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Oft Forgotten Leadership Fundamentals

William R. Farrell

Avital function of the military leader is to influence the behavior of his subordinates in ways that will impel them to successfully complete the “mission.” Through experience, the effective leader acquires the necessary skills to fashion a unit into a cohesive organization intent on fulfilling the stated goals. This task becomes significantly more difficult when the organization is large and complex, perhaps encompassing a membership of differing social strata, economic levels, and professional qualifications. Socialization, in this case, demands significant time and effort and should be of utmost concern to the leader who will need to correctly understand the motives and behaviors of workers within the organization, as well as individuals in the external environment who can impact on the organization. In large organizations this is an extremely difficult task because the resources available for gathering enough data to make such judgments are limited; therefore, leaders tend to fit incoming information into existing perceptions, which simplifies the processing of such data and accelerates the decisionmaking process. Unfortunately, these perceptions are often incorrect, and sensitivity to this can be an important asset for the military executive.

The intentions and actions of the leadership, as perceived by the organization members, are very important. If the expectations of the members are not fulfilled, morale and performance deteriorate, and the mission is obstructed. While in some instances formal authority and coercive power may be useful tools to correct a deteriorating situation, the military executive will do well to determine first if the fault perhaps lies with leadership for:

- not having clearly communicated the organizational goals;
 - having nurtured the perception that effort equates with performance;
- and/or
- having fostered the expectation for rewards that cannot be delivered.

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The successful leader keeps in mind the importance of *socialization*, *perceptions*, and *expectations* in his administration of a complex organization. These three concepts, often taken for granted, can have a significant impact on goal achievement.

Socialization

Edgar H. Schein, a noted professor at the Sloan School of Management at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, has written extensively on the role of socialization in successful organizations. The following paragraphs deal with some of his thoughts that are applicable to a military environment.¹

Fundamentally, socialization is the process whereby a new member learns the value system and norms of an organization. Such learning generally centers on: basic goals, preferred means to achieve these goals, member responsibilities, behavior patterns for effective performance, and means to maintain the integrity of the organization. Both military officers and enlisted men are confronted with a dramatic socialization process upon entering basic training or officer indoctrination schools. These programs serve as mechanisms for replacing an individual's former values with those determined to be essential to the organization. The shaving of heads, issuing of common uniforms, and the assigning of numbers dramatically enforce an abrupt change, resulting in loss of the prior self to a new image that fits the mold of the organization. Training is successfully accomplished when the new member conforms to the new norms.

When the socialization process is complete, members will begin to identify themselves with the organization. Graduates of Marine Corps training programs are no longer Smith or Jones, but Marines who happen to have surnames. The bond endures for those who shared this common experience and continue to communicate through the years. Graduates of military academies often refer to themselves by their class date, revealing the importance of their shared socialization experience.

The success of a socialization process is not solely dependent on the organization. The motivation of those seeking membership must be factored in. If the desire to join is strong enough, individuals will tolerate a great deal of discomfort to gain acceptance. Entrants into fraternities and similar clubs will tolerate considerable abuse if approval by the group is important enough to them. Others will suffer harassment to prove themselves worthy of acceptance. Entrance into the Nuclear Navy, under the "watchful eye" of Admiral Rickover, illustrates a modern military example. Those who fail to see the relevance of such tactics, however, drop out fairly soon.

The need to continue socialization beyond the initial phase is essential. There are legal penalties for not fulfilling one's commitment to the military, but there are also efforts to give new members incentives to remain in the

organization—educational funding is a good example. The longer you stay the more you receive. Promotions often coincide with the completion of an enlistment term. A recent promotion incurs the attendant “moral” obligation to reenlist. The timing associated with financial rewards for civilians is another example. If the reward occurs just prior to an opportunity to leave, the individual may feel guilty about leaving his “benefactor.”

Socialization continues as individuals receive information from the organization regarding goals and how they are to be achieved. This promulgation of information is, however, only a beginning. More often than not, true socialization takes place as members watch how others behave, be they peers or leaders.

Peer pressure can be extensive and possibly beyond the control of the leadership. A new ensign or lieutenant will observe the behavior of other junior officers. If temporary duty expenses are padded by a traveling group, “since the government does not pay enough,” pressure on the new individual to do the same will be quite strong. If regulations forbid using Government vehicles for personal reasons, and yet “everybody does it,” then the new member will probably do it too. If the duty day begins at 0730 but the new individual notices everyone drinking coffee and talking until 0800, he will more than likely adopt that behavior.

