Effective Team Leadership:
A Competitive Advantage

Dr. Stephen J. Gerras and Col Murf Clark

Leading and team leadership are related, but distinct. In today's environment, senior leaders must master both competencies. In what follows, we argue Army leaders need to develop—in more rigorous and deliberate ways—team leadership skills that go beyond the basic leadership competencies. Leaders of highly successful teams embody the leadership traits already familiar to us, but in even greater measures and at more sophisticated levels. Given the need for 21st-century Army leaders versed in full-spectrum operations, we assert that specific team leadership skills can provide competitive advantage for senior field-grade officers. The team leadership model we offer addresses some concepts not currently discussed in professional military education.

A team consists of two or more people who interrelate within defined roles to accomplish a common goal. While writing for military professionals, we intentionally limit discussion to hierarchical teams with an appointed leader. We distinguish a team from a work group, whose members often use additive processes to achieve their goals. In a battalion personnel section, for example, soldiers accomplish their duties (e.g., awards, personnel management, finance), independently. In contrast, a team nearly always uses integrative and interactive processes. A joint and combined strategic planning section in Afghanistan, where everyone's work depends on the other members of the cell, better exemplifies a team.

Why focus on team leadership? Because change and unpredictability color history, and because leadership models developed during the industrial era may not sufficiently address 21st-century needs. A long list chronicles "what's different"--from the challenges of full spectrum operations to advances in technology, from the impact of mass media and communications to less hierarchical organizational protocols. We argue that analytical thinking and decision-making requirements in the future will outpace and overwhelm the capabilities of an individual leader unless he or she knows how to leverage the power and synergy of the collective intellect of a team. In the coming decades, senior field grade officers and their teams will face greater uncertainty and be forced to apply hedging strategies to account for inevitable errors of foresight. Together, they will need to apply a broad range of skills through dialogue and productive debate in order to synthesize ideas and develop creative plans. Unlike their civilian counterparts, military leaders will not often pick their own team members. Team members will usually be assigned to their positions by a highly bureaucratic personnel-management system—the pale cousin of "talent management." This places an additional burden on the military team leader and therefore implies a greater need for team leadership skills.

Today's leaders must cultivate skills that differ in some ways from those of their predecessors. These differences answer the needs of flatter organizations and less submissive team members. 21st-century team leaders must display self-awareness, humility, and selflessness. Selflessness here means more than "not selfish" or altruistic, but also having the ability to see, understand, and accept the opinions of others—to the point of letting them overrule your ideas even when you prefer your own. Team leaders must let their subordinates lead and may need to allow mistakes, even at some personal cost. They must develop communication skills that go beyond clear and directive to rhetorically savvy. They must give reasons, not just orders. Because their teams will include other highly critical thinkers, leaders must consider other perceptions and perspectives, and formulate convincing arguments. The team leader must focus on developing a sense of trust among all members to enable constructive candor, honest feedback, and team resiliency. They must "lead from within" by collaborating as a peer while maintaining some autonomous leader authority.

The above description of team leadership differs significantly from the current norm, but we believe the Army will lose competitive advantage if it does not begin now to adopt a new model. High motivation, a "can-do" culture, strong discipline, and incredibly advanced technologies will only take the Army so far in the coming century. Clearly, many Army leaders already understand the importance of team leadership and practice it on a daily basis. This examination targets leaders who seek a basic foundation in these concepts, and offers enough new information to warrant the attention of experienced team leaders. If you belong in either of those categories, you may find the following model for team leadership helpful.

Team Leadership Model

Organizational theorists offer various models for team leadership; many reflect the underlying notion that teams are complex, dynamic systems that exist in larger systemic contexts of people, cultures, technologies, and structures.[1] Most models invoke the input-processes-output (IPO) model. Figure 1 portrays a model of team leadership we think applies well to military teams.

Though we emphasize the need for leaders to cultivate collaboration and create synergy, our depiction focuses attention on "the task" as a driving force that carries through the model. The task aligns activities in a hierarchical organization such as the Army, whose main competitive advantage is consistent high performance/mission accomplishment. It grounds the model to a practical activity more likely to satisfy a "task-oriented" and mission-focused culture. The model captures this by portraying the task flowing from inputs, through processes, and to outputs. It posits five important inputs that influence team leadership. In addition to the three factors entering from the left as inputs—people (team composition), resources, and task—culture and structure, which circumscribe the team, are also inputs. In the process area, the

