

2011

## Creating a Culture for Leading and Performing in the Extreme

Donald H. Horner Jr

*Jacksonville University, Lt Col (Ret), U.S. Army*

Luann P. Pannell

*Los Angeles Police Department*

Dennis W. Yates

*Lt Col, Field Artillery, U.S. Army, Fort Polk, LA*

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/usarmyresearch>

---

Jr, Donald H. Horner; Pannell, Luann P.; and Yates, Dennis W., "Creating a Culture for Leading and Performing in the Extreme" (2011). *US Army Research*. 345.

<http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/usarmyresearch/345>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the U.S. Department of Defense at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in US Army Research by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

Donald H. Horner Jr., Jacksonville University, Lt Col (Ret), U.S. Army  
Luann P. Pannell, Los Angeles Police Department  
Dennis W. Yates, Lt Col, Field Artillery, US. Army, Fort Polk, LA

## CHAPTER 17

# Creating a Culture for Leading and Performing in the Extreme

Donald H. Horner Jr., Luann P. Pannell, and Dennis W. Yates

---

---

### Inside the Surge: When Judgment Blurs and Cultures Collide

By early 2008 in the Iraq War, the positive effects of the U.S. “surge” had started to become visible in the streets of Baghdad, as shops began to reopen and people again filled the streets.<sup>1</sup> Despite these outwardly positive appearances, a sinister undercurrent flowed through the population. Rumors ran rampant in Iraqi military and government circles that the radical cleric Muqtada al-Sadr’s Mahdi Army was about to launch an offensive against the government of Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki, a fellow Shiite, because of Sadr’s unhappiness with his waning political influence.

In the neighborhood of Zafaranyah, in Baghdad’s southeastern quadrant, Sadrist fighters started to make trouble. The unit responsible for Zafaranyah had been trained by its commander to act with a great deal of restraint in order to avoid unnecessary civilian deaths. This was in keeping with guidance issued by General David Petraeus, commanding general of the Multi-National Forces–Iraq. The success or failure of Petraeus’ strategy of limiting civilian deaths depended solely on the support of the Iraqi people and their perceptions of American and Iraqi forces. What Petraeus was attempting to do on a large scale was to change the organizational culture of both forces. The events of February and March 2008 would put Petraeus’ vision and strategy to the test and offer evidence of what happens when old ways of doing business compete with the new.

On the second night of what would come to be called “the uprising,” a fight erupted between a dozen young Sadrist fighters and a platoon of American and Iraqi soldiers in the most troubled neighborhood in Zafaranyah. The engaged platoon was well trained, had the situation well in hand, and acted with restraint. What unfolded was a textbook example

of the tendency of higher headquarters to use available technological innovations regardless of the logic (or illogic) of doing so and in contravention of a subordinate commander's wishes.

The battalion watch officer, or "battle captain," ran from the tactical operations center (TOC) to the battalion commander's office to notify him of the firefight. The battle captain explained that the brigade headquarters wanted to drop a 500-pound bomb from an F/A-18 Super Hornet onto the house where it was believed that twelve or so fighters had gone to make a last stand. The brigade TOC was watching the house from several miles away via a live camera feed from an aerial drone.

Rushing to the TOC, the battalion commander attempted to call off the strike. "For God's sake—our job here is to protect the Iraqi people! It's the first sentence in our f—g mission statement! And you want to drop a damned bomb on someone's house?!"

Every soldier in the TOC broke eye contact. They knew they were wrong. Their error: they got caught up in viewing the action as nothing more than a video game. They failed to assess whether dropping a bomb on an Iraqi house was consistent with the commander's intent to exercise restraint and minimize civilian casualties.

Within minutes, the battalion commander was on his way to the scene of the fighting to assess the situation. Almost immediately, he heard the boom of a Hellfire missile striking its target to the east of the commander's location, followed by the staccato report of a string of 30mm shells from the helicopter's main gun. Several minutes later, the commander found the platoon. The two small units and the Iraqi soldiers began fighting their way deep into the neighborhood to find the target house. It appeared that the missile strike had taken the spirit out of the enemy fighters, and friendly forces surrounded the house. They found surprisingly little damage. Fortunately, the Apache helicopter had fired a newly developed missile, specifically designed to limit destruction in urban terrain. Nonetheless, there was still collateral damage to other houses and pools of blood on the ground, along with bloody Iraqi National Police uniforms.

**T**his all-too-real story illustrates what happens when judgment blurs and cultures collide. Despite a battalion commander's best efforts to comply with a general order to protect Iraqis, well-intentioned, but detached, soldiers ordered an air strike that effectively bombed an Iraqi home and generated unnecessary collateral damage. The incompatible, video game-like world of a TOC encroached upon the soldier-on-the-ground culture that sought to build positive perceptions and relationships among the local population. The established Army culture—to identify and target an enemy with all available weaponry despite potentially deleterious

effects to the local civilian population—trumped the new guidance and intent of General Petraeus and subordinate commanders.

This chapter examines methods of creating a culture for leading and performing in extreme environments. A theoretical framework is provided to help in understanding what culture is and what culture does and to offer insight into why it is so difficult to change a culture. The chapter combines a military view of culture with a police department's perspective to provide a broad sense of what culture means for organizations operating in extreme environments.

