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In This Issue:

Designing a Character Course

Leadership Styles & Destructive Behavior

Cultivation of Character

Leaders' Psychological Bravery

Space Force Culture

(see back cover for full listing)

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Cover Photo: The picture on the cover highlights two iconic buildings at USAFA. In the forefront is the Center for Character & Leadership Development which was made possible through generous contributions of USAFA graduates and donors and the United States Air Force. In the background is the USAFA Cadet Chapel. Both buildings represent the necessity for character development in all leaders.

JCLD / TABLE OF CONTENTS

RESEARCH

PROGRAM/INTERVENTION

INSIGHTS

BOOK REVIEW

RESEARCH

Designing a Course for Lifelong, Self-Directed Character Growth

Ryan Erbe, United States Military Academy

Yasmine Konheim-Kalkstein, United States Military Academy

Ray Fredrick, United States Military Academy

Elise Dykhuis, United States Military Academy

Peter Meindl, United States Military Academy

ABSTRACT

In this paper, we discuss how to create a course that helps students set a foundation for lifelong, self-directed character growth. To this end, we offer a new framework for character change which we call the 3M's for "mindset" (having a growth mindset for character growth), "motivation" (using psychological needs described in the Self Determination Theory, autonomy, competence, relatedness, and purpose), and "means" (tools for character development). We then give concrete examples of how each component of this framework can be used in a classroom setting to help students develop their character.

Keywords: Character, Virtue, Character Education, Higher Education

CONTACT Ryan Erbe ✉ **ryan.erbe@westpoint.edu**

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to present ideas on how to create a course that not only helps develop students' character in the short term, but also sets a foundation for life-long, self-directed character growth. Service academies have a core mission of developing leaders of character. Recently, there have been calls for institutions of higher education to focus on the character formation of their students (Bok, 2020) and initial work on the investigation of college level character education (Lamb et al., 2022). To accomplish the goal of our paper, we offer an organizing framework to prepare people for volitional character change – the 3M Framework. This framework, first introduced in Meindl and Dykhuis (2022), is grounded in the idea that successfully teaching for self-directed character growth requires (1) imbuing pupils with Motivation to be people of great character, (2) helping them build the right Mindset such that they ardently believe they can improve their character, and (3) teaching them the Means or tools that will allow them to continue to develop their character. In what follows, we provide background information on the 3Ms, along with specific examples of applications of each of the 3Ms. As an illustrative example of how the 3Ms may be applied in the classroom, we discuss a pilot character course recently carried out at the United States Military Academy (USMA) with a sub-section of first-year cadets.

Motivation

A course centered on facilitating character change should leave students more intrinsically motivated to be people of character. How can a character course do this? Self-Determination Theory (SDT; Deci, & Ryan, 2012) – arguably the preeminent psychological theory of intrinsic motivation – offers several ideas. SDT highlights three psychological needs that, when met, enhance intrinsic motivation: *Autonomy, Competence, and Relatedness*. In what follows, we will briefly discuss each of SDT's proposed needs, as well as the human need for *Purpose*. We touch on purpose both because of its close relationship to SDT constructs (Weinstein et al., 2012) and its importance for motivation (Hulleman & Harackiewicz, 2009; Yeager et al., 2014). We will then offer examples of how all four of these needs can be satisfied in a character formation course, thus, we believe, heightening students' intrinsic motivation to develop their character.

Autonomy

According to SDT, autonomy is the psychological need to have the perception of choice or control (Deci & Ryan, 2012). When an individual is provided with the freedom to choose, their sense of intrinsic motivation is enhanced (Deci & Ryan, 2012). In a character course, giving students options, such as which aspect of their character they can focus on developing, who they can work on this endeavor with, and which practices they can apply toward this end (e.g. written journal reflections; meditation) may facilitate intrinsic motivation to become a person of character.

Competence

We are more intrinsically motivated to do things that give us a sense of mastery, expertise, or competence (Deci & Ryan, 2012). A survey course on world history is unlikely to develop a sense of expertise if each lesson is focused on important, but seemingly unrelated epochs in human history, especially if connections between the lessons are not made explicit. The same is true for a character course composed of discrete lessons that do not build on themselves (e.g. one day devoted to gratitude, another day focused on self-control, another on goal-setting). Instead, to develop students' sense of competence in the domain of character development, course material should build on itself, much like an elementary math sequence begins with addition and subtraction, and gradually builds to multiplication and division.

Relatedness

Relatedness refers to an individual's need to feel interpersonal connection. According to SDT, when a person
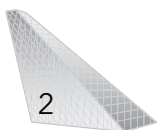
feels connected to another person through a task, or as the result of completing a goal, the individual is subsequently more intrinsically motivated to engage in that task (Deci & Ryan, 2012). Enabling students to work on their character together and helping them see how enhanced character leads to improved relationships, may intrinsically motivate them to work toward improving their character.

Purpose

Finally, connecting intermediate goals to one's supraordinate goal, or purpose in life fuels motivation for the former (Hulleman & Harackiewicz, 2009; Yeager et al., 2014). Studies with college students show that interventions designed to develop purpose can be effective (Bronk et al., 2019) and when implemented in a character education course, purpose interventions can help facilitate character formation (Mendonça et al., 2023). Thus, an instructor of a character course should work to teach their students how mastering course material might help them discover and/or reach some higher purpose in life.

Applications

There are many ways to apply SDT's insights to a character course. Here, we briefly share insights and strategies that have been implemented in a pilot character development course at USMA. In this course, we attempted to develop cadets' sense of character formation competence by guiding them through a sequential character formation curriculum. Cadets began by discerning what they considered to be their highest goal or purpose in life. They then decided what character trait to work on during the remainder of the year (thus satisfying autonomy needs) by determining which character trait would most strongly aid them in their attempt to achieve their supraordinate goal (hence satisfying "purpose" needs). Cadets were then taught a simple goal-setting strategy (see "goal-setting" under "Means" section below), and each week, cadets set a goal that would ultimately help them develop their target character trait. Cadets monitored their character goal progress through weekly

reflections and discussions with "Friends of Mutual Accountability" (explained further under the "Means" section) that they chose (providing another opportunity to not only satisfy the need for autonomy, but also relatedness, as we note further in the text).

In addition to applying SDT to our course, we also implemented discrete motivational practices. These included the use of relevant and attainable exemplars to inspire (Čehajić-Clancy & Bileweicz, 2021; Han et al., 2017; van de Ven et al., 2019), and "discrepancy awareness" activities (Allemand & Flückiger, 2017; e.g. asking cadets to think about how they would be remembered if they died today vs. how they want to be remembered).

Mindset

The second of the 3Ms is Mindset. Intentional change can be facilitated by a person's mindset or belief that they can change (Han et al., 2018). Here we briefly review two psychological concepts that relate to this orientation – self-efficacy and growth mindset. We then discuss how they can be developed in a character course.

Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy, or the belief that one can attain one's goals, is critical for accomplishing what one sets out to do (Bandura, 1977; Pajares, 1992; Van Dinther et al., 2011). An individual who believes they can perform a certain behavior – including positive character behaviors – when armed with the right character-building strategies (see *Means* section below), can develop the skills necessary to do so through persistent effort (Bandura, 2004).

Growth Mindset

A related but distinct concept is the growth mindset. Unlike self-efficacy, which focuses on one's belief in their own ability to accomplish a particular goal, growth mindset focuses on the notion that change is possible, not just for oneself, but in general (Yeager & Dweck, 2012). A hallmark of the growth mindset is the belief that effort

put forth can influence a trait or ability (Park et al., 2020). After all, if you do not believe you can change, why bother putting in the effort? Having a moral growth mindset, the belief that through effort, a person can become a morally better person (Han et al., 2020) has been shown to increase voluntary service engagement (Han et al., 2018).

Fortunately, a growth mindset is something that can be taught; interventions promoting growth mindset can influence the effort one puts into accomplishing a goal (Paunesku et al., 2015; Yeager et al., 2019). To develop a growth mindset, a person needs only to be offered evidence that they can in fact grow. There are at least two effective strategies for teaching someone that growth is possible: one anecdotal, another empirical. On the anecdotal side, there is reason to think that growth mindset can be developed simply by telling stories about redemptive figures – people who did not always act in exemplary ways but who changed their behavior for the better. These stories are inspiring (Klein & O'Brien, 2017), likely because they give people hope that they, too, can grow into exceptional people. Wise interventions designed to enhance growth mindset have long used stories of redemptive figures to convince people that change is possible (e.g. Blackwell et al., 2007).

A second strategy for developing a growth mindset is to simply offer empirical evidence that people do change. For instance, brief growth mindset interventions typically provide scientific facts about brain plasticity (Yeager et al., 2013, 2016). This teaches people that it is not only the case that people *can* change, but that change is a common occurrence in humans. It is written into our brains. Discussing evidence for personality and behavior change should be effective for the same reason.

Applications
To facilitate growth in self-efficacy, we took several steps to increase the likelihood that cadets in our pilot course would accomplish their character goals. They were taught a simple and effective goal-setting strategy (see "goal-setting" in the "Means" section), were provided with opportunities to set their own character goals, and were encouraged to pursue these goals outside of class. Additionally, each week in class they were given time to reflect on their goal progress.

To promote a growth mindset, at the beginning of the course, we provided cadets with empirical evidence that people change throughout the lifespan. Cadets also reflected on their own past positive development and identified people in their lives who have demonstrated effective character growth. Finally, throughout the course we used videos and readings that introduced relatable exemplars who have demonstrated considerable character growth, often during emerging adulthood.

Means
A student who *wants* to be a person of character (i.e. they are motivated) and *believes* they can develop their character (i.e. they have the right mindset) still might not fully develop their character. To do so, they need to have the right tools, or "Means" to develop themselves. In this section, we highlight four means: reflection, emotion regulation, situational strategies, and character-related knowledge.

Reflection
Reflection – here, specifically thinking and/or journaling about components of one's character journey – is a commonly used tool for character formation (Lamb et al., 2021), but not all forms of reflection are equally powerful. So, what does good reflection look like? We believe it involves thinking about the "*what*," "*why*," "*where*," and "*how*" of one's attempts at intentional character change (Johnson, 2020). What exactly does one aspire to be like? Why is this what they aspire to be and why do they not currently act this way? Where are they currently at on their road to good character? And how are they going to get where they want to go? It is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss all exercises that can

help people think through each of these components of reflection, but we will outline four especially efficient activities: values affirmation, self-monitoring, goal-setting, and plan-setting.

Values Affirmation. Values affirmation entails reflecting on one's personal values or goals, and then briefly writing about why one considers those values or goals to be especially important.[1] Research shows that values affirmation can increase myriad character-relevant qualities, including humility (Crocker et al., 2008; Ruberton et al., 2016), self-control (Schmeichel & Vohs, 2009), and prosocial behavior (Schneider & Weber, 2021).

Self-Monitoring. Empirical evidence demonstrates that for a litany of behaviors, simply monitoring one's behavior (also known as self-monitoring) is perhaps the most powerful behavior-change strategy available (Abraham & Michie, 2008). Why? There are many reasons, but one is that self-monitoring serves as a regular reminder of one's goals. Another reason for self-monitoring's effectiveness is that it likely motivates behavior change, either by showing people that they are effectively working toward their goals (thereby enhancing self-efficacy) or by revealing that they are not yet where they want to be. In these ways, self-monitoring helps address the "where" of reflection – where am I currently?

Goal-Setting. Simple goal-setting has been shown to be an important activity for promoting change (Epton et al., 2017). There are many useful goal-setting methods, but for simplicity's sake, we have created the "ABCS" of goal-setting. The ABCS system draws together the two components of goal-setting that research suggests are particularly important (Locke & Latham, 2006): a goal must be Attainable yet Bold (i.e. it must be difficult to accomplish), and it must be Clear yet Specific. As students progress through a character course, it might be

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1 To access a pre-made Values Affirmation activity, go to https://characterlab.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/grit_myvalues.pdf or visit www.pztools.org.

wise to introduce more complex goal-setting systems, but our experience is that the ABCS offer a practical jumping off point for people just starting to formally develop goals.

Plan-Setting. Goals alone will not lead to character change: they must be accomplished. To assist in goal-achievement, it helps to set a plan. One of the most effective techniques for plan-setting is WOOP (Oettingen & Reininger, 2016). WOOP stands for Wish, Outcome, Obstacle, and Plan. Using this system, one first identifies a Wish or future they desire (i.e. their goal). They then imagine the optimal Outcome or feeling associated with reaching that future. Next, an Obstacle they may face on the path to this future is considered. They then create a Plan to overcome the obstacle (Gollwitzer & Sheeran, 2006). Specifically, WOOP directs people to create an implementation intention: An "if/then" statement in which people report "If situation X arises, then I will Y." In part, implementation intentions draw their power from the fact that they succinctly encourage people to specify when, where, and how they intend to pursue their goal (Gollwitzer et al., 2010). Notably, implementation intentions have been successfully used to shape the character of emerging adults (Hudson & Fraley, 2015).

Though not a form of reflection, here we should note that mere reminders of one's character goals may also facilitate character formation (Bucciol & Piovesan, 2011; Mazar et al., 2008). This means that something as simple as setting a daily alarm to remind oneself of their goal can help a person develop their character. One potential weakness of this strategy, however, is habituation. If the content of the reminder (e.g. "Remember: Be Kind") and the timing of the reminder (e.g., every day at 7:30) remain the same, it will quickly lose its potency.

Emotion Regulation

Emotions play an outsize role in character, especially moral character (Haidt, 2001, 2003), because of their

tendency to drive behavior. Whether people are experiencing too many emotions, not enough, or not the right type, there are emotion regulation techniques that can help them. And in doing so, they will set a stronger foundation for character change. Two categories of emotion regulation practices that seem to be especially useful for character formation are meditation and gratitude-induction activities.

Meditation. Meditation is an internal process aimed at regulating attention and emotions for the purpose of enhancing equanimity, well-being, and character formation (Lutz et al., 2008; Sedlmeier et al., 2012; Willard, 1998). Contemporary types of meditation include mindfulness, transcendental, spiritual, and mantra. Meditation is known to improve psychological mechanisms fundamental to the development and enactment of character traits, including attentional control, self-awareness, and emotion regulation (Tang et al., 2015; Upton, 2017); it also directly impacts character by promoting self-control, prosocial behavior, prosocial emotions such as empathy and compassion (Kreplin et al., 2018; Luberto et al., 2018) and honesty (Feruglio et al., 2023). Forming a meditation habit is challenging, but fortunately there now exists a plethora of meditation apps (e.g. Healthy Minds, Headspace, Calm) that make it easier to create such a habit. The existence of these apps also means that character course instructors do not need to be meditation experts themselves to properly train students in meditation.

Gratitude. Perhaps the most efficient emotion-regulation activities for character are gratitude generators. Research shows that gratitude contributes to a host of character traits, including humility (Kruse et al., 2014), generosity (Bartlett & DeSteno, 2006), hope (Witvliet et al., 2019), and even self-control (DeSteno et al., 2019). Counting Blessings and Three Good Things activities (writing every night about three things one is grateful or thankful for, or three things that went well in their lives that day, respectively), are relatively quick,

painless, and powerful ways to generate gratitude. The Three Good Things activity is so powerful that it has been shown to increase happiness and decrease depressive symptoms for at least six months (Seligman et al., 2005).

Context

Environments influence behavior, so much so that some scholars suggest that their influence makes character irrelevant (Doris & Doris, 2002; Harman, 2009). According to these "situationists," humans are almost entirely products of the situations they (a) have experienced in the past and (b) experience today. But even if environments did hold the lion's share of influence over character (though see, for instance, Sabini and Silver (2005) and Fleeson (2001) for evidence that the importance of situations has been overstated), this would simply mean that the road to character change would go through efforts to change one's environment. Or as the behaviorist B.F. Skinner once said, "Don't try to change yourself, change your environment." Here we discuss two strategies that students can be taught and that may help them harness the power of their environments to improve their character: situation selection and situation modification (Gross, 1998).

Situation selection involves choosing an environment that makes good character more likely. For example, if you do not want to binge on candy, do not have candy in your home. If it is impossible to give into a temptation, it is impossible to *not* act the way you want to act. Of course, sometimes tailoring your environment to your character-related desires is not practical. Perhaps, for instance, your spouse wants candy in the house. In this case, instead of making a behavior impossible, you can make it more difficult, through situation modification. For example, ask your spouse to hide the candy. The point is simply that to the extent that environments are malleable, altering them is an important strategy for reaching your best self. For this reason, we suggest having students consider how to alter their own
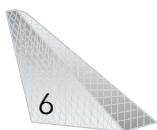
environments or set their own boundaries to support their character goals.

Knowledge

Lastly, we believe that students should be taught about a small set of concepts, theories, and models pertinent to character formation. For instance, students should be taught about the three main drivers of character formation outlined here – motivation, mindset, and means. Students should also understand the connection between character and future happiness. For example, evidence suggests that engaging in prosocial behavior such as donating time and money to others, increases positive affect and life satisfaction (Aknin et al., 2019). Not only is this information important and practical, but it is also simple and relatively enjoyable to learn. And by elucidating the connection between happiness and character, we suspect that many students will be more motivated to become people of character.

Applications

Early in our pilot character course, cadets completed a values affirmation activity to clarify what they considered of ultimate importance in life. They then set character trait goals that, if accomplished, would contribute to that which they ultimately value. Then each week in class, they were provided with time to (1) reflect on whether they accomplished their goals from the week before, (2) set or refine their goals, and (3) plan out how they would accomplish those goals.

Cadets also regularly practiced meditation, typically at the beginning of class. Instructors either used a pre-recorded guided meditation, or a meditation script provided for them. Cadets were shown empirical evidence that highlighted meditation's emotion regulation-enhancing capabilities and were encouraged to practice outside of class on their own. Finally, cadets discussed the power of environments and reflected on opportunities to select environments or modify them in ways that made it easier to accomplish their character goals.

Because friends are a powerful component of a person's social environment, one concrete way this was accomplished in class was through the selection of "Friends of Mutual Accountability." After cadets identified character traits to work on, set character goals, and chose their character friends, they met with them weekly to discuss their goal progress. By having friends in their immediate social context become aware of their goals, this more effectively positioned them to hold each other accountable for their character goal pursuits outside of class. Cadets were also provided with information about the connection between character and flourishing (such as the connection between virtues such as gratitude and positive psychological well-being outcomes), along with opportunities to write down and express what they were grateful for.

Conclusion

In this paper, we aimed to help administrators and educators develop a class that improves their students' character both now and in the future. In service of this goal, we offered instructors the 3M system. We then provided example activities that would help satisfy each of the 3Ms. Although many other strategies exist within each of these three bins, here we have focused on those that seem most effective and efficient. We should also point out that the 3M system not only provides a framework for designing a character growth class but also a structure for assessing the effectiveness of the course and the development of students (Meindl & Dykhuis, 2022). Our hope is that administrators and character educators can use ideas presented in this paper to help their students set a foundation for lifelong self-directed character growth towards a lifetime of flourishing.

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RESEARCH

Measuring the Relationship Between Leadership Styles and Destructive Leadership Behaviors Among Air Force Students Attending Army Command and General Staff College

Timothy Ramig, United States Air Force

ABSTRACT

Background: The Air Force uses the full range of leadership model (transformational, transactional, and passive-avoidant leadership) to develop leaders. However, there has been less research at how the leadership styles in the full range of leadership model are related to destructive leadership behavior, evidenced by adverse administrative actions.

Objective: Conduct a pilot study using the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire and Destrudo-L in tandem, within a smaller population of Air Force Professional Military Education students, to determine if, and to what degree, a relationship existed between leadership styles and destructive leadership behaviors.

Methods: The MLQ-5X and Destrudo-L research instruments were used to collect data from a population sample of the Air Force field grade officers attending professional military education (n = 22). The MLQ-5X measured leadership styles, and the Destrudo-L measured destructive leadership behaviors.

Results: Linear regressions measured the relationships between leadership styles and destructive leadership behavior and all regressions found $p \leq 0.005$. Transformational leadership behaviors were negatively related to both passive (B = −1.36) and active (B = −0.86) destructive leadership behaviors. Transactional leadership behaviors were also negatively related to both passive (B = −1.3) and active (B = −0.83) destructive leadership behaviors. However, passive-avoidant leadership behaviors had a positive relationship with passive (B = 1.21) and active (B = 0.68) destructive leadership behaviors.

Conclusion: This pilot study found a relationship between leadership styles and destructive leadership behavior. However, the cross-sectional design, small population within a single officer rank, setting of a competitive in-residence Professional Military Education course, limit the generalizability of the findings.

Keywords: Leadership, Transformational Leadership, Destructive Leadership, Air Force, Quantitative

Introduction[1]

In April, Kendall et al. (2023) identified in their 2024 Posture Statement to Congress that the Active Component of the United States Air Force would miss recruiting goals by 10%, and the Air Guard and Reserve components by even greater margins (Kendall et al., 2023). Since then, the Secretary of the Air Force highlighted efforts to decrease bureaucracy and loosen requirements to boost recruiting efforts (Gordon, 2023); the Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force released six priorities to improve talent retention across the enlisted force and the former Chief of Staff of the Air Force proposed solutions to recruiting challenges

during his confirmation hearing to become the next Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Garamone, 2023). Solving the recruitment and retention problem is key to fulfilling the priority of the National Defense Strategy's priority of "Building a resilient joint force" (U.S. Department of Defense, 2022).

Leadership directly impacts successful recruitment and retention of talent and will influence the Air Force's ability to overcome these two human relations management challenges. It has been found through research that transformational leadership increases employee retention through increased levels of organizational citizenship behavior and communication (Tian et al., 2020), improved job satisfaction and lower levels of departure intentions (Gan & Voon, 2021), increased organizational performance especially during times of high competitive advantage (Yamin, 2020), and

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[1] A version of this article was published previously as part of a master's thesis: Ramig (2023), "The relationship among rank, transformational leadership, and destructive leadership behavior," master's thesis, Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas.

increased innovation among Generation-Z employees resulting in decreased turnover (Gabriel et al., 2022). Research also found that transformational leadership was important in attracting talent, beyond other salary and benefit compensation (Mangisa et al., 2020).

While the United States Army maintains Army Doctrine Publication (ADP) 6-22 that defines, models, and details application of leadership (U.S. Army, 2019), the United States Air Force adopted the Full-Range of Leadership Model, which includes transformational, transactional, and passive-avoidant (also referred to as Laissez-Faire) leadership styles (Arenas et al., 2018; Stafford, 2010; United States Air Force, 2022). This model was developed in the mid-1980s (Avolio & Bass, 2004) as the transformational leadership era embraced more of an intrinsic approach as it evolved from the transactional era (Benmira & Agboola, 2021; Greenwood, 1996; Horner, 1997; King, 1990; Landis et al., 2014; Van Seters & Field, 1990).

The Air Force's leadership model focuses on the effective leadership behaviors, but it does not address the destructive leadership behaviors (DLBs), also called toxic leadership. These DLBs have been shown to negatively affect the organizational environment. Research shows that toxic leadership is related to lower work productivity (Rohayati, 2022), counterproductive behavior among subordinates (Gabriel, 2016), as well as increased intentions among employees to leave (Akca, 2017), due to increased burnout and emotional exhaustion (Gravili et al., 2022).

In fact, until the 1990s, leadership theory in general focused primarily on the factors associated with effective leadership and implied that lacking such factors caused ineffective leadership (Ashforth, 1994). Between 1994 and 2007, researchers studied DLB and attempted to define and classify them independently (Ashforth, 1994; Namie & Namie, 2000; Tepper, 2000). Einarsen et al. (2007) provided a broader definition of DLB, which became the generally accepted definition:

"The systematic and repeated behaviour by a leader, supervisor or manager that violates the legitimate interest of the organisation by undermining and/or sabotaging the organisation's goals, tasks, resources, and effectiveness and/or the motivation, well-being or job satisfaction of subordinates."

Larsson et al. (2012) consolidated the context and definition of these researchers and developed the Destrudo-L to measure both active and passive forms of DLB within a military environment.

This knowledge gap prompted the design of a pilot study to determine if relationships between leadership styles and DLB within the Air Force could be measured. Field grade officers often fill several critical squadron roles, including squadron command, director of operations, and assistant directors of operations. Majors typically impact scores of Airmen under their immediate leadership. The Air Force Element at the Command and General Staff College (CGSOC; Fort Leavenworth, Kansas) cooperated with research, and provided access to its students, composed entirely of majors, as a research population. With this population sample in mind, the following research questions and hypotheses were developed:

Research Question 1: If and to what degree is there a relationship between transformational leadership behaviors measured by the MLQ-5X and DLB measured by the Destrudo-L, as experienced by Air Force field grade officers (FGOs) attending CGSOC?

