

FEATURE ARTICLES

The Value of Leader Humility in the Military

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ABSTRACT

Humility is a vital quality for leaders in civilian institutions but also for leaders of military units at all echelons. There are multiple connections between leader humility, as described by past literature in the field of management, and the U.S. Air Force Academy's conceptual framework for developing leaders of character. If these connections are valid, then it can be concluded that humility not only improves the effectiveness of a unit but also acts as a precursor to the development of leaders of character. This current work uses past literature to create a definition of leader humility and discusses its benefits for both the individual and the unit in the military. The authors describe how leader humility can be misconstrued as antithetical to effective military leadership and prescribe experiential evidence, both personal and biographical, to the contrary. Conclusions in the form of propositions for future examination are drawn from this review of literature and experience. We propose that humble leaders are better able to live honorably and lift others while elevating the performance of their units. Propositions bridge the gap between humble leadership and character-based leadership in the military while explaining why greater humility can lead to improved performance.

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Over the last decade, humility has been identified as an important leader characteristic by scholars of leadership and management. However, the conversation has largely remained limited to the field of commercial business. While beneficial in this arena, related models surrounding humility can be applied across a variety of organizations. Government organizations are of note, considering that the consequences of those leaders' choices can affect the public at large, to include citizens across multiple regions – as these leaders can be involved in higher levels of government with even greater consequences. We suggest that humility in leadership as a topic of research should be extended to other domains like the military – this organization's effectiveness being a critical factor in foreign relations and national defense. Therefore, our work expands the conversation beyond its current scope, applying the literature to a military context. We suggest ways in which leaders across the hierarchical spectrum can improve the performance of their respective units by incorporating humility into their leadership styles. As it relates to the theme of this special issue of “Valuing Human Conditions, Cultures, and Societies,” we see the benefits of humility in the areas of knowing oneself, knowing others, and constructive engagement—and will discuss those benefits. We also make connections to the existing leadership development framework currently utilized by the United States Air Force Academy (USAFA).

This paper will first describe previous literature concerning humility in leadership and management, largely within the context of commercial business. We then describe how the virtue of humility is antithetical to the generally accepted characteristics of military leadership and describe the relevancy of and benefits from exhibiting humility as a military professional. Next, we give several examples where humility has been evident in leadership (or in some cases lacking) and how organizations are subsequently affected. Finally, we describe the Leader of Character framework used at USAFA, which extends from past literature, and the connections that exist between leader humility and leaders of character. Several propositions are suggested that tie humble leadership to the Leader of Character framework.

Leader Humility

Humility is a complex term that many have attempted to define over the years. Scholars have developed different definitions depending on the context in which the term is used. Still, there is some consistency. Humility has been generally accepted as a moral virtue which results in a byproduct series of actions. Therefore, the virtue of

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humility is dimensional, expressing itself with respect for a multitude of component characteristics. Humility has both an internal and external component as all definitions reference both moral and actionable manifestations (Argandona, 2015; Owens et al., 2013; Ou et al., 2014; Vera & Rodriguez-Lopez, 2004).

Argandona outlines this dimensionality and dual mannerisms, referring to inward and outward humility as the intra- and inter-personal dimensions (2015). The intrapersonal dimension refers to how one sees him or herself, while the interpersonal dimension refers to how one reacts to the way others see him or her. This virtue is subsequently acquired through repetitive, voluntary acts which reinforce thoughts and actions generally associated with humility – a reference to Aristotle’s virtue ethics (Argandona, 2015).

Owens, Johnson, and Mitchell detail outward (or interpersonal) interactions although their study accepts the existence of an internal component of the virtue as well (2013). Expressed humility is exposed in social contexts when one views themselves accurately (knowing oneself), displays an appreciation for other’s abilities (knowing others), and remains teachable when in the wrong (constructive engagements) – the three component factors (Owens, Johnson & Mitchell, 2013). Vera and Rodriguez-Lopez follow the same line of thought in describing the subject, considering humility as the “Mid-point between the two negative extremes of arrogance and lack of self-esteem” (2004, p. 395). By assuming the virtue is displayed silently when performed rightly, the two go as far as describing thirteen exhibited behaviors as a way of defining the subject. These include: openness to new paradigms, eagerness to learn, acknowledgement of mistakes and attempts to correct, acceptance of failure, advice-seeking inclination, willingness to develop others,

desire to serve, respect for others, sharing disposition, willingness to accept success simplistically, non-narcissistic reputation, lack of complacency, and frugality (Vera & Rodriguez-Lopez, 2004). These behaviors are rooted in the internal mindsets of humble managers at all levels of an organization’s hierarchy.