### **CULTURE: LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The structural-functional school of anthropology and sociology is an appropriate point of departure for a discussion about creating an organizational culture expected to perform in *in extremis* contexts. The notion of culture as a structural element of society was introduced by Polish anthropologist Stanislaw Malinowski in his ethnographic research on tribes in the southwest Pacific islands, Africa, and elsewhere. Malinowski views culture as a collective system of shared habits and emphasized the functionality and utility of these habits for society. This functional view of culture “lays down the principle that in every type of civilization, every custom, material object, idea and belief fulfills some vital function.”<sup>2</sup>

Though Malinowski's contemporary, Alfred Radcliffe-Brown rejects the structural-functional view as tautological, he highlights that the relational aspects of culture help form bonds of kinship that extend beyond family, marriage, or blood into groups or teams through which blood kinship is metaphorical.<sup>3</sup> Radcliffe-Brown argues that culture can be created, learned, and transmitted in meaningful ways within groups, teams, and organizations. The American sociologist Talcott Parsons acknowledges this distinction and notes that “culture is intrinsically transmissible from one action system to another by learning and diffusion.”<sup>4</sup> From a leadership perspective, this would be good news because it suggests that once identified, the proper culture for functioning in dangerous contexts can be replicated, taught, and reinforced. Another implication is that cultures can be adjusted and changed.

Parsons goes on to argue that culture creation and transmission are essential tasks required of all social systems.<sup>5</sup> In Parsonian terms, “[T]he problem of creating, preserving, and transmitting the system's distinctive culture and values” is an issue of survival for the social system.<sup>6</sup> The American industrialist Chester I. Barnard went a step further, arguing that transmission of a

company's culture and values is an essential leadership task. Barnard views the creation, maintenance, and transmission of culture as a primary function of the chief executive. "The distinguishing mark of the executive responsibility is that it requires not merely conformance to a complex code of morals but also the creation of a moral code for others. The most generally recognized aspect of this function is called securing, creating, inspiring of 'morale' in an organization. This is the process of inculcating points of view, fundamental attitudes, loyalties, to the organization or cooperative system, and to the system of objective authority."<sup>7</sup>

Barnard asserts that it is a meaningful pattern of relationships within an organization—the culture—that creates "a condition of communion and the opportunity for commandship."<sup>8</sup> Embedded in this framework are the elements of esprit de corps and élan indicative of high-performing teams and organizations operating in extreme environments. Barnard's *Functions of the Executive* is foundational to conceptions linking leadership with organizational culture.

Tom Peters and Robert Waterman's *In Search of Excellence* extend the view of culture from something that an organization *has* to something that an organization *is*. Linda Smircich agrees, noting that initial usages described culture as "an attribute or quality internal to the group . . . and a fairly stable set of taken-for-granted assumptions, shared beliefs, meanings, and values that form the backdrop for action."<sup>9</sup> In this way, organizations actually take on the identity of the cultures they espouse, becoming part myth, part legend, and part reality. Peters and Waterman note that companies become identified with their cultures and contend that "excellent companies are marked by very strong cultures, so strong that you either buy into their norms or get out."<sup>10</sup>

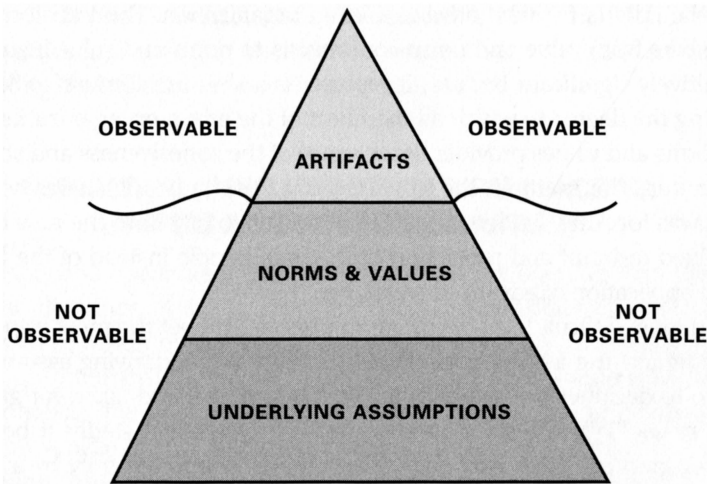
Edgar Schein's *Organizational Culture and Leadership* offers a relevant and useful conception of culture for leaders and teams performing in extreme environments.<sup>11</sup> Schein's views are appealing because they operationalize, or make concrete, many of the variables implicit in earlier theoretical formulations. Schein's conception is a derivation of the structural-functional approaches blended with insights garnered from years as an organizational scholar. Schein defines culture as a "pattern of shared basic assumptions that the group [or team or organization] learned as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems."<sup>12</sup>

Schein's definition is densely packed. His theory notes that culture is relational, learned, transmitted, patterned, and perception based. It also suggests that most people in an organization presume the culture to sanction certain

perceptions, thoughts, feelings, and behaviors based on a past history of problem solving within the organization and with outsiders. At the risk of distorting Schein's views, a simpler definition is offered here to demystify the concept: Culture refers to a basic pattern of assumptions, norms, behaviors, and values learned by members of a group or organization as the proper way to think and behave and includes a general sense of "how things work" in the group or organization. In plain language, culture refers to "how things are done" by an organization and "what matters" to an organization. This definition of culture serves as the basis for the discussion here.

