders manage organizations to achieve ends are not only important to achieve strategic objectives—but also for the lives and careers of the people working in the organization.

To Learn More

For more on Levers of Control

Robert Simons, 'Control in the Age of Empowerment,' Harvard Business Review, 73, no. 2 (1995): 80-88. https://hbr.org/1995/03/control-in-an-age-of-empowerment

For more on leadership that creates "Adaptive Space"

Michael Arena, Rob Cross, Jonathan Sims, and Mary Uhl-Bien, M. (2017). How to catalyze innovation in your organisation. MIT Sloan Management Review, 58, no. 4 (Summer, 2017): 38-48. https://www.robcross.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/how-to-catalyze-innovation-in-your-organization-connected-commons.pdf

For more on the informal organization

David Krackhardt and Jeffrey Hanson, "Informal networks: The company behind the chart,"
Harvard Business Review, 71, no. 4 (July-August, 1993): 104-111.
https://hbr.org/1993/07/informal-networks-the-company-behind-the-chart

For more on alignment

Steven Kerr, "On the folly of rewarding A, while hoping for B," The Academy of
Management Executive, 9, no. 1 (1995): 7-14.
http://www.ou.edu/russell/UGcomp/Kerr.pdf

CHAPTER 4. COMPETITIVE STRATEGY

Andrew A. Hill, Douglas Douds, and Dale Watson

Tic-tac-toe has an optimal strategy to avoid defeat: play the center square on your first turn, unless the other player already did so. Alas, there is no equivalent in strategic competition, where the quest for reliable rules for competitive decision-making is futile. "Go with what works," is a fine mantra, but we should always add, "Until it stops working."

Competitive systems require *strategies* for making choices. This chapter examines the broad characteristics of these strategies, and describes the range of strategic choices and opportunities available to leaders.

Strategy has been defined many ways, but for the purposes of this discussion, we offer the following: *strategy is guidelines for decision-making in conditions of competitive uncertainty, with the purpose of reducing that uncertainty and creating or maintaining an advantage.*[1] Without competition and its accompanying uncertainty, strategy is unnecessary. Competitive strategies prioritize and balance contradictions over time, space, and scale. Competitive strategies can be deliberate or emergent, direct or indirect, based on limited or unlimited resources, and can involve competition based on quality, quantity, or a mix. Additionally, deliberate strategies may be active or passive. All strategy is based on expectations of causal relationships between an action and a desired (or undesired) effect.

Furthermore, all strategic competition involves the construction of a narrative that is essential to sustaining competitive advantage. The strategic leader does not wholly control this narrative. The stories we tell about competition at the strategic level are collectively determined (i.e., socially constructed), and changes in these stories can fundamentally

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[1] Adapted from John Von Neuman and Oskar Morgenstern, *Theory of Games and Economic Behavior,* Commemorative Edition (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004). Originally published 1944.

change the meaning and interpretation of competition in both the present and the past.

Ways of Competing

Effective competitive strategy is not about rules for decision-making. More useful for competition are strategic themes that give coherence to competitive choice yet preserve flexibility in making those choices. Here we identify three strategic themes: (1) deliberate (active or passive) and emergent, (2) direct and indirect, and (3) quality and quantity.

Deliberate (active or passive), and emergent strategies

The difference between deliberate and emergent strategic approaches is significant. Deliberate approaches reflect a heroic view of competition, in which intelligent leaders survey the environment, and then build and implement great strategies. According to Henry Mintzberg, deliberate strategies:[2]

- Are controlled, conscious, and formal processes, decomposed into distinct steps

- Place responsibility for the overall process with the chief executive

- Produce fully-formed strategies that are then implemented through detailed attention to objectives, budgets, programs, etc.

Deliberate strategies produce an ordered result that reflects the will of the key decision-makers in an organization. Examples of deliberate approaches include Henry Ford's adoption of the moving assembly line to produce automobiles, Nazi Germany's conquest of Europe, and the World Health Organization's ten-year program to eradicate small-pox.

Deliberate strategies may be active or passive. Active competitive approaches are proactive and involve taking the initiative by making choices that start new chains of causation. Passive approaches are reactive and involve making choices to

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[2] Henry Mintzberg, Bruce Ahlstrand, and Joseph Lampel, *Strategy Safari: A Guided Tour Through the Wilds of Strategic Management* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2005), 43-44.

frustrate, delay, or break the chain of causation that your adversary is building. In military terms, the choice between an active or passive competitive strategy resembles that between an offensive or defensive approach. Both are entirely legitimate strategic approaches. The benefits of an active or offensive strategy need no explication here. Militaries instinctively prefer active strategies, and the doctrine of the U.S. armed forces identifies the *offensive* as a "principle of war."[3] However, passive (or defensive) approaches warrant a modest (ahem) defense.

History is full of examples of effective defensive strategies. Facing a deadly invasion by the armies of Hannibal, the Roman Consul Quintus Fabius Maximus earned the nickname "Cunctator" (delayer) because he studiously avoided decisive engagements, taking advantage of his short supply lines by waiting out his enemy. Hannibal retreated from Italy not because he lost a battle, but because he faced a political threat at home. King Charles V of France turned the tide of English conquest of Northern France by refusing battle and stripping the countryside of provisions. The Russians took a similar approach to Napoleon's 1812 invasion.

Effective passive strategies tend to change the basis of competition from what an adversary seeks to what you seek. In the above examples, the victors changed the competition from one that took place primarily on the battlefield to one that played out over months and years in the less exciting areas of logistics and geography. The challenge for adopters of passive strategies is that they tend to have less control over timing and are more reactive. Competitors can pursue hybrids of active and passive strategies. The victorious colonies of the American Revolution pursued a broadly passive strategy, but they punctuated it with key victories that required offensive operations, notably at Trenton and Yorktown.[4]

Where deliberate strategies tend to be top-down (or centralized), emergent strategies tend to be bottom-up (or

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[3] U.S. Joint Staff, *Joint Operations*, Joint Publication 3-0 (Washington, DC: U.S. Joint Staff, 17 January 2017), A-1 to A-2.

[4] Robert Middlekauff, *The Glorious Cause: The American Revolution, 1763-1789* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

decentralized). Emergent approaches to strategy take a much humbler view of the individual capacity of decision-makers. Emergent strategies are not incoherent, but display *unintentional* order that arises from patterns of decision-making over time, and this order is typically not clear until after the fact. According to Mintzberg, the case for emergent strategy assumes, "the complex and dynamic nature of the organization's environment… precludes deliberate control; strategy making must above all take the form of a process of learning over time, in which, at the limit, formulation and implementation become indistinguishable."[5] Mintzberg adds that emergent strategy:

- Places responsibility for strategy learning and development throughout the organization – there are many potential strategists

- Makes leaders responsible not for preconceiving deliberate strategies but for managing a process of strategic learning

- Finds strategies first "as patterns out of the past, and only later perhaps as deliberate plans for the future"[6]

Emergent strategy is therefore strategy that arises from the ground up, through learning. It changes the character of the competition from driving to adapting to changes in the competitive environment. It is less about planning and coordination in initial decisions, and more about adaptation and flexibility in subsequent decisions. Examples of emergent strategies include Amazon's evolution from its initial focus on online book sales, Apple's transformation into a mobile-device manufacturer, or the expansion of the United States during the 18th and 19th centuries.

Note that emergent and deliberate approaches are not mutually exclusive, and organizations can use each one at distinct stages of competition. In the military, deliberate strategy may accurately reflect strategy-formulation prior to the start of a

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[5] Mintzberg, *Strategy Safari,* 208.
[6] Ibid., 209.

conflict, giving way to emergent strategy once competitive conditions force learning.

Direct and indirect strategies

In 1974, U.S. Army Colonel Harry Summers, a decorated veteran of the Vietnam War, traveled to Hanoi, Vietnam as part of a military delegation attempting to resolve the status of missing American servicemen. Summers later recounted an exchange he had with a North Vietnamese officer, Colonel Tu. When Summers said, "You know, you never beat us on the battlefield," Colonel Tu responded, "That may be so, but it is also irrelevant."[7] This story wonderfully illustrates a crucial choice in strategy: the choice of *where* to compete in time, space, and scale.

We can classify most competitive strategies as direct or indirect. In Harry Summers's experience, he argued that the U.S. military had completely dominated its opponents in Vietnam in *direct* military competition. His counterpart took the position that, whatever the truth of Summers's statement, direct military competition did not really matter, because North Vietnam had defeated the United States in *indirect* competition by eroding its will to fight.

The U.S. military has a long-standing taxonomy of two generic strategies in war—annihilation and erosion—that broadly reflect the direct and indirect approaches. Joint Publication 1, Doctrine for the Armed Forces of the United States, explains: "The first is to make the enemy helpless to resist us, by physically destroying his military capabilities…The second approach is to convince the enemy that accepting our terms will be less painful than continuing to aggress or resist."

Which is better? Sun Tzu famously recommended the indirect approach, suggesting that leaders first strive to defeat enemies by attacking their strategy (sometimes translated as "plans"), thereby avoiding the uncertain outcome of battle.[8] Sun Tzu wrote: "Therefore the skillful leader subdues the enemy's troops without any fighting; he captures their cities without laying siege to them;

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[7] Harry Summers, *On Strategy: The Vietnam War in Context* (Carlisle, PA: US Army War College Press, 1982).

[8] Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, trans. Ralph Sawyer (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2007).

he overthrows their kingdom without lengthy operations in the field."[9]

Indirect strategies have disadvantages, as well. They are more complex and often more time-consuming than direct approaches. The connections between cause and effect in indirect strategies are longer, and incur greater risks of miscalculation and error, both in making decisions and in constructing a narrative to justify a strategy to key stakeholders, an important leadership responsibility (more on this below). North Vietnam may have defeated the U.S. indirectly, but it took years of struggle, and the nation suffered terribly as a result of its military disadvantage.

Yet the question of whether indirect or direct strategy is better sort of misses the point: an effective strategy inevitably must include degrees of both. North Vietnam pursued both indirect and direct strategies. It attempted (unsuccessfully, for the most part) to defeat U.S. military forces on land and in the air. After early failures in costly conventional battles with U.S. forces, North Vietnam indirectly engaged the U.S. military in guerilla warfare while preparing to fight a direct conventional war against South Vietnam when the timing was opportune.

The main difference between direct and indirect strategies is not the relative superiority of one or the other, but how each operates in or across the levels of an overall strategic concept. Direct strategies tend to focus *within* levels of national security strategy. For example, dominance of the sea was an objective of the United Kingdom's Royal Navy during the Second World War. To establish and maintain this dominance, the Royal Navy focused on its ability to destroy enemy vessels in direct naval combat. Germany initially attempted to contest Royal Navy dominance in the North Atlantic. Finding itself losing that competition, it chose a different route: avoid direct engagements with the Royal Navy, and use submarines operating in "wolfpacks" to destroy allied merchant vessels. Thus, Germany chose not contest the Royal Navy's dominance of the sea, but to compete *across* levels of naval strategy. It used U-boats, ostensibly a tactical element in conventional naval operations, to compete at

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[9] Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, trans. Lionel Giles, http://classics.mit.edu/Tzu/artwar.html (accessed June 13, 2018).

a higher level and scale of strategy. The transport of people and goods over the sea, the higher purpose of the Royal Navy's dominance, became the target of German naval strategy.[10] Germany sought to deny the U.K. not its naval dominance, but the higher-level *benefits* of that dominance. Germany's indirect strategy worked well for a time, until the Royal Navy figured out that it needed to compete at that level, as well, adopting convoy tactics that changed the course of the naval war.

The experience of the Royal Navy illustrates three key points regarding direct and indirect strategies: first, indirect strategies are most evident in a willingness to accept a competitive disadvantage at one level in pursuit of a competitive advantage at a higher level; second, one competitor can employ a direct strategy while its opponent employs an indirect strategy; third, indirect strategies can become direct when an adversary "levels up" its own strategy.

Strategies of quality, strategies of quantity

Our final strategic category concerns the classic choice between quality and quantity. Michael Porter, in the seminal work *Competitive Strategy*, proposes two generic strategies for business competition: cost, and product differentiation.[11] Cost competition and product differentiation are simply different words for the trade-off between quantity or quality. In nature, we see the virtues of quantity and quality evident in different evolutionary paths. Bacteria, the oldest and most common of all life-forms, effectively use mass to compensate for individual weakness. In contrast, sharks – to take just one example – rely on quality. With a physiology that has changed little in over 100 million years, they use speed, strength, sharp teeth, and some sophisticated sensory capabilities to find and consume prey.[12] Of

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[10] Gautam Mukunda, "We Cannot Go On: Disruptive Innovation and the First World War Royal Navy," *Security Studies* 19, no. 1 (2010): 124-159.

