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Assessing Navy Flag-Level Command Transitions: Commanders, Command Teams, and Effectiveness

McAnally, Winli; Gallenson, Ann; Jansen, Erik; Stames, Paul

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ASSESSING NAVY FLAG-LEVEL COMMAND TRANSITIONS:

COMMANDERS, COMMAND TEAMS, AND EFFECTIVENESS

by

Erik Jansen Ph.D.

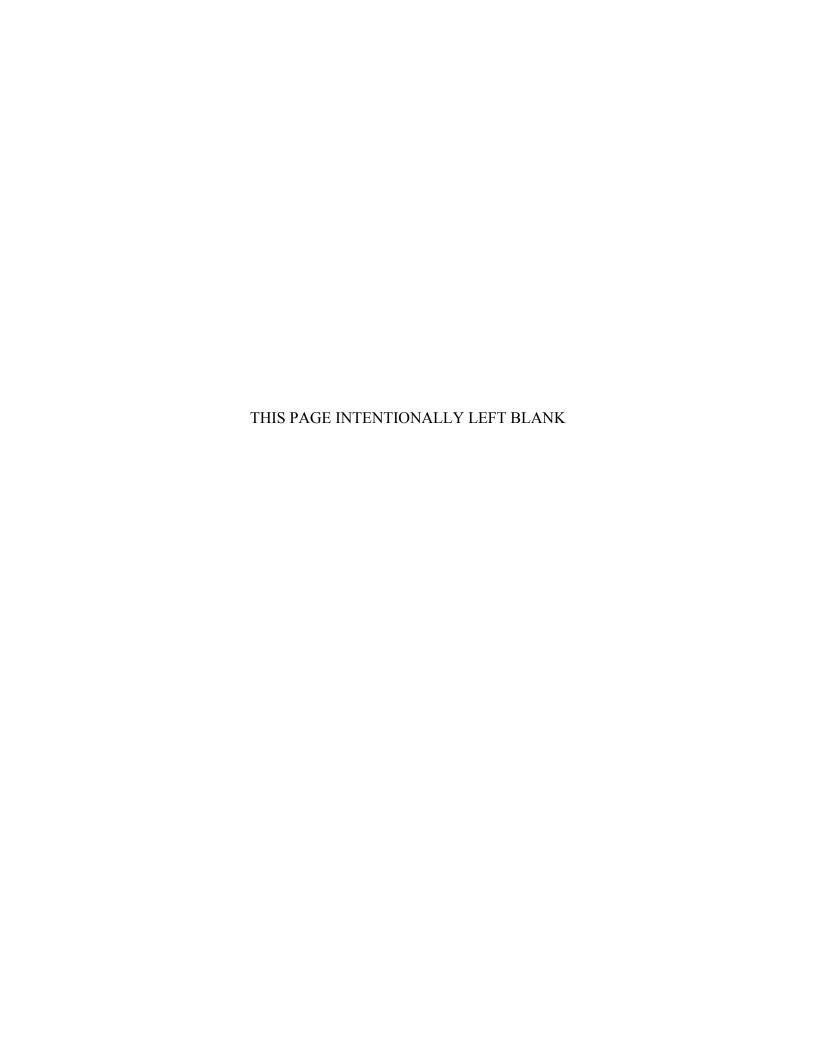Ann C. Gallenson

Contributors:

Winli McAnally

Paul Stames Ph.D.

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I. INTRODUCTION: FLAG-LEVEL COMMAND TRANSITIONS

The research questions central to this study are: Why are some flag-level command transitions in the U. S. Navy more effective than others? Can we identify factors relevant to a command and its incoming commander that expedite the transition process while increasing the probabilities of mission alignment and thus mission success? This paper presents results from the first study of a multi-phase research project aimed at identifying an assessment process to aid commanders and their command leadership teams in aligning the professional, organizational and institutional goals of their command.

Command transitions occur at all levels of leadership across all of the uniformed services. The Navy's flow of human resources through its organizational hierarchy and work roles depends on these transitions to create and groom the leaders and teams who command and shape the Navy and, most critically, to accomplish its missions. The Navy's career paths aim to teach and hone an individual's technical skills, expand their institutional experience, and deepen their managerial and leadership abilities through formal training, education, and relevant command experiences. Flag-level command transitions mark the highest progressions in an individual's Navy career and develop and sustain the executive and leadership capabilities and readiness throughout the Navy institution.

A. DEFINING FEATURES AND THREE TYPES OF COMMAND TRANSITIONS

The unit of analysis in this study is a U.S. Navy command transition, with a focus on flag-level commands. Figure 1 provides a view of Navy command transitions. The story of a transition begins with a command and an outgoing commander who transfers command to the incoming commander. In some cases, the story of transition – as told by interviewees – extends backward to an earlier commander. Figure 1 illustrates three types of transition: (a) direct inject; (b) fleet-up; and (c) leadership gap. These are described more fully in our Research Findings. In all three, there is a check-in and a formal assumption of command. The fleet-up transition maximizes the familiarity and overlap of the incoming and the outgoing commanders by promoting the executive

officer (XO) to be the commanding officer (CO). Direct inject is more traditional, with the overlap and communication between incoming and outgoing commanders varying from a matter of a few hours or days up to a period of several months. Fleet-up requires conforming to a plan; when plans go awry in the face of uncertainty and complexity, direct inject will be required. In some cases, uncertainties make plans and timely injection impossible, resulting in a gap with no commander in place. The gap must be filled, perhaps by a more junior officer, a member of the Senior Executive Service (an executive) or a higher-level Government Service (GS) civilian. As the findings below indicate, a gap is viewed as problematic and undesirable. The end of the transition process is somewhat subjective, depending on who is telling the story and the context of the command itself. A command may be dealing with external events or multiple internal transitions that can extend the perception of still being in a state of transition.

Figure 1
Three Types of Command Transitions

With the help of our interviewees, we define command transitions as beginning with the announcement of the new commander and concluding after a period of

assimilation and acclimatization. Experience shows that the assimilation period typically takes approximately four to six months, although that time may be reduced considerably for fleet-up transitions.

B.   THE FORMAL CONTEXT OF COMMAND TRANSITIONS

The structure of Navy organizations, including its senior composition and its military and civilian composition are mandated by law. Title 10 of the United States Code creates the legal basis for the roles, missions, and organizations in each service and the Department of Defense (DoD). The limits on the number of flag officers and the length of their terms are outlined in the Code. Appendix A contains the Organization Chart for the Department of the Navy, and Appendix B contains a brief summary of Title 10 as it pertains to Navy roles and length of service, and a brief description of the *John S. McCain National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2019* (NDAA 2019) that recently loosens some of the personnel restrictions for the military services.

Command transitions occur at every level of a command; there will be multiple change of commands during any commanding officer's (CO's) assignment and career. Their assignments generally vary in duration ranging from an average of twelve months to three years; some exceptions are legal while others are circumstantial.

C.   THE IMPORTANCE OF COMMAND TRANSITIONS

There is a clear consensus that leadership and management are critically important to command effectiveness, and this is certainly so at the executive or flag-levels of leadership. All realize that our Navy commanders operate in a hierarchical context of authority and accountability where their decisions and actions have great import on missions, commands and the lives of those in their commands. Their decisions are best served by efficient and effective information and knowledge flows. Thus, there is also consensus that command transitions can make a difference in the short-term and most likely in the longer-term effectiveness of commands. We take as given that command transitions are important, and we seek to uncover, in this exploratory study, the critical dimensions of effective transitions.

D.   RESEARCH LITERATURES

The roles or billets in the organization chart in Appendix A require a flow of people to move into and through them. Human resource (HR) flow (Beer, et al., 1985)

refs to this movement of people, which includes promotions and assignments, as well as recruitment, selection, placement, temporary and permanent rotations, reenlisting, and separations (for cause, due to downsizing, or for retirement). There are large academic and practitioner literatures related to management succession planning, talent management, promotions, and the many issues of HR flow, but reviewing this is beyond our scope and focus. An excellent source focusing on the private sector is Ram Charan's (2011) *The Leadership Pipeline*, which presents a perspective on transitions at multiple levels of the organization. The Navy conducts and supports applied research in this domain of "manpower planning" and "detailing," particularly as it relates to retention, training and qualifications, and problems of optimizing the total system; some research has focused – primarily at a macro, policy level - on developing senior Navy leaders (Hanser, et al., 2008). There is little or no systematic research that focuses on the needs and lived experiences of those who go through flag-level command transitions.

There is a smaller academic literature that focuses more narrowly on individual management transitions (e.g., from functional managers to general managers, or from product managers to business unit managers, or from "managers" to "leaders"). Watkins (2013) useful *The first 90 day* draws on some of this, and one of our interviewees mentioned it. The empirical, scholarly research literature is quite small and business centric; it presents some interesting and perhaps even provocative findings (e.g., Tempelaar, & Rosenkranz's [1917] Journal of Management study: *Switching hats: The effect of role transition on individual ambidexterity*.) Some of this literature will inform the theoretical models that emerge as we move through Phase 2 of the research project.

We found no research that is aimed at developing a normative, midrange, theoretical model of command transitions at the higher executive, flag-levels of the Navy. (There are essays or commentaries that raise design and policy issues, such as the value and practice of fleet-up [cf. *Naval Proceedings*]). Our research is therefore inductive and aims to identify promising constructs (i.e., factors) and principles (i.e., conjectures that can become hypotheses) based on our interviewees' considerable experience and expertise.