Schein proposes that there are three levels of culture within an organization. "Levels" refers to "the degree to which the cultural phenomenon is visible to the observer."<sup>13</sup> The distinction between levels is significant because it implies that (1) not all elements of culture are readily discernable and (2) there can be matches and mismatches between levels—meaning that one can encounter mixed cultural signals at various levels of the organization. Figure 17.1 depicts the three levels of culture.

The easiest level to observe are artifacts, which are "all the phenomena that one sees, hears, and feels" when encountering a group or organization.<sup>14</sup> Artifacts appeal to the senses and include such elements as the physical plant



**FIGURE 17.1** Schein's three levels of culture

Source: Stephen J. Gerras, Leonard Wong, and Charles D. Allen, "Organizational Culture: Applying a Hybrid Model to the U.S. Army" (unpublished working paper, U.S. Army War College, 2008), based on Edgar H. Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1992).

and environs, language, colors, attire, signage, behavioral interactions, stories, myths, legends, ceremonies, and the like. Artifacts are what visitors and new employees most immediately notice when dealing with the organization. Artifacts are, however, but one aspect of culture, providing only a hint of what the organization may or may not actually value. The degree to which artifacts “reflect deeper values in the minds of organization members” is uncovered only after having spent a good deal of time observing or working in the organization.<sup>15</sup>

At the next level are espoused values or norms and values.<sup>16</sup> They are deeper, less readily observable aspects of culture than artifacts. Norms and values are transmitted to members of the group through learning, practice, and assimilation. Values are judgments about what is important in an organization, while norms represent unwritten rules that allow members of a culture to know what is expected of them in various situations. What one values will affect what one perceives as “normal” behavior in an organization. Values and beliefs define the organization, are a mechanism for social control, and also influence identity development.

Those who best embody, transmit, and propagate norms and values to other members of the group become recognized as leaders. Because of this, Schein argues that “culture and leadership are two sides of the same coin.”<sup>17</sup> By this he means that leaders create and reinforce culture, and culture determines the criteria for who advances in an organization. The transformation of members from value and norm conformists to norm and value instructors is cognitively significant because it represents a shift from “must” to “ought.” Assessing the degree to which all members of the group or organization buy-in to norms and values provides some sense of the cohesiveness and strength of the culture. For example, the story opening this chapter illustrates how difficult it was for Army leaders to get subordinates to buy in to the new culture that valued restraint and protection of the Iraqi people instead of the heavy-handed application of advanced weaponry.

The most difficult level of culture to discern, and yet the most important, is basic underlying assumptions. Paradoxically, basic underlying assumptions are hard to decipher because they are so fundamental and taken for granted. Schein notes, “When a solution to a problem works repeatedly, it becomes taken for granted. What was once a hypothesis, supported only by a hunch or value, comes gradually to be treated as reality. We come to believe that . . . things work this way.”<sup>18</sup>

Basic underlying assumptions are similar to what Chris Argyris calls “theories-in-use.” Argyris explains that “human beings have programs in their heads about how to be in control.”<sup>19</sup> These organizational rules to live by are

so basic, so underlying, that they are unconscious and unspoken. Basic underlying assumptions define “what to pay attention to, what things mean, how to react emotionally to what is going on, and what actions to take in various kinds of situations.”<sup>20</sup>

The opening scenario illustrates the three levels of culture. During the surge, an underlying assumption was that technology is good. This assumption leads to the norm of using technology whenever necessary to target combatants. The artifact is the firing of the Hellfire missile into the house containing combatants. Mismatches between levels of culture offer a valuable metric for leaders. Artifacts representative of norms and values, and norms and values consistent with basic underlying assumptions, yield a consistency that reinforces and guides behaviors. For *in extremis* organizations and leaders, mismatches could produce a measure of indecisiveness that might result in unnecessary injuries and casualties. The Iraq story reflects what happens when the culture that a leader is trying to create is out of step with previous norms and values and basic underlying assumptions.

John Kotter’s *Leading Change* reinforces just how difficult it is to lead cultural change.<sup>21</sup> He argues that change “sticks” only after it becomes part of how the majority of people in the organization, about 75 percent or more, do business. Kotter suggests that lasting change will not occur “until new behaviors are rooted in social norms and shared values.”<sup>22</sup> Three factors weigh heavily in such change: a conscious effort to demonstrate and model the new way of doing things, rewarding behaviors consistent with the new culture, and appointing leaders that embody the new culture.

### **PRACTICAL APPLICATION OF CULTURAL CONCEPTS: THE LOS ANGELES POLICE DEPARTMENT**

For leaders and operators in dangerous contexts, the opening story illustrates how the demands of safety, complex ethical responsibilities, and the consequences of action or inaction must be simultaneously weighed in a short; ultra-high-intensity time frame. To cultivate a culture of sound leadership for such contexts, one must examine the role of training. Training becomes the premium vehicle for not only promoting organizational change, but also for inculcating those changes into values and beliefs that influence the culture. It is the training of an organization’s most precious assets—its people—that determines how they think, feel, and act while facing critical situations.