Meanwhile, Ou, Tsui, Kinicki, Waldman, Xiao, and Song review interpersonal interactions as a byproduct of the leader’s internal struggle with the virtue (2014). Accordingly, the components of this internal struggle shape the study’s definition of humility – based around six internal characteristics: an accepting self-view, self-awareness, appreciation of others, openness to feedback, low self-focus, and self-transcendence. It should be noted that this model is the only reviewed work which rejects a definition inclusive of both internal mindset and external actions, basing their definition of humility wholly on a “self-experience framework” (Ou et al., 2014, p. 37).

Nevertheless, the overall series of definitions and models generally point to an acceptance of humility as being an internal viewpoint with directly linked actions. First, one struggles with the concept within and how to use it in their daily life, then he or she demonstrates those actions or behaviors rooted in this predetermined identity, and finally, that person pursues the virtue through iterative practice.

Still, it is Hoekstra, Bell and Peterson, who link personal passion to that concept, recognizing that self-interested drive does not necessarily contrast with the practice of virtue ethics – particularly that of humility (2008). The unrelenting drive for perfection that often calls people to reject fallibility and pursue ineffective actions due to a lack of self-awareness and fear of embarrassment can be balanced with an

extreme rejection of that same mindset, leading people to act in ways which do not align with the politics of an organization and ultimately damage one's career aspirations. Again, their recommendation follows the described model – first recognizing a core component of humility, which is followed by some

errors and not hesitating to face the truth. These are the tenets of humble leadership according to Schein and Schein (2018).

We use the following definition of leader humility that sequentially pieces together commonalities across

previous literature. Leader humility links the balance of self-understanding and appreciation of feedback against personal drive to repeated actions that engage others in the decision-making process, producing distinguishable change in a leader's organizational approach over time. With this understanding of leader humility in mind, we will look at how it fits into a military context. Although there are military leaders that engage their respective units with humility, it is certainly not a guarantee.

Often, the perception of military leadership does not include the character trait of humility. However, we see great possibilities if it can be accepted on a larger scale.

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linked external action and ultimately a result conditioned on that worldview, culminating in some lasting legacy within the given organization (Hoekstra, Bell, & Peterson, 2008).

Schein and Schein discuss the challenge that any humble leader faces in moving organizational relationships from Level 1 to Level 2, helping to clarify possible external actions (2018). Level 1 relationships are transactional and rule-based while Level 2 relationships are personal and trusting as seen in friendships and effective teams. The Scheins' see a need for personal connections between superiors and subordinates that allow for psychological safety, enhanced communication, and ultimately a more effective organization. Humble leaders must walk the thin line between being too formal or too intimate. Level 2 relationships still ensure there is accountability while allowing for freedom to speak up, accepting

Challenges to Humility in the Military

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Today, high ranking officers and non-commissioned officers are seen decorated in ribbons and badges, something in which service members across all branches take extensive pride – a ceremonial depiction of seniority, accomplishment and competence. Rituals accompany the completion of nearly every

accomplishment from the moment a service member takes the Oath of Office to the day he or she retires. For example, in the Air Force, it is customary for retirees to receive a “Shadow Box:” a container of memorabilia which acts as a reminder of achievements across one’s career. Stories of old talk about the greats – Washington crossing the Delaware River, the 7th Calvary making their last stand at Little Big Horn, or General McAuliffe’s refusal to surrender at the Battle of the Bulge. Songs are used as well – the Marine Corps hymn enshrining victories across the ages, for instance. Students of modern war are told about the daring Robin Olds and his Wolfpack that grounded enemy aircraft in Vietnam, or more recently, the American Sniper – Chris Kyle – who neutralized a number of enemies in Iraq and Afghanistan. Even now, a statue stands outside the Air Force Academy as a reminder of Brigadier General Robinson Risner who led prisoners of war in staunch opposition against their captors. These are just a few (and there are many more like them) – all pointing to the idealized vision of a great military leader: independent, self-sufficient, and indestructible.