E.   ORGANIZATION OF THE PAPER

Following this introduction, we present the Research Methods section, which uses elite interviewing, coding, (Aberbach & Rockman, 2002) and content analysis of 13 individuals, including 8 admirals. The Research Findings section follows and presents our findings according to three levels of analysis: the institutional context of the command, the command, and the commander. Quotations are given to illustrate the most salient factors, the relationships among them, and how they are perceived to relate to effectiveness. The Discussion and Conclusions section examines the effectiveness construct and then reexamines the research factors that have emerged. The reexamination is in the form of force field analyses: we examine the factors and provide some detail about how they can function as either facilitators of or challenges and barriers to command transition effectiveness. We believe the results and force field analyses will show the promise of phase 2 of the project, as the qualitative research is surfacing the critical elements needed to compose a theoretical model. Such a model promises to be practically useful for commanders and commands and those who educate and train them for transitions. In addition, determining the relationships among factors (and theoretical constructs, such as trust, empowerment and assessing risk) would be a contribution to management and leadership scholarship.

II.   RESEARCH METHODS

A.   RESEARCH PROGRAM

This study was designed as the first phase of an envisioned four-phase research program. The purpose is to move toward a mid-range theoretical model of Navy flag-level command transitions. Such a model would relate transition factors to transition effectiveness. The factors would operationalize a normative model useful for an assessment process and should help incoming commanders and teams better understand and manage command transitions. Proposed subsequent stages of the research program are briefly summarized in Appendix C.

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH METHODS

Qualitative research methods are especially appropriate when there is little available, relevant research to address research questions and when the desire is to understand and uncover key factors, themes and relationships among these in order to move toward a more structured, explicit, formal understanding of a process. Our analytic method was based on elite interviews and content analysis.

Krippendorff (1980) says, "The pursuit of content analysis is fundamentally empirical in orientation, exploratory, concerned with real phenomena, and predictive in intent" (p. 9). Content analysis allows us to move beneath the surface of formal structures and official statements about roles, ranks, authorities, responsibilities, duration, and timing of command assignments and focus on the lived experiences and cultures of commands that comprise individuals' knowledge and understanding.

Aberbach and Rockman (2001) note that elite interviews are appropriate when a major aim of the research is "to examine important parameters that guide elite's definitions of problems and these responses to them" (p. 673). Our subjects are elite in status, highly educated, with direct experience of flag-level command transitions. Our interviewees also have been motivated to make sense of their experience so as to enhance their odds of having more successful experiences in the future; they have thought through the issues at some length.

a. Interviews

The interview questions (i.e., the interview schedules) used in the research are presented in Appendix D. They were broad and accompanied by prompts and follow-up questions to elicit interviewees' knowledge and sense-making about present and past command transition experiences. The focus was on Navy flag-level command transitions, although individuals sometimes spoke of earlier transitions in their careers, which they thought were important for our understanding. The questions were designed to expose themes about factors contributing to transition alignment and misalignment, often by comparing and reflecting on successful and unsuccessful command transitions.

Our interviewees have considerable first hand experiences of command transitions as subordinates, superiors and as focal new leaders. They naturally have used abductive reasoning to generate their own personal theories about the actions and circumstances that contributed to or hindered effectiveness. The texts of their interview responses thus provide appropriate input for our analyses.

Telephone interviews were scheduled for an hour and often ran for 10 to 20 minutes more, sometimes wandering into other topic areas involving leadership or the larger HR system and culture of particular Navy communities, groups, or units. Each of the contributors to this research sometimes led in the interviews; a second interviewer was present to listen and ask follow-up or clarifying questions.

Interviewers are all associated with the Naval Postgraduate School's Center for Executive Education or on the faculty of the Naval Postgraduate School. Interviewees were informed, as per Institutional Review Board requirements, that their participation was voluntary, they could end the interview at any time, and that we would make every effort to keep their identities confidential.

b. Interviewees

We conducted thirteen elite interviews (Aberbach & Rockman, 2001) of 8 flag officers (admirals) ranging from O-7 through O-10, 3 flag staff members (i.e., 2 captains and one commander), and 2 SES members in shore commands. The interviewees' military experiences were primarily representative of the surface warfare and aviation communities and included afloat, ashore, supply, and secretariat-level commands. The most problematic aspect of our small set of interviewees is that all

military were males and our two executives were female, an issue to rebalance in phase 2 of the study, when we also hope to include the senior enlisted perspective.

c.   *Analysis*

Transcripts from the interviews were coded by the two authors of the report and entered into a data base. Both coders independently coded three common interviews, discussing their emerging codes to achieve greater consensus; the rest of the interviews were coded by a single interviewer. However, both interviewers continued to read all texts and continued to discuss the codes and their meaning as we were developing our research findings. The codes developed are, as is characteristic of content analysis, sometimes more general and thus at a higher level of abstraction (e.g., "empowerment") and sometimes more specific and at lower levels of abstraction (e.g., a "sense of purpose" or "a sense of competence" are more specific categories of "empowerment"). Some codes appear more frequently than others (e.g. "empowerment" more than "morale"). In the texts, we looked for conjunctions between codes (e.g., "empowerment" and "trust" are likely to appear together whereas "empowerment" and "operational" are unlikely to appear together). These conjunctions suggest relationships and conjectures that are covered in our force field analyses in the Discussion and Conclusion section.

In our reported findings, we refer to an O-5 or O-6 as a "command team member", an O-7 or O-8 as an "admiral" and an O-9 or an O-10 as a "senior admiral"; we refer to a member of the Senior Executive Service as an "executive."

III.   RESEARCH FINDINGS

A.   LEVELS OF ANALYSIS AND OUR TERMS DESCRIBING INTERVIEWEE RANKS

We organize our findings into three levels of analysis:

1. *The institutional context of the command*, which is at the organizational and ecological levels and includes factors outside the boundary of the command;

2. *The command*, which is largely at the group level of the command team but can extend to all of the members of the command and thus be at the organizational level

3. *The commander*, which is at the individual level of analysis, and focuses on the incoming commander and his or her attributes and actions.

Interviewees often would address a particular topic at one particular level of analysis (e.g., the political context of commands in "D.C.") but relate this to factors at another level (e.g., the commander's style or behavior.)

B.   THE INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT OF COMMANDS AND COMMAND TRANSITIONS

In this section, we address topics that are primarily external to a Navy command going through the transition process. We first note the sheer diversity of commands.

DIVERSITY AND UNIQUENESS IN COMMAND TRANSITIONS

Our interviews reveal that the US Navy comprises an extraordinarily diverse and complex set of organizations, and we realize that we touched only a tiny subset of that. There is diversity in mission sets, echelons and levels of command, size and demographics (e.g., civilians and contractors or all military; shore commands and operational sea commands), unit technologies and work processes, and cultures.

With this diversity in mind, our interviewees were able to provide general insights and suggest patterns across this diversity as they have been naturally motivated to learn

from their experiences as they face new career challenges. Although they generally said there was no "ideal" or "one best way" of doing transitions, they did suggest factors that they believed were related to greater or lower likelihoods of success.

Table 1 presents those general factors that we conceptualized being primarily outside the command's boundary and thus forming the institutional context of command transitions.

Table 1
The Environmental and Institutional Context of Command Transitions

Emergent Research Factors
■ Tactical, operational, strategic: Vertical differentiations
■ Types of Navy organizations and command: Horizontal differentiations
■ Operating Navy, HQ, staffs, functional, communities, groups
■ Type/design of transition process:
■ Fleet-up
■ Direct inject
■ Gap/gapped
■ Human resource flow and detailing
■ Frequency of command changes
■ History and Immediate Conditions (e.g., Crises)
■ Politics and Stakeholder Complexity

TACTICAL, OPERATIONAL, AND STRATEGIC LEVELS OF THE COMMAND

Our interviewees spoke in terms of three vertical levels of command, which created the context of the purpose, mission, and level of the command within the organizational structure of the Navy. These were the tactical, operational, and strategic. Although related to formal, doctrinal usage of these terms (Joint Publication 1, 2017) associated with vertical differentiation of the structural hierarchy, they spoke of it more in terms of cognitive differentiation and related to what needs to be known at higher levels of leadership. Flag-level leadership lies primarily at the operational level of warfare, between the tactical and strategic levels. However, this term becomes ambiguous as "operational" also refers to the "operating" or "operational Navy." Thus, command at sea, even for those at lower levels, can be described as operational. We will now turn to the voices of our interviewees, and we will return to this topic in our Discussion and Conclusion section.

a.   *The Tactical Level of Command*

A senior admiral said:

There are three phases. If you're working, thinking, and operating at the
tactical level, then …your jumping from task to task to task. It's pretty
simple, and it's what you do as a young officer. So, you get really good at
task management.

At tactical levels of command (identified strongly with O-5's but up
through O-6), our interviewees' perception was that performance and promotions largely
depend on technical competence and the mastery of tactics. An officer from the aviation
community described the mastery of flying as an individual and with increasingly more
complex formations and aircraft. However, the O-5 and O-6 levels are also described as
"operational" when describing command and "operations" at sea.

b.   *The Operational Level of Command*

A Navy O-6 said, "So tactical would be O‑5 command level and below.
And strategic is going to be O‑10 command level and above usually with the operational
level being the O‑7s and O‑8s, some O‑9s." In this context, the O-6 to O-7 is
transitional, and this transitional stage of learning to "positionally" enter the flag ranks
comes up repeatedly in interviews. A senior admiral cautioned that:

in my mind, one- and two-star flag officers, particularly the new ones in
that transition, need to know that it's not their time for big ideas. It's their
time for execution. You know, the job is to get something done.

Another Admiral said:

we're very much at the Commodore Perry [level]. You open Japan to the
West, which is very thin guidance, and your job is to be creative within
your authority. You'll hear people say, "Know your authorities and
execute to the fullest."

At the operational level, another admiral said, "you … should be putting out
guidance in an operational framework about what you want to have happen at the tactical
level."

Learning one's position and authority is matched by determining how and what to
appropriately communicate. Thus, communicating downward through multiple levels

and echelons and with increasingly large commands as well as upward ("what does a four-star admiral need to know?") were sometimes framed by the three levels - tactical, operational, strategic – of vertical cognitive differentiation.

c.   The Strategic Level of Command

A senior admiral said of the Strategic level:

> You have to get that strategic lens of what's the purpose of this command? How is its capability being consumed for the purpose of the Navy? … [The transition] is a really good time to get some grounding around this. … It's easy to just say I know what that is, it's simple. But when you get into primary and secondary and tertiary missions, it makes you thoughtful.