It is within this framework that the Los Angeles Police Department began to examine traditional models of police training. As a practical matter, the



LAPD anticipated that it needed to adjust its policing for its force to adequately address the demands of future generations. Such a mental and cultural shift is easier said than done, however, particularly given the rich, tradition-based entities that police forces tend to be. It is not sufficient to simply add more training; it must be training that will shift thought processes so that a variety of new questions is asked.

### **Techniques for Assessing Culture and Change**

Frequently, the inability of an organization to accept change is connected to a failure to adequately assess the cultures affected by the change. The formidable social forces of formal and informal cultures can often block even the best initiatives. In the case of the LAPD, knowing that a solid understanding of the concerns from the frontline of policing would be critical, the principles of “leadership by walking around” were applied in numerous situations and by several different leaders in collaboration with one another.<sup>23</sup>

Leadership by walking around was employed during the course of everyday tasks. Various leaders in the training office looked for transitional opportunities to develop meaningful conversations, such as while officers were on break from a class, waiting in line for firearms qualification at the shooting range, training to hold a perimeter, or preparing for physical training. Running with classes of recruits allowed trainers to glean elements of accepted culture based on the recruits’ chants. They also observed the use of positive and negative reinforcement by staff and noted the response to high and low achievement.

LAPD leaders derived insights from walking around and paying attention to those who were “invisible” in the organization. This technique helped to include the perspective of the parking attendant, the records clerk, and the student workers and trainees. Focus groups alone would not have allowed these perspectives to surface. From the collection of observations through informal interactions, a framework, vocabulary, and subcultures were identified for examination through more formal assessment procedures.

Army leaders likewise employ leadership by walking around as a technique for assessing culture. During such interactions, the leader exerts little direct influence because, for the most part, members of the unit are actually doing things properly. The leader exerts direct influence only on those parts of the organization that are not behaving in a manner consistent with cultural norms and values. Put differently, the leader touches on, or uses “touch points,” to correct aberrant behaviors.<sup>24</sup>

Although examining culture may seem unnecessary or labor intensive, to do otherwise is to invite failure. In the case of the LAPD police academy, the following six cultures or subcultures were examined:

- current culture of the department
- culture of the community being served
- culture of the recruit
- culture of the training instructors
- culture of field training officers
- the envisioned future culture

More structured assessments were conducted through focus groups, discussions with key stakeholders, and a review of documentation and procedures. Investigations revealed a myriad of issues that had to be accounted for in order to adequately address a redesigned training model. Generational differences between recruits and senior officers proved significant. In contrast to their trainers, new recruits are “millennials,” who tend to have short and selective attention spans and operate with the expectation that information should be readily accessible. Tending toward nonconfrontation, millennials are “joiners” who want to be a part of something with a greater purpose, something larger than themselves. Given that this segment of the population represents the bulk of new trainees entering the LAPD police academy, two questions arose: “How do they learn?” and “How can they be reached?” The academy had been designed originally to meet the needs of a different kind of recruit, community, and environment. The LAPD had to thoroughly evaluate what training (and culture) needed to change in order to ensure success for the next generation of officers in a media-driven world of high expectations, incessant scrutiny, and constant demands.

Similar to the military, traditional police training had typically emphasized pride, discipline, and performance. Police recruits sat at attention with minimal class discussion. Formal and informal instruction, including recruit-to-recruit blogs and internet sites, told recruits to sit still, learn the material, and spout the textbook response. In essence, the mind-set required to succeed in the police academy was antithetical to the previous expectation of engagement held by the community and officers in the field.

The LAPD police academy aspired to do more than simply pass mandated state standards. Though it was determined that continuation of strong tactical training was necessary, improvements had to be made to encourage critical thinking and reward initiative. Training had to evolve so that new officers could be confident in their abilities to think through and master emergent

*in extremis* scenarios. The new goal was to complement tactical strengths by developing officers who were self-motivated, community-oriented critical thinkers and problem solvers. This revised goal demanded a new training paradigm and a new culture.

## THE LAPD POLICE ACADEMY TRAINING PARADIGM

### Part I: Peak Performance by Training the Whole Person

“Training the whole person” requires that all elements of the human condition be considered in the process in order to replicate the real-world policing environment. To reflect the shared importance of all aspects of a human response, the LAPD training triangle was created as a representation of all learning domains to be debriefed in training (see Figure 17.2):

- affective domain, or emotions
- cognitive domain, or thoughts
- psychomotor domain, or behaviors

The concept of developing the “whole person” is endemic to leadership paradigms and is rooted in the Army’s “be-know-do” leadership development model.<sup>25</sup>

The challenge of LAPD police academy instructional teams was to ensure that each trainee gets pushed to deeper levels of skill acquisition. Training must mimic real life, which means that often one domain may be more dominant than another. A significant shift in LAPD training culture was changing the definition of success from simply passing a cognitive test to one that involved all elements—emotions, behaviors, and thoughts—of a realistic training scenario.

Though representative of a cultural shift for the law enforcement training community, these concepts are not new to those who study peak performance and sports psychology. Not having the advantage of classes full of highly disciplined, gifted athletes, the LAPD’s aspiration was to get exceptional response capability out of normal people. This is where the potential of human motivation needs to be accessed the most, and this represents a significant contrast to the traditional police academy classroom, which involved instructor-to-student lectures with little exchange between the two. The older approach did not reflect the dynamic, interactive nature of community policing, which values critical thinking and problem solving. The latter is the culture the LAPD police academy sought to create.

