



LEADERSHIP: THE AIR DIMENSION

By Colonel William Lewis

Introduction

There are very few disciplines that receive as much attention and study as leadership. However, in spite of the myriad of articles, books, motivational speakers and courses on the subject, there is clearly not a universally accepted understanding of the scope, breadth, competencies and application of leadership. As explained by Bennis and Nanus, “Leadership competencies have remained constant throughout the years, but our understanding of what it is, how it works, and the ways in which people learn to apply it has changed over the past decades.”¹

There have been many publications on leadership in a military context, but the majority of the writings and empirical research is focused on the United States Army or, more generically, from a land-based construct. Arguably, this focus on army leadership is due to the profession of arms’ preoccupation with the “combat-warrior” image.² As such, little anecdotal or empirical research is available regarding leadership in the air force, and the majority of what does exist is from the United States Air Force.³ Furthermore, most leadership research tends to focus on those employed in traditional operator roles, including combat arms, aircrew as well as maritime surface and subsurface officers, with very little attention to the leadership of the large number of military officers and non-commissioned members that support operations.⁴ Therefore, this paper will initially explore the concepts of culture and its contributions to leadership, followed by a brief outline of existing publications on air force leadership. Then, the current Canadian Forces and Air Force leadership courses will be presented with the intent of demonstrating that these courses do not adequately prepare Air Force leaders. A few of the outdated traditions and myths about leadership will be explored, and a few concluding comments and suggestions will be offered.

Culture

While perhaps not a concept that initially comes to mind when considering leadership,

it has been postulated that every organization has a culture.⁵ Culture is an abstract concept, defined by Schein as:

... a pattern of shared basic assumptions that was learned by a group as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems.⁶

Schein goes on to describe culture as a concept that is more than just shared beliefs and traditions. The Canadian Forces’ (CF’s) leadership doctrine keystone document *Conceptual Foundations* defines culture similarly:

A shared and relatively stable pattern of behaviours, values, and assumptions that a group has learned over time as an effective means of maintaining internal social stability and adapting to its environment, and that are transmitted to new members as the correct ways to perceive, think, and act in relation to these issues.⁷

Regardless of which definition is chosen, there are three different levels or depths against which an organization can be analysed. Using Schein’s taxonomy, the three levels are: artifacts, espoused beliefs and values, and underlying assumptions.

Artifacts are those things that can be visibly observed, such as a culture’s symbols, structure, language, ceremonies and rituals as well as its members’ mannerisms and interactions. Espoused beliefs and values typically originate with the individual who is the founding leader of the group. The basic underlying assumptions are the most fundamental level of a culture. It is the level from which future behaviour can

be most accurately predicted. These shared assumptions have become entrenched and are very difficult to change.⁸ But why is culture important to an organization and its leadership?

As explained by Vermillion, there are several reasons that theorists postulate why it is important to understand the culture of an organization.⁹ In fact, Schein argues that “the only thing of real importance that leaders do is create and manage culture...the unique talent of leaders is their ability to understand and work with culture...”¹⁰ Therefore, it is essential, and it may be argued to be of primary importance, that leaders of an organization understand the concept of culture. Culture guides the behaviour of the members of the organization by establishing a set of structures, routines, rules and norms. In many ways, culture is the most visible and identifiable aspect of an organization, which influences personnel both internal and external to the organization.¹¹ Therefore, it is essential that leaders are aware of and work within the culture to bring about successful change and effective performance.¹²

Most of the literature on a military culture centres on what distinguishes the military culture from the rest of society and concentrates on the military as a profession of arms. From a review of literature, Harries-Jenkins offers that there are two distinctive and widely accepted models of military professionalism: the profession of arms and the pragmatic military profession.¹³ The profession of arms was introduced in 1957 by Huntington in his work *The Soldier and the State*. Huntington’s concept centres exclusively on the premise that the unique skill of the military profession is the “management of violence” which sets it apart from the rest of society.¹⁴ He further postulates that the military is a profession by its expertise, responsibility and corporateness, and it is these three characteristics that make the military culture unique.

In contrast to this view, Janowitz offers the concept of the “professionalism” of the military. His model acknowledges that the military as a profession is dynamic and the characteristics of the military professional change over time

to align with the transformation of the parent society by adopting civilian norms resulting in reducing the difference in skill between military and civilian counterparts.¹⁵ He offered five basic hypotheses that account for this differing viewpoint: changing organizational authority, narrowing skill differential between military and civilian elites, a shift in officer recruitment, the significance of career patterns and trends in political indoctrination.¹⁶ Janowitz did make comment directly on the Air Force, stating that it was the service with the greater tendency for employing technical specialists compared to the Army. Therefore, Janowitz’s model is more inclusive than Huntington’s and also can be used by the support organizations.

