

Leadership Lessons at Division Command Level - 2004

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This study depended greatly on the candid, thoughtful, and enthusiastic participation of the Army officers from the four Divisions who had recently returned from a challenging tour of duty in Operation Iraqi Freedom. Their commitment to excellence and their mature professionalism reflected the essence of enduring Army values.

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SECTION I: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

This study focuses on the development of Army leaders. The basic assumption is that good leadership enhances both the short-term combat and related capabilities of the organization and the associated long-term health of the Army as an institution.

This study was authorized by the Commanding General, U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command on 8 January 2004 and assigned to the Commandant, U.S. Army War College for execution. It was designed to take advantage of recent experiences within four Army Divisions just returned from 12-15 months of service in Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF).

With the variety of modes of combat and combat-related functions, restructuring of task forces, decentralization of tasks, interaction with governmental and non-governmental agencies, integration of Active and Reserve Component forces, and the inherent complexities of an often incoherent battlefield, OIF may be typical of future campaigns. The OIF environment highlighted two lingering challenges for organizational leaders. First, the need to attain immediate tactical success while maintaining the long-term health of the force. Second, the need to establish the necessary centralized control to ensure integration of operating systems while encouraging and supporting the required initiative at subordinate levels.

The data collection phase included surveys and interviews with 77 officers from four Divisions, plus two Corps Commanders and a Deputy Corps Commander, from March through October 2004. This field work was supported by the Commanding Generals of U.S. Army FORCES Command, U.S. Army Europe, and the Commanding Generals of III, V, and XVIII Corps, along with the full cooperation of the Commanding Generals of the Divisions involved in the study.

Study goal and focus

The goal of the study was to contribute to future operational readiness and institutional strength of the Army by providing insights and recommendations regarding leadership at Division level. The study was designed also to be useful in other areas of officer training, education, selection, and development by identifying those behaviors that are crucial for contemporary leader effectiveness, and by suggesting methods for inculcating those behaviors.

The study focused on Division Commanders. They continue to play major tactical and operational roles. In the complex 21st Century environment such as OIF, their actions often have immediate strategic impact as well. Even on a complex, dispersed battlefield their personal leadership style has substantial impact on the quality of the command climate and the resulting capability for sustained operational effectiveness. Occupying prominent traditional positions within the Army structure, they represent collectively the primary pool for future three and four-star leaders from the Combat and Combat Support arms.

Study assumptions

The officers who participated in the study, the Commanders, Assistant Division Commanders, Chiefs of Staff, eight members of each Division Staff, and from six to ten subordinate commanders in each Division, were assumed to be familiar with Army leadership doctrine and had formed opinions regarding the behaviors of good and poor leaders whom they had personally observed. This assumption proved to be correct.

It was also assumed that these Divisions were generally healthy organizations that had performed well in OIF. That assumption, validated both inside and outside the Divisions, was also correct.

Another assumption was that Army transformation, with new organizational structures, would still require competence in tactical, technical, conceptual, and interpersonal leadership skills, understanding that the appropriate mix and type of skills would continue to evolve.

There were no data from which to conclude that these four Divisions are typical of other Army Divisions. A reasonable but unsupportable assumption is that they are.

Leadership doctrine and study methods

Current Army leadership doctrine is outlined in AR 600-20, “Army Command Policy,” and FM 22-100, Army Leadership. Required skills are discussed in four areas: tactical, technical, interpersonal, and conceptual. A number of Army pamphlets and studies have provided additional input in describing what particular capabilities senior or strategic leaders should have. Army values, expressed in FM 22-100 and elsewhere, set the foundation for how officers function as dedicated professionals.

The **study aimed at observable behaviors**—not inherent competencies or traits but on actions that officers take to direct and motivate others and to create command climates that support sustained operational excellence. By identifying specifically which leader behaviors are responsible for perceptions of good and poor leadership, there would be a basis for conclusions and recommendations regarding contemporary Army leader development systems.

The study relied on interview data (averaging 2-3 hours per participant) as well as on the quantitative results from the survey instruments. The statistical data and the interviews were mutually supporting, and the results unambiguous.

Study Participants

GRADE	DIV HQ	DIV STAFF	SUBORD. CMDR	CORPS HQ	TOTAL
O-9	0	0	0	2	2
O-8	4	0	0	1	5
O-7/6P	6	0	0	0	6
O-6	3	1	18	0	22
O-5	0	16	14	0	30
O-4	0	11	0	0	11
O-3	0	4	0	0	4
TOTAL	13	32	32	3	80

Selected summary data

The *Leader Behavior Preference Worksheet* (LBP)

Chart 1 shows selected data from the Leader Behavior Preference (LBP) instrument, designed specifically for this study. After reviewing Army leadership doctrine and prior leadership studies, consulting with active duty and retired officers, and holding discussions with Army War College students and faculty members, a list of 29 important, positive behaviors was developed as an instrument to collect written anonymous survey data and to stimulate discussions about leadership.