[11] Michael E. Porter, *Competitive Strategy: Techniques for Analyzing Industries and Competitors* (New York: Free Press, 1998). Porter included a third strategic type, "focus," but we set it aside because Porter himself later recategorized focus as a sub-type of differentiation.

[12] Discovery.com, "Interactive Timeline of Shark Evolution," *Shark Week: Sharkopedia*, https://sharkopedia.discovery.com/shark-topics/prehistoric-sharks/#interactive-timeline-of-shark-evolution (accessed May 10, 2018).

course, most competitors would prefer both quantity and quality, but constraints on resources tend to make that difficult.

Returning to Porter's generic versus differentiation strategies, firms competing on cost (generic) sell commoditized products, such as gasoline, for which price is the overriding determinant of consumer choice; these firms therefore focus on selling at a lower price than competitors. Product differentiators, by contrast, assume that customers choose their products based on characteristics such as quality or performance (luxury cars, for example); price remains a factor, but it is not pre-eminent. Acknowledging Soviet dominance in mass in a potential European war, after Vietnam the U.S. military shifted decisively to a focus on differentiation, seeking overmatch.

Quality and quantity strategies are not as simple as they sound, leaving plenty of room for leaders to determine how, exactly, to implement a strategy. A cost competing firm, for example, can lower costs by generating production efficiencies, or by focusing on improving distribution. In warfare, for example, a military that focuses on annihilation of opposing forces can pursue that strategy through advantages in quantity (mass) or quality (overmatch).

It may be tempting to see the strategic choices of deliberate/emergent, direct/indirect, and quality/quantity like a golfer views golf clubs—in golf, you can only use one club per shot. But strategy is not like this. Effective strategy can incorporate each one of the types described above, albeit in different elements of the strategy. Leaders should consider how all of the competitive demands facing their organization correspond to these various types. It is not a question of what approach is best in all circumstances, but which one aligns better to a specific competitive threat or opportunity, and to the capabilities of the organization itself.

We now turn to a final, critical aspect of competitive strategy: the strategic narrative.

Competitive Narratives[13]

The stories we tell about strategic competition can be as powerful as the facts themselves. The old aphorism "seeing is believing," nicely captures the spirit of the Enlightenment, with its scientific revolution and celebration of the persuasive power of physical evidence.[14] Yet it is often true that "believing is seeing." This is a potent strategic tool, and the degree of freedom leaders have in re-constructing the reality of war increases from lower to higher levels.

At the strategic level, the meaning we give to reality differs based on how we collectively interpret it – how we *socially construct it*. Emile Simpson writes, "Strategy seeks to invest actions in war with their desired meaning… Strategy does not merely need to orchestrate tactical actions (the use of force), but also construct the interpretive structure which gives them meaning and links them to the end of policy."[15]

Leaders get to influence, if not outright define, the meaning of reality. Recognizing the constructive possibilities of strategy can dramatically expand strategic choice and give rise to more creative strategies. At the strategic level, even simple questions (e.g., "What happened?") can have multiple, even contradictory answers, and the validity of those answers may depend not in differences of facts, but on the interpretation of those facts, and the ability to convince others that your interpretation has merit.

Competition is complex, with few binary conditions or outcomes, and this complexity increases as one moves from the tactical to the strategic level, where every answer seems to begin with "it depends". Sociologist William Bruce Cameron's observation, "not everything that counts can be counted and not everything that can be counted counts," holds true.[16] Perception,

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[13] Adapted from Andrew Hill and Douglas Douds, "Believing is Seeing: On Strategic Imagination," *WAR ROOM*, 23 March 2018, https://warroom.armywarcollege.edu/articles/believing-is-seeing-on-strategic-imagination/ (accessed July 11, 2018).

[14] Thomas Fuller, *Gnomologia: Adagies and Proverbs; Wise Sentences and Witty Sayings, Ancient and Modern, Foreign and British* (London, UK: 1732), 174.

[15] Emile Simpson, *War from the Ground Up* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2013), 28-29.

[16] William Bruce Cameron, *Informal Sociology* (New York: Random House, 1963), 13.

national will, and leadership are intangibles that are hard to quantify. Sometimes we interpret this strategic complexity as a higher barrier to analysis, but one that can nevertheless be cracked. Leaders may still believe that at the strategic level there is some underlying, objective reality awaiting their discovery. We do not just discover strategic reality; we also define it. That is, reality is "socially constructed," determined through social and political processes of discussion, negotiation, persuasion, and historical interpretation. This may smack of postmodernism, with its subjective realities and relativistic truths. Such concepts are not often invoked in military circles. Yet considering the social construction of military and political outcomes is a powerful way to see new strategic possibilities.

The social construction of knowledge means that the social environment, with its relationships, culture, norms, and values, significantly influences how we understand the world, and how we understand the world affects what we know to be true.[17] It was on the sociological foundations of social construction that Alexander Wendt and other theorists created the constructivist alternative to the realist/neo-liberal argument international relations. Wendt writes, "If the United States and Soviet Union decide that they are no longer enemies, 'the cold war is over.' It is collective meanings that constitute the structures which organize our actions."[18] In a socially constructed context, a leader has maneuver space to shape the meaning of facts, and therefore transform our understanding of reality.

This reality-construction is the true indicator of James MacGregor Burns's *transforming leadership*.[19] Transforming leaders do not change the facts; they change what the facts mean by constructing new possibilities. Ulysses S. Grant did this transforming work in the smoke-choked aftermath of the Battle of the Wilderness. What looked like defeat for three years running was no longer defeat. The facts made it seem like a loss – over

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[17] Brent D. Slife and Richard N. Williams, *What's Behind the Research? Discovering Hidden Assumptions in the Behavioral Sciences* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1995).

[18] Alexander Wendt, "Anarchy is what States Make of it: The Social Construction of Power Politics," *International Organization* 46, no. 2 (Spring 1992): 391-425, 397.

[19] James MacGregor Burns, *Leadership*, electronic version (Open Road Media, 2012), originally published 1978.

18,000 Union casualties to 11,000 Confederates, both Union flanks assailed, forward motion halted, and the Confederates still in their defensive works. Grant had the authority to choose to retreat, and the option was open to him. He chose differently. In the process, he transformed the Battle of the Wilderness from a tactical loss into a successful first step in a campaign to end the war. It was a creative effort to shape the perception of the army he was leading and the public that supported it. Was it true? That question misses the point. It was true because the Union Army believed it, and, eventually, so did its Confederate opponents.

Though leaders cannot, on their own, successfully advance a strategic narrative, they have freedom to create and preserve options domestically and internationally by creatively interpreting established facts—Charles DeGaulle re-creating a French Republic in the midst of defeat in the Algerian war, or Nelson Mandela creating a post-apartheid Africa in which whites would still have a place and a voice. President Richard Nixon and Secretary of State Henry Kissinger shattered the western, monolithic view of global communism by opening the door to China in 1972. Nixon described it as "the week that changed the world."[20] And it had, though it took a lot longer than one week. It ended the mutual isolation of the People's Republic of China and the U.S.[21] Yet the pre-Open Door facts remained the same. China was still communist, and Mao was still in charge. The Vietnam War continued. The Cold War was still frosty.[22]

Conclusion

This and the preceding two chapters described the competitive environment and the basic characteristics of competitive strategies employed by strategic leaders in seeking to create and maintain a competitive advantage. Both papers briefly discussed how leaders can use their organizations to understand the complex, adaptive environment, and develop effective strategies for leading in it. Effective organizational leadership is

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[20] Margaret MacMillan, *Nixon and Mao: The Week that Changed the World* (New York: Random House, 2008), xxi.

[21] Patrick Tyler, *A Great Wall: Six Presidents and China – An Investigative History* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2007), 360.

[22] MacMillan, *Nixon and Mao*, 338.

the *sine qua non* of competitive success, and the next chapter examines in greater detail the organizational environment that leaders must negotiate to achieve that success.

Chapter 5. Senior Leader Roles

Craig Bullis

"Whatever your life's work is, do it well."[1] Martin Luther King, Jr. used these words as he admonished his followers to be the very best in their current jobs. The same admonition applies to those assuming the responsibilities of strategic leadership. The executive context is different and, consequently, so are senior leader responsibilities.[2] Some of the many differences in the strategic environment include the sheer number of subordinates, the sophistication of one's inner circle, increased budgets, and expanded time horizons.[3] Previous chapters of this primer have focused on the strategic context as well as the individual knowledge, skills, and abilities required of strategic leaders. Aligned with these changes is the recognition that others' expectations of effective strategic leadership also change. One of the ways to think about those new responsibilities is in the context of senior leader roles.

Senior leader roles — what they do and how they spend their time — are an important topic of both research and development. The purpose of this chapter is to describe the importance of those roles and to present a framework that illustrates the duties that effective senior leaders are expected to perform. To inform this endeavor, leadership research provides valuable insight and suggests that leaders at the strategic level recognize the following:

> *Senior leader roles emerge from the behavioral expectations of both internal and external stakeholders. Senior leader incumbents also influence their own roles based on individual performance and relationships with powerful stakeholders.*

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[1] Martin Luther King, Jr., "1956 Speech in Montgomery, AL," in *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr., Volume III Birth of a New Age, December 1955-December 1956*, eds. Clayborne Carson, Stewart Burns, Susan Carson, Dana Powell, and Peter Holloran (Oakland, CA: University of California Press Books, 1997).

[2] See, for example, Chester I. Barnard, *The Functions of the Executive* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1938), and Marshall Goldsmith and Mark Reiter, *What Got You Here Won't Get You There: How Successful People Become Even More Successful* (New York, NY: Hyperion, 2007).

[3] Elliot Jaques, *Requisite Organization: A Total System for Effective Managerial Organization and Managerial Leadership for the 21st Century* (Fleming Island, FL: Cason Hall & Company, 1996).

> *Individual performance of the most important roles – a classification that varies between organizations - defines senior leader effectiveness for both internal and external constituents. Moreover, the roles that senior leaders embrace (or avoid) can impact the competitive advantage of their organizations: choices matter.*
>
> *The nature of senior leader roles is paradoxical and role conflict is a normal aspect of leadership at the strategic level.* [4]

WHAT ARE "ROLES"?

A *role* is a structured, standardized, and institutionalized pattern of behavior that results in a predictable behavioral outcome.[5] Roles, in essence, are the natural outcome of sustained human interaction and labels assigned to such interactions suggests an expected behavioral pattern (e.g., customer, parent, or commander). Extending this perspective, Katz & Kahn suggest that one can define the concept of "organization" as a system of roles;[6] as such, this view of enduring roles over time helps explain organizational consistency under conditions of consistent personnel turnover. Within organizations, roles can sometimes be associated with particular positions[7] at the role of "child," "clerk," or "division G3" generates certain expectations of behavior. Moreover, roles can also be associated with particular echelons within an organization as expectations differ at lower and higher echelons.[8]

Role requirements for senior leaders expand rather than replace the leadership demands at lower echelons. As such, successful leadership at lower echelons provides a necessary but

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[4] Gary Yukl, *Leadership in Organizations*, Global Edition (Essex, England: Pearson Education Limited, 2013); Robert E. Quinn, *Beyond Rational Management: Mastering the Paradoxes* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1988); Henry Mintzberg, *The Nature of Managerial Work* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall); Henry Mintzberg, *Mintzberg on Management: Inside our Strange World of Organizations* (New York: Free Press, 1988); Bernard M. Bass, *Bass & Stogdill's Handbook of Leadership: Theory, Research & Managerial Applications* (New York: Free Press, 1990).

[5] Daniel Katz and Robert E. Kahn, *The Social Psychology of Organizations*, 2nd ed. (New York: Wiley, 1978).

[6] Ibid., Chapter 7 (pp. 185-222) focuses explicitly on development of roles within an organization.

[7] Ibid., 45.

[8] T. Owen Jacobs and Elliot Jaques, "Executive Leadership," in Reuven Gal and A. David Mangelsdorff (Eds.), *Handbook of Military Psychology* (New York: Wiley, 1991).

not sufficient behavioral repertoire for success in the strategic leadership domain.[9] In sum, an understanding of leadership roles orients senior leaders to expectations, appropriateness, and feasibility of different actions while serving as or advising leaders at the strategic level.