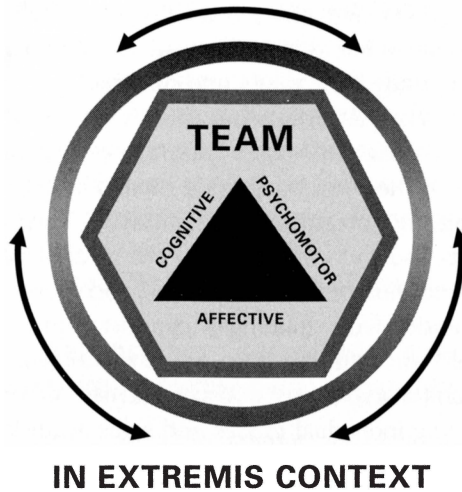


FIGURE 17.2 Los Angeles Police Department police academy training model

Older models for police training were focused primarily on training a skill set—typically represented by cognitive or psychomotor learning domains—without much discussion of how an individual’s affective state would influence either. The police academy wanted trained officers confident in their ability to assess and understand the role of emotion in human conflict. Consistent with Schein’s notion of basic underlying assumptions, the new culture emphasized knowing, instead of ignoring, the affective component of training.

The focal point for teaching affective responses is the LAPD’s mission, vision, and values. These concepts represent the meaning of and motivation for why the LAPD does what it does. Acknowledging the numerous emotions experienced with policing, the department’s mission, vision, and values help channel police officers’ affective responses by causing them to consider what the response ought to be in a given scenario.

### **Part II: Trained in a Team, by a Team, To Be a Team**

The LAPD police academy emphasizes that individuals are embedded in teams. It is not a trivial matter that the police academy’s emphasis on team flies in the face of American society, which stresses individualism. Even the notion of the American Dream reinforces individuality by noting that the United States is a “land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for every man, with opportunity for each according to ability or achievement.”<sup>26</sup>

The deep roots of individuality point to the potential challenge and struggle of inculcating the value of teams in police academy training. This represents a foundational clash of underlying values and cultures.

Solutions for *in extremis* events are more commonly team-based and involve a coordinated, collective action. Police forces dispatch their most elite teams to intervene in the most dangerous situations. Though respected for their individual skills, these teams are best known for their well-coordinated, synchronized efforts and movements. These teams are cross-trained for full awareness and appreciation of the complexity of each person's role. As Figure 17.2 connotes, extensive team training is conducted in a continuous cycle. Strong teams require strong individuals, so remediation is done at both the micro (individual) and macro (team) levels of analysis.

By deemphasizing individual grades and skills acquisition in the LAPD police academy, the organization leverages the social environment to create a different, more critical and more team-based, officer. The vision is that the organization will succeed or fail based on the aggregate performance of its coordinated teams. The intent is to create the building blocks for team collaboration, roles, and responsibilities early in one's development as a police officer.

Ultimately the LAPD of the future will reflect an interdependent organization that values teams for their specific functions and for their contribution to the force. Having officers train in teams creates ownership, responsibility, and a better awareness of how one team's response fits within the larger operational context. This creates a more resilient workforce. Research suggests that resiliency is increased when those exposed to life-threatening, *in extremis* environments feel an affinity for and social connection to colleagues in meaningful ways.<sup>27</sup>

### **Part III: The Context—Training through an Event, Not to It**

The final portion of the LAPD police academy model requires that the dynamic development of the individual and the team occurs within an experiential learning environment. This necessitates officers training "through" an event and not to it. Training through an event includes training not only for the extreme event, but also for events following or preceding the crisis. The latter tend to encompass the preponderance of daily police work.

Laudably, the law enforcement community spends significant training dollars preparing for *in extremis* events meant to test certain psychomotor (behavioral) capabilities. Often ignored, however, are the cognitive (thoughts) and affective (emotion) domains. After an *in extremis* event, it is incumbent on leaders to ensure that individuals, teams, and organizations return to

functioning at a neutral level. Cultivating a healthy police culture requires that officers return to functioning in the relative calm of more “normal” situations.

This LAPD model incorporates many aspects of what is already known to cultivate resilience in those who chose the career path of a first responder. Taken as a whole, the model speaks to the deliberate, practical, and informed manner in which the LAPD has gone about the process of building a culture of policing based on the contribution of every individual as a leader and the value of every team in completing the mission.

### **LEADER AND LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT IMPLICATIONS: AN INTEGRATED ARMY (GREEN) AND LAPD (BLUE) PERSPECTIVE**

Envisioning and enacting a positive culture capable of sustaining high-level performance in extreme environments takes an enormous commitment of time and energy. While much has been written about culture or “command climate,” the pragmatic view suggests that complex written perspectives generally lose their luster in practice.<sup>28</sup> This bias toward “doing” hints at the need to keep guidance regarding leadership and leadership development simple. Providing subordinates a general framework within which to work and allowing them the freedom to innovate within that framework also fits within the broader American culture. What follows are tips about leading effectively in extreme situations. The intent is to offer a perspective that readers can use to develop their leadership style in the context of creating a sustainable organizational culture capable of winning during extreme circumstances. The insights apply to a leader’s attempt to assess, discover, change, or transmit the appropriate culture.