Such a leader is brave and daring, someone who can overcome even when the odds are stacked against them. They do not have shortcomings, nor are they ever unsure. They make bold decisions and stick to them, no matter the opposition. These leaders are perfect – or rather, give the appearance of perfection. Why would they have a need to “know” themselves or others when they are infallible and should be followed simply because of their prowess? This is not to discount the actions of those depicted in any way but is to say that the storybook telling of each account does not reflect a full vision of most of these individuals or events, nor a full vision of effective leadership. Instead, we offer that a leader should “balance the ledger,” as recommended by Hoekstra, Bell, and Peterson (2008). To balance

the ledger is to find a middle ground between personal desire to attain achievements in an institution and the development of a self-aware mindset which involves others more in the decision-making process (Hoekstra, Bell, & Peterson, 2008).

A military leader should always maintain the personal drive to make decisions unilaterally when necessary and strive for excellence, while also maintaining a sense of awareness to determine when their abilities fall short (Hoekstra, Bell, & Peterson, 2008). This balancing effect allows for adequate humility in contrast to the unwavering drive that embodies the prototypical example of a military leader. Through moderation of these ideals, one conditions themselves to use the talents and capacities of surrounding advisors, subordinates, and resources. While the archetypal military leader is often successful, it is our assertion that this type of mindset allows for a better resolution of any given problem set and a better outcome for the organization.

Benefits of Humility in the Military

The next logical questions would be: should organizational concepts that have generally been applied to civilian organizations be applied to the military as well? And, what leads us to assume that the development of humble leadership characteristics will positively benefit the military as a whole? In response to those questions, we again consult the management literature.

Rego, Owens, Leal, Melo, Cunha, Gonçalves and Ribeiro discuss how personal humility among leaders, expressed through behaviors that we previously discussed as being the result of an internal struggle, can affect their respective teams (2017). Variables used in the study include leader-expressed humility, team humility, psychological capital (PsyCap; a measure composed of four dimensions: self-efficacy, hope,

resilience, and optimism), and team performance. By establishing a series of direct relationships in the order of the variables mentioned here, the study derives an indirect relationship between humility expressed by a leader and overall team performance. In effect, the study shows that a leader's ability to display humility causes his or her team to act humbly as well, driving them to be more effective in the long-term (Rego et al., 2017).

Because this study was concerned with teams, groups of individuals with some common leader at their head, we find it reasonable to project the results onto military units. Each unit, no matter the size, is a group with a common leader that has been given a goal or objective to achieve. Therefore, we surmise that a leader's personal development of humility in combination with personal passion should better the overall performance of his or her military unit.

Next, because the military consists of a series of hierarchical subunits, each with its own leader that reports to a higher authority and each maintaining specific but related objectives, we sought to determine whether humility among higher-ranking leaders could affect the entire organization or just those individuals close to that leader – his or her team. In support of this idea, two studies found that the humility of a CEO directly correlates to the integration of top management teams (TMTs). CEO humility appeals to the collective interest of each TMT. Then, TMTs are more easily able to overcome competitive self-interest. This is because TMTs understand how subunits interact by virtue of the CEO incorporating relevant teams in the decision-making process, rather than dealing with each subunit independently. Furthermore, CEO humility allows for empowerment behavior which, through a ripple effect via the TMT, improves middle manager's overall job

performance and commitment (Ou et al., 2014; Ou, Waldman, & Peterson, 2018).

When applying these findings to the military, we propose that a high-ranking member who exhibits humility may affect their subordinate units, not merely those individuals near to him or her – similar to the impact of a CEO. Even if subunits misalign objectives and compete with one another, the humble commander should be able to integrate decision-making processes to effectively utilize each subunit's capabilities to the fullest. In turn, humble middle managers within each subordinate unit may have similar effects on groups that fall under their authority, potentially improving the performance of lower-level units.