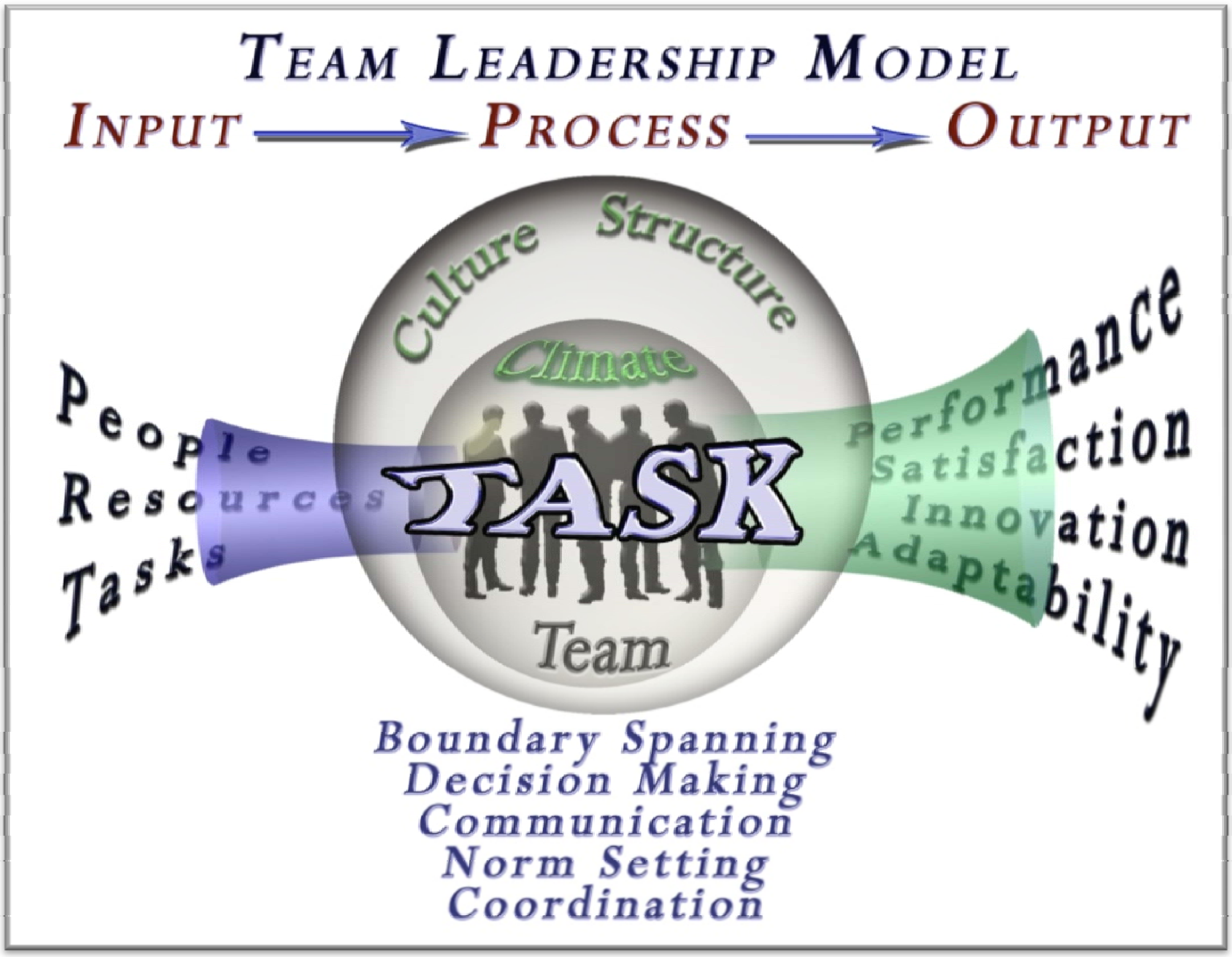

Figure 1. Team Leadership Model

actions of the leader remain central, but additional whole-team factors have a significant impact on process outcomes and team success. They include the level of boundary spanning, the decision-making style of the team, the level and type of communication and coordination, and the team's norms. Finally, in addition to team performance, team member satisfaction and the level of innovation and adaptability of the team are also important and relevant outcomes. To apply the model, leaders must gain a more detailed understanding of each of the factors in this IPO team leadership model.

INPUTS

People—Team Composition

Readers may question why a team leadership article for military professionals would bother to address team composition; most may assume the assignment process provides little

leeway for leaders to select their team members. Two factors undermine this assumption. First, as leaders move up the organizational hierarchy and the team structure and purpose require and allow more flexibility, leaders have more authority to determine and control team membership. A division commander, for example, may leverage greater authority to choose and "hire" team members than a battalion commander. As well, the higher up in the organizational hierarchy a leader serves, the more opportunities he or she may have to create ad hoc teams such as limited-duration task forces or councils of colonels to address pressing short- or long-term issues. Second, by understanding the considerations of team composition, leaders can influence whom they bring onto their team and whom they may attempt to remove. This becomes even more important with ad hoc teams. As leaders think about the composition of their teams they should explicitly address three concerns.