Being thoughtful goes along with the observation that, at the strategic level, "you should be turning at a much slower rate." This often takes time; the same senior admiral indicated the complexity of thought required as he said:

> Spending time [looking] through that [strategic] lens is just … so important. You can start working from that strategic [perspective] and get down to what the institution is about [in order] to support that mission …. As I'm about to transition and take command here, I've got the strategic view, the multi-mission deliverables. I have these lanes of enablers, and where do we stand within those enablers. Oh, now, that one is not an enabler; it's actually an attractor. Okay, what's the mitigation plan for that? Then you think, okay, so I have a good view, … [but] does this picture in my head match how my boss is looking at it?

Another admiral pointed to the highest levels of governance and strategic inputs, saying:

> At the echelon two level, we focus on strategic implications and making sure that we are ready to respond to queries from Washington as to what different countries may be asking of them back there for justification or rationale, whatever it might be.

TYPES OF NAVY ORGANIZATIONS/COMMANDS

Organizations also are structurally differentiated (horizontally) into different functions, communities, groups and regions, and people who work in these diverse units come to have different assumptions and perspectives about organizational processes (e.g., planning, time-horizons, formal versus informal styles (cf. Lawrence & Lorsch [1969] on

cognitive differentiation). Interviewees discussed how the command processes might unfold differently in different communities (e.g., surface warfare or aviation) or commands (e.g., the operating Navy vs. shore commands with civilians). Not surprisingly, those who experience the operational context may develop deep assumptions and views that affect their experiences and actions in command transitions.

d. The Operational Context: The Operating Navy

Operational also refers to the "operating navy" or "operational navy," as in the following usage of command at sea:

> In an operational context, everybody understands their job, they understand their mission. There's literally a target. We're all trying to go in and blow it up or render something else defenseless, achieve some objective that's measurable. And we're all focused on it, we're all pointing to it, and it probably even has a picture. We have certain timelines, and everybody from the flight deck to the cruisers to the watch standers all understand and play a part in that. And they're all pulling the rope in the same direction.

These commands share in a "uniform culture"; personnel have been socialized into the structures, policies, practices and culture of the Navy. Thus, an admiral spoke about the "assurance about the type, number, and the longevity of the people you have working for you" being somewhat greater than when "you start talking about major staffs and other positions where you don't necessarily have that."

One can catch the ambiguity of terms as an admiral rises to higher levels of strategic thinking while still clearly referring to the operational Navy, moving from guns and ordnance to considerations of complex stakeholder relationships.

> The ship's job is to go out and fire guns and deliver ordnance on time on target. But what's the higher calling here? Well, defend the high seas. Okay. And the higher calling? Well, to provide deterrents. Oh, and then what are your levers? Oh, yeah, there is this thing called theater security cooperation: Allies and partners.

e.   *Headquarters and Staff Commands*

Operational commands were differentiated from headquarters or staff commands, which were viewed as sometimes placing different demands on commanders. Two quotes from admirals following:

> The flavor is different if it's an operational command versus a staff command. … Operations is about generating readiness, and that readiness is aimed at a future requirement to deliver the operational capability of the command. If it's a staff, it's usually the analysis of the requirements above echelon and down echelon.

> It's when you get to the back-shop side of the Navy – higher-level staffs and those sorts of things – where you don't know what you're walking into culture-wise. You're not sure of the current esteem level of your organization with higher headquarters. And you're walking into a pretty established tempo to support the higher headquarters commander… It takes a little time.

THE THREE TYPES OF COMMAND TRANSITION PROCESSES

There are three types of command transition process – fleet-up, direct inject, and gap or gapped – for bringing the commander and the command together. These were illustrated in Figure 1. Our interviewees discussed these, and this revealed the central roles of time, timing and commander familiarity with the command as core to transition effectiveness:

> the longer the transition period or the depth of the transition where the prospective leader comes in and can gather that context, the better both for the leader and their effectiveness because they'll establish a more credible direction. It's more achievable, and they'll be able to harmonize it in such a way that it takes that culture into account. That's something that can happen over time. So, the real element, in my mind, the controlling variable, is time.

f.   *Fleet-up*

All of our interviewees regarded fleet-ups as a best practice. An admiral said, "You're familiar with the people; with the vector; with the strengths and the weaknesses as you move from a position of responsibility for execution to that leadership

position responsibility for direction and mission." It also may help command effectiveness because of the relationship it creates between the XO and CO:

> With the fleet-up, you also have that opportunity to establish a relationship not only with your CO when you're XO, but also with your XO when you're CO because you're also mentoring and grooming that XO for the next level.

Fleet-up creates stability and continuity. Admirals also said, "It focuses on mission continuity and organizational continuity so that you don't have the perturbations that come with those periodic or episodic injects." And, "You also know, how do you communicate your command philosophy, and how do you hold people accountable for executing it? So direct inject is a steeper learning curve."

> It keeps a command from wildly swinging left and right because since you're the XO, you're trying to help the CO be the best he can be. When you take over there, are smaller rudder orders. If you have what the SWOs used to have before fleet-up, you get wild swings. You put stresses on the rudder, and you may break [the ship/the command]. We actually have exactly that happening today….

Fleet-up can happen in the shore side (e.g. "moving down the hall to a new office" after serving under the CO for two years.) The only drawback mentioned to fleet-up was not associated with the transition but to the fatigue that resulted from three years of 12-hour days on a ship. Almost all of the stories we heard of fleet-up involved command at sea.

At the highest levels, one Senior admiral shared a different perspective:

> "I guess at the O‑5, O‑6 level, you have the time to do a fleet-up. You're three years in the command whereas later on when you're more senior, I think the advantage of fleet-up is actually diminished, … because you have a better idea about what works and what doesn't work.

g.   *Direct Inject*

Direct inject was contrasted to fleet-up by most of our interviewees. An admiral's comment was somewhat typical:

> The] leader might parachute in at any one of a number of positions… they've missed the entire cultural tone and performance vector; someone

drops in on that and has to rely on very broad-brushed skill sets and areas
of focus and rely on those O-6 levels of direct reports to be successful.

Because direct inject, unlike fleet-up, provides little familiarity through
overlaps of individual commanders, an admiral said that one needs to "minimize the
distractions, focus solely on the mission, and work for safety."

h. Gaps between Admirals

Gaps occur when there is no overlap between the outgoing commander,
with only a temporary or acting "commander" in charge. Gaps might occur for several
months with department heads or temporary, relatively junior, GS managers trying to fill
the gap. One flag staff member described how department heads struggled to create a
sense of vision and direction as a gap stretched into two months. This same commander
said that if he had a magic wand, "I would forbid gaps. Minimum seven days overlap,
preferably two weeks. I think the gapped leadership billets is where things get off track."

Gaps also seem to be able to amplify other factors that are major or minor
problems. Interviewees described situations where the organization was not "at the
table" for extremely important meetings due to the lower status of the acting commander.
Similarly, when multiple transitions were occurring (civilian Director, COS) during a
gap, it was perceived to have created more turbulence within the command. If the new
commander is also making the O-6 to O-7 transition, the gap was seen to amplify the
difficulties of that transition for the commander and the command.

HUMAN RESOURCE FLOW – THE HR CONTEXT OF TRANSITIONS AT THE INSTITUTIONAL LEVEL

Human resource (HR) flow is the institutional context of command transitions.
Interviewees discussed the larger manpower and detailing systems sometimes in general
terms and sometimes with respect to their own specific experiences and a particular
transition. Promotions and vertical flow are related to learning and development in this
admiral's comment:

> Your first job as a flag officer is a huge point. The difference between
> one‑star and two‑star is not as great. But certainly, becoming a

three‑ star is a big deal. And that piece, that added responsibility is another place I think where there should be some focus and discussion.

The larger manpower system can create HR flows that result in a high tempo and frequency of turnovers. Both of our SES executives both commented on high frequency of turn-over in the organization. One said:

> So, in less than five years, … I was on my third commander, so my third four‑star and my third deputy commander. And then all of my peers that are mostly flags with a couple of civilians, all my peers had all rotated three times.

One result is that a greater proportion of time is spent preparing for and working through transitions.

The HR system was itself seen as impacted by larger issues of institutional design. An admiral said it "seemed" like having more limited numbers of "groups" and "opportunities for command-at-sea" paired with the difficulty of going from a one-star to a two-star level without command-at-sea" results in a choice in which "you either promote fewer people, find a different path to ensure that the right people promote, or you run the wicket faster." Frequency was thus possibly a result of "running the wicket faster."

The HR system can also be impacted by crises. A senior admiral wondered and even suggested a research project on the impacts on the personnel system resulting from the Glenn Defense Marine Scandal.

HISTORY AND IMMEDIATE CONDITIONS

Commands are influenced by past events. Previous strategic, operational and tactical decisions, the actions of past commanders and higher commands, past crises and how the organization dealt with them, and the values and norms that underlie the culture (e.g. a culture of trust or mistrust) are important. One senior admiral, discussing the challenges of direct inject, offered advice seemingly relevant to all command transitions and perhaps especially relevant to those coming in after a gap in commanders:

> Get some time to read and start out with that strategic sense; look at if there's any visibility to what are some real successes the command has had, what are some of the failures the command has had. Go back and

look over the surveys, the command climate surveys or any survey that reveals the opinions of the members of the command. You will learn pretty quick if you can read that sort of as unvarnished and unexplained; if you go over it with the principal that you're turning over with, it sometimes becomes a little defensive on some of the lower scores. It's important to read it first and get it in your head, and then approach it by asking questions.

Our interviewees indicated that some commands are excellent and the task is largely one of sustainment. Others may require more immediate action as they are viewed as sub-standard. A sense of history is important in appreciating this and determining if the understanding a commander has is congruent with that of his own commander.