- *Keep your command philosophy simple and provide a framework for winning in extreme environments.* Army commanders have traditionally been encouraged to publish a “command philosophy” upon assumption of their position. Some command philosophies are several pages long, for example, ten single-spaced pages or more. The problem with this approach is that often the leader’s words do not match subsequent actions. In Scheinian terms, a mismatch is created between espoused values—what the leader says—and actual behaviors—what the leader does. This disconnect between espoused values and basic underlying assumptions results in cynicism among organization members.
- *Get the big ideas right.* Leadership is about getting the “big ideas” right.<sup>29</sup> A small number of big ideas—modeled by the organizational leader every

day and copied by subordinates—are better than tenfold ideas published in an unread philosophical epic. Consider the following command philosophy, a scant two sentences long: “Do the right thing” and “Treat others the way you want to be treated.” Consider adding a qualifier at the end of the document and one has the essence of the philosophy: “You will learn more about me and my beliefs as we meet each other during the course of our operations and day-to-day life within the unit.”

- *Lead by example in all things—and teach.* Avoid the common misperception that leading by example simply means being the fastest or the strongest. Teaching is an indispensable part of being a leader—and never more so than in extreme environments. As Admiral James Bond Stockdale noted, “Every great leader I’ve ever known has been a great teacher, able to give those around him a sense of perspective. . . . Teachership is indispensable to leadership and an integral part of duty.”<sup>30</sup> This theme, that leadership is teachership, is essential in dangerous environments.
- *Seek personal balance in order to protect your ability to make decisions.* Current literature cites balance as a critical element of holistic leadership.<sup>31</sup> The notion is simple: do not ignore one’s very real need to read, reflect, and rest. The organization depends on the individual and the collective abilities of its leaders and members to make sound decisions, and sound decisions are affected by one’s emotional, physical, social, and spiritual health. To illustrate, General Douglas MacArthur is rumored to have never made a serious decision after 3 p.m., preferring instead to spend his evenings in quiet reflection and to postpone big decisions until the morning.
- *Periodically review your philosophy for subordinates.* It is easy to get caught up in the gravitational pull of the day-to-day running of an organization. Take the larger organizational view. One should not assume that new members of the group will absorb leaders’ beliefs or philosophy through osmosis. Much as big ships do not make sharp turns, it takes time and reinforcement to change organizational culture. Remember the opening story about Iraq?
- *Develop the ability and tacit knowledge to identify where you are needed and at the precise time you are needed.* In Army parlance, the notion of being where needed most is known as the decisive point. The ability to identify the decisive point and to be present as necessary accrues through experience, training, and trial by fire. Leaders must be present and vigilant because even well-intentioned subordinates can get off track. Be mindful of this dynamic.

- *Attend to all elements of extreme events, whether during training or real life.* This chapter's opening story highlights how a given tactical situation can elicit numerous applicable solutions. Some solutions are consistent with and others are in opposition to the desired organizational culture. Although predictable in the Iraq situation as told, the responses of embarrassment and shame are emotions largely excluded from training development or tactical debriefs. If only tactical operations are debriefed, only tactical operations will be improved. *In extremis* events require leaders to attend to all facets of an operation.
- *Train the whole person.* First responders to dangerous events, whether wars abroad or emergencies at home, are challenged in a number of ways. The challenges occur before, during, and after the events. These include battles for scarce resources, lack of support from senior leaders, and bureaucratic red tape to train for all elements of an operation. Organizations that fail to train the whole person and challenge their capabilities across all domains fail to adequately prepare team members for the totality of the experience.

A best practice focused on training the whole person is a technique used by the German Army Quick Reaction Force (QRF) in Afghanistan.<sup>32</sup> In summer 2008, a German army military psychologist offered psychological education and mental training to the soldiers and leaders of a platoon earmarked for duty with a second contingent of the QRF. Military psychologists in the German army work as consultants in psychological matters, preventive specialists focusing on post-traumatic stress disorder and other psychological outcomes, coordinators for after-care measures following critical incidents, and counselors for soldiers before, during, and after operations.

This particular psychologist designed two instruments for psychological self-assessments: (1) a self-check for mental readiness to engage in a fight-and-survive scenario and (2) a self-check for leadership and team capability during a fight. Instruction was provided regarding how to adapt to unusual, *in extremis* situations and how to adequately perform self-checks for combat readiness.

Results showed that 63 percent of participants felt better prepared for combat, and 86 percent acknowledged the utility of a self-check to make them more aware of combat stressors. Similarly, 90 percent of participants fully agreed that mental preparation is necessary as a means of anticipating psychological stressors associated with combat operations. Researchers concluded that interventions by military psychologists paid huge dividends before, during, and after QRF missions.