Research Question 2: If and to what degree is there a relationship between transactional leadership behaviors measured by the MLQ-5X and DLB measured by the Destrudo-L, as experienced by Air Force FGOs attending CGSOC?

Research Question 3: If and to what degree is there a relationship between passive avoidant leadership

(PAL) behaviors measured by the MLQ and DLB measured by the Destrudo-L, as experienced by Air Force FGOs attending CGSOC?

Hypothesis 1 (H1): There is a negative relationship between TL behaviors, as measured by the MLQ-5X, and DLB, as measured by the Destrudo-L, experienced by Air Force FGOs attending CGSOC.

Hypothesis 2 (H2): There is a negative relationship between transactional leadership behaviors, as measured by the MLQ-5X, and DLB, as measured by the Destrudo-L, experienced by Air Force FGOs attending CGSOC.

Hypothesis 3 (H3): There is a positive relationship between PAL behaviors, as measured by the MLQ-5X, and DLB, as measured by the Destrudo-L, experienced by Air Force FGOs attending CGSOC.

Method

This pilot study used a quantitative methodology with a cross-sectional design. A research instrument composed of the MLQ-5X, and Destrudo-L asked participants to measure, on a Likert scale, a series of leadership behaviors of their most recent direct supervisor. The MLQ-5X measured the nine elements of the Full Range of Leadership, which composed transformational, transactional, and passive-avoidant leadership styles (Avolio & Bass, 2004), while the Destrudo-L (included as Appendix A), measured five elements of DLB, which composed active and passive DLB (Larsson et al., 2012). Higher scores indicated respondents experienced a higher incidence of the behavior.

This study was designed and executed in accordance with the ethical principles established in the Belmont Report and was found to be institutional-review-board-exempt by the Director of Human Protection of the Command and General Staff College.

Results

Of the 73 FGOs attending the CGSOC in residence at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas for the 2022–2023 Academic Year, the overall participation rate was 30.1% ($n = 22$). Respondents were asked to answer five demographic questions (race, gender, previous supervisor's rank, previous supervisor's race, and previous supervisor's gender). Participant demographics revealed 72% were white ($n = 16$), 18% non-white ($n = 4$), and 9% preferred not to answer ($n = 2$). In addition, 95% of the participants indicated they were male ($n = 21$), while 5% preferred not to answer ($n = 1$). Among Air Force FGOs as a whole, 80% were white, 21% were non-white, 81% were male, and 19% were female. Based on these limited demographics, the sample was not found to be representative (some factors were representative and others were not in this pilot study) of all Air Force FGOs (Military One Source, 2021a, 2021b).

PSPP is a free statistical analysis software package provided by the GNU project, and was used to first analyze descriptive statistics. The Quality Assurance Office deidentified survey responses and provided the data with Likert scale responses represented numerically. Individual question responses were consolidated into the five domain scores in Figure 1, according to instructions from the original research (Avolio & Bass, 2004; Larsson et al., 2012). The mean scores, standard deviations, and variable ranges are presented in Table 1.

PSPP was then used to run separate linear regressions between the independent variables of transformational leadership, transactional leadership, and passive avoidant leadership, and the dependent variables of active and passive DLB. The results are presented in Table 2. All linear regressions produced statistically significant results ($p \leq 0.005$).

Figure 1

Research Methodology Visualization
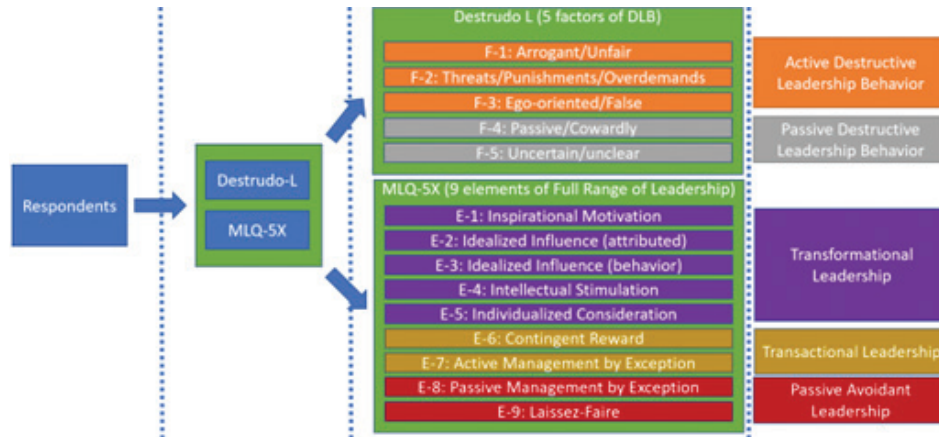
Table 1

Descriptive Statistics

Variable	N	Mean	Std dev	Range
Active DLB	22	1.64	0.95	3.50
Arrogant Unfair	22	1.81	1.30	5.00
Threats Punishments Overdemands	22	1.31	0.39	1.25
Ego Oriented False	22	1.82	1.34	4.50
Passive DLB	22	2.24	1.33	4.53
Passive Cowardly	22	2.35	1.42	4.80
Uncertain Unclear Messy	22	2.13	1.28	4.25
Transformational Leadership	22	2.57	0.88	3.45
Idealized Behaviors	22	2.22	0.89	3.50
Idealized Attributes	22	2.83	1.08	3.50
Inspirational Motivation	22	2.77	0.99	3.50
Intellectual Stimulation	22	2.51	0.99	3.75
Individual Consideration	22	2.55	1.00	3.50
Transactional Leadership	22	2.13	0.66	3.00
Contingent Reward	22	2.69	0.97	3.75
Active Management by Exception	22	1.56	0.77	3.00
Passive-Avoidant Leadership	22	1.12	0.97	3.13
Passive Management by Exception	22	1.23	0.94	3.25
Laissez Faire	22	1.01	1.10	3.75

Table 2

Linear Regression Tables Between Leadership Styles and Destructive Leadership Behaviors

	Unstandardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients	*t*	Sig	95% confidence interval for B	
	B	**Std Error**	**Beta**			**Lower bound**	**Upper bound**
Linear regression table between transformational leadership and active destructive leadership behavior							
(Constant)	3.86	0.39	0.00	9.82	0.000	3.04	4.68
Transformational Leadership	−0.86	0.14	–0.80	−5.94	0.000	–1.16	−0.56
Linear regression table between transformational leadership and passive destructive leadership behavior							
(Constant)	5.75	0.39	0.00	14.81	0.000	4.94	6.56
Transformational Leadership	–1.36	0.14	–0.91	–9.54	0.000	–1.66	–1.07
Linear regression table between transactional leadership and active destructive leadership behavior							
(Constant)	3.41	0.58	0.00	5.84	0.000	2.20	4.63
Transactional Leadership	–0.83	0.26	–0.58	–3.16	0.005	–1.38	–0.28
Linear regression table between transactional leadership and passive destructive leadership behavior							
(Constant)	5.00	0.77	0.00	6.51	0.000	3.40	6.60
Transactional Leadership	–1.30	0.35	–0.64	–3.75	0.001	–2.02	–0.58
Linear regression table between passive avoidant leadership and active destructive leadership behavior							
(Constant)	0.88	0.23	0.00	3.81	0.001	0.40	1.37
Passive Avoidant Leadership	0.68	0.16	0.69	4.30	0.000	0.35	1.01
Linear regression table between passive avoidant leadership and passive destructive leadership behavior							
(Constant)	0.89	0.21	0.00	4.13	0.000	0.44	1.34
Passive Avoidant Leadership	1.21	0.15	0.88	8.24	0.000	0.90	1.51

Discussion

With the cooperation of the Air Force Element at the Army Command and General Staff College, this pilot study sought to determine if relationships between leadership styles and DLB within the Air Force could be measured. H1, which predicted transformational leadership would have a negative relationship with DLB was supported by a linear regression relationship between transformational leadership and active DLB ($B = -0.86$) and passive DLB ($B = -1.36$). H2, which predicted transactional leadership would have a negative relationship with DLB was also supported by a linear regression relationship between transactional leadership, active DLB ($B = -0.83$), and passive DLB ($B = -1.30$). Lastly H3, which predicted a positive relationship between passive avoidant leadership and DLB was also supported by a linear regression relationship between passive avoidant leadership and active DLB ($B = 0.68$) and passive DLB ($B = 1.21$).

Conclusion

This pilot study found evidence of relationships between three leadership styles and two forms of DLB. However, the pilot study had a small sample size, which impacted its generalizability and quality of the data being analyzed. A low population sample does not immediately disqualify results, as Jenkins and Quintana-Ascencio (2020) found that regression provides accurate estimates when the variance is low in populations as small as $n = 8$, and Ospina and Marmoleio-Ramos (2019) identified a coefficient of variance under 1.0 as low variance. However, while this data did have a population larger than eight ($n = 22$) and all the coefficients of variance were under 0.866, this research would greatly benefit from significant expansion to provide generalizability across a larger population of the Air Force.

This pilot study used a cross-sectional design, which only collected data at one point in time from a very narrow population of Air Force officers. Furthermore, the survey asked participants to rate the leadership behaviors of their previous supervisors. While the survey was anonymous and individual protections were outlined in an informed consent document, there is still a potential for social desirability bias affecting responses. Future research utilizing a longitudinal approach across a larger and more generalizable population would better assess longer term trends of leadership behavior across the Air Force and address these limitations. The results of a longitudinal study would also provide quantitative data that could be used to determine whether leadership behaviors are related to recruitment and retention trends across different career fields or service components.

Despite these limitations, this pilot study provided initial evidence that leadership styles are related to DLB within the Air Force. As the Air Force seeks to decrease DLB, there should be a focus on how leadership styles are being developed in leaders. Future research could also impact pre-commissioning sources (Air Force Academy, Air Force Reserve Officer Training Corps, and Officer Training School), Technical Schools, and other developmental opportunities.

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Appendix A: English Adaption of the Destrudo-L

Destrudo-L Survey

Adapted to English with permission of Dr. Gerry Larsson

Directions: With regards to your previous supervisor, mark how much you agree with the following statements

	Do not agree at all					Fully agree
1. Makes subordinates feel stupid	○	○	○	○	○	○
2. Behaves arrogantly	○	○	○	○	○	○
3. Treats subordinates differently/inconsistently	○	○	○	○	○	○
4. Is unpleasant	○	○	○	○	○	○
5. Shows violent tendencies	○	○	○	○	○	○
6. Punishes subordinates for making mistakes or failing to meet goals	○	○	○	○	○	○
7. Uses threats to get his/her way	○	○	○	○	○	○
8. Has unreasonable demands	○	○	○	○	○	○
9. Takes credit for subordinates work	○	○	○	○	○	○
10. Places personal needs above the group's	○	○	○	○	○	○
11. Does not trust his/her subordinates	○	○	○	○	○	○
12. Does not keep promises/agreements	○	○	○	○	○	○
13. Is non-confrontational	○	○	○	○	○	○
14. Is absent/missing around subordinates	○	○	○	○	○	○
15. Does not display an active interest in work	○	○	○	○	○	○
16. Does not take charge of things	○	○	○	○	○	○
17. Shows insecurity in his/her role	○	○	○	○	○	○
18. Is bad at structuring/planning	○	○	○	○	○	○
19. Gives unclear instructions	○	○	○	○	○	○
20. Is often/easily confused about work	○	○	○	○	○	○

PROGRAM/INTERVENTION

Operationalizing the Human Condition, Cultures, and Societies Outcome through the National Character and Leadership Symposium

Pete Swanson, United States Air Force Academy

Rouven Steeves, United States Air Force Academy

Michele Johnson, United States Air Force Academy

ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on the Human Condition, Cultures, and Societies institutional outcome at the United States Air Force Academy (USAFA) and highlights the connection between the outcome and the 2024 National Character and Leadership Symposium (NCLS) theme. Each year, the symposium provides the USAFA community and visitors the opportunity to learn from and engage with nationally recognized speakers. Interactions allow participants to contemplate not only the importance of valuing the human condition but also engage concertedly and compassionately with others. Every four years, the NCLS theme is rooted in the institutional outcome of the Human Condition, Cultures, and Societies. This year's theme places particular emphasis on precisely the need to know oneself, know others, and to elevate performance through

constructive engagement to make a difference, namely learning what each can and must do to value the human condition and human beings. The authors explore how USAFA operationalizes the importance of understanding the human condition as participants transition from the academic classroom to the field to the Air Force and Space Force.

Keywords: Leadership, Human Condition, NCLS, Outcome, USAFA

Introduction

"I not only think we can make a difference; we need to make a difference!" When a cadet shared the foregoing words after the National Character and Leadership Symposium (NCLS) 2020's closing Challenge Ceremony (the last time NCLS had the Human Condition Outcome as its focus), we knew it was a success. For the purpose of this outcome, as well as the very reason for NCLS directly addressing this important theme, is not merely to learn and contemplate valuing the human condition but engaging concertedly and compassionately with other human beings as valuable and unique individuals. NCLS 2024 once again has as its focus the Human Condition, Cultures, and Societies Outcome, and its theme this year places particular emphasis on precisely the need "to make a difference," namely learning what each can and must do to value the human condition and human beings. The following paper's intent, therefore, is not only to explain what the outcome entails and how it relates to the United States Air Force Academy's (USAFA) mission to develop leaders of character but inspire the reader to prepare themselves to actively engage with NCLS 2024. For those unable to attend the symposium in person, may the following examination of this topic encourage the reader to make use of the many and varied resources that will be available through the upcoming symposium to contemplate, reflect on, and apply all that is entailed with "valuing Human Conditions, Cultures, and Societies." After reviewing the history of the outcome and discussing its current formulation as well as the theme of

NCLS 2024, the essay closes with a challenge of its own: namely to make the most of this year's symposium by asking what each of us can and needs to do to make a difference with respect to valuing each other.

USAFA's institutional outcomes have undergone several iterations over the past decade plus, from 19 often vague and overlapping outcomes in 2009 to the current, focused set of 9 outcomes[1]:

1. Critical Thinking
2. Application of Engineering Problem-Solving Methods
3. Scientific Reasoning and the Principles of Science
4. The Human Condition, Cultures, and Societies
5. Leadership, Teamwork, and Organizational Management
6. Clear Communication
7. Ethics and Respect for Human Dignity
8. National Security of the American Republic
9. Warrior Ethos as Airmen and Citizens

The Human Condition, Cultures, and Societies Outcome itself derives from two interrelated original outcomes from 2009, namely the *Intercultural Competence and Involvement Outcome*, which was grouped under the category of Responsibilities and the *Civic, Cultural, and International Environments Outcome*, which was grouped under the category

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1 For a more in-depth description of each of the outcomes, please go to: https://www.usafa.edu/academics/outcomes/

of Knowledge (United States Air Force Academy [USAFA], 2009). The knowledge component was the foundational element; responsibility was the impact resulting from implementation. There were also what were called warrior skills, which were the means knowledge would result operationalized in responsibilities. The reason for this brief historical jaunt is to illuminate that the original structural categories have been retained in each of the current outcomes, which include components that involve cadets achieving sufficient knowledge, per the focus of the outcome, which are then translated into skills with an eye to responsible engagement.

Indeed, the current Human Condition, Cultures, and Societies Outcome's driving parameters involve both the knowledge and skills related to knowing oneself and knowing others to facilitate precisely the type of thoughtful, constructive engagement required of today's air and space leaders. It is important to note that the criticality of this particular outcome spans the gamut from the interpersonal to the global. As will be developed in greater detail in what follows, whether an airman is engaging with someone in their unit, whose ethnic or religious background is different from their own, or a guardian involved in a joint operation with an ally, whose cultural paradigms evince important distinctions from their own, the ability to promote effective intercultural engagement will of necessity involve cross-culturally attuned insights that value both one's own and another's cultural and social milieus.

Although each of the nine outcomes is foundational to the education, training, mentoring, and developing of officers and leaders of character, a strong case can be made that the Human Condition, Cultures, and Societies Outcome is itself foundational to all the other outcomes. In simple terms: without one understanding who one is, one cannot act meaningfully – identity precedes activity. All the other outcomes overtly deal with key human activities such as politics, ethics, officership-statesmanship, and science, technology, engi-

neering and mathematics (aka STEM) exploration and implementation, all of which draw on the functionally empowering Outcomes dealing with critical thinking and clear communication. While critical thinking and clear communication are important foundational means, their employment depends on the individual first and foremost knowing who they are and then knowing the person or people with whom they are engaging. This necessarily involves critical thinking, but one must first have a thought about which to think, critically or otherwise. And the ability to clearly communicate what one thinks or feels involves precisely an attunement to the human condition and the cultures and societies in which human beings live. The critical component of constructive and compassionate engagement will invariably follow when good and necessary distinctions are made that reflect verities that are universal or culturally conditioned and situated. Although the foregoing adumbrations will be developed in greater detail by the authors, the essential point is worth retaining at the forefront of the mind's eye: who one is and understands oneself to be is critical to seeing and understanding another, which is critical to nurture the element of all morally meaningful activity, namely doing the right thing at the right time in the right way for the right reasons.

USAFA's vision is to be the Air Force's premier institution for developing leaders of character. The implementation of this vision is USAFA's mission, namely educating, training, and inspiring men and women to lead the United States Air and Space Forces in service to our Nation by embracing our core values of integrity, service, and excellence. To meet this mission, a profound appreciation of the human condition in its cultural and social complexities is not merely a nicety but a necessity. That is to say, to effectively engage with both allies and competitors regionally and internationally requires a profound awareness of others in light of an equally profound awareness of oneself. Coherent action only proceeds from a coherent identity, which takes into account the identity of one's interlocutor – per the out-

come: self-knowledge, other knowledge; constructive, meaningful engagement.

The foregoing is codified in USAFA Manual 36-3526, *Developing Leaders of Character at USAFA*. As the seminal part of this governing document, the Leader of Character Framework "provides all Academy personnel, military and civilian, with a deliberate, flexible, and foundational conceptual framework to use in developing themselves and others" (USAFA, 2022, p. 5). Specifically, the Framework operationalizes the USAFA vision and mission by defining what a Leader of Character is and shaping a cadet into someone who:

- Lives honorably by consistently practicing the virtues embodied in the Core Values;
- Lifts others to their best possible selves; and
- Elevates performance toward a common and noble purpose.

The Human Condition, Cultures, and Societies Outcome plays a critical role in the foregoing. Cadets must embody the core values as part of their self-knowledge. Then and only then can they lift others to become their best possible selves, which by definition entails the other knowledge. In turn, constructive engagement follows as one strives to elevate collective performance to a common, noble purpose. In sum, the purpose of the Human Condition outcome is to help tomorrow's air and space leaders learn to value not only their own particular situatedness but that of others as well. Doing so will be critical to domestic and foreign engagement that places a high value on nurturing a more peaceable and amicable world.

The Center for Character and Leadership Development

Given USAFA's primary strategic goal of developing leaders of character in service to our nation (USAFA, 2021), the Center for Character and Leadership Development (CCLD) is the primary integrator to accomplish this goal. CCLD serves USAFA by advancing character and leadership development in preparation for service to the nation across many educational, training, and experiences (ETEs) throughout the 47-month cadet course of instruction. These ETEs, which include academics; military training; athletics; and character and leadership development, serve as developmental steppingstones through which members pursue the growth of their own identity by engaging in purposeful experiences and practicing habits of thought and action (USAFA, 2022). In addition, the specific ETEs associated with the Human Condition, Cultures, and Societies institutional outcome, as well as the other eight outcomes, are the "the means through which we develop others and ourselves in purposeful and engaging ways" (USAFA, 2022, p. 9).

One of the developmental experiences that aligns directly with the Human Condition, Cultures, and Societies outcome is the NCLS. Held annually each February, NCLS is the Academy's flagship character and leadership event, which brings together distinguished scholars, military leaders, corporate executives, and world-class athletes to inspire, motivate, and equip 6,500 participants for honorable living and effective leadership.

Each year, the NCLS theme rotates among four of the nine USAFA institutional outcomes: (1) Human Condition, Cultures, and Societies, (2) Warrior Ethos as Airmen and Citizens, (3) Ethics and Respect for Human Dignity, and (4) Leadership, Teamwork, and Organizational Management. The NCLS 2024 theme, Valuing Human Conditions, Cultures, and Societies, explores the complexities of what it means to be human, and the qualities exemplified by admirable citizens and leaders. As an extension of this institutional outcome, selected speakers are invited to focus their presentations on the common experiences, emotions, and challenges we all share as humans.

As citizens of unique societies and cultures, symposium speakers examine how human commonalities and different perspectives come together to build connections and create effective leaders and teams, often by sharing their personal stories of struggle and success. In this global and interconnected environment, it is important to understand that success results from understanding ourselves and others, and that teams work best when all members feel valued and respected. Through NCLS, USAFA takes the opportunity to engage in purposeful experiences to develop leaders of character by taking the time to appreciate viewpoints, experiences, and perspectives other than our own. The implementation of this in the personal and professional life of the attendees is then to *Live Honorably*, *Lift Others* as fellow human beings seeking to understand and better live what it means to be human and *Elevate Performance*.

In addition to the four rotating themes, the NCLS committee of faculty, officers, staff, and cadets selects a marketing tagline each year that connects the strategic-level theme with what is going on day-to-day across the cadet wing. This year, cadets chose *Embrace Culture. Empower People #NCLS2024*, which highlights the importance of actively creating and fostering a culture of dignity, respect, and accountability. This emphasizes the importance of leaders and leader-developers recognizing and celebrating the diverse backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives of individuals and global communities with the goal of creating respectful, cohesive communities. According to Cadet First Class Rachel Parillo, the NCLS 2024 Cadet-in-Charge:

> Embracing culture represents making informed decisions, based on understanding, experience, and knowledge and being open to learning more about cultures and perspectives different from our own. Whereas, empowering people recognizes each person's unique strengths, abilities, and perspectives, and using that knowledge to advocate for their

opportunity to thrive. (personal communication, November 26, 2023)

Such perspective speaks to how USAFA seeks to empower all members of the Academy through the institution's *Let's Be Clear* campaign focused squarely on preventing unhealthy behaviors, responding to harm courageously, and accelerating accountability (USAFA, 2023). "Embrace Culture. Empower People #NCLS2024" challenges NCLS participants to think about how the complexities entailed in leadership influence the way we navigate the human condition. It is a call to action for leaders and leader-developers to create and nurture a culture of inclusion, respect, and empowerment where everyone feels valued, supported, and inspired to contribute to the mission's success.

The Human Condition as One of Six Outcomes

With the foregoing in mind, a more robust discussion of the Human Condition, Cultures, and Societies Outcome can now transpire with an eye to elucidating how the vision and mission are implemented in concrete gorals. The three pillars of the Outcome are: (1) know oneself (thyself), (2) know others, and (3) constructive engagement. Let us begin by considering the first in some depth.

At the Oracle of Delphi, ancient Greece's most important religious site, the visitor is confronted on the portico with the inscription, *Know Thyself*. What does it mean to know oneself? With respect to the human condition, to know what it means to be human entails knowing first and foremost what a human being is not. And what is a human being not? A human being is neither a god nor a beast. Bound by time and space, man is mortal, with limited knowledge about the world in which he lives and moves, and with limited abilities, all too often none at all, to (re)shape the cosmos, the world, and other human beings in his or her own image. Man

is not a god. And yet man is not merely an animal, a beast. Human beings have volition and the capability to reason between choices, choosing the better and leaving off from the worse. Humanity, at its better moments, is capable of acting reasonably. But what does it mean to act reasonably?

In *The Nicomachean Ethics* and *Politics*, Aristotle discusses that each thing has a *telos* – an end for which it is designed and the pursuit of which alone allows for a thing's fulfillment, which is to say its wellness, completeness, and, for human beings, happiness. Living in accordance with the *telos* of human excellence – doing the right thing at the right time in the right way for the right reason (Aristotle, 1999) – a human being becomes truly human and exercises his or her liberty as a being beholden to the knowledge of the good. Herein lies the foundational – the critical – step to learning to know oneself, namely learning what one is not and, by extension, intimating what one is, or might become, if one lets oneself pursue one's *telos*. Although there is an objective and universal component to this type of self-knowledge, it needs to be stated that for any such knowledge to become effective for a given individual, it must become one's own, and this must transpire in one's own particular way. That is to say, whatever is absolute about the human condition, each human being must embrace it as an individual and each will do so in ways that are unique to the particular person they are. This must not only be understood but valued and nurtured.

What this means for cadets at USAFA is understanding that as human beings they are not merely citizens in a republic but officer-candidates, who will soon take on the noble commission of being officer-statesmen charged with the duty of protecting and defending the republic against all enemies, foreign and domestic. This telescoping trinity of identities is the Leader of Character framework by which USAFA graduates will in time become tomorrow's air and space leaders as commissioned officers.