First: team size. In contrast to a prevalent Army cultural assumption that big teams get easier "buy-in" and produce a better product, most researchers argue teams be as small as possible. Leaders need to determine what skills are required and then limit the size of the team to those who have the requisite talents to meet the requirement, regardless of their organizational position.[2] For example, a brigade commander may assign an *assistant* S-3 to a high visibility, commander-led project, and not the brigade S-3. Typically, Army leaders assume if you assign talented people three levels down, you must also include the intermediate members one and two levels down. This practice, though culturally logical, creates inefficiency. Although violating existing protocols, research shows that small, talent-based teams perform better and have a greater chance of producing a first-class product.[3]

Second: diversity matters. In complex environments, teams with more diversity tend to perform better and produce more innovation.[4] Several caveats inform this assertion. First, although most organizations focus on demographic diversity (e.g., race, gender, and nationality) the real focus should be on psychological or cognitive diversity. A team of four white males—if one is conservative, one is liberal, one is linear-thinking, and one is more intuitive—may be more diverse than a racially or otherwise demographically varied team. When considering team membership, leaders should strive for psychological diversity, but also understand that this typically presents additional leadership challenges. A multicultural team in a Joint, Interagency, Intergovernmental, and Multinational (JIIM) environment, while probably providing more innovation and less groupthink, may also encounter more coordination and communication difficulties in an already complex environment.[5] Team leaders must anticipate and compensate for these foreseeable challenges.

Third: other team-member characteristics. Team leaders ignore the research in this area at their own peril. Especially at the strategic level, team leaders must seek members who are strong conceptual thinkers, have empathy for others' perspectives, think at the enterprise level (i.e., they are able to see across stovepipes in the organization), and act with integrity.[6] At any level, the research generally reveals that teams composed of members higher in cognitive

ability, conscientiousness, agreeableness, extraversion, and emotional stability perform better.[7] Finally, to whatever extent possible, team leaders must identify and eliminate derailers. Derailers, by deficiency of personality, mood, and influence, disproportionately weaken the emotional disposition of the team.[8] If leaders must choose between a derailer with overwhelming talent, and a more agreeable person with sufficient talent, they should choose the latter.

Resources

Not surprisingly, even the most motivated soldiers, on the best teams, with the clearest tasks, will still struggle if they have no money, facilities, or time. A philosophy of "doing more with less" quickly leads to a logical limit. Team leaders need to advocate for resources. As expected, research shows teams able to acquire organizational resources perform better than those in resource-poor environments.[9] Additionally, if organizations ask teams to tackle difficult assignments, only commensurate rewards may ensure team motivation on future projects. Organizations should reward teams as a whole with recognition, future resources, money, or opportunities for other desirable work.

Tasks

The task is the foundation for all team activities. The specified task dictates the suitability of all inputs; it acts as the central driver of the process, and defines key effectiveness criteria of the outputs. Teams may receive tasks or generate their own. Proactive team leaders scan the environment for relevant tasks their organization might overlook. They must also understand their obligation as gatekeeper for the team's tasks. This role takes on special importance in an Army whose culture encourages the acceptance of almost any mission with a "can-do" attitude. Finally, leaders must prioritize tasks and allocate resources in a deliberate manner. Anyone who has performed a "high priority" task without "high-priority" resources knows the negative effect of such misalignment.

Culture

The organization's culture circumscribes all the team's processes and, most importantly, its underlying decision-making logic. One prominent theorist defines "culture" as the shared pattern of underlying assumptions that drives how organization members think, feel, and act.[10] Team leaders should carefully assess the culture and weigh any proposed initiatives or decisions against the likely cultural response. Power distance and performance orientation most likely top the list of factors that drive Army culture.[11] The concept of power distance helps explain the hierarchical expectations in the Army. Unlike Google, for example, it would be countercultural and risky for a team leader to show up on his first day and say, "Okay, I know I'm a colonel, but I want everyone to call me Harry." Although we argue successful team

leaders need to empower their subordinates, they cannot disregard cultural norms. Performance orientation closely relates to the Army's "can-do" attitude. Again, we believe team leaders need to collate all the knowledge within the team to inform decision making. However, leaders should also balance the cultural expectation for rapid decision making (i.e., performance orientation expectations) against the time it may take to gather additional information or perspectives. Finally, leaders must remember culture typically takes many years to change. Team leaders should usually adapt to existing culture, rather than try to change it.