The most difficult challenges discussed resulted from crises outside the command that systemically affect the entire force (e.g., the Glenn Defense Marine Scandal) or those that also directly impact the specific commands. The USS McCain and USS Fitzgerald collisions directly impacted some commands as their mission related to the performance of these ships. When a transition occurs in such commands and other factors (e.g., a gap with an acting commander, multiple transitions of personnel within a command, or a new CO also becoming a new admiral), then those factors can be seriously amplified by the crisis.

i.   Politics (e.g. Washington D.C.) and Stakeholders

The issue of politics and stakeholders was also related to issues of the level – strategic, operational, tactical – of the command and even to how we define effectiveness. An executive experienced in the "DC" context said: "They need to be in and experience D.C. and develop a rapport. We will send him all over to folks at different places that we are going to need to engage." A senior admiral said:

Where it gets interesting is if you're in some other facet or form of government, and you're now potentially mingling with a culture and egos the likes of which you've never been exposed to. You will likely step on a land mine or two if you don't fully understand the culture and, sometimes, peoples' predilections to not trust you in uniform. It's a place you may never have been, [because] you always just felt that you were trustworthy. … It can cause impacts to the mission.

C. **THE COMMAND TEAM AND COMMAND PERSONNEL**

The Command is nested within the larger institutional and command climates discussed above. A higher tempo of command transitions at a higher institutional level is felt by increased numbers of transitions in commands. Crises have ripple effects that affect many commands and direct effects when a command's mission is centered around the crisis and its issues.

The commander in turn is nested in the Command and the factors that we describe here create the setting that affect the commander. The commander in turn takes actions that, to a greater or lesser degree, change the command. A culture of trust with high morale is a tremendous advantage for an incoming commander, and a commander can, to some degree, make a difference in that culture through his or her actions. Thus, we see overlap between the themes and factors we associate and describe in Table 3, which focuses on the commander, and Table 2 below, which focuses on the Command.

Table 2
The Command

Emergent Research Factors
▪ Developing the team for alignment and purpose
▪ A culture of trust
▪ Trust and confidence among the team
▪ A culture of mistrust
▪ Proportions of civilians in the command
▪ Support by members of the command team (e.g., SES, COS, Dept. Heads)
▪ Number and frequency of their transitions

Commanders appreciated their dependence on the team. A senior admiral noted that messages, visions, and commander's intent, especially in higher echelon and taller organizations, might never reach sailors and civilians unless the senior staff and command team is aligned. He said, "The staff is the one doing all that hard work. It is all about understanding how to strengthen and enable staff, … and that takes time to figure how to do that." Because teams are composed of individuals, an admiral adds "Whatever team you've got, you've got to maximize their talents of each, grow them and integrate them into a team that can win."

DEVELOPING THE TEAM: ALIGNMENT & PURPOSE

The civilian executives were particularly articulate about command personnel's concerns as they saw their function in terms of aligning and providing continuity. One spoke for civilians in the command:

> I've got goals and aspirations and other things. And I understand how to operate within this command. And every three years or so, someone new comes in and the big fear is, am I going to fit? Is my work still valuable? Am I still valuable? What does the boss think about? How do I interact with this new person because they may not be like the older person?

This sentiment seemed as descriptive for the military as the civilian side of the command. The commander is much anticipated, but the command also is the setting that the commander anticipates. It presents him or her with opportunities and challenges, and trust seems to be a central construct for understanding this.

A CULTURE OF TRUST

Trust and a culture of trust that support high morale was a very frequent theme. It emerged more or less explicitly in our interviews with respect to all levels and echelons of command and analysis: interpersonal relationships, teams, units, and entire organizations, as well as all levels of rank. One senior admiral saw trust as a key priority and foundational:

> "The first thing you have to do is establish a level of trust. My assumption was that people wanted to be there, and they wanted to do a good job, that they had some type of training and some confidence and knew what they were doing: that was me trusting them. … More important is their trust of me. It was in every command. Are you genuine? Do you care about the people? Do you care about the mission? I think that is probably the most critical piece of any leadership.

One of the admirals chose a metaphor – also shared briefly by an executive - to show how essential trust is to the functioning and performance of relationships and commands:

> Trust is the oil in your engine. And if you don't change the oil or keep putting oil in -- if you lose the trust -- your engine seizes, and you come to a complete stop and you're useless.

Trust was simultaneously viewed as an indicator and determinant of effectiveness. We did not ask our interviewees to specify what they meant by trust. But we suspect they would agree that "trust means that one believes in and is willing to depend on another party" (McKnight, Cummings, & Chervany, 1998).

TRUST AND CONFIDENCE AMONG AND IN THE TEAM

We return to the subject of leadership development in discussing the commander below, but here we note that the command also is looking for some level of competence from the C.O. as well, and trying to discern how the commander is judging their own levels of competence. One flag staff member spoke of trust initially in terms of command at sea, but extended the theme to other commands, saying:

> The key to each [transition] is to very quickly establish technical expertise.
> Look at their operating procedures. Look at how they're doing business.
> You can't go and run an organization without any technical competence.
> You have to ground yourself pretty early and understand the fundamentals
> and the process and procedures by which that organization operates.

Of course, leaders cannot have technical expertise in everything. One said: "You may be the most experienced, but you're clearly the least proficient, … And you have to figure out how you're going to empower your people … That people connection is vitally important to what we do." The comments of different admirals seemed to reveal a balancing act in which the commander must assess his or her team's competence, demonstrate his or her own competence, and create a climate of trust where people are empowered to respectfully assert their competence.

AN ENTRENCHED CULTURE OF MISTRUST

The importance of trust is dramatically revealed by its absence. Only one interviewee described an organization that was "certainly untrusting and was, in many senses, dysfunctional because of the divisions in the organization." This commanding admiral reported he had to be:

> the neutral element and to walk in a way that … I got the full extent of everyone's concerns and thoughts…. [Due to] circumstances probably beyond their control, it led to, "Hey, no matter who comes in here, we're not going to trust them." … It was a constant in the forefront of my mind. Everything I do, everything I say, every action I take, I have got to be on my game because they now trust me, but it was very fragile. At any minute, it could probably just shift back into chaos.

PROPORTIONS OF CIVILIANS IN THE COMMAND

The civilian workforce came up a number of times, often with respect to trust. Several interviewees noted that self-confidence and morale had dropped when a commander's actions seemed to devalue civilians (e.g., not appointing capable civilians as department heads or excluding them from meetings); command morale rebounded when they were promoted or included. This may happen when officers at any level reflexively rely on other military personnel rather than work with their civilian leadership and staff. To what degree this is mistrust versus simply trusting the familiar was an open question, but the end result can be the same for those who feel their contributions are no longer recognized. This same "similarity bias" (i.e., trusting those who are more similar to ourselves and thus who we are more familiar and comfortable with) was mentioned by some of our highest-ranking admirals as well as our executive interviewees. Such a scenario can result in dysfunctions as communication breakdowns occur: An executive interviewee described a "painful" transition in a new command, where the message seemed to become: "I don't like [or am not comfortable with] civilians." The executive recounted that:

> … they [the military] weren't sure how to deal with civilians. And they didn't know how to control them… They turned all of their department heads into military. Civilians felt very disenfranchised; there was a lot of

frustration. He just wasn't getting what we needed, and the staff just didn't know how to make him happy. It was painful.

Executives talked about helping their admirals understand civilians and helping civilians earn the trust of admirals. Executives saw themselves as resources for the admirals. One said:

> I see my role as -- and a lot of people call it – continuity, which makes sense. But … it really is making sure that this command continues to deliver what the Navy needs and the Marine Corps needs regardless of who's sitting in the command seat. And my job is to make this commander successful and the commander that sits there successful. To do that, I've got to coach both sides so that we're all playing together on the same field so that we can keep the ball moving. Otherwise, we're going to sit in a huddle for too long. And the Navy moves too fast for that.

Admirals spoke of the importance of their support from the uniformed members of their command. An admiral described his chief of staff, "with two and a half years' experience on the job and another two years' experience on the base" as "providing context that I wouldn't get otherwise."

SENIOR STAFF SUPPORT AND TRANSITIONS

Table 2 present two other issues that were important, one of which is covered below in a section on Supports for the Commander. It was revealed by the previously quoted executive who spoke of her role in maintaining continuity, serving as a bridge between the staff and new admirals to support his or her vision, helping navigate the complex stakeholders of the command. Such skill by civilians who can provide continuity is critical.

But so also are the military personnel who, by virtue of past experiences in general and/or of a few years in a command, become equally important key success factors. We here again are at the issue of competencies of the team, expertise of the commander, and open communication.

The importance of senior military and civilian staff members was revealed by references to the problems that resulted when multiple staff transitions were occurring

during the transition process. The importance of the factor of number and frequency of transitions seems relatively clear.

Again, our interviewees emphasized the commander's role and actions in shaping the command, but some noted that the commander also was being shaped by the command, especially earlier in the careers as flag officers. This resonated with the comments of the admiral making the O-6 to O-7 transition who said it was a challenge to learn how to act not only functionally but "positionally." In one case, foresight in planning for the transition had been an empowering experience for a command team. Leadership partly framed the transition as helping to develop the new admiral, which one interviewee said added a sense of team ownership to the process and possibly provided individuals an opportunity to show they were valued assets when the admiral arrived.

D.   THE COMMANDER

The incoming commander is the most central figure in our research question. Many of the factors mentioned above come into focus again here. In the previous sections, we discussed the institutional and command conditions that create the situation the incoming commander faces. In this section, we look within the boundary of the command and focus more on the commander in the context of the command team. Issues such as trust and empowerment again become central.