When one examines the proficiencies undergirding the first pillar of *Know Oneself to Live Honorably*, one recognizes their interplay. If cadets are able to understand what it means to be a human being, a citizen in a republic, and an officer-statesmen in the Air and Space Force (Proficiency #1) in light of understanding the various factors that have shaped their identity (Proficiency #2), both with respect to objective and subjective elements entailed in identity (Proficiency 3), they can then offer a robust critique and defense of their own identity (Proficiency 4). Such self-knowledge is the first critical step in being able to begin the process of considering the varied similarities and differences that allow us to properly value another, having first properly evaluated ourselves.

What has been discussed in terms of self-knowledge can and must now be applied in the same manner to others in the same order as it unfolds for one's self. The second pillar of *Know Others to Lift Others* and the two corresponding proficiencies are merely the application of the foregoing to fellow human beings. Proficiencies #3 (Describe key elements of an identity different from one's own) and #4 (Explain historical, cultural, social, and political developments that have shaped another's identity and worldview) of *Know Others to Lift Others* are then parallel to Proficiencies #1 and #2 of Know Oneself to Live Honorably. The individual's attunement to their own identity informs their ability to describe key elements in another's identity, explain the milieu that shaped their identity, make good and necessary comparisons and distinctions between objective (universally true) and subjective (biased) elements of another's identity, and defend or critique both objective and subjective elements of their identity.

It is best to understand these two pillars of this Outcome (namely self-knowledge and other knowledge) not as chronologically linked – first self-knowledge and then other knowledge – but as intertwined and requiring interplay at each stage. It is a truism of the human

condition that one learns about the cosmos, the world, and oneself through comparison and contrast with other things and other people, as if one were looking in a mirror of sorts that reflects back to the observer both the appearance of things and, if the mirror is of superior quality, the reality of things, at least as best as human beings can discern this. As Alexis de Tocqueville (2000) observes of the importance of civic institutions to the maintenance of a democratic republic, "Feelings and ideas are renewed, the heart enlarged, and the understanding developed only by the reciprocal action of men one upon another" (Tocqueville, 2000, p. 152). This applies to all areas of human existence but especially as it relates to self-knowledge and other knowledge. The principle of contrariety, and by extension the principle of congruity, which undergirds the ability to make reasonable and meaningful comparisons and contrasts with and between things, is a fundamental tenant of human existence. The ability to utilize these principles effectively determines one's ability to grow in terms of self-knowledge, which is ever in relation to the other knowledge.

The third pillar, *Elevate Performance through Constructive Engagement*, is best seen as the application of the first two knowledge pillars. That is, as already stated earlier, correct action presupposes correct knowledge – who we are determines what we will do, if we are seeking to act reasonably and coherently and not blithely and spastically. This applies to personal and professional interactions and equally to the life of individuals no less than to the life of states.

Constructive engagement then requires an individual to first "explain the uniqueness and interconnections of various peoples, cultures, and societies in their appropriate spatial and temporal contexts" (Proficiency #5), and then to "respond prudently to various cultural and social scenarios, settings, and situations, whether in the classroom or in the field" (Proficiency #6). The ability to respond effectively to the geo-political complexities on an international scale and to the socio-cultural complexities of human interactions on an interpersonal scale both presuppose the ability to explain what unites and divides human beings such that mankind may constructively engage at the right time in the right way for the right reasons.

Another way of understanding this is in terms of what is referred to as intercultural knowledge and cross-cultural competency. The former overlays with the first two pillars of this outcome (self and other knowledge) and the latter with constructive engagement. Understanding oneself and another is central to intercultural knowledge, and the ability to effectively interact across cultures is the heart of cross-cultural competency. With respect to the education and training of USAFA cadets, this entails preparing cadets in the classroom to effectively interact with others across the spectrum of their activities, both personal and professional. For instance, a cadet learning about self and others as a German language minor would have the opportunity to engage with the people and culture he or she has been studying while participating in a target country and language immersion program. Returning to the classroom, this individual has now not only studied about self and others but has gained life experiences related to both and would, ideally, bring this learning and these experiences back to the classroom to enrich the learning environment for all. In turn, this individual might go on a longer semester exchange, or participate as a commissioned officer in the Language Enabled Airman Program (LEAP) – the Air Force's premier language learning program for officers.

From the classroom to the field to the operational Air and Space Force, such a student-officer is truly a life-long learner. Examining propositions about what it means to be a human being situated in a particular culture and society, such an individual testing various hypotheses in the field, and through a continuous loop of learning and living embodies precisely the type of life-long learner the institution desires to nurture.

It is important to keep in mind that the institution's primary educational and application focus here with respect to the knowledge and engagement of USAFA's cadets resides with what is generally understood to be the operational level. That is, the tactical level constitutes the day-to-day usage of language and its corresponding actions by which we both learn about ourselves and others and learn to engage constructively. This requires a strategic vision, enshrined at USAFA as being the Air Force's premier institution for developing leaders of character (United States Air Force Academy, 2021). All that transpires at the operational level is the lynchpin that takes the strategic vision and ensures that our tactical engagement is meaningful. The work of the institution's educators, trainers, coaches, leaders, and mentors is to assist cadets in acquiring the cognitive and experiential tools that at once allow them to contemplate the strategic vision while finding *ground truth* implementation in daily thought and deed. Akin to the interactive loop that constitutes the classroom to the field to the operational force model, the interplay between the strategic and tactical by means of the operational is a powerful means to develop cadets to do the right thing at the right time in the right way for the right reasons. When people talk about the importance of valuing others even as they value themselves via constructive engagement, the exploration of the human condition in terms of self-knowledge and other knowledge is of undeniable importance.

Courses Linked to Proficiencies

The foregoing framework and all that it entails remains sterile unless implemented. Here USAFA's educators across all mission elements play a key role. A highly effective teacher can enliven an ordinary discipline, whereas a less effective instructor can do the opposite. With respect to the Human Condition, Cultures, and Societies Outcome – as well as the other eight USAFA institutional outcomes – in order for cadets to meet the institution's expectation of achieving mastery of the outcomes, having highly effective instruction is critical. Thus, it is important to examine the various courses that contribute to this outcome as well as why and how they play a role in cadets' education. Previous research has shown that transformational leadership behaviors can be developed in courses or training programs (e.g. Dvir et al., 2002; Kelloway et al., 2000). One of the main tasks of the Outcome team is to find creative, effective means to ensure transformational leadership transpires in the classroom, which intentionally develops a cadet's thought and encourages their actions to ever and always valuing human beings as unique individuals. The courses directly involved in the Human Condition Outcome are continuously making improvements with the foregoing foremost in mind.

At present, the following academic courses are linked to this outcome (listed in order of level) and categorized within the three pillars of the Leader of Character framework: Know Oneself to Live Honorably, Know Others to Lift Others, and Elevate Performance through Constructive Engagement.

- Foreign Language 131–132: Basic Sequence. As part of the academic core that all cadets must take or validate (i.e. test out of), these introductory courses are taught in one of the eight languages offered at USAFA: Arabic, Chinese, French, German, Japanese, Portuguese, Russian, and Spanish. These courses align with three proficiencies, which fall under the pillars of Know Others to Lift Others (Proficiency #3) and Elevate Performance through Constructive Engagement (Proficiencies #5 and #6).
- History 300: World History. The course addresses the aforementioned three proficiencies and examines connections between human societies around the globe and their development over the past thousand years. Cadets learn to describe, identify, and explain the uniqueness and interconnectedness of cultures, peoples, and societies in both their spatial and temporal contexts.

- Behavioral Science 360: Sociology. This course addresses the first four of the Outcome's six proficiencies, which are under the pillars of Know Oneself to Live Honorably (Proficiencies #1 and #2) and Know Others to Lift Others (Proficiencies #3 and #4). This course examines connections between the cadet's background and identity in terms of American society at large by scrutinizing cadets' lives while exploring the impact of a variety of social phenomena (e.g. culture, power, race, and gender).
- English 411: War Stories. This course focuses on Proficiencies #3 and #4 as categorized under the Know Others to Lift Others pillar of the Leader of Character framework. Focus is placed the intellectual and moral aspects of war as expressed in the literature of the profession of arms.
- Geography 412: World Cultural Geography. The course focuses on Proficiencies #3, #5 and #6. Whereas the third proficiency is part of the Know Others to Lift Others pillar, the latter two are classified as part of the Elevate Performance through Constructive Engagement pillar. The course focuses on the major world regions by considering five themes: cultural coherence and diversity, environment, population and settlement patterns, geopolitical fragmentation, and unity and economic and social development.
- Department of International Programs: Cadet Intercultural Competence. Each year cadets apply for, and if selected, participate in study abroad programs in a variety of countries where the target languages are taught in the Department of Foreign Languages or participate in cultural immersions irrespective of language ability. Cadets' intercultural competence ("one's ability to shift cultural perspective and appropriately adjust behavior to cultural difference and commonalities," DiBiasio et al., 2023) is measured before departing the United States and again when they return to gauge gains in their ability to function effectively across cultures. Using the *Intercultural Development Inventory* (Hammer, 1999), the measurement of cadet

intercultural competence falls under Proficiencies #1, #3, #5, and #6, which fall under all three pillars of the Leader of Character framework.

NCLS 2024 and the Path Forward

In light of the foregoing and given the focus on the Human Condition, Cultures, and Societies Outcome for NCLS 2024, the symposium will be a tremendous opportunity for cadets, professors, military trainers, visitors, and Air and Space Force leaders to engage constructively on a plethora of topics related to what it means to be human as citizens of a great republic as well as officer-statesmen.

Prior to the start of NCLS 2024, it is worthwhile for all participants to spend quality time contemplating what it all means personally and vocationally in the profession of arms. Researching speakers of interest prior to the symposium will provide important contextualizing information about the speakers' backgrounds and lived experiences as well as the substance of the upcoming presentation. Such information will clearly enhance in-person interactions and discussions with the speakers. Further, once the symposium concludes, self-reflection, contemplation and discussions among NCLS participants should not end. It is arguably an essential activity given not only the importance of the outcome, but the world USAFA cadets will be entering as commissioned officers.

> "Whether in the classroom, on the parade or training grounds, or on the athletic fields of friendly strife – let alone the fields of not so friendly strife that along with the geo-political realities of our world comprise the civil-military spectrum – self-knowledge in relation to other knowledge, resulting in constructive engagement, is the only truly viable means of striving to create a better tomorrow" (Steeves, 2020, p. 16).

Lifelong learning is critical to human growth, and NCLS 2024 can be a launchpad for critical think-

ing and understanding of the human condition. The authors recommend that attendees and speakers continue to question what it means to be human, citizens of the American republic, and officer-statesmen dedicated to protecting and defending the Constitution of the United States of America.

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PROGRAM/INTERVENTION

Undergraduate Management Research as Deliberate Development of Leaders of Character?

Emily Bulger, United States Air Force Academy

Peter Leestma, United States Air Force Academy

Daphne DePorres, United States Air Force Academy

ABSTRACT

The United States Air Force Academy's mission is to "educate, train, and inspire men and women to become officers of character motivated to lead the U.S. Air Force and Space Force in service to our nation." Leaders of character are expected to (1) Live Honorably, (2) Lift Others, and (3) Elevate Performance through three critical steps of owning, engaging, and practicing their own development journey. The Cadet Summer Research Program (CSRP) is an institution-wide program that provides selected cadets the opportunity to function as independent adults while conducting research outside the classroom, in both military and civilian institutions. Cadets work on research projects in partnership with organizations across the country and are expected to produce results with real-world applications. Given the considerations explored above, we undertook a nascent exploration of the connection between management majors' CSRP journey and our deliberate approach in developing leaders of character. We strongly suggest that CSRP, as experienced by management majors, unfolds as a transformative experience that contributes to cadets owning the pursuit of their own identity, engaging in purposeful experiences, and practicing habits of thought and action.

During this multifaceted process, cadets put into practice what it takes to live honorably, lift others, and elevate performance in socio-technical systems. In many ways, these systems replicate those they will serve as officers, better preparing them to lead in future conflicts.

Keywords: Leaders of Character, Cadet Summer Research Program, Socio-technical systems, Experiential learning, Undergraduate business management research

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Introduction

The United States Air Force Academy (USAFA) has as its mission "to educate, train and inspire men and women to become officers of character motivated to lead the U.S. Air Force and Space Force in service to our nation."[1] Leaders of character are expected to "respect the dignity of others and practice habits consistent with the Air Force core values by (1) Living Honorably, (2) Lifting Others, and (3) Elevating Performance (USAFA Manual 36-3526, 2022). As others have explored, the ever-present focus to develop into a leader of character (LOC) is evident in the day-to-day operations of the Air Force Academy and in the lives of cadets as they undertake a 47-month Bachelor of Science program that combines education and leader development through experiential learning (Silveria, 2018). At USAFA, the Cadet Summer Research Program (CSRP) provides rising seniors the chance to continue their journey as learners in their fields of study. CSRP is a great example of one of the many programs at USAFA that gives students an experiential learning opportunity. In "Developing Leaders of Character for the 21st Century," USAFA's current Superintendent, General Richard Clark, encourages permanent party and faculty to learn and integrate the LOC framework into organizational processes, strategic plans, and in our conversations with cadets and our dialogue with one another (2021, p. 2). As such, we believe one such

integration opportunity lies in the administration of USAFA CSRP processes.

CSRP cadets conduct research and learn as independent adults outside of the "learning laboratory" of USAFA. As compared to the USAFA environment, this transition to the "real world" offers a strong contrast; cadets become exposed to the volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA) environment found across corporate America and other organizations (Lindsay, 2020). Therefore, CSRP offers our student scholars in the field of management the ability to "study individuals, organizations, markets, and the interactions amongst them" (Lederman, 2019).

As both management researchers and current and former directors of CSRP, we wanted to undertake a more deliberate approach to facilitate cadet engagement in purposeful experiences at the organizational level. By changing our processes and making students more aware and reflective of the interactions and relationships among individuals, teams, and organizations, we hoped to further their development as leaders of character. (USAFAMAN 36-3526, 2022). Therefore, beginning in the summer 2023 CSRP cycle, we sought to better understand whether and how an undergraduate management research program can contribute to the deliberate development of leaders of character. In integrating the LOC framework within the Department of Management CSRP, we modified our processes and

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[1] https://www.usafa.edu/about/mission/

adopted five new techniques, to include: (1) explicitly communicating our standards and expectations to both sponsor organizations and cadets and getting their commitment and agreement to adhere; (2) utilizing a whole-person approach in our selection of CSRP participants; (3) establishing a cadre of CSRP faculty mentors from which to pair cadets; (4) hosting a "research boot-camp" to outline potential research methods and process consultation approaches; and (5) requiring cadets to reflect on and journal their CSRP journey. Based on our insights, we believe this approach can be applied to other undergraduate research programs seeking ways to further develop learners and leaders of character.

Background

Cadet Summer Research Program

The Dean of Faculty (DF) at USAFA runs CSRP, a five- to six-week summer program that takes place from late May through early July every year. Each department has a CSRP director who is responsible for getting research agreements with sponsor organizations reviewed and approved at the institutional level. Additionally, directors are expected to develop and maintain relationships with sponsor organizations' designated representatives so that, when DF allocates CSRP slots, they can advertise specific research projects to their majors and competitively select and match cadets to various organizations across the country. Sponsor organizations present our students with complex problems and issues that may or may not have a solution, much less a simple one. Selected cadets travel to and work directly with personnel in both military and civilian institutions (i.e., government and military organizations, defense contractors, and firms in the civilian and private sectors), where they conduct basic or applied research on specified problem sets. In coordination with an assigned mentor or project team within that organization, cadets are expected to produce, deliver, and communicate the results of their research before returning to USAFA.

Research, as undertaken by management majors, differs from the more traditional research undertaken by science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) majors who, by and large, constitute most of the cadet population at USAFA. Many STEM cadets undertake CSRP in the field or in a laboratory, where there is often a clear link between the CSRP experience and the exploration and testing of propositions that result in the advancement of knowledge about technical issues in sponsoring organizations. This exploration is often conducted through traditional means, employing predictions based on hypothesis testing, with iterations of testing based on results and revised hypotheses. Management majors do this as well; yet the application of the scientific method unfolds less observably and with greater involvement of the researcher and participants as integral elements of the process. With this understanding in mind, we will review how management majors conduct social science research and how their CSRP experiences support their formation as leaders of character.

Department of Management CSRP

Besides the required USAFA core curriculum, which includes many STEM courses, the curriculum for management majors includes foundational topics such as the principles of management, organizational behavior, accounting, economics, finance, human resources, marketing, strategy, and several elective courses associated with management, such as business ethics and quantitative decision making. Our majors utilize existing management theory and practice to positively impact CSRP organizations in real time. In doing so, they act as action researchers. Action researchers are, traditionally, insiders who conduct research while operating in the context of their organizations (Reason & Bradbury-Huang, 2001). While not being members of the organization, management CSRP participants are not strictly objective researchers; they are also expected to provide their insights and perspectives on the issues they are examining. Thus, participants embed themselves in the

socio-technical context, characterized as a system where individuals and technology interact as operations are performed to produce outcomes (Cooper & Foster, 1971). Changes, such as those wrought by applied research, must consider how relationships across an organization's various social and technical subsystems will be impacted, given that they are interdependent (Appelbaum, 1997) and have, as objectives, joint optimization (Molleman & Broekhuis, 2001). Thus, the researcher has direct involvement with the production and application of relevant research outcomes.

The above type of management research is executed through what is often a cyclical and iterative that includes problem identification, action planning and action taking, observation and reflection, and discussions with members of the organization to consider the applications of what was learned. The latter is important so that organizational contexts can be transformed to align with desired states more closely. Thus, the cadet, as a management researcher, is a temporary facilitator of organizational learning; management majors experience CSRP in a socio-technical system whereby data is collected by the cadet, the organization makes sense of the data, and then both the cadet and organization apply what they have learned to contribute to closing the gap between the initial state and the desired state (Mirvis, 1996). Management majors can contribute to the knowledge resident in the systems of their CSRP clients, even when their projects may not appear, at least on the surface, to be traditional forms of research. We believe this intersection of a management major as both a researcher and a LOC presents a fruitful avenue of exploration.

CSRP Integration Techniques
In our attempt to make a connection between undergraduate management research programs and their role in developing leaders of character, we employed five different techniques in the administration of Department of Management CSRP processes and, subsequently, collected data from current and former CSRP participants

and program directors. The visible manifestations of many of these techniques can be obtained from the authors. First, well before certain program deadlines, we outlined a clear set of expectations and guidelines for both our sponsor organization and cadet CSRP participants (see Appendices A & B). The expectations for the sponsor help laid the foundation for the value that the cadet could bring to their organization while the expectations for the cadet emphasized that they will be representing the Air Force Academy and the Department of Management and should act accordingly. Second, despite some of the minimum standards to participate in CSRP, as outlined in a Dean of Faculty Operating Instruction (OI), we took a whole-person approach to selection; we did not strictly adhere to minimum academic requirements. We actively pursued grade point average (GPA) waivers for those cadets who might not meet the standards described in the OI but who might otherwise be an excellent candidate for the program (e.g. based on past and current instructor feedback from their classroom engagement and performance). Third, we established a cadre of faculty mentors at USAFA who were available throughout the year for CSRP cadets to reach back to with any research questions and concerns (see Appendix C for our initial announcement soliciting faculty mentor volunteers). In addition, these faculty mentors were asked to help their assigned cadet(s) make connections between the process of developing leaders of character and management research at the individual, team, and organizational levels (e.g. providing guidance on what to communicate in email correspondence and how best to follow-up). Fourth, we hosted a "research bootcamp" for our CSRP cadets before they departed and explained, in greater detail, the simultaneous research and process consultation approaches inherent in action research. In line with previous guidance, the bootcamp ensured that each of the participating cadets had a similar understanding of the requirements and process we expected them to follow while on CSRP. We also emphasized the collaborative effort (with their sponsor) of developing a specific and defined research question that would be

useful in narrowing the scope of their projects. Finally, we required reflective journaling throughout the cadets' CSRP journey, which proved useful in enabling them to recall and extract the knowledge and meaningful insights they gained from their research experience. Additionally, we coupled the journaling with a required narrative summary submission upon a cadet's return from CSRP. This summary captured overarching insights on both their research process and their further development as leaders of character. As part of our regular processes (as outlined in a department OI), at the start of the fall semester, cadets gave a presentation to the CSRP directors and other faculty members highlighting how concepts they learned in management courses were observed and how they applied concepts learned in those courses to resolve or improve an issue at their sponsor organization. In addition to anecdotal evidence from cadet recollections of their CSRP experience during presentations and faculty members (who had either participated in CSRP as cadets or had been a CSRP director in the past), quotes from cadet journal entries and narrative summaries constituted the data collected to inform our insights. Below, we incorporate quotes from the latter to describe what we learned from our nascent exploration of whether and how an undergraduate management research program contributes to the deliberate development of leaders of character.

Insights

The LOC framework provides a useful lens through which to evaluate the benefits of our deliberate interventions on management majors' CSRP experience. In their capacity as CSRP participants, conducting research and engaging in experiential learning, cadets have a unique opportunity to own the pursuit of their identity, engage in purposeful experiences, and practice habits of thought and action (Clark, 2021; Easterby-Smith, 1997). To sponsor organizations, cadets may also offer a unique perspective, where their evidence-driven solutions and recommendations have the potential to enhance and elevate organizational performance. Given the context and management research considerations outlined above, we highlight how our integration techniques interacted with CSRP cadet experiences to enhance the development of management majors as leaders of character.

Living Honorably

When cadets accepted their CSRP slots, among other expectations, they were charged with communicating effectively and with integrity. In the more operational setting of their CSRP projects, cadets practiced and reflected upon the proficiency of their communication skills as they interacted with diverse stakeholders. Further, as they began to engage in applied management research, some cadets were confronted with and had the opportunity to navigate ethical challenges. Through these experiences, cadets practice living honorably as they must handle complex situations with integrity, especially in how they communicate with their sponsors. One member of a four person CSRP team shared:

> "This morning, we gave the final presentation to [sponsor organization]. It was special. From a presentation standpoint, it was like nothing I had ever done. Giving a brief to forty people in an atmosphere to improve [the organization] was different than anything I have done." Member of Management Department CSRP Team #2

While cadets frequently reported that communications within the client system went smoothly, some experienced and reflected upon incidents where communication led to misunderstandings. These cadets shared that they took ownership of the opportunity to learn and do better:

> "[I] learned a valuable lesson in communicating today. We let our supervisors know we'd be working from home but did not inform the person directly in charge of our day-to-day. Thus, the confusion." – Management Department CSRP Participant #9

Each CSRP participant was expected to contribute positively to the organization and, by extension, its stakeholders. Therefore, cadets approached their research with a sense of responsibility to do their best for the sponsor organization, keeping in mind the implications of their work as it was applied in the broader and interconnected system. There were times when cadet observations led to reconsidering how they could lead and manage with integrity, especially as it relates to how people are treated and how organizational performance is impacted:

> "There seems to be a ginormous information and understanding gap here between those who are working on the floor and those who are setting the standards for their operations. This disconnect could very well feed the human error probability by putting unreasonable expectations for the work to be completed in too short of a time and causing operators to hurry or even fudge some numbers." Management Department CSRP Participant #5

Lifting Others

Each CSRP experience included working closely with members of the sponsor organization and better understanding their unique challenges, history, and personal experiences. Successful collaboration with organizational members fostered shared responsibility and mutual support throughout the project. We believe this knowledge contributes to fine tuning cadets' skillsets as it pertains to lifting others to their best possible selves and, in so doing, improve the performance of their teams.

As cadets engaged with members of the sponsoring organization, their use of and proficiency with interpersonal skills were enhanced, as reflected in personal journals. Cadets not only focused on the tasks or projects they were assigned but also needed to make sure they were building and supporting positive relationships and constructive environments. After CSRP participants returned to campus, their presentations often cited how positive relationships were built. One cadet noted this importance:

> "This CSRP far exceeded my expectations, and I am grateful for the incredible [sponsor organization] employees I was able to build relationships with." Management Department CSRP participant #7

Another CSRP participant wrote:

> "People mold to their environment, it is human nature. There needs to be a more foundational structure from the start in order to start changing towards a better culture. Structuring and implementing a useful onboarding process will be beneficial towards strengthening communications." Management Department CSRP Participant #3

Elevating Performance

Organizational problems embedded within CSRP projects allowed cadets to embark on a process to solve them, which, inevitably, came with surprises and unexpected challenges. Thus, cadets needed to adapt and demonstrate resilience in the moment. In addition to helping sponsoring organizations solve problems and achieve goals, cadets also enhanced their own problem-solving capabilities. We postulate that, when cadets are called upon to address real-world organizational challenges, they will be spurred to think critically and at a more strategic level. This development will also serve them well as officers of the U.S. Air Force and Space Force, leading people in future conflict.