Personal Benefits of Humility

Knowing that humility is relevant to the organization in total, we should also explain how it benefits the individual. Previous research supports the development of self-awareness as critical in attaining humility (Argandona, 2015; Hoekstra, Bell, & Peterson, 2008; Ou et al., 2014; Owens, Johnson, & Mitchell, 2013; Vera & Rodriguez-Lopez, 2004). A viewpoint aligned with humility drives leaders to desire to learn from others and acknowledge mistakes and weaknesses. By doing so, leaders accept that failure is not fatal but an opportunity to evaluate their own selves as a means for improvement in the future. Through understanding their weaknesses, they also recognize others' strengths rather than feeling threatened. Such a point of view forces people to not think too highly of themselves and instead presume that others are able to counsel or act when they fall short (Argandona, 2015; Hoekstra, Bell, & Peterson, 2008; Owens, Johnson, & Mitchell, 2013; Ou et al., 2014; Vera and Rodriguez-Lopez, 2004). The humble leader will understand the value of the people in their organization and attempt to utilize those resources at all times.

We further suggest that humility does not bind a person to mediocrity. While the acceptance of shortcomings is one characteristic of humility, the virtue also instills a realization of excellence when applicable (Argandona, 2015). We refer to this as the attainment of self-respect, in line with Hoekstra, Bell, and Peterson's (2008) depiction of humility and in validation of Vera and Rodriguez-Lopez's (2004) determination of it as a mid-point between extremes. This provides the means for an individual to seek out his or her passions in a driven but inoffensive manner, and it offers a careerist the capacity to get ahead while refraining from narcissism. It is the lower bound which shields an individual from thinking too little of themselves, allowing them to accept credit even if only in the context of the group that they lead or support (Hoekstra, Bell, & Peterson, 2008; Vera & Rodriguez-Lopez, 2004).

The personal benefit of realizing humility can be expressed as the aggregate of rejecting two extremes. Whereas some would consider it a complete definition in and of itself, we consider the achievement of a healthy dose of self-awareness and self-respect to be the direct result of instilling a humble mindset in a person and their subsequent humble actions. These attributes can only be achieved after repeated practice of the virtue.

Exemplars of Leader Humility in the Military

While the perception of the successful military leader may not often include humility, there have been occasional individuals who have demonstrated this type of behavior. In this section, we look at two highly successful military leaders from history who demonstrated the characteristic of humility in their leadership styles. As we describe below, these

leaders were extremely effective, at least in part due to their humility.

Major General Joshua L. Chamberlain

Joshua Chamberlain began the Civil War as a Lieutenant Colonel in the Maine Militia. He rose to the rank of Major General during the conflict and

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earned the respect of his soldiers and superiors as a man of character and great humility. He continually placed the well-being of his troops ahead of his own and earned a reputation as a "soldier's soldier" from all who crossed his path. A soldier from the Pennsylvania militia who saw him in action stated, "If anyone in the Fifth Army Corps maintained a spotless name and won enduring fame from that corps...more than commensurate with the range of command he held, that one was Joshua L. Chamberlain" (Trulock, 1992, p. 300). By his enemies, he was described as, "one of the knightliest soldiers of the Federal army" (Trulock, 1992, p. 305). Yet despite these accolades from high and low, he remained humble and focused on others. He continually placed himself in harm's way and did so with more concern for his soldiers than himself. He stated, "...an officer is so absorbed by the sense of responsibility for his men, for his cause, or for the fight that the thought of personal peril has no place whatever in governing his actions" (Trulock, 1992, p. 105).

Shortly after taking command of the Twentieth Maine Regiment, Chamberlain was faced with a

difficult situation involving the enlistments of some of his men. Approximately 120 soldiers from the Second Maine Regiment were left behind when their unit headed home. These men had unknowingly enlisted for three years instead of two, like most of their comrades. Forty of these soldiers were embittered by the situation and refused to do their duty and follow the orders of their commander. These men were brought to Chamberlain as mutineers, and he was told to make them adhere to their duty or to execute them. The men had been treated as prisoners and were tired and hungry.

Chamberlain first had them fed and issued new clothes, and then he separated them and assigned them to different companies throughout the regiment to reduce their level of angst. Chamberlain recognized that these men had been treated poorly and instead treated them with the respect they deserved based on their service records. He even wrote, unsuccessfully, to the Governor of Maine on their behalf. He explained to them that he had no choice but to put them back into service, but that he would treat them fairly and give them the opportunity to voice complaints to their leaders in Maine (Trulock, 1992). Chamberlain could have easily towed the line, badgered the men and even threatened them with execution. Instead he treated them with respect, listened to their complaints and explained his predicament. His willingness to hear their perspective and to work with them on a difficult situation led most of the 40 men to return to service and even become some of his best soldiers and advisors. In this way, he got to know their needs and desires and he earned their respect.