Roles are important because they convey behavioral expectations: the required actions of an incumbent as perceived by themselves and others.[10] The combination of internal and external forces results in senior leader's actions being both anticipated and predictable.[11] Consequently, when an individual's actions are disconnected from others' expectations for their role, confusion — and possibly trouble — follows.

Leaders who lack an understanding of their role expectations in the organization risk two types of role-related failures: (1) embracing roles perceived as *illegitimate* by key stakeholders; or (2) failing to fulfill expectations in *legitimate* roles. Moreover, specific roles do not exist in isolation--the roles and their inherent responsibilities interact in many different ways, sometimes even conflicting with each other. This results in significant complexity for senior leaders. Consequently, the sophisticated awareness of what others expect of the senior leader — their roles — is a first step towards effective performance.

Developing an appreciation for senior leadership roles begins with recognizing the many forces that influence "expected behavior." First, duty descriptions provide an initial orientation to the role responsibilities, reflecting the rules, regulations, and policies associated with the position.[12] However, a job description rarely captures the comprehensiveness of senior leader responsibilities. Consequently, a second force consists of internal stakeholders who expand those formal duties with opinions of other, non-written responsibilities. For example, superiors,

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[9] Stephen J. Zaccaro, *Models and Theories of Executive Leadership: A Conceptual/Empirical Review and Integration* (Alexandria, VA: U.S. Army Research Institute for the Behavioral and Social Sciences, 1996).

[10] Compared to research regarding leadership style, think of roles as what senior leaders must do (the written and unwritten job description); style – a different topic in social science research – refers to the way in which the leader accomplishes those responsibilities.

[11] Katz & Kahn, *Social Psychology*.

[12] The classic dodge, "That's not in my job description," reflects what happens when people are asked to act outside of their roles.

subordinates, and peers within the organization expect senior leaders to behave in ways that advance that group's personal interests.[13]

A strictly internal focus, however, is incomplete at more senior levels.[14] Therefore, the third group that exerts significant influence on senior leader roles are external stakeholders,[15] those individuals and organizations outside of the formal organizational boundaries that have interests in the performance of the organization. Finally, because most leaders in the Department of Defense (DoD) and other established organizations are filling positions previously held by others, precedences set by those previous senior leaders establishes expectations for behavior. Relatedly, socially-prescribed norms from the broader strategic environment inform the appropriateness of leader action.[16] In the end, the development of senior leader roles demands consideration of many different constituencies who each have unique interests.

While many roles are functions of stakeholder positions and their powerful expectations, roles also reflect the *interdependence* between the person and the position.[17] As such, the incumbents themselves have discretion in the development and prioritization of roles.[18] This interdependence begins with selection, as many senior leaders are often selected for a position because their background aligns with expanded role requirements.[19] A related example of this person/position interdependence results from

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[13] The alignment between personal and organizational interests is a critical leadership function. Peter Senge suggests that such alignment is the essence of an organizational vision. Peter M. Senge, *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization* (New York: Currency, 2006), 191-215.

[14] Jacobs and Jaques, "Executive Leadership."

[15] A means to identify and evaluate external constituencies is included in Chapter 2 of this Primer.

[16] Katz and Kahn, *Social Psychology*.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Donald C. Hambrick and Sydney Finkelstein, *Strategic Leadership: Top Executives and Their Effects on Organizations* (New York: West Publishing, 1996).

[19] Katz and Kahn, *Social Psychology*. In the military context, the truism articulated at almost every promotion ceremony is that past performance has demonstrated the capacity to perform well the roles of the advanced position. Fundamentally, such expressions suggests a goodness of fit to the duties at the next higher level.

one's performance in the job, as effective performance, over time, increases both the discretion as well as expectations of leaders.[20]

Taxonomies of Leadership Roles

For decades, leadership researchers[21] and practitioners[22] have identified the fundamental challenge of leadership as balancing the requirements for task oriented behaviors that accomplish the mission of the organization with human dimension requirements that accommodate the many people involved in the organization. These two challenges still exist at the strategic level, but, as discussed earlier, the strategic context is broader, more uncertain, and more complex.

Lists of role requirements for senior leaders abound and many of them differ in label or definition.[23] One categorization that might be familiar to USAWC students are the requirements for Senior Service College (SSC) graduates. Incorporating identity-development concepts into requirements for SSC graduates, Galvin proposed four persistent (i.e., context-free) role identities of senior leaders (e.g., steward of the profession, critical and reflective thinker, networked leader, and resilient leader) as well as four mission-specific identities for senior leaders within the military domain (e.g., strategic advisor and communicator, strategic planner, strategic theorist, and senior leader at the strategic level).[24] These identities help orient aspiring senior leaders to the individual transitions they must make as they move

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[20] Donald C. Hambrick and Sydney Finkelstein, "Managerial Discretion: A Bridge between Polar Views of Organizational Outcomes," in L.L. Cummings and B.M. Staw (Eds.), *Research in Organizational Behavior*, Volume 9 (Greenwich, TT: JAI Press), 369-406.

[21] Kurt Lewin, Ronald Lippitt, and R.K. White, "Patterns of Aggressive Behavior in Experimentally Created Social Climates," *Journal of Social Psychology* 10, 271-301; John K. Hemphill and Alvin E. Coons. "Development of the Leader Behavior Description Questionnaire," in Ralph M. Stogdill & Alvin E. Coons (Eds.), *Leader Behavior: Its Description and Measurement* (Columbus: Ohio State University, Bureau of Business Research, 1957).

[22] Barnard, *The Functions of the Executive*; Robert M. Gates, *A Passion for Leadership: Lessons on Change and Reform from Fifty Years of Public Service* (New York: Vintage, 2017).

[23] Researchers vary in role descriptions because of varying methods used in their development or because of imprecise definitions of behavior and effectiveness. Biographies add realism to lists of required behaviors, but are also limited because they applied only to a single person in (generally) a single context. Yukl, *Leadership in Organizations* provides a broader discussion.

[24] Thomas P. Galvin, *Enhancing Identity Development at Senior Service Colleges* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 2016).

from organizational to senior leadership.[25] As such, Galvin's role identities orient USAWC education and transitioning students toward broad strategic leader duties. This chapter, however, takes a broader perspective and attempts to identify the behavioral roles inherent in senior leader responsibilities. Towards that end, then, the classic work by Henry Mintzberg provides solid foundation.

Mintzberg's framework is probably the most recognized framework of strategic roles within the executive literature. It balances the requirements to focus both inside and outside of the organization. It is specific enough for senior leaders to identify required behaviors, but is general enough to be applied to multiple positions of strategic responsibility across organizations and even nations. Mintzberg identified ten CEO roles in three categories: interpersonal, informational, and decisional.[26] Because of their breadth and applicability, Mintzberg's class work in executive roles serves as the foundation for this chapter.

Interpersonal Roles

Interpersonal roles are rooted in the senior leader's formal authority but are exercised in both formal and informal contexts. As such, as interpersonal roles affect relationships both internal and external to the organization. Mintzberg proposes three interpersonal roles—figurehead, leader, and liaison. At first glance, these roles will be familiar to unit leaders, but at the strategic level these roles are far broader in scope and complexity.

The *figurehead* role reflects the leader as a symbol of the organization to both internal and external audiences. It includes participation in ceremonial functions and other duties as the representation of not just the leader's own organization but the defense establishment as a whole. These activities include, among many others, attendance at changes of command, prominent social affairs, and Congressional hearings.

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[25] Scott Snook, Herminia Ibarra, and Laura Ramo, "Identity-Based Leader Development," in Nitin Nohria and Rakesh Khurana (Eds.), *Handbook of Leadership Theory and Practice* (Boston, MA: Harvard Business Press, 2010), 657-678.

[26] Mintzberg, *Nature of Managerial Work*; Mintzberg, *Mintzberg on Management.*

Directed internally, the *leader* role describes the leader's relationship and use of power with subordinates in formal (e.g., hiring, training, meetings, etc.) and informal (e.g., socializing, mentoring, etc.) interactions. These influencing activities focus on accomplishing organizational tasks while also aligning subordinates' personal objectives with organizational goals. Formal and informal activities might include the development of the senior staff team or subordinate commanders as well as actions to establish and maintain a positive command climate. Within military units, the leaders' roles are more direct. Supervisors can issue directives and personally follow up to ensure compliance. At the strategic level, where organizations are dispersed globally and leaders have far greater responsibilities outside the organization, the leader role is performed more indirectly.

Leaders assume the *liaison* role when interacting with contacts outside of the leader's organization. In other words, leaders focus on the development and maintenance of beneficial relationships with influential external stakeholders. More generally, leaders are liaisons when they engage others in contexts where the leader's formal authority is less relevant. In the military, such activities might include informal interactions with the community, other military leaders, members of Congress, the media, or industry representatives and contractors. Junior leaders rarely perform this role, or do so under severe constraints. In contrast, senior leaders exercise this role routinely.

Consider how the interpersonal roles complement each other. A figurehead who fails to be an effective liaison may find it more difficult to serve as a formal representative of the organization. A second example would suggest that a failure in the leader role because of toxic relationship with subordinates can negatively affect the ability to connect with subordinates' families (a liaison role) or to leverage a subordinate's relationship with a powerful external stakeholder.

Informational Roles

Due to a large number of interpersonal contacts, the senior leader manages a vast amount of information, probably more than any other organizational member. Mintzberg argues that

information management is predominant to three CEO roles — monitor, disseminator, and spokesperson.

The *monitor* actively and continuously scans the organizational environment--internal and external--to gain information. With the most extensive network in the organization, the leader is uniquely positioned to obtain crucial data from multiple stakeholders through interactions down, up, and out. Leaders typically travel extensively and have the opportunity and responsibility to formally and informally gather information across the entire organization and the context in which it operates. However, at the strategic level it is difficult if not impossible to sustain a complete picture of the organizational context: the organizations are too large and complex. Senior leaders must act on information that is increasingly incomplete and dynamic.

The information gathered by the senior leader can only be acted upon when it is disseminated. As *disseminators*, leaders first decide what information to share, and what to retain. Then, leaders pass information to and between subordinate work elements for their awareness and possible action. Senior leaders use a variety of methods to keep their subordinates informed from formal statements, orders and meetings to personal communications with other senior leaders either orally or through digital/written means. Mintzberg's research found that most senior leaders prefer oral communication exchange. However, in large, complex organizations, how does the senior leader know how thoroughly the message has passed down to all members?

While the disseminator role is generally directed internally, the *spokesperson* role highlights the importance of external communications. As *spokesperson*, senior leaders seek to influence the attitudes and expectations of those outside the organization. Note that this role often compliments the responsibilities of the *figurehead*. Whether celebrating a great success or managing a crisis, senior leaders inform external audiences, shaping outside judgments of the organization's identity, value and effectiveness.

Again, note how the informational roles interact. The *monitor* provides the opportunity to garner significant information that can provide both short and long-term benefit to the organization. Senior leaders have the unique responsibility to interpret such

information to determine its usefulness for organizational action.[27] Leaders must *disseminate* that information in a timely manner, providing organizational subsystems the opportunity act on it. Moreover, the *spokesperson* must keep powerful external stakeholders informed about potential changes in the environment that can influence organizational action. Information exchanged with both internal and external stakeholders can help identify future threats and opportunities for the organization.

Decisional Roles

Information is most valuable when it is used to make good decisions. Crucial, strategic choices are often reserved for the most senior leaders in organizations. The *decisional* roles highlight those responsibilities--entrepreneur, disturbance handler, resource allocator, and negotiator.

As *entrepreneurs,* leaders are responsible for conceiving, designing, and executing change in their organizations. The *entrepreneur* responds to perceived threats and opportunities (hearkening back to the monitor role) by seeking to change the organization or the environment to create new alignments between organizational capabilities and environmental opportunities. General George Marshall's transformation of the Army prior to World War II, Admiral Hyman Rickover's development of a nuclear navy, and General Curtis Lemay's expansion of the Strategic Air Command are examples of military leaders in the entrepreneur role.