- *Train all the way through an event, not just to it.* A derivative of the preceding discussion is that events leading to a dangerous context and recovery from the actual event engender significant additional challenges. Leaders cannot stop leading once the tactical operation has concluded. Leaders must anticipate the ongoing needs of their people, consider the political environment and constructs within which operations are conducted, and acquire the resources needed after the extreme event.
- *Demonstrate righteous anger judiciously.* The notion of losing one's temper judiciously appears to be oxymoronic. Yet, this prescription is both interesting and supported by the leadership literature. Research shows that leaders only have so many silver bullets, and if fired all at once, the werewolves become immune. This is often referred to as the "silver bullet theory" of leadership, coined by former Stanford University president Donald Kennedy.<sup>33</sup>

The argument here is not advocating behaving badly. Rather, the intent is to leverage the affective response of subordinates by judiciously using anger as a motivator. Daniel Goleman, Richard Boyatzis, and Annie McKee suggest this approach in *Primal Leadership*. They argue that this commanding style should be part of a leader's repertoire and is best used "in a crisis, to kick-start a turnaround, or with problem employees."<sup>34</sup>

In *Sacred Hoops*, the basketball coach Phil Jackson speaks about "righteous anger" and how to deliver it. He states, "As a rule I try not to unleash my anger at players. . . . When it happens, I say what I have to say, then let it pass, so the bad feelings won't linger in the air and poison the team. Sometimes what my father called 'righteous anger' is the most skillful means to shake up a team. But, it has to be dispensed judiciously."<sup>35</sup> Jackson's points are reinforced by research suggesting that "emotional arousal in moderation may also have a positive impact on human learning."<sup>36</sup> Admiral Stockdale supports Jackson's contention: "Every so often, I would play that 'irrational' role and come completely unglued" in order to stimulate the desired arousal in subordinates.<sup>37</sup> His point: being theatrical at the right time really helped him during his *in extremis* imprisonment in the Hanoi Hilton.

- *Link mission, vision, and values, and make them meaningful.* Full commitment is necessary for success in extreme environments, and for human beings, commitment is linked to meaning. Hence, the values and vision of an organization must be devised, communicated, and reinforced in a manner that stimulates full commitment to accomplishing the organizational mission. These are essential tasks for creating the desired culture.

Napoleon warns leaders that this sort of commitment cannot be bought and is not for sale. He cautions, "A man does not have himself killed for a half-pence a day or for a petty distinction. You must speak to the soul in order to electrify him."<sup>38</sup> Stockdale agrees: "More than any other factor . . . success or failure depends on the moral sentiment, the ethos, the spirit of the man."<sup>39</sup>

In extreme environments, the binding force of individual commitment is manifested by unit cohesion. Cohesiveness of the variety required to succeed *in extremis* is derived from membership in a team of professionals fully committed to subjugating one's needs for the good of the team. Membership in such teams must be earned, standards must be high and consistently enforced, and there must exist overarching meaning of the rarest form. In these environs, leadership is as much about communicating meaning as it is anything else.<sup>40</sup>

- *Conduct training in teams by teams early.* A well-established body of sociological literature demonstrates that human beings endure and operate in extreme conditions essentially for each other. S. L. A. Marshall's *Men against Fire* (1947), Morris Janowitz and Edward A. Shils' classic "Cohesion and Disintegration of the German Wehrmacht in World War II" (1948), Samuel Stouffer's *American Soldier* (1949), and Charles Moskos' "Why Men Fight" (1969) equally contend that trust in and overriding commitment to the team serves as the tonic that keeps soldiers fighting in combat.

The same motivational foundation applies to first responders. Evidence suggests that identification with one's team, the cohesiveness of the team, and the team's commitment to organizational goals are linked with successful functioning in extreme environments. For these reasons, it makes sense to form teams early and to conduct training in teams in order to bind individuals into an identifiable, functional collective.

- *Seek continuous improvement.* The literature on "learning organizations" also applies to organizations operating *in extremis*.<sup>41</sup> Seeking continuous improvement implies double-loop learning, which Argyris describes as learning that changes the system. This involves unlearning old ways of doing business and continually seeking new ways to operate. A culture of continuous improvement is necessitated by the enormity of the dangers and risks associated with operating in extreme environments and by the ingenuity of the opposition.

## KEY REFERENCES

In addition to the referenced citations, there are several relevant texts that speak to aspects of producing an organization capable of sustaining high performance in extreme environments. This short list of seminal works is valuable for addressing the topic of culture:

- Blaber, Pete. *The Mission, the Men and Me: Lessons from a Former Delta Force Commander*. New York: Penguin, 2008.
- Kotter, John P., and James L. Heskett. *Corporate Culture and Performance*. New York: Free Press, 1992.
- Loftus, Bethan. *Police Culture in a Changing World*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2010.

Building and sustaining a culture capable of winning in extreme environments ultimately comes down to whether people—soldiers, police officers, fire fighters, and first-responders of other types—are willing to fight for each other. The true test of a winning culture is whether unit members consistently run toward and rather than away from the fight—be it a fight against a raging fire, criminals with bad intentions, or enemy combatants. For an exhaustive look at unit cohesion in extreme environments, see the following:

- Henderson, William Darryl. *Cohesion: The Human Element in Combat*. Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press, 1985.
- Wong, Leonard, et al. *Why They Fight: Combat Motivation in the Iraq War*. Carlisle, Pa.: Strategic Studies Institute, 2003.