As a result of his successful leadership throughout the Civil War, he was asked by Ulysses Grant to command the Union troops at the surrender ceremonies of the Army of Northern Virginia. Chamberlain considered

honoring the surrendering army with a full salute, but then thought it to be too much recognition. Instead, he determined to have his troops render a “carry arms”, or a marching salute, which he felt was appropriate to recognize the bravery and sacrifice of the vanquished foe (Trulock, 1992). It would have been easy and understandable for him to deny the confederate troops this recognition, but his character led him to honor their service and grant them a level of respect despite the horrors each army had inflicted on the other. This level of respect and humility was remarkable.

As an exemplar of humble leadership, Chamberlain stands out. Most military leaders are heroic, stoic, and sometimes overconfident. Major General Chamberlain did act heroically, but he never lost his humanity. He cared for his soldiers, respected his enemies, and exemplified the concepts of humble leadership described in this paper.

General George C. Marshall

General George C. Marshall is another example of humble leadership in the military. He accepted few awards and honors during his career, except when necessary for political relations, and took the time to mitigate the extent to which others saw him as anything greater than a public servant. As one example, in 1941, Marshall squashed the prodding of a reporter who asked if the general would run for President, noting that such aspirations would ruin his ability to do his job appropriately (Stoler, 1989). By doing so, he maintained the structure of a military subservient to the government – an important American ideal – and avoided upstaging others, which ensured effective interactions across organizations involved with the World War II effort.

In addition to his general personality, his wartime actions also demonstrated humility. As the General of

the Army, it was his responsibility to coordinate ground and air components across Europe and the Pacific. Although he valued unity of command, Marshall always trusted his staff. He once stated, "Army officers are intelligent... give them the bare tree, let them supply the leaves" (Stoler, 1989, p. 112). Marshall provided autonomy to General Eisenhower, in following his own direction, when running Operation Overlord, the invasion of Normandy. Even before, in 1943, he had told Eisenhower to "List your final desires and so far as I can see now they will be approved," best describing the relationship between these two commanders (Stoler, 1989, p. 113). Still, while he guided European affairs directly with support from subordinates, he gave an even freer hand to commanders in the Pacific. Though MacArthur is referred to as Marshall's antithesis by Stoler, he was given relative control over army and air components in the Pacific to operate in conjunction with mass naval components under Admiral Nimitz (1989). In breaking unity of command (otherwise valued), Marshall could use MacArthur as needed – being someone who understood strategy on the ground and who could rally soldiers in the theater – while still preserving Naval relationships through the increase of forces in a dual campaign that saw Naval dominance of action in the Pacific (Stoler, 1989).

Even when acting as a military diplomat instead of a wartime commander, his behavior showed a willingness to see others' needs and respond accordingly. While an advocate of military preparedness before the war, cautious of overextending military support in Europe, Marshall did not fear interallied coordination when entering World War II. Knowing the coordination machinery to be an important component of any counter-effort, he suggested that all Allied units in a theater come under one commander – a British general for the Australian-British-Dutch-American command. He went a step further to support the Anglo-American

Combined Chiefs of Staff to direct global unified strategy, reporting to both Churchill and Roosevelt, rather than attempting to coordinate countries' war production and deployment independently. This forced the American military to undergo structural changes in order to mimic that of British command structures (Stoler, 1989). In doing so, Marshall showed an understanding that personal prowess or even that of the American military would not withstand Axis machinations, subordinating isolationist tendencies and American military success to that of something greater: Allied victory. Whereas others may have sought out a strategic design to benefit their own image, he sought the betterment of a greater whole and humbly guided American aspirations in light of its allies' as well.

In preparation and performance within the context of World War II, General Marshall embodied humility as a military leader. He refused to take credit personally, trusted subordinate commanders, and sacrificed his own glory for that of the coalition. Although those around him were not always examples of the same character, his humility as a military officer, commanding or otherwise, was responsible for integrating relevant units and allowed for effective coordination of the war effort.