Structure

Like culture, the structure of the organization and the team constitutes both an input and a permanent factor that influences team processes. While leaders must accept responsibility for understanding how the organization's larger structure influences group processes, they must simultaneously bear the responsibility to ensure their team's structure enables success. Most leaders lack the authority to reorganize the broader organization. Unfortunately, this fact often encourages a social construction of reality (as opposed to an objective assessment of reality) whereby team leaders incorrectly assume they also may not change their smaller team's structure. Organizational constructs, such as Officer Efficiency Report (OER) relationships and hierarchical office-space arrangements may reinforce this misconception. Adaptable team leaders in the 21st-century will not hesitate to change both the lines of authority in their teams' structures and the strength of these reporting relationships. In the Information Age, logic demands a reconsideration of team structures designed to address Industrial-Age problems. Virtual and ad hoc teams further amplify this new reality. Ultimately, the team leader should foster productive team interaction leading to task completion. Quickly reorganizing team structures to fit specific tasks requires imaginative leaders and flexible team members. The most successful leaders will develop the ability to envision alternative structures and mold the right members into a cohesive team.

PROCESSES

A National Football League (NFL) team recently fired its head coach ten games into the season and replaced him with their top-ranking assistant coach. The team, which had lost most of its games to that point, turned its season around and won many of the remaining six games. What explains the improvement? The players remained the same. The rules of the game did not change. The owners did not build a new stadium or pay the players more money. The team ran basically the same offensive and same defensive schemes. Most would agree that new leadership drove the improvement. In terms of our team leadership framework, the new leader shaped the predetermined inputs by creating and implementing processes that led to the desired outputs. This anecdote isolates a single variable to reveal team leadership as the most crucial component of success.

How do leaders do this? Credible research supports the conclusion that effective leaders excel at both task-focused behaviors and people-focused behaviors.[12] In addition to mastering these behaviors, leaders and their team members scan outside team and organizational boundaries for signs of change that may influence the team. They understand the importance of their decision-making style on team outcomes and ensure the coordination efforts and communication patterns of the team align with the task requirements. Further, effective team leaders and team members understand the importance of team norms and know how to influence them. They maintain self-awareness and remain cognizant of the harmful effects of toxic behaviors. Finally, successful team leaders in the 21st century acquire a comprehensive understanding of power and appreciate how the exercise of power and influence affects many internal team dynamics.

Students of team leadership should keep in mind that the relationship between any group process and team effectiveness may vary with the nature of the task.[13] For example, we might associate a flexible team communication pattern with high-performing teams, but only when the task is uncertain. In terms of team processes, the literature clearly concurs on several points. First, leaders need to intentionally socialize new members into the team with deliberate on-boarding rituals. All members need to inculcate team norms, communication modes, and coordination expectations. Second, though not specifically listed as a variable in the framework, team cohesion is a desired team characteristic. Research shows that highly cohesive teams will persist on difficult tasks long after less cohesive teams relent.[14]

A Discussion of Power

For our purposes, "power" simply means the ability to influence others. As mentioned in the discussion of culture, the Army has a high power-distance culture. Additionally, in the Army, team members know almost immediately who wields the most formal power; visible rank and organizational hierarchies leave little doubt in anyone's mind. Organizational theory considers two broad categories of power: position power and personal power. Position power may derive from one or more of three bases: rewards, coercion, and legitimacy. Personal power has two bases: expert and referent power.[15] Reward power is the power accrued because of the ability to influence someone by providing things he or she desires, such as a glowing efficiency report or a preferred assignment. Coercive power usually involves negative reinforcement whereby the leader compels action or compliance by threatening an undesirable outcome for the subordinate. A subordinate altering behavior to prevent a poor efficiency report, adverse judicial action, or even a simple butt-chewing exemplifies the result of coercive power. Legitimate power springs from one's role or position. Often, subordinates will follow a team leader simply because the formal structure of the organization has placed them in that relationship. In most organizations, especially in the military, members default to this norm. People respond to expert power, which clearly relates to task competence, because they trust

experts to do and say the right things. Referent power accrues to some people because others admire them, identify with them, or even see them as role models.

Senior-level team leaders should understand the bases of power they can effectively use, and more importantly, understand the likely outcomes. Team members usually acquiesce to a leader's use of position power. Though acquiescence may appear identical to willing compliance, the overuse of position power on a near-peer team may occasionally lead to resistance. Regardless the outcome, the continued reliance on position power will not likely produce sustained high performance levels. Unlike position power, the use of personal power often results in identification or internalization—the arguably more desired outcome. For instance, a brigade commander, by virtue of his position, clearly has legitimate, reward, and coercive power over a battalion commander; hopefully, he also has expert and referent power.

In contrast, an American colonel leading a NATO team will have much less position power and must rely on expert and referent power to effectively influence a team of foreign near-peers. An Army colonel serving on the Joint Staff at the Pentagon, for instance, will have a power base much more akin to the NATO colonel than the brigade commander, especially with civilian GS-15-level subordinates. In essence, senior field grade team leaders are much more likely to find themselves leading teams in which personal power is more effective than position power. This assertion implies that team leaders need verifiable expertise and credibility. Even more importantly, they must cultivate genuine relationships that engender empathy in team members. Leaders who effectively build productive relationships can address any problem. Leaders who fail to build relationships should expect all tasks to be more difficult, if not impossible. A poor understanding and application of power at this level will likely lead to undesirable outcomes.