Some events in the organizational environment cannot be anticipated. Complex systems like large organizations are subject to what the sociologist Charles Perrow calls "normal accidents." Crises will occur, but where and when are unknown. As *disturbance handler*, the leader determines how the organization responds to adverse circumstances. These "disturbances" may come from inside or outside the organization (e.g., a natural disaster, a terrorist attack, a financial scandal, a failure of discipline or safety, etc.). An organization truism states, *success has*

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[27] Richard L. Daft and Karl E. Weick, "Toward A Model of Organizations As Interpretation Systems," *The Academy of Management Review* 9, no. 2 (April 1984): 284-295.

many fathers, but failure is an orphan. In practice, then, when an organization is confronted with failures or tragedies, regardless of their origin, responsibility for solving the problem stops on the leader's desk.

As *resource allocator*, the leader prioritizes the distribution of scarce resources, determining which projects are "bills" to pay and which projects are "bill-payers." Maintaining the long view while simultaneously meeting the short-term demands placed on the organization requires distinct skills and a well-balanced approach. Yet resource allocation is not just about the uses of organizational money, equipment, and people; it is also about how leaders use their personal resources. Relatedly, Mintzberg suggests that, "The most important resource the manager allocates is his or her own time."[28] In other words, leaders must choose which meetings to attend and which to skip, which subordinates to mentor and which to leave to others, and so on. In this sense, the *resource allocator* also determines how much time a leader devotes to the various roles described in this paper.

As *negotiator*, leaders manage the competing interests of key external and internal stakeholders in important decisions. Externally, leaders must maintain the flow of key resources into the organization (e.g., financial capital, talent, and even time). Internally, they must also balance the interests of multiple stakeholders, including boards of directors, unions, competitors, suppliers – the list is extensive. Consider how a service chief negotiates for resources amidst the competing interests of other services, the Congress, and the internal constituencies of the service itself. Other examples of the strategic military leader as *negotiator* include DoD strategy and resource allocation discussions, base reallocation and closure discussions, and determining the conditions associated with allocating responsibilities among Allied Nations.

Effective leaders make decisions to provide the organization a sustainable competitive advantage. Whether a decision is meant to align the organization with external opportunities, respond to a crisis, or allocate scarce resources within the organization, most

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[28] Mintzberg, *Mintzberg on Management,* 20.

decisions at the strategic level will involve some form of negotiation. Stakeholders have too much power for senior leaders to believe that they can arbitrarily decide major organizational activities. The political environment in which these leaders operate demands more subtle approaches to decision-making.

Caveat: The complexity of competing roles

Strategic leadership literature abounds with stories of executives who must balance opposing demands within a particular role. The resource allocator role, for example, highlights the reality that there is never enough money to meet resource demands, so leaders make choices and accept risk. One additional complexity of role frameworks is the recognition that the roles also compete with each other.[29]

Robert E. Quinn highlights this tension, arguing that senior leaders must provide for both structure and predictability as well as adaptability and flexibility while simultaneously focusing both inside and outside of the organization.[30] Even a cursory review of service chief duties validates these constant pressures. Executive leadership research suggests that one's balance across all roles, over time, results in more effective senior leader behavior.[31] To achieve this balance, though, strategic leaders must "get above the fray" of day-to-day activities to understand the organization and corresponding senior leader responsibilities in both time and space, thereby better "seeing" their personal obligations to help move the organization forward.

SUMMARY

Leader effectiveness impacts the performance of organizations.[32] As leaders transition to responsibilities of strategic leadership, the astute leader recognizes and embraces the additional duties inherent in their new roles.

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[29] Quinn, *Beyond Rational Management*.

[30] Ibid.

[31] Stuart L. Hart and Robert E. Quinn, "Roles Executives Play: CEOs, Behavioral Complexity, and Firm Performance," *Human Relations* 46, no. 5 (January 1993): 543-574.

[32] David V. Day and Robert G. Lord, "Executive Leadership and Organizational Performance: Suggestions for a New Theory and Methodology," *Journal of Management* 14, no. 3 (September 1988), 453-464.

The challenges and opportunities confronting strategic leaders are complex and far-reaching both in time and in magnitude. Leaders at the strategic level often operate with great discretion. They represent the organization, shape it, and orient it to the future, all while managing a myriad internal and external relationships. In executing these responsibilities, strategic leaders must recognize the numerous expectations of their behavior. To that end, this chapter introduced and provided an overview of senior leader roles that effective executives should strongly consider. As a starting point for a productive analysis of the demands placed on strategic leaders, Mintzberg's framework is a useful approach to understanding these responsibilities.

Chapter 6. Senior Leader Competencies

Douglas Waters[1]

Organizational theorist Richard Boyatzis defined competencies as "the underlying characteristics of a person that lead to or cause effective and outstanding performance."[2] Like skills or abilities, competencies are differentiated from inherited traits in that they can be developed and improved within motivated individuals. While education can aid in competency development, reflective experience is the primary means that individuals both acquire and improve competencies.[3]

Leadership competencies fall into three clusters: conceptual, technical and interpersonal.[4] While these three categories are important for leaders at all echelons in an organization, there are qualitative differences between their manifestations among subordinate units and manifestations at the strategic level. This is predominately driven by the leader's environment, as the increasing complexity and greatly expanded scope of responsibilities at higher echelons requires new or qualitatively different applications of existing competencies to emerge.

Strategic conceptual competencies include the thinking skills needed to understand and deal with the complex and ambiguous strategic world. Technical competencies involve the skillful application of both specialized knowledge and organizational resources to accomplish objectives; at the strategic level, this includes understanding the political, cultural and economic systems that impact the organization and how to interact with, influence and/or change them. Interpersonal competencies include effective team-building, negotiation skills, and consensus

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[1] This chapter is an update to Chapter 4 of the *Strategic Leadership Primer's* 3rd edition, Stephen J. Gerras (ed.).

[2] Richard E. Boyatzis, *The Competent Manager: A Model for Effective Performance* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1982), 21.

[3] David D. Day, Michelle M. Harrison and Stanley M. Halpin, *An Integrative Approach to Leader Development: Connecting Adult Development, Identity and Expertise* (Taylor and Francis, New York, NY, 2009), 131-132.

[4] Robert L. Katz previously described these categories as "technical, human and conceptual." See Robert L. Katz, "Skills of an Effective Administrator," *Harvard Business Review* 33, no. 1 (1955): 33-42.

building both internal and external to the organization, plus the capacity to communicate effectively.

Conceptual Competencies

Strategic leaders are faced with an environment of difficult, competing issues, few of which have clear solutions and all of which pose risks or challenges. Strategic issues are generally complex and ill-defined,[5] and most information available is ambiguous and incomplete. Most possible courses of action have such complex second- and third-order effects that a completely accurate prediction of their outcomes is not possible. To be successful in such an environment, strategic leaders need sophisticated conceptual abilities. These strategic conceptual competencies can be aggregated under two categories: strategic thinking and problem management.

Strategic thinking

Strategic leaders rely on highly developed conceptual abilities to facilitate good judgment and inform decision-making. For senior leaders, this competency is normally referred to as "strategic thinking," and it is associated with functioning at the highest echelons of an organization.[6] Strategic thinking has been described as being intent-focused, future oriented, and involving an enterprise-wide, integrated perspective; it is ultimately about obtaining competitive advantage for the whole organization.[7] Strategic thinking relies upon the application of cognitive competencies (e.g., critical, creative and systems thinking) that begin developing in the tactical and operational environments of organizations, as well as more developed frames of reference and enterprise understanding that come through experience.

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[5] Originally coined as "wicked problems" in social policy planning literature. See Horst W. J. Rittel and Melvin M. Webber, "Planning Problems are Wicked Problems," in Nigel Cross (Ed.), *Developments in Design Methodology* (Chichester, NY: John Wiley & Sons, 1984), 135-144.

[6] Not exclusively so however. Individuals at lower organizational levels can still be strategic thinkers, although their lack of experience and enterprise knowledge tends to result in a more narrow application.

[7] Douglas E. Waters, "Understanding Strategic Thinking and Developing Strategic Leaders," *Joint Force Quarterly* 63 (4th Quarter 2011): 115.

Strategic thinking both shapes and is reliant on three critical competencies that are essential to the strategic leader: the ability *to envision the future*; the sophisticated *use of theory*, and the application of *reflective judgment*.

The capability to formulate and articulate strategic aims and key concepts is perhaps the strategic leader's most significant capacity. This demands an understanding of the interaction of ends, ways, and means as they come together to form a strategy. A staff of strategists may develop and refine the strategy, but the strategic leader provides the direction, the concept, and the intent. In order to do so, the leader must be able to *envision the future*. This involves understanding and evaluating the relationship between the organizations' past, the present, and significant trends in its environment to create a depiction of the future that is aspirational, attainable and grounded within the organizations' historical context.[8]

A senior leader must not only have the ability to envision the future, but must also work proactively to shape the future environment to enhance goal attainment. At the strategic level, goals may be far-reaching and should be formulated to accommodate contingencies that reflect the organization's relationship to a changing environment. This requires the thinking and processing of information creatively outside established boundaries. It is an ability to see the organization and environment not as it is but rather as it ought to be.

Related to the ability to envision the future, the *use of theory* becomes increasingly important as the leader moves higher in the organization's hierarchy**.** The complexity of the strategic environment makes direct observation and interpretation of events difficult. The actions and motivations of actors and organizations can be unpredictable and difficult to discern without the use of a theoretical perspective to aid in interpretation. This can involve the application of established theory that the strategic leader finds valid, such as the use of international relations theory to interpret and predict geopolitical

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[8] Jeanne M. Liedtka, "Strategic Thinking: Can it be Taught?" *Long Range Planning* 31, no. 1 (1998): 123 refers to this as "thinking in time."

events, or more often the use of individually derived theories based on experience.

Strategic thinker development over time is facilitated by increasingly sophisticated frames of reference.[9] Every leader builds a complex knowledge structure over time from schooling, personal experience, and self-study. For the strategic leader, this knowledge structure is a "map" of the strategic world; it is a dynamic representation of the significant factors in the strategic environment with cause and effect interrelationships. The strategic leader, equipped with a well-developed frame of reference, interprets the environment and recognizes patterns that may have no discernable meaning to subordinates. A frame of reference therefore acts as a theoretical basis for observation, insight and prediction.

As important as theory and well-developed frames of reference are to the strategic thinker, they are in and of themselves insufficient, and, if used reflexively, can become limiting.[10] All theories are provisional, and their outputs demand scrutiny. Additionally, the complex, ill-structured nature of strategic issues confounds attempts to "template" solutions based on cognitive maps grounded in prior experience, no matter how comprehensive. While there likely will be similarities that the strategic thinker can leverage, the essential uniqueness of these type of problems requires the leader to be open to new input and interpretations from others, including mentors, subordinates and peers. The willingness to rethink past experiences and evaluate their relevance in light of the introduction of new data and interpretations is the essence of *reflective judgment*.

Problem management

Management of strategic problems deals with issues that are competing, that have manifold implications which are often difficult to understand completely, and that have potentially catastrophic outcomes if not resolved carefully. There are no

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[9] Also referred to as mental maps, schema or knowledge structures. For more see Christiane Demers, *Organizational Change Theories: A Synthesis* (Sage Publications, Los Angeles, 2007), 61-71.

[10] James P. Walsh, "Managerial and Organizational Cognition: Notes from a Trip Down Memory Lane," *Organization Science* 6, no. 3 (May-June 1995): 282.

"right" answers. Many issues are not so much a choice between "right and wrong" as a choice between "right and right" (or even "acceptable and okay"). This involves applying past experiences, identifying patterns, discarding non useable data, understanding second- and third-order effects, maintaining flexibility, and knowing what is an acceptable outcome for the system as a whole. It also involves working and thinking interactively and not solving problems individually.

Strategic level problem management implies more incremental decision making than what lower echelon leaders are accustomed to. Problem management involves "massaging" the problems towards the desired outcome—making adjustments, modifying the initial approach, and discarding alternatives that inhibit progress. Many of the most significant problems at the strategic level require this approach because simple and direct alternative courses of action do not exist. Leaders at lower echelons develop alternative courses of action, assess probability of success, and pursue the selected course of action to fruition. This differentiation between problem management and linear cause and effect decision making is a major element in the transition from direct to more indirect leadership.

Technical Competencies

Technical competencies at the strategic level differ significantly from those skills required at direct or organizational levels. While the technical skills used at lower echelons (e.g., tactical and operational warfighting) are important elements of the senior leader's frame of reference, they are less relevant for tasks at the strategic level. Technical competencies include an understanding of complex, adaptive systems, the ability to diagnose and lead enterprise-level change, and appreciating the broader political and social systems within which the organization operates.

