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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.

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RESEARCH

The Leader Rating Gap: How Leaders Rate Their Subordinate Leaders

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates a paradox in leadership assessment, which we term the Leader Rating Gap (LRG). Through content analysis of interviews with 25 West Point cadets and tactical officers, we found that raters primarily cited influence behaviors when describing great leadership in general. However, when evaluating their own subordinate leaders' job performance, raters emphasized individual performance behaviors over influence behaviors. These findings have implications for leadership development and assessment practices in military and civilian organizations, highlighting the need for organizations to align their leadership evaluation criteria with desired leadership behaviors and outcomes.

Keywords: Performance reviews, Evaluations, Ratings, Leadership, Followership, Influence

Introduction

They say great leadership is hard to define, but we sure know it when we see it. Or do we? Applying content analysis to individual interviews of 25 West Point cadets and tactical officers illuminates a related paradox. When raters were asked to describe how they know when someone else really "has it" as a leader, they primarily cited

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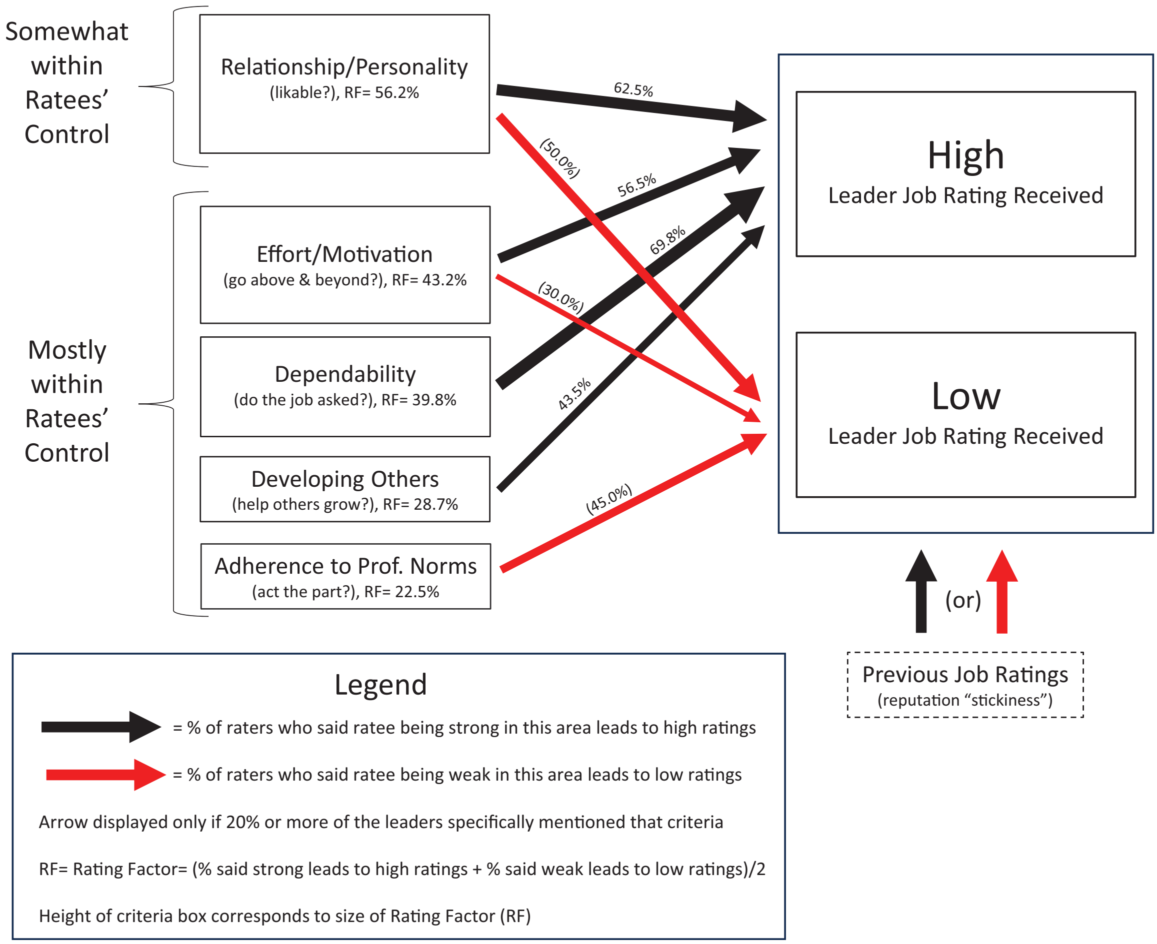
influence behaviors. Yet, when these same raters were asked to describe the criteria they use to assess the job performance of subordinates, almost all of whom were in leadership roles themselves, raters cited evaluating individual performance behaviors more than influence behaviors, a phenomenon we name the Leader Rating Gap (LRG) depicted in Figure 1. Specifically, raters cite assessing their subordinate leaders on, in order of decreasing frequency: relationship/personality, effort/motivation, dependability, focus on the development of others, and adherence to professional norms. Additionally, we found that the previous job ratings subordinate leaders receive are "sticky," as they influence the subordinates' current job ratings.

Identifying Someone Who Is (Could Become) a Great Leader

Organizations have long been concerned with assessing the leadership ability and potential of their leaders and future leaders, hereafter "subordinate leaders" (Marshall-Mies et al., 2000). There have long been debates on which qualities make great leaders (Bass, 1985; Kirkpatrick & Locke, 1991) and limitations in the ability to accurately assess desired leadership skills and behaviors (Kolb, 1995; Yukl &

Figure 1

How Leaders Rate Their Subordinate Leaders



Van Fleet, 1992). Additionally, even when there is consensus on leader qualities and assessment tools, raters' biases and environmental influences can affect their evaluation of their subordinate leaders' performance and potential.

Leaders' Influence on Others

Leadership is generally seen as behaviors that inspire, influence, and motivate performance in others (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Northouse, 2018). Effective leaders mobilize followers, prioritize subordinate needs, and foster a positive service culture (Heifetz et al., 2010; Linden et al., 2014; Maxwell & Dornan, 2006). This selflessness is central to ethical and transformational leadership, where leaders act as role models, transforming followers' values and beliefs (Bass, 1999; Hendrix et al., 2015; Mayer et al., 2012). Yukl (2012) identifies task, relations, and change-oriented behaviors as key to organizational influence. Additionally, strong leader character links to greater organizational commitment, satisfaction, work group performance, and organizational citizenship behaviors (Hendrix, 2015). Indeed, effective senior leadership, which includes ethical and transformational practices, correlates with positive outcomes like organizational performance, employee engagement, and adaptability (Church et al., 2021).

Influential Leader Traits and Behaviors

When describing effective leadership, scholars cite the importance of influence behaviors, individual performance traits, and effective followership, though they do not agree on which are most important (Feller, 2016; Giles, 2016). Examples of important influence behaviors and leader traits include leader vision, inspiration, empathy, and trustworthiness (Bennis, 1989) and emphasize listening, persuasion, stewardship, and commitment to growth (Spears, 2010). Traits like humility suggest successful leaders focus on others' interests, fostering strong relationships, work engagement, and likability (Beissner & Heyler, 2020; Wortman & Wood, 2011). Social intelligence, the ability to understand and manage oneself and others (Thorndike, 1920), and emotional intelligence are also said to be crucial to effective leadership (Goleman, 2011; Goleman & Boyatzis, 2008), as is being attuned to social contexts (Huang, 2020). Additionally, social judgment skills become more important as leaders advance and handle more complex and ambiguous problems (Mumford et al., 2000). Similarly, Bartone et al. (2002) found that social judgment skills and Big Five traits like conscientiousness and agreeableness enhance leader performance. Since conscientiousness includes dependability and perseverance, and agreeableness involves selflessness and cooperativeness (Barrick & Mount, 1991; Witt, 2002), leader traits and their influence behaviors can be closely related. Other authors have stressed the importance of the example the leader sets for others (Spain et al., 2021) and the significance of a leader's character on their organizations (Spain et al., 2022).

Furthermore, some of the traits and behaviors that make effective leaders also make effective followers (Riggio et al., 2008; Uhl-Bien et al., 2014). Effective followership can be defined as deliberately executing the vision of the leader (Slager, 2019). Indeed, effective followers are proactive, responsible, and problem solvers, similar to good leaders (Hamlin, 2016). McCallum (2013) notes that most people are followers more often than leaders and outlines similar qualities of followership: strong self-management, commitment to the organization, optimal impact focus, courage, credibility, and honesty. Implicit followership theory describes ideal followers as team players, loyal, productive, and engaged (Junker & Van Dick, 2014). Since almost all leaders are also followers, when leaders are evaluated for their performance, raters may evaluate their subordinate leaders on both their influence behaviors and their followership behaviors.

Leadership Assessment

Assessing leadership is crucial for organizational performance, yet objective evaluation is challenging. For example, inaccuracies in performance appraisals stem from unclear roles and goals (Anderson & Stritch, 2015), imperfect metrics (Behn, 2003), judgment errors, and biases such as the halo effect and implicit prototypes (Bowman, 1999;

Junker & Van Dick, 2014; Schyns & Meindl, 2005). Biases can distort evaluations, as raters may focus on one positive trait or prioritize unconscious schemas. Additionally, rater-subordinate similarities can positively skew evaluations (Schraeder & Simpson, 2006). Evaluating individuals with diverse skills complicates assessments, as past successes may not guarantee future success (Finkelstein et al., 2018).

The performance appraisal system used by organizations also affects how raters assess subordinates. A forced-distribution rating system (FDRS), used by organizations such as the U.S. Army to evaluate its officers and the United States Military Academy (USMA) to evaluate its cadets (US Army, 2019; USMA, 2022), requires raters to differentiate between strong and weak performances, aiming to improve accuracy and promote honesty (Stewart et al., 2021). This helps prevent leniency and centrality biases, where raters give overly generous or moderate ratings to avoid conflict (Berger et al., 2013; Schleicher et al., 2008). A FDRS typically categorizes subordinates into above-average, average, and below-average, with corresponding incentives such as raises and promotions, which can undermine teamwork and create feelings of injustice (Moon et al., 2016). Combining FDRS with other appraisal challenges and desired leader traits and behaviors leads to our first series of questions of our exploratory research:

> **RQ 1A:** What traits and behaviors do raters look for when identifying a great leader in general?
>
> **RQ 1B**: What traits and behaviors do raters actually use when differentiating the performance of their subordinate leaders?
>
> **RQ 1C**: Are the answers to 1A and 1B the same?

Since an FDRS effectively makes a rating system into a competition for high ratings, it is important to consider what else may influence ratings other than the ratees' influence behaviors and individual performance. One possibility is that leaders' previous job ratings, operationalized as their professional reputation, will influence their current rating. Scholars have shown that past performance is a primary data point for identifying high-potential talent, referred to as "high potential," "future leader," "crown jewel," or "shining star" (Church et al., 2021), and these stars excel in their roles, receive higher regard and rewards, are often more visible due to higher visibility projects and responsibilities (Groysberg et al., 2008), and are disproportionately more valuable and productive than average workers (Ernst & Vitt, 2000; Hunter et al., 1990; Narin & Breitzman, 1995). Since past performance is a predictor of future performance (Lawler, 2017), raters may be tempted to take the cognitive shortcut of allowing subordinate leaders' previous rating(s) to influence their current rating. This leads to our final research question:

> **RQ 2:** Do leaders' previous job ratings influence their current rating (stickiness)?

Method

Design

We conducted a qualitative content analysis using semi-structured interviews. Subjects included current and former West Point cadets and tactical officers.

Semi-Structured Interview Development

The principal investigator developed the initial interview guide and preliminary semi-structured interviews to validate the guide, interview techniques, and technology, focusing on the process of assigning the military development (MD) grade. The MD grade, a weighted average of ratings from military officers and upper-class cadet supervisors, reflects a cadet's overall job performance. Half of the MD grade comes from a military tactical officer supervisor, and the other half from two-to-three upper-class cadet supervisors, and it is given at the end of each semester and summer training period (Lewis et al., 2005). As every tactical officer and cadet rater is necessarily in a leadership position, and every rated cadet was serving in a leadership position or soon will be (e.g., a freshman) (USMA, 2018), the MD grade could be considered a "leadership grade," though this rephrasing has not been formally studied for validation.

The preliminary interviews included one current cadet, one current tactical officer, and one former cadet and covered themes such as institutional expectations for grading, how cadets graded each other, perceived grading criteria, and the relevance of MD grades predicting officer performance. Participants were also asked about other topics they wished to discuss. These interviews revealed the potential influence of other grades (academic and physical performance/ grade point average [GPA]), leading to the refinement of the initial questions.

Participants

We conducted 25 interviews using a purposeful convenience sample, including 12 current West Point cadets (two women and 10 men) equally divided between the top and bottom 20% of their class: two first-year students, two sophomores, four juniors, and four seniors whose job performance was rated 11 times throughout their four years. Additionally, we interviewed eight tactical officers (all men). These included four current tactical officers and four who served in the role from 1996 to 2005, who have all rated their cadets. We also interviewed five alumni (one woman and four men), from classes spanning from 1992 and 2004, with little suspected structural or cultural change to the rating system during the aforementioned periods. These demographics were generally consistent with the cadet and tactical officer population at the time of data collection.

Semi-Structured Interviews

The principal investigator conducted the interviews. Twenty of the interviews were conducted by phone, and five were in person. Each interview lasted between 30 and 75 min, with an average duration of 45 min. All interviews were recorded using a smartphone and transcribed verbatim using a private transcription service.

Ethics

Each participant provided consent at the beginning of the interview. The United States Military Academy's Human Research Protection Program approved the study.

Data Analysis

Code Development

Our exploratory study employed a rigorous qualitative content analysis methodology using MAXQDA 2022 software (VERBI Software, 2021), adhering to the iterative abstraction and interpretation framework delineated by Lindgren et al. (2020). Each of the four researchers independently coded the same set of interviews, followed by weekly team meetings dedicated to discussing, refining, and revising the emerging codes. This collaborative approach ensured a thorough examination of the data, with the iterative process persisting until the team collectively determined that no additional codes were emerging.

During this process, we realized that coding interviews in their entirety might allow the context of one question to influence the coding of subsequent questions. To address this, we adapted our strategy for the second coding phase by segmenting interviews into smaller units based on individual questions. Each question was then coded in isolation by a designated researcher, mitigating the risk of cross-question influence and ensuring a more focused analysis. Note that this method does not require or support an opportunity to test interrater reliability.

Analysis

Regular team meetings remained crucial, providing a platform to discuss new codes and ensure alignment across all questions. After the detailed coding phase, the team synthesized and organized the codes into broader thematic categories, establishing parent codes while retaining detailed subcodes. As an example, to address our first research questions, we coded the responses to questions about why a leader gave a subordinate the MD grade of "A" alongside the responses to questions about what makes a great leader. This meticulous, iterative alignment and theme development process continued until the team reached consensus on the final set of codes and their thematic structure. Once all responses were coded, we used MAXQDA to retrieve the code frequencies.

Results

What Makes a Great Leader, and How Does a Military Development Grade of "A" Compare?

What do raters say identify great leaders?

Several themes emerged within the responses regarding how a respondent knows when one cadet "has it" as a great (future) leader and another does not (see Table 1). By far, the theme that occurred most frequently of those who responded (n = 21) was the influence on others, with 90.5% of respondents mentioning that that influence on others was integral in being a great leader. Additionally, various emerging leadership traits and behaviors, such as initiative, confidence, and going the extra mile, were mentioned by more than half (61.9%) of those who responded.

What criteria did raters use when giving a military development (leadership) grade of "A"?