The socialization process is also significantly influenced by the leader’s behavior. His instructions and policy letters may be read and understood by all in the organization (under the best of circumstances), but if his behavior implies otherwise, then the example implicit in his behavior will be the prevailing socialization factor. If a leader preaches flight safety to a flying organization at commander’s call, yet tells exciting stories to junior officers at happy hour about how he always “tested the envelope or stretched the rules,” it should not surprise him when the pilots do the same. If he stresses the importance of family life, yet works 12 hours a day, 7 days a week, then he should be prepared for the organization to follow his lead. For a superior to expect effective socialization, his behavior must be consistent with the stated goals. Letters and memos simply are not sufficient.

Considerable time may be required for meeting and talking with various elements of the organization. Key individuals should be identified and frequently consulted. Steps should be taken to insure that each member feels he is a part of the organization. Perhaps broad goals (identifying all segments with the organization) need to be stressed to promote cohesiveness. The importance of national security, the value of their uniformed service and specific unity, readiness, best use of resources, and personal integrity are examples of unifying images.

Recognition should be given when the socialization process is attained. This might be in the form of a promotion, a title, an award, or simply an invitation to sit in on an important decisionmaking session. Such signals,

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read by the entire organization, will be interpreted as behavior rewarded, and the members will respond accordingly.

Determining just when socialization has been achieved is often a judgment call by the organization's leadership. To assist in making this decision, Professor Schein suggests that one needs to recognize the difference between the degree of socialization that occurs in the acceptance by group members of both *pivotal* norms and *relevant* norms.

Pivotal norms are fundamental to the success of an organization. They require an acceptance of the organizational roles, missions, and goals; respect for the chain of command; adherence to the Uniform Code of Military Justice; and similar basic values that are part and parcel of the defense establishment.

Relevant norms are not as necessary for membership itself, but are desirable for those seeking full acceptance and advancement within the organization. A relevant norm might center on one's participation in social or unit sporting events; the role an individual's spouse might play; participation in fund-raising activities; willingness to come to work early and stay until the boss leaves; participation in community affairs; and other relevant behavior which is commonly associated with the ambition to succeed in an organization. Leaders need to distinguish between pivotal and relevant, recognize which are most important for the success of the organization, and then foster the new membership with these values. Evaluation should center on these key values and norms in lieu of surrogate activities such as regular attendance at organization happy hours, playing golf or tennis with the boss, etc.

As an organization seeks to induce its membership to accept its value system, it is not unusual to find some members rejecting all efforts. Labeled "rebels," they often are fired or eventually resign. Unfortunately, some remain, and the leadership needs to identify such people, provide them with counseling, document their behavior, and build a case for dismissal should poor performance result in spite of efforts to help them adjust.

There are individuals within an organization who will conform to all values, pivotal and relevant. While this can be viewed as desirable in some circumstances, such as combat when individual creativity could be detrimental to the rest of the unit, there are other times when conformity can be quite costly. If all members of a leader's staff view the world similarly, they offer little originality or critical judgment. Mind-sets that induce a certain behavior without question because "that is the way it is done" or that impose adherence to rules that may no longer be valid can lead to disaster if agencies fail to examine changes in the environment or the foundations for their judgments. This behavior, sometimes referred to as "groupthink," may afford a very comfortable environment, but military leaders should be wary of this contentment and recognize its potential costs. Further, in joint

environments, where members of several military services and civilians may be working together, it behooves the leader to be sensitive to the established value systems of each group. There may well be subtle distinctions between pivotal and relevant norms within each organization. Failure to comprehend this will make a difficult job even more so.

Between both extremes lies a category termed, "creative individualism." This represents an ideal middle ground where all the pivotal norms are adopted, but relevant norms, while acknowledged, are not slavishly adhered to, thus, allowing room for creativity and individualism. As one advances and becomes more closely identified with the core of the organization, this individualism becomes more difficult to demonstrate. A leader will do well to recognize this phenomenon and encourage ascending members to express their thoughts and views. Granted, socialization exerts a strong force on all individuals within the organization, but like other similar organizational forces, it should be recognized and dealt with effectively.