Table 3
The Commander

Emergent Research Factors
▪ Vision for alignment and empowerment ▪ Cognitive/information processing styles 　▪ Slow vs. fast; satisficing vs. maximizing 　▪ Adaptive and agile ▪ Balancing trust accountability and risk ▪ Delegation for empowerment ▪ Communication ▪ Supports for transitioning admirals 　▪ Training, coursework, mentoring, coaching, executive resources

VISION FOR ALIGNMENT AND EMPOWERMENT

Although strategy may be doctrinally associated with the highest levels of the Navy's Leadership (i.e., CNO), strategy also is often defined as the ways and means used

to achieve the mission (Thompson & Strickland, 1990). In this sense, the Naval officers we interviewed are thinking strategically; a senior admiral said, "that's the vision thing and there are many paths between where we are and where we need to go. And as a leader, you must pick one of those paths." Leaders may have their own philosophy and beliefs about the best ways to move forward, but they seek and need a vision to align goals and coordinate. A senior admiral said, "You are looking for alignment as well as other requirements above the echelon you are serving in, and you are also looking down to the lower echelon to make sure that you are aligned in terms of being able to provide [resources] and directions." Another identified vision as involving "working across horizontally" and "working vertically." In order for "vision and commander's intent" to function, "you have to get the team that you were given to buy in and share your vision."

A shared vision can provide individuals with a sense of purpose and empowerment by making clear the connections between principles, means, and intent to larger missions of the unit and the Navy. One executive noted that "It is much better to get everybody aligned to a vision that's common … especially civilians who don't respond as well to orders … so that we're all excited and going to push together." In addition, sailors and civilians – perhaps more with younger generations of sailors – seem to expect, as one of our admirals indicated, more "transparency" about the reasons behind particular expectations and actions. Another benefit noted by an admiral is that once people understand "your principles," they "self-govern." This also is empowering as it supports a sense of self-control and autonomy (Thomas, 2000); it also may convey respect, which contributes to a culture of trust.

THE COMMANDER'S COGNITIVE OR INFORMATION PROCESSING STYLES

The interviewees brought up style quite frequently. They seemed to most often use the word "style" as psychologists typically use it, as a preference or habitual pattern of behavior, rather than a deeper, more durable "personality" trait. It most commonly seemed to refer to cognitive or information processing styles involving the commander's preferred or habitual ways of handling information, approaching problems, and making decisions. This can lead to differences in preferred communications (and

communications style) as well as decision making and problem solving (and thus leadership style):

> I've had some who like to have a nice long paper with a lot of thought in it and, you know, footnotes. And that's what they want ahead of time. And others who say, hey, I just want to see a couple bullets. And so, it could really whip some of the staff around.

Although there was appreciation that individuals and situations are unique and different styles (and personalities) can work, interviewees frequently offered cautions about styles that they saw as moving too fast.

COGNITIVE STYLE: THINKING FAST VS. THINKING SLOW[1]

It was common place (among admirals, flag staff members, and executives) to caution against moving too fast. The interviews indicated effectiveness was more generally associated with checking one's own perspectives and vision with the higher command and other stakeholders, as well as with their team to reflect and move carefully and even modestly. This was seen as especially the case for commands that were not all military, were in D.C., or involved more political and inter-agency interactions. One executive -- who incidentally appreciated "three different styles" of three admirals – said:

> the success factor was the fact that the admiral took the time to get to know his key staff, the people who would be helping him along, and the stakeholders. He really thought through where the command was; where the Navy needed that command to be; and what they're role was going to be as they took command.

One high-ranking admiral, having been through many command transitions, said:

> I learned that fast is slow. I developed a kind of three-month process where I didn't do anything, didn't make any changes for the first month, you know, just kind of looked and listened. ... But in the second month, it

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[1] This section borrows from Kahneman's (2011) book and the admiral who is quoted as saying "fast is slow". Several interviewees referred to speed. A related cognitive dimension is satisficing vs. maximizing. Satisfice combines the words "satisfy" and "suffice", and it thus refers to a style that seeks a "good enough" solution using heuristics rather than seeking either a maximizing or optimizing style.

was a discussion about, "Hey, you know, what do we think about this?" "What do we think about that?" … Then the third month was about making modest changes, not even moderate changes because sometimes commanders come in with the sense of, I've got to make a difference. How you create speed within an organization is not by driving the speed yourself. It's by empowering the organization to go fast.

Even in commands that were all military and in the more tactical domains of the operating Navy, an interviewee noted that fast actions that appeared as "change for changes sake" were not likely to be a good foundation for trust; it was better to have "a thought-out vision that was carefully communicated to drive the change." Rapid changes risked appearing as someone primarily "trying to make a difference" or "thinking of their legacy" or even motivated to "unravel a previous legacy" rather than focusing on the "institution" or the "mission".

Another form of trying to move fast is the multi-focused, long list of the:

new guy who came in and the very next day had a change of command. The very next day [over the weekend] he throws up a 30 slide PowerPoint presentation of all the changes he wants to make. And … there's no context behind all these changes. … Concentrate on the four or five core things that are important and trust everybody else to do everything.

However, in circumstances involving crises or a command with serious deficiencies, the advice above might be moderated. The subtleties of this issue did not receive attention, but an interviewee who warned against speed also warned against being too slow in establishing vision and direction.

COGNITIVE STYLE: ADAPTATION AND AGILITY[2]

Admirals recognized that the transition to the flag-level was sometimes difficult because their preferred style is the one that led to success at the more tactical levels of command. One admiral said:

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[2] This section title draws from cognitive psychology. Adaptive individuals unlearn and relearn and thus develop a new dominant style. Agile individuals can pivot agilely at shifting their styles to fit the situation and are less easily characterized as having a dominant style; they are more flexible. Again, styles are habitual patterns, and habits can be changed or modified.

The biggest transition for me to sit back, think about what needs to get done, concentrate on the four or five core things that are important to this job, and trust everybody else to do everything. Now, I've never been one that doesn't trust the people below me, but I still like to know every little detail just because I'm a detail‑craving kind of guy.

He said that this could be – especially at the flag-level – perceived as micro-managing. Another admiral noted that his coach was working with him to step back from the pattern of doing too much himself.

Another admiral indicated that too much caution could be a problem and suggested that coaching could have been helpful in overcoming problems:

I've seen one-stars, I think, you know, fail to be bold; to step up; to take command; to take fleets. You know, I always felt bad because I don't think they had the coaching or the leadership or the discussion about what it really means at this point in the career.

As with so much involving style and leadership, balance, adaptation and agility based on understanding seems the not so surprising advice. But there is a special caution to – in most circumstances – avoid a reflexive style of moving fast prior to understanding the context. And understanding the context typically requires communication and reflection, especially in more complex and diverse contexts.

BALANCING TRUST, ACCOUNTABILITY AND RISK

One admiral described the impossibility – especially as one advances to higher levels of command – of understanding all of the details of lower level actions and their consequences. Commanders, by necessity, must delegate and trust. One admiral described his realization as a mid-level aviation officer that there were concentric circles of trust that eventually encompassed just about every sailor on his carrier; it was not just his wingman or squadron, but all of the functions that were required to make his flights successful. A senior admiral, said, 'To make a judgment, you have to trust your people…. I didn't have to judge, I just gave [trust], you know."

However, commanders also have to be responsible and accountable for their actions, so the admiral added: "And then they [those I have given my trust to] will either

lose that trust or not." Another admiral said, "I'm going to trust [them], and then I'm going to monitor the performance and then see whether they let me down and what was the cause of it."

Thus, trust is critical, but so also is the need to monitor and maintain situational awareness, and this creates a potential tension between actual or perceived management style and the trust relationship between the commander and his or her people.

> You had to trust that other people were going to do the right thing…. Most of the things that consumes our time is doing checking to make sure that other people are doing the things that you think they should be doing. And what that says is – – because you have to do that yourself -- what it says is you don't trust them. It means that in order to trust, you have to take risks.

Naval officers often learn to maintain situational awareness by walking around and learning about their people. These lessons at the more tactical and operational levels are viewed as applicable for command transitions. A command team member said:

> You have a set of questions and interactions as you interview people or as you walk around the ship with somebody so that you can try to gain an understanding of how they make decisions, how they assume risk because there's going to be people who assume risk for you every day. And, you know, the earlier you can gain an understanding of other people's risk calculations the better.

Thus, risk is managed by assessing how others make judgments and their "risk calculations." Leaders depend on their subordinates but have to assess their competencies.

<center>DELEGATION FOR EMPOWERMENT</center>

Delegation of authority was viewed as important although it was generally passed over rather quickly. One admiral said, "The way to manage is to empower and delegate so that you are empower [the command – hundreds of people] to work the problem, and … day-to-day activities are much more manageable." Another senior admiral interestingly said he did not always delegate responsibility with authority, so as to communicate, "I have your back" and "if you make a bad decision it's my bad. I own that problem." He also advocated "Understanding your people so delegation is to the

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individual who has the competency and the tools to manage that level of authority." The issues involving risk, trust and empowerment are discussed below in the Culture of Trust section of this paper.

<div align="center">COMMUNICATION</div>

Failures to communicate vision and intent can, as we discuss in the section on Culture below, can be frustrating and painful. One command team member said:

> that initial communication and then feedback of what you want done, that's where I get the trust from. If I don't hear from you, I'm going to assume everything's okay and then I start down this road, and then someone comes and tells me, "No, you're going in the wrong direction." Now, I'm beginning not to trust what you want me to do.

In this vein, an admiral expressed frustration that did not translate to deep mistrust, but certainly did not contribute to a sense of empowerment, and the relationship remained tense. He recalled being a brand-new admiral, and asked:

> How does a one-star communicate directly with a four-star? What kind of communication does that four-star need from me? Honestly, I failed in my first five or six attempts because I wasn't brief enough; that's not how he wanted to be informed with. He wasn't providing guidance on how to inform him. So therein lies an enormous challenge that I hadn't had to face in prior roles.

