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COMMAND PHILOSOPHY DEVELOPMENT

An Individual Study Project
Intended for Publication

by

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U. S. Army War College
Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania 17013
29 March 1990

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ABSTRACT

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In recent years command philosophy development has received increased attention by its inclusion in battalion and brigade pre-command courses. Likewise, the Army War College has reintroduced command philosophy development to its advanced course curriculum with the objective of having each student develop his/her own personal philosophy of command. A literature review revealed that little has been written on command philosophy at the senior level (brigade and higher). As a result of an analysis of views by some senior Army commanders and a literature examination, this study will examine senior leader command philosophy development by addressing what an effective philosophy should contain, to whom it should be addressed and the functions it should serve. (copy)

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INTRODUCTION

The Army spends considerable resources in preparing officers for command positions. In most cases, following the selection process, command designees are sent to pre-command courses which provide background instruction designed to prepare them for successful command. During pre-command courses, time is set aside for these officers to develop a philosophy of command. Supposedly, the allotted time allows command designees an opportunity for reflection, soul-searching, and generally, a "coming to grips" with the reality of what lies ahead. The end result is expected to be a well-defined command philosophy which can be clearly articulated to everyone in the organization.

This paper examines senior leader command philosophy development by addressing three areas: what an effective philosophy should contain, to whom it should be addressed, and the function it should serve.

COMMAND PHILOSOPHY DEFINITION

Most senior Army officers have been told of the necessity for having a command philosophy since their days of commanding a company. In fact, virtually all senior commanders have successfully used some form of command philosophy while commanding a battalion-sized force. What then is a command philosophy? My research indicates that

there may be some misunderstanding or lack of a clear definition of command philosophy. Webster's New Twentieth Century Dictionary defines philosophy as general principles which govern thought and conduct.¹ Command philosophy should then be defined as general principles which govern thought and conduct of a commander. More recently in a military publication, Colonel Larry J. Smith defined command philosophy as an articulated set of guidelines or policies by which the leader sets forth "how" a unit will accomplish its mission in order to complete a long-range vision.² Note that this definition includes vision as an integral part of a command philosophy.

From the two definitions presented, this author contends that command philosophy and vision are two separate entities. According to Field Manual 22-103, vision is a personal concept of what the organization must be capable of doing by some future point. It establishes focus for actions and guidance which the organization will follow.³ Similarly Ket de Vries defined vision as a concept which creates a focus and sense of direction which mobilizes followers to pursue a course of action to its successful conclusion.⁴ Based, then, on these definitions, vision is specific to the organization and concentrates on goals and objectives. If a command philosophy concentrates on how a unit will accomplish specific objectives as professed by Colonel Smith, then the philosophy would have to change each time that a vision for the organization changes.

Should command philosophy be dependent on vision as advocated by Colonel Smith? Probably not if we accept Webster's definition of philosophy. Much confusion exists today in the Army because there is no clear distinction between command philosophy and vision when, in fact, there should be a well-defined difference. Field Manual 22-103 clearly defines vision, but this research failed to produce an accepted definition of command philosophy in official Army publications. If Webster's definition of philosophy is correct, then the Army should universally define command philosophy as a set of general principles governing a commander's conduct and thought which can be transmitted orally or in writing, formally or informally, to groups or through key subordinates. This definition implies that once established command philosophy will set a tone for a commander's actions and remain constant, even if his/her vision or the organization's mission changes. Furthermore, this suggests that a command philosophy should remain constant as a commander moves through the hierarchy from one organization to another. This becomes particularly important for senior Army commanders since consistency leads to credibility. Inconsistent behavior sends mixed signals to subordinates, increasing anxiety, producing uncertainty, raising concerns about fairness, confusing the nature and priority of goals and raising the possibility that a leader will be seen as being deceptively manipulative. What matters for leaders is consistency born of abiding

commitment to certain personal values and to guiding actions by their light.⁵ Consequently, command philosophy and vision must be separate entities which together provide the foundation for an effective command climate.