As previously mentioned, the leader's task is to insure the ongoing progression of the organization toward the achievement of its goals. Coupled with the organizational goals are subunit and individual goals, all of which must be managed simultaneously. Ideally, the leadership tries to attain congruence between them. Although total congruence is rarely achieved, a sound socialization process will help to insure a sufficient melding of all three in the effort to fulfill the mission.²

Perceptions

It is essential to understand the perceptual forces that are operating in order to use the socialization process for building and maintaining an effective organization. Individual views and reactions to an organization are influenced by personal belief systems. The extent to which members are willing to be socialized is often determined by how they view the leadership and the nature of the organization. The hierarchy and subordinates frequently differ in their judgments of how to manage a particular situation. Recognition of these dissimilar perceptions is an essential component for achieving sound communication between the various echelons of an organization. This also assures proper motivation for reaching the goals that organization members view as a combination of their own and those of the larger social unit.

The perceptual process,³ the means by which people gather data and form ideas about the world around them, can be used to harmonize one's inner thoughts with the working environment. Because the gathering and digesting of information is inhibited by time constraints, perceptions are used to help sort incoming data into existing frames of reference, e.g., we may

see an individual who is well-dressed and groomed and ascribe additional characteristics to him or her. We may assume that person to be intelligent, honest, thoughtful, etc. An unshaven and shabbily dressed individual sitting on a park bench may be viewed as lazy, shiftless, untrustworthy, etc.—and all of this is interpreted with minimal factual information. Our value system, based upon our experiences in life, is the foundation for rapid categorization of facts and decisions. A University of Minnesota study disclosed⁴ that people readily make judgments about other people simply from the sound of their voices. Gathered data indicated that males form extensive evaluations of women based upon the sound of their voices over the telephone. Without meeting them, and after only a brief conversation, men rated women with pleasant voices as interesting, sociable, enthusiastic, poised, and confident.

The perceptual process encourages us to view things the way we want to and not necessarily the way they are. We often refuse to accept new information that contradicts our long-standing beliefs. The Japanese surprise attack on the United States during World War II may have convinced many Americans that the Japanese could not be trusted—a supposition reinforced by wartime propaganda. Today, many of those Americans may continue to distrust the Japanese, perceiving ulterior motives in the behavior of their government and business officials.

In large national security organizations, one occasionally will encounter military members who “know” that civilians never carry their share of the load. Civilians, who have worked long years for the Government, “know” that military members come to an organization, stir things up, and seek short-term gains that reflect credit on themselves and then leave with little or no concern for the long-term health of the organization. Elements of both also “know” that certain races or genders would never have gotten as far as they did without excessively favorable treatment under equal opportunity laws.

Common perceptual inhibitors to expect are:⁵

First Impressions: Carrying our first impression of an individual into subsequent interactions allows us to make only one major judgment, which thereby permits us to avoid repeating the discrimination process, despite evidence of the need to reassess.

Temporal Extension: A momentarily observed characteristic of someone, which becomes fixed, thereby dictating that all future observations conform to the beliefs that are associated with the observer’s original perception, e.g., a subordinate who is observed being kindly toward a coworker is assumed to be a nice person. Often, in large organizations, subordinates develop mental snapshots of the leader who is seen only briefly, and from these encounters they extract large amounts of information about the “boss.” This information can travel about the organization very quickly, insuring that all “know” what the boss is really like.

Locus of Cause: This concerns the tendency to view the motivation for an action as originating either with the person or the circumstance. One tends to blame environmental factors when one does badly. I did poorly during the inspection because the inspector was unfair. I had too many other things to do at the same time, and my equipment was old and worthless. I received an outstanding rating because I worked hard, planned accordingly, and impressed the inspector with my knowledge. If the Soviets want to cut an arms deal, they must be after something. If the United States wants an arms deal, it is because we are peace-loving people at heart.

Halo Effect: This is the tendency to overrate, without concrete evidence, the characteristics of individuals. This was previously illustrated by the conclusions drawn by men talking with women over the telephone. One might also attribute certain characteristics to an individual who was a great "wing man" in a small flying unit. The inaccurate assumption is that if he was good in one environment he will naturally be good in another, e.g., as an executive assistant to a ranking official in the Pentagon. The two environments demand different skills and results may not be as expected.