## NOTES

1. The surge refers to the increase in the number of American troops ordered deployed in 2007 by President George W. Bush to provide additional security and combat power. Approximately 20,000 additional soldiers were deployed to Baghdad.
2. Abram Kardiner and Edward Preble, *They Studied Man* (Cleveland, Ohio: World, 1961), 24.
3. A. R. Radcliffe-Brown, *Structure and Function in Primitive Society* (London: Routledge, 1952).
4. Talcott Parsons and Edward Shils, *Toward a Theory of Social Action* (New York: Harper and Row, 1951), 159.
5. W. Richard Scott, *Organizations: Rational, Natural, and Open Systems* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1987).
6. *Ibid.*, 68.
7. Chester I. Barnard, *The Functions of the Executive* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1938), 279.

8. Scott, *Organizations*, 63.
9. Linda Smircich, "Concepts of Culture and Organizational Analysis," *Administrative Science Quarterly* 28, no. 1 (1983): 58.
10. Thomas J. Peters and Robert H. Waterman Jr., *In Search of Excellence* (New York: Harper and Row, 1982), 77.
11. Edgar H. Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1992).
12. *Ibid.*, 12.
13. *Ibid.*, 16.
14. Schein, *Organizational Culture*, 17.
15. Richard L. Daft, *Organization Theory and Design*, 10th ed. (Mason, Ohio: South-Western, 2010), 375.
16. Schein uses the term "espoused values." The authors find "norms and values" to be more descriptive of the processes involved.
17. Schein, *Organizational Culture*, 2.
18. *Ibid.*, 21–22.
19. Chris Argyris, *Overcoming Organizational Defenses* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1990), 13.
20. Schein, *Organizational Culture*, 22.
21. John P. Kotter, *Leading Change* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 1996).
22. *Ibid.*, 15.
23. See Peters and Waterman, *In Search of Excellence*, for a comprehensive discussion of this leadership technique. The practice was used by senior executives at Hewlett-Packard and originally called "management by walking around" (MBWA).
24. The term "touch points" is also referred to as "negative control": if while walking around the commander finds things are going well in the unit, there is no need for corrective action. When things are going awry, the leader takes action and exerts control to positively affect the situation.
25. See the whole-person paradigm by Franklin-Covey at [www.franklincovey.com](http://www.franklincovey.com); see *Army Field Manual 22–100 Army Leadership: Be, Know, Do*, August 1999, for a thorough discussion of the Army's model; another source is Richard E. Cavanaugh, *Be-Know-Do: Leadership the Army Way* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2004).
26. James Truslow Adams, *Epic of America* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1931), 15.
27. Merle Friedman and Craig Higson-Smith, "Building Psychological Resilience: Learning from the South African Police Service," in *Promoting Capabilities to Manage Posttraumatic Stress: Perspectives on Resilience*, ed. D. Paton, J. M. Violanti, and L. M. Smith (Springfield, Ill.: Charles C. Thomas, 2003), 103–118. To clarify, positive resilience can be thought of as the capacity to endure and adapt to repeated exposure to potentially traumatic events while retaining the ability to live a well-rounded, healthy life with positive relationships.
28. The authors concur with Edgar Schein conceptually: Climate is an element of culture, not vice versa. The comment as written reflects the Army's perspective, which tends to broadly view culture and climate as interchangeable concepts.

29. For a more thorough discussion, see Robert J. Allio, "Leadership: The Five Big Ideas," *Strategy and Leadership* 37, no. 2 (2009): 4–12.
30. James Bond Stockdale, *Ten Years of Reflection: A Vietnam Experience* (Palo Alto, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1984), 73–74.
31. The term "holistic leadership" is not new. See Gordon L. Lippitt, *Organizational Renewal: A Holistic Approach to Leadership Development* (New York: Prentice Hall, 1981). The *Journal of Leadership Studies* devotes its spring 2012 edition to the topic of holistic leadership and sustaining high performance.
32. The authors wish to thank Jochen Grigutsch for his contribution to this paper. This section is largely written by him or adapted from his work.
33. For a discussion of this and other nontraditional leadership theories, see Donald H. Horner Jr., "A Different Twist: Non-Rational Views of Leadership," *Military Review*, November–December 1996, 45–50.
34. Daniel Goleman, Richard Boyatzis, and Annie McKee, *Primal Leadership: Realizing the Power of Emotional Intelligence* (Boston: Harvard Business School, 2002), 55.
35. Phil Jackson, *Sacred Hoops* (New York: Hyperion, 1995), 141–142.
36. Russell Shilling, Michael Zyda, and E. Casey Wardynski, "Introducing Emotion into Military Simulation and Videogame Design: America's Army: Operations and VIRTE," *Proceedings of the GameOn Conference* (London, 2002), 3.
37. Stockdale, *Ten Years of Reflection*, 37.
38. Kevin Kiley, "Thumbing through the Napoleonic Wars: The Words of Napoleon and Others Who May Have Influenced His Methods," *The Napoleon Series*, 2010, [http://www.napoleon-series.org/research/napoleon/c\\_quotes.html](http://www.napoleon-series.org/research/napoleon/c_quotes.html).
39. Stockdale, *Ten Years of Reflection*, 95.
40. Louis R. Pondy, "Leadership Is a Language Game," in *Leadership: Where Else Can We Go?* ed. Morgan W. McCall Jr. and Michael M. Lombards (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1978), 87–99.
41. For a thorough discussion of double-loop learning, see Chris Argyris, *Overcoming Organizational Defenses* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1990).