Systems understanding

At lower echelons, leaders understand how their organizations operate and how to foster conditions that enable them to be more effective. At the strategic level there is decreased concentration on internal process and system integration and

increased concentration on how the organization fits within the total Department of Defense (DoD) framework and into the broader international arena. Organizational systems have complex inter-relationships, and are characterized by behavior that is highly adaptive in nature. Strategic leaders must wrestle with identifying system boundaries and determining relevant inter-relationships within and across these boundaries. In this environment, numerous reporting and coordinating relationships are in play. Thus strategic leaders must understand their separate roles, the boundaries of these roles, their demands and constraints, and the expectations of other departments and agencies.

Political competence within the joint, interagency, intergovernmental, multinational (JIIM) environment.

The ability to participate effectively in the JIIM environment is predicated on an understanding of the various actors, issues and agendas that characterize such a diverse entity. This mix of cultural, experiential and viewpoint diversity requires sophisticated political instincts in order to navigate successfully. Political competence does not imply being partisan, but refers to the ability to see issues and events through a political lens to better understand motivations, rationale and red lines.

For example, senior leaders must successfully participate in interagency processes in support of national security policy formulation and execution. Just as important is the capacity for interacting with the legislative branch. Political competence is necessary to understand senior civilian perspectives and provide relevant advice in policy and strategy deliberations. Leaders at the strategic level present a balanced argument of national security requirements, benefits, costs, and risks, but to do so effectively, they must also factor in their civilian superiors multifaceted requirements, many of them political in nature.

National force projection necessitates an understanding and integration of joint and combined operations. Different nations have different cultures, operating practices and principles which impact operations of a combined force. Similarly, each Service has developed a different culture, vocabulary, and expectation for its members. Strategic leaders must recognize these cultural and

political differences, and then communicate and act in a nuanced way to gain the full understanding and commitment of seniors, peers and subordinates within the JIIM environment.

Strategic change management

Leaders facilitate change throughout their organizations. However, in contrast to efforts at lower echelons, change management at the strategic level is fundamentally different. Strategic leaders must be comfortable with the nuances of organizational culture and the concept of alignment if they hope to lead a successful change effort in the enterprise environment. At lower echelons, leaders can order their subordinates to make desired behavioral or process changes and then directly monitor them to ensure compliance. Strategic leaders within the DoD have vastly greater spans of control and do not directly interact with most members of their organizations on a regular basis. They therefore must act and influence indirectly.

Strategic change management within very large hierarchical organizations is a difficult task. There are significant challenges with communication, competing agendas, and overcoming resistance. To lead a successful strategic change effort first requires cultural, systems and process diagnosis. Is the organizational culture suited to attainment of the current vision? Are systems, processes and structures aligned to the mission and the requirements of the future environment? If not, then the strategic leader must intervene and proactively align culture, systems, structure and process to ensure organizational effectiveness and future success.

Interpersonal Competencies

Interpersonal competencies are critical to leaders at all echelons. While their relative importance is stable across units, there is a qualitative shift in the nature of these competencies at the strategic level. Leadership at lower echelons involves more hands-on interaction with direct subordinates, and interpersonal competencies are necessarily focused on these critical *intragroup* relationships. Although still relevant, senior leader focus is more on relationships between groups and stakeholders and how to

better manage *intergroup* dynamics.[11] Strategic interpersonal competencies include building consensus within the organization, negotiating with external agencies or organizations to shape or influence the external environment, building senior leader teams, and communicating internally and externally.

Consensus building

In contrast with leaders at lower echelons, strategic leaders devote far more of their time dealing with outside organizations. Consensus on an issue is necessary if coordinated and effective action is to be taken. Consensus building is a complicated process based on effective reasoning, logic, and negotiation which may take place over an extended period. Consensus is not unanimous agreement. It is more about what all parties can live with than what any one party would prefer. It requires involving all stakeholders, encouraging input, making problems visible, and making decisions collaboratively.

Consensus building is different from directing or commanding. While strategic leaders may issue direct orders, such orders have less force in the complex strategic world. For example, in working with peers, it is imperative to reach consensus, as peers will not respond to orders. Ultimately, consensus building requires the ability to influence key stakeholders through logic and trust built over time. In contrast to direct obedience to orders, the process of consensus building only ensures that effective reasoning has taken place and that contentious issues have likely been resolved. Even when consensus is achieved, the leader and organization must continuously work to ensure that "apparent" consensus bears out in the actions of the consensus stakeholders. Trust and strong working relationships are central to this process.

Negotiation

As stated earlier, many relationships at the strategic level are lateral and without clear subordination. In many of these relationships strategic leaders must rely heavily on negotiating skills. Successful negotiation requires a range of interpersonal

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[11] Katz, "Skills."

skills. Perhaps the most important is the ability to stand firm on nonnegotiable points while simultaneously communicating respect for other participants. Personal attributes underlying this ability require skills in listening, in diagnosing unspoken interests and agendas, and the capacity to detach oneself personally from the negotiation process. The essence of successful negotiating is differentiating true interests from rigid positions, demonstrating a willingness to compromise when interests aren't threatened, and working collaboratively and creatively to increase value and attain mutually agreeable ends that further those interests.[12]

Senior leader team building

The volatility associated with the strategic environment has mandated a shift in how senior leaders discharge their responsibilities. "The Great Leader" view of strategic leadership, where a dynamic and effective CEO takes the reins of the organization and leads it to higher levels of success has given way to the realization that no single individual can do it all alone.[13] The rapidly changing, information-laden environment mandates reliance on senior leader teams to sustain competitive advantage.

Senior leader teams differ from those found in subordinate units. They frequently consist of high-performing peers from across the Army and DoD, many possessing significantly different perspectives shaped by the organizations they represent. Team leaders must work to develop trust within the group, and establish a leadership dynamic characterized by expert and referent power in lieu of a reliance on simple positional power that is less effective at this level. The team leader must demonstrate self-awareness about their own strengths, weaknesses and biases, and at the same time exhibit empathy for other team member opinions, perspectives and agendas. Ultimately, success will hinge on the leader's ability to enable a

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[12] Roger Fisher and William Ury, *Getting to Yes: Negotiating Agreement Without Giving In* (Penguin Books, New York, 2011), 11-15.

[13] R. Duane Ireland and Michael A. Hitt, "Achieving and Maintaining Strategic Competitiveness in the 21st Century: The Role of Strategic Leadership," *Academy of Management Executive* 19, no. 4 (November 2005): 65.

team climate that values candor, collaboration, performance and ultimately, task attainment.[14]

Communication

Internal to the organization, strategic leaders communicate through a variety of direct and indirect means. Observers are keenly sensitive to nuances of meaning. Effective communication within the organization is important to changing, or even maintaining, direction or policy. If change is desired, large organizations can be steered on a new course only very deliberately because of their inertia. When leaders attempt change through policy, regulation, or vision, their communications are interpreted at every level. Thus, care in choice of words is essential to ensuring the desired message is received.

External to the organization, strategic leaders communicate with Congress, government agencies, national political leaders, and their constituents. This is accomplished through a variety of means. Through writing, meetings, interviews for news media, or through public speaking engagements, strategic leaders communicate for the organization. This requires clarity of thought, direction, and process. Possessing these communicative attributes, coupled with a high degree of persuasiveness, provides the leader with the necessary tools to build support, build consensus, and negotiate successfully.

Summary

Strategic leader competencies fall under three broad categories: conceptual, technical, and interpersonal. These competencies are supported by a broad and rich frame of reference developed throughout the leader's life that enables the leader to deal with tremendously complex issues and events. Although theoretical and historical readings can make salient the knowledge, skills, and abilities related to any strategic leader competency, most often these competencies will be developed through hands-on experiences, especially if linked to some sort of

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[14] Stephen J. Gerras and Murf Clark, *Effective Team leadership: A Competitive Advantage*, Faculty Paper (Carlisle, PA: U.S. Army War College, August, 2011), http://www.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a595113.pdf (accessed April 24, 2018).

candid feedback mechanism from a trusted mentor. Future strategic leaders should balance identified weaknesses with challenging jobs and opportunities in order to stretch and develop current skills.

Chapter 7. Senior Leader Character

Maurice L. Sipos, Nate Hunsinger, and Peter R. Sniffin[1]

> *Most people can bear adversity. But if you wish to know what a man really is, give him power. This is the supreme test.*
> — *Robert G. Ingersoll on Abraham Lincoln*[2]

Great philosophers, theologians, and psychologists have studied morality for thousands of years. Although Aristotle, Plato, and Socrates debated the assumptions underlying moral ideals, they agreed that moral standards existed as a part of the natural world and that humans could learn them through the process of reason.[3] According to Aristotle, "Character is that which reveals moral purpose, exposing the class of things a man chooses or avoids."[4] In the more modern context of leadership, scholars label character as the collection of values that define who we are and cite character as the "essential ingredient of enlightened senior leadership, especially of military leaders."[5]

More often than not, discussions of character focus on destructive behaviors that often derail careers and destroy trust and confidence in organizations and their leaders. Positive aspects of character, however, allow leaders to differentiate between right and wrong while maintaining the moral courage needed to take appropriate action in the face of adversity. While easy to say, history provides ample evidence of highly successful political, corporate, and military leaders whose lapses of judgment destroyed their legacies and shook the public's confidence in the institutions they led.[6] Such failures indicate a

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[2] Robert G. Ingersoll, "Motley and Monarch," *The North American Review* 141 (December 1885), 531. Similar quotes are frequently misattributed to Abraham Lincoln.

[3] David Day, Michelle M. Harrison and Stanley M. Halpin, *An Integrative Approach to Leader Development: Connecting Adult Development, Identity, and Expertise* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 72.

[4] Ibid., 71.

[5] Montgomery C. Meigs, "Generalship: Qualities, Instincts, and Character," *Parameters* 31, no. 2 (Summer 2001), 4-5.

[6] Standards of Conduct Office, *Encyclopedia of Ethical Failure* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense Office of General Counsel, October 2014).

misalignment between individual and organizational character values and emphasize the critical role that leaders play in modeling ethical behaviors and positive character traits for their followers to emulate.

Army leaders at all levels are responsible for developing and maintaining high moral standards to earn the trust of the American people and serve as stewards of the profession.[7] General Mark A. Milley, Chief of Staff of the Army, underscored the importance of developing leaders of character who "will not only be responsible and empowered, but they will be accountable for both the results they achieve and the values they hold."[8] The Army defines character as one's "true nature including identity, sense of purpose, values, virtues, morals, and conscience."[9] The problem with such a broad definition, however, is that it can mean different things to different people. Such generality can lead to disagreement over which facets of character are important for leadership effectiveness, confusion about how to measure character, and debate over how character should be developed (see Chapter 8).[10] There is little doubt, however, that a misalignment of character values can undermine the trust required to build and maintain teams capable of executing mission command.

In this chapter, we posit that character is the product of individual traits, worldview, life experiences, and environmental factors displayed through actions, decisions, and interpersonal relationships. At the strategic level, the environment places additional demands on leaders that may require them to refine their identity, frame of reference, and critical thinking strategies to address dynamic situations without defaulting to instinctive approaches that were effective at tactical and operational levels. The goal of this chapter is to examine character using a framework

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[7] Meigs, "Generalship," 5.

[8] Mark A. Milley, "Remarks to the Association of the United States Army," AUSA Dwight David Eisenhower Luncheon, Washington, D.C., October 4, 2016. Transcript available at http://wpswps.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/20161004_CSA_AUSA_Eisenhower_Transcripts.pdf.

[9] U.S. Department of the Army, *The Army Profession*, Army Doctrine Reference Publication 1 (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Army, 2015).

[10] Gerard Seijts, Jeffrey Gandz, Mary Crossan, and Mark Reno, "Character Matters: Character Dimensions' Impact on Leader Performance and Outcomes." *Organizational Dynamics* 44, 65-74.

that considers both individual and situational characteristics. First, we describe how individual aspects of character impact leadership. Next, we review how the strategic environment can place unique demands on leaders that interact with personality to test their resilience and character. Finally, we discuss the role that strategic leaders play as stewards of the profession and practical implications of character development.