One admiral noted that we don't want to force people to learn by "hard knocks", so consciously communicating expectations and preferences/style by communicating with the command team was advocated by our interviewees. Executives may fulfill a valuable role both for the senders and receivers of information at different levels of the command hierarchy.

The topic of communication produced perhaps more specific nuggets or insights than other areas, which were sometimes more thematic and easier to summarize. These insights (all from admirals) include:

- The tempo of communicating: A senior admiral followed the practice of "a morning standup" akin to "morning quarters" on ships.

- And the key to such meetings: "The key is how do you make it as brief and make it something people want to come to instead of, 'Well, have to run down to the commander's desk."

- The importance of multiple channels, especially in large commands: Of course, at higher levels, with "sheer numbers and layers" of several thousand people, "I had to really work on those communication channels."

- And complexity and difficulty of communicating in political contexts such as DC or interagency settings communicating in "a culture and [with] egos the likes of which you've never been exposed to."

- "The real terrain and culture and history [comes from getting] a circumspect input from the folks who are outside the organization."

Communication is – somewhat obviously - critical for integrating and directing upward and downward. This comes out insightfully in the comments of our interviewees.

SUPPORTS FOR ADMIRALS TRANSITIONING TO NEW COMMANDS

As previous sections indicate, commanders receive supports from multiple sources: XOs, deputies and chiefs of staff, division or department heads, senior enlisted, staffs, and SES executives. They also briefly mentioned other supports.

a. Pre-Command Training

The U.S. Navy invests considerable resources to the success of command transitions of its senior officers and admirals. The officers generally spoke very positively about their training, coursework, coaches, and traditions regarding transitioning into a new command. There was the suggestion that – for the most challenging cases involving direct inject or gaps – commanders might profit from a more "seminar-based approach" using cases and involving case discussions. (The argument was that a case teaching approach might become a means for officers and experienced teachers to surface their assumptions as they discuss actions they might take with a particular case.) There was also a belief (or realization?) that formal classroom experiences can only go so far and then experiential learning needs to occur.

b. *Mentoring and Coaching*

Mentoring and coaching was mentioned in a number of contexts and especially in political contexts. Executives and admirals talked about the value of their own coaches as well as the importance of knowing how to mentor, coach and develop their subordinates. One admiral said:

> They were all my peers before, and suddenly I'm their boss. I'm supposed to be able to provide them coaching and mentorship. I spent a lot of time with my coach about that. … subordinate development is important, but people tend to think that now that you're wearing a flag, you know all the answers.

c. *Naval Postgraduate School*

NPS's Center for Executive Education offers a number of services for flag officers and their teams. Several admirals said these supports were especially valuable. One senior admiral said:

> I brought out my team [because] I didn't have time to try to go back and preach to them and get them to buy in. I thought it would be best to have that discussion in front of you all, … and you were able to facilitate good cross communication among my team, you know, the inner circle part of the team.

Another senior admiral mentioned the value of:

> some tools from the NPS toolbox, which I felt were really essential to, number one, get a feel for where everyone was. And, when I went to talk to people about these tools, I said, "Hey, look at this, and they said, "Where'd you get that?" I said, "Hey, I got this at NPS. All you have to do is ask."

E. EFFECTIVENESS AND TIME

Effectiveness is the key idea that framed our interviews and responses. Thus, effectiveness is embedded in many responses. Fundamental to transition effectiveness is mission accomplishment. Our interviews – admittedly small at this stage of the research – shared key interpretations. They indicated that commanders who have greater understanding and knowledge of the workings of the command, its strategy, context, and people are better able to make effective decisions and to empower people and build trust.

Command teams who feel their commander has shared his vision, understand it, feel empowered and trust each other are more likely to be effective. Commanders benefit from various forms of support, including coaching and mentoring, which helps them be better mentors and coaches as they rise in the executive level.

For both commanders and commands, time was critical to effectiveness, as an admiral indicated:

> So, the longer the transition period or the depth of the transition where the prospective leader comes in and can gather that context, the better both for the leader and their effectiveness because they'll establish a more credible direction. It's more achievable, and they'll be able to harmonize it in such a way that it takes that culture into account.

If the command team has the time and resources to prepare and plan for the transition, then perhaps less overlap of time is required, and a smoother transition can occur: An executive described "probably the most textbook perfect" transition she experienced:

> We actually had the major deliverables of our strategic plan, our focus areas, and our initiatives actually all ready, pretty much outlined. We had talked to our stakeholders about whether we were on the right track and our customers as to whether, our plan was going to be impactful to them. We talked to senior leaders in the Navy so that when the admiral took command, he felt very comfortable that he was on the right path.

However, sometimes, an admiral notes, circumstances deny commanders and commands the time:

> When it's gone less well is – – sometimes where we're so busy, it just seems like you – – okay, just sit here with me, and then stand by my side for the day, and we'll work the issues together. And we feel like that that's the turnover because you're going to pick up these issues tomorrow when I turn over. You'll learn at least what the topic is of the day. That's mildly effective, but only in a narrow view because you miss out on the broader strategic points of how does it relate to my mission or task, you know, things I'm accountable for within my command.

Commander effectiveness remains a somewhat complex issue that requires more interviews. There seems to be consensus that the transition from O-6 to O-7, to learning what it means to "positionally" be an admiral is generally challenging. So also, are

transitions to O-8 and upward. As admirals move upward, they lean less toward tactical and more toward strategic mindsets and contexts. Styles carefully developed and rewarded at lower levels of tactical and then operational levels may need to shift toward more agile styles suited for the complexities of diverse organizational cultures, stakeholders, and politics. These issues were surfaced in our interviews but need more investment in research to be more specific.

IV. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

We conclude our paper by extending our preliminary results by again discussing effectiveness and then turning to a series of force field analyses. A force field analysis examines the factors or forces in a command that either facilitate and accelerate the success of a command transition or inhibit, challenge or create barriers to the success of the transition.

A. EFFECTIVENESS

Table 4 presents three approaches to effectiveness, using a framework from organizational theory (Daft, 2016).

Table 4
Three Approaches to Assessing the Effectiveness of Command Transitions

Effectiveness Approach*	Effective Transitions	Ineffective Transitions
The goal based approach to effectiveness	Mission focus and continuity of existing strategies and vision for the future are formed or forming.	Mission focus is absent, or becomes unfocused and/or unclear as the transition proceeds.
An effectiveness approach based on processes internal to the command and the relationships between its people	Internal command unit processes are characterized by trust, morale, empowerment of people, and communication and team cohesiveness is high	Internal processes are characterized by mistrust, poor morale, alienation and frustration as communication and cohesiveness deteriorates.
The stakeholder based approach to effectiveness	In simpler contexts, focusing on the needs and expectations of higher commands may be sufficient; in complex, political contexts stakeholder analysis and understanding must be developed by the commander and the team.	The commander and/or the command team are not aligned with their higher and/or lower commands and do not appreciate the expectations and assumptions of their critical stakeholders (e.g., supported or supporting commands).

* The goal based, internal process based and stakeholder based approaches to effectiveness are presented in Daft (2016). Internal process approach refers to the internal processes of the command itself.

The goal based approach frames effectiveness in terms of whether the effects, outcomes and goals of the command are met. However, command transitions occur in a relatively short period to look for outcomes and goal accomplishments of the command, especially at the flag-level where time horizons to accomplish results tend to be longer. One admiral said goals are often not met for a year or more after the incoming commander has left the command. When goal achievement is hard to assess, it is common to judge effectiveness by assessing the command's internal processes; these include openness of communications, trust, morale, and clarity of vision and commander's intent. At higher executive levels, particularly those that are joint, combined, or involve multiple agencies, and are political with diverse and sometimes competing stakeholders, effectiveness needs to be defined in terms of balancing the demands and expectations of multiple stakeholders, and perhaps multiple commanders.

In our preliminary analyses, we have surfaced likely constructs. The analysis is suggestive of what we are likely to find in further analysis, although some of the associations and insights may shift. This study is preliminary in nature, and we must be careful not to overgeneralize. However, in this section we formulate a preliminary assessment of the factors that seem to be facilitators of versus challenges or barriers to effective command transitions. This should be suggestive of the kind of analysis we would extract with a larger number of interviews.

B.   FORCE FIELD ANALYSIS OF THE INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT

Table 5 presents a preliminary force field perspective of the institutional context of the command transition. This environmental context of the Navy, DoD and beyond permeates and forms the framework for all the factors that follow in Tables 6 and 7.

The first and second factors in Table 5 are at a strategic level. The first is concerned with levels of the command: tactical, operational, strategic. Our interviewees indicated – as does formal doctrine – that the highest level of command, the strategic level, is at the very pinnacle of the Navy (i.e., CNO). However, commanders think strategically, as do their subordinates, as they weigh the strengths and weaknesses of their units (and themselves) with the threats and opportunities presented by their situations to select courses of action. Tactical commands require such strategic thinking; in addition,

Table 5
The Institutional Context of the Command Transition

Factor	Facilitators	Barriers or Challenges
Level of the command and complexity: "leaning" tactically vs. "leaning" strategically	Leaning toward more tactical thinking and development of command and control of a socio-technical force; tactical and operational excellence.	Leaning toward more strategic thinking involving longer time horizons, environmental threats and opportunities and the design or redesign of organizational structures to fit the environment. Great complexity and perhaps more resistance and inertia
Political contexts and politics; stakeholder complexity	Greater consensus of values and agreement on appropriate means and the role of the command among relevant stakeholders; trust accorded the uniform.	Disagreements and conflict on ends, values and means involving critical stakeholders; lack of clarity and conflict regarding the role of the command; mistrust of the uniform.
Resource availability	Adequate human, social, and technical resources to meet challenges .	Inadequate human, social, and technical resources leading to overload and perhaps commander isolation; morale suffers.
History, current conditions, reputational effectiveness	A proud history with competent leaders responding effectively to change; high reputational effectiveness.	A declining history, perceptions of being a weak command, viewed as a likely dead end for future mobility.
Higher-level command expectations	Maintain excellence of current capabilities and/or pivot and adjust to new demands or disruptions.	Fix a poorly performing or "broken" command or decommission an existing command
Type/design of transition process	XO or another experienced subordinate commander takes command (fleet-up); capable improvisation and execution of direct inject.	Gapped commands offering no overlap between incoming and outgoing commanders; weak coordination and improvisation of direct inject

tactical thinking also occurs at higher levels of command. With this said, higher levels of command are more likely to require dealing with the accelerating changes of our world, with more complexities of technology, people, organizational levels, groups, and external stakeholders. Factor 2 – political contexts and stakeholder complexity – suggests that it

is more difficult to manage when there is conflict and a lack of consensus regarding means or, even more problematic, ends. Factor 2 may be related to Factor 1: Strategic thinking in higher echelon commands may encounter more disagreements, complexities, and conflicts in perspectives than lower level commands.