Themes that emerged from at least half of those that responded (n = 22) to the question regarding what factors trigger an MD grade of "A" included individual performance (72.7%), followership (72.7%), influence on others (68.2%), and emerging leadership traits and behaviors (63.6%). Note that "influence on others" was only the third most frequently mentioned criterion.

Perceptions of Military Development Grade Influences

Table 2 presents respondents' identified leader traits and behaviors and the frequency of these traits and behaviors (or absence in the instances of low MD grades) with each letter grade on a spectrum from "A" to "F," excellence to failure.

Table 1
Great Leader and Military Development Grade "A" Code Frequencies

Parent code	**Great Leader**		**MD Grade "A"**	
	n	**%**	***n***	**%**
Influences others	19	90.48	15	68.18
Emerging leadership traits and behaviors	13	61.90	14	63.64
Social intelligence	10	47.62	7	31.82
Character	9	42.86	8	36.36
Followership	9	42.86	16	72.73
Individual performance	8	38.10	16	72.73
Communication	3	14.29	4	18.18
Subordinate performance	3	14.29	3	13.64
Position	3	14.29	9	40.91

Note: % is the valid percentage reported in MAXQDA, which is the percentage of interviewee documents where the code occurred and there was a response to the question. For great leader, there were 21 interviewee documents with responses. For MD Grade "A," there were 22 documents with responses.

Table 2
Military Development Grade Code Frequencies

Parent code	MD Grade "A"		MD Grade "B"		MD Grade "C"		MD Grade "D" or "F"	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Dependable/Responsible	16	69.57	4	16.67	2	10.00	-	-
Relationship/Personality	16	69.57	8	33.33	10	50.00	4	57.14
Effort/Motivation	13	56.52	18	75.00	6	30.00	0	0.00
Developing others	10	43.48	4	16.67	3	15.00	3	42.86
Professional norms	8	34.78	8	33.33	9	45.00	3	42.86
Self-academic performance	8	34.78	2	8.33	4	20.00	-	-
Self-physical performance	8	34.78	3	12.50	2	10.00	1	14.29
Self-job performance	8	34.78	2	8.33	7	35.00	3	42.86
Accountability/Ownership of others	5	21.74	4	16.67	3	15.00	2	28.57
Communication	4	17.39	7	29.17	1	5.00	1	14.29
Discipline	4	17.39	7	29.17	6	30.00	1	14.29
Self-mental performance	4	17.39	2	8.33	0	0.00	0	0.00
Competence	3	13.04	4	16.67	0	0.00	0	0.00
Followership	3	13.04	6	25.00	4	20.00	0	0.00
Individual performance	3	13.04	-	-	-	-	-	-
Learning orientation	3	13.04	4	16.67	1	5.00	0	0.00
Position/Seniority	2	8.70	6	25.00	1	5.00	-	-
Subordinate performance	2	8.70	5	20.83	0	0.00	0	0.00
Genesis for exceptional performance	1	4.35	-	-	-	-	-	-
Sticky	1	4.35	-	-	-	-	-	-
Decisiveness/Decision-making	0	0.00	0	0.00	1	5.00	0	0.00
Mental health	0	0.00	0	0.00	1	5.00	1	14.29
West Point brand	0	0.00	-	-	0	0.00	1	14.29
Average performing	-	-	-	-	3	15.00	-	-
Compared to their peers	-	-	-	-	1	5.00	1	14.29
Number of responses	23	100.00	24	100.00	20	100.00	8	100.00

Note: % is the valid percentage reported in MAXQDA, which is the percentage of documents where the code occurred where there was a response to the question, which is noted in the number of responses. Note that most "C", "D", and "F" related parent code responses were cited as weak or absent.

Excellent "A" military development grade

As seen in Table 2, for those that responded (n = 23) to the influence of awarding an MD grade of "A" when analyzed with the codes developed for the MD grade-specific questions, responsible and dependable (69.6%), social skills, such as relationship/personality (69.6%), effort/motivation (56.5%) were the top three themes that arose.

Average "B" military development grade

Effort/motivation (75.0%) stood out from other themes within the influence of an MD grade of "B" of those that responded (n = 24) and was the only theme that emerged from at least half of the respondents.

Below average "C" military development grade

For those who responded (n = 20), themes influenced by an MD grade of "C" were less frequent than "A" or "B" grades and given either in a negative context or in the absence of the behavior. The most frequently mentioned theme was (poor) relationship/personality (50.0%), with no other theme identified within at least half of the respondents.

Poor "D" or "F" military development grade

Like the "C" MD grade responses, there were not many mentions of "Ds" or "Fs" in responses and those themes that emerged were negative. However, the theme identified by more than half of the respondents was (poor) relationship/personality (57.1%).

How Do Leaders Differentiate the Performance of Their Subordinate Leaders?

The themes of the interviewees' (n = 25) responses to questions about how they evaluated subordinate leaders across the range of possible ratings were grouped into five themes. To represent the average likelihood of interviewees referencing that theme when describing a highly rated ("A" or "B") or lower performing (grades "C," "D," or "F") cadet, we created the variable "Rating Factor" (RF), calculated by adding the percentage of interviewees who said that the presence of that factor leads to high rating to the percentage of interviewees who said the absence of that factor leads to low rating, divided by two. These themes and their corresponding RFs include the ratees' relationship/personality (RF = 56.2%), effort/motivation (RF = 43.2%) dependability (RF = 39.8%), developing others (RF = 28.7%), and adherence to professional norms (RF = 22.5%). Notably, the only influence (i.e., leadership-related) factor in the top five is "developing others," coming in as the fourth priority.

Military-Grade Stickiness

Participants were asked whether cadets are able to move their MD grades up or down over time (n = 23) or were their current MD grades dependent on previous ones (i.e., were they "sticky"). The majority responded that they believe that the MD grade is sticky (91.3%) and many cited that initial impressions play a role in that stickiness (42.9%).

As a note, in our analysis, we did not see differences in the responses of our two freshmen (future leaders) from the responses of our 10 upper-class cadets (current leaders) nor did we see significant differences between our tactical officers and cadets. Therefore, we did not include that further in this project.

Discussion

This research supports the presence of what we call the LRG, the unexpected difference between how supervisors (raters) describe great leadership (i.e., primarily influence behaviors) and how they actually rate their subordinate leaders (i.e., primarily individual performance). Further, it presents the criteria that raters, perhaps unconsciously, use to formally evaluate their subordinate leaders. In order of most influential to least so, these include the raters' perceptions of their ratees' 1) relationship/personality, 2) effort & motivation, 3) dependability, 4) focus on developing others, and 5) adherence to professional norms.

Since almost all leaders are both followers and leaders, it is possible that raters' expectations of their subordinates' ratio of influence-behaviors to individual performance change over time. For example, a USMA cadet team leader is typically a 19-year-old sophomore who supervises either one or two 18-year-old freshmen cadets, while a regimental commander is typically a 21 year-old senior, has had at least two additional years of leadership experience, and supervises 1,100 other cadets from all four classes. Perhaps, on average, raters' expectations of team leaders are appropriately weighted toward individual performance, whereas raters' expectations of regimental commanders are more weighted toward their influence behaviors.

Yet, overall, this paper's findings can be discouraging for an organization's leadership presence and quality. Even though most organizations have many supervisory positions, since the LRG may predict that leaders will be rated according to their individual performance, these same leaders are less incentivized to supervise and develop their subordinates. The research also showed how job ratings are "sticky" in that previous high performers are potentially unfairly bolstered in future job ratings. Similarly, previous low performers may have difficulty increasing their ratings in proportion to greater performance. Considering these initial findings, we offer several recommendations.

First, to incentivize leaders to spend their limited resources influencing others, organizations should (re) define their formal leader job evaluation criteria to prioritize influence behaviors over individual performance behaviors. These organizations will likely need to determine what right looks like and establish some oversight/control to encourage rater adherence to the formal criteria, as old habits often die hard.

Second, organizations should deliberately educate their leaders on their likelihood of having cognitive biases, including the propensity for them to reward their subordinate leaders' individual performance over their influence behaviors, the propensity to value the ratee's relationship/personality (i.e., social skills) over both the ratee's effort and dependability, and the assumption that the ratee's current performance is likely similar to their performance during previous rating periods. Following the protocol of the U.S. Army's new command assessment programs, organizations could ensure to conduct a centralized rater calibration exercise prior to the start of a significant evaluation rating period (such as the end of the calendar year) while also holding brief anti-bias refresher training for raters each morning during that period (Spain, 2020).

Third, to build confidence in their organization's rating system, senior leaders should consistently and regularly assess it, including annually presenting a report on it to their leaders at all levels. This report should address whether the behaviors measured in their current leader rating system predict leader success, subordinate performance, and organizational outcomes in the short-, medium-, and long-term future. The information, organizational humility, and transparency communicated by this annual report can build leaders' confidence in their organization and its rating system.

Fourth, many organizations can struggle to decide what criteria to prioritize when choosing which leaders to select for promotion. Individual performance, such as technical skills in structuring complex financial products or maintaining a fleet of military helicopters, can be enormously valuable for an organization. Acknowledging that all talented employees are not capable of or interested in being effective supervisors, organizations may need some members of its talent pipeline to focus on technical knowledge (and individual performance). In contrast, organizations may need other members to focus on developing others (and group performance). Therefore, organizations should consider building separate but similarly attractive career paths for leader-track and technical-track employees. This would be a significant change for the U.S. military and other organizations who currently expect almost all of their senior employees to supervise others.

Finally, there likely is validity to wanting individual performance behaviors in subordinate leaders, especially since leaders' example alone can create positive motivation in followers. Perhaps organizations now emphasize a particular definition of great leadership that is too narrowly focused on influencing others, whereas a better definition of great leadership may also require both social skills and individual performance skills.

Limitations and Future Research

Although this study addresses ratings of subordinate leaders from multiple perspectives, the sample was selected based on convenience (USMA.) Additionally, while this study was exploratory in nature, the small sample size limits the generalizability to the operational Army or for civilian institutions. Also, the data are just over 10 years old, so adding and analyzing additional interviews could add validity to findings.

Another potential limitation is that the ratings studied are based on a forced distribution system, which means that leaders are constrained in the range of ratings they can give. This constraint may result in individual attributes/accomplishments becoming more salient when deciding who will achieve high ratings. Thus, there are potential disconnects between what attributes/accomplishments leaders say are important and what attributes/accomplishments they actually reward when rating current and future leaders.

Additionally, there are very different expectations of subordinate leaders who lead small groups (e.g., one to eight people, such as USMA team or squad leaders) than subordinate leaders who lead larger groups (e.g., 30 to 1,100 people, such as USMA platoon leaders or regimental commanders). Therefore, future research might focus on unpacking those differences and whether it is worrisome.

Though some civilian organizations also use a forced distribution rating system, future research, including replication with a more representative sample, is suggested to understand if a similar leader rating gap exists for civilian employees (Rainford, 2023; Williams et al., 2021). Also, using a larger sample that includes quantitative measures in addition to qualitative measures would provide a more comprehensive examination and understanding of leader ratings.

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RESEARCH

A Systematic Review of Leadership Curriculum at the U.S. Air Force Academy from 1955 to 1980

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ABSTRACT

"Growing strong leaders and resilient families" is one of four strategic priorities of the United States Air Force, as it postures to operate within the Great Power Competition Environment. Among leadership development milestones, pre-commissioning sources are foundational experiences for officers, of which the United States Air Force Academy remains a primary pillar. The purpose of this research was to determine how influential civilian advancements in leadership theory impacted the curriculum of the academy from 1955 to 1980, which was a period of rapid evolution of leadership theory from behavioral, through contingent and situational, to transactional and transformational leadership theories. With approval from the Department of Behavioral Science and Leadership, a systematic review was conducted of course material for core courses from 1955 to 1980, which included course syllabi, course descriptions, lesson plans, and required reading material. The Behavioral Science and Leadership curriculum at the Air Force Academy was very responsive to civilian advancements in leadership theory, often integrating emerging theories into

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the curriculum within 2 years after the publication of theory-defining works. The Air Force Academy has a history of an adaptable curriculum responsive to emerging research findings, which allowed the program to keep pace with leading civilian institutions. As we navigate a potential post-transformational leadership era, the Air Force Academy should continue to stay abreast of emerging research to maintain a proactive leadership development curriculum that supports the Air Force's strategic priorities.

Keywords: Leadership, Curriculum, Learning, USAFA, DFBL

The United States Air Force (USAF) highlighted four strategic priorities to posture the force for success within the Great Power Competition environment (U.S. Air Force, n.d.), which is where major world powers compete for global diplomatic, military, and economic influence to shape international relations The third of these priorities is to *"Grow strong leaders and resilient families."* Since the Air Force rescinded Air Force Doctrine Document 1-1 *"Leadership and Force Development"* in 2021, the USAF has lacked an organizational definition for leadership, which impacted how USAF leaders are developed and assessed. However, the genesis of leadership development for all commissioned officers begins with one of three commissioning sources: Reserve Officer Training School for cadets attending civilian universities, Officer Training School for college graduates, and the United States Air Force Academy (USAFA; U.S. Air Force, 2023). To help answer how the Air Force can grow strong leaders, this systematic review explores the formative leadership development experiences gained through the commissioning process, then considers how past curriculum evolutions could inform future updates to best balance civilian research advancements and leadership challenges unique to the military.

Of the three commissioning sources, the USAFA is the focus of this review because it provides the most standardized leadership development experience for cadets with the fewest external variables. In the following sections, curriculum from the Department of Behavioral Science and Leadership (DFBL), between the years of 1959 and 1980, were examined for influence from civilian advancements through the evolution of leadership eras.

Review of Leadership Theories

The evolution of leadership theories has been extensively studied. This article synthesizes two reviews, by Nawaz et al. (2016) as well as Benmira and Agboola (2021), which both detailed the major leadership theories from the Trait Theory through the transformational leadership theory. Since this review focuses on the evolution of the curriculum at the USAFA from 1955 to 1980, it was assumed trait-based leadership theories, which faded out in the 1940's and presumed that leaders are born instead of developed, did not heavily influence the curriculum. Instead, this research looked for evidence primarily from the behavioral leadership theory, situational and contingent leadership theories, and transactional and transformational leadership theories.

Behavioral leadership theory, which was prominent during the 1940s–1950s, broke with the assumption that leaders are born with certain traits and characteristics associated with leadership, and instead argued leaders could be made. Specific behaviors of successful leaders could be taught to develop overall effectiveness, regardless of situation or environment (Benmira & Agboola, 2021). In addition to being one of the pioneers of social psychology, Kurt Lewin was also influential in the development of behavioral leadership theory and researched the behavioral responses of group members from different leadership styles (Lewin et al., 1939).

However, by the mid-1960s researchers started to acknowledge that there was not a one size fits all approach to leadership, and that unique situations and environments impacted successful leadership (Benmira & Agboola, 2021; Nawaz et al., 2016), which led to the development of three primary theories: situational, path-goal, and contingent leadership theories. In these theories, the relationship between the leader, the subordinates, and the organizational environment all play key factors. Hersey and Blanchard (1969) shaped situational leadership and argued that subordinates shaped the relationship, and leaders needed to be able to adjust leadership styles to the situation. House and Evans' (1971) path-goal theory posited that leaders could adaptively use four primary leadership styles and a clear path to reach objectives to support followers in achieving goals. Fiedler (1964) was the pioneer of contingent leadership theory, and argued that leaders were the more dominant focus of the relationship, and focused less on leaders changing styles, but of the importance of matching a leader to the situation, based on the leadership style required.