These behaviors that distilled Army leadership doctrine and reflected continuing concerns of the Army officer corps were those particularly critical in **creating a command climate that supports operational excellence and also motivates competent people to continue military service.**

Participants were required to select a particular number of items in four categories as shown. Each selection was independent and followed by a discussion. Participants saw the LBP as credible and useful. All participants in the study completed the LBP.

The summary in **Chart 1** shows behaviors at the top of the list in each of four categories. The “top” behaviors are based on the percentages of responses to each of the 29 items from the 73 officers who participated (the 4 Division Commanders and the 3 officers from Corps Headquarters are not included in this portrayal.)

The chart shows the top 12 of the 29 behaviors selected as **most important**, (Column A); the top 8 selected as **most differentiating** between “Good” and “Poor” leaders (Column B); the top 6 identified as the **outstanding strengths** of their Division Commander (Column C); and the top 5 seen as areas that their Division Commander **might work on** to enhance his effectiveness (Column D). (As one subordinate remarked about his greatly respected Division Commander, “He is really good. The best I have ever worked for. If he could learn to _____, he would be even more effective.”)

(Additional data on LBP participant responses are found in Appendix B.)

Chart 1

Top Responses on Leader Behavior Preferences (LBP) Worksheet (N = 73)

Behaviors that create a command climate that supports operational excellence and also motivates competent people to continue their military service.

Column A = Most important for setting climate (12 = 40+% of responses) [In bold]

Column B = Most differentiating between Good and Poor leaders (8 = 30+% of responses)

Column C = Outstanding strengths of the Division Commanders (6 = 30+% of responses)

Column D = Behaviors for Division Commanders to work on (5 = 19+% of responses)

Specific leader behavior (for a Division Commander)	A	B	C	D
1. Adapts quickly to new situations and requirements.	X	X	X	
2. Understands and employs current Army and Joint doctrine.				
3. Keeps cool under pressure.	X	X	X	
4. Knows how and when to involve others in decision-making.				
5. Clearly explains missions, standards, and priorities.	X	X	X	
6. Sees the big picture; provides context and perspective.	X	X	X	
7. Sets high standards without a “zero defects” mentality.	X			
8. Encourages initiative and welcomes new ideas.				
9. Backs up subordinates; confronts the boss if necessary.				
10. Is trustworthy; keeps promises or explains why he can't.				
11. Employs units in accordance with their capabilities.				
12. Can handle “bad news.”	X	X		
13. Gets out of the headquarters and visits the troops.	X	X	X	
14. Coaches and gives useful feedback to subordinates.				X
15. Sets a high ethical tone; demands honest reporting.	X			
16. Will share the risks and hardships of his soldiers.				
17. Knows how to delegate and not “micromanage.”	X	X		
18. Is consistent and predictable in his behavior.				
19. Shows respect and consideration for others of any rank.				
20. Puts mission and people ahead of his own career.				
21. Is approachable; listens to questions and suggestions.				X
22. Can make tough, sound decisions on time.	X	X	X	
23. Shares the limelight; gives due credit to others.				
24. Senses unproductive policies and makes prompt adjustments.				X
25. Builds and supports teamwork within staff and among units.	X			X
26. Holds people accountable for their actions and results.				
27. Is more interested in doing good than looking good.				
28. Is fair; doesn't play favorites with units or people.				X
29. Is positive, encouraging, and realistically optimistic.	X			
30. Write in: (There were 11 behaviors. See Section III for details.)				

The Assessment of Selected Aspects of the Command Climate Instrument (ACC)

Another technique used to collect data and to stimulate discussion was the Assessment of Command Climate (ACC) instrument shown below. Data collected from interviews supported the conventional wisdom that the quality of the command climate influences operational effectiveness, and that the Division Commander greatly influences the climate.

Shown on the ACC [**Chart 2**] are the views of the Division Commanders and the comparative views of their subordinates on various elements of the climate. These are combined results of the overall situation in four Divisions: they reflect healthy command climates, with some variation among the components of the climates. (Since these data are from members of Division Headquarters and from field grade subordinate commanders, they provide a key and meaningful portion of climate information. However, the data cannot generate reliable conclusions regarding the climates of specific subordinate units.) The strongest element of the climate was item A. “A strong, healthy focus on mission accomplishment.” The relatively weakest (but still in the high range) was item C. “A reliable, timely, open flow of information.” Within the best climates, officers noted particularly the clarity of the Division Commander’s intent and the mutual trust that enabled subordinate commanders two or three echelons down to make local tactical adaptations to meet that intent.