In the United States, especially since the 1960s, a considerable amount of study has taken place regarding military culture and its relationship to society. Perhaps the most controversial is Charles Moskos’ institutional/occupational (I/O) thesis, which was introduced in 1977 as a result of the United States military transitioning from conscription to an all volunteer force. Moskos observed significant changes occurring in the military. He proposed that the military was transforming from an institutional organization (one that is value-driven based on the greater good) to an organization that was more occupational (thus demonstrating civilian characteristics that were more focused on self-interest than that of the larger group).¹⁷ Moskos, and fellow researcher Frank Wood, maintained that the tendency towards occupationalism affects military effectiveness in three key areas: mission performance, member motivation and professional responsibility.¹⁸ This I/O model is frequently cited and is the foundation for ongoing research. This research has concluded that there are I/O differences between not only the services but also between the branches within the services. Furthermore, there are intra-service I/O differences between officers and non-commissioned members (NCMs) as well as technical and non-technical branches.¹⁹ In fact, Wood has focused his research on the United States Air Force (USAF). He concludes that the Air Force’s dependence on technology

results in its officers more likely to specialize and experience a “diffused sense of purpose.” This “diffused sense of purpose” can undermine the strength of a culture thus resulting in a fragmented culture. He further concludes, in line with the occupational concept, that pilots had a greater tendency to identify as specialists and that support officers identified themselves as a part of the institution.²⁰

There have been other researchers that have investigated, albeit fairly superficially, the differences between USAF

operators and supporters. Morabito used the Yukl’s Managerial Behaviour Study research instrument (which

is based on the behavioural leadership model) to determine the activities that most influence leadership development. He found that the most important activities in developing personal leadership skills were working on the job with NCMs, peers and superior officers. The activities that were the least important were the formal leadership courses.²¹

Phelan conducted a study of USAF majors, with a specific focus on operator and support officers, to determine what behaviours were perceived to be critical to mission accomplishment

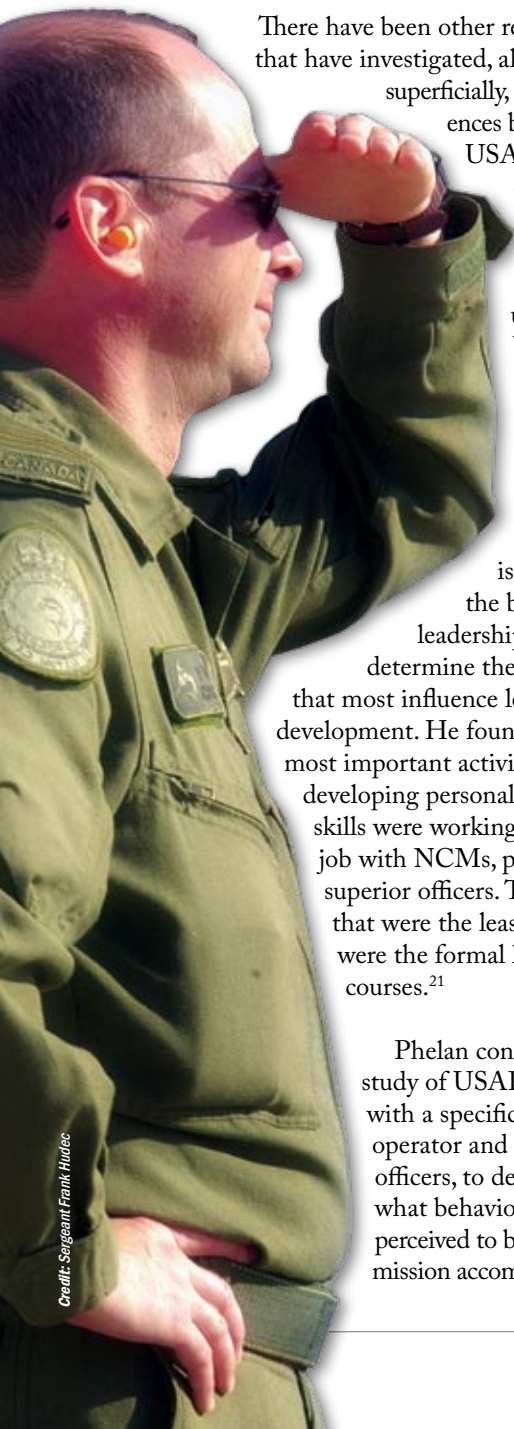
and successful leadership. As a result of this investigation, he concluded that support officers attributed greater importance to interpersonal skills, while operators attributed greater importance to technical skills.²²