It is important to realize that command philosophy deals more with the commander and the process of command while vision relates more closely with organizational goals and objectives. Commanders must be aware when assuming a new command position that units can more easily adapt to changes in command philosophy than changes in vision. Changes in vision can cause wholesale modifications which could render a unit totally ineffective for a given period of time. New commanders should, therefore, be familiar with the vision of the previous commander to preclude throwing any unit into disarray from the outset.

AN ELEMENT OF NECESSITY

The Army has supported the idea of command philosophies for several years. During 1977, 1980, and 1984, the Army War College completed studies which included command philosophies of several former battalion commanders.⁶ (Another edition is scheduled for publication during the 1991 Academic Year.) Although these studies concentrated on command where direct leadership methods predominated, these studies indicate that the Army places some significance on command philosophy. A copy of one of these studies is still being distributed today at battalion

commander pre-command courses. One reference used during that block of instruction is an article espousing the significance of having a command philosophy. It states that after ten years of research, studies, interviews, discussions, and analysis of command climate surveys, evidence indicates the key to being an outstanding commander is having a well-developed command philosophy and a vision of what he/she wants the unit to be.⁷

In recent years the Army War College has realized the importance of having a command philosophy and has reintroduced an advanced course, Contemporary Command and Senior Leadership. Students enrolled in this course are required to develop and write a personal command philosophy as the final course requirement.⁸

In Love'em and Lead'em, Paul Malone III supports the Army by indicating that personal philosophy is needed by commanders because subordinates can serve best only when they know who the commander is and what the commander wants.⁹ It is difficult for those being led to be very effective if they do not know the leader.

At senior levels, commanders move from a level where direct leadership methods are primary in executing command to a level where indirect methods are required. Direct leadership skills involve direct control of own and delegated work. Whereas indirect leadership at the senior-level involves a mixture of direct and staff-aided output with reduced direct control.¹⁰

Although senior commanders are further removed from soldiers, there still appears to be a necessity for soldiers to understand something about their leader. A command philosophy will, therefore, produce a frame of reference from which the commander's actions will evolve. Some may question if there is any distinction between a commander's philosophy and a staff officer's philosophy. According to our definition, there should be no basic difference except for the size of the audience. If a command philosophy is consistent, it is transportable and will fit a staff element just as it will fit a larger organization. Again, the emphasis on command philosophy rests with conduct and thought, which is expected to mature with the officer but essentially to remain constant.

COMMAND PHILOSOPHY CONTENT

Since there is general consensus that a philosophy of command is necessary, of what should it consist? Several answers have been proposed outlining what should be included. Paul Malone asserts that command philosophy should reflect a combination of candidness, idealism, and reality while demonstrating an understanding of the organization's mission and the "contract" as viewed by subordinates. It should share idiosyncrasies that will influence interpersonal relationships in the workplace.¹¹

Similarly Edgar Schein believes that a command philosophy should explicitly state the commander's values

and assumptions. These statements, he emphasizes, should highlight a small portion of the assumption set which operates in an organization and should, most likely, highlight those aspects of a leader's philosophy that lend themselves to public articulation. Such public statements may have a value for leaders as a way of emphasizing special aspects to be attended to in the organization, as values around which "to rally the troops" and as reminders of fundamental assumptions not to be forgotten.¹²

From another perspective, Joseph Badaracco and Richard Ellsworth posit that leader philosophies should contain fundamental assumptions about human nature, about people in the organization, and the kind of activities that lead to outstanding results. They contend that these philosophies build up over many years through the experiences and influences which shape a person's life. Even though few leaders stop, reflect on, and make explicit their philosophies of leadership, their fundamental assumptions influence practically everything they do.¹³

