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T o a degree that is often surprising to people outside the military, decisionmakers and planners in the armed forces have an abiding interest in the character and integrity of military leaders and their subordinates. The service academies view as one of their primary goals the development and reinforcement of high moral and ethical standards in future military leaders. The Army's basic leadership training manual, Field Manual 22-100, identifies character as an essential attribute of military leaders and includes an entire chapter on the definition, importance, and development of character.[1]

Character may also be an important component of combat readiness. British General Sir James Glover has argued that a man of character in peace is a man of courage in war. He goes on to tell us that character is "a moral quality that grows to maturity in peace and is not suddenly developed in war."[2] We share a similar developmental view of character. In this article we argue that character is an inner quality that develops over the course of one's life and that its development in adolescence and adulthood can be understood as progressing through three relatively distinct phases or stages. At the completion of each successive phase, there is an increase in a person's ability to reflect upon and disengage from a prior way of understanding the dynamics of human relationships. Each successive developmental shift enables the individual to view personal and organizational life from a broader and more encompassing perspective. This process facilitates both an increase in ethical decisionmaking and an ability to take account of more of the complexity of human and organizational experience in making decisions.

Leadership and Character

The Army's leadership training and development efforts recognize that the requirements for effective leadership change as one advances in

rank and responsibility. Recently, leadership experts have identified three distinct levels of leadership in the Army: direct-level leadership, senior-level leadership, and executive-level leadership.[3] As one moves up through these three levels there is a relative decrease in the use of personal or direct leadership and a corresponding increase in organizational and strategic (conceptual) leadership. While the skills and knowledge required to make the transitions from direct to senior to executive leadership are many, we would argue that one vital component is the level of character development that has also occurred. In short, there must be changes in the inner qualities of the military leader that parallel and support changes in the leader's technical competence in order for him to function effectively at increasingly higher levels of leadership. Without these inner qualities, technically competent senior- and executive-level leaders will not be able to use their technical competence effectively.

Although the view of an individual's level of character development as a critical feature of leader effectiveness is an appealing one, attempts to promote character development have been handicapped by the absence of a coherent view of exactly what character is. Despite the fact that character is usually considered to be an inner quality of the person, until recently social scientists have had little to say about what it actually is or how it develops. Fortunately, in the past few years psychologists working at Harvard University have proposed a radically new way of looking at and understanding the development of the person, a way which we think provides a powerfully persuasive view of the nature of character and its development.[4] In this article we will present a brief summary of this new view and some of the conclusions from our research with Army and Air Force officers that illustrate it in the context of military leadership.

Most people readily recognize the presence of character when it is demonstrated in a person's actions. The account of the conduct of Second Lieutenant Cleo W. Buxton in the 34th Infantry Division during World War II provides one such example.[5] As a rifle platoon leader, Lieutenant Buxton indoctrinated his men with regard to their responsibility for prisoners; they searched prisoners to be sure they had no weapons, then protected them from those who might attack or injure them. Early in the fighting in Italy, his platoon captured three German soldiers. They were escorted to battalion headquarters, where one of the prisoners refused to give his name, rank, and serial number (as required by the Geneva Convention of 1929). The battalion commander became angry and slapped the prisoner. The prisoner

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spat back. The commander was furious and ordered his troops to kill the three prisoners.

Lieutenant Buxton's men returned from battalion headquarters with this story. Buxton immediately walked back to headquarters, thereby risking charges of desertion in the face of the enemy. There he found the prisoners digging what appeared to be their own graves. Buxton confronted the battalion operations officer with the question, "What are the prisoners doing?" Told in effect that they were indeed digging their own graves, Lieutenant Buxton then engaged his superior officer in a heated discussion of national and Army values. Lieutenant Buxton later learned that the prisoners were not killed.

Unfortunately, our military history also includes instances where character and integrity did not prevail—witness My Lai in Vietnam. These lapses in moral and ethical decisionmaking have been attributed to a number of factors, including poor command climate, battle stress, and the callous nature of warfare itself. Whatever the external reasons may have been, it is also likely that the inner qualities of character, integrity, and moral courage (or their lack) were also implicated.

What is it in a person that enables him to demonstrate the sort of integrity and strength of character shown by Lieutenant Buxton? Surely it is important that one uphold the military virtues of loyalty (to one's unit and to the nation), personal responsibility, and selfless service. But how can we be sure that at times of extreme stress a person will act on these values?