Finally, Shawn Black examined leader behaviours of squadron commanders of three flying and two maintenance squadrons. This doctoral thesis concluded that most squadron commanders, especially pilots, had very little personal leadership experience prior to taking command which resulted in lower score results compared to a 2004 United States normative sample on transformational and transactional leadership behaviours. They were more likely to use management by exception and laissez-faire behaviours with their subordinates. The study also revealed that the attributes that subordinates, the majority of whom were NCMs, valued most in preferred commanders were strong people skills, trust, honesty and fairness.²³

Investigations into the cultural and leadership differences between the services in the Canadian military have primarily been carried out by Al English. English argues that in order for an officer to assume an operational command, two preconditions must be met: mastery of the profession of arms and earning trust of subordinates “by sharing the risks of those they command.”²⁴ English submits that the first precondition is achievable for non-aircrew, but he ultimately questions whether the second precondition is achievable for non-aircrew.

CF Leadership Education

The critical importance of education, both academic and professional, is well documented in a number of studies undertaken over the last thirty years. Guiding documents such as Defence Strategy 2020, Officership 2020 and NCM Corps 2020²⁵ have all reached the same conclusion: in order to operate effectively in a complex military environment, all members of the CF require crucial intellectual skills and specific competencies. The CF requires officers and non-commissioned members who have outstanding intellectual ability, who are capable



Credit: Sergeant Frank Hudec

of effective command and who possess the leadership and management skills required in an increasingly uncertain world. As well, experience has indicated that differences between officer and non-commissioned member professional development can no longer be defined by rank, as officers and non-commissioned members deal with many of the same issues.

Reporting to the Canadian Defence Academy (CDA), the Non-commissioned Member Professional Development Centre, situated at the Royal Military College, Saint-Jean, was created on 1 April 2003. Their role focuses primarily on developing, implementing and presenting the NCM professional development requirements for developmental periods three through five. This is accomplished through a combination of distance learning and on-site courses and includes the intermediate leadership qualification (ILQ), the advanced leadership qualification (ALQ) and the CPO1/CWO chief qualification (CQ). Also under the authority of CDA, the Air Command Academy, located at 16 Wing Borden, is responsible for the primary leadership qualification (PLQ).

The PLQ course is a modular format, with Performance Objective 201 covering the leadership of subordinates. A total of 720 minutes of lectures, or 70 periods, are devoted to leadership. For many, this is their first introduction within the CF to formal leadership education. Unfortunately, the retention and utilization of this new knowledge is only confirmed with multiple choice tests, which clearly is not the best way to demonstrate leadership competencies. The remainder of these courses (ILQ, ALQ and CQ) have a nine to ten week distance learning portion, followed by a residency portion at Saint Jean. Each successive course includes both written submissions plus case studies and lectures to cover their increased leadership responsibilities. However, without the benefit of knowing the differences between services and the exact competencies required of junior Air Force leaders, the material is very much founded in the traditional combat-warrior paradigm.

Also reporting to the CDA is the Canadian Forces Leadership Institute (CFLI), which was established in September 2001 as a centre of excellence for leadership research and professional concept development in the CF. The mandate of CFLI is to research, develop and disseminate core concepts of leadership and the profession of arms to the CF to stimulate and promote an intellectual base for identifying best practices, encouraging professional development, articulating core leadership and professional concepts as well as providing a focus and unity of thought in these domains.²⁶

CFLI has sponsored many investigations and papers on various aspects of leadership. One of their more recent sponsorships was an investigation to create the framework for continued professional development for CF general and flag officers and those chief warrant officers / chief petty officers, first class selected for senior appointments, beyond and after the formal courses delivered to senior leaders at the Canadian Forces College. The result of this research was the framework depicted in Figure 1, which consists of five leader elements (expertise, cognitive capacities, social capacities, change capacities and professional ideology). These elements were derived from an “especially thorough analysis of the suite of 2020 documents, the Profession of Arms Manual (*Duty With Honour: The Profession of Arms in Canada*) and *Leadership in the Canadian Forces: Conceptual Foundations*, plus the substantial generic literature on leadership.”²⁷ The framework also contains a total of 16 attributes required of all CF leaders contained within the five elements. The work concludes with a very well structured articulation of the competencies required at the four leader levels (junior, intermediate, advanced and senior) for each of the five elements. The leader development framework is depicted in Figure 2, and an example of the details of one of the elements is included as Figure 3. The challenge will be to recognize this framework and to integrate it as a key design component of the CF. The obvious next step would be to further refine this framework, especially at the junior, intermediate and advanced levels, for the uniquenesses of each service and its associated culture.