At the Army's pre-command courses, the ingredients of a command philosophy are taken from Colonel Michael Plummer's article, "Winning in Command". The article proposes that an effective philosophy contains values (starting with courage, candor, commitment, and competence). It should outline how command will be exercised, which objectives are important, the reward and punishment system as well as an evaluation system.¹⁴

Perry Smith in his book, Taking Charge asserts that a command philosophy should include the rich and successful history of the organization, the commitment of the organization to international, national, and community goals, the need for high personal and institutional integrity, the strategic vision of the leader and the organization, the policy of decentralization and empowerment of subordinate leaders, the need for innovation, and the process whereby creative ideas move up in the organization. It should reflect the thoughts and dreams of the leader.¹⁵

Feedback received and compiled in the Excel Net Concept Papers, Volume II indicates that command philosophies contain specific goals and objectives, priorities, a system for information flow, a system of performance assessment, and a commitment that peacetime actions will directly relate to wartime missions. The command philosophy should be a place for a commander to go when he/she is psychologically lost, afraid, or confused. It is a place where the commander can say, "These are the things I believe and stand for. And these are the things I won't stand for."¹⁶

The Army War College's Command and Management Theory and Practice Reference Text states that the content of a command philosophy should describe what the commander considers to be most important and provide insight into how the commander goes about doing his job so others can synchronize their efforts with his. It suggests that the focus should be broad enough to provide reference points for

ethical, personal leadership style and managerial style preference issues.¹⁷

Colonel Duane Lempke's study on "Command Climate: The Rise and the Decline of a Military Concept" reviewed command philosophies of twenty-seven large unit commanders at Fort Polk, Louisiana. All cited that a command philosophy should state goals and objectives, values, priorities, purpose and mission, share a vision, and address teamwork.¹⁸

Likewise, a Fort Benning, Georgia survey of twenty commanders during the period 1985-1988 revealed that a command philosophy should contain goals and objectives, values, priorities, standards, purpose and mission, a vision, and an outline of leadership style.¹⁹ While taken at different times in separate locations, these surveys provided similar results.

In 1989, the Army War College class was surveyed on command philosophy content. The overwhelming majority reported that the most important ingredients were goals and objectives, values, ethics, standards, vision, purpose and mission, and a statement of teamwork.²⁰

Collectively, the literature suggests that a command philosophy should contain:

- | | |
|-------------|-------------|
| ·candidness | ·idealism |
| ·values | ·objectives |
| ·integrity | ·vision |
| ·ethics | ·mission |
| ·standards | ·policy |

- idiosyncrasies
- a statement of teamwork
- a performance assessment
- an evaluation system
- things of importance to the commander
- system of information flow
- a reward and punishment system
- activities which lead to outstanding results
- how command will be exercised
- assumptions about human nature
- understanding of organization's mission
- history of the organization.
- goals
- priorities
- purpose

TARGET AUDIENCE OF A COMMAND PHILOSOPHY

In order for a command philosophy to be effective, the target audience must be clearly defined. In a military organization this guidance is quite clear by the hierarchy or chain of command which explicitly reveals who works for whom. The Army War College's Command and Management Theory and Practice Reference Text states that dissemination of a command philosophy is an ongoing dialogue process with subordinates, not simply the release of a paper.²¹ Furthermore, the literature review conducted for this paper overwhelmingly supports the contention that command philosophy should be addressed and disseminated throughout the command to subordinates.

COMMAND PHILOSOPHY PURPOSE

When a commander's philosophy is received by subordinates, it should be fully understood. The preponderance of evidence gleaned from the literature identifies the following purposes of a command philosophy:

- it provides insight into who the leader is, his leadership style, and his plan for implementation;
- it identifies values which are important to the leader;
- it sets priorities, goals, objectives, and establishes policy; and finally,
- it provides a vision for the organization.