The Impact of Non-humble Leadership in the Military

Unfortunately, the authors have experienced leadership that lacks humility at times in their careers. The impact of this leadership style has had profound negative impacts. In this section, we describe those experiences as evidence that leadership that lacks humility can negatively impact organizations and individuals. This supports the research regarding the civilian sector and how a lack of leader humility has detrimental impacts.

The examples of poor leadership come in the form of individuals who do not display characteristics such as fallibility, vulnerability, transparency, inadequacy, or interdependency (Hoekstra, Bell, & Peterson, 2008). In fact, many subordinates see these types of leaders as infallible and smarter than anyone else around them. Effective self-reflection is typically absent from these leaders' repertoires, leading to significant challenges in the organization as acceptance of anything less than perfection is not allowed. Members of the team find themselves always on the defensive and having to guard themselves from an inevitable onslaught of negative criticism.

Team members who work for this type of leader find themselves walking on eggshells and reluctant to share bad news for fear of raising the ire of the leader. Even those who are expert in their field will hesitate to share their opinions in this type of environment. Other subordinates may begin to mimic the behavior of the non-humble leader, assuming that this type of behavior is required for success in the organization.

In this environment, we see evidence of the relationship between leader humility and team effectiveness. When the leader lacks humility, the team's performance suffers. It becomes difficult to be authentic, come up with innovative ideas, or develop talent in this type of environment (Rego et al., 2017). Subordinates either decide that they do not want to follow this type of leader and move on to other opportunities or they see this type of behavior as exemplary and try to pattern their behavior after it.

Lack of self-awareness on the part of the leader makes it difficult to have open conversations exploring different possibilities. When the leader wants it done their way, it precludes any discussion of

alternative possibilities. Innovation is hampered because subordinates are unwilling to propose new ideas for fear of being chastised. Finally, talent development is stunted because subordinates either hate or emulate the behavior of the leader.

Additional issues such as a desire for popularity and a lack of caring were additional challenges faced by organizations with a non-humble leader. When the leader is more concerned about their own well-being and their own success than they are about those of their subordinates, it leads to a very difficult environment. Projects are more difficult and efficiency decreases in the organization. Individual motivation is difficult to maintain and animosity can develop toward the leadership team, which makes the organization less effective in completing the mission.

Humility as an Antecedent to High-Character Leadership

The United States Air Force Academy's Center for Character and Leadership Development (CCLD) created a framework for developing leaders of character in 2011. It is an academically-based effort to define what it means to be a leader of character. There are three aspects of a leader of character that are outlined in the framework. They are: Living Honorably, Lifting Others, and Elevating Performance. The authors see many connections between these three characteristics and the principles of humble leadership as previously discussed. In this section, we seek to make those connections in order to highlight the benefits of humble leadership in a military context. After describing each aspect of the leader of character framework, we present several propositions about the relationship between leaders of character and humble leaders. The propositions can be tested in the future to verify their validity.

To Live Honorably means to consistently practice the virtues espoused in the Air Force Core Values (CCLD, 2011). These core values are: Integrity First, Service Before Self, and Excellence In All We Do. There are several sub-components of the Living Honorably construct laid out in the framework. These are humility, honesty, courage, accountability, duty, care for others, and respect for human dignity, among others (CCLD, 2011). Humility is an explicit sub-component which shows its importance to the idea of being a leader of character.

In addition to this explicit link, there are several other areas where the concept of leader humility is necessary for one to Live Honorably. There is a correlation between the ideas of honesty and accountability as related to the humility characteristic of self-awareness described by Ou and her colleagues (2014). An individual has a concept of their own integrity, but it is important that this concept be aligned with the external perception of their integrity as well. For one to be self-aware, one must be able to take an honest look at themselves and how others view them. They must be able to know themselves by taking time for self-reflection. A realistic assessment of who you are and how you are perceived is critical to success for the humble leader (Argandona, 2015). Additionally, the leader must be willing to hold themselves accountable for their actions and take responsibility when things do not go well. A leader who has enough humility to be self-aware will find it much easier to live honorably than a leader who is unwilling to look at themselves in an objective fashion and lacks humility.