Transactional leadership emerged in the late 1970's and focused more specifically on the nature of the relationship between leader and follower as a transaction (Benmira & Agboola, 2021; Nawaz et al., 2016). Leaders were able to leverage authority to motivate subordinates through an exchange of rewards for meeting expectations and punishments for failure to meet expectations. Transactional leadership theory is credited to Burns (1978), though Bass (1985) expanded on the framework with the introduction of transformational leadership. Transformational leadership theory introduces the idea of achieving the greater good of the organization through motivating and inspiring subordinates to align their goals with that of the organization's values. Bass and Avolio (1990) would go on to create the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire, which is still recognized as the primary leadership research instrument in the field (Kasema & Suviste, 2020).

Methodology

This systematic review researched archival material owned by DFBL at USAFA, and stored within the Clark Special Collections section of the McDermott Library. The primary reference sources available were volumes from the planning board study predating the establishment of USAFA, Air Force Academy Catalogs that were available to the public and provided a general admissions and program overview, "Curriculum Handbooks" that were for faculty and cadet use which gave more specific graduation and course requirements, and the archived departmental material. Material from the years 1955 to 1980 were targeted due to the significant civilian research advancements in the areas of leadership theories. Due to the extensive amount of material to review, the following methodology was used to systematically prioritize which resources were studied, and which information was extracted from each source.

The USAFA Curriculum Handbooks were referenced through 1980 to determine what DFBL requirements were for all students. DFBL had numerous electives, and different majors required additional courses; however, because not all students took these courses, they are outside the scope of this review. A prioritized list of core course requirements was developed, which drove a more targeted examination from the DFBL course material. While reviewing the material, themes and sources were identified to determine if curriculum was influenced by civilian research advancements. Prioritized material included annotated bibliographies, textbooks and selected readings, course reference lists, and course descriptions. Lower priority material included student handouts, discussion and study questions. Final course grades and other personally identifying information, as well as homework and assessment questions were excluded completely.

Results and Discussion

A systematic review of the available curriculum resources from DFBL during the years 1955 to 1980 identified the amount of influence civilian advancements in the fields of leadership had on the USAFA curriculum. The first available curriculum list was found in *"Air Force Academy Planning Board Study: The Curriculum"* (1949), where the stated purpose of the curriculum design was to *"enable every Air Force officer, regardless of his specialty, to represent the Air Force advantageously, in any educated group, at home or abroad, either socially or officially."* The first Curriculum Handbook was developed for the years 1955–1958, after which it was updated on an annual basis.

Table 1 below illustrates what the core DFBL curriculum requirements were for graduation for all cadets attending the USAFA. Table 2 provides significant course names and changes throughout the years. To understand the tables, it is important to note the name of the department changed several times throughout the years. Originally the Department of Leadership Studies, it changed to Psychology (1961), to Behavioral Sciences (1962), to Psychology and Leadership (1965), to Department of Life and Behavioral Sciences (1971), and finally to Behavioral Sciences and Leadership (1975). Additionally, since the course *"Psychology of Family Relations"* was eventually moved to the Department of Sociology (1968), it was excluded from more in-depth analysis. Lastly, while the original curriculum proposal included four classes totaling 8 semester credit hours, the implemented curriculum only reached a total of three courses and 6 credits (1976).

The targeted list of DFBL courses taken by all cadets was developed from the core requirements and provided the initial focus of the expansive departmental materials. Unfortunately, departmental materials were not available from the years 1955 to 1958, when USAFA was based out of Lowry Air Force Base in Denver, Colorado. To narrow the material reference further, more in depth focus was given for new courses, or when course titles were changed. Material for years without change were skimmed to identify any significant curriculum rewrites. Generally, civilian leadership theory advancements significantly influenced the curriculum material, but due to the extent of the material an exhaustive list of examples was impractical. Instead, targeted examples are used in the following sections to concisely highlight influences, deviations, and changes chronologically.

Chronological Influence of Leadership Theory Evolution

There is significant evidence from departmental material (1959) that early curriculum was significantly influenced by Behavioral Leadership Theory elements. Within the first set of departmental material for *LS302* (1959), the course objective of the junior-level course was to introduce the psychology of human behavior to leadership abilities through the focus of everyday behaviors. Full course materials were not available for *LS302*, but lesson topics (e.g., introduction to motivated behavior, the self and behavior, intelligence and behavior, etc) reinforce this assessment. Additionally, in the other required course, *LS301* (1959) a recommended reading list of books, from which excerpts were pulled from to develop the course reading. Table 3 lists books, authored by prominent authors in the management field, from the list. The course material reinforced the importance behaviors and roles of leaders and managers are at a general level.

In 1965, while the influence of leadership research into situational leadership were observable, the curriculum of *Beh Sci 302* would best be described as in early transition. The primary textbook was *"Principles of Management"* by Koontz and O'Donnell (1964) and the majority of the

Table 1
Core Graduation Requirements for Cadets at USAFA

Starting Year	Core Course Requirements	Credit Total	Notes
Planning Study Proposal	Piych 101,102. 301, 302	8	
1955-1958	Principles of Human Behavior, Applicabon to Leadership and Personnel Management	5	
1959	Leadership Studies 301, 302,400*	N/A	• Curriculum Handbook not available, and assessed from numbering of courses in departmental material and Course Titles
1960	N/A*	N/A	• Curriculum Handbook not available. While Departmental Material available, due to increased number of total offered classes and different course numbering, could not assess which were core requirements
1961	Psych 201, 302	5.5	
1962	Psych 201, 302	5.5	
1963	Beh Sci 203, 302, 303	5.5	
1964	Beh Sci 203, 302, 304	5.5	
1965	Beh Sci 203, 302, 304	5.5	
1966	Beh Sci 203, 302, 304	5.5	
1967	Beh Sci 203, 302, 304	5.5	
1968	Psych 100, 302	5	
1969	Psych 100, 302	5	
1970	Psych 301, 302	5	
1971	Psych 301, 302	5	
1972	Beh Sci 301, 302	5	
1973	Beh Sci 211, 302	5*	• Credits for Beh Sci 211 varried based on if it was taken in fall or spring semester
1974	Beh Sci 211, 302	5*	• Credits for Beh Sci 211 varried based on if it was taken in fall or spring semester

(*Continued*)

Table 1

Core Graduation Requirements for Cadets at USAFA

Starting Year	Core Course Requirements	Credit Total	Notes
1975	Beh Sci 211, 302*	5	• Pages identifying core requirements were missing from Curriculum Handbook, assessed no change due to all course offerings in the Department remaining the same from 1974
1976	Beh Sci 110, 220,330	6	
1977	Beh Sci 110, 220,330	6	
1978	Beh Sci 110, 220, 330	6	
1979	Beh Sci 110, 220,330	6	
1980	Beh Sci 110, 220,330	6	

Note. Created by author from information compiled from *Curriculum Handbook* by USAFA (1955–1980) and *Air Force Academy Planning Board Study Volume 2: The Curriculum* (p. vii) by Headquarters The Air University (1949).

course still referenced foundational works from the early 1950's and reflected more of the traditional behavioral leadership theory. However, in the Instructor Handbook for *Lesson 19: Introduction to Leadership* the entire first paragraph of the instructor note discussed the shift in leadership research toward situational leadership theory, where the "where" and "under what circumstances" were of at least equal importance to "who" was leading. This lesson explored the situational aspects of leadership and introduced the concept that one size does not fit all when it comes to leadership. This is significant because this was only 1 year after the Fiedler (1964) published his groundbreaking article.

By 1970, the influence of situational leadership theory on the curriculum was dominant in *Psych 302*. In the *Course Overview* earlier leadership theories were resoundingly critiqued. Trait based leadership theory was identified as "discredited" as an approach of studying the traits of successful leaders. Following that, it was specified that universal leaders do not exist and successful leadership is based on the individual, the followers, the organization, and the socio-cultural environment. The course material also consisted of articles such as *"Contemporary Trends in the Analysis of Leadership Process"* by Hollander and Julian (1969), which critiqued Lewin's behavioral leadership theory, and advocates for situational leadership, as well as the article *"Style or Circumstance: The Leadership Enigma"* by Fred Fiedler (1969), one of the pioneers of contingent leadership theory.

By 1975 *Beh Sci 302* had undergone another name change, yet the influence from situational leadership era remained dominant. A very similar introduction still provided early contrast to trait and behaviorist leadership theories by addressing leadership myths. Additionally, instead of just incorporating articles that advocated a shift from behavioral leadership theory to a more situational approach, the lesson schedule included a lesson specifically on Fiedler's situational model, and continued lessons covering the relationships between leader,

Table 2

Course Information and Changes to Core Graduation Requirements at USAFA

Starting Year	Course Identifier	Course Name	Notes
Planning Study Proposal	Psych 101	Basic Principles of Military Psychology	Proposed Course
	Psych 102	Applied Military Psychology	Proposed Course
	Psych 301	Psychology of Morale and Leadership	Proposed Course
	Psych 302	Psychology of Morale and Leadership	Proposed Course
1955	N/A	Principles of Human Behavior	Initial Course
	N/A	Application to Leadership and Personnel Management	Initial Course
1959	LS 301	Leadership Studies	New Course
	LS 302	Personnel Management	New Course
	LS 400	Basic Cadet Instruction	New Course
1961	Psych 201	Psychology of Human Behavior	New Course
	Psych 302	Human Relations in Management	New Course
1962	Psych 201	Psychology of Individual Behavior	Name Change
1963	Beh Sci 203	General Psychology	New Course
	Beh Sci 302	Human Relations in Management	Psych 301
	Beh Sci 303	Psychology of Family Relations	New Course
1964	Beh Sci 304	Psychology of Family Relations	Updated Identifier
1966	Beh Sci 302	Human Relations and leadership	Name Change
1968	Psych 100	General Psychology	Beh Sci 203
	Soc 304	Sociology of Family Relations	Moved Departments
1970	Psych 301	General Psychology	Updated Identifier
	Psych 302	Command Development 1: Leadership Process	New Course
1972	Beh Sci 301	General Psychology	Psych 301
	Beh Sci 302	Applied Behavioral Science in the Military Environment	Name Change
1973	Beh Sci 211	General Psychology	Updated Identifier
1976	Beh Sci 110	General Psychology	Updated Identifier
	Beh Sci 220	Behavioral Science Application to Leadership Phase 1	Updated Identifier / Name Change
	Beh Sci 330	Behavioral Science Application to Leadership Phase 2	Updated Identifier / Name Change

Note. Created by author from information compiled from *Curriculum Handbook* by USAFA (1955–1980) and *Air Force Academy Planning Board Study Volume 2: The Curriculum* (p. vii) by Headquarters The Air University (1949).

Table 3
Selected Highlights from the Recommended Reading List

Author	Title	Year
H. Koontz & C. O'Donnell	Principles of Management	1955
R. Davis	The Fundementals of Top Management	1951
H. Simon	Administrative Behavior	1951
F.J. Roethlisberger & W. Dickson	Management and the Worker	1939
0. Tead	The Art of Administration	1951

Note. Created by Author from Departmental Materials (1959) for LS302 *"Recommended Books on Leadership, Management, and Social Psychology."*

organization, and group. There were still two lessons on behaviorist approaches to leadership in the *"Feedback and Reward Systems"* block of instruction, but the overall goal of the course was to develop situational leaders.

By 1980 *Beh Sci 302* expanded into two required courses with significant change, *Beh Sci 220* and *Beh Sci 330*. *Beh Sci 220* introduced cadets to task issues that deal with group leadership, while *Beh Sci 330* covered the interpersonal aspects of group leadership. In the introduction to *Beh Sci 220*, three differences stood out. First was a clear explanation of the difference between management and leadership. Secondly, the course provided a definition of "The ability to influence people to achieve organizational and personal goals." Lastly, the advancements in leadership research in the civilian side were deliberately studied. Six lessons were set aside to broadly cover the history of leadership theory, and separate lessons were devoted to Fiedler's contingency theory, the influential Hersey and Blanchard's Situational Leadership Theory, and House's Path-Goal Theory, which are all part of the situational leadership era. Additionally, lesson 20 was devoted to Transactional Leadership, which was an emerging leadership theory, which would eventually herald in the transformational era.

Moving Forward

The United States Air Force continues to prioritize development of strong leaders to operate within the Great Power Competition environment, and commissioning sources remain an important aspect of talent acquisition and initial leadership development. The goal of this systematic review was to consider how past curriculum evolutions could inform future updates to best balance civilian research advancements and leadership challenges unique to the military. The results found indications the leadership curriculum was responsive to emerging academic research. DFBL updated the curriculum within 2 years of the first major releases of situational and transactional leadership theories. The course heavily relied on textbooks, books, and articles used in civilian institutions.

Future Research

Future research could expand this work by exploring the homework and assessment portions of the departmental material. Assessment is one of the primary aspects of learning science, and significant insight could be gained through assessing the weighted grading systems, along with how exam questions are written to align with the learning objectives of the course. Future research in the evolution of leadership development would best be supported by the expansion of research into other departments. During research, several other departments might provide additional insight into not only how leadership theory was taught, but also practiced. Courses in business management were not part of DFBL and might provide additional information. Additionally, the department of Military Training would provide a look at how the cadet training outside of the classroom was incorporating leadership styles and practices to provide a more complete picture.

This research remains relevant as leadership theory is undergoing research that might lead to the next evolution into a post-transformational era. With the advancement of Artificial Intelligence, Machine Learning, and Automation, coupled to the massive shift to telework that many companies employed during the COVID-19 pandemic, transformational leadership is being redefined in the modern workplace. By looking back to learn how past evolutions of theory were incorporated, USAFA has the opportunity to have a proactive strategy that would keep its education on pace or ahead of civilian institutions.

As the Air Force adapts to operating within the Great Power Competition environment, artificial intelligence has the potential to augment conventional, cyber, and nuclear capabilities (Schmidt, 2022). While these operational applications of artificial intelligence are outside the scope of this discussion, the impacts to leadership theory and higher education are relevant. Artificial intelligence, automation, and machine learning are redefining leadership by optimizing operational efficiency and supporting data driven decision making (Shwetha, 2024). Still, ethical leadership challenges remain, including lack of transparency and accountability, integrated biases, and organizational change resistance. The challenge of integrating this evolving leadership paradigm, is the military's current stance on leveraging technological advancements within the classroom.

USAFA is uniquely postured to navigate this paradigm shift, by bridging both the civilian and military sectors. Civilian researchers continue to explore how to develop higher education programs integrating artificial intelligence addressing the accompanying ethical challenges (McGrath et al., 2023; Nguyen et al., 2023; Slimi & Carballido, 2023). Professional Military Education (PME) faces similar challenges across development levels and branches of service. Throughout this transitional period, USAFA could support positive change by continuing to monitor ongoing civilian research efforts and continually refine its program to be adaptable to the changing environment. This would not just benefit USAFA but could be adapted throughout the PME enterprise.

Where USAFA can add to this body of knowledge, is the ability to demonstrate *how* such leadership theory advancements can enhance learning outcomes throughout the cadet wing, through practical application. This would better prepare future officers to understand how to balance emerging data-centric leadership theory without losing the proven benefits of a transformational approaches, which will be vital in the Great Power Competition environment. It would also combat long term organizational resistance to change by shaping a more informed generation of adaptable leaders. USAFA's proactive history to leadership advancements should inspire them to continue leading the way as they enter this next period of change.