RESEARCH ANALYSIS

An analysis of twelve current and former senior commanders' command philosophies revealed some similarity with what has been written in the literature concerning content, audience, and purpose of command philosophy. Examination of sixty-four additional comments from fifteen division commanders taken from the U. S. Army Military History Institute, Experiences in Division Command Program, disclosed that only one commander mentioned command philosophy. That one comment only stated the necessity for having a command philosophy.²²

Most of the personal command philosophies analyzed in this paper were from general officers.²²⁻³³ When examined

for content, the philosophies unanimously included the following:

- honesty
- setting a personal example
- integrity
- discipline
- values
- developing/training subordinates

Other elements cited as worthy for inclusion included:

- setting and maintaining high standards
- identifying priorities
- defining a purpose
- encouraging teamwork
- soldier and family care
- developing cohesion
- a commitment to open communication.

Even though the latter points were not unanimous, they do provide insight into how some of our current senior leaders think. Based then on what these commanders have embodied in their command philosophies, it becomes even more critical for the Army to adopt a universal definition of command philosophy such as that which was proposed earlier in this paper.

As the research command philosophies were further scrutinized for target audience, unanimously the commanders believed that their philosophies should be directed to their subordinates. There was no differentiation in subordinates,

however. Therefore, one is led to conclude that these commanders addressed their philosophy statements to all subordinates.

The research philosophies, when studied for stated or implied purposes, practically mirrored the literature by indicating that command philosophies should:

- provide insight into the leader
- identify certain critical values
(especially honesty)
- establish basic policy
- set priorities
- establish unit climate
- set standards.

Hence, consensus prevails among those who have written about command philosophies and those who actually serve as commanders about the purpose of an effective philosophy.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Since little has been written on command philosophy, particularly at the senior level in the Army, it is necessary that a document be published in the near future delineating a clear definition and outlining the recommended content, target audience, and purpose for having such a philosophy. Based on the literature review and research conducted for this paper, there are several elements which must be stated or implied in a command philosophy. These elements include:

- professional ethics
- values
- integrity
- leadership principles
- idiosyncrasies.

The first four elements are non-negotiables as mandated by the Officer's Code. Therefore, idiosyncrasies remain the only negotiable element of a command philosophy. Specific professional ethics, values, integrity, leadership principles, and idiosyncrasies are:

Professional Ethics

- selecting right from wrong
- displaying obligation to duty
- selecting the right choice and giving reason for the choice selected

Values

- duty, honor, country
- loyalty to nation and unit
- selfless service
- personal responsibility
- courage
- candor
- competence
- commitment

Integrity

- sincerity
- honesty
- candor

Leadership Principles

- know yourself and seek self-improvement
- be technically and tactically proficient
- seek responsibility
- make sound timely decisions
- set the example
- know your soldiers and look out for their welfare
- keep soldiers informed
- develop a sense of responsibility
- ensure each task is understood
- train soldiers as a team
- employ your unit according to its capabilities

Idiosyncrasies

- any personal characteristic
- any personal mannerism
- any personal peculiarity.

If command philosophy were limited to the elements listed above, a commander's conduct and thoughts would be simple, easily understood and transferable, as senior leaders move from position to position.

Other things of interest to the commander and unit such as vision, mission, priorities, policies, and purpose should be promulgated through policy letters, commander notes, training plans, etc. Because some of these change frequently, it is necessary that current updates be disseminated. On the other hand, a command philosophy

remains constant and can be promulgated through writing, during staff meetings, office calls, or anytime one comes in contact with the commander.

All sources in the research agreed that a command philosophy should be addressed to subordinates in general. Since the research concentrated on senior level commanders who exercised command using the indirect method of leadership, it may not be as critical that all members of a command receive the senior leader's command philosophy. It is more important for soldiers in the foxhole to be aware of the command philosophies of those who exercise direct leadership, namely company and battalion commanders rather than for those who exercise indirect leadership (brigade and higher). In other words, commanders at brigade and higher levels are more involved with managing resources rather than actually leading soldiers. Therefore, senior commanders should direct their command philosophies to their immediate staff, their subordinate commanders and the staff at the next lower level. These are the personnel who will be charged with executing orders and desires of the senior commander.