Caring for others is another key aspect of Living Honorably. Humble leaders are said to have a low self-focus (Ou et al., 2014). When a leader focuses less

on themselves and more on others by getting to know their people, they demonstrate a level of care that is critical to both the subordinate and the organization. Leaders who lack humility may pound their chests and celebrate their achievements. They may also take credit for the work of their subordinates. In contrast, the humble leader will deflect credit away from themselves and onto their subordinates or their team. They will not seek the limelight but will attempt to put the focus on the success of others.

The final aspect of Living Honorably is duty. This is a term often associated with the military that means doing what is asked of you regardless of the cost. This definition is directly linked to another aspect of humble leadership described in the literature: a transcendental self-concept (Ou et al., 2014). This

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describes the humble leader as one who serves a greater good and puts the needs of their organization before their own. It also relates closely to the Air Force core value of Service Before Self. A humble leader sees their mission as propelling their organization to success as opposed to pursuing their own self-interests. Given all these connections, we find a close relationship between the concept of humility and the ideas associated with living honorably. The first proposition follows:

Proposition 1: A humble leader is more likely to live honorably than a leader who lacks humility.

The second aspect of being a leader of character is Lifting Others to be their best possible selves (CCLD, 2011). Leaders of character need to be focused on the members of their organization and figuring out how to enable those individuals to achieve their full potential. Knowing their subordinates is the first step in finding their strengths and lifting them to new heights. Within the leader humility literature, appreciation of others is another key tenet (Ou, Waldman, & Peterson, 2018). Humble leaders are able to admit that they are fallible and sometimes inadequate. At times, they are vulnerable and transparent with their followers which allows others to see what weaknesses exist and how they can fill the gaps. The humble leader realizes that they do not have all the answers and they acknowledge that they need others to be successful. This recognition of the interdependent nature of an organization's members allows all subordinates to see their importance to mission accomplishment (Argandona, 2015). This can lead to more constructive engagements and greater organizational success. Because of a humble leader's ability to appreciate others, they can challenge, support, develop and inspire their subordinates to be the best representation of themselves. This correlates very closely with the concept of Lifting Others. The second proposition is:

Proposition 2: A humble leader is better able to lift others than a leader who lacks humility.

The final aspect of a leader of character is Elevating Performance toward a common and noble purpose (CCLD, 2011). This relates closely to the previously discussed aspect of humble leadership, a transcendent self-concept (Ou et al., 2014). Military members often refer to a "higher calling". The work they do is in defense of the Nation and its ideals. When they are focused on something besides personal gain, they are able to encourage their subordinates to do the same.

There is a continual drive for the humble leader to get better and this leads to elevated performance for them and their organizations. The external focus of the humble leader allows them to spend a large amount of their time helping others to be their best selves. This, in turn, can lead to increased organizational performance.

Another important connection between the humble leader and Elevating Performance is found in the management literature. Rego et al. found an indirect connection between leader-expressed humility and team effectiveness (2017). The humble leader empowers their subordinates and instills humility in their top management team. This, in turn, leads to a corresponding increase in the effectiveness of the team they lead (Rego et al., 2017). As a result, we feel that leader humility is a key component to a leader of character's ability to Elevate Performance in an organization. The final proposition is:

Proposition 3: A humble leader has a greater ability to elevate performance in their organization than a leader who lacks humility.

Conclusion

Humility may not typically be a characteristic that comes to mind when discussing leaders, particularly those in the military. It is time for that to change. The humble leader is one who is self-aware, open to feedback, has an appreciation for others, is not focused on themselves, and who has a transcendent self-concept (Ou et al., 2014). The humble leader values the human condition, knows themselves and their subordinates well and engages in constructive work to better the organization. They are also willing to be vulnerable, admit their mistakes, and acknowledge their need for others (Argandona, 2015). This paper has presented and discussed how these traits can initially appear antithetical to the archetypal characterization

of military leadership. Organizations can benefit from humble leaders and the tools they bring with them and history has provided examples of military leaders who demonstrated humility in their leadership as well as discuss those who have not. Finally, several connections between leaders of character and humble leaders have been proposed. In conclusion, these propositions should be studied to determine their validity and then used to improve the development of future military members. Our Nation deserves the best leaders.

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