Task-Focused Behaviors

As mentioned earlier, research on teams reveals that successful team leaders typically focus on two types of behavior: task-focused and people-focused. Task-focused behaviors include goal setting, work apportionment, process structuring, adapting to changes, standard setting, information seeking, and feedback. Empirical studies routinely demonstrate that task-focused behaviors directly relate to team effectiveness.[16] Of all task-focused leader behaviors, goal setting is arguably the most important and most effective. Specific and ambitious goals lead to higher performance than goals that implore people simply to do their best.[17] Team leaders at the senior level must articulate goals that are consequential, challenging, and clear.[18] Teams that routinely achieve excellence begin with clear objectives and expectations, receive timely and candid feedback, and garner recognition for goal accomplishment. The "can-do" American Army considers task accomplishment a sine qua non for effective team leadership. Additionally, to be most effective in complex environments, senior field grade officers must

exercise task-focused behavior with an emphasis on personal power as opposed to position power.

Task-focused leader behavior requires a concomitant ability to know when to monitor a situation and when to take action. History offers countless examples of generals and CEOs who waited too long to remove someone for poor performance, thus failing to prevent negative long-term and/or unintended consequences for their organizations. Usually, high-performing teams have high-performing individual members, and most teams cannot continue to perform at high levels when one or more members fail to match the high individual performance of the rest. Leaders should work hard to overcome the common tendency to carry poor performers as this almost always erodes the performance of the team.

People-Focused Behaviors

In addition to sorting through how best to accomplish tasks, effective team leaders exercise people-focused behaviors. These include developing a positive climate, facilitating team member participation in the group, harmonizing interpersonal problems, setting standards of behavior, and being friendly and supportive. Military readers may be surprised to learn that some studies show people-focused behaviors have twice the effect on team performance as task-focused behaviors.[19] This does not mean that team leaders should focus all their energy on climate and cohesion at the expense of task-focused behaviors, but it probably implies that a task-oriented team will be more productive if the leader properly manages climate[20] concerns and sets conditions that enable healthy relationships among team members. Additionally, teams with leaders who participate in the group generate more problem solutions than directive leaders who remain aloof.[21]

Leadership studies rarely discuss the management of egos, though this skill often becomes important to team leadership at higher levels. Ironically, ego itself may lead to denial that such a skill would be necessary; their egos may not allow leaders to admit that egos get in the way of team performance. Consider this example. Unlike the battalion commander who leads company commanders ten years junior in age and rank, senior team leaders typically lead near peers who already have highly successful careers. They may even achieve leadership positions that place them in charge of team members older than them or who are more accomplished or more experienced in some areas. Almost inevitably, senior military officers find themselves leading experts in the diverse concerns of national security. Even for a brigade commander, team leadership involves a great deal of ego management. The effects increase at each higher level. Much like Eisenhower when leading Patton, Bradley, and Clark—not to mention Montgomery and other British officers—senior leaders need to remain constantly cognizant of the bases of power they choose to use. In each instance, with each talented subordinate, leaders must consider perceptions of equity that may arise from their decisions. As leaders progress to higher levels, people-focused behaviors become much more complex

than simply saying "good morning" and "thank you." They involve a complex skill set requiring high emotional and social intelligence along with a high degree of humility. The ability to balance the opposing traits of humility and self-confidence—though possibly the most difficult skill required of senior leaders—may determine success or failure.[22]

In addition to managing egos, team leaders must manage the composition of in-groups. Like all human beings, leaders naturally prefer to work with a specific subset of their subordinates while tending to avoid others. If indulged in even the least visible way, this inclination leads to a perception of "in-groups" and "out-groups." The large body of literature addressing this topic exceeds the scope of this paper,[23] but we may summarize: effective leaders should work hard to bring as many subordinates as possible into their in-group.

At the negative extreme of people-focused behaviors we find toxic leadership. Toxic leaders typically display abusive, authoritarian, narcissistic, and self-promoting behaviors. In a Center for Army Leadership Annual Survey, 84% of Army leaders reported having worked for a toxic leader at some point in their careers.[24] Interestingly, in a study of toxic leaders in the military, researchers found that the leader quality most closely associated with poor team outcomes was unpredictability.[25] Apparently, military subordinates will tolerate a self-promoting jerk as long as they can rely on consistent behavior.[26] However, when the leader is a jerk on Monday and supportive on Tuesday, subordinates become dissatisfied and eventually desire to leave the unit and military.