What they had previously learned as management majors was applied during CSRP in a practical context. Cadets directly experienced how management theories, models, and practices can be leveraged to better understand and solve organizational problems. This led to a deeper understanding of what it takes to be an effective leader, expected to positively facilitate organizational performance. In the following quote, one cadet expressed concern about being able to both strategically and accurately represent his work for the benefit of the organization; specifically, it captures how they had to

make choices that, on one hand, were in line with research objectives, but, on the other, were (mis)aligned with competing ideals.

> "I am used to being given a clear set of guidance in terms of what the final project looks like. Here I am not sure what my final product should be, and I am fearful that I am not doing enough. My project asked for no more than a one-page summary of my recommendations. How do I put 60,000+ rows of data and two weeks of extensive work onto one page while still explaining what I want to explain? I submitted a one-page summary today with a slideshow in case they ask me to present it, but I feel like I was not able to share the justification behind my final recommendation." Management Department CSRP Participant #8

Inherent in many sponsor organizations' research projects was the expectation for cadets to develop innovative solutions to existing problems. This fostered a mindset of continuous improvement, which is critical for proactively and reactively dealing with dynamic and evolving environments. As the below quotes demonstrate, even though optimal conditions and structures may not exist within an organization, cadets realized business decisions must continue to be made and executed:

> "A key takeaway from all of today was realizing how interconnected the entire company is, yet they fail to create synergies amongst certain business areas which leads to certain bumps in the road." – Management Department CSRP Team #2

> "Today the union votes on whether to end the strike and accept the proposal put forth by [sponsor organization]. Going to work today was a little more tense. Most meetings were cancelled, and there were still only 4 people in office. My boss got heckled on her way into work this morning." – Management Department CSRP Participant #3

> "During the discussion there was an interesting dialogue between [my mentor #1] and me regarding the fundamental question of whether the [sponsor organization] program is incentivizing the right aspects. It is a thought-provoking question from [my mentor #2] that has been on my mind for some time. Even [my mentor #1] himself expressed uncertainty about this matter. We acknowledged the importance of critically examining the program's incentives and evaluating whether they align with the desired outcomes. This ongoing exploration needs some further consideration, and I am committed to delving deeper into this topic and formulating a well-rounded answer for my final briefing." Management Department CSRP Participant #1

This last selection of quotes also reflects several motivations for management majors' preparation and participation in CSRP, to include a desire to best serve the sponsoring institution and to enrich the cadet's formation as a LOC.

Discussion and Conclusion

We believe the five program elements, newly implemented in our 2023 CSRP cycle, are critical building blocks for the management CSRP at USAFA and can be leveraged in other undergraduate business management research programs. First, by including specific guidelines and expectations for both participants and sponsors, we emphasized our priority of connecting CSRP participants with committed and experienced organizations. Second, by taking a whole-person approach to CSRP selection, we moved beyond a cadet's academic performance and selected participants based on their interest and past engagement across the major, as well as our belief they would be a great fit for the program. Third, by establishing a cadre of faculty mentors at USAFA, cadets had access to dedicated resources they could reach back to and connect with to address any research concerns. Fourth, we conducted a "research bootcamp" to establish a common understanding of potential research methods and consultation approaches. Finally, we required

reflective journaling so that participants could better extract the knowledge gained from their research experience while continuing their formation as leaders of character.

What we, as faculty, learned strongly suggests that CSRP, as experienced by management majors, unfolds as a transformative experience that contributes to the formation of leaders of character. Embedded in socio-technical systems that, in many ways, replicate the systems they will serve in as officers and leaders, cadets undertake a multi-faceted process to put into action what it takes to live honorably (i.e., by pursuing their own identity), lift others (i.e., by engaging in purposeful experiences), and elevate performance (i.e., by practicing habits of thought and action). In unfamiliar, VUCA environments and exposed to the broader environmental and mental complexities of humanity, cadets observe and practice what they have learned from the USAFA curriculum; they apply both their discipline's proven research methods as well as what they have previously learned about being leaders of character (i.e., a VUCAH[2] leadership approach to innovatively solve problems). By being outside of both the classroom and USAFA's "leadership laboratory" and fully engaging in CSRP, cadets can function independently and take advantage of the unique opportunity to add value to and elevate the performance of an organization, before they are expected to as officers in our U.S. Air and Space Forces.

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2 Lindsay's (2020) "Letter from the Editor" explaining USAFA's strategic goals within a VUCAH [volatile, uncertain, complex, ambiguous, and humility component of leadership] backdrop.

Appendix A

DFMA CSRP Sponsor Organization Guidance and Expectations

1. **What the cadet brings to the table:** USAFA cadets participating in the CSRP experience with your organization have developed knowledge and skills related to the USAFA outcomes and courses (see attached "The Management Major at a Glance. docx"). Projects you assign to cadets are expected to challenge the cadets to apply what they have learned and reasonably expand their knowledge and skill-sets. Keep in mind that the cadets begin their major courses as juniors, and your cadets have completed one year of coursework in their management major.

2. **Point of contact:** The Point of Contact (POC) for the cadet shall be a person who has decision-making power to direct the cadet's activities and is the person the cadet reports to. The POC should NOT be a relative or family friend, although the cadet may have a personal relationship with someone in the client system. This stipulation is intended to minimize conflicts of interest, political considerations, and presumptions about as well as over-familiarity with the host organization.

3. **CSRP project**: The client has a situation (dilemma, problem or desired state identified) within his/her organization that can be framed as a question or objective. Please see attached "Sponsor Org Project Request Form.docx" for a template you can use to outline and communicate details of your proposed research project. To date, the organization is seeking help with:
   a. clearly identifying the "problem" and/or
   b. figuring out how to approach the "problem" or opportunity and/or
   c. developing a plan of action and/or
   d. acting on a project that has already covered a, b, and c

   Based on the above, the scope of the CSRP project may include a, b, c, and/or d.

4. **Felt need for CSRP project:** The POC him/her-self has embraced the organization's "felt need" or urgency to realize outcomes from the project assigned to the cadet. We ask that hosting organizations do their best to avoid projects that are not of importance to the organization in order to support USAFA or the cadet CSRP.

5. **Mutual understanding of CSRP project, Part I:** The CSRP occurs over a five- or six-week period, which is a very short time period. Communicating the scope of the project should be discussed in-depth with the cadet at the beginning of the engagement. In the early stages of the CSRP experience, the situation is framed as a project where the generation of new (and actionable) knowledge for the client system is the primary goal. (This more closely aligns with research as opposed to a traditional internship.)

6. **Mutual understanding of CSRP project, Part II:** The POC and cadet are expected to mutually discuss their understanding of the project and articulate a desired state that may be reached by the end of the five- or six-week CSRP. The POC and cadet should meet periodically (at least once per week) to review the agreement and make necessary modifications to the project specifics or scope of the project.

7. **Cadet understanding of the context of the CSRP project:** Note that we advise the cadet to take some time (1–3 days) at the beginning of their residency to explore the context in which the project resides. This may involve talking to people within the organization, reading existing materials, plant tours, etc. This gives the cadet an opportunity to understand the context and the specifics of the project before they dive into the work. At the conclusion of this brief period, we suggest that the cadet and POC meet to review their earlier understanding of the scope of the project. Discussions during this period should serve align the cadet's understanding of the project and how to proceed and that these match the expectations of the POC.

8. **Cadet role in CSRP project:** The client agrees that the project is such that the cadet must serve as a researcher and be more than a pair of hands and is expected to develop an understanding of the business of the organization (or unit), the context in which the project resides, the resources available for pursuit of the research, access to the POC and others who are involved with the project, clear scope of project and expectations, and the agency to undertake the project employing his/her decision making skills and applying his/her knowledge. (A pair of hands is someone who does simply performs tasks as assigned by the client, often not requiring much discernment and input on the part of the cadet. The pair of hands projects are often straightforward, even simple, tasks that the client could easily perform but has simply not had the time or manpower.)

*The cadets will also be receiving this information to use as they begin their interactions with you and your organization.

Appendix B
Guidelines for Management Majors to Accept CSRP
Congratulations!

You have been selected for the Department of Management (DFM) Cadet Summer Research Program (CSRP). CSRP is a great program, and we are excited to work with you throughout next semester and the summer to make this a valuable experience.

To make this official and confirm your slot selection, you must accept the CSRP guidelines and expectations below by replying to this email and confirming your intent (regardless of whether you want an in-person, remote, or hybrid CSRP project).

– Once you commit to CSRP (by accepting your slot in reply to this email), you will be removed from consideration for Cadet Summer Language Immersion Program (CSLIP) summer leadership positions, Foreign Academy Visits (FAV), Cultural Immersion Programs (CIP), Powered Flight, etc. (CSRP takes priority.)
– CSRP will take place during the first and second summer periods and you are still required to work a cadre program during third period. Therefore, you must be willing to give up all or most of your summer break to participate.

    o If you have not already been asked to do so, you will get a form to fill out your summer preferences. I am aware that CSRP is not an option. Unless you withdraw from CSRP, your summer schedule will reflect CSRP for the first two periods regardless of your preferences. However, please still be honest with your summer preferences so you can get your desired program during third period.

        § You cannot participate in a leadership position that takes up more than one summer period.

– Be familiar with the goals of the DFM CSRP: To help you become better leaders, managers and problem solvers by providing you with opportunities to:

    o Reinforce your understanding of management concepts by seeing them applied outside of the classroom.
    o Apply management concepts and conduct research to help an external sponsor organization.
    o Bring innovative best practices from sponsor organizations back to USAFA for continual improvement to our program.

– Your sole job is CSRP during this time. Expect to work a typical office shift schedule throughout your CSRP (Monday-Friday, 0730-1630). Your sponsor organization will update you with their specific expectations.
– Uniform of the Day (UOD) will be determined by your sponsor organization. We will update you as we receive that information.
– At the end of your CSRP, each sponsor organization will have expectations for your final deliverable that they will brief to you at the beginning of your CSRP.
– In addition, and following your return from CSRP, each of you will be required to produce a presentation and brief the Management Department, describing your research and what you accomplished over the summer. This will include (at a minimum):

    § How concepts you learned in USAFA Management courses were observed at the sponsor organization.
    § How you applied concepts you learned in USAFA Management courses to resolve/improve an issue/component of your sponsor organization.
    § Presentations should follow the basic sequence of background information, objective, research conducted, ranking of alternatives, resolution proposed, implementation analysis (if possible), and lessons learned.

– While we will consider your preferences for research projects and sponsoring organizations, you understand that you may not get your top choices (to include those who sought to create their own project with an org of their choosing).

– You are expected to meet both your sponsor's and our expectations at the end of this CSRP. If you encounter any issues, you should coordinate with us early and often so we can get you on the right path. Letting us know at the end of your CSRP that you will not be able to meet our expectations is too late and may result in disciplinary action.

  o If your CSRP sponsor reaches out to you, please provide them the information they request and cc both of your DFM CSRP Directors on the response.
    § However, NEVER sign any paperwork without coordinating with us beforehand (all paperwork will have to undergo a legal review before you can sign-we will coordinate the legal review).

– Your CSRP sponsors are paying USAFA for all of your travel expenses (airfare, per diem, lodging, transportation or rental car, if they choose to allow one). They send the money to the Air Force and you are reimbursed via the Defense Travel System (DTS). This means that your travel must follow all government regulations and will be based on what works best for the sponsor organization.

– Before we can book your travel for CSRP, I will need each of you to verify that your Government Travel Card (GTC) is active
  o Call the number on the back of your card and "check account status" and ensure that the expiration date extends past Aug 2023.
  o If you don't have a GTC or there are issues, please let me know as soon as possible (ASAP) and coordinate with your Academy Military Trainer (AMT) to resolve the issue.

– Ensure your DTS profile is updated, including your Electronic Funds Transfer (EFT) bank account and GTC information

  o You can log into DTS here: https://dtsproweb. defensetravel.osd.mil/dts-app/pubsite/all/ view
  o If you do not have a DTS profile, please coordinate with your AMT ASAP to have an account created and let me know this is the case.

– In April, we will be scheduling meeting(s) with you all to begin discussing summer logistics, your research projects, and what it means to conduct research. You are expected to make every effort to attend these meetings and communicate with us in advance if you cannot.

– Until summer schedules are released, you can anticipate/plan on the following itinerary for your CSRP (understanding that dates may shift a few days in either direction):

  o Travel to CSRP Location: Beginning Monday after graduation week (You are most likely traveling on Memorial Day, but this allows you to start your CSRP on Tuesday morning (and saves your sponsors money over the weekend). Your sponsors have all approved or requested this itinerary.)
  o Return/Travel to Colorado Springs or Break Location o/a the beginning of the fourth of July holiday
    § You will most likely have a week of summer break following your CSRP. You can travel to a break location of your choice or you can return to USAFA. You will need to decide what you'd like to do by the time we create your DTS authorization. DO NOT BOOK ANY PERSONAL TRAVEL UNTIL WE GIVE YOU THE APPROVAL.

Appendix C
Initial Announcement Soliciting CSRP Faculty Mentors
Message to faculty: looking for CSRP mentors

DFM's CSRP Directors are seeking help from our amazing faculty in the department to guide cadets in certain operational/functional setting they will be headed into over their summer CSRP project. For example, if you are familiar with Statistical Process Control (SPC) techniques to control production in manufacturing facilities or inventory level analysis and maximization procedures, we would pair you up with cadets sponsored by an (organization that designs, develops, and sells gear solutions for the DoD and other large industrial corporations.

The time commitment of participating as a faculty mentor should be minimal (e.g., 2–4 meetings these next few months leading up to their departure o/a 28 May). Our goal is for you to support our CSRP program by acting as Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) SMEs and working with the cadets to better understand and refine the scope of their projects and to answer questions related to the research context (e.g. operational setting, functional unit) and provide applicable theories/frameworks/training/certifications/analytical tools/etc that may be useful to them in conducting research and solving problems for their sponsor org. Additionally, the mentoring role could include how best to communicate back and forth with the sponsor org POC, as they may seek additional info or clarification, throughout this journey.

Would this be something you'd be interested in? If so, please let us know. I will also be adding a list of the research projects (once we get them from sponsors) to our Teams channel for you to review to determine the best fit.

PROGRAM/INTERVENTION

Lens X: A Practical Approach to Taking Care of Your People

Daphne DePorres, United States Air Force Academy

Matthew Orlowsky, United States Air Force Academy

Matthew Horner, United States Air Force Academy

David Levy, United States Air Force Academy

ABSTRACT

Graduates of the United States Air Force Academy (USAFA), as commissioned officers, are charged to "take care of their people." While this leadership aphorism makes sense, this article describes what it means in practice. An interdisciplinary USAFA team explored the dynamics of leader development from multiple angles, resulting in a focus on two dimensions (or "lenses") that help a leader understand what actions can be taken to help an employee achieve subjective well-being at work. The intent is to draw attention to the nature of the interaction with organizational members that foster engagement and need fulfillment. We do that by focusing a leader's attention on needs, narratives, and micro-exchanges. Those interactions, behaviors, and micro-exchanges are the foundations of and the most tangible, changeable element of climate and culture. This practical lens equips any leader to seize every opportunity to foster fulfillment of the psychological needs for belonging, agency, and efficacy. This framework can be used by anyone but is particularly relevant to supervisors and USAFA cadets who will be entrusted to lead an all-volunteer military force.

Keywords: Leadership, Self-Determination Theory, Belonging, Engagement, Retention

"Lt, Take care of your people," said U.S. Central Command General "Stormin" Norman Schwarzkopf, Jr. to Lt Dave Levy in a hangar at an undisclosed location in the Middle East during Operation Desert Shield in the fall of 1990. At some point in their careers, it is probable that most people reading this article, especially military leaders, have been charged to "take care of your people." This makes sense that is what leaders pledge to do along with accomplishing their missions–take care of their people. But what does it mean in practice? In this article, we share a leadership approach we are incorporating into a number of courses at the United States Air Force Academy (USAFA), called Lens X. Lens X illuminates the DNA of what "taking care of your people" means. We hope this discussion will stimulate your thinking about the complex interactions between leaders and employees while being clear about the individual impact of well-being on mission accomplishment.

USAFA is charged by law to develop Leaders of Character that are immersed in the history, traditions, values, and beliefs necessary for the long-term readiness and success of the Air and Space Forces (DoDI 1322.22). And, most importantly, graduates must be equipped to "convey and sustain" that culture (DoDI 1322.22 para 3). As faculty, we understand and embrace this duty as integral to what we do. As researchers, we understand that the three levels of culture are composed of observable artifacts, espoused values, and underlying assumptions and that "culture is constantly reenacted and created by our interactions with others and shaped by our own behavior" (Schein, 2010, p. 3). So, to enable cadets who graduate from USAFA to immediately take on leadership responsibilities as a "core group of innovative leaders capable of thinking critically who will exert positive peer influence" (DoDI 1322.22, para 3), we aimed to create a tool to focus them on the most observable and changeable element of culture – their interactions as artifacts of climate (Schein, 2010).

To develop this tool, a USAFA team[1] explored the dynamics of leader development from multiple angles, including interdisciplinary literature from psychology, sociology, and management (e.g. Bandura, 1982, 2018; Berger & Luckman, 1966; Checkland, 1981/2000; Deci & Ryan, 1980; Lewin, 1946), our leadership journeys, and the Academy's rigorous leadership development course of instruction. The result was a focus on two dimensions (or "lenses") that help a leader understand what actions can be taken to help an employee achieve subjective well-being and need fulfillment at work. The dimensions spring from agreement with Deci and Ryan's original work that "both person *and* situation variables affect behavior; similarly, both phenomenological *and* mechanistic variables affect behavior" (1980, p. 33). Also like Deci and Ryan, the intent is to draw attention to the *nature of the interaction* with organizational members that foster their engagement and need fulfillment. We do that by focusing a leader's attention on needs, narratives, and micro-exchanges. This is important because each year approximately one thousand cadets graduate from the Academy. This translates to graduates potentially impacting hundreds of thousands of volunteer, military personnel, as well as civilians and contractors. Thus, we take the responsibility of contributing to the formation of leaders very seriously.

As a means of illustration and clarification, think for a moment about one of the best experiences you have had at work. How would you describe it? Ask yourself what made it such a positive experience for you?

Here is an example of a positive experience that will help us move forward with our discussion. Taylor took on a new role in the organization, one that had never existed before and one she knew she was not fully

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1   Contributing members represented the Dean of Faculty from Departments of Behavioral Sciences and Leadership, Management, former USAFA colleagues, the Athletic Department and the Center for Character and Leadership Development.

prepared for. The role was highly visible and there was quite a bit of pressure to achieve success quickly. In the first few months, Taylor felt as if she was drowning in information and making decisions that could affect the success of the organization, as well as the people within the organization. She had more than a few long days and sleepless nights. Taylor worked very hard and succeeded, but she did not achieve success in a vacuum.

When Taylor reflected on that period of her life, several elements besides hard work stood out as critical to her ultimate success. The first was that on the start day of her new role, her manager said, "This is what we have to accomplish here." The manager explained the goal, and it was a big one. And then the manager said, "You'll figure this out, that's why we selected you. But know that whatever resources you need, come to me and we'll get them for you." And that's exactly what happened. Her manager's offer was not a blank check. What unfolded was far more valuable; her manager's mentorship and support through feedback, brainstorming, planning, and just knowing that he had her back bolstered her personal confidence and belief in her ability to do her job. Taylor recounted that some of the most fleeting interactions were the most impactful, such as a warm "Hey Taylor, how's it going?" as they passed in the hall. Through it all, her manager's stated intentions were followed up by actions.

In our workshops, classes, and our own personal experiences, we observed what research on the topic of self-determination theory has long shown–innate psychological needs must be fulfilled in sufficient quantities in order for a person to experience subjective well-being. The original work with self-determination theory posited the needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 1980). For our purposes here, we suggest the needs be modified slightly to agency, efficacy, and belonging. While Deci & Ryan focus broadly on the needs of individuals, we use more current terminology within an organizational context. As an exam-

ple, belonging captures current organizational focus, particularly when it comes to diversity and inclusion, in a way that "relatedness" does not. For use in the organizational context, the needs component is broadened to include a focus on individual needs fulfilled through actions and interactions within the organization, where individual needs and organizational goals are obtained concurrently. For example, belonging (Leary & Baumeister, 1995) can be fostered by your new coworkers wrapping you into the group, treating you as a full member from day one. Agency (Bandura, 2018) is evident when you experience the freedom to accomplish your work as you wish when you are encouraged and trusted to employ your talents, skills, and make appropriate decisions as you navigate the system around you. Finally, efficacy (Bandura, 1982) is having the belief that you can achieve desired outcomes, successfully meeting challenges along the way.

Belonging, agency, and efficacy are seen as needs that must be met in sufficient quantities in order for individuals to experience well-being and to thrive. Thus, every interaction you have as a manager or leader is an opportunity for you to help fulfill those needs for your employees. Every interaction is an opportunity to take care of your people. As you do this, and if your experience is like ours, you too likely will increase your need fulfillment as a leader, increasing your own sense of belonging, agency, and efficacy. An ideal work experience can be seen as one where everyone's psychological needs are met on an ongoing basis.

Let us revisit our earlier example. Taylor experienced a strong sense of belonging–even though she was new, and in a recently established role, she never doubted that she was seen as a valuable member; at first by the manager, and then through relationships she developed with other team members with the manager setting the example. Second, although Taylor had a steep learning curve, she knew that she could get the resources she needed, which included not only

tangible things like software but also the support and guidance to successfully navigate her way through the organization's systems in order to do the work. Here, Taylor experienced agency. While Taylor worked and sometimes did not always succeed on the first try, the environment created and maintained by her manager enabled her to learn from her actions, apply those learnings, and ultimately succeed. Taylor eventually internalized the knowledge that she could reach the goals set for her, even on days where nothing seemed to go well. Here, Taylor experienced efficacy. How did the "one of the best work experiences" you recalled align with this?

Now recall the most negative work experience you have had. What made it such a negative experience for you? You might know where this is going. Our guess based on having this conversation with many people is that the negative experiences are negative because they fail to foster fulfillment in one or more of the same three areas: belonging, agency, and/or efficacy. Often, these negative examples are the antithesis of need fulfillment. Hostile work environments that destroy any hope of belonging. Extreme micro-managing that provides little to no agency. Or being given tasks that are either insultingly easy to accomplish or far too difficult, destroying the experience of efficacy.

Let us look at another example where fostering belonging, agency, and efficacy is not as straightforward as Taylor's experience. Dean was a superstar employee working in an organization known for its very positive organizational culture. After three years, he quit. When asked why, he said he never felt like he belonged. His colleagues were shocked. His manager said Dean's leaving felt like a dagger to his heart. When digging deeper to better understand why Dean wanted to leave, the manager came to understand that Dean's family experienced significant challenges as Dean was growing up. He also struggled, feeling like an outsider, in his previous organization. Dean had narratives that greatly impacted how he perceived the work cultures where he was an employee. We all have narratives that arise from the messages we absorb from the environment around us, which influence our sense of need fulfillment. Narratives matter, and they impact how we perceive and experience agency, efficacy, and belonging.

The leader and/or supervisor in our focus here is also aware that the supervisee sees the world through his or her narratives, where the narratives, or stories an individual holds about their world, are filters through which they see the world, and these narratives impact their thoughts and behaviors (Gergen & Gergen, 1997). The leader or supervisor does not know the status of a supervisee's needs or narratives. In fact, the supervisee may not even be aware of a narrative that has come to the fore and impacts how they respond to an interaction or exchange (Zahavi, 2007). Yet, micro-exchanges, as well as any interaction between two people, can impact the narratives within the self (Hermans, 1999). An interaction can trigger reactions in the recipient that have little or nothing to do with the intent of the person who launches the exchange (Vallacher & Wegner, 1987). Lens X suggests that micro-exchanges can serve as mini-experiments within a critical reflective process (Gray, 2007) the intention of positively impacting the relationship, the recipient of the micro-exchange and the transformation processes within the organization. However, as in any experiment, a mini-experiment requires reflection and analysis on the part of the leader as an important step in the process to realize knowledge that can inform future micro-exchanges (Ploderer et al., 2014). Narratives of interest here take three forms: societal, organizational, and individual. From the example above, we can infer that Dean internalized a narrative from his and his family's experiences that made it difficult for him to experience belonging and organizational and individual narratives that validated his societal experience in spite of cultures that promote belonging for most members.

Since our narratives are largely about individual perceptions and may drive how we experience need fulfillment, managers must tend the garden of agency, efficacy, and belonging for each of their employees. Imagine you are in a meeting with an employee and you ask him if he is familiar with a decision-making tool that you feel could be helpful to him for a project he is working on. He tells you he is not familiar with it. You might be tempted to say something like, "Really? You've been here two years and never heard of it?" potentially negatively impacting the fulfillment of one or more of his psychological needs. At this moment, you have a great opportunity to help him experience a deeper sense of belonging, agency, and/or efficacy or do the exact opposite. So what might you do instead? You smile and say something like, "I think you'll love it, let me show you," as you grab a marker and draw on the whiteboard, explaining the tool and how to use it. This is one example. Multiply it a thousand-fold and you open up the possibility of incredibly positive personal and organizational impacts.