Stereotyping: This perception ascribes attributes based solely on the class or category to which an individual belongs and is founded on such distinctions as race, sex, culture, age, grooming standards, religion, national regional origination, military affiliation, etc. Stereotyping can also be applied to fighter jocks, the infantry, staffers, submariners, black shoes, and the like. It assigns to a person in one or more of the classifications all of the allegedly associated characteristics.

The implications of these perceptual hazards are significant, and awareness of them is only the first step for the leader who should endeavor to cultivate sensitivity to the world around him and, when possible, question the obvious and "knowns" to insure their continuing validity. He or she must understand that what is patently obvious at the highest levels of the organization might be perplexing and confusing to members at the lower levels. A leader's perception is only one part of the equation; the followers' perceptions are also very important and can have a profound impact on expectations and motivations within the organization. It is this phenomenon to which we now turn.

Expectations and Motivation

Intrinsic to the attainment of organizational goals is the motivation and willingness of members to work toward accomplishment of the objectives. This desire to achieve is contingent on the workers' beliefs that their personal fulfillment is somehow tied to the success of the organization as a whole. The socialization process set forth above can be highly instrumental in yielding this outcome.

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Beyond this, people must perceive that the efforts they expend toward achieving the goals will somehow be rewarded.⁶ Further, it is necessary that the rewards be perceived as equitable to the efforts expended. Rewards do not necessarily have to be financial in nature; they may well be in the form of recognition or increased opportunity for greater responsibility.

Military executives have a very important function to perform—insuring that perceptions and realities are in accord. Rewards offered to workers should reflect what the workers feel is important as well as what the leader perceives to be of value. That which a general or an admiral may judge to be a fitting reward may not necessarily satisfy the needs or desires of a civilian, sailor, or soldier. If a reward is offered, it should be viewed as significant recompense by the recipient and in line with the performance and reward ratio for the entire organization. When that equilibrium exists, members of the organization tend to be better motivated and thus more willing to support the effort required to achieve the stated goals.

One final comment about perceptions concerns how the individual views his role within the group. While there may be extensive job descriptions on file, this information does not always comprehensively explain the “how” of job performance. Here, the leader needs to clarify role definition for key individuals. For example, an executive officer, in addition to being the number two individual in a naval unit, might also be the strict enforcer, allowing the commanding officer the role of a concerned and personable superior. The roles could be reversed. The chief of staff could be the organizational integrator or a benign staff person. The chief of the personnel division could be the informal liaison with all the civilians as well as the person hiring and firing. The senior enlisted person could be a role model for the noncommissioned officers or simply another member of the unit. The expectations of people within an organization vary and the more clearly defined their job and *role* descriptions are, the more clearly will they perceive their fit into the organization, thus aiding the leader immeasurably in the fulfillment of the mission.

The socialization and perceptual processes are part and parcel of any organization—so fundamental that their impact is often taken for granted or overlooked. Assumptions are made and certain modes of behavior are expected. As one moves higher in large national security organizations and becomes responsible for integrating the efforts of more diverse bodies of people, the effects of socialization and perceptions become increasingly important. The development of an integrative personal strategy for leading complex organizations demands consideration of these concepts if harmony and successful completion of the mission are to be realized.

Notes

1. Edgar H. Schein, “Organizational Socialization and the Profession of Management,” *Sloan Management Review*, Winter 1968, pp. 1-9.
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2. Eric Flamholtz, "Organizational Control Systems as a Managerial Tool," *California Management Review*, Winter 1979.
3. David J. Lawless, *Organizational Behavior*, (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1979), pp. 75-86.
4. *The New York Times*, 1 September 1981, p. C-1.
5. Lawless, p. 85.
6. Lyman W. Porter and Edward E. Lawler, *Managerial Attitudes and Performance*, (Homewood, Ill.: Richard D. Irwin, 1968), p. 165.



The Thirteenth USAF Academy Military History Symposium

The United States Air Force Academy will sponsor the Thirteenth Military History Symposium from 12-14 October 1988 on the topic, "The Intelligence Revolution: A Historical Perspective." The symposium's first session will analyze intelligence activities before 1939. Sessions on the second day will examine the effect of intelligence on the major belligerents of World War II, while an evening banquet address will probe the intelligence revolution's influence on counterintelligence activities. The final day will feature sessions dealing with the revolution's legacies and will conclude with a panel discussion on how the intelligence revolution has affected current military postures.

For information concerning symposium registration, contact:

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