Individual Considerations

Researchers have used a variety of approaches to study character and leadership. Some researchers focus on character strengths and their influence on organizational climate,[11] whereas others focus more on character flaws that lead to poor judgment and career derailment.[12] Still others focus on how aspects of character relate to leadership effectiveness.[13] When it comes to succeeding at the strategic level, however, leaders must be aware of their natural tendencies to balance their character strengths and weaknesses.

It is not surprising that individuals display aspects of their character in various degrees. The most strongly expressed character traits often define an individual or who they are perceived to be, whereas the least expressed may require more energy for one to display. Character strengths often reflect people at their best, whereas character weaknesses often reflect people at their worst. Researchers often group character strengths into factors such as wisdom, courage, humanity, justice, transcendence, accountability, integrity, drive, and humility.[14] Of the character strengths studied, accountability, integrity, and drive were rated as the most beneficial across levels of

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[11] See Christopher Peterson and Martin Seligman, *Character Strengths and Virtues: A Handbook and Classification* (New York: Oxford, American Psychological Association, 2004) for a review. A free character strengths test is available at https://www.viacharacter.org/.

[12] Tomas Chamorro-Premuzic, "Could Your Personality Derail Your Career?" *Harvard Business Review* , September-October 2017); Robert Hogan and Joyce Hogan, "Assessing Leadership: A view from the Dark Side," *International Journal of Selection and Assessment,* 9 (2001): 40–51.

[13] Timothy A. Judge, Joyce E. Bono, Remus Ilies, and Megan W. Gerhardt, "Personality and Leadership: A Qualitative and Quantitative Review," *Journal of Appled Psychology 87*, no. 4 (2002): 765-780.

[14] Willibald Ruch and René T. Proyer, "Mapping Strengths Into Virtues: The Relation of the 24 VIA-Strengths to Six Ubiquitous Virtues," *Frontiers in Psychology* 6 (2015): 460-http://dx.doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2015.00460; Also Seijts et al., "Character Matters."

leadership,[15] whereas integrity was most consistently related to executive performance.[16] In addition, strategic leaders rated transcendence (vision) and courage as important character traits leading to positive outcomes.[17] Taken together, these findings suggest that accountability, integrity, drive, vision, and courage may influence the culture of trust within an organization.

In contrast, character weaknesses left unchecked can derail careers and devastate organizations.[18] Often called dark traits, character weaknesses (e.g., callousness, manipulation, and impulsivity) can become problematic if they cause disruptive workplace behaviors that can derail even the most successful and effective leaders.[19] Although dark traits combined with innate strengths can be effective for unit leaders, they are often associated with toxic leadership as individuals gain power and influence.[20] Consequently, leaders must develop their character strengths to mitigate any weaknesses exposed by the strategic environment.[21]

Environmental Considerations

Students attending senior service college often hear that the knowledge, skills, and abilities that led to their success at the tactical and operational levels are not necessarily sufficient for them to succeed at the strategic level.[22] The strategic environment itself is complex, dynamic, and competitive (see Chapter 2) and may require leaders to develop new or enhance existing competencies to excel at this level (see Chapter 5). Moreover, there are aspects the strategic environment itself that may challenge a leader's character and influence their effectiveness.

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[15] Seijts et al., "Character Matters."

[16] John J. Sosik, William A. Gentry, and Jae Uk Chun, "The value of virtue in the upper echelons: A multisource examination of executive character strengths and performance," *The Leadership Quarterly, 23,* no. 3 (June 2012): 367-382.

[17] Seijts et al., "Character Matters."

[18] Chamorro-Premuzic, "Could Your Personality?"

[19] Ibid.

[20] Delroy L. Paulhus, "Toward a Taxonomy of Dark Personalities," *Current Directions in Psychological Science, 23,* no. 6 (2014): 421–426.

[21] Chamorro-Premuzic, "Could Your Personality?" 4.

[22] George McAleer, "Leaders in Transition: Advice From Colin Powell and Other Strategic Thinkers," *Military Psychology 15,* no. 4 (January 2003): 309-322.

Because people tend to judge character based on behavior, one must consider how the strategic environment can influence a leader's behavior.[23] Aspects of the environment can define situational strength to influence behavior or impact decisions in a way that reveals character.[24] As leaders transition from tactical to strategic levels, situations tend to become weaker in some ways and stronger others, thereby revealing one's character over time (see Figure 1). Specifically, situational strength can be described by its clarity and consistency, by constraints placed on one's freedom to make a decision, and by the consequences resulting from a decision.[25] Strong situations provide clear behavioral cues that encourage people to act according to cultural norms, whereas weak situations provide ambiguous cues that increase the likelihood that individual character rather than cultural norms impact behavioral choices.[26] Situational strength has less impact on behavior when a leader's character is aligned with organizational values. In contrast, situational strength becomes more important in preventing leaders from engaging in maladaptive behaviors when a leader's character is misaligned with organizational values. Aspects of situational strength and how they change from tactical to strategic environments are summarized in Figure 1.

Clarity

Clarity, defined as the extent to which cues about work-related responsibilities and requirements are available and understandable,[27] can be used to describe situational strength in the military context. Typically, behavioral expectations and cues at the tactical and operational levels are well defined by standard operating procedures, policies, organizational culture, and guidance from supervisors.

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[23] Rustin D. Meyer, Reeshad S. Dalal, and Richard Hermida, "A Review and Synthesis of Situational Strength in the Organizational Sciences," *Journal of Management* 36, no. 1 (2010): 121-140.

[24] Ibid, 122.

[25] Ibid., 125-127.

[26] Robert B. Kaiser and Robert Hogan, "How to (and how not to) Assess the Integrity of Managers," *Consulting Psychology Journal* 62, no. 4 (2010): 216-234.
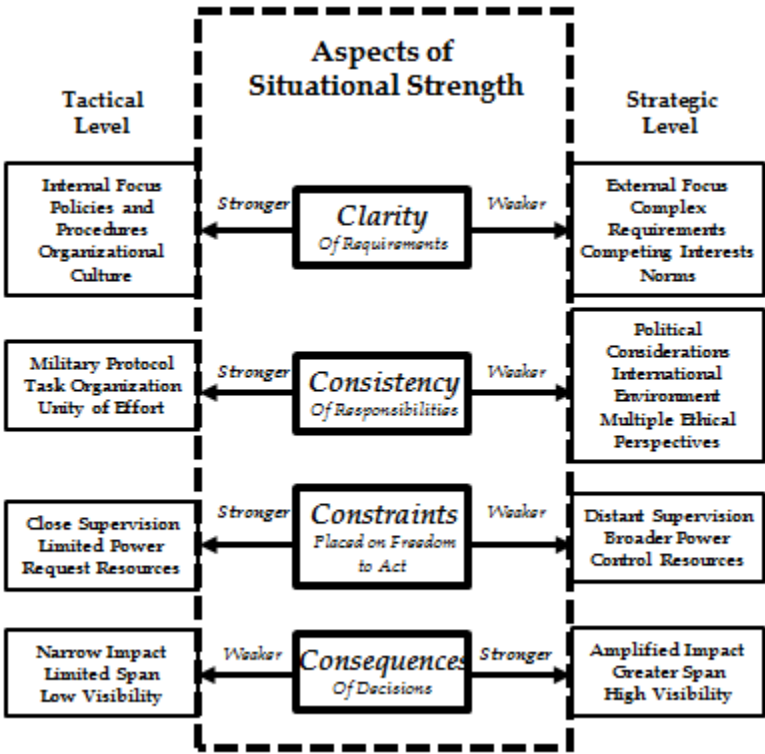
[27] Ibid, 125

Figure 1. Aspects of Situational Strength[28]

At the strategic level, however, work-related responsibilities and requirements are qualitatively more complex and often focus on the growth and future of the organization, both of which are not readily measurable during the leader's tenure.[29] Strategic leaders, often geographically separated from their supervisors, receive less guidance from their superiors than they did at tactical and operational levels. Furthermore, they often negotiate with equally influential partners with competing interests and cultural norms across international and organizational boundaries to accomplish their responsibilities and requirements. Taken together, the increased complexity of the environment, reduced supervision, competing interests, and cultural differences all

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[28] Original graphic by author.
[29] McAleer, 313.

serve to decrease the clarity of the strategic environment in a way that can test a leader's behavior and decisions.

Consistency

Situation strength can also be described by consistency, which is defined by how aligned cues about work-related responsibilities and requirements are with each other.[30] At the tactical and operational level, information and data received is generally filtered through a hierarchy of robust organizational policies and procedures that are consistent over time and marginally impacted by external organizations. At the strategic level, however, this all changes when senior leaders shift from military protocols and procedures to more political and international environments where guidance can change rapidly and take many forms. The scope and volume of information alone can be overwhelming and can force senior leaders to rely on intuition, heuristics and other decision-making shortcuts to deal with inconsistent environmental cues. Furthermore, the types of decisions senior leaders make may no longer be right versus wrong, but may reflect more difficult choices that require them to consider multiple ethical perspectives.

Constraints

Constraints, which reflect how much autonomy or power one has to make decisions and take action, can also be used to describe situation strength. Organizational constraints (based on formal structure or bureaucracy), legal constraints, fiscal constraints, formal policies and procedures, close supervision, and monitoring all increase situation strength.[31] Individuals at the tactical and operational levels are more likely to display positive aspects of their character when operating in such constrained environments. When these constraints are loosened or when leaders attempt to "work around" them, we can see behavior that can expose their character flaws.[32] For example, by virtue of their success, strategic leaders often have greater autonomy, privileged access, and unrestrained control of organizational resources.

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[30] Meyer, Dalal, and Hermida, "A Review," 126.

[31] Ibid., 126.

[32] Kaiser and Hogan, "How to (and how not to),"220.

When left unchecked, strategic leaders have to rely on their own judgment and discipline instead of being constrained by strong external forces.[33]

Consequences

Finally, situation strength can be described by consequences, which focus on the extent to which one's decisions have important positive or negative consequences for oneself, others, or the organization.[34] Unlike the previous aspects of situation strength, the greater consequences of decisions made at the strategic level help align individual character values with organizational values in a way that increases the likelihood of positive behavioral outcomes. At the strategic level, senior leaders have "amplified impact" and the potential to "do more good for more people," and conversely, the potential to "do greater harm by modeling poor behavior, violating ethical standards."[35] For example, if a leader thinks that they will not be held accountable for their actions, they are less likely to be constrained by organizational values.[36] The scale of their decisions, in terms of both people and resources, requires strategic leaders to rely on a deep-seated value system and interpersonal skills that are tested by the strategic environment.

When Individual and Environmental Considerations Collide

Given the increasingly stressful environments inherent to strategic leadership, self-awareness may help leaders mitigate the physical and emotional costs of operating at the strategic level. Strategic leaders must be aware of their natural tendencies in

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[33] Dean C. Ludwig and Clinton O. Longenecker, "The Bathsheba Syndrome: the Ethical Failure of Successful Leaders," *Journal of Business Ethics* 12, no. 4 (1993): 265-273.

[34] Meyer, Dalal, and Hermida, "A Review," 126.

[35] Lee E. DeRemer, "Stewardship: What's In It for You?" Faculty Paper (Carlisle Barracks: PA: U.S. Army War College, July 2009), 4-5.

[36] Although there may be a perception that senior leader misconduct is increasing, the percentage of substantiated cases among senior leaders remains significantly lower than across other grade plates. Reports such as *The Inspector General Annual Report* (see http://www.apd.army.mil/Publications/Administrative/POG/TIG.aspx) suggest that senior leaders will likely be the subject of an allegation themselves once they reach the rank of general officer or senior executive service. Nevertheless, strategic leaders must maintain the moral courage to shape institutional culture positively through their actions, words, and decisions in the face of increasingly competitive, complex, and dynamic environments.

terms of their character strengths and weaknesses and the conditions under which they need to monitor and regulate their behavior. The interaction between character, organizational pressure, increased power, autonomy, influence, and control can challenge the physical and mental resilience required to thrive in strategic environments.[37] For example, strategic leaders are often more visible, get less honest feedback about their ideas from subordinates, receive conflicting or ambiguous guidance, have less control over their schedules and events, and often have difficulty maintaining work-life balance. Combined, these demands may increase the likelihood that they will rely on their own judgment without considering external forces. Consequently, it is important for strategic leaders to be aware of how individual differences, character, and the environment interact to inform their decisions.