In summary, successful team leaders expertly perform both task- and people-focused behaviors. Empirical studies have shown that goal-oriented teams, with high standards of excellence and leaders who also attend to the climate and interpersonal needs of team members, perform at higher levels. As our team leadership model portrays, however, there are other components and considerations in the Process portion of the model. Although some of these considerations clearly overlap with task- and people-focused behaviors, we feel they are important enough in terms of predicting the performance of teams to warrant separate discussion. Also, unlike task- and people-focused behaviors, which are leader-centric, these are strongly dependent on subordinate involvement and interaction.

Boundary Spanning

Many team leaders serve in other roles as members of teams at the next higher echelon. Most prefer to spend their time with "their team," but at the levels where most senior field grade officers serve, they should dedicate more time to boundary spanning. Boundary spanning involves collaborating with others outside the team, scanning the environment, and negotiating resources for the team.[27] These activities often define the difference between the lower field grade ranks and senior leadership—literally between being a major and being a colonel. Senior team leaders are the nexus between the demands of the external environment

and the internal workings of the team. Senior team leadership emphasizes linking teams across boundaries to their broader environment. Thus, leaders not only manage the vast quantity of outside information relevant to the team, they also interpret and define this outside environment for team members. Studies have found boundary spanning behaviors explain large amounts of variance in perceived team effectiveness—explaining 24% of the respective variance.[28] Beyond acting as boundary spanners, leaders need to create a team climate that encourages all team members to interact appropriately with the outside environment.

Regardless of their natural inclinations, senior leaders must accept the need to network. Though we often assume leadership—not to mention networking—requires an extroverted personality, many successful military leaders are introverts. The boundary spanning requirement for senior leader teams dictates that introverted military leaders stretch their personal limits to develop a wide-range of relationships with potential stakeholders for the team and the organization. By doing so, these leaders will increase their access to information, gather valuable resources, and better insulate the team from undesired demands. These outside interactions highlight the importance of mastering personal power-related competencies. Networking rarely requires exercising legitimate, reward, or coercive power. It hinges on the leader's credibility as an expert in the team's core competency and his or her ability to develop constructive relationships beyond the boundary of the team (i.e., referent power). The effective team leader understands that the personal relationships he or she builds today often become a key resource for problem solving tomorrow.

Decision Making

Senior team leaders must involve their subordinates in the decision-making process as much as possible. Additionally, they need to empower those beneath them to make decisions their expertise and organizational authority allow. Leaders must also balance the benefits of developing subordinate "buy-in" and access to more information against time available. In the Information Age in which "analysis paralysis" occasionally grips all of us, timely decision making demands that leaders decide when to *quit* gathering and analyzing data and when to *stop* taking inputs from the team. This function requires more art than science. At a minimum, senior team leaders need to recognize that decision making at the strategic level differs from the tactical level. Decision quality also suffers when a leader defaults to position power. Though position power usually evokes compliance from subordinates, it may also stifle their willingness to offer candid opinions during the decision-making process. Leaders should establish a team climate that encourages maximum candor, regardless of the potential for disagreement.

This potential for disagreement—or even conflict—deserves further comment. Often senior leaders prefer harmony to the conflict that may result from in-depth discussion that considers a broad range of options. With large egos and big rice bowls at stake, leaders too often make decisions that least threaten egos or allocated resources. Actually, team leaders

need to foster a climate in which members openly acknowledge and discuss their disagreements about team strategies and goals. Cognitive conflict results from judgmental differences about how best to achieve common objectives; it places ideas—but not people—in opposition. This type of conflict improves team decision quality because it allows multiple perspectives while not degrading team processes. In contrast, affective conflict tends to illicit emotional responses and may highlight personal incompatibilities or disputes. It therefore inhibits decision consensus, reduces decision quality, and makes the team less effective. Thus, for leaders to improve the effectiveness of their teams, they need to optimize the climate to encourage cognitive conflict while precluding affective conflict.[29]

Communication

Not surprisingly, high-performing teams communicate effectively. Their exchanges—both written and spoken—are concise and clear. Team leaders must go beyond their Leader Books (notebooks containing items for meetings) to communicate effectively about complex topics. Inspiring and motivating high-level teams demand sophisticated and compelling communication. Unlike work groups that depend less on intra-team communication, teams depend on clear and complete information, accurately described surface observations about the external environment, and a common understanding of goals, processes, and norms. Team leaders must create a climate of psychological safety for all team members. Psychological safety exists when all team members believe interpersonal risk taking has low stakes.[30] Psychological safety is a prerequisite of trust, a critical component for a high performing team in a complex environment. Team members who trust each other assume only good intentions on the part of their peers, thus allowing all to let down their guards and open up. This openness eventually reveals multiple, and sometimes controversial, proposed solutions to the teams' difficult challenges. Members on teams without trust sometimes hold or hide information that would benefit the team, even when withholding the information might cost them something. Without trust, healthy risk taking becomes much less likely.