How do you tend the garden of belonging, agency, and efficacy for each employee? Our answer is micro-exchanges–the small interactions we have with others almost continuously. Micro-exchanges can range from a simple question such as "How'd that meeting go that you were concerned about?" to more complex and iterative interactions such as conversations. The emphasis on micro-exchanges in this article centers on the intersection of the individual and the organization and stems from a nuanced understanding of human needs and organizational dynamics. From this perspective, micro-exchanges are viewed as micro-interventions that have the potential to positively impact individual well-being and performance, as well as the organization's. In essence micro exchanges are interactions between two people where one person, the leader is aware that the supervisee has needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Deci et al., 2017) and for Belonging, Agency, and Efficacy (Bandura, 1982, 2006;

Baumeister & Leary, 2017) within the context of his or her work within the organization.

It is important to recognize that none of us are perfect and we likely engage in inadvertent negative micro-exchanges. Leaders should "know and appeal to a short list of widely shared values such as honesty, respect, responsibility, fairness, and compassion. In other words, don't assume too little–or too much–commonality with the viewpoints of others" (Gentile, 2010, p. 24). Further, leaders should be forthright about the values they are bringing into decisions and expect value conflicts in order to calmly and competently navigate them (Gentile, 2010). If our intentions are good and we start with positive, widely held values our employees will likely give us a bit of leeway. Intentionality is key, as we select and engage in micro-exchanges in order to have a positive impact on the person's perceptions of belonging, agency, and efficacy. Intentionality also recognizes that while we will never know what another person's lived experiences have been or legacies they bring with them, we know that their narratives are not our narratives and we do our best to avoid assumptions while we try to help them fulfill their needs of belonging, agency, and efficacy through the micro-exchanges. It is also helpful to remember how our own psychological needs might affect our exchanges. In what ways do our own needs for belonging, agency, and efficacy interact or compete with others? In some cases, you may need to temporarily subordinate your own needs for agency or efficacy, for example, in order to more authentically engage with others and achieve a future state that is better for all parties involved.

Below is a model that elucidates this approach (Lens X Figure 1). We call this model Lens X for a reason. We use "X" because psychological needs and narratives commonly intersect. In a visual representation, these "lenses" form an "X." Even more important is that we refer to the model as a lens. A lens is something we look through, a way of seeing the world. The intersecting lenses of needs and narratives narrow a leader's

Figure 1
Lens X Model[2]

attention to action research "experiments" to increase a member's engagement. When you look at your relationships through Lens X, you see needs that you as a leader or a manager can help an employee potentially fulfill through positive micro-exchanges that recognize the unique narratives of each individual. In so doing, you are in a position to make every interaction an opportunity to take care of your people.

Now that we have explored an approach to "taking care of your people" how has your conceptualization of "taking care of your people" shifted? To what extent are your micro-exchanges positive? Negative? What commitment are you willing to make to engage in more positive micro-exchanges from this point forward? How will you tend the garden of belonging, agency, and efficacy for those you interact with? Every interaction is an opportunity to take care of your people. Make yours count.

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2 Image design by Rinata Bauzhanova. Image previously published in, "Needs, Narratives and Micro-Exchanges in Organizations: A Values-Based Approach to Organization Development and Change" in the *Organization Development Journal*.

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Cultivation of Character for Ethical Leadership: The Department of Leadership Education at Culver Academies

Evan Dutmer, Culver Academies

ABSTRACT

Since 1894, Culver Academies has aimed to develop leaders of character. Rooted in the military academy and boarding school traditions, Culver has centered leadership development around central virtues and values. In 1986, recognizing the need to provide integrated, successive leadership learning experiences for students across 4 years, Culver instituted a standalone academic Department of Leadership Education. The Department of Leadership Education, housed in the Schrage Leadership Center, is unique among secondary boarding schools in offering four successive academic leadership education classroom experiences alongside Student Life curricula. Each year's curriculum is centered in a transformational leadership framework, utilizing evidence-based tools to guide students' leadership and character growth at each level. Ultimately, students' growth is assessed by faculty (and students themselves) according to core leadership and character competencies developed by the Academies. Continual improvement of the department is ensured through a comprehensive triennial review process. The aim of this article is to illustrate a successful, iterative character and leadership education experience in a 4-year secondary school context.

Keywords: leadership, character education, virtues, values, transformational leadership, competencies

Introduction

The mission of the Culver Academies is to educate "students for leadership and responsible citizenship in society by developing and nurturing the whole individual—mind, spirit, and body—through integrated programs that emphasize the cultivation of character" (About Culver Academies, 2023). Culver lives out this mission across two constituent academies—Culver Military Academy and Culver Girls Academy. Following in the military academy tradition, each academy is organized around the school's foundational virtues and values (Zanetti, 2020; Metcalf & Heller, 2022). The Culver Virtues align with the High Six Virtues of the VIA Classification of Character Strengths and Virtues: wisdom, courage, justice, moderation, humanity, and transcendence (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). The values, again evidencing the influence of the US military, are honor, truth, duty, service.

In 1986, Culver Academies inaugurated the Department of Leadership Education, marking a significant step toward fostering an integrated, consistent leadership education experience for every student. The driving force behind this initiative was the conviction that while the Honor Code, Code of Conduct, and Student Life curricula left students well-prepared for their personal and career futures, a unified, integrated leadership education experience would further guarantee virtues- and values-based leadership development for every student. Led by the Committee on the Culver Experience, this department was designed to harness the institution's diverse program offerings in pursuit of a unified goal: producing exemplary leaders of character who aimed to selflessly serve their communities.

In other words, at Culver, leadership and character were already *caught* (through the Student Life curriculum) and *sought* (through the inculcation of the Culver Code of Conduct and other aspirational creeds); but it remained for the Academies to make sure that leadership and character were consistently and com-prehensively *taught* in academic, classroom settings (Arthur et al., 2022).

Over the past three and a half decades, the Department of Leadership Education, housed in the Schrage Leadership Center, has evolved while maintaining the unwavering focus on the overarching aim of cultivating leaders and citizens of character. The department remains committed to educating whole individuals who embody the virtues and values necessary for responsible citizenship and developing the capacity to inspire others within a democratic society (Bass & Bass, 2008). Rooted in Culver's virtues and values, the curriculum merges ancient and contemporary virtue ethics, leadership studies, psychology, and positive organizational scholarship (POS) to deliver a comprehensive and itera-tive educational experience for each student.

Leadership as a Co-Constructed Process

Building on the seminal work of James MacGregor Burns, the department views leadership as a collaborative process shared between leaders and followers, transcending traditional hierarchical roles, and in service to elevating ends. Accordingly, the department agrees with Burns when he writes that "[transformational leadership] occurs when [leaders and their followers] ... raise one another to higher levels of morality and motivation" (Burns, 1978, p. 20). Burns critical of understandings of leadership that exaggerated the role of designated leaders, argued that leadership is a process in which power is derived from a relationship between leaders and followers. Burns underscored the significance of the relationships between leaders and followers and highlighted the ways in which leaders and followers can mobilize one another bi-directionally. This has been called understanding leadership "as a co-constructed process" (Northouse, 2022, p. 364; see also Kotter, 1990).

The result is energizing leadership that can bond teams, transform organizations, and elevate individuals'

character (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Sosik & Jung, 2018). This understanding of leadership draws inspiration from historical figures such as Mahatma Gandhi, Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., Nelson Mandela, Desmond Tutu, contemporary voices like Malala Yousafzai, Pope Francis I, and Indra Nooyi, and extensive social science research on organizational effectiveness demonstrating how transformational leadership can catalyze positive change on personal and societal levels (Bass & Riggio, 2006).

A Focus on Virtues and Values: Authentic Transformational Leadership and Positive Organizational Scholarship

The department's approach to leadership education is underpinned by Culver's Virtues and Values. Far from advancing a "naked power-wielding" analysis of leadership, the department aims to draw on renewed interest in ethical, values-driven leadership in the last 50 years (Ciulla, 2012, 2014; Jones, 2023; Lamb et al., 2022). The department emphasizes the concept of leadership as a catalyst for personal and collective growth—especially with respect to human potential. Leaders are envisioned as agents of positive transformation who not only uplift themselves but also elevate their followers and team members, all in pursuit of better societies and human flourishing (Cameron & Winn, 2012).

The department educates, then, for what has been called "authentic transformational leadership" (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999; Sosik, 2015). Authentic transformational leadership is understood as transformational leadership that is rooted in leaders' and followers' mutual pursuit of the good and character development and growth, namely, virtues and flourishing for individuals and societies (Sosik, 2015).

This ideal of authentic transformational leadership connects to the department's broader commitments to educate students in the foundations of POS. Students learn how virtuousness in organizations has been connected to greater effectiveness on traditional

measures of workplace performance while noting the power of strengths to improve individuals' subjective well-being and engagement in organizational contexts (Cameron, 2021; Miglianico et al., 2020). Consequently, a strengths-based approach using the VIA Classification of Character Strengths and Virtues (including students taking the VIA Inventory of Strengths (VIA-IS) Assessment each calendar year) is employed at each grade level. John Yeager led the integration of VIA Strengths across Leadership Education curricula beginning with his arrival in 2007 (Yeager et al., 2011). Further, the department serves a leadership role within Culver as a resource for enacting positive leadership practices among faculty and staff to enhance virtuousness across the entire organization.

Curriculum Design: An Integrated Path to Transformational Leadership for Each Student

The academic journey through the Department of Leadership Education is carefully structured to instill transformational leadership at each stage of a student's education and run alongside and in complement to the athletic, extracurricular, and Student Life residential curricula at each grade level. The current core iteration of courses in the department were co-created by a core teaching team and has been in place since 2014. These courses are (in order from grades 9 to 12): Learning Living Leading (LLL), Teaming and Thinking (TNT), Ethics and the Cultivation of Character (ECC), and Senior Leadership Reflection (SLR). Throughout each course, instructors take care to order their experiential learning designs around core learning strategies that have been recently identified as the "Seven Strategies for Leadership and Character Development" (Lamb et al., 2022). These strategies (virtue practice, virtuous exemplars, virtue literacy, moral reminders, reflection, systems awareness, and friendships of mutual accountability) serve as helpful guides to in-class instruction and help to further ground the experiential emphasis of the course design across the department (Kolb, 1984).

9th Grade: Living, Learning, Leading

A student's leadership education journey begins with a required 9th grade leadership, learning, well-being, and belonging course. This course builds on an understanding that leadership begins as "self-management" (Drucker, 2005). Self-awareness, character development, well-being, power awareness, implicit and explicit biases, and bias mitigation are emphasized. Students take the VIA Strengths Inventory as a first step of strengths spotting, connecting institutional virtues and values to those present in evidence-based positive psychology. Students engage in a wellness module in support of institutional aims in health and well-being and continue this learning through an integrated wellness check-in running throughout the course. Further, students engage in basic routines of Social Emotional Character Development, especially through emotional self-awareness and self-regulation using the Mood Meter, developed at the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence (Brackett, 2019).

Committed to a vision of leadership education that honors the structures of individual human brains and learning, students also learn how to learn best through a basic understanding of the science of learning and relevant brain science (Barrett, 2020; Willingham, 2022). Key to this portion of the course is students' engagement with growth mindset research and examination of their own academic mindsets (Dweck, 2007).

Students use these resources in engaging in early study of transformational leadership. Students familiarize themselves with the five practices model of exemplary leadership and reflect on exemplary leadership they witness around campus and how they could leverage their VIA Strengths to effect those practices themselves in varied team contexts (Kouzes & Posner, 2018).

10th Grade: Teaming and Thinking

In the 10th grade course, *TNT*, students embark on an in-depth study of teams, team dynamics, and effective teaming. Using a transformational framework which emphasizes the bidirectional processes of leadership, students analyze their existing teams for varied leadership actions and reflect on both effective and ineffective teams they have participated in. The department utilizes the Five Behaviors model of effective teaming for this reflection (Lencioni, 2011). Students conclude their experience with a presentation describing an exemplar effective team and setting goals for future teams and team leadership positions they will occupy in their 11th grade year. This course nurtures experiential learning in complex human groups, empathy, problem-solving, and an appreciation for diverse perspectives in team environments.

11th Grade: Ethics and the Cultivation of Character

The 11th grade course, *ECC*, is a graduation requirement for every student. It consists of an enacted, practiced virtue ethics course and a deeper introduction to an ethical leadership model via authentic transformational leadership. Students study ancient origins of contemporary virtue ethics and positive psychology through Aristotle, Confucius, and other character-based ethics around the world (Dutmer, 2022). Further, students apply their learning through several applied reflective exercises—for instance, constructing a goal hierarchy that leverages their VIA Signature Strengths in service of drafting possible "ultimate concerns" (Duckworth, 2016). The Seven Strategies complement the curriculum for the course and, in particular, assist in guiding the structure of the applied experiences.

The application backbone for the course is an ongoing Character Lab that runs throughout the entire course. It is a weeklong intention-setting and evidence-gathering exercise that allows students to chart their growth toward mastery of particular virtues and character strengths. Growth in the virtues over the 9-week experience is ordered around a spiral curriculum model, as has previously been developed at the Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues (Arthur et al., 2017). Contem-

porary topics in leadership studies introduced include emotional intelligence, empathy, and leadership applications of the dual process theory (fast and slow thinking). The course provides opportunities for competency performance via an interview for an imagined student leadership position of character integrator (modeled on some of the recent curricular work at the United States Military Academy), an ethical film analysis podcast (ethical films viewed and studied include *SELMA,12 Angry Men,* and *He Named Me Malala*), and a final written performance reflection that draws on each weekly Character Lab and is assessed around evidence of growth in the five leadership education competencies.

12th Grade: Senior Leadership Reflection

Each senior engages in a comprehensive reflective experience on competencies across 4 years of leadership experience, drawing on extensive research in educational psychology emphasizing the importance of developing students' reflective capacity for deeper learning (Lamb et al., 2022). Students craft an essay that reflects on summative performances relating to each of the core leadership competencies. These reflections offer an opportunity for both celebration of accomplishment for students while also providing excellent evidential opportunities for competency assessment by the SLR faculty facilitator. The department collects a repository of qualitative evidence of students' leadership experience that could be used for future internal and external research.

Electives: Psychology and Psychology of Leadership

Building on its deep curricular connections with contemporary psychology, the Department of Leadership Education also offers an introductory and advanced course in psychology. Both focus on positive psychology and the psychology of leadership. Psychology of Leadership is an upper-division course taught as an introduction to POS, focusing on virtues and strengths development in complex human organizations. The concluding performance for the course consists of an academic literature review on an area of POS of students' choosing.

Senior Elective Capstone: Honors Seminar in Leadership Education—The Theory and Practice of Leadership (HIL)

An Honors Seminar in the Theory and Practice of Leadership offers advanced students an opportunity for continued study of leadership through a college-level seminar in Transformational Leadership, culminating in creation of research papers in conversation with contemporary leadership studies, presented before the Department of Leadership Education. Students simultaneously engage in a college course in Leadership Studies while practicing essential academic skills for upper-level collegiate research. The research paper is understood as an academic service to the Academies community.

Leadership Education by Design

As part of its most recent triennial review process, the department engaged in a thorough renovation of its curricular documents using the Understanding by Design (UBD) framework in 2022–2023 (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005). Key to this work is the crafting of shared core understandings and essential questions for our students' leadership education careers. These core understandings and essential questions can be integrated horizontally and vertically across courses according to the spiral curriculum previously discussed. In this way, students are able to engage with core knowledge and understandings at greater levels of complexity over successive years.

The department has arrived at some of the following core leadership understandings and essential questions to guide its work:

Sample Enduring Understandings
Virtues are alive,and to be lived,and practiced.
As virtues are applied and practiced, human beings can improve and continue to strive for a eudaimonistic life.

Ethical leadership in teams requires continual character improvement among leaders and followers toward ends that contribute to overall human flourishing.

Transformational leadership requires transformation (higher levels of character and higher levels of productivity/engagement/motivation) from both leaders and followers.

Leadership requires an understanding of human behavior and attitudes.

Leadership can be understood as a co-constructed process (between leaders and followers) in human organizations.

Leadership is a phenomenon in human organizations that can be studied using the tools of psychology.

Organizational culture impacts employee performance and well-being.

Leadership practices can be taught and are improvable. Certain team member behaviors can enhance teamwork; others can hinder it.

Service is promoting the welfare of others in the community.

Sample Essential Questions

What is leadership?

Who is a leader? Who is a follower?

What does good leadership look like?

How do I improve and grow as a leader?

How can I connect my philosophy of leadership with my practice of leadership?

How do I live out my philosophy of leadership in my community?

How do I help develop and nurture others for leadership?

What observable evidence is there for effective leadership?

Each level of the curriculum offers successive opportunities to engage with these understandings and questions at great sophistication and depth. Further,

cross-course agreement on foundational key understandings enhances student learning across course experiences (Bruner, 1960; Mehta & Fine, 2019).

Competencies of Character and Leadership Education

Evaluation of Culver's leadership and character education has evidenced the need for continued development of the department's evaluation methods. Further, Culver has enacted an institution-wide adoption of competency-based learning. As part of this curricular evolution, Culver has developed a draft of competencies around five core distinguishing characteristics of a Culver graduate: leadership, scholarship, communication, well-being, and citizenship. These competencies were developed by cross-campus, interdisciplinary drafting teams aiming for maximum interdepartmental feedback and ownership of the competencies. Each of these core distinguishing characteristics is accompanied by 4–6 competencies. Accordingly, the department has begun and continues to make important changes in its assessment of student growth through adoption of five core leadership performance competencies and four process competencies.

The Department of Leadership Education, following a growing number of educational institutions, has begun to assess student growth according to two sets of competencies: performance competencies and process competencies (Paulson Gjerde et al., 2017). The performance competencies under "Leadership" are:

Positively Influencing: A Culver graduate practices effective leadership approaches by positively influencing others.

Achieving Goals: A Culver graduate achieves goals for personal growth aimed at improving their contribution to their team or group.

Modeling and Empowering: A Culver graduate serves as a model for peers and empowers leaders

and followers in order to support community values and the group's purpose.

Serving Communities: A Culver graduate fulfills their responsibilities and engages in meaningful acts of service in order to improve their communities.

Power Awareness: A Culver graduate recognizes the power dynamics inherent in systems, events, and circumstances and that change is made by working within or challenging existing systems.

The process competencies are collaboration, iteration, perseverance, and behaving honorably. These are shared across the campus rather than being the possession of any single department. This is indicative of broad agreement across departments and disciplines that these competencies are important habits for students to develop as learners and leaders in the campus community. They are as follows:

Iteration. A Culver graduate engages in cycles of practice, feedback, reflection, and revision to improve.

Collaboration. A Culver graduate shares responsibility for group goals, exchanging ideas and questions with respect and humility.

Perseverance. A Culver graduate perseveres in the face of setbacks through their own agency or by seeking appropriate assistance.

Behaving Honorably. A Culver graduate speaks up for and acts on behalf of what is right and holds themselves and others accountable for what they do and say.

The proficiency indicators—established by a school wide calibration—are *distinguished, proficient/distinguished, proficient, developing/proficient, developing* corresponding to traditional grade point averages of 4.0, 3.7, 3.4, 3.0, and 2.7. Faculty regularly meet to calibrate standards within levels and across the department and offer students chances to assess their own proficiency according to rubrics for each of the above competencies.

Measurement and Evaluation

Following its most recent triennial review process, the department has identified key areas for growth and improvement in the coming years. First, Culver is uniquely positioned to engage in leadership and character research on its campus. The department has committed to engage in measurement of student progress in its curricula using standard tools. For example, the department plans to provide for each student assessment of leadership behaviors in a transformational framework through the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ; Bass & Riggio, 2006). Further, following the example of the Jubilee Centre of Character and Virtues, the department will build on its work assessing student character strengths and development through a process of triangulation (Kristjánsson, 2015). VIA-IS Assessments, on this method, can be combined with other measures of character development, especially those that aim to activate virtue-relevant schemas in students (Walker et al., 2017). Along with teachers' assessment of students' progress toward the leadership and character competencies outlined earlier, this process of triangulation will help to produce a fuller snapshot of students' character and character development over a Culver academic career.

Fully Integrated Programs

Next, the department recognizes the need to continue deepening integration of its leadership and character development aims across campus and between its two constituent academies, Culver Girls Academy and Culver Military Academy. Student Life, extracurricular, and athletic areas offer excellent opportunities for continued collaboration and development of the leadership performance and process competencies outlined earlier. The shared leadership competencies—identical across campus and both academies—will greatly accelerate

this collaboration. With a central repository of student competencies, faculty and staff across the Academies will be able to offer feedback regarding students' progress. Further, given the connections between positive psychology and the science of well-being (PERMA Theory of Well-Being - Positive Emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, Accomplishment), there exist opportunities for continued and deeper collaboration with the Department of Wellness. As the department leverages its programming in support of these complementary departments, it will assist in achieving the overarching mission of the Academies.

Conclusion

Culver Academies has striven to educate and mold leaders of character since its inception in 1894. The Department of Leadership Education, founded in 1986, is a key part of that mission. The Department of Leadership Education has ensured each student receives a reflective, charted course of leadership and character growth as a graduation requirement. Through a 4-year sequence of course offerings, Culver offers a unique level of ethical and leadership training for high schoolers in a US context. Given the recognized need and continued desire for character and leadership development programs that engage students to learn more deeply beyond standalone course experiences, Culver Academies Department of Leadership Education stands as an important example among secondary schools that aim to cultivate the whole person.

Acknowledgements

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INSIGHTS

Leaders' Psychological Bravery

Dana Born, Harvard University

Paula Caligiuri, Northeastern University

Much has been written about the importance of psychological safety (Edmondson & Lei, 2014). Creating an environment in which everyone feels secure to express themselves and take risks without fear of negative consequences is a critical responsibility of any leader. But what does it take for a leader to cultivate this kind of safety on their team, within their unit, or across their organization?

The answer lies in what we call *psychological bravery*. To build a culture of true psychological safety, leaders must possess psychological bravery, the mental strength and courage to take risks, to embrace ambiguity, to make difficult decisions, and to stand firm in the face of adversity. Leaders' psychological bravery involves their willingness to confront fear, uncertainty, and potential criticism while maintaining a commitment to excellence, integrity, and ethical standards.

At a high level, psychological bravery is a form of moral courage, which the literature describes as taking a risky or unpopular action in response to an ethical, moral, or values-based challenge (Sekerka & Bagozzi, 2007). This is not a new idea: Half a century ago, Eleanor Roosevelt wrote that "courage is more exhilarating than fear and in the long run it is easier. We do not have to become heroes overnight. Just a step at a time, meeting each thing that comes up, seeing it is not as dreadful as it appeared, discovering we have the strength to stare it down." More recently, research has demonstrated that individuals who act in a morally courageous manner – that is, who engage in consistent, sometimes subtle acts of psychological bravery – reap a wide range of benefits such as experiencing a greater sense of meaning in their work and overall life satisfaction (Deeg & May, 2022).

In a leadership context, psychological bravery is what enables leaders to consciously step into discomfort and risk in both words and action, especially where issues of moral, ethical, or functional importance are concerned. After all, leaders often face tough choices, and their decisions may be met with resistance, uncertainty, scrutiny, and criticism. Psychologically brave leaders are willing to take on potentially unpleasant or confrontational situations, uphold integrity,

and navigate difficult conversations or decisions with grace and compassion. They take calculated risks, confront unethical behavior no matter the costs, speak up against wrongdoing even when it is unpopular, and innovate despite the possibility of failure.

It is only when leaders demonstrate the courage to take real risks that those around them will feel psychologically safe enough to exhibit psychological bravery themselves. This bravery should, in turn, spark a virtuous cycle, further boosting the culture of psychological safety that is necessary for people to feel comfortable taking risks.

Of course, imbuing your leadership with psychological bravery is no small feat. In particular, there are five key, interrelated characteristics that psychologically brave leaders exhibit:

Moral and Ethical Courage

The literature on cultural agility describes a phenomenon known as *cultural minimization*, in which leaders opt to maintain a certain standard even when it runs counter to the prevailing cultural norm (Caligiuri, 2021). More broadly, psychologically brave leaders must stand firm in their values and ethical beliefs, even when it is uncomfortable or unpopular, making decisions and taking actions that are morally and ethically aligned with their values even in the face of dissent or opposition.