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INSIGHTS

The Thing: To Elevate Us All

Dr. Kevin Basik, PhD, Chief, Leadership Programs, National Medal of Honor Griffin Institute

Could this be the thing? The thing that answers the call we hear within ourselves. The thing that re-ignites a passion for excellence. The thing that inspires positive action in individuals, teams, organizations, or communities. Dare I say, the thing that unites a nation? For this to happen, this thing must not just be appealing, but must feed a visceral hunger. It has to tap into something we all know in our bones is powerfully important, no matter what our journey or context. It must illuminate a path that young and old alike can follow, especially in the toughest moments. That's a tall order. But there's good news: This thing is something people want. The problem is, we've gotten disconnected from it. Until now:

The Thing is Honor

Now, do not lose momentum on me here! I'm not talking about the feel-good, bumper sticker, nod our heads and say, "Yes, it's important" and move on, version of honor. I'm talking about the "No kidding it's important – so what are you going to do about it?" version. This is the Honor that thumps you in the chest, calls you out, challenges you to walk your talk, and dials up the moment-by-moment test in your personal and professional life. It's the Honor you can't get away from because it all counts.

Embracing the spirit of honor stirs your soul and doesn't let you off the hook because you want to be on this hook. If people connect to honor on this level, it truly has the capacity to shift the ground of personal and leadership development and change our nation.

Imagine a place where leaders are hungry to live their values at home and work. Imagine classrooms, from kindergarten to high school, where character development is not a program, but is woven into the fabric of every classroom, ballfield, lunchroom, and faculty lounge. Imagine businesses, organizations, and political parties where doing the hard, right thing is the unapologetic default. Imagine communities where citizens have a shared standard to be their best with and for each other. Do you feel that? The desire is there. Let's stop imagining and start building.

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Defining This Thing

Honor: Living a shared moral and ethical code of excellence

There are a few important elements to this definition.

1. Honor is a shared phenomenon. Whether we do or don't have honor is defined through the eyes of the community to which we want to belong, even if it's with just one other person. This tribe signifies "who *we* are" and "who *we* are not." Think about it: the Boy/Girl Scout Oath, a marriage vow, a school honor code, the SEAL Creed, the Hippocratic Oath, or the Pledge of Allegiance, and on and on – all of these reflect membership in something bigger than oneself.
2. There is a "Code of Excellence" that holds the values "we" embrace as sacred. It represents the standards, the price of admission, and the expectations for membership. The code should be aspirational, pulling us to our "best selves." Violation of this code literally "dishonors" the community and should threaten membership for the offender.
3. The code of excellence must be "moral and ethical," taking off the table any option for a self-serving, deviant, or perverse version of honor.
4. All of this means nothing unless it is lived. An executive once shared an important insight: "Your values, creed, faith…mean little. Until they're tested. Then they mean everything." Valuing something, or declaring a standard is an important first step, but only to the degree that it is put into action. To *have* honor, one must *live* honor, placing the responsibility squarely on the shoulders of the individual, moment by moment.

"Honor" isn't a term you hear much anymore, but its spirit and value have never been more needed. The time has come to reconnect with the essence of honor. And we believe there are 3,519 points of entry.

The On-Ramp to Honor

Of the 40 million people who have served in the U.S. military, just over 3,500 have been recognized as the ultimate exemplars for our values "as lived" in the chaos of battle. Abraham Lincoln commissioned the Medal of Honor in 1861 as the nation's highest and most prestigious military award for a reason. It serves as the declaration that the values we hold most dear can be demonstrated by those among us, even in the most challenging and extreme of circumstances.

True to the definition of Honor above, no one ever received the Medal of Honor for *intending* to do something. They took action and brought the values (our code of excellence) to life, in spite of all the challenges – often times by making the ultimate sacrifice. These inspirational yet humble heroes often describe themselves as "ordinary" people, who, in a critical seemingly impossible moment, did something extraordinary.

We are all familiar with the recurring Medal citation phrases like "…went above and beyond the call of duty…," "…with total disregard for his/her own personal safety…," "…selflessly sacrificed for others…," "…refused to leave anyone behind…," and "…their courage and fighting spirit inspired others to take action…" What's important here is that these phrases don't have to be reserved only for combat or Medal of Honor recipients. Adults, kids, parents, coaches, peers can all find opportunities to demonstrate similar actions where we live and lead, in our own testable moments. We are all humans trying to struggle well through fear, uncertainty, and challenge. We can borrow insights, strategies, and clues from each other across our struggles. What helped or inspired one person may help or inspire another. What better example to learn from than those among us who have passed the test when it mattered most?

Yes, the Medal of Honor is a military award for valor in combat, but at its heart, the spirit of the Medal and the recipient stories are about answering the call to do the hard, right thing in our own life battles. There is a hero within each of us, and we are called to be "extraordinary," bringing to life our shared code of excellence.

The Values That Endure

The Medal of Honor embodies, at a minimum, the timeless, enduring values of Integrity, Courage, Sacrifice, Commitment, Citizenship, and Patriotism. Think about it – these are first values we try to instill in our kids because they are foundational for character. No surprise – they also matter for adults. Of course, there are countless other values and virtues that represent "our better angels," organizational imperatives, and the promise of our nation – all worthy of pursuit. But let's start here. These 6 enduring values are always important, serving as the foundation on which to build the people and leaders of character we desperately need today.

INTEGRITY: Being honest, keeping your word, and doing what is right, especially when it's hard.

COURAGE: Acting despite fear, danger, or hardship.

COMMITMENT: An internal force that binds you to an idea, relationship, or goal.

SACRIFICE: Risking or giving up something of value for someone or something else.

CITIZENSHIP[1]: The responsibility to participate and contribute to your community, society, or nation.

PATRIOTISM[1]: The love, pride, and appreciation you have for your country.

We absolutely notice when these values are present, and immediately feel the consequences when they are absent. In the end, they represent the foundational "code of excellence" we should demand of ourselves, our kids, our leaders, and each other.

The Catalyst(s) to Shift The Nation

Activating this "thing" – inspiring a nation to answer the call to live and lead with Honor, will require something special. Actually, it will start with three special things, all of which are coming to reality as we speak:

A Monument. A Museum. An Institute

1. **The National Medal of Honor Monument** (construction to begin after 2025)**:** The President has authorized, and Congress has *unanimously* approved (let that sink in for a moment!) the construction of the National Medal of Honor Monument on the National Mall in Washington, DC. This iconic memorial will honor and celebrate the spirit of those who earned the Medal, those who deserved it but were never recognized, and the sacrifice that they all made to show us our shared values are worth pursuing.[2]
2. **The National Medal of Honor Museum** (opening March 2025, Arlington, Texas). The iconic, dramatic Medal of Honor Museum will be a premier destination and national treasure for America (think Smithsonian-quality experience in the heart of the country). It will serve as the "vault" to protect,

1 We suggest Citizenship and Patriotism can be reflected in the superordinate value of Service to a Greater Good, defined as "Dedicating time, talent, and energy to something beyond yourself."

2 https://mohmuseum.org/the-monument/

preserve, and present the stories of the Medal of Honor recipients. Within its 100,000 square foot footprint, the stories, voices, and artifacts of the heroes will come alive in ways that will inspire action in young and old alike.[3]

3. **The National Medal of Honor Griffin Institute** (active and delivering programs now). If the Museum is the "vault to protect" the spirit of the Medal of Honor, then the Griffin Institute is the "vehicle to project" the spirit of the Medal to people everywhere. The Institute's mission is to "Inspire, Equip, and Connect people to live the values of the Medal of Honor" through its centers focused on youth (K-12) character development, adult leadership development, and values-based thought leadership.

As the Monument and Museum continue toward completion, the Institute has already begun delivering content for youth in schools across the nation, and in adult programs, all in a fresh, relevant, engaging, and transformational way. Each intervention leverages the Medal of Honor recipient stories to introduce the spirit of honor and the values worth pursuing. And wherever possible, actual Medal of Honor recipients are integrated into the experiences, as speakers, fellow facilitators, instructors, and even honorary cohort members.

The initial Institute offerings – from middle school field trips and high school workshops, to organizational leadership development programs and executive retreats – have all touched a nerve of excitement that clearly validates the Honor "thing" is powerfully relevant and valued. To an almost shocking degree. Why? Because it's not a hard sell. The hunger is there. People want to strengthen their commitment and courage as people and leaders. They're desperate to live "in integrity" with their values. People know in their hearts the power of sacrifice and service.

3 https://mohmuseum.org/the-museum/

Everyone is on their own version of the battlefield. They can relate to the "gap" between wanting to live and lead these values of excellence…and actually doing it. And they want to do better. The invitation to equip themselves and learn from our cadre, each other, and Medal recipients is one that has resonated powerfully because it travels into both personal and professional domains. This is the journey that matters.

The Early Lessons

Although the Institute is in its early stages in delivering youth, adult, and thought leadership programs, some insights are becoming clear. The more we collectively tap into these imperatives, the more we can shift the nation and make Honor "the air we breathe."

1. **The values never stop being important.** Whether it's the 6 enduring values we offer, or others that individuals embrace, the idea of defining and then pursuing a code of excellence is what pulls us toward success and significance. Whatever values you pursue, frame them as actions and behaviors you can practice to the point of becoming habits of excellence.
2. **The 2nd bridge is critical.** At the institute, we always strive to cross "2 bridges." Bridge 1 is where we hear the Medal of Honor story and identify the value on display. The 2nd (critical) bridge identifies where in our own life we have the opportunity to demonstrate that value. The combat battlefield is an analogy for the battlefields of our own lives: tough conversations, physical/emotional/professional fear, stepping into uncertainty, standing up to peer pressures, etc. If, in the Medal of Honor story, we see what helped the recipient live the value, it may offer a clue about how we can apply it in our own lives. If we don't cross "the 2nd bridge" of application, we risk this experience just being hero worship, leaving us to say, "Well that's inspiring, but it doesn't apply to me."
3. **Honor is built and revealed at the Gap.** Our lives are a series of testable moments, big and small.

We constantly stand at the gap between where we are, and who we want to be. On the other side of this gap is the standard of excellence, and we've got to push through the pressures to move from decisions to action. Our program participants have found strength and hope in borrowing insights from the factors that helped the Medal recipients, to apply in their own personal and professional battles. For example, focusing on strengthening competence, confidence, and commitment (what we call the "Courage Catalysts," born from what recipients say helped them take action) offers a path to conquer the gap in their testable moments of life.[4]

4. **The beauty of imperfect heroes.** The Medal of Honor recipients will be the first to admit they are imperfect, ordinary people who did something in a moment. While they may have been the exemplar of courage in that scenario, they are still people who struggle with fear in other moments. It is a powerful relief when kids and adults recognize that these heroes are just like them, striving to live their values moment-by-moment. It's an even more powerful lesson when a Medal of Honor recipient joins the cohort, taking notes and striving to learn and grow as a fellow "traveler" on the climb of life and leadership.
5. **The kids "get" it.** We have been so inspired and encouraged by how the K-12 students (and their teachers) have responded to the recipient stories and the lessons of Honor. The key is to offer it up in a way that meets them where they are, relevant to their life struggles and aspirations. These young people want to be their best possible selves and have a level of maturity that is waiting to be invited to the table. (Soapbox: So often, adults complain about the youth, but do little themselves to model the values they expect. Honor is contagious.)
6. **Patriotism is a natural byproduct.** Even though we emphasize that the Monument, Museum, and Institute are about the values (not the military context), we do not shy away from the swell of pride, awe, and patriotism that naturally comes from exploring life and leadership through the lens of the Medal of Honor. Visitors and participants can't help but acknowledge and appreciate the sacrifices made for the nation by the recipients (and those they strive to honor by sharing their stories). Thankfully, Honor is non-political. Just as the Monument was unanimously approved by Congress, we believe that by knowing the recipient stories and embracing the values embodied by the Medal, this could be the "thing" that connects us across countless divides.

Call to Action

We have a flicker within us that deserves to be fanned. As we begin this journey to ignite the spirit of honor across this nation, we invite you to take action as well. There are many ways to do this. You can start by going to the website to find out more about the enduring values that were mentioned previously.[5] You can also dive into some of the Medal of Honor recipient stories.[6] You will no doubt be inspired, but take that inspiration and tell others about the story, and why it impacted you.[7] Finally, and most importantly, consider what you can do in your life and your circle of influence to define and live your shared code of excellence. To bring honor "to life" in the nation, bring it to *your* life, now.

We need to reconnect with the spirit and power of Honor. Could it be the thing that elevates us as individuals, teams, organizations, cities, and a nation? We believe it absolutely is. Do you?

4 For a more thorough description of the gap, please refer to: https://jcldusafa.org/index.php/jcld/article/view/47/46

5 https://mohmuseum.org/

6 https://mohmuseum.org/recipient-database/

7 Don't forget to cross the 2 bridges (identify what values they displayed in their action, and think about what it would look like for you to more powerfully demonstrate it in your own life).

INSIGHTS

Notes Afloat Aboard the U.S. Coast Guard Cutter Eagle: A Premier Floating Leadership Laboratory

Mary Graf, United States Coast Guard Academy

Leader development at the U.S. Coast Guard Academy for this former Army officer, truly is something special. After just 1 year on the job, I have fallen in love with the Academy, its mission, the Cadets, faculty, staff, coaches, crew of the Barque Eagle, and the United States Coast Guard. Let me share with you my observations of the amazing leadership experience afloat on the USCGC Eagle at this small but mighty federal service academy on the Thames River in New London, Connecticut.

Leader Preparation

Just days on the job in 2023, I observed the leadership curriculum in action in the Mid-Grade Cadet Transition Course (MCTC). One which every 2/c Cadet (rising junior) must complete before becoming cadre, before taking charge of trainees in one of 14 core experiential programs, such as SWAB Summer, Waterfront, Eagle, etc. After completing Organizational Behavior & Leadership in the classroom, where 3/c Cadets (sophomores) study leadership theory and models, contemplate their application, and work toward developing their own leader framework, MCTC applies case studies and utilizes role play to solidify theory in action. Second-class cadets rehearse their roles as teacher-leader and mentor by understanding DiSC profiles, delivering leadership models, and core values lessons prior to donning their red aiguillettes and assuming the title, Cadre.

Fast-forward 1 year, this summer with a much better understanding of the Coast Guard Academy Leadership Development Program (CGALDP), I set sail for the first time ever under way on the U.S. Coast Guard Cutter, Barque Eagle.

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A Floating Leadership Laboratory

The Eagle is a 295-foot, three-masted square rigger built in 1936. As one of the Academy's core experiential programs, its primary mission is to develop leaders of character and train cadets for commissioning as officers in the United States Coast Guard. It is home to a full-time crew of 60 officers and enlisted—highly trained Coast Guardsmen who take great pride in their work, in training and developing cadets, and in their ship. They display exceptional professionalism, technical proficiency and camaraderie, which appears to stem directly from the quality command climate set by their Captain.

There are 21 1/c cadets (seniors at the Academy) aboard Eagle for the summer training program where for the first time, they are treated like junior officers. The crew provides cadets a unique opportunity to observe practitioners, establish professional relationships, ask questions, have discussions, and experience immersive leadership development while at sea.

Embracing their role aboard Eagle prepares 1/c cadets to assume leadership positions in their final year at the Academy where the Corps leads the Corps. Unlike most other academy graduates, Coast Guard Ensigns go directly to the fleet, immediately assuming a leadership role, while junior officers in other services often receive additional formal military schooling before joining an operational unit. 1/c cadets at the Coast Guard Academy are expected to lead with integrity in accordance with the core values of the service – Honor, Respect, and Devotion to Duty. They enforce standards for the under classes, while also holding themselves and their peers accountable. They receive mentorship from the officers and crew, set goals and expectations, receive feedback, and a final assessment on performance, leadership growth, and technical proficiency.