One subordinate commander remarked, “I have watched three different Division Commanders over the past several years. All of them were tactically competent. But this is the only one who knew how to build a command climate.”

Chart 2

Assessment of Selected aspects of the Command Climate (ACC)

[Average assessments by 72 subordinates (**Subord.**) compared with 4 Div Commanders (**CG**)]

1	2
Marginal	

3	4
Satisfactory	

5	6
Exceeds expectations	

A. A strong, healthy focus on mission accomplishment.						
Subord.					5.46	
CG				4.75		
B. Clarity of standards, goals, and priorities.						
Subord.					5.32	
CG				4.25		
C. A reliable, timely, open flow of key information.						
Subord.				4.65		
CG			3.5			
D. An appreciation for initiative and innovation.						
Subord.					5.11	
CG			3.5			
E. Consideration for the well-being of people.						
Subord.					5.51	
CG				4.75		
F. A prevailing sense of mutual trust and confidence.						
Subord.					5.26	
CG				4.25		
X. Overall assessment of the climate.						
Subord.					5.25	
CG				4.25		

The *Campbell Leadership Descriptor*© (CLD)

The third instrument used in the study, the Campbell Leadership Descriptor ©, required the 32 staff participants to describe “Self”, “Good Leader,” and “Poor leader” using 40 positive descriptions of behavior. **Chart 4** below shows the top eight items that showed the greatest differences between “Good” and “Poor.” (The complete listing is shown in Appendix B. Other depictions of Campbell results are in Section II: Findings and Observations.)

These results are consistent with those of the LBP: technical skills are at the lower end of the scale, while interpersonal—and perhaps conceptual—competencies are seen as most important. Interview sessions confirmed that this does not mean that technical and tactical skills are not important: rather it shows that technical and tactical skills are seen as commonly well-developed and that the distinction between “Good” and “Poor” leadership rests primarily in the interpersonal domain.

Chart 3

Campbell Leadership Descriptor N = 32 (Division Staff)

The eight top items in order of the greatest difference between descriptive ratings of “Good” leader and “Poor” leader.

(“Good” leaders evidence these behaviors and “Poor” leaders do not.)

- Q. 11. **Encouraging:** Helps others to achieve more than they thought they were capable of achieving.
- Q. 18. **Trusted:** Is trusted by individuals and groups in conflict to be a fair mediator.
- Q. 22. **A good teacher:** Communicates critical information needed by groups to perform well.
- Q. 21. **A good coach:** Gives constructive feedback in a way that benefits individuals.
- Q. 31. **Credible:** Believable, ethical, trustworthy, has few hidden motives.
- Q. 24. **Listens Well:** Open and responsive when receiving ideas from others.
- Q. 3. **Persuasive:** Presents new ideas in ways that create “buy-in” from necessary constituencies.
- Q. 12. **Mentoring:** Provides challenging assignments and related coaching.

Summary list of most critical behaviors

A compilation of survey and interview data led to the formulation of a list of critical behaviors for Division Commanders (and other leaders) that would best assure creation of “A Command climate that supports operational excellence [“Operating”] and also motivates competent people to continue their military service [“Improving”].] They are taken from the LBP items and provide a convenient description of critical behaviors as seen by study participants. They are described as “The BIG 12” and are referenced in the conclusions and recommendations. (The data and interviews made 12 a logical number of conspicuously significant behaviors from the list of 29.) [See Chart 4]

Chart 4

The “BIG 12”

At the top of the list: (In order of question number.)

- # 3. Keeps cool under pressure.
- # 5. Clearly explains missions, standards, and priorities.
- # 6. Sees the big picture; provides context and perspective.
- # 22. Can make tough, sound decisions on time.

Also particularly significant: (In order of question number.)

- # 1. Adapts quickly to new situations and requirements.
- # 7. Sets high standards without a “zero defects” mentality.
- # 12. Can handle “bad news.”
- # 14. Coaches and gives useful feedback to subordinates.
- # 15. Sets a high ethical tone; demands honest reporting.
- # 17. Knows how to delegate and not “micromanage.”
- # 25. Builds and supports teamwork within staff and among units.
- # 29. Is positive, encouraging, and realistically optimistic.

Study Conclusions

1. The Division Commanders and other officers from the four Divisions who participated in this study were by any measure an impressive group. Their overall performance in OIF reflected the best traditions of the U.S. Army.
2. Current Army leadership doctrine as expressed in FM 22-100—outlining skills in the tactical, technical, interpersonal, and conceptual areas—is suitable for guiding the behavior of Division Commanders and other officers in 21st Century operations.