For example, a whistleblower acts with moral and ethical courage by putting their own career or safety at risk in order to expose wrongdoing or corruption. Taking action in this way demonstrates a willingness to stand up for what is right and just despite potential personal consequences. Summarized on the book cover and detailed in his book, *Here, Right Matters*, Retired U.S. Army Lieutenant Colonel Alexander Vindman recounts how he found himself at the center of a firestorm after deciding to report the infamous phone call that led to former president Trump's impeachment (Vindman, 2021). Despite straining his relationships with colleagues, superiors, and even his own father, as well as eventually ending his decorated career in the U.S. Army, Vindman remained confident that he had done the right thing. Refusing to back down even in the face of intense pressure to stay silent and the potential for enormous personal and professional cost, Vindman demonstrated the moral and ethical courage that's emblematic of psychological bravery.

Diplomatic Communication

Psychological bravery is not just about doing the right thing. It's also about having the thoughtfulness to communicate those brave decisions respectfully and effectively – in other words, it is about diplomacy. The best leaders share their thoughts, beliefs, and feelings openly (even when their input might be received with skepticism or disagreement), engaging in difficult conversations and addressing uncomfortable or taboo topics transparently and authentically.

Longtime diplomat and former U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman speaks powerfully to the importance of diplomatic communication in her book, *Not for the Faint of Heart* (Sherman, 2018). In her book and related articles, Ambassador Sherman describes how, as a mediator in the Iran Nuclear negotiations, she worked tirelessly to ensure her language was precise and respectful, ultimately helping her negotiate a mutually acceptable solution to avoid escalating tensions. Throughout her career, Ambassador Sherman demonstrated the courage and consistency it takes to remain diplomatic, even in the face of huge potential risk.

Risk Tolerance

Taking risks needlessly or excessively is not good leadership. But at the same time, avoiding risks at all costs does not work either. Effective leaders must be willing to make decisions and take actions that, while informed

and considered, carry inherent risks. Indeed, to avoid risks that might compromise values or long-term goals, sometimes it is necessary to take some risks in the shorter term. This means accepting failures and setbacks (and encouraging team members to do the same), recognizing that apparent failures can also serve as opportunities to learn and develop that can ultimately result in even better outcomes than the safe course or status quo would have achieved.

After all, progress is impossible without some level of risk. In his book *HOW: Why How We Do Anything Means Everything*, Dov Seidman, Founder and Chair of The HOW Institute for Society, proposes that real progress requires innovation, and people can only innovate if they're willing to tolerate some risk.

One of American history's most famous examples of psychologically brave leadership is the Reverend Martin Luther King Jr., who led the U.S. Civil Rights Movement in the 1950s and 1960s. At the risk of losing everything he valued, from his family to his freedom to his very life, he never wavered from his passionate and undying fight for racial equality. King's commitment to peacefully confronting systemic racism and injustice came at a substantial personal cost, but it also inspired millions to join the struggle for civil rights. Through both his words and his actions, King demonstrated an incredible tolerance for risk, helping to advance the civil rights movement and bring about significant social change in the United States and around the world.

Openness

Another important facet of psychologically brave leadership is the ability to be open to new ideas and conflicting perspectives when developing strategy and making decisions. This means potentially revising decisions and strategies when new information is presented and honestly admitting misjudgments or mistakes.

When we imagine a quintessential leader, we might picture someone who is tough, decisive, unshakeable – but psychological bravery means having the courage to admit that you do not have all the answers. For instance, during a group discussion about a controversial topic, an individual who actively listens to others considers opposing viewpoints rather than dismissing them out of hand and is open to changing their own perspective based on the information presented demonstrates a high level of openness. This willingness to consider new ideas and engage in constructive dialogue can sometimes be uncomfortable, but it is the only way to achieve mutual understanding, which in turn is critical to ensure effective decision-making.

To be sure, remaining open minded is often easier said than done. Leaders' psychological bravery will likely be met with inertia, resistance to change, and even outright opposition. Leaders might find themselves at odds with established norms, practices, or beliefs within a team or organization, necessitating skills related to conflict resolution, change management, persuasion, and motivation. But while these tactics can lessen the blow, some amount of resistance is inevitable – and when it when occurs, it is crucial for leaders to exercise psychological bravery by maintaining courage, diplomacy, risk tolerance, and openness.

Culture Creation

Finally, psychological bravery means not just honing your own leadership muscles but also fostering a culture that invites those around you to cultivate and demonstrate bravery as well. Leaders must build a climate in which others feel empowered to share dissenting, innovative, or unconventional viewpoints, without fear of retribution.

In a corporate context, this might be framed within a conversation about company culture. For instance, a tech company might work to establish a culture in which

employees are encouraged to take risks, think outside the box, and share their ideas freely. Fostering such an innovative environment requires leadership, policies, and practices that prioritize creativity and open communication. The media giant Pixar serves as a particularly illustrative example: Its mantra of "fail early, fail often" has contributed substantially to its culture of creativity and thoughtful risk-taking, with its co-founders even explicitly arguing that "It is not the manager's job to prevent risks. It is the manager's job to make it safe to take them."

Conclusion

Leading with psychological bravery is not easy. Consistently demonstrating bravery, especially in resistant environments, can be deeply mentally taxing and is only possible with a strong support network of peers, mentors, and advisors who can provide guidance, perspective, and emotional support. Leaders should also prioritize self-care practices such as mindfulness, regular exercise, and adequate rest to maintain their mental and emotional well-being, as well as engaging in continuous learning and development programs that equip them with the skills and resilience necessary to navigate challenging environments.

In the words of Theodore Roosevelt, "Far better it is to dare mighty things, to win glorious triumphs, even though checkered by failure, than to take rank with those poor spirits who neither enjoy much nor suffer much, because they live in the gray twilight that knows not victory nor defeat." By daring mightily, psychologically brave leaders endeavor to elevate themselves and the teams and organizations they lead, shaping a future defined by courage, compassion, and collective triumph.

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INSIGHTS

Space Force Culture

Chang Suh, United States Space Force

April Brittain, United States Space Force

ABSTRACT

The word culture is a verb meaning to grow something. Only in the past few centuries has it been used as a noun. This tendency has caused confusion about what it is we are actually growing. As the United States Space Force enters its 4th year as a military service, it behooves space professionals and stakeholders to consider the etymology of important words like culture and Guardian. Given the mission priorities of the USSF, the key is for Guardians to focus on growing, influencing, and culturing one another.

Keywords: Space Force, Culture, Leadership

This article is a call to action for Guardians of the United States Space Force (USSF) to help cultivate and grow the USSF culture. One of the more effective ways to influence our culture is by enriching the human experience of being a Guardian. Therefore, how Guardians interact and engage with one another is a valuable (and limited) opportunity.

Often culture feels like something that "happens" to us, rather than something we are empowered to influence. It does not help that there are so many definitions of the word "culture," and that it is dynamic and multi-faceted. To help us actively participate in influencing the USSF culture around us, this article explores the nature of culture itself, and what the current USSF culture might reveal about who Guardians are, what we do, why we do it, and how we might do better? If Guardians answer this call to action, their participation will surely increase others' sense of psychological safety, belonging, and significance. What signs of progress might we see indicating we are on the right track? A decrease in risk aversity, an increase in mission command, and deeper human connection—a more agile and team-centric ecosystem—all of which could help move the needle on recruitment, retention, and performance.

However, these are merely conjectures based on assumptions and mental models. As the statistician, George Box once observed: "All models are wrong, [but] some are useful." So, let us start by exploring some key assumptions.

The late Dr. Edgar Schein, a renowned professor who taught at the MIT Sloan School of Business, defined culture as "a pattern of shared basic assumptions." These basic assumptions are unseen (or invisible), not collectively defined across an organization, and, therefore, may be taken for granted. Assuming there is some truth to this idea, it behooves us to take inventory of key assumptions we might share as a community of Guardians and look for meaningful patterns. If, in fact, patterns of how we make assumptions reveal something about our culture, it could potentially inform our decision-making and bias for action. Sun Tzu famously said, "If you know the enemy and know yourself, you need not fear the result of a hundred battles." Gaining insight into the patterns of our assumptions might reveal something deeper about ourselves and our shared identity as Guardians.

The desired culture for Space Force is a culture that supports what winning looks like that day. This is an assumption, and it means that if the Russians parachute men in unmarked uniforms into Crimea, then winning might look a little different than if the Chinese send a fleet of balloons over the continental United States. Whoever makes such an assumption, by definition, accepts the statement as true, or as certain to happen, at times without proof. In other words, an assumption is often an inherent belief. Some assumptions are explicit, while others are implicit or even tacit. So, it does not come as a surprise that some assumptions are not even questioned—they are accepted without deep critical analysis or sense of doubt. It is also no surprise that a person might lack the vocabulary to articulate said assumption, since they might not even be aware of having it. Whether a person is aware, or unaware of having a certain assumption, it still influences the person's behavior to some extent, since it is encoded in their "individual operating system."

There are purportedly over 134 definitions of the word culture. For the purpose of this article, we are prepared to assume that they might all be valid, depending on context. What is more germane than the definition(s) of culture is its etymology. The word culture comes from the Latin *colere*, which means "to grow, tend or care for" and also came to mean "to till" as in "tilling the ground." In fact, centuries ago, the word was used almost exclusively as a verb rather than a noun or adjective, as we do today (as in "he seems very cultured"). It is curious and notable that the root of the word guardian comes from the old French for gardener, or keeper—not the 21st century Martha Stewart gardener, but the ancient gardener whose job was to keep the wolves at bay and the fig trees prospering. The etymology of the word guardian aligns with the Space Force Guardian's dual function, which is implied in the USSF mission statement: "Secure our nation's interests in, from, and to space." The Chief of Space Operations (CSO), USSF, General B. Chance Saltzman, states in his Commander's Note #16 that "securing our Nation's interests means protecting the security and prosperity the Nation derives from space."[1] This dual function implies a dual identity of the Guardian as a Sentinel-Steward. Interestingly, the Delta 7 Detachment 5 patch portrays the Greek demigod Bootes, who is portrayed in mythology wielding a sickle in one hand and a spear (or a shepherd's crook) in the other. The sickle is an agricultural tool and represents prosperity and the harvesting of crops (hence Bootes is also known as the Ploughman). The spear, on the other hand, is a weapon that represents the sentinel duties of the Guardian. One might argue that the Sentinel-Steward, like Bootes, is a star keeper who wields the tools necessary for protecting both the security and prosperity we derive from space.

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1   Saltzman, B.C., C-Note #16, 6 September 2023.

Having established the root of the word culture—and noted its curious relation to the root of the word guardian—we turn to another concept popularized by Dr. Schein. Namely, the idea that assumptions are the building blocks of an organization's culture, influencing its values and manifesting themselves in human behavior (what he calls artifacts; Schein, 1992). So, let us begin with the artifacts, which are visible and often tangible. Just picture in your mind an archeologist at a dig site. While digging, she might first come across some spoons, forks, and pottery. As she studies the artifacts, she begins to understand how the people lived from the images portrayed on the pottery or the dwelling walls. The archeologist might deduct some of their values from the behavior portrayed (e.g., did they value the community and family?). A deeper study might reveal the assumptions behind these values, such as human beings can hunt together. In this way, Dr. Schein explores in his writings the relationship between assumptions, values, and human behavior. In light of this, we might ask ourselves what influences our USSF assumptions? No need to overthink this one. Part of what drives our assumption is perception (i.e., how we see the world). Our worldview is often informed by our lived experience. Which begs the question: if perception influences our assumptions, then what influences our perceptions? According to the writer Anais Nin, "We don't see things as they are, we see them as we are." In other words, our identity powerfully influences how we choose to perceive the world around us. If the world is a system of interpretations, our identity has a say in how we interpret what we experience.

In February 2023, Assistant Commandant of the Marine Corps, General Eric Smith, was interviewed about why the U.S. Marine Corps was not struggling, like its sister services, to meet recruitment goals. His answer: "Your bonus [as a marine] is that you get to call yourself a Marine…. That's your bonus." In other words, the world's wealthiest individuals cannot purchase that identity, since it is priceless. And the Marine's identity influences her/his perception, assumption, values, and behavior.

After all, how difficult is it to walk into a room and spot the Marine? Of course, part of what gives them away is the cultural artifact embodied in dress and appearance. One might say it is also how they behave…their commanding posture.

Assuming that the Guardian's identity is that of Sentinel-Steward, how might that distinguish them in a crowded room? What traits might be the "undeniable tells" of a Guardian in a room? Down the road, one of those distinguishing characteristics could be the Guardian's exercise of mission command. Every warfighter associates mission command with centralized control, and decentralized execution, in alignment with Commander's intent. So why might the Guardian's exercise of mission command be any different from that of a soldier, airman, or seaman? In the Chief of Space Operations' Planning Guidance, General John "Jay" Raymond states: "…I direct a default command style of 'command by negation' where subordinate echelons are expected to default to action except where a higher echelon has specifically reserved authority." In an interview with Colonel Chris "Trigger" Fernengel, who helped write the CSO's Planning Guidance, he observes that mission command for a Guardian means that we do not default to "mother may I—instead we assume greenlight" unless told something specifically is red light (Personal Communication).[2] In one of his earliest interviews as CSO given in November 2022, General Saltzman emphasizes the importance of mission command. He also foot-stomps the importance of mission command in his Commander's Note #7, urging USSF leaders to empower the lower echelons to fail forward to learn from mistakes.[3] And there is more. In the Guardian Spirit Handbook 1-1, published in April 2023, General Saltzman stresses that the USSF values are "our North Star," serving as a guide for fulfilling the mission: "We rely on an inner moral compass, Character,

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2   Personal Communication. Interview by author with Colonel Christopher Fernengel, Commander of Delta 3, 28 July 2022

3   Saltzman, B.C., C-Note #7, 24 Feb 2023, Barriers to Mission Command.pdf (spaceforce.mil)

and Connection with fellow Guardians as we pursue the mission of the Space Force with Commitment and Courage."[4] Said another way, Guardians fulfill their commitments with great courage, and in close consultation with their character. And they do so in a manner that builds connection, rather than decrements it. Our interpretation of mission command is distinctively intertwined with our USSF values.

Another leitmotif (or refrain) we often hear from General Saltzman is the importance of focusing, not only on the challenges, but also the opportunities that lie before us in any given situation. While a risk-averse leader might urge a singular focus on the threat, both General Raymond and General Saltzman have repeatedly emphasized the outsized importance of focusing not only just on the challenges that lay ahead but also the opportunities. This idea aligns with the dual function of the Sentinel-Steward, whose dual priorities are security (threat) and prosperity (opportunities). In an increasingly competitive and contested domain in the context of Great Power Competition, there is a grey zone where prosperity is under sustained duress, just below the threshold of open hostilities. So, the business of culturing or gardening has an unrelenting cadence for the Guardian whose job is to guardian (be the Sentinel-Steward) 24/7.

So, what might Guardians do to help foster a culture aligned with its mission? It is the opinion of these authors that the USSF culture is a CODR: our Culture grows Organically, Deliberately, and Relationally. For instance, we see its organic growth in the Space Force Gaming League, which grew out of the Air Force Gaming League. Without formal authority or abundance of funding, the Space Force Gaming League grew in two years to comprise 1,500 members, which is more than 10% of the total military and civilian Guardian population today. The culture also grows deliberately as shown in the uniform, song, and Guardian Spirit Handbook

1-1.[5] Finally, our culture grows relationally—meaning it is influenced by how USSF relates to the outside world. If Steve Carell makes fun of the Space Force on Netflix, it can negatively influence how the world perceives the USSF mission and even how Guardians view themselves. Perhaps this is why NASA's outreach teams invest so heavily in their relationship with Hollywood. In fact, one of the CIA's most memorable in-reach events purportedly involved having the actor Daniel Craig drive into Langley in an Aston Martin, while the loudspeakers blared the James Bond theme song for the throng of Agency employees cheering in the Langley parking lot. Imagine how those employees might have felt.

One way that Guardians might help *colere* (grow) the culture of Space Force is what we consider the Stop-Drop-Roll technique for cultural leadership: Notice-Influence-Maximize the culture. First, notice the culture around you where you are. And do so while suspending judgment, which will take practice since it is human nature to interpret (and judge) what one perceives. What helps to suspend judgement is to take a posture of curiosity. For instance, if you see Guardians organizing Nerd Nights at the base, one might be tempted to judge them harshly by saying that Guardians belong to a profession of arms and playing games jeopardizes lives. Resist that temptation and instead try to be curious so that you might see not only the threat (challenge) but the opportunities. What you might see is resilient human networks forming deep connections. You might even see people playing games of strategy that enhance neuroplasticity and dexterity.

As you deeply notice the culture around you, you might better perceive opportunities to influence the culture in a way that more optimally aligns with the mission. For instance, a leader might offer to join the 1,500 Guardians in one of their eSports activities or cheer them on as the team competes against other mili-

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4   Department of the Air Force, E-publishing website, spfh1-1.pdf (af.mil)

5   Department of the Air Force, E-publishing website, spfh1-1.pdf (af.mil)

tary services. If one were to do so, they might notice that the Guardians are speaking with one another through microphones as they operate the keyboards. They are calling each other by their game names (not unlike Call Signs) and having conversations that support mental health. They are bonding in a psychologically safe space, and even connecting with one another after the game for meals and outdoor sports. If Guardians happen to be playing the ancient Chinese board game of Go during a Nerd Night, one might argue that the skills gained could even help Guardians better understand China's strategic culture and, thereby help, USSF in the Great Power Competition. Another example of how you might Notice-Influence-Maximize the culture around you is with the dozens of Guardians who practice jiu-jitsu with one another. On any given morning, walk into the Pentagon gym and you will see Guardians grappling with each other. These Guardians are connecting through martial arts while honing a skill that requires heightened attention to speed, distance, and angles—incidentally skills germane to space warfare. They are also developing a warfighter ethos that comes from having a relationship with fear, pain, and loss. Imagine the opportunities for a leader to notice these grapplers and influence this sub-culture? These are just a few examples of how the USSF can leverage the evolving culture to further the mission.

Every Guardian can help grow the USSF culture. In fact, the best way to influence our culture might be through how we interact with one another. However one defines it, Space Force's culture is intimately tied to the human experience of being a Guardian. Each of us can pause to notice the culture around us (while suspending judgement) and take a posture of curiosity to see how we might influence the culture to better align our shared identity, mission, and purpose. Harvard Business School reminds us that culture impacts every facet of a business and recommends a few pertinent best practices: role modeling, being attentive to how employees speak to one another, evaluating norms that influence how work–life balance looks, the permissibility of making mistakes—and finally—how each employee feels about their work and organizational environment. By taking close inventory, often, of the behavior we demonstrate as Guardians, the rationale behind the decisions we make, and the accountability we hold one another to, a flourishing human ecosystem and value proposition we call the Guardian experiences emerge.

What will all of the above ultimately take? Courage, Character, Connection, and Commitment. It is the way. Semper Supra![6]

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6   This is the official motto of the USSF. It derives from Latin meaning Always Above.

INSIGHTS

Perspectives on Leadership and Character

Alison Yang, Spencer Stuart

Paul Yang, Spencer Stuart

Interviewed By: Douglas Lindsay[1]

Lindsay: My guests today are Allison and Paul Yang, United States Air Force Academy (USAFA) class of 2015 and 2016, respectively. Allison and Paul are a married couple home based in the Washington, DC area. Both work for Spencer Stewart, a global executive search and leadership advisory firm as associates in executive search. Both served in the Air Force with distinction winding up their careers in 2022 as officers in intelligence and maintenance leading large teams. The pair recently contributed to an article on veterans and leadership in a Spencer Stewart publication.[2] The article featured profiles of 10 prominent Chief Executive Officers (CEOs), three of whom are USAFA graduates, and currently lead United Airlines (Scott Kirby), McAfee (Greg Johnson) and Johnstone Supply (Lance Devin). We will spend the next few minutes getting to know Allison and Paul and we'll talk about their work with Spencer Stewart. We will then focus on the top qualities they believe make the best leaders. Finally, we'll ask them to share one or two bits of advice they would give to those who want to be leaders. Thank you both for your time today. As we get started, would you give us a little backstory on your lives before you got to the Academy? What was your growing up experience like?

Paul Yang: Sure, I can start. I come from an immigrant family. My parents moved to the United States in 1993. When I was about two and a half years old, we moved to Queens, New York, where my mom was a pharmacist and my dad was a truck driver. It was an interesting sort of startup story is what I'd like to call it, in the sense that

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CONTACT Douglas Lindsay ✉ **douglas.lindsay@afacademy.af.edu**

I spent my weekends teaching my parents the English that I had learned during school. It was also a little bit of a challenging household as well. There was a lot of stress growing up in this country and not knowing the language and trying to navigate being in a completely different environment. That heavily influenced how I operate and how I think about being a problem solver, paying attention to detail, facing adversity, etc.

Alison Yang: I have a bit of a different childhood. I had what you would describe as an all-American childhood. My mom was a first-grade teacher and my dad was an Air Force officer. I had two younger brothers close in age and we were all best friends. We had to be best friends because we moved every few years or so but it really taught me how to be resilient how to adapt to a lot of change in life. I ended up growing this love for people. I loved meeting new people everywhere I went. I know sometimes it can go the other way where you hate moving, but for some reason I really clung to that.

Lindsay: Those are very different origin stories. How did that translate into wanting to go to the Academy?

Alison Yang: I think I'd always been a very outgoing kid, always driven to be an achiever. This passion for people I would say started in high school and I prided myself on knowing everyone in the in the class. I was class president and was friends with the dorks and was friends with the popular kids. My proudest moment in high school was when I was a benchwarmer on the varsity basketball team and I was voted captain of the team. I would go up against the star player on the opposing team. I'd come off the bench, flip the coin and go sit back down on the bench. Sort of like a Rudy story as they would throw me in the last few minutes of the game. I was really proud of that. I also saw the service aspect from my dad. I saw a lot of women in leadership and knew that's something I could do and that I would love to do, that I'd love a challenge. I would definitely say that all stemmed from my childhood.

Paul Yang: For me, my parents really encouraged me to go out there and learn what's out there and get involved as much as much as I could. We had this rule in the house where we would speak Korean. But, when you're outside of the house, you speak English all the time. Which is interesting, you know, because my parents wanted to learn the language and get familiar with it. But that ingrained in me this idea that there's this whole world of knowledge out there, and there's all these things to do, especially being in a brand new country. So, throughout my childhood and growing up, I spent a lot of time getting involved in different clubs and different sports just because I wasn't familiar with it. I wanted to learn it and figure it out. So, I did a varying range of things. I did Model United Nations (UN) and I tried out the robotics club. I wasn't very good at it, but I tried a couple of different sports. That influenced me when I got to the Academy, because I tried out for a sport that I never played before. I ended up playing the whole season. It was a great, great time to try that. I didn't really know that the Air Force Academy existed, I just knew that I wanted to give back to this country. I wanted to be able to serve and wanted to be able to give back. And so, I guess I always knew I wanted to join the military. I guess that's what kind of led me down the path of going to the Academy. I enlisted out of high school and I was really fortunate and lucky to be surrounded by some key mentors that told me that this place called the Air Force Academy existed in Colorado Springs. They said I should apply and that I didn't have to work until I finished the application. I was very fortunate to have those folks that championed me and that shaped my view of leadership later on in life.

Lindsay: Allison, was it something you were familiar with, because of your dad? How did you come to know about the Academy?

Alison Yang: He was not an Academy grad. My junior year I was considering options. I heard about the Air Force Academy and knew about it from my dad, who

had friends who had gone to the Academy. I stepped into the Junior Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC) in my high school and said, "I'd like a pamphlet on the Air Force Academy." They were like, sit down, what sports are you in? I was like, "Whoa, I just want a pamphlet." That sort of started things. Once I started the application process, which as a lot of people know, it's an intensive application process. You actually feel like you've achieved something when you submit your application. I was really excited to have that opportunity. I just knew it was right for me, especially as someone who was an achiever.

Lindsay: What was it like when you got here? You both accomplished a lot in high school, a lot of activity and were really busy. Were there some questions about what did I get myself into?

Alison Yang: I loved it. I had watched a lot of videos about basic training. But I have a really funny story. On my in-processing day I was ready to conquer it, you know, I got through all the screaming on the footprints. I was like, I just have to make it to my room and I'll have some roommates and I can commiserate. We can do this together. I finally get to my dorm room and I had two roommates. One of them wouldn't speak to me. She was too nervous to talk. The other one started hyperventilating and she couldn't calm down. That said, both of them are incredible officers still in the Air Force today. Both made it through, but in that moment, I said to myself, "I' going to have to do this." It was a little bit of a reality check once I got to that moment.