Team leaders must closely monitor the extent of information sharing among team members and also explicitly gauge how well team members understand organizational and team objectives and strategies. Often, team leaders assume once they have communicated the organization's and team's purposes, team members understand the underlying logic. Leaders forget their team members did not attend the meetings during which accompanying rationale came to light or became common knowledge. Therefore, leaders must also recount the dialogue and logic from which these strategies sprang. Given this additional background information, the team has a much better chance of achieving vertical and horizontal alignment with the rest of the organization.

Norm Setting

You have just received orders to lead a six-month, joint service task force in the Pentagon. "Norm setting" may be the last thing on your mind; perhaps it should be the first. More than anything else, norms influence member behaviors. Norms define appropriate and inappropriate behaviors for the team.[31] They tend to form in three ways; they are imported, evolve gradually, or are deliberately created. Effective team leaders recognize that once established, norms persist. Therefore, savvy leaders determine how to get the most productive norms accepted from the outset. Simultaneous with norm setting, leaders should deliberately enact people-focused leader behaviors to build the cohesion that serves as the principal mechanism of norm enforcement. Norms strongly influence the collective efficacy and effort level of team members. Once established, norms are enforced by the members themselves; they will confront nonconforming peers when their behavior deviates from expectations. Finally, strong norms help limit the negative effects of social loafing. "Social loafing" describes a group phenomenon in which individual effort decreases with group size. A cohesive team with strong norms deters social loafing by creating a high performance expectation from all team members.

Coordination

How well team members coordinate their activities largely determines their effectiveness.[32] Team leaders should help develop the interaction patterns among team members that will lead to success. Leaders must consciously analyze the processes team members use to acquire and exchange information, which members get specific assignments, the pace of task completion, and the establishment and monitoring of performance standards. A key ingredient in team coordination is shared mental models. Team members consciously or unconsciously develop mental models from the beliefs, thoughts, and verbal descriptions they experience. These models then guide subsequent thoughts and actions.[33] Well-coordinated teams share mental models about team purposes, their connections to each other, roles, and behavior patterns. These team-based mental models form a fundamental requisite for effective coordination. They develop over time, but team leaders may shape certain elements—roles and interaction patterns—of such models toward more efficient team coordination.[34] Many Army officers have been part of an effective battle staff. When the staff received a tasking, each officer knew his or her role, the expected performance standards and timelines, and all coordination requirements. This type of effectiveness springs from shared mental models. They know what the boss expects and how to work together. As team composition and tasks get increasingly vague and complex, the leader must deliberately act to ensure the development of these shared mental models.

Failure to develop shared mental models can lead to uncoordinated—and thus inefficient or unproductive—efforts. Uncoordinated team members expend their energies in

different directions, or fail to synchronize their work on time-critical tasks.[35] At worst, duplication of tasks or even counterproductive efforts result, and some sub-processes may go completely undone.

OUTPUTS

At the end of the day, the Army's culture evaluates performance based on the successful accomplishment of specified and implied tasks. Team leaders accept and shape the inputs to their teams, including people, resources, and culture, then enact team-leader processes to produce desired outputs. As the model portrays, these outputs include task performance, member satisfaction, innovation, and adaptability. Of these four, most would pick task performance as most important. However, failure to value member satisfaction as an important team output can lead to decreased motivation and, more importantly–as the Army experienced in the late 1990s—significant attrition of talent. Finally, adaptability and innovation have become increasingly important outputs for the Army. The dynamic conditions of the contemporary operating environment mandate an adaptive and innovative force. Adaptability and innovation stem from selecting the right people for a team, giving them the leadership to develop norms that encourage prudent risk taking and creativity, and rewarding these specific behaviors. Innovative solutions, that embed adaptable capabilities for the changing security environment, increase competitive advantage.

Correspondingly, team leaders must develop metrics to determine how well their teams perform tasks or achieve other outputs. Typically, how quickly, efficiently, and effectively a team achieves a desired outcome indicates team performance. The challenge for team leaders in determining *what* to measure resides in meeting each of the two basic requirements for an effective metric. First, some characteristic of the relevant outcome or incremental progress toward task completion must be subject to accurate and objective measurement. Second, that chosen characteristic or increment must relate directly to successful achievement of the final outcome. Useful or meaningful metrics provide critical feedback to signal adjustments to both the inputs and processes. The leader embodies one critical link in the feedback mechanism, but the Input-Process-Output model makes clear that the leader may not or cannot control all the means to achieve desired outputs. The organization may provide weak team members, the strength of its culture might overwhelm the team leader's attempts to re-orient the team's objectives, or the entrenched norms of an established team may impede the efforts of a newly assigned leader to propel change.