The third factor, resource availability relates to the time, personnel and energy that can be dedicated to the transition process. A command gap is a problem of resource availability. External stresses (an especially a crisis) can create demands that exceed capabilities due to lack of resources. Demands to do more with less are demands for efficiency, and these generally eliminate slack in the system, which may be required for people to effectively learn and adapt.

The fourth factor is concerned with history, current conditions (positive and negative) and expectations in light of these. The fifth factor, the reputation of the command as perceived by higher headquarters - is shaped by history and current events and leads to perceptions and expectations about what the incoming commander is expected to do. Events that are negative and engage the attention of powerful stakeholders (e.g., the press and social media, politicians, and the highest levels of command) can range from problematic to rarer, serious crises. All have the potential to challenge the understanding, judgment and communication skills of commanders going through transitions.

FORCE FIELD ANALYSES OF THE COMMAND

Table 6 presents a preliminary force field perspective of the command itself, and thus focuses on personnel, especially the senior staff and leadership team who are so critical in integrating the commander into the work of lower level personnel. Their understanding, motivation, commitment, and skills would seem to be critical to the success of the commander and the command.

The first factor, planning to support the transition process, is much less critical in a context such as fleet-up, but it becomes important when the process is a direct inject or gapped. Our interviewees indicated that the commitment of the outgoing commander and the involvement of the command team in the process could have a major effect on the success of the transition (although *perhaps* less at the highest levels of command, which are more institutionalized and have a commander who has gone through more

Table 6
The Command Team, the Command and the Command Transition Process

Factor	Facilitators	Challenges &/or Barriers
Planning to support the transition process	Careful planning by outgoing commander and command team (months not days)	No time to plan due to crisis and/or work overload.
HR Flow: Frequency of transitions in the command	Continuity and staggered, well-planned and well-timed turnovers at all levels of the command	Many turnovers across multiple levels (commanders, COS, executive service)of the command
Relationships based on trust	Openness, sharing, honesty and confidence and cohesiveness	Closed, guarded, lack of sharing, untruthful, development of cliques and isolates
Empowerment of Individuals	Command personnel have a sense of ownership, individual and team competence, of purpose and of autonomy	Command personnel lack identification with the organization and its purpose; lack a sense of maintaining good or high standards
Morale and esprit de corps of groups and units	Confidence in team members and the command and its future; cohesiveness, pride and ownership; esprit de corps	A lack of confidence and a sense of frustration with the command and its future; alienation; cliquishness and fragmentation.

transitions). Factor 2 indicates that gaps or turnover in senior enlisted, senior civilians, direct reports (and officers at higher levels above the command) can create difficulties in continuity that impact the command transition process. The first two factors are both impacted strongly by factors outside the command: the institutional environment and its systems for HR flow.

The final three factors are aspects of the command's culture, which the incoming commander is stepping into and must operate within. In situations where the reputation of the command is damaged, commanders may be expected to turn around the culture. Gaining and sustaining trust may well be the most central factors for successful command transitions and may dramatically impact mission success. Organizational cultures characterized by mistrust and conflict among their units, divisions and people can result in the commander's thinking being dominated by issues of trust: forcing careful, self-

edited conversations, repeated clarifications, struggles to build trust, and the sense that any trust that has been built is so fragile that it will fracture. A culture of trust, characterized by open communications, honesty and cohesiveness, should facilitate mission/goal effectiveness.

Empowered individuals have a sense of ownership, competence, purpose and at least some autonomy in how they do their work (i.e., they do not feel micromanaged). Morale and esprit de corps includes confidence in the team and its leadership and a sense of pride and ownership at being a team member.

FORCE FIELD ANALYSIS OF THE INCOMING COMMANDER IN THE TRANSITION PROCESS

Table 7 provides a preliminary force field perspective on the factors associated with the commander, who operates in the setting of the command. The first two factors focus on the importance of vision, pacing, strategy and goals. The third factor focuses on the preparedness and familiarity that the commander brings with him into the transition. It includes previous experiences and education acquired through his career that have familiarized him or her with the communities, groups, work processes, technologies, structures of roles, laws and rules, subcultures and environmental factors that are relevant to taking command. It also includes knowing what he or she does not know and knowing how – as much as is possible – to learn what isn't known yet.

Factors three through six focus on management and leadership knowledge, skills and abilities, including delegation. The fourth factor emphasizes the general management and leadership skills that the commander brings to the command and also those developed through the command transition; it includes his or her management philosophy. The command transition process is often viewed as involving the command adapting itself to the new leader. (This may be less applicable for the new one-stars who may be viewed as needing to be socialized into being an admiral; indeed, a positive motivator for investing in team planning for a commander's transition to the flag ranks may be "we can shape the new admiral.")

Table 7
The Incoming Commander in the Transition Process

Factor	Facilitators	Challenges &/or Barriers
Commander's vision and pacing	Making time to learn, reflect and communicate vision and establish a vision	Absence of clear, compelling vision; lower level left to struggle with alignment
Commander's strategy and goals	Presents a focused means of achieving mission success and results	Presents unclear, scattered, too many or few goals not coherently aligned with mission and strategy
Commander's preparedness and familiarity for the command	Career path and experience has prepared him/her with relevant understanding of communities and groups: tends to know what he/she doesn't know or knows how to find out.	Career path and experience has not prepared him/her with needed understanding; not aware of what he/she doesn't know and tends not to seek out knowledge (e.g., isolates self, depends on narrow inner circle)
Commander's management and leadership skills and philosophy for alignment/coordination	Possesses and develops key managerial skills (e.g., delegates and empowers) and leadership skills (e.g., inspires through a sense of purpose)	Lacks key skills in management (e.g., difficulty delegating; tendency to micro-manage) and/or leadership (e.g. tends to be intimidating, coercive or reactive)
Delegation for empowerment	Leveraging diverse skill sets and motivating the team; developing and empowering individual team members	Tends toward micro-management and centralization; doesn't communicate expectations or information, except through minimal negative feedback
Risk Assessment in the context of trust	Trust is given but risk is monitored and assessed; people are expected to professionally monitor themselves	Trust is withheld and external monitoring by supervision is emphasized; trust must be earned
Commander's styles: cognitive and communication	Advantages seem to accrue considered and reflective thinking that seek multiple points of view, are open, invite inputs, and communicate the vision. Agility to shift style. Adaptability to learn.	Cautions are raised by habitual patterns that are rapid or fast, dogmatic, are restricted to an inner circle of similar people, or involve infrequent or ambiguous or communications lacking in specific feedback. Difficulties shifting styles.
Support to the commander	Commander is aware of and strategically uses available support resources: coaches and mentors; Naval Postgraduate School resources or other appropriate programs	Commander goes it alone, perhaps feeling isolated with "the weight of the world on his shoulders"

The fifth and six factors refer to specific skills that most often emerged in discussions of developing trusting relationships and building a culture of trust. The fifth – delegation for empowerment – may be paired with the sixth – risk assessment. Commanders by necessity must delegate, and this involves giving their trust. But their positions require them to demand accountability, and so they must also assess and monitor their subordinates' capabilities, performance and risk assessments.

The seventh factor refers to the commander's style or habitual pattern of behavior (e.g., a "go to," reflexive style that is more directive and decisive). Style relates to comfort and preferences people have about information (including how they receive and provide information) and communication (how frequent and specific feedback is). Note that style does not equate to ability; people can act non-habitually and mindfully in ways that are counter to their dominant style; new habits – when reinforced – replace old habits. This suggest that the best style might be associated with the agility to switch from one style to another as the situation demands.

Finally, the last factor in Table 7 refers to the support commanders receive. A number of interviewees – civilian and military - reported that classes, coaching and mentoring helped them be more effective; it also can help them become better at coaching and mentoring those they command. There is likely more that can be done to make support resources more available to commanders but also make them aware of resources that already exist.

C. FUTURE RESEARCH

Qualitative research and content analysis on thirteen people cannot claim to generalize to larger "subject populations" (i.e., services, communities, ranks); it instead aims at uncovering patterns in respondents' interpretations so that key themes and factors can be uncovered. These can be used to inductively develop key constructs and possible theoretical relationships.

We think phase one provides a proof of concept that leads naturally to phase two. In phase two, the research also will allow us to "unpack" and dig deeper into relationships like those between a culture of trust, empowerment of individuals, cognitive

styles of commanders, and risk assessment in the context of delegation. As the force field interpretations become more clearly understood and as more specificity is added about them, they will become more useful for commanders and commands trying to create more effective transitions, as well as for those who provide support in the form of formal training and education, command courses, coaching and mentoring.

Of particular interest for future research is the issue of crisis and its effect on command and command transitions. This issue came up largely as contextual for many commands and directly impacting a few commands. It deserves clarification and examination in future research. In our interviews, we heard that crises demand attention, can overload individuals and groups in the command and can affect morale. The most dramatic case of crisis we heard involved collisions at sea and lives being lost, with higher commands and many stakeholders focusing on causes and accountability and on what should be changed. Scandals can be slower moving but still result in critical challenges (i.e., people losing jobs or not being promoted) that create the context of challenging transitions. Sometimes flag officers and commands are swept up in issues that would not rise to the level of crisis except that they become amplified by media, including social media, and may become politicized; they can become extremely stressful, particularly if training, education and experience have not prepared commanders for such situations. Research could also investigate how being in what is perceived as a critical situation or a crisis can sometimes be a crucible that brings commands together and develops more capable leaders.