Figure 1: CF Leader Framework²⁸

		LEADER FRAMEWORK ELEMENTS				
		Expertise	Cognitive Capacities	Social Capacities	Change Capacities	Professional Ideology
LEADER LEVELS	Senior	Strategic	Creative Abstract	Inter-Institutional	Paradigm Shifting	Stewardship
	Advanced	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑
	Intermediate	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑
	Junior	Tactical	Analytical	Inter-Personal	Open	Internalize

Figure 2: Leader Development Framework²⁹

Conclusion

In spite of the breadth and depth of writings and research on leadership, the majority of published military leadership work has been about the land element, specifically the United States Army. Most of the leadership research that does exist regarding the air force is primarily focused

on aircrew and pilots. This attention is due in part to Harries-Jenkins “combat-warrior paradigm.” As such, the realm of those who support those directly responsible for the management of violence has largely gone unstudied.

One of the key concepts to include in any study of unique leadership interactions is the

<h1 style="margin: 0;">EXPERTISE</h1> <h2 style="margin: 0;">TACTICAL TO STRATEGIC</h2>	
Junior	
Technical and Tactical Procedures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning standard military occupational classification (MOC) and sea/land/air procedures. • For initial leader roles, acquiring an overview of such standards and procedures as well as small group tactics.
Intermediate	
Military Information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How MOC contributes to larger formation capabilities. • Understanding not only what to do but the context in which this occurs. (data + context = information) • Examples include effects-based operations, context of incremental information on democratic systems, international law and civil control of the military.
Advanced	
Defence Knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • From information to knowledge, incorporating a broad understanding of CF and defence as a key component of security and government functions. • Shift from information to knowledge requires additional perspective of understanding the rationale and purpose of intended actions; the generalized outcomes which are to be achieved. (information + purpose = knowledge)
Senior	
Security Expertise	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scope and content moves from knowledge to expertise with accompanying expansion to a strategic understanding of the domain of security. • Shift from knowledge to expertise requires ability to apply the philosophy and principles that govern the generation and employment of military capacities (knowledge + philosophy = expertise) and strategic institutional co-existence among peer ministries and foreign defence agencies. • Expertise at this stage clearly is dependent upon the complementary development in professional ideology, a full understanding of the profession of arms.

Figure 3: Expertise: Tactical to Strategic³⁰

concept of culture. Of the three levels of culture postulated by Schein, the third level of the underlying assumptions are key to leading and managing an organization. Culture guides the behaviours of those within and outside the organization, and it is the distinct job of the leadership to understand and work within this culture.

The study of military culture has been primarily shaped by the works of Harries-Jenkins and Janowitz. More recently, the institutional/occupational thesis by Moskos has received considerable attention. Together with Wood, they have characterized the present military occupations as either focused on the occupational (technological aspects) or

on the institutional focus. The most recent investigations have concluded that the Air Force does indeed have a distinct culture (and indeed subcultures) and that aircrew are more concerned with the occupational aspect, while the majority of the supporting occupations have a more institutional focus.

The Canadian Defence Academy has the responsibility for all CF leadership education. Under their direction, the Air Command Academy administers the primary leadership qualification, while the Non-commissioned Member Professional Development Centre administers the intermediate leadership qualification, the advanced leadership qualification and the CPO1/CWO chief qualification. Each of these latter courses includes both a distance learning and a residency portion. However, without the benefit of a clear understanding of the unique

differences required of Air Force leaders, all receive the same combat-warrior education.

Also reporting to the CDA is the Canadian Forces Leadership Institute. One of their recent studies proposed a CF leader framework, which is comprised of five elements (expertise, cognitive capacities, social capacities, change capacities and professional ideology). As well, a leader development framework incorporating four leader levels (junior, intermediate, advanced and senior) across the five elements was suggested. For each of these levels and elements, the work suggested various competencies and strategies to better prepare the leaders of tomorrow. Again, the frameworks are not unique for any Service and, especially for the more junior leadership levels, the Air Force would benefit from some dedicated research so as to ensure our future leaders excel. ■

Colonel Lewis presented this paper at the 14th Annual Air Force Historical Workshop – Maple Leaf Aloft: The Historical Dimension of Canadian Air Power Leadership. He is currently the Director of Coordination in the Strategic Joint Staff.

List of Abbreviations		I/O	institutional/occupational
ALQ	advanced leadership qualification	ILQ	intermediate leadership qualification
CDA	Canadian Defence Academy	MOC	military occupational classification
CF	Canadian Forces	NCM	non-commissioned member
CFLI	Canadian Forces Leadership Institute	PLQ	primary leadership qualification
CQ	chief qualification	USAF	United States Air Force

Notes

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*Captain Mike Allard (R) briefs his crew prior to taking off on a mission aboard a CH146 Griffon helicopter. R to L from Captain Allard are Master Corporal Scott Trudell, flight engineer; Sergeant Dave Zimmer, mission specialist; and Captain Andy Michener, co-pilot.
Credit: Warrant Officer Serge Peters*