CONCLUSION

This model of team inputs, processes, and outputs illustrates many important concepts and relationships senior field grade officers must understand to lead effective teams in the 21st-century operating environment. These principles apply to non-virtual teams; questions remain in determining how best to adjust this model to accommodate virtual teams. For example,

absent the face-to-face rituals of traditional teams, will virtual substitutes allow the same level of bonding so critical to the speed and accuracy of team interaction? The cumulative evidence to date suggests virtual teams are both slower and less accurate than successful face-to-face teams.[36] However, the latest technology, including unified-communications that combine high-definition, high-fidelity voice, video, and data in real time holds the promise that many of the same leadership principles may transfer to virtual teaming. This and similar questions beg further observation and experimentation to develop more effective virtual substitutes or to determine how virtual teams might compensate for these whatever disadvantages remain. In the meantime, we offer this incomplete prescription for leading from within to gain competitive advantage.

---

[1] Daniel R. Ilgen, John R. Hollenbeck, Michael Johnson, and Dustin Jundt, "Teams in Organizations: From Input-Process-Output Models to IMOI Models," *Annual Review of Psychology* 56 (2005):519.

[2] Paul S. Goodman and Associates, *Designing Effective Work Groups* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1986), 83.

[3] Ibid, 83.

[4] Ibid, 15.

[5] Eduardo Salas, Gerald F. Goodwin, and C. Shawn Burke, *Team Effectiveness in Complex Organizations* (New York: Psychology Press, 2009), 233.

[6] Ruth Wageman, Debra A. Nunes, James A. Burruss, and J. Richard Hackman, *Senior Leadership Teams* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 2008), 84.

[7] Murray R. Barrick, Greg L. Stewart, Mitchell J. Neubert, and Michael K. Mount, "Relating Member Ability and Personality to Work-Team Processes and Team Effectiveness," *Journal of Applied Psychology* 83 (1998):377.

[8] Stephen J. Zaccaro, Andrea L. Rittman, and Michelle A. Marks, "Team Leadership," *The Leadership Quarterly* 12 (2001): 473

[9] Goodman, 54.

[10] Edgar H. Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2004), 17.

[11] Stephen J. Gerras, Leonard Wong, Charles D. Allen, "Organizational Culture: Applying a Hybrid Model to the U.S. Army," *USAWC Strategic Leadership Selected Readings* (2009), 226.

[12] C. Shawn Burke et al., "What type of leadership behaviors are functional in teams? A meta-analysis," *The Leadership Quarterly* 17 (2006): 291.

[13] Deborah L. Gladstein, "Groups in Context: A Model of Task Group Effectiveness," *Administrative Science Quarterly* 29 (1984): 501.

[14] Zaccaro, 466.

[15] John R.P. French and Bertram Raven, "The Bases of Social Power," in Group Dynamics: Research and Theory, ed. Dorwin Cartwright and Alvin Zander, 3rd Edition (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), 259-269.

[16] Burke, 297.

[17] See Edwin A. Locke and Gary P. Latham, *A Theory of Goal Setting and Task Performance* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1990).

[18] Wageman 59.

[19] Burke, 299.

[20] The importance of climate to team leadership drove our decision to include it in the depiction of the model, but a thorough discussion is beyond the scope of this paper.

[21] Zaccaro, 464.

[22] Ulmer, W.F., et al., *Leadership Lessons at Division Command Level—2004* (Carlisle Barracks: U.S. Army War College, 2004).

[23] See Peter G. Northouse, "Leader-Member Exchange Theory," in *Leadership: Theory and Practice* (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2004), 147-167.

[24] Center for Army Leadership, Special Report 2010-1, CAL Annual Survey of Army Leadership: Army Leaders' Perceptions of Army Leaders and Army Leadership Practices (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Center for Army Leadership, August 2010).

[25] Andrew A.Schmidt, "Development and Validation of the Toxic Leadership Scale" (Master's Thesis, University of Maryland, 2008).

[26] Readers may question the use of the term "jerk" in an academic article. Consider the appropriateness of one of its definitions: "an unlikable person; *especially* one who is cruel, rude, or small-minded." Few terms more accurately describe a toxic leader.

[27] Burke, 292.

[28] Ibid, 300.

[29] Zaccaro,472.

[30] Amy C. Edmondson, "Psychological Safety and Learning Behavior in Work Teams," Administration Science Quarterly 44 (1999): 354.

[31] Goodman, 195.

[32] Zaccaro, 473.

[33] Ibid, 459.

[34] Ibid,476.

[35] Frank J. Landy and Jeffrey M. Conte, "Teams in Organizations," in *Work in the 21st Century*, 2nd Ed. (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2007),556.

[36] See Boris B. Baltes et al., "Computer-Mediated Communication and Group Decision Making: A Meta-Analysis," *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes* 87, Issue 1 (January 2002): 156-179.