One audience often overlooked by the commander who should be a target of a command philosophy is one's supervisor. In order for a commander to be effective, he/she must be in tune with the supervisor so that synchronized conduct and thought permeate throughout an organization from top to bottom. Finally, the senior

commander's philosophy should be addressed to him/herself so that it can be used as a ready reference and reminder of what has been proclaimed as the basis for one's conduct.

As for purpose, this author agrees with the literature and research that the purpose of a command philosophy should be to:

- provide insight into the leader
- identify certain critical values
- establish unit climate
- set standards through personal example.

Interestingly the research revealed that nine of ten general officers had not written a command philosophy for distribution since brigade command even though they had commanded at higher levels. They believed that writing a philosophy was unnecessary at higher levels because senior commanders only directly influence subordinate commanders and staffs. The four most senior respondents (three and four-star generals) in this research strongly asserted that a command philosophy should be lived rather than written. Likewise, the Army War College class of 1989 in a survey was cautious about endorsing written command philosophies. ³⁴ This perception further confirms the belief that senior commanders should set a superb personal example.

After an extensive literature review and examination of several command philosophies, there is no question on the importance of having a philosophy. In every case, the consensus was that senior commanders should have a set of

principles clearly outlined which guide their conduct. Even though many deemed it unnecessary to write a philosophy, they firmly believed their actions provided an example which reflected their personal philosophy of leadership. More importantly, overwhelming evidence indicates that the key to an effective command philosophy is the ability to live it daily.

For senior leaders, the following methodology is recommended for developing a command philosophy:

- 1) draft a command philosophy;
- 2) set it aside for one week;
- 3) review after one week to determine if author can live by it;
- 4) if not, revise and set aside one additional week;
- 5) if so, publish and follow it to the letter.

It is imperative that the Army War College and other institutions having the responsibility of preparing senior leaders for command strongly insist that future senior commanders prepare command philosophies which clearly articulate principles which guide their thoughts and conduct. Using as a basis the ideas presented in this paper, future senior commanders will have an idea of the content, target audience, and purpose of an effective command philosophy.

The Army should incorporate the findings from this paper into all instruction concerning command philosophy development as soon as possible. This information would

provide future commanders the benefit of sharing ideas from those who have commanded at senior levels previously. It will also provide a single frame of reference from which all future senior commanders could fit their personal statement of philosophy. While it may not be necessary for every senior commander to place the philosophy in writing, it is more important that the principles be distinct, unwavering, focused on the commander, and directed to subordinates, the supervisor, and him/herself.

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23. General Colin L. Powell, letter dated 26 September 1989, p. 1.

24. Lieutenant General William H. Harrison, letter dated 13 October 1989, pp. 1-2.

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APPENDIX

RESEARCH LETTER TO CURRENT SENIOR COMMANDERS

DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
UNITED STATES ARMY WAR COLLEGE
Box 137
Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania 17013-5050

18 September 1989

General Colin L. Powell
Commander In Chief
Forces Command
Fort McPherson, Georgia 30330-6000

Dear General Powell:

I am conducting research on command philosophy development at the executive level of leadership (brigade and higher) which requires more emphasis on indirect methods. My research will address what a good command philosophy should contain, to whom it should be addressed and the functions it should serve. It includes a literature review and analysis of several existing executive level command philosophies with an ultimate goal of publication in a military journal.

As part of my research I desire to include your command philosophy in my detailed analysis. If you are willing to allow your command philosophy to be analyzed in this study, I respectfully request that you send me a copy.

I sincerely hope that the results of my research will benefit future senior military leaders in their command philosophy development.

Respectfully,

Vernon W. Hatley
242-80-4979
Lieutenant Colonel, AD
USAWC, Class of 1990