The Curriculum

The Coast Guard Academy follows the LEAD Strategy in developing Leaders of Character. L – Learn from Theory; E – Experience through Practice; A – Analyze using Reflection, and D – Deepen understanding through Mentoring. Each of these is on full display onboard Eagle as cadets learn the nuances of sailing a traditionally rigged barque and the demands of life at sea. As division members, 3/c cadets practice hands-on leadership – exercising personal responsibility, accountability, followership, self-awareness, teamwork and reflection while learning basic technical seamanship.

3/c cadets are a member of a division, working with others in a stress-induced setting and advancing toward qualifications commensurate with their experience thus far. They man sail stations – set sails, douse sails and brace the yards, depending on wind speed and conditions. They climb rigging, stand watches, drill, train, perform mess duty and ship's work all day long. And they clean – the ship is maintained to an immaculate standard as the permanent crew cares for her with a great sense of pride in their work and in their ship.

For 1/c cadets (rising Seniors), The Eagle summer experience is designed to mirror the routine of a newly commissioned Ensign in the fleet – balancing competing demands of leading a division, performing assigned collateral duties, and earning appropriate qualifications. 1/c cadets are directly responsible for leading 3/c cadets through daily training activities, watch standing, qualifications, day work, while also acting as role models and mentors. These challenges encourage the development and honing of leadership skills such as communications, emotional intelligence, and technical credibility. It just may be the best hands-on experiential program in any academy, college, or university across the country – developing leaders of character, preparing service ready Ensigns for their role as junior officers in the United States Coast Guard.

Eight Days at Sea

I am not an Academy graduate. I don't pretend to know all the hands-on, experiential training opportunities

and leadership programs at the other service academies. I simply reflect on the fact that while aboard Eagle, sailing from Bermuda to Halifax, cadets work round the clock. They study, practice, stand watch, take boards and earn qualifications that will serve them in their first assignment as Ensigns in the fleet and throughout their Coast Guard careers. By the end of their 6-week evolution (some stay for all 11 weeks), 1/c cadets truly run the ship. Initially, under the tutelage and watchful eye of the crew; however, after they earn their qualifications, they are frequently left in charge. 1/c cadets both give and receive mentorship, participate in professional development with the Executive Officer, (the Captain is present most times). They practice reflection and hone their leadership skills and competencies appropriate for their role in the division and class year.

The berthing areas are neither roomy, nor comfortable. There is no wi-fi service; cadets work the mess, and literally swab the deck. They execute sail stations – manually hoisting and turning the masts on a vessel that weighs more than 1,600 tons. They may get seasick; they may get homesick. Most have not had leave or seen their families since March and will not return stateside until August, but it doesn't show. They work round the clock, honing their craft, practicing leadership in preparation for their role at the Academy and upon graduation, in service to the nation.

Still, the Eagle experience is not only about seamanship. With port calls in 9 different territories and countries, plus 3 stateside Cadets welcomed more than 21,000 visitors on board just this past summer alone, giving tours, conducting several outreach events and high-level engagements. While in port, Eagle hosts U.S. Ambassadors, heads of state, and top-ranking military officials in countries of high strategic importance, well representing the U.S. and the Coast Guard.

How Did We Go?

The Coast Guard Academy Leader Development Program utilizes a systems approach, highlighting leadership competencies as inputs, while hands-on experiential programs provide the process. Reflecting on the efficacy of the program, I'd like to highlight outputs and feedback from cadets based on their Eagle experience. A total of 99% of 3/c Cadets completed their required qualifications – a 3% increase over last year. A majority (57%) responded that the unit was invested in their leadership and professional development "a lot" – a 15% increase over last year. When asked the extent to which they practiced the leadership competencies of accountability and responsibility, 83% said frequently – a 22% increase over last summer. A total of 70% reported receiving weekly mentoring.

Reflecting on the best part of the Eagle experience, some top comments from cadets include: "I experienced character development in a stressful environment"; "a crew whose primary mission is to train and mentor cadets"; "getting comfortable with the uncomfortable"; "learning to be responsible for my actions"; "overcoming challenges in difficult situations."

From the Captain

Jessica Rozzi-Ochs (Class of '00) is the 30th Commanding Officer of USCGC Eagle and the first woman to hold this prestigious post. She stated, "The 1/c cadets were exceptional this summer. They worked incredibly hard, balancing their leadership role as a Mast Captain or Division Officer, their collateral duty, and their professional qualifications. In addition, they led sail stations, participated in numerous restricted-water transits and other evolutions such as man overboard, etc., and played a critical role in daily shipboard life."

It seems that the intended outcomes and feedback present strong indicators that the practicum is working and remains a good return on investment for both the Academy and the service. In the eyes of this old Army officer, it truly was a privilege to be a part of something quite special aboard America's Tall Ship.

INSIGHTS

The Four Domains of Character

Arthur Schwartz, Character.org

The content of your character is your choice.
Day by day, what you choose, what you think
and what you do is who you become.
– Heraclitus

The word "character" is used in so many ways. For example, screenwriters and novelists create fictional characters. Several social media platforms restrict the number of "characters" we can use. And how many times do you think back to someone you knew in high school and say to yourself, "what a character!"

Then there is that well-known saying "Hire for character, train for skill." I love sports, and every year during the NFL and NBA drafts, I'm always eager to find out which athletes may drop in the draft because of their character. Of course, the military also emphasizes the importance of character, as highlighted in two recent books, ***The Character Edge*** and ***Becoming a Leader of Character***.

When it comes to a person's character, here's what we know. It's not your personality. You can be an extravert or an introvert and have good character. You can be "carefree" or a "worrywart" and still do the right thing, at the right time, in the right way, and for the right reasons.

Inspired by the Heraclitus quote above, character has long been defined as knowing the good, desiring the good, and doing the good. Many of us in the field of character development use the phrase "habits of head, heart, and hands." Of course, this definition begs the question: *What's the good*?

For centuries, the term virtue was used to describe "the good." For example, Plato and Aristotle wrote about the "cardinal virtues" (justice, courage, prudence, and temperance) and in the New Testament we learn about the theological virtues of faith, hope, and love.

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More recently, scholars have established four discrete domains of character. They undertook this effort, in large part, because practitioners (including parents, educators, coaches, youth leaders) were seeking a more useful and comprehensive approach to explain, model, and reinforce the constellation of different virtues.[1] Personally, I am grateful for their trailblazing scholarship. These four domains have helped me to better understand and explain "character" to a broad range of audiences. Before these four domains surfaced, most people interested in character formation either had a narrow perspective (i.e., character meant nothing more than being honest and trustworthy) or they thought that character was a person's fixed and predetermined personality.

Today, these four domains offer families, schools, and workplace leaders, including the miliary, a powerful roadmap to help people of all ages care about and practice a wide range of character strengths. Here are the four domains (in no particular order):

Moral Character (our 'ethical self')

Honesty, integrity, and trustworthiness. For many of us, these virtues are at the core of what it means to be a person of character. A person who does not lie, steal, or cheat, whether that person is a ninth grader or an officer in the military.

Performance Character (our 'best effort self').

Self-discipline, responsibility, and perseverance. It's hard to imagine a person of character going through life always saying "oops." Rather, these are the virtues needed to pursue excellence in any area of endeavor, especially in the face of a setback or a difficult time.

1 In recent years scholars and practitioners have used other terms besides virtue to describe goodness in action, such as traits, morals, character strengths, core values, principles, and positive qualities.

Intellectual Character (our 'critical-thinking self')

Curiosity, open-mindedness, and humility. You may not think of these qualities as character strengths, but they surely are. These virtues, or "habits of mind," enable us to ask great questions or to appreciate the perspective of others. They also enable us to learn from our mistakes.

Civic Character (our 'common-good self')

Fairness, respect, compassion, and contributing to the common good. Historically, these virtues were part of what scholars called "moral character." However, I think it's critically important– especially in our "it's all about me" culture – to elevate the importance of treating others with respect, courtesy, and dignity. In addition, civic character is about taking responsibility, as a citizen, to strengthen the common good through volunteering and other acts of service.

Clearly, there are a few virtues and character strengths that don't easily fit into one domain or another. For example, I study the virtue of courage and while I would place courage in the "moral character" domain, acts of courage are also seen as examples of performance or civic character.

Gratitude is another virtue that's difficult to place in just one domain. To me, gratitude is an example of moral character, but it's also a "habit of mind" (thus fitting into the intellectual character domain). There is also the virtue of kindness. Am I being unethical if I don't show kindness? Or does kindness fit more parsimoniously into the civic character domain?

What I do know is that there are real benefits to integrating these four domains into our personal and professional lives. I have a dear friend who was a long-time CEO of several telecommunications companies. He was a superstar in his industry. Yet, I'll never forget the time that he told me he needed to become a better listener. He didn't want his team to think it always had to be his way (or the highway). Over several years, he intentionally worked on developing humility as one of his character strengths.

Leaders don't just have to look into the mirror to see the benefits of utilizing these four domains. They should use these domains as a tool to strengthen and enhance their commitment to leading a character-centered team or organization. For example, are you taking intentional steps to ensure that everyone on your team is being honest and showing integrity for *intrinsic reasons* (instead of complying only to avoid getting in trouble or being punished)? How are you fostering and developing the performance, intellectual, and civic character strengths of your team?

In sum, these four domains offer leaders the opportunity to reflect on the "habits of head, heart, and hands" that are dynamically forming and shaping their own character as well as the character of their team or organization. The four domains also offer each of us a "workout plan" to strengthen the different character strengths we all need to be our best selves, especially during the storms of life.

INSIGHTS

The Evolution of Collegiate Honor Codes

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ABSTRACT

Collegiate honor codes have been around for over 200 years. During this time, their purpose and use have evolved from a means for students to defend their reputation, to weeding out unwanted students, to enforcing academic integrity. Today, character development has become a core focus of collegiate honor codes. Awareness of this evolution is critical to the successful implementation and administration of collegiate honor codes and our pursuit of character and leadership development.

Keywords: Academic Integrity, Honor Code, Character Development, Character Education, Higher Education

Collegiate honor systems are a form of student self-government that establishes, oversees, and enforces standards of ethical conduct. Unlike the more common academic integrity policy, they empower students to own the culture of integrity at their institution. Furthermore, they take a psychological approach to academic misconduct by promoting the development of moral thinking and creating a social contract between members (Ayala-Enriquez & Guerrero-Dib, 2024). Honor systems typically include an honor code, a student oath, a peer judiciary process, unproctored exams, and some expectation for peer reporting (Hoekema, 1994; Lyman, 1927; McCabe, 2024; Tatum et al., 2018; Zoll, 1996). Schools with longstanding honor systems routinely claim them as central to their institutional identity (Limneos, 2023).

Schools with an honor system are frequently referred to as honor code schools (Eaton & Fishman, 2024). As a result, researchers and institutional policies often use the terms honor code and honor system interchangeably when referring to their student-run programs. Unfortunately, some schools have also referred to their academic integrity

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policies as honor codes, which can lead to confusion. In this paper, the term honor code implies the existence of a student-run honor system.

Today, honor codes are designed to promote the ethical development of their students through an environment of trust and respect (Ball, 1997; Charles, 1968; Nuss, 1996), but they did not all start out that way.

The Origins of Collegiate Honor Codes

In the United States, collegiate honor systems date back nearly 250 years and are deeply rooted in Virginia (Baldwin, 1915). The College of William & Mary proudly boasts the adoption of the first university honor code in 1779. What started as a gentlemen's code focused on social norms was eventually formalized as a written legacy, adding a student pledge in 1784 (William & Mary, 2024). Nearby, the University of Virginia claims honor was at their institution's core since its founding in 1825 (Barefoot, 2008) and touts the oldest entirely student-run honor system, starting in 1842 (University of Virginia, 2024). Similarly, the University of Richmond has had an honor system since 1830 (The Commonwealth Times, 2004), the Virginia Military Institute (VMI) claims an honor concept since 1839 (Virginia Military Institute, 2024), and Washington & Lee University adopted their code in the 1840s (Washington & Lee University, 2024).

From there, the concept spread (Geiger, 1922), and several other schools adopted student-run disciplinary systems in the 1800s, including Indiana University (1870), the University of Maine (1873), North Carolina (1890), Princeton (1893), and Haverford College (1897). Of note, in 1863, students at the University of Illinois unanimously agreed to set up the most elaborate system at the time. Though not called an honor code, it was developed to oversee student discipline and included executive, legislative, and judicial components. It even had a system of fines (Sheldon, 1901). Meanwhile, other schools, such as Amherst, the University of Pennsylvania, Vermont, Wesleyan, and Bates, experimented with collaboration between faculty and students rather than allowing an entirely student-run system (Sheldon, 1901).

In 1901, a survey of 32 colleges showed that 17 (53.1%) had implemented honor systems (Sheldon, 1901). By 1915, 125 of 425 colleges surveyed (29.4%) claimed honor systems, while an additional 43 claimed to have an informal honor code, and 31 were considering adoption (Baldwin, 1915).

Not all implementations were successful. The University of Illinois' student attempt at self-governance struggled with frequent policy changes and narrowly escaped multiple threats of rebellion. In 1883, the Attorney-General of Illinois got involved and challenged the system's legality. Shortly after, the students voted to abolish it (Sheldon, 1901). Meanwhile, Stanford University's initial attempt to establish an honor system in the 1890s failed due to the reluctance of students to report dishonesty (Sheldon, 1901). Several other schools also abandoned their codes due to concerns about the fairness of student courts, the difficulty of sustaining student investment, and a lack of willingness to report peers (Kelly, 1925; Lyman, 1927; Sheldon, 1901). At the time, some scholars reasoned that honor was an aristocratic product fostered in the antebellum South by family pride and predicted that honor codes would struggle to gain traction in northern schools (Limneos, 2023; Sheldon, 1901; Streeter, 2019).

Meanwhile, the Military Service Academies and Senior Military Colleges also have a strong affiliation with student-run honor systems. Though none of their codes was formalized in writing until 1922 (Gebicke, 1995), all of them have had honor concepts imbedded in their institutions since the 1800s. The development of their codes was aligned with Christian moralization and based on the ideals of restrained manhood, gentlemanly conduct, and self-discipline (Limneos, 2023).

Norwich University assigned cadet boards to investigate honor offenses as early as 1823, and Virginia Tech allowed students to form committees overseeing a quasi-official honor system as early as 1882. VMI has had a matriculation oath addressing honor and encouraging self-regulation since 1848, and North Georgia's first cadet honor pledge dates back to 1883. At the United States Military Academy (West Point), cadets who sought to establish and enforce standards of honorable behavior formed what was commonly referred to as the "Vigilance Committee" in the 1870s (Limneos, 2023). It endured as an unofficially sanctioned organization until being formally recognized as an Honor Committee in 1922 (Sorley, 2009).

Early Focus on Reputation

During their early years, honor codes were not focused on academic cheating or ethical development. Rather, emphasis was on the inherent trustworthiness of students and the expectation that their honesty should not be questioned (Geiger, 1922; Sorley, 2009). More emphasis was placed on peer loyalty and reputation than academic integrity (Glanzer, 2021), and honor codes sometimes complicated or even undermined efforts to enforce rules against cheating (Glanzer, 2021). They also served as a mechanism to dismiss or purge unwanted students rather than as a tool to enlighten and develop them (Mathews, 1930).

In a period when personal honor and reputation were highly valued (Freeman, 2017), honor codes were primarily used as a defensive measure against disgrace. A gentleman's word was his bond, and any hint of disrespect was dangerous. Calling someone a liar equated to fighting words, and duels were an accepted way to settle disputes (Freeman, 2017). These cultural norms extended to college campuses, and dueling was explicitly forbidden at the College of William & Mary (Geiger, 1922) – probably due to a riot after two students were punished for dueling in 1802 (Santos, 2013). If a student's honor was challenged, it could easily devolve into violence, and the student enforcement of honor codes sometimes resulted in bloodshed.