The Three Faces of Military Character

In our interviews with military officers, our emphasis has been on how and why each officer holds particular values and beliefs, with less emphasis on what those values actually are. In choosing to focus on the inner source of each officer's values rather than on the content of those values, we have been able to identify three distinct types of officers, all of whom may espouse the same values but who, under the surface, are strikingly different. The approach that enabled us to identify these different types of leaders was a structured interview focused on the deep structure of the personality, the internal frame of reference that each officer used to impart meaning to his experiences. Before attempting to clarify the nature of these critical character differences, let us glance at the three types of military leaders we have identified. Again, each type is defined not so much by what values he endorses as by the extent to which the individual is able to take a critical and disinterested perspective toward his own value system.

• **The Operator**. The first leader type we identified can be called "the operator." This label usually brings to mind a person who has a personal agenda which he pursues without any real concern for the welfare of others. People don't trust operators because they believe that the

operator will go beyond permissible bounds to meet his own needs and also because they sense that operators can't really be trusted. Commonsense wisdom about operators is that they are secretly "looking out for number one" despite appearances to the contrary. In our opinion this negative view of operators is too narrow. In fact, our interviews suggest that many individuals who fit this personality type are positive, productive, and interested in being good military officers. For example, an operator could be very interested in keeping himself in top physical condition, helping his nine-year-old daughter earn a starting spot on the neighborhood softball team, and insuring that 90 percent of the transport vehicles under his command are combat-ready at all times. These are all acceptable goals in a military officer, yet the operator pursues them in a particular way, a way that reflects a characteristically one-sided view of the world. What distinguishes these officers is not that they have self-serving personal agendas. Rather, their critical attribute is that they can't take a perspective on their goals or agendas. And it is this inability to take a perspective on, to make secondary, their goals and agendas that leads to the operator's fatal flaw. *That flaw is an inability to internalize another person's perceptions of them.*

The ability to think about another person thinking about you is the basis of all the connections that people feel for one another, including such unifying experiences as mutual trust, loyalty, and even guilt. To use an old expression, you have to be able to put yourself in the other fellow's shoes before you can truly feel a connection to him. Operators lack this ability. The closest they can come to seeing the other guy's point of view is to realize that others may have their own separate agendas and goals. When the operator puts himself in your shoes, he is imagining or thinking about what your agendas are. He's trying to figure out what you are hoping to accomplish or get out of your joint situation. This will allow him to maximize his own payoffs. But what he can't do is think about how you may be experiencing or thinking about him. Lacking such empathy, the operator, in one very important respect, is not trustworthy. Trust for the operator means that if I help you get what you want, you'll help me get what I want. But trust is a great deal more than that for most of us. It's a commitment to doing what is necessary to maintain a certain feeling for one another, a feeling that is not directly connected to the accomplishment of individual goals. This is the way in which operators cannot be trusted; they are unable to be sensitive to shared meanings or shared perceptions. Real trust means being able to place confidence in the motives and actions of one another in the absence of external sanctions and rewards. That confidence occurs only with others who have gotten past a concept of relationships based on the exchange of mutually beneficial rewards.

Because of this lack of empathic ability, the operator is unable to participate fully in those collective processes that are so essential to effective

leadership: mutual respect, team spirit, and mutual trust. One officer we interviewed who fit this pattern viewed his leadership role as consisting entirely of helping his subordinates identify personal goals that they could attain if they also took care of Army business (taking care of Army business was this officer's personal agenda). He was good at clarifying for his subordinates the consequences of their actions and specifying what was expected of them. Although he had done well in a staff position, he was much less effective when he was promoted to a position where he was in command of a combat unit. As a commander this officer seemed unable to inspire his men, and he never seemed able to capitalize on esprit de corps as a motivational tool. Although he did earn the respect of some of his men— owing to his determination and hard work—his own view remained that his men appreciated him because he was able to help them meet their own goals. Lacking was the deep bond of shared respect that can be so critical in combat situations. We labeled him an operator because of his single-minded focus on concrete payoffs (both his own and others') as opposed to thinking about how others were viewing him. This particular focus was the critical determinant of his identity as a military officer.

• **The Team Player**. Our second type of military officer is the one we refer to as the "team player." The team player's stock in trade is his connection to others. Unlike the operator, the team player is highly sensitive to how others *feel* about him. This contrasts with the operator, who is most concerned about what others will do to or for him. For the team player such actual outcomes or consequences are important only for what they reveal about how the actors feel about him. More accurately, what is critical for the team player is how people simultaneously feel about each other. Is there a special feeling? Do they perform out of a feeling of mutual respect? Is there a satisfactory degree of team loyalty?