Paul Yang: For me, I would say the in-processing and basic training at the Academy felt in an odd way familiar, because I had gone through enlisted basic training. I went to the prep school and then went through basic training here. So, by the time I they came around, I kind of knew, Okay, I'm going to get yelled at, they're going to break us down and go through this whole process. But I felt this need or this kind of calling to help my other classmates, because many were coming straight

out of high school. That desire to kind of share what I had known, even if it's something as simple as rolling socks and folding your t-shirts in the right way to meet the to meet the measurements. I figured, you know, this is something that I know that could be helpful, in some way, shape or form. Let me let me go ahead and share that. My whole early stages, or the early days at the Academy, that's what I felt called to do. Sharing that knowledge.

Lindsay: What would you say are the couple of important moments or what impact that the Academy had on you during that time in terms of your development, not just as a person but as a leader?

Paul Yang: I had never played a game of soccer in my entire life. Maybe it's because I grew up in New York and there are not many fields. When I got to the prep school, one of my buddies in my squadron said, "Hey, you should try it out for this team. You seem athletic, you like to run, why don't you come out to the field and try it out?" I did, and I enjoyed it. I didn't know how to kick a soccer ball the right way, but I knew how to run. I knew that I was competitive and sort of headstrong in that way. I would say that was a highlight. I got lucky because the person that would be starting in the position that I was in as a left back ended up getting injured in the early days of the season. So, I found myself in the situation of okay, I basically know how to play the sport. I can listen to my coach's advice. But I now found myself in a starting position. I wasn't very good, but I felt what an opportunity to be able to play this sport at this level, having never played it before. And the Academy, certainly you know, only a place like that is where you're given an opportunity like that, right? That was like a pretty big moment, and for me a very proud moment.

A lowlight, for me, was about halfway through the Academy. I was going through some personal things. I maybe lost sight and I let it affect my academics,

particularly one class, and I ended up failing a course. At the end of the semester when you fail a course you go through a board process. I almost got disenrolled and my advisor really championed me. He said, "Hey, it's okay, these things happen." He kind of brought me back down to earth and I went through the board process and ended up obviously not getting disenrolled. But it was a big, tough pill for me to swallow of, hey, there are things in life that you need to focus on and make sure that they're squared away and good to go. To ensure that it doesn't leak into other areas of your life particularly if there are high stakes involved, like enrollment at the Air Force Academy. I think that's an important part. Because we tend to focus on the positives, right? We don't realize that without those crucible moments, those kind of lower points that you have, that help us frame out who we are and our perspective.

Lindsay: It sounds like it kind of changed your trajectory, a little bit about reassessing, "What am I doing here? What do I really want to get out of it?" I had a similar experience. My first semester sophomore year I came in at a 2.0 Grade Point Average (GPA), just above the line so to speak. It was close enough to the sun, so to speak, that it was my crucible moment. It was a real evaluation moment for me to go, "Okay, I need to do some things differently if I want to keep making this happen." Allison, how about you? What were some high and low points for you?

Alison Yang: One of my favorite things about the Air Force Academy is just the incredible opportunities that it affords cadets. I did the jump program, an immersion trip to Poland, a language trip to Morocco, a DC trip for a history class, I was on the women's club lacrosse team and got to travel all over the place, and I was able to march in an Inauguration Day Parade. All of those were just incredible moments. I would say the biggest thing that had an impact on my leadership is I was able to be the Cadet Squadron Commander my senior year. I learned that peer leadership is a hard thing. I think that

being a cadet and a leader of cadets is harder than any officer leadership position I had because there's formal structure within the military and there's a natural chain of command. But when you're leading your peers, you have to live with them every day too. So, it's a total exercise in dealing with people interpersonal skills, and you get that direct feedback. It was a great lesson to me that not everyone is going to love everything that you do and especially as a person who really loves people and who wants to be friends with everyone. Learning that sometimes as a leader, you have to make tough decisions, or you have to do things that maybe not everyone will be on board with. That was a great lesson for me at that time that I carried on throughout my officer career.

Lindsay: Taking those experiences that you had at the Academy, how did that translate into saying, I want to be a maintenance officer or I want to be an intelligence officer?

Alison Yang: I loved my political science and international relations classes. That drew me into an interest in the intelligence field and just really synthesizing data about the world, understanding what drives our adversaries, what motivates people and then ultimately, proposing actionable solutions to leaders to make decisions. So, really enabling operations, which I loved. It would get me as close to operations as possible without actually flying in a plane. I tried powered flight, but I threw up every time so I knew that being a pilot was not for me. But that foundation in my classes actually at the Academy drew me into the intelligence field.

Paul Yang: I chose to be a maintenance officer and I put that as my top choice. Early in my Firstie year, when we were putting in our preferences, I was thinking through, "What is the career field where I can support the flight-line and solve everyday problems?" We don't have to go too much into the details here, but it's a tough career field operationally. And, I gravitated toward that.

Lindsay: I do want to ask a question about how you all got together. You are Class of 2015 and 2016, both at the Academy at the at the same time, and now and you're married. Can you talk a little bit about how that started or how you met?

Alison Yang: I first remember meeting Paul when he walked into an interview that I was holding for my second in command when I was a Cadet Squadron Commander. I was looking for my Superintendent and Paul interviewed for that role. That was the first time I had met him. I was dating someone else at the time. So, I had no romantic interest in him. But that was the first time I remember meeting him and I hired him. He worked with me for a semester and we became great friends after that.

Paul Yang: It's six o'clock in the morning and Allison was sharing Weiss (her maiden name) Advice up on the staff tower at Mitchell Hall before breakfast when everyone is just trying to make it through the day. I learned from a distance, and I had a lot of respect for her and I obviously still have a ton of respect for her now. When I found out that I was moving into Cadet Squadron 30, and I was applying to be her Superintendent, I was like, wow, I would love to get to know this individual. So, this is kind of a running joke where our relationship started with Alison being my boss, and she still is today. That's sort of like our founding story, if you will.

Lindsay: So, Paul, sitting in Mitchell Hall hearing that that information, what was your reaction?

Paul Yang: I personally enjoyed it. I think Allison is very good at telling you what you need to hear. So, I really appreciated that even in the early waking morning hours of the day. Allison was getting up there and saying some true things like, "Be a friend," "Support somebody," and "Be there for one another." "If you have a tough test, at the end of the day, you'll be done with it." I mean, just simple things that might not sound like

a lot at the surface level, but it really hits home because it's just real. It's true and it's honest. So, to answer your question, Doug, I loved it.

Lindsay: The Academy and the experiences that you've talked about really springboarded you in your careers because you obviously had success. So, what was it that you think you got out of the Academy that really helped set the stage for you?

Alison Yang: I think I would go back to the whole peer leadership thing. The fact that I had already been leading people as a senior and then I went straight into my job as an Intel officer. I was leading a floor of 75 airmen at an Ops Center, and it was just awesome. I had all these people around me and I knew how to interact with people. When you have an operational mission, it just becomes even more important. I think that really set the stage. All of the character and leadership development that we were taught at the Air Force Academy, all of that becomes second nature, you know? We had already learned that by that point. Being that kind of leader for people I think really helped me springboard as a second lieutenant into a successful Intel career.

Paul Yang: Part of it is the wealth of resources that the Air Force Academy has. Even if it's just walking down the hallway and talking to your Air Officer Commanding (AOC), who had spent probably 10 plus years in a specific career field and knows people in other career fields. The networking aspect that the Air Force Academy provides is huge. Or maybe it's your instructor for one of your classes that came out of a career field to teach at the Air Force Academy. So, utilizing that network and just knowing the wealth of knowledge and resources that were there was huge.

Lindsay: It's always interesting to me to see the path that people choose because I certainly had my own path when I was there as I found my way through.

Even though we all go through a similar process, how we personalize that is really interesting. So, can you talk a little bit about what that transition was like in terms of kind of getting into the space of leader development that you're in now?

Paul Yang: So we decided to transition out at the same time, which, by the way, many of our colleagues and close friends thought we were crazy to be separating at the same time due to the sheer amount of risk there. But, we took a leap of faith. We attended a career conference through a junior military officer hiring and transitioning company. When we attended the conference, Allison and I we really kind of focused on the company culture and the mission of the company. Because we were coming out of the military, we naturally gravitated toward companies that had a clear and defined mission orientation or goal, something that is founded on clear values that aligned with the things that we felt we aligned with. Actually, when we attended the career conference, they told us to attend as individuals, rack and stack them in your in your brain, and see where their alignment is with location with career fields and different areas. We came across an executive search firm, Spencer Stuart, and we just absolutely fell head over heels in love with the company culture and the type of work that they do. It aligned with how I think and how I approach my day to day, which is championing other people, giving people a chance, and solving problems. Being an executive search organization, that's essentially what you get to do. You are helping your clients solve problems. In this case, it would be leadership gaps, whether it's succession planning, maybe someone's retiring, et cetera. You are talking to people and potential candidates for a role that they maybe otherwise wouldn't have landed on their radar in the past. So, being able to learn their story and help them figure out what their goals are. If there's an alignment with where they are trying to go with an opportunity that a company can offer, then great, let's talk about it.

Alison Yang: I agree. Everything that Paul says is accurate and maybe just to answer just the beginning of your question, why we made the decision? We were both hard charging on active duty and really loved the service. For us, we just had decided we were going to be in a position where one of us will have to deploy, the other will have to go back to teach, or something like that. We could see our career paths taking divergent directions. So, we decided let's just see what else is out there and let's see what we can do. Paul had some experience from his dad and the business experience he's had in this country. For me, I didn't even know what corporate life was like. I said, "If not now, then when?" We made the leap and everything Paul said about Spencer Stuart the culture is incredible, and that is why we joined. We've really enjoyed our time so far in the year and a half we've been there.

Lindsay: What was it that really helped you land successfully on the other side (getting out of the service)? We know sometimes people struggle a little bit there in terms of what do I want to do?

Paul Yang: We were doing it together. We naturally just had someone across the dinner table championing each other and going through the same experience together. So, being able to talk through ideas, talk through all the different scenarios and just having an ear that would listen was really, really helpful for us. I wouldn't say that's the only way, but just having a partner through that tells a broader story of making sure that you surround yourself with folks that have been through something like this before or is going through it and being able to talk through things and act as a sounding board was really helpful for us particularly.

Alison Yang: We are also huge proponents of transition companies, especially for junior military officers. We would have had no idea and we partnered with Cameron Brooks. We spent a whole year in their program. They helped us translate our military skills into

corporate speak, helped us with resumes, and then we had about 20 different companies that were aligned to our experiences that we would have never thought we would be qualified for. If it were not for a program like that, I'm not sure we would have known. Not only that, we had all these different industries we could compare. So, Paul and I got to say, all right, do we want manufacturing? Do we want banking? Do we want to be in professional services? We ultimately chose that incredible experience overall.

Lindsay: Any regrets?

Alison Yang: None.

Paul Yang: No regrets.

Lindsay: You talked about executive search. Can you walk us through a little bit what that looks like?

Paul Yang: At our firm, we are in executive search. That's actually a world we didn't know existed prior to going to the career conference and starting in this firm. But basically we help large mid to large size companies on the public and private side, assist leaders to make career moves or we help clients solve their internal succession and leadership planning. What that looks like on a day-to-day basis, just to kind of maybe break it down is a lot of calls, a lot of internal and external conversations where you're running projects or searches internally and just making sure we're following the process. We are making sure we're managing things internally and hitting all the dates for the deliverables. Then externally, lots of meetings with clients providing updates on our market feedback. And also, this is probably the bulk of the amount of time that we spend, is having conversations with potential candidates to make sure that we go through the full assessment process and doing our full due diligence to ensure that the folks that we would be potentially putting forth on a search or on an opportunity are aligned well.

Alison Yang: Paul and I are both in different practices within the firm. I'm in the industrial practice, which means that I help recruit, assess and place executives in any domain within industrial. So that could be oil and gas, that could be manufactured products, engineered products, aerospace and defense, or distribution at large. It could be anything within the industrial sector and anywhere from a vice president level up to a CEO. Paul is in the financial officer practice where I'm in more of a functional practice.

Paul Yang: We call it financial officer practice or basically Chief Financial Officers (CFOs). So, most of my work is with finance executives. CFOs and key deputies. Since it's functional, I spend a lot of my time across many different industries. Because I think CFO speak is pretty transferable from one company to another, from one industry to another, with the exception of a few that are just different. That's the difference between a focused industry versus a functional practice.

Lindsay: What you talked about, that idea of being able to connect with people, serve with people, influence, championing others, and solving problems, it sounds like you've found your space on the other side in terms of what it is that you really enjoy. What your purpose is. Is that fair to say?

Alison Yang: Absolutely. And that's one of the reasons why we why we love it so much is we really feel that we've landed in a place where we can utilize all these skills. Also, when we are assessing talent, one reason that it's just great to have been a leader in the military is that when these executives are talking to us about change management or change leadership within the organization, we don't just know it conceptually, we know it practically from our time in service. So, we know if they're just blowing smoke. We found that to be very valuable. In our veterans article, having access to folks like Scott Kirby and Greg Johnson, who know of these search firms because that's how they hire people. So it's

been really neat, not only just being able to practice something that we love, but then also being able to talk to really incredible people.

Lindsay: I think you hit on that piece of being able to not just talk about it, but kind of share your experiences. I think that gives a different credibility of being able to say, "Yeah, I've been there, done that," and talk about it that way, whether it's a CFO or in industrial. Right?

Alison Yang: Absolutely.

Lindsay: With that in mind, what are some of the challenges or mistakes that you see leaders making today?

Paul Yang: One of the things I know is if an individual jumps from one company to another company too frequently, that could be an important thing. That could mean a lot of things, right? It could mean that an individual was in the ecosystem of a private equity firm and they're buying and selling companies and moving from one company to another, which is fine, if you can speak to that. But if it's not a situation like that, then it sort of signals that someone maybe hasn't done their full due diligence on an opportunity before taking on that role. So that's something that I would say. It usually doesn't reflect too positively.

Alison Yang: My advice, springing from that would be, we've talked to plenty of folks that they find themselves in a situation or in a company that they might not like, or in a specific role that they might not like. It doesn't mean that they have to leave the company. It doesn't mean that there aren't other things that they can try. So, my advice from that particular mistake would be, see what else is out there within that company, because the consistency of moving from one scope of responsibilities to another within the same company reflects a lot more positively than, "Hey, I was there for eight months and I didn't like it and I left." A better story would be, "I was there for about a year. I wasn't enjoying my job.

I moved here within this part of the company and that's where I really found my passion for X," and then you can expand from there. Maybe some other ones that we see are people getting experience outside of their respective functions. Paul's got a better example of this with finance, maybe you can go into that?

Paul Yang: I think this is just the product of being in the functional practice where I'm talking to a lot of different CFOs in varying different industries. I think it has a history of being a little bit siloed, but that's not the case anymore, right? You have folks that maybe start out as an accountant. Or maybe they start in a big professional services firm and they work their way through accounting and audit, et cetera. I think the best ones are the ones that expand beyond just their specific functions. What I mean by that is maybe this is someone who has an accounting background, but takes the time to learn other aspects and areas of the business beyond what they see behind the numbers on finance. So, in a manufacturing organization, that would mean getting close to the business, getting close to the manufacturing floor, getting close to the product and really understanding, touching, feeling, and seeing the product that their business is manufacturing. It really helps that particular individual really translate what the numbers they are working with and managing and what that really means to their client or customer base. Those that are better able to speak to that, I have found that are the ones that tend to be more operationally oriented, the ones that can speak more about the business and not just finance.

Alison Yang: Another big mistake that we see, maybe the biggest mistake, is burning bridges. You hear that at the Academy to never burn a bridge. Within executive search, we extensively vet people for our clients. We have people that look phenomenal on paper, people who show up to an interview and they have an incredible interview, and have great results on paper. If you've got colleagues or peers or bosses that you have a bad reputation with, we will find it, and we will hear it. So,

it all comes back to being a person of character. You also see the mistakes that leaders make when it comes to interviewing for jobs, which is not being prepared and not presenting in a professional manner. We've had people show up late to board meetings and have been completely taken off the list as a possible candidate as a result.

Lindsay: Alison, you mentioned something about character and being a person of character. Are you seeing more interest in that area as you're going through executive search in terms of not just about what it is that you do, but how you're showing up?

Alison Yang: Yes, absolutely. I wondered that when I went into corporate America if we would see these companies that we work with, these client companies, what they would focus on or if they are just looking for people who can just drive results within a company. I'm telling you more often than not, we have calls where most of it is we are looking for someone who knows how to lead people or they are going to have to come in here and do a lot of change management. It's also something we really value at Spencer Stuart. At our firm we screen for character. That's one the four things we screen for when we assess people. So yes, there's quite an emphasis on it and it's awesome.

Paul Yang: I'll speak about the practice that I'm in. Pure finance capability, especially in a public company, is all public. You can see the public filings. You could look and see their company performance and ensure that the performance is there and it's measurable. But more often than not, we will find that someone could be a high performer based off of just pure numbers and pure historical performance. And then we will meet members of the board or other members of the team in which they'd be working with on a day-to-day basis and the feedback would be, "That is not someone that we can see ourselves getting along with and working with on a day-to-day basis," or "That is not someone I feel

a connection with," or something like that. That usually means that they are a good finance professional or they're good at what they do, but people are not really sure that this is someone that would inspire others of the company. So, to Alison's point, I think at the end of the day, there will always have to be an underlying baseline of capabilities, but what brings someone to the next level, is one's character.

Lindsay: I would like to transition to the article that you worked on where you looked at the top CEOs and what sets them apart. The article focused on CEOs who are veterans and their experiences. What are the top five takeaways that you are seeing that really make those effective leaders different than everybody else.

Alison Yang: I can talk to the first two and then Paul can talk to the last three. Tying into that article, one thing that we've talked about most of this podcast is interpersonal skills and how important that is. It's not groundbreaking, but it's very real and it underpins most if not all other qualities that these top-performing CEOs all have. The first one that was also highlighted in the article as a team first mentality. It's about as simple as it gets. Can you bring the team along? Is the team a part of your mission and your story? Sometimes when we talk to people, if they're all about themselves or if they can't describe how they've impacted their team or how they brought the team along, it's very obvious and very clear. There's a lot of culture change that happens in these organizations and if you can't have a team first mentality, that won't necessarily happen. So, that would be the first one. The second one is humility. Being able to understand that you are not the smartest person in the room, but having the strength to make a decision when you need to. But, also making sure you're valuing all opinions. So, humility is the second one.

Paul Yang: Another one is something that Scott Kirby, the CEO of United Airlines, had mentioned when we

spoke to him as we were working on the article. He talked about how folks that come out of the military have no quit. When we asked him to expand on that, he talked about how when someone is asked whether or not they're willing to potentially make the ultimate sacrifice for this country, any other ask following that in and out of the military becomes, I don't want to say easy, but it's going to fall short of it. Right? So, there's this idea of being resilient and understanding how to perform under pressure when there are high stakes. I think that would be the key third theme. Being resilient in tough times and knowing how to perform under pressure when the stakes are high. Then, the next one is stakeholder management. I think that's a very common thing that we would hear both in the military and out of the military. Understanding and having the ability to work with a variety of different people. It kind of goes to that point of being broader than just what your function is. Understanding what one decision does to the rest of the organization and how it affects others around you. In the military, there's so much connectivity between the squadron, flight, group, or wing level that it naturally just happens. But out in the corporate world, sometimes you can get siloed and you might not see the direct translation of how decisions affect other people. So being able to understand who are the internal and external stakeholders is important. I think the fifth one, Alison already talked about a little bit is change. Especially with AI and the incredible technologies that are out there. It's a very fast moving world. Being able to understand what is happening and being able to understand how that translates internally to one's organization is important.

Alison Yang: When it comes to change management, one of the key questions we ask the people we assess is where was the business when you came in and what have you achieved since then? So, it's where was it, where is it now, and how did you do it? That's one of the ways that we assess for change management.

Lindsay: What I'm encouraged about is each one of those five are things that you can actually get better at. You go, "I'm not where I want to be, but I can do that." Is that fair to say?

Paul Yang: Yes. No one is perfect in any of these areas. It takes practice and it takes time. Oftentimes, we'd be speaking with folks on the phone or in a meeting where we realize someone will have that introspection to look back and say, "Okay, this is an area that I'm not good at." Maybe it is team building and maybe they're 15, 20 years in their career and they're like, "You know what, I need more experience building a team. What is an opportunity at this company where I have the opportunity to do that?" And then, seeking that out and putting it into practice is a key thing. Recognizing that there are these areas that I need to improve on. But to your point, Doug, these are all things that can be practiced and learned in real time.

Lindsay: As you are assessing them, whether it be from the industrial side or the CFO position, are you finding that these leaders are receptive to the feedback that you are giving them in terms of some of those areas where they're not where they need to be? Are you seeing an openness and a willingness to lean in and learn about that?

Alison Yang: It's interesting you say that because if they are open to hearing it, they're showing humility. You know, you assess that just in the way that they interact with you as a person. Are they too busy for you? We often get people ask us questions like "How can I be better?" I think if you meet a real stinker, then they're probably not going to be as receptive to things like that.

Paul Yang: And there are more candidates for a particular role on any given day. There is a high volume, right? So, that means not everybody is going to be able to get the job that they want, and that's just the fact of life. There are those that come back and say, "Hey,

I know I was a finalist, or maybe I wasn't a finalist, but what feedback do you have for me? How could I have done better?" To Alison's point about having that level of humility to say, "Okay, I didn't get this, but there's got to be a reason why. What are those reasons? Is it the team building? Is it I did not share enough about change management? Did I not talk about a certain result or maybe it was how I presented myself and showed up to the meeting?" I think that also has to do with our firm because we have both our clients and our candidates put that trust in us and they look to us for that advice. We are transparent because a) we have to be, and b) because they need it. It's all about uplifting others and providing feedback to others so that they can get to where they are trying to go.

Alison Yang: We are a little bit like a broken record here, but the one theme that captures all of this is care about people. If you care about people, your interpersonal skills are likely decent. You have the humility to set yourself aside. You have a leg up on stakeholder management, which enables you to have teams that perform under pressure and operate well through change. It's also the difference between having people who just get the job done because they have to versus the people who get the job done because they want to. They believe in you and they believe in the mission. So, if you are good at caring about people, if you just care about people in general, you'll get there. And that would be our advice.

Lindsay: Thank you both for your time today.

INSIGHTS

Bring Me Courage: Empowering Student Voices to Reduce Sexual Assault and Harassment Reporting Barriers and Influence Culture

Taren E. Wellman, U.S. Air Force Academy

ABSTRACT

Sexual assault and harassment on college campus, particularly military service academies, is a complex problem requiring student-led culture change. Efforts of the top-down campus administrator to change culture will be ineffective without student buy-in and input. Listening to student voices is necessary to identify barriers and paths to enable behaviors on the peripherals that reinforce desired culture traits. This article highlights a student-led effort at the U.S. Air Force Academy to reduce reporting barriers by disincentivizing peer pressure to remain silent in the face of harassment, bullying, hazing, or assault.

Keywords: Culture, Sexual Assault, Harassment, Barrier, Reporting

Cultural problems deserve the participation and input of those most affected by cultural solutions. Without ownership, involvement, and agency of the beneficiaries of change, ingrained norms may become more calcified by rejecting the influence of the "outsider." This article proposes that efforts to make cultural shifts, particularly with the goal of reducing sexual assault and harassment, must be perceived to be led by the people who live in and own the culture. Otherwise, toxic cultural norms may backlash and become even more calcified and entrenched.

Since the integration of women at U.S. military service academies in the mid-1970s, every one of the academies have experienced a persistent overall rise in unwanted sexual contact, harassment, and discrimination, despite comparatively stable rates of incident reporting (DoD Report, 2022; Davis & Klahr, 2023).[1] While external oversight-induced changes at the service academies during their 47-year history with women should have improved overall gender equality, the data related to unwanted sexual contact and harassment indicates stagnation or even perhaps the opposite effect.

Military service academies today have an urgent interest in identifying ways to turn the tide. The urgency is driven by recent DoD reports showing a significant and sustained increase in unwanted sexual contact and harassment, and a renewed external pressure in light of decades of work devoted to reducing prevalence (DoD Annual Report, 2022; Lawrence, 2023; Davis & Klahr, 2023). As an alum and professor at a military service

academy, and former prosecutor and defense counsel for military sexual assault cases, I could not help but be profoundly affected by the data and interested in finding solutions for a problem that had not seemed to appreciably improve since my time as a cadet (2002–2006).