At the University of Virginia, students during this time were described as proud, easily bruised, and quick to violence. They demanded respect, concealed knives, and brandished guns freely. Their sense of "honor" compelled them to respond when it was questioned, and they stabbed each other with little to no thought or hesitation (Streeter, 2019). The most prominent example of violence associated with honor codes occurred in 1840, when a law professor at the University of Virginia was shot and killed by a student amidst escalating tensions over enforcement of student discipline (Santo, 2013). The student population condemned the killer, resolved to bring justice to the situation, and established a fully student-run honor system 2 years later (Adams, n.d.).

At West Point, cadets were taking honor cases into their own hands as early as 1862 when several attempted to tar and feather a fellow cadet who had admitted theft. Three years later, another student accused of theft decided to leave the Academy for fear of being tarred and feathered as well. Luckily, the Superintendent found out, investigated the situation, and exonerated the falsely accused student. Nevertheless, by 1871, the Vigilance Committee had established a reputation for violence, severe hazing, and silencing – which consisted of students and faculty ignoring an accused cadet until they chose to leave of their own volition (Sorley, 2009). A student found in violation by an honor committee but not disenrolled would receive a new dormitory room with no roommate, a separate dining table, and a separate desk in each classroom (Charles, 1968).

Meanwhile, at the Naval Academy, an informal honor code typically resulted in a fistfight if a student's integrity was questioned. In 1905, one of these fights resulted in the death of a midshipman. As a result, President Theodore Roosevelt ordered the honor code to be abolished, and honor standards were instead incorporated into Academy regulations (Ball, 1997; Gebicke, 1995).

The Shift to Academic Integrity

With the turn of the twentieth century, the number of colleges and honor codes grew. In 1900, only 977 institutions of higher education existed in the United States, with an average of 243.6 students per school. By the 1990s, the number grew to 3,706 institutions with an average of 3,970.6 students per school (Nichols & Good, 2000). That's a 1,530% increase in student population per institution! Higher education enrollment nearly quadrupled from 1940 to 1970 (Goldin & Katz, 1999), and both the number and percentage of high school graduates attending college continued to increase dramatically from the 1970s until 2010 (Hanson, 2024). Though there is no master list, the percentage of schools with honor codes appears to have remained relatively stable.

As the number of honor codes grew, their purpose also evolved to become increasingly focused on academic integrity. The first documented analysis of collegiate honor codes was conducted in 1901 by Professor Henry Sheldon of the University of Oregon in his book *Student Life and Customs*. At that time, honor codes were still focused on conduct and the personal honor of students rather than cheating. However, they were gaining broader attention, and a desire to shift the focus was growing. West Point acknowledged cheating as a violation for the first time in 1905, but, even then, it was added by the administration, not the students (Sorley, 2009). By 1910, large-scale discussions surrounding honor systems, with universities advocating both for and against them, were occurring, as noted by the 1910 American Bar Association proceedings (Mathews, 1930).

In response to spirited discussions among students and faculty on the efficacy of honor systems, a committee at Ohio Wesleyan University was appointed to conduct an intensive study on the topic. In 1930, the U.S. Department of Education (known then as the Office of Education within the Department of the Interior) published its findings in a bibliography referencing 134 books and articles on honor systems and academic integrity (Mathews, 1930). Twelve consisted of studies on the status of honor systems, 25 provided descriptions of existing codes, and 44 provided discussions on academic honesty and the honor system. The final 53 papers were all written in the 1920s on academic cheating, highlighting its growth as a research interest and its link to honor codes.

By the 1960s, over 400 papers had been written on issues of academic dishonesty (Fishman, 2024), and the shift toward student cheating as a focal point culminated in its first large-scale study. Bowers (1964) found that college cheating was prevalent, and less cheating was occurring in honor code environments.

The Introduction of Due Process

As campuses grew in number and size, concerns about cohesion and standards also intensified (Keppel, 1917; Thelin & Gasman, 2003). The rise in student diversity and part-time attendees transformed once-small, relatively homogeneous campuses into large, culturally diverse institutions. This led to a diminished sense of community and common purpose among students, as well as increased competition. Student focus was now on securing a grade, a degree, and employment (Horowitz, 1986; Levine, 1980; McCabe, 1993). By 1935, West Point proclaimed that their function was not to serve as a reformatory of morals and formally embraced the ideals of a single sanction – disenrollment – for honor violations (Homser, 1984). Similar interpretations were adopted by several Senior Military Colleges.

Modern due process rights for college students were driven by the U.S. Supreme Court case *Dixon v. Alabama State Board of Education* in 1961 (Lee, 2014). Coupled with a shift from parental-style oversight of student conduct to a more hands-off approach (Hoekema, 1994), university administrations began to accept that an effective educational process depends on student cooperation (Hanson, 1990) – a goal that might be accomplished through an honor code. As a result, student involvement in college disciplinary processes increased across the country from the 1970s to the 1990s (Conway & Lee, 2014). By the 1990s, over 1,000 institutions of higher education (27%) had adopted some type of honor code (Zoll, 1996).

At the same time, legal attacks on the constitutionality of honor codes at the Military Service Academies played out in federal courts, driving the administrative system to become more regulated (Ball, 1997; Borman, 1976; Gebicke, 1995; Sorley, 2009). Interest in control over honor codes had moved from the students to the institutions, to the nation. Subsequent reforms introduced crucial due process into honor codes, enhancing confidence in the system and student buy-in. However, they also increased bureaucracy and extended investigation timelines. Single sanctions were officially removed at the Air Force Academy in 1960 (Randolph, 2022) and West Point in 1977 (Sorley, 2009).

The Shift Toward Character Development

Research on honor codes and academic integrity continued in scattered pockets across the country without a disciplinary home until the arrival of the internet, an advocate, and a focal point for integration (Fishman, 2024). Dr. Donald McCabe, commonly known as the father of academic integrity, conducted the most prominent study on collegiate honor codes. His vast research on academic integrity and college cheating spanned from 1990 until 2012, culminating in his book, *Cheating in College: Why Students Do It and What Educators Can Do About It*. In 1992, he founded the Center for Academic Integrity as a research-driven organization to promote academic integrity on college campuses. In 2010, the organization became the International Center for Academic Integrity (ICAI; Gallant, 2020).

With Dr. McCabe and the ICAI, a shift toward character development emerged in the 1990s. Rather than focusing on prohibited behaviors, they began promoting the positive values of honesty, trust, fairness, respect, and responsibility that create a foundation for responsible conduct in students (Center for Academic Integrity, 1999). McCabe et al. (2012) identified the decision to cheat or not as one of the most basic ethical decisions faced by college students, and he intentionally framed academic integrity as an element of character development. McCabe advocated for moral education, cultivation of aspirational communities, and promotion of prosocial values in addition to traditional honor codes for student development.

Around the same time, the Military Service Academies also began focusing on character development and remediation for misconduct. The Air Force Academy made a series of substantial philosophical and administrative changes to its honor code in the early 1990s, focusing on honorable living and "doing the right thing" rather than the four don'ts: lying, stealing, cheating, and tolerating (Dierker, 1997). The first honor probation was implemented on October 9th, 1990 and consisted of a 6-month suspended disenrollment while a cadet went through remediation (Ball, 1997). West Point implemented a similar 6-month honor mentorship program designed as an intensive process of guided self-examination and self-evaluation before making a final retention decision (Sorley, 2009).

The Effectiveness of Modern Honor Codes

The elaborate research of McCabe and his colleagues at over 200 institutions from 1990 through 2008 repeatedly found that collegiate honor codes effectively promote integrity and reduce cheating (McCabe & Pavela, 2000; McCabe et al., 2012). Countless other researchers have replicated his findings and endorsed honor codes as a way to promote academic integrity (Tatum, 2022; Zoll, 1996). Yet, it is worth noting that not everyone has come to the same conclusion. Hall (1996) found that the existence of an honor code is not of itself a deterrent to academic dishonesty, and Arnold et al. (2007)

found that honor code schools do not self-report significantly lower amounts of cheating than non-honor code schools.

The most powerful influence on student cheating is their perception of peer behavior (McCabe & Treviño, 1997), and honor codes can significantly impact student behavior (McCabe et al., 2001a). Seeing other students engage in prosocial behaviors – such as designing and enforcing academic integrity policies, making pledges, educating their peers, initiating dialogue, and behaving honestly – can play a significant role in shaping and upholding standards of academic integrity (Ball, 1997; McCabe & Pavela, 2000; McCabe et al., 2002; Roig & Marks, 2006; Zoll, 1996).

Beyond a reduction in cheating, collegiate honor codes can play a valuable role in character development (Charles, 1968; Lyman, 1927). Honor education encourages students to gain a deeper understanding of why cheating is morally wrong (Schwartz et al., 2013). Then, holding students accountable for the ethical behavior of their peers forces them to wrestle with their values (McCabe et al., 2001b). Furthermore, honor codes have a unique capacity to foster a trusting community and cultivate honesty and integrity among students (May & Loyd, 1993). This development, in turn, translates into ethical behavior beyond the college setting. McCabe et al. (2012) reported that individuals who experienced an honor code in college and currently worked in an organization with a strong code of ethics exhibited higher levels of ethical behavior in the workplace.

Public perception of institutions with robust honor codes can also enhance their overall reputation and student recruitment (Manuel, 2020). Despite an inability to completely eradicate cheating, honor codes hold intrinsic value. They symbolize the societal ideals of honor, integrity, and ethical conduct, which remain deeply valued traits in our society and essential qualities desired in the workforce. These are important and respected aspirations for any community (Charles, 1968; Hall, 1996).

However, collegiate honor codes are not a silver bullet, and they should not be implemented solely to combat student cheating. Issues with campus culture must be addressed first (Hendershott et al., 2000), involving all levels of the institution – from students to faculty to governing boards (Nuss, 1984). McCabe and Treviño (1993) emphasized this point when they found that some non-honor code schools with strong cultures of academic integrity exhibited lower levels of cheating compared to institutions with longstanding honor code traditions that were not effectively internalized. Merely having an honor code does not automatically promote integrity nor deter cheating (Hall, 1996; Scott, 2001; Zoll, 1996).

The easiest way to render a code ineffective is to use it as window dressing (McCabe et al., 2012). New students who arrive with a positive attitude toward the honor code will quickly become cynics when they realize that it is neither followed nor enforced. Their idealistic views are likely to degenerate quickly, leading them to conform to prevailing social norms despite written regulations (McCabe et al., 2001a; Waring & Do, 2012). For an honor code to work, wrongdoers must perceive that their actions are socially unacceptable, they will be caught, and they will receive severe penalties for misconduct (McCabe & Treviño, 1993).

Student conviction that academic integrity is a fundamental value worth upholding is central to the success of an honor code (Ball, 1997; Roig & Marks, 2006; Tatum, 2022; Zoll, 1996). They appeal to students' desire to live up to a higher standard as well as their pride and commitment to an academic community (Hoekema, 1994). Honor codes can be a tremendous asset for institutions that embrace them, and educational leaders should do everything possible to facilitate the trust and privileges they provide (Zoll, 1996). However, they cannot force them. The key is student ownership (Lyman, 1927) with faculty support (Hall, 1996). Though this has been challenging for some schools, others have found wide commitment and ongoing student support (McCabe & Pavela, 2005; Raman & Ramlogan, 2020).

Then, even if an honor code has adequate support and is implemented properly, they still have critics. The greatest criticisms have been over unproctored exams, single sanctions, and peer reporting policies (Beatty, 1992). Unproctored exams can enable cheaters (Alonso, 2023), while single sanctions have been viewed as draconian, with an expulsion penalty so severe it may discourage reporting (Cheung, 2014). Meanwhile, mandatory reporting policies are perceived to create a conflict of loyalties (Mathews, 1930), which can be especially challenging in a society where peer loyalty is valued, and reporting wrongdoing is often frowned upon (Zoll, 1996). As a result, if not properly integrated and enforced, honor codes may inadvertently enable and mask cheating rather than deterring it (Gibbons, 2007).

Finally, most campuses cultures are simply not strong enough to support a traditional honor code (McCabe et al., 2012). Developing and nurturing an honor code is most challenging at larger institutions where the sense of community is less pronounced (Arnold et al., 2007; Lyman, 1927; McCabe & Pavela, 2000). Consequently, honor systems are typically found at private schools with small to moderate enrollment and are often church-affiliated (Hall, 1996). The best examples of thriving honor codes are likely at the Military Service Academies and Senior Military Colleges where their mission is shaped entirely around the character development of their students.

Conclusion

As a longstanding American tradition, collegiate honor codes continue to gain traction and have begun to spread globally (Raman & Ramlogan, 2020; Rettinger & Searcy, 2012; Shepherd, 2007). Despite their imperfections, modern honor codes have consistently demonstrated their superiority over other methods to reduce cheating (May & Loyd, 1993; Novotney, 2011) and have evolved to emphasize character development. By incorporating collegiate honor codes, organizations can strengthen their ethical culture, engaging all members and focusing on clear, aspirational goals (Dufresne, 2004; McCabe et al., 2012). This approach encourages a commitment to ethical behavior and supports a growth mindset. Looking forward, honor codes will undoubtedly continue to evolve, leveraging research to build on their accomplishments, shape academic cultures, and promote character development in higher education.

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INSIGHTS

Banking on the Right Sort of Character

Edward Brooks, University of Oxford

Stephen Scott, Starling

"For the learning of every virtue there is an appropriate discipline..."
– Bertrand Russell, "Philosophy for Laymen" (1946)

At JPMorganChase's 2023 Investor Day, an analyst asked CEO Jamie Dimon what it took to be a good bank leader. "The most important strength is you're trusted and respected by people, that you work your a-- off, that you give a sh-t, that you know you don't know everything," he replied.[1] Trustworthiness, industriousness, commitment, intellectual humility. Perhaps not an exhaustive list, but these seem to be important virtues for leaders in finance, according to Mr. Dimon – and it's hard to argue with him, given his iconic industry status. But how do we test for such personal qualities *before* bringing someone into the banking sector, let alone before they might manage to reach its pinnacle?

Regulators want to know

Even before the financial crisis, banking sector overseers began trying to evaluate whether potential industry entrants and executives were rightly deemed "fit and proper" for their roles. In the UK, for instance, the 2000 Financial Services and Markets Act awarded the Financial Services Authority the power to disqualify persons from undertaking regulated activities if they were not of the right sort.[2]

In 2010, the Central Bank of Ireland (CBI) introduced its Fitness and Probity regime as a means to help rebuild trust in the financial sector post-Global Financial Crisis (GFC)[3]. The regime requires that firms ensure staff are fit to

1 JPMorgan Chase & Co. (2023). *2023 Investor Day transcript*. Online (accessed November 2024): https://www.jpmorganchase.com/content/dam/jpmc/jpmorgan-chase-and-co/investor-relations/documents/events/2023/jpmc-investor-day-2023/JPM-Investor-Day-2023-Final-Full-Transcript.pdf

2 UK Government (2000). *Financial services and markets act 2000*. Online (accessed November 2024): https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2000/8/notes

3 Central Bank of Ireland (2010). *Fitness and probity for regulated firms*. Online (accessed November 2024): https://www.centralbank.ie/regulation/how-we-regulate/fitness-probity

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work in the industry, to include conducting some assessment of their character. It establishes a process by which the CBI approves or denies candidates for senior management positions and removes those it deems unfit.