It is imperative that strategic leaders understand how the strategic environment will test their character, health, and resilience. For example, the increased demands placed on strategic leaders can reduce the amount of time available for sleep, which in turn, can negatively affect executive decision-making ability.[38] In addition to focusing on sleep, activity, and nutrition, senior leaders must also focus on personal resiliency to withstand the increased demands placed on them by the strategic environment. Developing ethical fitness by studying the attributes and practices of historical leaders of character while learning from successful mentors of known character is also recommended.[39] Many senior leaders also focus on spiritual fitness to build their resilience as it can result in a more positive emotional life, better social connections and a healthier lifestyle.[40] In sum, unless senior leaders proactively address personal resilience, the increased demands of the strategic environment will challenge and may erode their inner strength.

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[37] Ludwig and Longenecker, "Bathsheba Syndrome," 271.

[38] David F. Dinges, "Foreword: Sustaining cognitive performance: A modern imperative," in Nancy J. Wesenstein (ed.), *Sleep Deprivation, Stimulant Medications, and Cognition* (Cambridge University Press, 2012), ix.

[39] DeRemer, "Stewardship," 23-25.

[40] Brian Koyn, "Religious Participation: The Missing Link in the Ready and Resilient Campaign," *Military* Review 95, no. 5 (2015): 2-12.

Stewardship

Strategic leaders have the power and opportunity to shape the institution and to strengthen the profession of arms. At the most senior levels, leaders serve not only as role models, but also as stewards of the profession charged with the responsibility to develop themselves as leaders of character while simultaneously setting the conditions for positive organizational culture and behavior to thrive. Sustained investment in character development across all levels of the institution is critical in strengthening the culture of trust required to exercise the principles of mission command. As noted in *Forging the Warrior's Character*, "perceptions of a leader's dependable character and competence form an overall evaluation of a leader's credibility. Credibility leads to the development of trust."[41] Successful senior leaders have the strong character required to establish the culture of trust and to serve as stewards of the profession.

Strategic leaders must continually develop and maintain their moral and ethical compass to build trust both inside and outside the organization to include the country they serve. Strategic leaders are required to model exemplary character daily when their personal and organizational values are tested by stressful and competitive environments that are often outside their control. To do otherwise not only violates the trust placed in the military by the American people, but also erodes organizational culture and threatens the future viability of the all-volunteer force. Our country demands this of our leaders. As stewards of precious government resources, we unequivocally owe it to the nation and those we serve.

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[41] Don M. Snider and Lloyd Matthews (Eds.), *Forging the Warrior's Character: Moral Precepts from the Cadet Prayer* (Jerico LLC, 2007), 93.

Chapter 8. Senior Leader Development

Michael Hosie

Strategic leaders must be committed to a lifetime of learning and development. The strategic environment is too complex, the scope of responsibility of strategic leaders is too broad, and the risks associated with error at this level are too great for leaders to approach the challenge with anything short of humility and a concomitant desire to continuously improve.

A fundamental assumption running through Army leadership doctrine is that leaders can develop.[1] Individuals, in this view, are not born with all the skills and abilities to succeed as leaders. Instead, development of Army leaders occurs throughout their careers in professional military education settings, during operational assignments at home or overseas, and through self-study and reflection, among other ways. For strategic leaders, the leadership competencies developed at the tactical and operational levels are not discarded for new ones. Instead, strategic leaders build upon their foundation and develop new and complementary skills and abilities to lead effectively in the new environment. But successful strategic leader development is more than refinement and accumulation of skills and abilities—it also includes identity change and a maturation of individual cognition and character.

Making strategic leader development challenging, individuals develop at different rates and have varying levels of developmental potential. Moreover, certain experiences and environments influence the developmental processes differently. Consequently, there is no generic prescription for strategic leader development, but certain concepts generalize toward its acceleration. For example, practitioners and researchers agree that at the individual or organizational levels, developmental programs based upon assessment (self-awareness), challenge (goal-setting), and support (feedback) best set conditions for

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[1] U.S. Department of the Army, *Army Leadership*, Army Doctrine Reference Publication 6-22 (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 2012), https://armypubs.us.army.mil/doctrine/index.html (accessed November 2, 2018).

individual development.[2,3] Additionally, organizational leader development programs should follow adult learning guidelines and acknowledge inter-individual differences in developmental requirements (e.g. development programs are best if individually designed). Finally, although emerging strategic leaders in the military come from myriad backgrounds with differing levels of developmental readiness, there are similarities in this particular population that can guide best approaches to leader development.

Considering the military's closed and sequential promotion systems, Army strategic leaders and their advisors are likely in *midlife*—a lifespan period with implications for learning and development. While there is significant variability in individual experiences during midlife, the period can be broadly characterized.[4] During this period, work and family demands likely peak as individuals progress to positions of increasing responsibility at work while potentially becoming primary caretakers for both previous and successive generations at home. Midlife is also characterized by declining health, physical abilities, and fluid intelligence (e.g. processing speed).[5] However, the period is also one of great productivity and potential. It is a time of reflection and recalibration when individuals evaluate previous experiences and accomplishments and look forward to explore potential futures with a newfound appreciation for the finite nature of time. Midlifers, especially ones matriculating to the highest positions in organizations, likely have a strong sense of identity with and mastery of their profession. Their accumulated knowledge adds depth and agility to complex problem solving by expanding their frames of reference. Decades of social experience positively influence emotion regulation, self-efficacy, and wisdom. Finally, midlifers become increasingly concerned with generativity—a focus on preparing the next generation. Successful strategic leadership development

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[2] David V. Day, Michelle M. Harrison, and Stanley M. Halpin, *An Integrative Approach to Leader Development: Connecting Adult Development, Identity, and Expertise* (New York: Routledge, 2009).

[3] Ellen Van Velsor, Cynthia D. McCauley, and Marian N. Ruderman, ed., *The Center for Creative Leadership Handbook of Leadership Development*, 3rd ed. (San Francisco: John Wiley & Sons, 2010).

[4] Margie E. Lachman, "Development in Midlife," in *Annual Review of Psychology*, 55 (Paolo Alto: Annual Reviews, Inc., 2004), 305-331.

[5] Ibid.

programs consider these factors, both positive and negative, in setting conditions for individual learning and growth.

Certain conditions influence the likelihood of developmental success in emerging military strategic leaders.[6] First of all, leaders must identify and accept a need for change. Busy midlife adults only expend valuable resources in development if the need to change is internalized. Consequently, self-awareness with respect to the demands of future professional roles is essential to strategic leader development. Second, adults seek intrinsic benefits from participation—they have to see the benefits of developmental efforts. Finally, adult learners develop best in supportive environments that provide resources, feedback, and opportunities for experimentation. In summary, emerging strategic leaders are more likely to purposely develop if they know that change is important, the process is rewarding, and they have a supportive environment.

Determining what should be the focus of strategic leader development efforts is challenging. As discussed earlier in this primer, strategic leaders operate in extremely complex environments and address problems that have no easy answers. Decisions at this level can have wide-ranging impact and often fail to address all sources of risk. To deal with these challenges, strategic leaders must fill multiple roles (chapter 4) and have a wide range of knowledge, skills, and abilities—each of which may drive different developmental strategies. For example, if one conceives strategic leadership as a set of skills (e.g. technical, conceptual, interpersonal) that can be trained, developmental efforts would leverage skill acquisition processes—learning the facts about task requirements, integrating new information with stored knowledge, and extensively practicing new skills to the point of expertise and automaticity.[7] Yet the skills required for various strategic leadership roles may not apply to all of them. Consequently, this chapter focuses on three broad areas supported by leader development research[8] to focus

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[6] Day, et al., *Integrative Approach.*
[7] John R. Anderson, *Cognitive Psychology and its Implications*, 2nd ed. (New York: Freeman, 1985).
[8] Day, et al., *Integrative Approach.*

developmental efforts for strategic leaders—strategic leader identity, strategic leader thinking, and strategic leader character.

Developing Strategic Leader Identity

Increasingly, leadership experts suggest that leader development is closely linked to identity development.[9] In other words, this view suggests that efforts to develop leaders are essentially about facilitating and accelerating identity transitions. Identity research provides insight into the mechanisms of leader change and, consequently, informs leader development processes. Identity refers to one's self concept—a compilation of traits, knowledge, experiences, and self-perceptions such as efficacy—considered in relation to the environment.[10] Individuals have many identities. For example, an Army colonel might have identities as a spouse, an American, a tactician, and as a professional soldier. These identities coalesce over time, are shaped by the environment, and are strong determinants of performance—they resist change. Yet emerging strategic leaders are at an inflection point regarding identities. These leaders have excelled at the tactical and operational levels, but they must assume new identities complementary with strategic demands and roles.

Identities change throughout the life course as individuals take on new roles, respond to feedback, and gain insight into their preferences, talents, and values.[11] One can visualize the process of change in three reciprocal stages: (1) separation, (2) transition, and (3) incorporation.[12] In the first stage (separation), an individual is motivated to change by a discrepancy between an assessment of their current and desired identities. Their current identity is formed through self-awareness while desired identities are developed through observation of mentors, defined by new role

[9] Herminia Ibarra, Scott Snook, and Laura Guillén Ramo, "Identity-Based Leader Development," in *Handbook of Leadership Theory and Practice*, eds. Nitin Nohria and Rakesh Khurana (Boston: Harvard Business Press, 2010), https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Scott_Snook/publication/228980188_Identity-based_leader_development/links/0a85e539f4a71d50e9000000.pdf.

[10] Ibid., 4.

[11] Edgar H. Schein, *Career Dynamics: Matching Individual and Organizational Needs* (Reading, MA: Addison Wesley Publishing Company, 1978).

[12] Ibarra, et al., "Identity-Based Leader Development."

demands, or shaped by developmental authorities. Consequently, the process begins with accurate self-awareness of personal knowledge, skills, abilities, and other attributes. Self-awareness can be gained through many sources. Personal reflection, 360 degree assessments, coaching, and testing (e.g. cognitive or personality testing) are some examples leaders can leverage to improve self-awareness. With this self-awareness, individuals are postured to discover and quantify discrepancies with their desired identity. Regarding emerging strategic leaders, a desired identity may include developing expertise in defense management, refining critical thinking skills, or internalizing institutional stewardship responsibilities. The dissonance created by comparing current and desired identities fosters motivation for change. Individuals motivated to change can then transition (stage 2) to a new identity through experimentation with different behaviors, acquisition of new skills, and adoption of provisional identities. Finally, individuals evaluate experimental behavior and incorporate (stage 3) or discard elements in the creation of an evolved identity.

This paradigm is useful for understanding the mechanisms supporting strategic leader development. Emerging strategic leaders in the military likely have strong professional identities related to expertise at the tactical and organizational levels. This identity is built upon years of experience leading soldiers and is reinforced by positive feedback in terms of evaluations and promotions. However, purposeful strategic leader development is predicated on accurate self-awareness, and many leaders may not have accurate perceptions of their abilities and potential to lead at the strategic level. Consequently, strategic leader development programs should facilitate leader self-awareness regarding role identities germane to the strategic environment (e.g. strategic leader, advisor, theorist, and steward – see Chapter 5). Simultaneously, developing leaders must better understand the specific knowledge, skills, abilities, and behaviors necessary for effective leadership in strategic roles (e.g. skills required by Executive Officer to the Army Chief of Staff, or Chief, Legislative Liaison). In the military, professional military education, operational assignments, mentors, and role models provide valuable opportunities for leaders to envision desired identities. Once the desired identity (a strategic leader identity) is identified,

emerging strategic leaders can begin development through learning and experimentation, resulting in decreased dissonance and, eventually, increased capabilities and capacity.

Developing Strategic Leader Thinking

Experts agree that leadership at the strategic level universally increases demands on leader conceptual skills.[13] The prevalence of complex problems at the strategic level makes sense-making and sense-giving capabilities ever more critical. Fortunately for leader development programs, cognition is believed to be one of a few aspects that develop in midlife adults.[14] Considering the importance of strategic thinking (see chapter 5), developmental efforts should be weighted toward leader cognitive development.

Varying terms are used to describe the highest levels of human cognition such as reflective judgment, critical thinking, and epistemic cognition.[15] These terms are different, yet they have certain commonalities. For example, each concept acknowledges that absolute claims of truth are subject to human fallibility. They suggest that higher levels of cognition require conscious and deliberate thought and effort and acknowledge human unreliability regarding objective analysis of information. They support the acquisition and evaluation of knowledge through multiple frames of reference. Ultimately, the concepts suggest that highest levels of cognition explore the "truth value" of information, assumptions, and inferences. Strategic leaders with highly developed strategic thinking skills will be best postured to make sense of the myriad complex problems endemic at that level and share that understanding with others.