3. Tactical and technical competence as reflected in both mission success and subjective assessments of performance indicate a remarkably high level of proficiency. This is clear testimony to the effectiveness of Army efforts to train to specific high standards in those leadership skills over the last two decades.
4. The personal leadership style of the Division Commander remains a unique, significant factor in determining the quality of the command climate, even when the Division is dispersed and engaged in complex and varied operations.
5. While the vast majority of Army officers demonstrate admirable leadership in OIF and elsewhere, Army leader education, training, development, and selection processes have not yet ensured that all field grade and general officers possess the interpersonal skills required to apply optimally their strong tactical and technical skills. (This study does not have a basis for conclusions regarding conceptual competencies.)
6. There are specific leader behaviors that are particularly critical to leadership success of Division Commanders and other officers. Those behaviors also clearly distinguish between the “Good” and the “Poor” leader. These comprise the “BIG 12” list.
7. There are specific skills that even outstanding Division Commanders can improve in order to raise their performance to an even higher level. (Team-building, horizontally and vertically, and performance coaching are often two of those specific skills.)
8. There is widespread agreement that most officer leadership development takes place in command and staff assignments. However, there are no institutionalized methods for ensuring that officers, particularly senior officers such as Division and Brigade Commanders and Division Chiefs of Staff, receive meaningful performance feedback and coaching in the field.
9. Since the selection process for battalion-level command creates the pool from which Division Commanders are eventually chosen, criteria for that selection need to consider interpersonal as well as tactical and technical skills.
10. A healthy command climate is essential for sustained organizational effectiveness, and is crucial for enhancing the small unit agility and initiative required in campaigns such as OIF. However, there are few if any Army educational or training programs that teach how to examine, build, and sustain command climates.
11. The Division Commanders and other officers who participated in this study saw it as helpful in reflecting on their leadership styles and competencies. (Division and Brigade commanders indicated that assessment and feedback similar to the model used in this study would have been particularly beneficial to them early in their command tours.)

Recommendations

The implementation of these recommendations requires that Army education, training, development, and selection systems be integrated and modified so that tactical, technical, interpersonal, and conceptual skills are suitably developed in all positions that lead to Division Command.

1. Sustain current training methods (CTC, BCTP, AAR, etc.) that have produced high levels of competence in tactical and technical skills.
2. Use the results of this study, in particular the “BIG 12” behaviors, in leadership education programs in Army schools and training centers to better prepare leaders for Division and other levels of command.
3. Review current educational programs to ensure those models for decision-making, methods for formulating and articulating commander’s intent, and leadership techniques for battlefield command and control support the development of individual and organizational adaptation and agility essential in current and future campaigns.
4. Develop comprehensive, integrated systems for behavioral assessment and feedback early in an officer’s career as part of the process for preparing and selecting individuals for future command. (The 360-degree approach that compares self, superior, peer, and subordinate perceptions of behavior would be a key element.)
5. Include in the Army school system curricula an explanation of the critical role of self-awareness, and the relevance of 360-degree performance feedback as an essential tool for continuing development as a leader.
6. Develop a model for individual feedback and learning within operational units and staff assignments that supports continuous development of requisite skills and behaviors essential for professional growth.
7. Develop methods to encourage and reward coaching and developing subordinates by commanders and chiefs of staff. As one method of focusing attention, include in the next edition of the Officer Evaluation Report “Development of subordinates” as an explicit item.
8. Ensure that the Army education system, including pre-command refresher courses, includes subjects of coaching/counseling, team-building (vertical and horizontal), and climate assessment and development.
9. As an interim measure, provide officers selected for Division Command and Assistant Division Command with a brief review of the findings and recommendations of this study. Also provide refresher training in team-building (horizontal and vertical), climate building and assessment, personal time management, coaching, and performance feedback. Use this pre-command orientation until such time as these subjects have been institutionalized within the Army education system.

10. Develop assessment criteria for selection for battalion-level command that include review of interpersonal as well as tactical and technical skills.
11. Provide to the Division Commanders a reliable, uncomplicated system for periodically reviewing the command climate. (An instrument similar to the ACC would be suitable.)
12. Implement a system of structured leadership performance feedback to commanders, similar to the field methods used by this study team. Make this confidential feedback available for the personal development of new commanders at Brigade and Division level early in their command tour—perhaps 4 to 6 months after taking command.
13. Ensure that the process for selecting Division Commanders includes a review of a broad range of data that describes the leadership skills of the candidates.

END OF EXECUTIVE SUMMARY