Having this ability to engage in the world of interpersonal connections, the team player has some enormous advantages over the operator, who is effectively oblivious to the fact that a world based on mutual trust or loyalty even exists. True, the team player can use the concrete "You scratch my back and I'll scratch yours" strategy of the operator with his men. But he also can use his personal connections to them; that is, he can capitalize on their mutual feelings of trust, respect, or affection in the exercise of his leadership. If we think of the operator as solely a fastball pitcher, the team player has the advantage of also having a curve. He can use whichever pitch is going to get the job done. He has a broader perspective than does his operator counterpart. Whereas the operator is constrained to view the world as a place where everyone is out to get the best deal he can for himself, the team player sees another way that things often work. He understands that at times some people will forego their individual interests to pursue group goals, achievement of which will engender shared trust and loyalty.

Despite the broader perspective and added power possessed by the team player in comparison with the operator, team players also have a critical flaw. *Team players are unable to take a perspective on their connections and loyalties*. They are, quite literally, prisoners of the ways in which they are viewed and experienced by others. Consider how one Army captain described his current assignment as a field instructor. In response to a question about what his reaction would be if his men thought he was a phony, he replied: "I'd feel rejected; I'd feel a lowered sense of self-worth because I base my sense of self-worth primarily on my ability to be real to my men. And even though I can rationally accept the fact that there are some men I just cannot lead, I still try, because you have to."

The team player doesn't decide to be a team player. He is one. Being part of a team is a basic part of the way he defines himself. He is the officer who, were he to "turn" as a POW, would do so by becoming a part of the enemy's team. He would never do it just for the personal gain. It's the operator, who defines himself in terms of his ability to accomplish his goals, who would defect purely because of the advantages he sees for himself.

Yet it is important to realize that team players are often seen as good officers. Listen to the following dialogue involving another Army officer whom we found to be a team player:

Officer: "For that time that I have a man, I'm responsible for him. No matter what I think of that man or what his background is, what his values are, I'm responsible to *make* him a better person."
Interviewer: "What makes you responsible?"
Officer: "Well, the position you're in as a leader. Those men are under your control, so you're responsible in that sense."

This officer espouses the somewhat appealing idea of responsibility to others. But, as this and other parts of the interview revealed, he was not able to allow others to take responsibility for themselves. He's not saying that he *takes* responsibility for his men. He says he *is* responsible for them. And why is he responsible? Not because of some personal conviction, but because of his position on the Army team.

• **The Self-Defining Leader**. If the operator is defined by his goals and agendas and the team player by his relationships with others, then our third type is defined by his personal commitment to certain internalized values and ideals. This is the officer who is able to forego certain personal payoffs and, when necessary, risk the loss of his men's respect and affection to pursue actions that he is convinced are right.

Here is the officer whose sense of worth is self-determined. Unlike the operator, who depends solely on the accomplishment of certain goals to maintain his sense of worth, or the team player, who needs to feel accepted or at least respected by his men to maintain his self-esteem, the self-defining

leader makes his own judgments about his worthiness. He is of the group in which Lieutenant Buxton would probably be classified. Buxton's actions in Italy seemed to be a function of his own deep commitment to humane values. He was able to risk loss of his own command and his place as a good junior officer because he didn't, ultimately, define himself either by the accomplishment of certain goals (as the operator does) or by being a good team player. Aware of these risks and pressures, he could, nonetheless, follow his own conscience. And this, we think, is what largely defines the person of character.

It is important to note that the pursuit of personal goals and a reverence for team play are not themselves discarded as one moves up the scale of development to become a self-defining leader. Obviously, all human beings do—or should—pursue goals and cultivate human connections. But the self-defining leader keeps these desirable human impulses in their proper perspective, always subordinating them to the dictates of his internalized sense of right and wrong.

A Developmental Framework

Even if you have been able to recognize officers of your experience, partly or wholly, in the three officer types outlined above, you may find yourself thinking, "So what? How does this classification of different types of leaders equip me to be a better leader." It wouldn't except for the fact that *the three types of military officer depicted represent successive stages in the potential development of every person.*[6] This being so, they have some important implications for the development of character in military officers and, more generally, for the development of leader effectiveness.

One important implication of the developmental view is that it provides a powerful way of understanding personality differences in those whom we lead, a view that permits the leader to look past the surface to the core of each individual's way of approaching and understanding himself and the world. For example, this view can help us understand why a focus on the team, team spirit, and team morale just doesn't work with some subordinates. It's not because they don't care about the rest of the unit. Rather, it's because they have not yet reached that phase of their own character development where they are able to understand and participate in the world of shared perceptions. To motivate these subordinates, the leader may have to appeal to their personal interests, not to their status in a mutually supportive unit. As another example, this developmental view can shed light on the agony of a junior officer who feels torn between loyalty to his men and loyalty to his family. If he is a team player, then he is literally caught between the conflicting demands of two interpersonal worlds that collectively provide his sense of identity. To tell him merely that he has to set

priorities may be of no use to him at all, because the ability to set priorities in his connections to others (his men vs. his family) is exactly the developmental step he has failed to take. In the short run, it will be much more effective simply to help him find a solution to his dilemma that he can see as preserving his standing with both his men and his family. In sum, an appreciation of the psychological dynamics of the three character types may assist the commander in devising short-term leadership tactics tailored to the individual needs and peculiarities of his subordinates.