There are other possibilities for contributions directly related to the integration of theories and theoretical models. For example, our future qualitative research on command transitions can address how theoretical models on "initial trust formation" and on "reputational effectiveness" might be integrated. This study already suggests that key factors come together in ways that have not been studied very thoroughly in terms of transitioning into leadership positions: how do the intricacies of effective delegation, risk assessment, empowerment and the development of trust actually relate in the perceptions of people, and can this be operationalized or measured? How do people form judgments of reputational effectiveness?

D.   CONCLUSION

Most generally, what is revealed by the research *to this point*, is that command transition effectiveness is largely a management problem of information and knowledge flows and a leadership problem of team building and building teams of teams. The commander's success and transition success are largely a function of previous experience, of the time to learn and rate of learning, of effectively organizing and transferring information; and of creating and finding contexts for dialogues and interactions to put that knowledge into action. The commander's and command's success seems to largely be a function of maturing as a team and developing as individual performers; it is seemingly shaped but not determined by how the commander enables open communications, trust, and empowerment while assessing risk and competencies.

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APPENDIX A: DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY ORGANIZATION CHART:

EXECUTIVE

SECRETARY OF THE NAVY
UNDER SECRETARY OF THE NAVY

- CHIEF OF NAVAL RESEARCH
- CHIEF OF LEGISLATIVE AFFAIRS
- CHIEF OF INFORMATION
- AUDITOR GENERAL
- CHIEF INFORMATION OFFICER
- JUDGE ADVOCATE GENERAL OF THE NAVY
- NAVAL INSPECTOR GENERAL
- OFFICE OF PROGRAM AND PROCESS ASSESSMENT
- DEPUTY CHIEF MANAGEMENT OFFICER/ DIRECTOR OF BUSINESS TRANSFORMATION

- ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF THE NAVY (RESEARCH, DEVELOPMENT AND ACQUISITION)
- ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF THE NAVY (MANPOWER AND RESERVE AFFAIRS)
- ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF THE NAVY (FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT AND COMPTROLLER)
- ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF THE NAVY (INSTALLATIONS AND ENVIRONMENT)
- GENERAL COUNSEL OF THE DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY
- DEPUTY UNDER SECRETARY OF THE NAVY

CHIEF OF NAVAL OPERATIONS
- BUREAU OF NAVAL PERSONNEL
- BUREAU OF MEDICINE AND SURGERY
- OFFICE OF THE CHIEF OF NAVAL OPERATIONS

COMMANDANT OF THE MARINE CORPS
- HEADQUARTERS UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS

SHORE ESTABLISHMENT [2]

- NAVAL SEA SYSTEMS COMMAND
- NAVAL SUPPLY SYSTEMS COMMAND
- UNITED STATES NAVAL ACADEMY
- OFFICE OF NAVAL INTELLIGENCE
- NAVAL LEGAL SERVICE COMMAND
- NAVAL AIR SYSTEMS COMMAND
- NAVAL FACILITIES ENGINEERING COMMAND
- NAVAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING COMMAND
- NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL
- NAVAL HISTORICAL CENTER
- SPACE AND NAVAL WARFARE SYSTEMS COMMAND
- STRATEGIC SYSTEMS PROGRAMS
- NAVY INSTALLATIONS COMMAND
- NAVAL WAR COLLEGE
- NAVAL SAFETY CENTER
- UNITED STATES FLEET CYBER COMMAND

- SUPPORTING ESTABLISHMENT
- MARINE CORPS RESERVE
- OPERATING FORCES OF THE MARINE CORPS

(SUPPORT)

OPERATING FORCES [2]

- NAVY RESERVE FORCES
- UNITED STATES NAVAL FORCES EUROPE
- UNITED STATES NAVAL FORCES CENTRAL COMMAND
- ATLANTIC FLEET (INCLUDES FLEET MARINE FORCES)
- FLEET FORCES COMMAND [3]
- OPERATIONAL TEST AND EVALUATION FORCES
- NAVAL SPECIAL WARFARE COMMAND
- UNITED STATES NAVAL FORCES SOUTHERN COMMAND
- PACIFIC FLEET INCLUDES FLEET MARINE FORCES)

[1] Systems commands and SSP report to ASN (RDA) for acquisition matters only.

[2] Also includes other Echelon 2 commands and subordinate activities under the command or supervision of the designated organizations.

[3] For Interdeployment Training Cycle purposes. Commander, Fleet Forms Command Controls LANFLT and PACFLT assets.

APPENDIX B: TITLE 10 AND THE NDAA 2019

Title 10 Section 526 of the United States Code limits the number of active duty officers serving in all services and restricts the Navy to 162 active duty flag officers. Exclusions for appointments to the Joint Services are allowed but limited for all services, capping the Navy at 61 flag officers. Section 525 of the Code, further limits the number of active duty Navy positions for the rank of admiral to six and the rank below vice admiral to fifty. The average time in assignment for admirals is three years with exceptions for certain positions that are legislated for four or more years, e.g. the Chief of Naval Operation's serves for four years, and the director of Naval Nuclear Propulsion serves for eight. Non-flag officers may have shorter assignments to optimize exposures to different aspects of their community, a region, and organizational levels. Statute requires all flag officers to retire one month after their sixty-fourth birthday. Four-star admirals must retire after forty years of service unless reappointed to the same grade for extended service.

On 13 August 2018, *H.R.5515 – John S. McCain National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2019* (NDAA 2019) became law and ushered in the ability to make significant changes in the services' personnel management practices, including restrictions on promotion and assignment. Specific changes include:

- Ending some of the "up-or-out rules" that forced officers to leave military service if they failed to be promoted along rigid timelines.
- Allowing for mid-career civilians with high-demand skills to enter the military up to the rank of O-6.
- Allowing promotion boards to move high-performing officers higher on the promotion list regardless of their time in service.
- Allowing service secretaries to create "an alternative promotion process" for specific career fields[3].

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[3] Shane, Leo, III. "Congress is giving the officer promotion system a massive overhaul." Military Times. https://www.militarytimes.com/news/your-military/2018/07/25/how-officers-are-promoted-will-get-its-biggest-overhaul-in-decades-heres-what-that-means-for-the-military/ (accessed September 1, 2019).

APPENDIX C: THE FOUR PHASES OF RESEARCH-FUTURE RESEARCH

This paper reports on the first phase of an envisioned four-phase research project. The four phases are:

Phase 1: Exploration of command transitions through qualitative methods. Use interviews and content analyses to uncover factors that are most important to assess leadership-command alignment for commanders, command leaders, and the institution (the commander's CO).

Phase 2: Validate the Phase 1: Expand the qualitative data to include more admirals from the submariner, cyber, and space communities, plus more admirals from the operating forces. Expand admiral and leadership interviews across the shore and staff commands.

Phase 3: Create assessment process candidates from the data gathered in phases 1 and 2. Assessment types might include, but are not limited to: general check-lists, existing skills and/or style assessments, brief diagnostic exercises taken from industry, tailored coaching and team-building workshops and/or programs, and formal courses.

Phase 4: Testing, refinement, and piloting of the resultant transition assessment process instruments. The processes will be introduced to commands going through transitions. Refinements and further distribution will follow.

APPENDIX D: QUESTIONS FOR COMMAND TRANSITIONS RESEARCH

LEADERSHIP QUESTIONS (FOR THOSE WHO HAVE BEEN INCOMING FLAG-LEVEL COMMANDERS)

Q1) Please tell me the story of your most successful transition?
- What vulnerabilities were revealed?
- What strengths were revealed in that transition?
- How did you know you had the right people in the right positions?
- What was the "speed" of establishing trust during that transition, how did you manage it?
- Why do you perceive this transition as successful?
- What contributed to the transition's success?
- How do you determine what needed to change and what should be maintained?

Q2) Please tell me the story of your least successful transition?
- What vulnerabilities were revealed?
- What strengths were revealed in that transition?
- How did you know you had the right people in the right positions?
- What was the "speed" of establishing trust during that transition, how did you manage it?
- Why do you perceive this transition as your least successful?
- What contributed to the transition's lack of success?

Q3) What do you wish you knew or had asked before, during, and after each of your transitions?
- Can you describe the critical incidents or events in which that knowledge would have been helpful?
- How have you used that knowledge in subsequent transitions?

Q4) How have transitions differed across the commands you have led and served in?
- What was different?
- What was similar?

"Expert Opinion" Questions (to be asked of both Leaders and teams if time permits):
Q1) What is the ideal transition?

COMMAND QUESTIONS (FOR COMMAND TEAM MEMBERS: O-5, O-6'S. SENIOR EXECUTIVE SERVICE MEMBERS)

Q1) Please tell me the story of your commands most successful transition?
- What did you know about the new leader?
- How did this knowledge influence the transition?
- What did the leader know about the command?
- How did this knowledge influence the transition?
- What was the role of timing and duration of the transition?

Q2) Please tell me the story of your commands least successful transition?
- What did you know about the new leader?
- How did this knowledge influence the transition?
- What did the leader know about the command?
- How did this knowledge influence the transition?
- What was the role of timing and duration of the transition?

Q3) What do you wish you knew or had asked before, during, and after each leadership transitions?
- Can you describe the critical incidents or events in which that knowledge would have been helpful?
- How have you used that knowledge in subsequent transitions?

Q4) How have transitions differed across the commands you have served in?
- What was different?
- What was similar?

"Expert Opinion" Questions (to be asked of both Leaders and teams if time permits):
Q1) What is the ideal transition?

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