Other jurisdictions have followed suit, establishing fitness and probity regimes that emphasize character assessments and individual executive accountability for culture and conduct related outcomes:

- As a part of its 2016 Senior Managers and Certification Regime,[4] the UK Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) administers fitness and propriety tests for employees and senior personnel in financial firms;
- In 2021, the Monetary Authority of Singapore (MAS) introduced Guidelines on Individual Accountability and Conduct,[5] which insist that bankers be "fit and proper" for their roles;
- In January 2024, the NY Department of Financial Services (DFS) introduced Final Guidance on how firms should review the character and fitness of their officers and directors;[6] and, that same month,
- Canada's Office of the Superintendent of Financial Institutions (OSFI) produced Integrity and Security guidelines,[7] which contemplate ensuring that "people are of good character."

The character assessments these agencies administer typically focus on qualifications, experience, and personal ethics. But one may fairly ask whether these regimes, and the tests for character they apply, are themselves "fit and proper." Many suggest that they are not.

What is "Good" character?

The validity of the Irish regime was called into question earlier this year, for instance, after a candidate deemed unfit to serve on the board of an Irish fund manager appealed the CBI's decision. In its highly critical judgment, the Irish Financial Appeals Tribunal found that the appellant had been "denied fair procedures at every stage of the process" and blasted the CBI for its "flawed" decision-making.[8]

On the heels of this public criticism, the CBI commissioned an independent review of events and, in July 2024, published the Final Report by Andrea Enria, the widely respected former head of supervision for the European Central Bank.[9] Mr. Enria highlights the importance of sound supervisory judgment in the CBI's assessment of fitness, probity, and character. While Mr. Enria rightly argues that the CBI should assure its supervisory culture supports the production of the good judgment necessary, he does not descend into offering formulaic views as to how such good judgment is reached. The Irish case, and Mr. Enria's sensible study, thus highlight the principal challenge confronting regulators who wish to test for character: it's entirely unclear just how they hope to do so.

Consider, for example, guidance the NY DFS offered banks to shape their own character assessment methods.

4 Financial Conduct Authority (2023). *Fitness and propriety*. Online (accessed November 2024): https://www.fca.org.uk/firms/senior-managers-and-certification-regime/fitness-and-propriety-fp

5 Monetary Authority of Singapore (2020). *Guidelines on individual accountability and conduct*. Online (accessed November 2024): https://www.mas.gov.sg/-/media/MAS/MPI/Guidelines/Guidelines-on-Individual-Accountability-and-Conduct.pdf

6 New York State Department of Financial Services (2024). *Superintendent Adrienne A. Harris releases final guidance on vetting key personnel for state-chartered banks and non-depository institutions*. Online (accessed November 2024): https://www.dfs.ny.gov/reports_and_publications/press_releases/pr202401221

7 Government of Canada Office of the Superintendent of Financial Institutions (2024). *Integrity and security – guideline*. Online (accessed November 2024): https://www.osfi-bsif.gc.ca/en/guidance/guidance-library/integrity-security-guideline

8 Brennan, J. (2024). *Central bank to review fitness and probity process after 'flawed' decision*. The Irish Times, February 15, 2024. Online (accessed November 2024): https://www.irishtimes.com/business/2024/02/15/central-bank-to-review-fitness-and-probity-process-after-flawed-decision/

9 Central Bank of Ireland (2024). *Review of the fitness and probity regime*. Online (accessed November 2024): https://www.centralbank.ie/news/article/press-release-review-of-the-fitness-and-probity-regime-11-july-2024

The department suggests that firms examine things like: (1) how much debt an applicant holds, (2) whether they have a criminal record, and (3) whether they've missed child support payments. While such questions may offer some indicator of specific behaviors that might be expected of a potential hire, they hardly suffice to assess character in the full. Nor do they reflect an appreciation for the importance of motivation, or the interplay between character and the circumstances within which it manifests in observed behavior.

The decision to approve or deny someone's suitability for a role in the financial sector comes with economic and reputational consequences for both the individual and the industry. It is contrary to the principle of due process that a regulator might prohibit someone from participating in the industry on the basis of inscrutable supervisory judgment, exercised through an ill-defined process, that fails to evince a clear understanding of the very thing regulators seek to investigate. This is not to argue that supervisory judgment is unimportant. We agree entirely with Mr. Enria that it is critical. But we need also to establish some transparent means by which judgments relating to character are reached, in a manner that is fair, reliable, and consistently applied. It is thus entirely fit and proper that the industry, and society more broadly, insist that policymakers do better. As a starting point, perhaps we might clarify precisely what is meant by "good character."

Character in context

Perhaps mythically, the idea of character in the context of financial services harkens back to some notional era when good old chaps set the norms for the industry – and its regulation – over port and cigars in exclusive dining clubs. To be "fit and proper" was simply to be viewed as such among "polite society." But to the extent that reality ever matched myth, those days are long gone, and it's no longer up to "the right sort" alone to decide who may be seated among them.

But in myth there is message: the idea that social disapproval results in ostracism rings true because it is, and always has been. What has changed is the manner in which these social forces operate, and who participates in the process. Rather than winning the approval of the privileged few, today, we expect moral judgments to be formed through an open, rigorous, and reliable process.

The academic study of character was catalyzed by the philosophical revival of Aristotelian ethics in the second half of the 20th century and has since grown into a modern science.[10] At the forefront of the field is University of Kansas professor Nancy Snow. In a formulation perhaps useful to regulators, Snow defines "character" as a constellation of lived virtues, to include qualities such as wisdom, courage, justice, humility, temperance, honesty, and integrity.[11] Such virtues are personal excellences developed over time – they are acquired by *deliberate practice* until they become habitual dispositions that guide a person's thinking, feeling, and action.

While character foregrounds personal agency, it isn't about individuals in isolation. Virtues of character, such as truthfulness and responsibility, are developed and manifested in social contexts beset by pressures, incentives, and expectations that either support or subvert their cultivation and expression. That is, there is a symbiotic relationship between personal *character* and social *context*. A person's actions are not simply a function of their character – they are also strongly influenced by the culture of the organization in which they work and the industry or space within which it operates.

Moreover, character and culture interact dynamically. Character is developed over time and, over time,

10 See, for example, Snow, N. E. (2020). What is a science of virtue? *Journal of Moral Education* 51 (1), 9-23. https://doi.org/10.1080/03057240.2020.1773777

11 Cole Wright, J., Warren, T. M., & Snow, N. E. (2020). *Understanding virtue: Theory and measurement*. Oxford University Press.

expectations, incentives, practices, and pressures shape a person's character. As Alison Cottrell, former CEO of the UK's Financial Services Culture Board put it: "The cultures we spend time in shape our character and our characters may in turn shape the culture."[12] Individual character is needed for people to navigate the supportive and subversive forces of culture, such that desired behavior follows, setting an example that others emulate. In leaders, virtues of character (personal excellences) enable them to discern, direct, and maintain a desired culture -- which can be thought of as a kind of corporate character.

That's all well and good, of course. But what does it tell us about assessing character through a "fitness and probity" regime?

Fit and proper "Fit and Proper" tests

Firstly, since character is not unitary but a dynamic constellation of qualities, we need to be more specific. Rather than a general focus on character, such regimes should target specific character traits (virtues) that are most important for leaders in financial services, and they should spell out precisely *why* this is.

Humor, generosity, and gratitude are virtues that would be welcome in leaders, generally speaking, but essential to those working in finance is a specific focus on virtues that provide proven safeguards against misconduct – virtues such as integrity, humility, and justice, for instance.[13]

Recruiters should be required to stipulate the personal virtues required for roles in the financial sector – to include a clear statement of what each desired virtue looks like in practice, why it is important, and how it will be evaluated in the recruitment and subsequent promotional processes.

Validated psychometric measures have been developed for specific virtues, which can be used as tools for personal reflection as well as in 360-degree feedback processes. A combination of survey- and interview-based assessment can be used to test for personal virtues that are well developed, to identify others that may need work, and to raise red flags where desired virtues appear to be absent.

Secondly, since virtues are cultivated over time through repeated practice, the idea of personal "fitness" should be taken seriously as a developmental term. If fitness assessments are to be meaningful, what needs to be identified is not evidence of some virtue in a candidate's past practice, but evidence of ongoing commitment to such practice. It's not enough to determine simply that a candidate appears to have been "fit" at some past time. Fitness declines quickly without consistent training, after all, in the physical as well as temperamental contexts alike. With this in view, if recruiters should be specific regarding the standards of character they seek, so should we ask applicants to be concrete in describing how they intend to maintain performance when it comes to the demonstration of virtues commensurate to the roles with which they hope to be entrusted.

Athletes no more achieve peak performance by reading Nike ads than we achieve enlightenment by downloading a mindfulness app. Accomplished athletes don't assume they will simply remain fit; they train for it, consistently, and we look for that discipline. It takes consistent practice to achieve the habits of excellence.[14] So, just as a candidate for a senior position might be asked how they will stay abreast of changes in regulation or new technologies, so too can they be asked to

12 Cottrell, A. (2023). *Character, leadership and culture in UK business; some thoughts*. Speech given at the University of Oxford in June 2023.

13 Meyer, M. (2024). Can good information prevent misconduct? The role of organizational epistemic virtues for ethical behavior. *Journal of Business Ethics* https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-024-05796-8

14 Sharp, L. (2021). *The habit of excellence: Why British Army leadership works*. Penguin.

detail their plan for ongoing character development in the context of a new role and organizational culture.

Lastly, since character is always developed and applied in relation to cultural context, we should emphasize that what we want are leaders who understand the dynamics of organizational culture and seek to drive virtuous behaviors in their organizations. Individual virtue is necessary but insufficient. Remember, it is the presence of shared virtues *across* an organization (through its culture) that is correlated with good conduct outcomes, not leadership virtues alone. We must therefore test for how a potential recruit will seek to promote desired virtues among peers and direct reports, and how they will test for their success in this direction over time.

Character, context and culture

Policy and practice around character in banking needs to be informed by better thinking. The reality that assessment of character and culture requires critical evaluation rather than formulaic calculation does not give regulators a pass, and there is a burgeoning science of relevance to which they may appeal.

If regulators truly care about the character of individuals and the culture of firms in the banking industry, then they should demonstrate this by convening a relevant dialogue that involves experts in character and culture theory, development, and measurement. Such a dialogue should specifically target the design of tools and evaluative frameworks that permit for the reliable assessment of individual character, corporate culture, and the interplay between the two.

If, instead, regulators continue to issue vague character requirements while leaving it to firms to devise a substantive means by which to demonstrate their observation of wooly mandates, then we can't leave character assessment to the regulators. Here again, the Irish case is illustrative: the CBI launched its character assessment initiative in the wake of public outcry and political insistence, and only studied its relevant practices closely after being confronted by public challenge and opprobrium.

We look to those entrusted with regulatory authority to demonstrate leadership and its associated character traits. Waiting for crisis to erupt before taking action is inconsistent with this expectation. Before regulators seek to assess the character of those in the banking sector, they might wish to demonstrate that they themselves are fit and proper to conduct such an exercise.

INSIGHTS

Distinguishing Types and Tiers of Self-Talk for Performance Enhancement

James Davis, Good Athlete Project

ABSTRACT

Self-talk refers to the dynamic narrative that is continually occurring between one's ears. It plays a role in prediction, interpretation, instruction, motivation, communication, and making sense of one's experience. Tuning in to this narrative, and working to deliberately cultivate it, plays an important role in performance. Those interested in leadership and character development should work to understand their own self-talk and the language they use to lead, as it will influence the self-talk of those in their charge. The more understanding one has over these principles, the better equipped they will be to match their inner narrative to their performance aims. This article takes a thorough look at types and tiers of self-talk to support leaders in their meaningful work.

Keywords: Self-Talk, Motivation, Leadership, Goal-Directed Behavior

Leadership and character development depend on communication. Providing direction, nurturing improvement, and building mental strength all rely, in large part, on the effective use of language. This includes the language we use inside our heads. The understanding and deliberate use of self-talk is an important component of this process.

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Growth mindset is a familiar and prioritized capacity in character development, from classrooms to the United States Military Academy at Westpoint (Erbe et al., 2024). It describes the belief that improvement over time is possible, and that deliberate effort can positively influence one's ability (Park et al., 2020; Yeager & Dweck, 2012). Developing a growth mindset depends on a leader framing situations and outcomes for those in their charge. When feedback is delivered in a way that highlights talent or fixed abilities, for example, learners engage with challenges differently (and less effectively) than when learners are praised for their work ethic and approach to problems (Dweck & Yeager, 2019). One possible mechanism for this impact is the cultivation of inner dialogue through external direction; that is, the language used by the instructor cues internal language used by the learner.

When one is consistently praised for their talent, inner narratives might reflect a connection to a fixed ability: for example, "I am smart." When that person encounters a setback their inner dialogue can shift, "maybe I'm not as smart as I thought." Self-talk reflecting this sort of "fixed" mindset is not ideal. Instead, a leader should use language focused on process, approach and work ethic. They will remind those in their charge that, despite challenges, they have an opportunity for growth. Direction using this sort of language has the potential to cultivate empowering inner narratives in others. One who has developed an inner narrative focused on growth might encounter a setback and think, "I missed the mark, but I can work hard and adjust." These internal narratives can signal and cultivate mental models, which are an essential component of the decision-making process and ultimately, behaviors (Mattar & Lengyel, 2022).

Deliberate use of self-talk has been linked to improvements in emotion regulation, performance, and alterations in neurological activation (Alfermann, 2019; Orvell & Kross, 2019; Walter et al, 2021). By unbraiding internal narratives, shining a light on effective self-talk strategies, as well as limiting ineffective or degrading forms of self-talk, a practitioner can gain personal insight, change the way they think, and better support people who are trying to do the same.

Self-talk is essential to character and leadership development. Coaches, educators, and leaders of all kinds should focus on self-talk to (1) gain control over their own inner-dialogue, and (2) support effective use of self-talk in those they lead.

Understanding Self-Talk

Thoughts influence behaviors, behaviors create outcomes, outcomes are interpreted through the filter of thoughts (internal processes and narratives). It is a continuous process. While many other factors are at play, including emotion and physiology, gaining control over one's inner narrative offers an opportunity to enhance one's state, behaviors, and outcomes… and support those they lead through a similar process.

Imagine a coach in a highly contested football game. If the coach's self-talk throughout the game includes ruminating on negative external components of the game (like weather conditions and contestable calls by a referee), that will impact his behavior. When a ref makes a "bad" call, the coach's disgruntled reaction, which was predisposed by his inner narrative, will deliver a message to those around him and further entrench his negative state. After the game, he might suggest that "those refs really screwed us," installing that narrative in the minds of his players.

This approach does not serve the coach, and it creates a ripple effect in the team. The athletes might then talk among themselves about how bad the refs were. When a friend asks how the game went, they might point directly to the refs, who "screwed us." The internal dialogue that flows from that point leaves the athlete with nothing to work on – after all, it was not their fault, it was the referee. That externally focused, negative self-talk will impact future behaviors. How would an athlete go on to practice in a way that accounts for a bad referee?

Those aiming for character and leadership development should know that by modeling a specific sort of language and approach, leaders are cuing self-talk in those they lead. Internal dialogue used by the leader can manifest in the external language a leader uses around their people, which influences the sort of inner narratives of those being led (Astington, 1999; Vygotsky, 1962; Zlatev & Blomberg, 2015). We developed this progressive visual aid to use with leaders (Figure 1) in order to improve usability of this concept. A leader has the opportunity to recognize where, within this chain of events, they are experiencing a concern, in order to properly identify next steps.

For example, the football coach might want to gain control over his inner dialogue and use language that recognizes the fact that a few calls did not go his team's way, but there were moments during the game that were under the team's control. He could, through his use of language, install a narrative that allows his team to focus on those controllable moments. This, instead of a default position influenced by negative perception of external forces, the coach and athletes would have agency.