A second implication of the developmental view concerns the longer-range responsibility of leaders to promote character development and maturation. Leaders aspire to more than just getting others to follow. They also have a commitment to the character development of their subordinates. And it's here that the developmental view has the most utility. It's not enough to be able to motivate the operator to be a good officer. We also want the operator to learn how to be a part of the shared commitment and mutual respect of a good combat unit, and we want him to be able to live by good military values in those rare situations where there are pressures to betray those values. Of course, one can't take an operator and make him a man of character directly. First, he's going to have to learn how to be a valued member of a team. Operators don't become self-defining leaders without first coming to an understanding of the world of mutual loyalties. When trying to inculcate military values, leaders who fail to recognize this fact may find their words falling on deaf ears.

Indeed, our view is that the only way to help subordinates grow is to tune into the way they currently view their world (i.e. as operators or team players) and then help them experience the limitations of that view. No single approach is going to work with all three types of subordinates. In dealing with self-defining leaders, the task becomes one of exploring the compatibility of Army values with the personal values they already hold dear. For the team player, the same approach would likely fail because team players, in one sense, don't have values that are wholly their own. The values of team players always turn out to be shared values, values that derive from their connection to, or membership in, a group—i.e. their own unit. And even though you can get the team player to embrace Army values by making those values the standards of his current reference group, you must remember that if the team player perceives a growing divergence between the interests of his own unit and those of the Army at large, the higher values are likely to be dropped. There's not the same risk with the self-defined leader because his values were developed personally through an internal process of character development. Only repeated personal experiences that call into question the validity of those values are likely to lead to their abandonment. No single event, however stressful, is likely to have such an effect, and so the self-defined leader can stand by his values despite enormous pressures to abandon them.

The Next Step

In its ongoing efforts to prepare officers for leadership responsibilities at the direct, senior, and executive levels, we think it critical that the Army include training that focuses on the character development of its officers. As one progresses up the leadership ladder in rank and responsibility, his ability to disengage from immediate situational constraints is likely to become increasingly important. As a first step toward equipping senior officers with this ability, the Army should support research that explores the links between the officer's developmental level (operator, team player, or self-defining leader) and his performance in critical decision-making situations. Also critical will be a careful exploration of how the officer's character interacts with his experience as he progresses through his military career. Though the outlines of our developmental view of character are now fairly well established, it remains to flesh out and refine this view in the context of devising specific training strategies to achieve desired results.

Meanwhile, we would caution against premature attempts to use this framework to select officers for promotion or other important assignments based on their developmental level. In the first place, assessment of an officer's developmental level can be complicated by exigencies of the moment. Thus, some situations demand leader behaviors (e.g., "You'll do it because I'm giving you a direct order!") that may not reflect the leader's highest level of functioning. In addition, the links between developmental level and performance in various leadership contexts have yet to be established. Still, we remain convinced that eventually such linkages will be established and will confirm what most of us have known in our hearts all along, that good leadership requires leaders who are persons of maturity, vision, character, and integrity.

NOTES

1. US Department of the Army, *Military Leadership*, Field Manual 22-100 (Washington: GPO, 31 October 1983).
2. Sir James Glover, "A Soldier and His Conscience," *Parameters*, 13 (September 1983), 53-58.
3. Cecil Calloway and Keith Kettler, "Leadership: A Multidimensional Framework," Excel Net Concept Paper #.75-86, 1986.
4. Robert Kegan, *The Evolving Self: Problem and Process in Human Development* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1982); Robert Kegan and Lisa Lahey, "Adult Leadership and Adult Development: A Constructivist View," in *Leadership: Multidisciplinary Perspectives*, ed. B. Kellerman (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1984); Robert Selman, *The Growth of Interpersonal Understanding: Developmental and Clinical Analyses* (New York: Academic Press, 1980).
5. Cleo W. Buxton, "Morality in Combat," *Command*, 17 (Spring 1975), 37-38.
6. We did not develop arguments in this article for our assertion that the three kinds of character represent successive stages along a developmental continuum. These arguments are set forth most cogently in Kegan, *The Evolving Self*. A longitudinal study is currently underway at Harvard to test the theory.