The pace at which women have been structurally and symbolically welcomed at the service academies is indicative of a deeper issue of cultural norms that may be affecting rates of sexual harm. Five decades ago, it was radical to open the opportunity for women to benefit from the quality education and preeminent leadership development that service academies provide (Stiehm, 1981). Since 1976, it has taken intense external (non-cadet) pressure and publicity to remove persistent symbols of inequality. For example, at the U.S. Air Force Academy it was not until 1997 that the use of simulated sexual assault against female cadets by fellow cadets during a mock prisoner of war training was stopped (Bayard de Volo & Hall, 2015). It was not until 2003 that exclusion-reinforcing language of "Bring Me Men" at the entrance gateway was replaced and women were permitted to keep their long hair, one of the few remaining symbols of femininity, upon indoctrination (Bayard de Volo & Hall, 2015; Callahan, 2009). It was not until 2023 that remaining urinals were physically removed from all women's restrooms in the dormitories at the Air Force Academy. These examples illustrate the depth of ingrained masculine norms and devalued femininity at service academies as a backdrop for evaluating the sexual harassment and violence problem.

Each of the changes were perceived to be instigated by authoritative leadership in response to intense external (non-cadet) pressure. But, almost like a living organism, culture resists forced change from outside actors because it is precisely the bonds of social structure that define the culture. Symbolic inequality is even more insidious than legally actionable violence and harassment because it often evades detection, becomes ingrained in social structures and tradition, and is normalized as a part of

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1 In academic year 2021–2022, an estimated 21.4% of service academy women and 4.4% of men experienced unwanted sexual contact, with a reporting rate of 12.0% (Davis & Klahr, 2023). Nearly 20 years earlier, in academic year 2005-2006, 9.3% of academy women and 1.2% of men experienced unwanted sexual contact (Davis & Klahr, 2023), with a reporting rate of 15.0% at West Point and unreportable rates at the other service academies (DoD Report, 2006, p. 9, 38). The rate of reporting at the military service academies has ranged from approximately 10.0% in 2008 to 16.0% in 2014, with a steady rate of 12.0% from 2015-2022 (DoD Report, 2009, 2022).

culture (Bayard de Volo & Hall, 2015). In other words, it rejects or evades what is perceived as superficial forced change, even if the reality is that the change came from a combination of internal and external factors. The seemingly slow pace, spanned across multiple decades, in which symbolic inequality is addressed at service academies is unfortunately a symptom of the underlying causes. These causes include pervasive valuing of aggressive normative masculinity and devaluing of normative femininity ingrained in military – and service academy – culture (Callahan, 2009). Military service academy hegemonic normative masculinity include valuing discipline, dominance, power, strength, courage, toughness, competitiveness, heroism, emotional control, protection, winning, and risk-taking (Callahan, 2009; Hinojosa, 2010; Morgan & Gruber, 2011).

While normative masculinity is ingrained in service academies (and the military more generally), the impermeable social problem of sexual assault and harassment is not limited to service academies. College campus leaders have wrestled for decades with how to reduce sexual assault and harassment (Kirkpatrick & Kanin, 1957; Warshaw, 1994; White House, 2014). Despite the universality of the problem (AAU, 2019), and the breadth of solutions thrown at it, very few interventions have been identified as effective (Basile et al., 2016)[2]. One theme that has emerged in research is that the issue is inextricably tied to campus culture (Cook et al., 2023; Coulter & Rankin, 2020; Chamberlain et al., 2008; Moylan & Javorka, 2020). Prevalence of sexual harassment and violence is a function of individual and campus-level factors, and these factors are related and interconnected (Moylan et al., 2019). But what appears

to be a solution – prompting culture change – is a problem with its own seeming intractability.

Culture Change

This article shares how a small number of students at the U.S. Air Force Academy, each wrestling with the same moral and social challenge but from very different perspectives, and each coincidentally approaching the same faculty member, led to two revelations regarding sexual assault and harassment at a military service academy, and a modest but novel way to address it.

The first revelation was that the people closest to the problem (students) may have a better understanding of the problem than those studying it, and in ways the data may obscure understanding. For example, the information shared anecdotally with this author by multiple students was the perceived social and structural consequences of being the initiator of an investigation. For example, if a sexual harassment occurs but the context in which it occurred involves many students aware of or engaging in underage drinking, the initial reporter of the harassment is socially outcast for causing others to be exposed for their misconduct because the investigation would inevitably reveal the other non-harassment offenses. In turn, the would-be reporter perceives that they would face reprisal by unit or team members, name-calling, shunning, non-selection for leadership roles, and loss of friendships or off-installation social opportunities.

Unfortunately, perceived peer ostracization was not offered as a reason for not reporting unwanted sexual conduct for U.S. Air Force Academy men or women in the 2018 or 2022 Service Academy Gender Relations Survey (Davis & Klahr, 2023, Tables 31, 32). That means that survey data does not even consider this as a major barrier to reporting, let alone measure it. The closest similar options on the survey for not reporting were "did not want more people to know," "did not want people talking or gossiping about you," and "felt

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2   The Center for Disease Control cautions that not every program is equally effective across all contexts, but an intervention that comprehensively promotes social norms protective against violence, teaches skills to prevent sexual violence (including social-emotional learning, healthy intimate relationships, and empowerment-based training), provides opportunities to empower and support girls and women, creates protective environments, and supports victims to lessen harms are promising approaches supported by evidence (Basile et al., 2016).

uncomfortable making a report." None of these options get to the heart of the matter of perceived ostracization. To be clear, the survey does measure peer ostracization and retaliation, but only for instances actually experienced for reporting an offense,[3] not the perceived consequence that prevented reporting (Davis & Klahr, 2023).

Second, students are the most effective change agents of their own cultural shifts because they are the ones comprising the culture and most directly influencing it. Organizational change scholars offer that transformative change requires a shift in socially constructed dominant paradigms (Kezar & Eckels, 2002; Simsek & Seashore Louis, 1994). "A paradigmatic culture shift occurs only when all members of the community develop and implement new understandings of campus processes and structures" and "ignoring or violating campus cultural norms is the death nail to most change initiatives" (Rankin & Reason, 2008, p. 265). Transformative change theory makes sense in light of empowerment-based training programs having evidentiary support in reducing sexual harassment and violence because they equip students with skills and confidence to counteract perceived norms (Basile et al., 2016). Students' interactions with each other both create and reinforce social structures (Giddens, 1979). If the premise is true that students are the most effective change agents, then the question becomes how to motivate and influence students to affect their own campus cultures in a productive way.

One approach for this problem might be to begin by ruling out what we know does not, at least in isolation, appreciably affect student motivation and culture

unless used as part of a comprehensive strategy: pronouncements of zero tolerance toward sexual assault and harassment, authoritatively prescribing what the culture should be,[4] and mandatory large-group sexual assault and harassment training[5] (Callahan, 2009; Kettrey et al., 2023; Rowley et al., 2002; Wolfendale, 2021). The lack of effectiveness of these strategies has led to significant frustration among students, military and congressional leaders. In addition to the failing methods in current use when not used as part of a comprehensive strategy, some theoretical approaches might be ruled out. Harsher criminal and administrative punishment for offenders might be ineffective or even counterproductive (Gneezy et al., 2011). Criminalization communicates a strong stance against sexual violence and harassment, and can lead to accountability or retribution for offenders and link victims to services. However, the deterrent effects of criminalization for intimate partner violence is inconclusive (Goodmark, 2021). Therefore, what measures are left for administrators and campus leaders to engage?

Reframe Leadership

The worthy goal of campus leaders might be to eradicate sexual misconduct, but this outcome is not even remotely within their span of control. Faculty and administrators are often called upon or tempted to intervene to control the cultural outcome. But, my students' experiences demonstrated that they each wanted to do the right thing in spite of significant barriers and

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3   The SAGR measures perceived retaliation that a person experienced after reporting one incident of unwanted sexual contact (USC). Perceived retaliation consists of professional reprisal, ostracism, or maltreatment. United States Military Academy (USMA) women who reported USC experienced retaliation at a rate of 31% and men at a rate of 25%. Women at USAFA and the United States Naval Academy (USNA) who reported perceived retaliation at a rate of 25% while the results for men were not reportable (Davis & Klahr, 2023).

4   Institutional statements are important as part of a comprehensive strategy but the impact of such statements has mixed results (Rowley et al., 2002).

5   Programs that formed education groups that consisted of a single gender had significantly greater favorable effects on sexual assault victimization rates than those that mixed genders. Programs that were implemented with small groups (less than 10) had significantly greater favorable effects on sexual assault victimization rates than those that focused on individualized education (Kettrey et al., 2023). Unfortunately, these single-gendered, small-scale training characteristics are uncommon in military training settings. Additionally, risk reduction programs that focused on personal safety had significant negative effects on bystander intervention compared to those that did not (Kettrey et al., 2023).

processes preventing it or making it that much more difficult. So, what if rather than trying to dictate end results, administrators approach the problem instead as better enabling our students' paths toward shifting their own culture toward the right choices? In other words, in addition to providing a vision of a healthy and respectful environment free of sexual harm, administrators can focus on refining structures and processes to clear the paths for students to find their own unique ways to disincentivize harmful behaviors and incentivize healthier and safer choices. In terms of transformative organizational change, "transformation starts with the systems that maintain the power imbalance" (Rankin & Reason, 2008, p. 265).

High incidence rates and prevalence of harmful behaviors at military service academies[6] is an outcome of culture but not the cause. Culture is the aggregation of students' interactions and their risk and protective factors, and of course influenced by the external factors such as the cultural influences of society (Rankin & Reason, 2008; Wilkins et al., 2014). Because culture is a complex system, its levers are likely best understood and influenced by those inside the complexity. Thus, effective transformative change efforts involve consistent empowerment-based strategies (Basile et al., 2016) and involvement of the constituents, from assessment development to process engagement and ownership (Rankin & Reason, 2008).

Rather than focusing on controlling the outcome, such as prevalence rates, the complexity should drive leaders to examine ways they can encourage the change agents to influence behaviors that contribute to the seemingly intractable problem. For example, leaders can reframe their goals from attempting to control outcomes (e.g. reducing incidence rates) to enabling a direction (e.g. empowering reporting). In complex environments,

we can experiment with and influence the peripherals but cannot control the center of the problem, which is most resistant to change (Berger, 2019, pp. 95–99). This starts with asking how we can "support the emergence of the things we want" rather than how we achieve a particular target (Berger, 2019, p. 95). We can start to think about enablers in addition to, or even more than, direct causes that tend to be elusive in complex systems (Berger, 2019, p. 96). What kinds of things are within our control that might enable students to influence each other toward reporting harmful behaviors?

As Peter Coleman (2011) advocates in *The Five Percent: Finding Solutions to Seemingly Impossible Conflicts*, when we encounter complex and seemingly intractable problems, we should resist the urge to simplify them because they are often non-linear and non-reducible. We should instead strive to identify what Coleman calls "local actionables" and seek to "alter patterns, not outcomes" (Berger, 2019, p. 95). The key then becomes selecting the right patterns ready for change and connecting those patterns together to maximize the spillover effects (Docherty & Lira, 2013).

Listening to Students' Experiences

One particularly stark and persistent pattern ripe for change is underreporting. Prevalence is the core of the problem, but creating an environment that encourages rather than discourages reporting and accountability is a powerful influence on the peripherals of the problem. To the extent current educational and administrative systems communicate and exact consequences for ancillary, non-sexual assault and harassment, violations, and do nothing to offer mitigation of consequences for those same violations when sexual harm is involved, the system is discouraging reporting in a utilitarian way (less people are in trouble and "harmed" if I ignore the sexual harm against one person). Thus, administrators imploring students to report is unlikely to make a difference when the core peer loyalty calculation is unaddressed. The effects may be particularly problematic in light of

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6   The incidence of unwanted sexual contact at college campuses nationwide is 13.0%, compared to 21.4% among women at military service academies (AAU, 2019; DoD Report, 2022).

the ingrained social and structural norms of loyalty to teammates at military service academies.

Sometimes this influence on the peripherals happens at a micro or individual level. A student seeks advice from a professor about the harassment they or others suffered. In doing so, the student is simultaneously probing how to navigate complex formal processes as well as informal social networks and consequences from someone who may be able to offer the perspective of experience. Faculty and staff can contribute to culture on a small scale by suggesting ways the student may approach the problem in a constructive way, imploring the best choices, and hoping they share with peers. While these individual influences are helpful, they are limited in scale and require the student to seek out the conversation or for a very attuned staff member to notice something is wrong and the student being open to sharing.

When multiple individuals present issues surrounding the same problem, it should capture our attention about the macro or institutional factors at work, despite the misdirecting data. A student may be wrestling with the aftermath of supplying alcohol to an environment in which hazing and harassment occurred. The student may struggle knowing the near guarantee of consequences for others and social fallout by a powerful group of peers. Administrators are often quick to respond to misconduct such as alcohol offenses in the interests of meting appropriate and speedy consequences and consistency. Harassment by others is a more difficult issue requiring further investigation. The students' perception is simple: I will get in trouble, and cause others to get in trouble, for doing the right thing and formally reporting. The perception gets ingrained into the culture: formal reporting is bad because it "hurts" others.

This scenario illuminated the inadequacy of existing law and policy (e.g. the concept of reprisal or recent "safe to report" policy applicable to sexual assault) to support the decision of a witness to report harmful behavior, or

even a victim to be protected from backlash by triggering consequences for others. At the military service academies, prior to the "encouraged to report" policy at the Air Force Academy in April 2023, there were no policies in place that prevented or mitigated consequences for ancillary misconduct when a student brought forward witnessing harassment or sexual assault beyond the 15 non-binding disposition considerations for all commanders under the Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ) including one's "willingness to cooperate in the investigation or prosecution of others" (Manual for Courts-Martial [MCM], 2024, Appx 2.1). For a student to come forward despite a lack of structural support for the decision (in the form of grace or mitigation for their comparatively lesser wrongs) would require immense strength of conviction in light of all the formal and informal consequences that would follow for them and others. It is difficult to imagine that other students, less equipped with mentorship and facing similar fallout, would make the same decision to report despite the consequences.

This scenario triggered a lightbulb moment revealing a structural barrier and misaligned incentives. At a military service academy, and likely many other college campuses, administrators communicate zero tolerance for sexual misconduct and harmful behaviors. Yet, we simultaneously fail to communicate that reporting is valued more than punishing associated non-sexual misconduct. We communicate through words and actions that accountability and discipline for comparatively minor offenses is more important than the zero tolerance for sexual misconduct that we espouse. The military has only recently communicated the message of better aligned priorities to victims of sexual assault (Undersecretary of Defense Memorandum, 2021) but not for witnesses of sexual assault or victims and witnesses of other harmful behaviors such as unlawful harassment, bullying, hazing, or discrimination.

The following example conveys the consequences of this messaging. A student becomes a victim of sexual

assault at a party in which underage drinking is prevalent. The victim communicates they were victimized to their friend who was at the party in which she and other friends were involved in underage drinking, making that friend an important outcry witness. The witness and other friends are certain to receive consequences for drinking if the victim reports their assault. So, in exchange for securing the chance that the single assailant will be held accountable, the victim must trade in the assurance that her friends will receive severe consequences. Amazingly, this dilemma is not accurately captured as a barrier to reporting at military service academies (DoD Report, 2022).

The gap in policy revealed an anecdotally powerful yet underappreciated barrier to reporting sexual assault and harassment: perceived social fallout. In deciding whether to illuminate sexual assault, harassment, or discrimination, witnesses and victims are likely and understandably very concerned with what they perceive to be the associated social ramifications. These ramifications could be more powerful regarding the decision to report than any structural or institutional consequence that may result from the report. This makes sense when we consider the source of students' power, credibility, and capital in their various campus networks and social circles.

The story travels faster and is far less controlled, or even accurate, with informal social channels; meanwhile, the counternarrative – the formal investigation – proceeds slowly and carefully, and cannot be widely shared. Informally, a student who does the right thing to hold others accountable for serious sexual misconduct can very quickly become a social pariah or ineffective in social circles important to their lives on a college campus.

Reporting sexual assault and harassment therefore is perceived to have an unavoidable tail, depending of course on one's role as a victim, witness, and the egregiousness of the harm. The reporter risks being known as the person who triggered accountability for all involved, especially those on the peripherals of involvement who may have no knowledge of the underlying harm that occurred. Students fear being perceived as the person who was "selfish" and caused their peers to get in trouble, directly impacting their peer credibility and social capital. This dynamic – the risk of consequences for those barely involved – is perhaps even more pronounced at military service academies where the consequences for ancillary misconduct such as underage drinking are severe. Add to this severity that cadets and midshipmen may be held accountable for simply being aware of the misconduct of others and not intervening; it is no wonder that such a barrier weighs heavily on students and impacts their decision to report.

Leveraging Student Ownership and Agency to Impact Reporting

Rather than going directly to administrators to dismantle the barrier once identified, we opted to provide it back to students to develop a solution. This allowed the effort to be attributable to peers, not administrators who are further removed from the problem. In other words, students could be the change agents and other students could trust they were not being tricked or cajoled by administrators to gain more reporting. This mechanism was intended to counteract potential cultural backlash or calcification.

We hand-picked a diverse team of four students in the Legal Studies major to develop a mechanism to reduce the barrier as part of their culminating undergraduate coursework. The team was diverse in terms of gender, race/ethnicity, hierarchal position within the cadet wing, and experience as judged by interests and significant involvement in various efforts while cadets. We also supplied mentorship and guidance from three diversly positioned staff members, including a faculty member, legal advisor, commander, and sexual assault response coordinator. If the team of students delivered on a workable policy, they would be rewarded with a seat at the

table to pitch the idea to decisionmakers. And a seat at the table they received; the students secured meetings with every major decisionmaker at the institution and built broad consensus paving the way toward implementation. Empowering these four students led to a compelling experiment on the peripherals of culture change. The policy has been coined "encouraged to report."

The goal of the work is to reduce the barrier of triggering consequences for others in deciding whether to report harmful behaviors. This is accomplished by incentivizing the reporting of collateral misconduct (ancillary, often minor violations of law or policy connected to sexual violence or harassment by proximity). The incentive is making the formal reporting by witnesses and victims of harmful behaviors as the buy-in to be treated with leniency by administrators. The "encouraged to report" policy does not guarantee a lack of consequences like "safe to report" does for sexual assault victims. Rather, it provides grace and discretion to administrators to intentionally minimize consequences for collateral misconduct when the greater harm of sexual assault, harassment, bullying, or hazing is reported. In turn, it also incentivizes bystanders to own their collateral misconduct in order to benefit from the policy and receive likely, but unguaranteed, leniency.

If this policy is effectively communicated, it may contribute to positive peer influence and culture shift. Rather than unifying around the certainty that collateral misconduct will be punished, students can unite around the idea that those who are forthright and own their collateral misconduct can be provided grace, and thus what might have previously been viewed as peer betrayal can be viewed instead as peer preservation and loyalty consistent with institutional values. The "encouraged to report" policy was only recently implemented at the U.S. Air Force Academy, so we cannot possibly know at this stage the effectiveness of such a policy without tracking and measuring it post-implementation, which the policy requires administrators to do.

As a result, the policy includes an important provision that any instance in which harmful behaviors are reported and collateral misconduct is involved (any minor offense related to but not consisting of sexual assault, harassment, bullying or hazing) must be administratively up-channeled and documented. When a good faith report of sexual assault, harassment, bullying, or hazing is made to an administrator (in this case a commander, sexual assault prevention and response coordinator, equal opportunity, or the inspector general's office), by a witness or victim, the commander is notified and within seven days must inform their supervising commander who mentors the subordinate commander about potential outcomes and sends the information to a central tracking entity. This upward reporting is designed not only to gain insight into effectiveness but also to encourage consistency in leniency and prioritization across the institution.

The effects on peer interactions, and thus campus culture, will be difficult to accurately measure. However, the next annual DoD report on sexual violence and harassment and service academy gender relations surveys should modify the survey questions related to reasons for not reporting to discern the policy's effectiveness in reducing the reporting barriers of guaranteed formal peer consequences and informal social fallout. If successful, this student-led policy writing experiment makes a powerful case for involving and empowering student voices to own and solve intractable and complex problems within their own cultures.

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BOOK REVIEW

A Review of "Together: The Healing Power of Human Connection in a Sometimes Lonely World"

Vivek H. Murthy, Washington, DC: HarperCollins Publishers

Review By: Kimberly Dickman

Dr. Vivek Murthy has been the US Surgeon General twice. As the Nation's Doctor, his mission is to lay a foundation for a healthier country. As the 19th Surgeon General, under President Obama, he led the national response to the Ebola and Zika viruses, the opioid crisis, and tobacco-related diseases. In 2016, he issued the first Surgeons General's Report on Alcohol, Drugs and Health where he called for an increase of access to prevention and treatment and shifted the view of addiction from being a character flaw to one of a chronic illness. As the current, 21st US Surgeon General he is focused on youth mental health crisis, well-being and burnout in the health worker community, and the growing proliferation of health misinformation. Prior to government service, his research focused on vaccine development and the participation of women and minorities in clinical trials. He has cared for thousands of patients as an internal medicine doctor and trained undergraduates, medical students, and medical residents.

What would the nation's top physician choose as a topic for his first book? Loneliness. Dr. Murthy knows that good medical providers start by listening so he started his first tenure as Surgeon General traveling and listening to people across North America. On his listening tour, he heard from parents, teachers, pastors, small business owners, philanthropists, and community leaders, and regardless of the major pain points, Americans were experiencing opioid addiction and obesity to anxiety and depression and others, a reoccurring dark thread existed. Loneliness.

Murthy's book, *Together: The Healing Power of Human Connection in a Sometimes Lonely World*, was published in 2020 during the height of physical distancing due to COVID-19. Though physical distancing due to the coronavirus increased many people's sense of loneliness, this book is based on trends that started decades before the pandemic and has since continued to get worse.

Loneliness exists due to our innate desire to connect. The book is divided by this with a focus on why loneliness exists now and then some suggestions for how to build connection. The author presents data from national surveys, academic research outcomes, and social neuroscience in a way that does not read like an academic journal but more like a story. Dr Murthy infuses the text with his own story of loneliness as a child and again as an adult to model the fact that many, regardless of background, education, position, or status, suffer from loneliness. Leaders can struggle with loneliness. It is important for leaders to acknowledge this for themselves as it can impact their performance, relationships, and their ability to lead most effectively.

The trend of increase in loneliness can be traced back to the later third of the twentieth century. Norms and opportunities to engage with others, religious participation, community organizations, and social events have declined. With the advancements of technology and social media, these trends have only worsened. From 2003 to 2020, time spent alone increased, while time spent in in-person social engagements decreased. We can order food, shop, bank, work, talk with family across the globe, and watch the latest movie all without changing out of our pajamas or stepping foot outside our homes. Though this can simplify our lives, "human connection is being edged out" (p. 98). The book lays out the data that loneliness impacts our immune system increasing risk for disease, prevention of healing, and increased probability of early death. It distracts us, impacts our cognitive ability, and increases the risks of

dementia. Psychological well-being is also affected by loneliness. Murthy describes the process of how individual sense of loneliness plays a direct role in the social morass we are currently experiencing across our nation and between people. The author does a great job differentiating loneliness from being alone and experiencing solitude with the last two being important for human health and flourishing while loneliness harms us.

Leaders may think that loneliness is a personal or psychological issue, but the research shows that loneliness impacts our productivity and effectiveness at work. It can spur on incivility and conflict in the workplace. Leaders must be aware of the potential impact that loneliness can have in the workplace. They can also be assured that there are things that leaders can do to increase the sense of belonging and connection.

The last third of the book describes these antidotes to loneliness. With the use of stories, Dr. Murthy writes that connection starts from the inside out. Knowing ourselves and practicing self-compassion is what the doctor orders. Having moments of pause to include quiet contemplation, meditation, or planned white space in our schedules allows for practices of gratitude and development of positive emotions. This prepares us for relationships with others. The author then writes about the different levels of connections we may have with others from the smallest number of intimate/romantic connections to friends and coworkers, to larger numbers of those we may not know deeply but see regularly, and even the importance of our connection to strangers. The science supports that each level of relationships serves a different but important purpose and the time we put into connecting at each level is time well spent for us individually, for the relationship, and for our nation's well-being. With most adults spending most hours of their day at work, the focus on relationship building for leaders in the workplace is important to personal well-being and mission accomplishment.

Loneliness is impacting how children perform in school, how workers perform in the workplace, our physical and psychological health, and our sense of division and polarization in our society. The antidote is simple yet not always easy, especially if we are lonely. Loneliness often begets loneliness. Dr. Murthy added an author's note section at the beginning of the book where he summarizes how we may heal our social world with these four strategies: 1) Spend time each day with those you love; 2) Focus on each other by eliminating distractions and genuinely listening; 3) Embrace solitude and develop a strong connection with yourself and 4) Help others and accept help from others. Leaders can help in this healing by modeling these steps, being present with others in the workplace, and destigmatizing help-seeking behaviors.

I highly recommend this book to those who lead others in the workplace, school, or home or who are human and in need of connection. It is an easy read that is full of science and story and is written with great compassion and hope. Further, the Surgeon General released an advisory report, *Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation*, in May of 2023 that I also recommend. It includes information on the effects from COVID-19 and includes recommendations for leaders in policy-making positions.