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[13] Stephen J. Zaccaro, "Social Complexity and the Competencies Required for Effective Military Leadership," in *Out-of-the-box Leadership: Transforming the twenty-first-century Army and Other Top-performing Organizations*, eds. James G. Hunt, George E. Dodge, and Leonard Wong (Stamford, CT: JAI, 1999); Russ Marion and Mary Uhl-Bien, "Leadership in Complex Organizations," *The Leadership Quarterly* 12, no. 4 (2001): 389-418.

[14] David Moshman, "Developmental Change in Adulthood," in *Handbook of Adult Development* (New York: Plenum, 2003), 43-61.

[15] Epistemic Cognition, "which describes an understanding of the limits, certainty, and criteria of thought. As part of epistemic cognition, and individual might reflect upon the sources of one's learning, the certainty of the absolute versus relative truth of one's learning, the simplicity or complexity of knowledge, or justifications for that knowledge." Day, et al., *Integrative Approach*, 86.

The identity development framework is a helpful tool to explore cognitive developmental strategies for strategic leaders. As discussed earlier, adults are more likely to embrace developmental processes and effect change if they recognize a discrepancy between their current identity and a desired one. Regarding cognitive identities, development activities should first support efforts for individuals to gain cognitive self-awareness. On one hand, this self-awareness regards personal assessments of strategic thinking competencies such as critical, systems, and creative thinking, among others. On the other hand, cognitive self-awareness also includes awareness of related traits such as general intelligence, openness to information, biases, and epistemic motivation (one's desire for developing accurate conclusions about the world). Individuals armed with this cognitive self-awareness can better understand and quantify their shortcomings regarding strategic thinking competencies. They can then embark on development strategies, enabled by supportive environments, to learn new skills and progress to the highest levels of cognition essential to effective leadership at the strategic level.

Formal education institutions can play a role in enabling self-awareness and building knowledge regarding strategic thinking skills. These skills can be practiced at these institutions, but experiential opportunities in strategic settings are likely most impactful for individual change. Adults learn best through experience.[16] Consequently, emerging leaders should look for challenging assignments and opportunities to experiment with and apply higher level conceptual skills.

Building Strategic Leader Character

The third area of adult development germane to all strategic leaders regards moral development.[17] After decades of experience, emerging military strategic leaders likely have strong professional and ethical identities that served them well at the tactical and organizational levels. However, that ethical identity, comprised of values, beliefs, and ethical reasoning skills, might

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[16] Day, et al., *Integrative Approach.*
[17] Ibid.; Moshman, "Developmental Change."

fall short of meeting the ethical demands at the strategic level. This contention may offend some emerging leaders and result in developmental resistance, but reports from the Inspector General or lessons from research should provide some necessary humility.[18] Fortunately, research suggests that adults can develop moral competencies throughout adulthood and that certain efforts can accelerate that process.[19]

A critical realization for emerging strategic leaders is that the strategic environment demands the highest levels of ethical reasoning and that further development is likely necessary. While leadership at all levels has moral and ethical implications, leadership at the strategic level is inexorably linked with ethical dilemmas due to the nature of complex, profound challenges endemic to that level. Effective strategic leaders must be prepared to identify ethical dilemmas, explore implications of actions through multiple lenses, and act in ways consistent with the organization's values. Additionally, strategic leaders are responsible for shaping the organization's ethical climate through role modeling, reinforcing desired behavior, and discouraging behavior inconsistent with core values and beliefs. Considering the significant ethical dimension of leadership at the strategic level, leader development efforts should emphasize its importance, identify differences among levels, and facilitate its development and maturation.

Although adults learn best through experience, formal educational settings also play an important role in character development. In these settings, strategic leaders can deepen knowledge regarding organizational ethics and develop skills relevant to moral development. Anchoring these processes is the Army Ethic—the evolving set of laws, values, and beliefs embedded within the Army culture of trust that motivates and guides the conduct of Army professionals bound together in common moral purpose. Educational settings facilitate deeper

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[18] Standards of Conduct Office, *Encyclopedia of Ethical Failure* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense Office of General Counsel, October 2014); Dean C. Ludwig and Clinton O. Longenecker, "The Bathsheba Syndrome: the Ethical Failure of Successful Leaders," *Journal of Business Ethics* 12, no. 4 (1993): 265-273.

[19] Lawrence Kohlberg, "Moral Stages and Moralization: The Cognitive Developmental Approach," in *Moral Development and Behavior,* ed. T. Lickona (New York: Holt, Rinehart, & Winston, 1976).

understanding of these guiding documents and concepts and allow individuals to assess their moral identities against them.

Character development efforts should include opportunities for individuals to learn skills associated with higher levels of moral development. Specifically, research suggests that individuals at the highest levels of moral development demonstrate strong understanding of moral reasoning.[20] Although there are competing definitions, moral reasoning generally reflects an individual's capacity to consciously and deliberately think about moral issues.[21] It enables leaders to consider the moral implications in novel, complex situations. Similar to higher levels of critical thinking, moral reasoning suggests a conscious awareness of the influence of emotions and intuition on judgement and suggests a capacity to examine issues through various lenses or perspectives. Finally, moral reasoning is assumed to influence judgement and not merely be leveraged post hoc. This approach does not reflect moral relativism where there are no universal moral principles. Instead, it permits an appreciation that all moral positions are not universally accepted. Development programs should facilitate knowledge creation in emerging strategic leaders regarding moral reasoning processes and provide opportunities for practice and feedback.

Armed with greater knowledge and capabilities, developing strategic leaders can better internalize the lessons through experiential application and reflection. Adults learn more effectively through experience, and the strategic environment provides myriad opportunities to exercise ethical thinking skills. Once again, the identity development paradigm is useful in describing how emerging strategic leaders might progress to the highest levels of moral development. First, leaders must assess their current moral identity, including beliefs, values, and knowledge. Next, developing leaders should gain a deeper understanding of the desired moral identity for strategic leaders. This might include deep understanding of the Army Ethic and the highest levels of moral reasoning. It likely also includes lessons learned through observation of respected (and disrespected)

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[20] Ibid.

[21] Leland F. Saunders, "What is Moral Reasoning?" *Philosophical Psychology* 28, no. 1 (2013): 1-20.

leaders dealing with ethical challenges. Once discrepancies between current and desired moral identities are identified, developing leaders can undertake the process of learning, experimentation, reflection, and incorporation necessary to effect personal change.

Implications

This chapter's approach to leader development is informed by its projected audience—highly successful direct and organizational leaders embarking on transitions to the strategic level while navigating the demands and changes associated with midlife. Considering this audience, envisioning strategic leader development as identity development enables individuals to better understand the mechanisms of change and its acceleration through deliberate and focused developmental efforts. Additionally, in line with a broad approach to development, the chapter presented two meta-competencies—strategic leader thinking and strategic leader character—as developmental focus areas that generalize across roles in the strategic leader environment.

AFTERWORD

Tom Galvin

Primers such as this serve two important purposes. One is educational, to help guide students and learners understand complex processes or concepts in a systematic way. The other is preparational. Given that many officers and civilians selected for advancement to positions of strategic leadership arrive will little practical experience in that environment, how do they begin their journey? Answering both purposes in thirty thousand words or fewer is challenging given the enormous breadth of literature and practical experience from the thousands of scholars and commentators studying all aspects of leadership. In contrast, Gary Yukl's renowned book on organizational leadership, cited often in this Primer, scratches the surface of this literature in a mere four hundred pages.

Advancement to senior leadership is a journey, and a personal one at that. Each contributor in this Primer has summarized and synthesized what is known and what has been observed about leadership in military and civilian contexts. But one's own personal experiences and perspectives are important. This Primer can tell you that you need to assume certain roles, attain various competencies, and strengthen your character and resilience. But that is not the same as finding oneself for the first time in one's career navigating a cubicle in the Army staff, dealing with direct reports located on other continents, having to deal for the first time with large numbers of contractors or civilians, or other unique challenges.

We specifically set out in this primer to emphasize the positive aspect of the transition to strategic leadership. There is already plenty of material out there dealing with the failures. But, there is also an unfortunate middle ground of officers and civilians who attain positions of senior leadership but never complete the transition. In a study I conducted with active Army graduates of the U.S. Army War College, participants faced two common challenges in the performance of their duties — working within the bureaucracy and facing parochial interests in pursuing

strategic matters. Cohorts of newly educated senior leaders are entering high-paced and demanding work environments. Their inboxes are full with matters of the here and now, pushing complex staff actions up the chain of command or responding to the constant flow of crises and contingencies in their areas of responsibility. Unfortunately, this results in too many of them functioning as higher-ranking action officers. This is okay for a period of time, but not over the long-term as many only have three to eight years of service left when they pin on colonel.

Having served as special assistant to several three- and four-star generals in service, joint, and combined staffs, I can attest to a couple factors that seem to separate those who remain higher-ranking action officers and those who transcend and make a long-term difference for their Services, agencies, or military departments. The first is that the true senior leaders often find one thing that represents their *passion*. It could be a problem that they feel compelled to fix, or a terribly negative experience that they do not wish repeated for anyone. But it has to be a passion – one that motivates them in the morning or keeps them up at night.

Those who have identified this passion pursue it for the remainder of their careers, one way or another. From research papers at the War College to pet projects as commanders of strategic-level organizations, these officers inject their passion into everything they do. It prevents them from getting mired in the busy work and the specifics of duty descriptions and provides them with a life-long sense of direction, which in turn is passed on to all those their colleagues, subordinates, and superiors. The officers becomes the 'go-to' people on such matters, indispensable because of the depth of knowledge and drive to succeed. Often, this passion also fuels their post-Army lives as they become government civilians, leaders in the private sector, or wherever they go.

When I advise War College students, during the first meeting I ask them what they are passionate about. Almost to a person, the ones who have already found their passion have an easier time completing the resident program requirements. Those who have

not and do not for the first few months struggle academically by comparison.

The second factor is *empathy.* In my work in strategic communication, I developed two statements that are highly cynical but painfully true for senior leaders:

Everything you say, do, or are can and will be used against you.

Everything you do not say, do not do, or are not also can and will be used against you.

Senior leaders can find themselves confronted with a sizeable number of actors whose primary purpose is to oppose the military. No amount of engagement will change their minds. No efforts at lasting negotiation will succeed. Moreover, while they may go quiet for a time, they never go away – resuming their criticism with a vengeance whenever the military makes a mistake (or the military's activities can be explained as a mistake). While junior officers might be shielded from such often-unwarranted criticism, senior leaders are more often expected to take it and still defend the organization.

From my experience, senior leaders who succeed are those who show the greatest empathy. This is different from having thick skin, which can convey indifference. In the strategic environment, indifference can be a liability, fueling further criticism and potentially mobilizing others to join the opponent. Empathy enables senior leaders to learn about complex issues from the perspective of the opponents. Synthesizing the opponent's language into one's own ideas can disarm the opponent's arguments, paving the way for senior leaders to promote their intended messages rather than devote time and energy constantly defending themselves.

Empathy is also an important skill to apply within one's own organization. It is embedded within all the interpersonal competencies expressed in Chapter 5, and underlies the conceptual competencies as well. After all, it is difficult to exercise

strategic thinking without showing empathy for alternative views.

In the Strategic Leadership course, I have asked students to tell a personal story about a senior leader that they admire. First-hand stories are preferred, although that isn't always possible. I then put up in the seminar room a wall poster with photos of the senior leaders cited. In nearly every story given since I did this exercise, the senior leader demonstrated the will and ability to take someone else's perspective into account. In doing so, they made a difference in the organization and those around them.

Everyone's path to senior leadership will be different – no effort to construct a hard and fast checklist will ever work. There is no magic ten steps to strategic leadership and likely never will be. Hopefully through reading this Primer you will have evaluated the senior leaders you have served under or observed from a distance and asked what the better ones had in common, and how you might develop yourself to follow in their footsteps. In turn, you may also have learned more about preparing the next generation of senior leaders.

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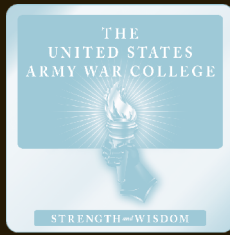
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