Developing agency can lead to empowerment. Self-talk is an essential tool in well-studied character development capacities like growth mindset, grit, and emotion regulation (Duckworth & Gross, 2014; Dweck & Yeager, 2019; Moser et al, 2017). If a leader can enhance or degrade those abilities in their people through the language they use, they should.

Think of the categories below as tools in the toolkit of one's mind. As projects arise, it is good to know (1) that you have tools at your disposal, (2) what those tools are and what they are capable of, and (3) how to gain experience using and cultivating those tools for future use. Many of the skills taught in cognitive behavioral therapy, dialectical behavioral therapy, and performance psychology depend on the awareness and intentional use of such internal tools (Brinthaupt & Morin, 2023; Hardy et al, 2009; Schaich et al, 2021). The most effective form of self-talk depends on multiple variables including situational context, task, and the state of the user. For example, motivational self-talk, as described below, is most appropriate when motivation is lacking. If one is already in a state of physical and psychological arousal, more motivation is not likely to be effective (Theodorakis, 2000). The Yerkes-Dodson Law proposes that the increase in arousal beyond optimal level can be counterproductive (Yerkes & Dodson, 1908). Understanding the nuances of self-talk can better equip one with appropriate tolls of the task at hand. With awareness, understanding, and tools at their disposal, a leader has an opportunity to be more *intentional* in their approach.

All good decision making is preceded by understanding. The first step is any intentional leadership is awareness; that is, bringing awareness to the fact that their inner dialogue is running. The second step is *understanding*. Understanding the influence of self-talk on behavior is essential. The dedicated leader will go one step further, as heightened understanding includes the recognition of types and tiers, as discussed in this article.

Figure 1

The Progression of Leaders Cuing Self-Talk in Athletes

Cuing Self-Talk			
Internal	***External***	***Internal***	***External***
Self-Talk of the Coach (Leader)	Language and Behavior of the Coach (Leader)	Self-Talk of the Athlete	Language and Behavior of the Athlete

Types of Self-Talk

Allyson Felix, 9-time Track & Field medalist, has made a habit of talking to herself. At the starting line before a big race, she will say things to herself like, "let's do this, it's time." Elite athletes tend to their bodies *and* minds. There is an increasing awareness of the impact of self-talk on athletic performance across a variety of sports (Hatzigeorgiadis et al, 2011; Santos-Rosa et al, 2022; Theodorakis et al, 2000).

Just before competition, Felix's self-talk has a certain flavor. She is not thinking about posture or stride length, she is hyping herself up ("let's do this"). Different *types* of self-talk – such as positive, negative, instructional, or motivational – work better in certain situations than others. Building an understanding of types and, as expanded on in this article, *tiers* of self-talk is an important step in maximizing its effect on performance.

There are many "types" of self-talk. A type refers to a category of self-talk with common characteristics. Positive and negative self-talk appear to be the most familiar. Research and practical applications continue to identify the importance of cultivating an inner narrative in service of life-satisfaction and performance (Mamak, 2019). Familiar examples note the ability of an inner narrative to influence expectations around specific events. If an athlete were to enter a game with self-doubt, "I stink" or "I don't know if I can do this," he changes the way he engages with the obstacle (the opponent over the course of the game). Every missed shot would be confirmation of this negative, self-effacing inner narrative. Conversely, positive self-talk like "I can do this" or "I practiced hard and I'm ready" might positively influence the way he engages with the same opponent. There again, studies in confirmation bias would suggest that every *made* shot in this case was proof of ability, and perhaps the missed shots could be seen as opportunities to adjust strategy instead of suggesting that he "stinks" (Nickerson, 1998).

Beyond positive and negative self-talk, Theodorakis and others have identified two additional types: instructional and motivational self-talk. Instructional self-talk includes cues which guide performance, such as foot placement or positioning in a drill. Motivational self-talk is more generalized, often offering internal encouragement like "I got this" or "I'm ready, let's go." Each plays a role in performance and has most commonly been studied in athletes (Theodorakis et al, 2000).

It is important for leaders to recognize this difference. If a coach continues to motivate without giving sufficient instruction, their team might find themselves incredibly amped up, but lacking understanding of what to do or how to do it. This can happen in the opposite direction as well. There are plenty of instances where an athlete knows exactly what to do, as the instruction has been incredibly thorough, but there is not enough excitement to accomplish the task amid challenging circumstances.

There must be balance. Instructional self-talk might be better suited for training, or while prepping for a competition. Motivational might fit best when the athlete is confident in the assignment and task, but wants to overcome self-doubt with a motivational reminder. Their usage might shift throughout a training session depending on the nature of a drill or task. Recognizing these types of self-talk enhances the opportunity for strategic and effective usage.

Tiers of Self-Talk

Positive and negative, instructional and motivational – these are categories which encompass the primary *types* of self-talked used before, during, and after performance. Significant experience and motivational interviewing of championship teams and leaders across multiple professional domains has revealed that there are "tiers" of self-talk occurring within these types. While conducting a recent round of research on self-talk in coaches, Dr. David Cutton (Texas A&M University Kingsville) found these tiers continued to present themselves. A tier refers to the relative arrangement of self-talk within the broader type. Understanding the tiers within well-studied types of self-talk can further codify and evaluate use of self-talk within the leader, and support the leader in training that inner dialogue within those they have been tasked to lead. While this is not an exhaustive list, it identifies common variations (as shown in Figure 2).

Task-Aligned Instructional Self Talk (IST-T)

Task-aligned indicates that the instructional self-talk is being used for the immediate task at hand. A wide receiver might internally remind himself to put his left foot forward in his stance, focus on the hands of the defensive back to avoid a "press" off the line, and sink his hips to adjust his route at 5 yards. This internal dialogue aligns directly with the task of running his route. In a different situation, a professor about to leave her home for travel might remind herself to turn down the thermostat to 70 degrees, then tie up the garbage and set it by the door so she remembers to take it out before she heads off to the airport. These in-moment reminders or internal directives allow conscious accomplishment (and adjustment, as needed) of the current task.

Goal-Aligned Instructional Self Talk (IST-G)

This sort of self-talk requires an identification of a slightly larger goal for which someone is performing a given task. A wide receiver might remind himself that, on 3rd and 4th, he must run his route beyond 4 yards to pick up the first down. The goal is the first down; he can then use task-aligned self-talk in accordance with that goal. The traveling professor might remind herself that she will not be home for a week and wants her apartment to be prepared for that time; she does not want to waste energy heating an empty apartment and does not want the garbage to stink up the kitchen in her absence. An internal reminder of the goal can enhance the use of task-aligned instructional self-talk to accomplish those goals by creating a congruency with a larger goal.

Mission-Aligned Instructional Self Talk (IST-M)

This layer of self-talk includes identification and occasional reminders of the overarching mission. The receiver's mission is to win the game, his next goal is to help his team pick up the first down, and his left foot must be forward so his task of running a 5-yard route can be accomplished. The professor's mission might be to have a successful trip to a conference at which she is presenting, she wants to relieve her subconscious of worrying about whether or not her house is in order, she then focuses on the tasks of turning down the thermostat and taking out the garbage. While using IST-M, one has an opportunity to vertically align their decision-making and inner narrative. Without internal reminders of the mission, goal- and task-aligned self-talk might not be easy to identify or utilize. When those tasks become challenging (the receiver is exhausted in the fourth quarter or the traveler is up at 4:00am to make an early flight), the mundane tasks can feel heavier if they are not clearly aligned with the larger mission. Using IST-M creates congruency and gives purpose to tasks.

Figure 2

Tiers of Instructional Self-Talk

Type: Instructional Self-Talk (IST)		
Tiers	Description	Example
Task-aligned (IST-T)	IST used for immediate task	"put left foot forward to run the route at 5 yards"
Goal-aligned (IST-G)	IST used to align behavior with goal	"have to run this route at 5 yards to pick up the first down"
Mission-aligned (IST-M)	IST used to vertically align with mission	"have to pick up the first down to keep the clock going and win the game"

Motivational Self-Talk can influence one's physiological state. Cutton identified the use of intense self-talk used by an elite powerlifter to enhance his performance in competition, noting that he could enhance access to his existing physical ability through directed inner-narrative (Cutton & Hearon, 2014). Other studies have associated this style of self-talk with differentiated activation of neural networks, suggesting that types of self-talk impact not only outcomes, but distinct activity in the brain (Kim et al, 2021). As with IST, MST can also appear in tiers, as shown in Figure 3.

Temporal Motivational Self-Talk (MST-T)

This is often time bound and used to thrive or endure in a moment. The receiver trying to perform at a high-level in a state of near-exhaustion might use self-talk like, "only two minutes left in the game, I can do anything for two minutes; one play at a time." The traveler who is working on her presentation during the flight suddenly has computer issues might say, "only an hour left in the flight, I'll use a notepad until then and transfer when I get to the hotel, I can get adjust for an hour." Athletes will often include time constraints to manage the intensity of the moment and appraise the degree of difficulty. In training sessions, one might use temporal self-talk to hold a difficult plank position for "10 more seconds" instead of enduring the discomfort for an abstract, unidentified length of time. During difficult preseason practices, an athlete might remind themselves that there are "only two more days" to remind themselves that there is a rest in sight, thereby committing fully to the next stretch of time. One might also use time constraints in the opposite direction, noting after an early loss that "it's a long season" and there is time to improve. This strategy depressurizes the moment and allows for more thoughtful appraisal, instructional self-talk, and deliberate work toward a future goal.

Ability-Based Motivational Self-Talk (MST-A)

This style of self-talk is generally optimistic in nature and often includes positive appraisal of skills. Each of the MST-T examples above used an element of MST-A. When pushing through the final 2-min of a game, the receiver reminds himself that he can get through the next stretch of time by because he "can do anything for two minutes." The traveling professor reminds herself that, for the next hour, she is confident in her ability to adjust. These levels of self-talk often work in concert, though they do not have to. MST-A can be far broader, appearing in the form of "let's go," "we got this," or "nobody can stop us." Allyson Felix confidently went with "let's do this, it's time." MST-A appears to be the most common form of Motivational Self-Talk.

Mission-Aligned Motivational Self-Talk (MST-M)

Similar to Mission-aligned Instructional Self-Talk, this often serves as a reminder of the larger purpose for sake of motivation. It appears in forms like "let's go, we have a game to win." In the professor, it might take the form of "this presentation is going to be valuable to people, I got this, I am going to adjust as needed to make sure it happens, and happens well." Aligning the moment with its larger, deeper purpose can imbue it with a resonance that pushes performance to a higher level. This is distinguishable from Mission-aligned Instructional Self-Talk (IST-M) to the degree that it pulls in emotion rather than cognition; that is, the more the emotion-driven alignment with a professor's purpose when saying "this is going to be valuable, I got this," compared to the cognitive vertical alignment of wanting to free herself from worry so that she can concentrate on her mission of educating people at the conference. Regarding MST-M, it is not uncommon to hear an Olympic medalist on the podium reflecting that they "did it for my parents, who always supported me," or "I wanted to make my country proud," or "thanks to God for making this possible." When that inner narrative is folded into one's self-talk, they often find it possible to push a little farther, work a little harder, and continue in service of the mission.

Figure 3

Tiers of Motivational Self-Talk

Type: Motivational Self-Talk (IST)		
Tiers	Description	Example
Temporal (MST-T)	MST which is time-bound, used to thrive or endure a moment	"almost there, I can do anything for two minutes"
Ability-based (MST-A)	MST using a positive appraisal of skills or experience	"been here before, I got this"
Mission-aligned (MST-M)	MST used to align with a larger purpose	"let's go win this game"

Stacking Self-Talk

Self-talk rarely falls strictly into one of these categories. One might need Motivational self-talk to get themselves to a place where Instructional self-talk is possible. They might move up and down the tiers and across types. They might bump into a negative line of thought, recognize it, and use Instructional self-talk to get themselves back into positive language (using self-talk to guide future self-talk). The receiver might be in the midst of task-aligned instructional self-talk, feel exhaustion set in, then use mission-aligned motivational self-talk to get back to a place where they can again focus on the task.

Nate Robinson spent 10 years in the NBA. He was a guest on the Good Athlete Podcast (Episode 29) and revealed numerous insights into his self-talk. At one point he reflected on one of his clutch performances with the Chicago Bulls, during the 2013 playoffs.

"That was a big moment for us. I just knew I had to get into the lane and keep working to get open and my guys would get me the ball," he said, followed by "I been there before, I just said to myself 'you got this'" (personal communication, 2019).

Robinson was stacking self-talk. Decades of playing gave him a high level of awareness in this realm and he easily shifted through types and tiers to create an effective inner narrative and, ultimately, an ideal performance state.

An examination of Robinson's self-talk:

Nate Robinson, Self-Talk	
Quote	**Type/Tier**
Big moment	Temporal Motivational (MST-T)
Had to get into the lane	Task-aligned Instructional (IST-T)
Keep working to get open	Goal-aligned Instructional (IST-G)
My guys will get me the ball	Mission-aligned Motivational (MST-M)
Been there before	Ability-based Motivational (MST-A)
You got this	Ability-based Motivational (MST-A)

Robinson, like many athletes, demonstrates that while in the moment, he inched closer and closer to Motivational styles. He understood the importance of the moment as it aligned with the team mission. He brought awareness to his task (getting to the lane, working to get open), and punctuated the moment with Motivation (you got this).

There is no precise script for how self-talk should be used. Golfers often include the use of positive and neutral self-talk to limit arousal (Marshall et al, 2016), whereas Cutton's powerlifter example used self-talk to enhance arousal (Cutton & Hearon, 2014). Increased awareness of types and tiers – and a recognition of what works best in a personalized, context-specific way – can turn the running dialogue between one's ears into an understandable landscape, and bring awareness to the tools at their disposal. It can help codify and evaluate effectiveness of self-talk strategies.

Awareness and understanding always precede responsible decision making. The ability to distinguish types and tiers of self-talk can provide agency through a newfound ownership of that talk.

Self-Talk Across Domains

Since language is an essential component of character and leadership development, exceptional leaders should work to become experts. While there are obvious applications in the field of mental health, leadership development, and performance enhancement, cultivating self-talk is valuable in all areas.

Imagine a scenario where you work with "Steve." Steve is a team member who you have had mostly positive interactions with, who you believe to be a good guy, but who rubbed you the wrong was in a recent meeting. If, between interactions with Steve, your self-talk could be characterized as negative, evaluating all the ways Steve "wronged" you, ruminating on all of Steve's faults, internally referring to Steve as a "dope" and a "fool" who does not understand you or respect your time – imagine how your next interaction with Steve might go. Future interactions with Steve might be nudged by the filter you have put on the situation, the narrative by which you describe him, resulting in a set of behaviors and interactions aligning with this inner narrative. On the other hand, if your self-talk is positive, optimistic, willing to give Steve the benefit of the doubt, and refers to Steve as a good guy who may have made a misstep, but you remind yourself that you are on the same team and willing to work with him to right the ship – image how differently that next interaction might unfold. In the development of leadership and character, even for those who are hoping to move quickly, it is worth slowing down and developing a fuller picture of the landscape. Best laid plans are effective only if knowledge inputs are current.

Whether it is in the workplace, the classroom, the court, or on the track, a leader can gain personal insight, change the way they think, and better support people who are trying to do the same by using effective self-talk. Understanding types and tiers is an important step in that process. Further articles should examine the additional types and tiers of self-talk, including but not limited to third-person self-talk, filtering, and catastrophizing. In any case, it begins with awareness. As Felix noted, one ought to be present in the moment, bring awareness to their inner narrative, and gain control over those thoughts. From there, a leader can create opportunities for performance enhancement and develop character that lasts a lifetime.

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