



# At the Fulcrum of Air Force Identity

Balancing the Internal and External  
Pressures of Image and Culture

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Lieutenant Colonel, USAF



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**AIR UNIVERSITY**  
**SCHOOL OF ADVANCED AIR AND SPACE STUDIES**



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Pressures of Image and Culture*

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## Foreword

Among the foremost objectives at the School of Advanced Air and Space Studies (SAASS) is to challenge our students to look intensely within themselves and their service to assess their performances objectively; to see criticism as opportunity for positive change; and to make recommendations based on careful, systematic, and deep intellectual analysis. In his exceptional study of culture and identity in the USAF, Lt Col Jonathan Riley has internalized these lessons and respectfully speaks truth to power. The literature on culture and identity is vast. It stretches across academic domains and service boundaries, yet no one to date has applied the acutely theoretical analysis that Riley so adeptly brings to bear.

Chronicling the efforts of a succession of Air Force chiefs of staff to invigorate what has been described as a crisis in identity, a purposelessness in action, and a loss of warrior ethos, Riley finds that the well-meaning but ineffective programs to alleviate these deficiencies do not stem from misplaced values or inept application. Rather, they are due to a fundamental divergence between top management and the rank-and-file majority that supports and enables the high-profile activities of leadership.

Too much Air Force intellect is spent lamenting the service's inability to get its message out. The Air Force's accomplishments and overall value are myriad and well documented, but senior leaders believe that Airmen do not get the credit they deserve for their sacrifices and contributions to national security. Successive chiefs have argued that a new spin is needed, a fresh logo or motto will change the mind-set of a nation, or perhaps a new uniform with a combat image will be the final piece of the identity-crisis puzzle.

With the long wars in Iraq and Afghanistan focused keenly on ground operations, Air Force personnel are portrayed as military auxiliaries, questioning their own relevance to the fight and disparaging their martial worth. The media highlights battle and the deaths of servicemen and women. The sacrifices of successive deployments and unfortunate casualties make the Soldier and Marine national heroes, as is appropriate. To some extent, the Air Force is a victim of its own success. No longer challenged directly in the air and able to fend off limited attacks as they occur, the Air Force has not lost a pilot in air-to-air combat since Vietnam. And with this air superiority, ground forces operate more effectively, securely, and in smaller numbers than ever before. Maintenance and other support personnel, although heavily stressed and constantly at work, are, perhaps because of their work environment, less likely to be killed or maimed by enemy action and therefore perpetually out of the limelight. Would that it were so for all of America's fighting forces.

## FOREWORD

Originally written as a SAASS master's thesis, Colonel Riley's *At the Fulcrum of Air Force Identity* received the First Command Financial Planning's 2010 award for the best SAASS thesis on the subject of leadership and ethics. I am pleased to commend this excellent study to all who believe that broadly informed research, rigorous argumentation, and clear expression are vital to the advancement of strategic thought and practice.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Everett Dolman". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly stylized font. The first name "Everett" is written with a large, looping 'E' and the last name "Dolman" is written with a prominent 'D'.

EVERETT CARL DOLMAN, PhD  
Professor of Comparative Military Studies  
School of Advanced Air and Space Studies

## **About the Author**

Lt Col Jonathan Riley was commissioned through Pennsylvania State University's Reserve Officer Training Corps program in 1996. Following a year as an ROTC Gold Bar recruiter in Akron, Ohio, he entered the public affairs career field and has held public affairs positions at Offutt AFB, Nebraska; Osan AB, Korea; North Atlantic Treaty Organization AB Geilenkirchen, Germany; US Central Command Air Forces; and Joint Base Balad, Iraq. He also served as a directorate-level executive officer at Headquarters Air Force. Colonel Riley is a graduate of the Defense Information School and a distinguished graduate of the Defense Language Institute German Language Program and Squadron Officer School. He holds an undergraduate degree in advertising from Penn State and a master's degree in mass communication and media studies from San Diego State University and is fully accredited in public relations through the Public Relations Universal Accreditation Board. Upon graduating from the School of Advanced Air and Space Studies, Colonel Riley was assigned as the chief of public affairs strategy and assessments for US Air Forces Europe, Ramstein AB, Germany.



## Acknowledgments

A work of this magnitude is never the product of just one person's efforts. I would like to thank my advisor, Dr. Everett Dolman, for allowing my creative process to roam freely and having full—if inexplicable—faith that everything would come together. I also thank my reader, Col Timothy Schultz, and the rest of the School of Advanced Air and Space Studies (SAASS) faculty members, each of whom had a significant hand in shaping my education this year.

To my fellow strategists in SAASS XIX, thank you for your camaraderie, intellectual rigor, and humor . . . and for never making me drink alone. I truly value the experiences we have shared and look forward to our paths crossing again.

Finally, and most importantly, I would like to thank those stalwart supporters who have underpinned every success I have seen during more than 17 years of this Air Force adventure. The future is unknown, but whatever greets me there is dedicated to the one who has taught me the true meanings of love, faith, courage, and family. “Wir bleiben wach bis die Wolken wieder lila sind,” mein Engel.



## **Abstract**

This paper explores the roots of the Air Force's identity problems by applying a theoretical construct to explain why many previous identity initiatives have been so startlingly unsuccessful. It concludes that senior Air Force leaders have failed, in part, because of their disregard for the powerful roles that organizational cultures play in the day-to-day lives of the average Airman.

The Air Force chief of staff who hopes to achieve a measure of success in shaping the future of the force will have to find the appropriate balance between the Air Force's external image and its internal culture. Among the other military services within the Department of Defense, the top Airman will have to make sense of the paradoxical mandates to cooperate to win the nation's wars while simultaneously competing for scarce resources in a zero-sum Washington, DC, budget battle. The chief who turns the corner will have to find an acceptable and durable equilibrium among the many organizational Air Force subcultures and, in particular, should consider ways to redefine the organization to achieve a more equitable power-sharing arrangement among the tribes. In the end, this leader will only be truly successful by discovering and communicating an emergent sense of Airman culture that resonates throughout the rank and file. Moving beyond the Air Force's "what" and "how," Airmen must be inspired with a clear and compelling "why."





## Chapter 1

### Introduction

“Today’s Air Force is experiencing an institutional identity crisis that places it at an historical nadir of confidence, reputation, and influence,” states Thomas Ehrhard in his 2009 work for the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, *An Air Force Strategy for the Long Haul*.<sup>1</sup> If his were a lone voice in the wilderness, one might be inclined to disregard it, but expressions of concern over the Air Force’s identity have become commonplace enough to border on trite. As early as 1989—on the eve of the collapse of the Soviet Union—a group of Air Force officers compiled their concerns in an unofficial paper that circulated throughout Air Force leadership.<sup>2</sup> “It is our view, however, that beneath these positive indicators and despite a widely respected tactical, technological, and managerial efficiency, the Air Force has lost a sense of its own identity and of the unique contribution airpower makes to warfighting,” they contend.<sup>3</sup> Over the past 20 years, Air Force leadership has confronted concerns like these at almost every turn. From the publication of “The Little Blue Book” of Air Force core values in 1997 to the 2000 creation of an official Air Force symbol, from Gen Michael Ryan’s Developing Aerospace Leaders initiative to Gen T. Michael Moseley’s clarion call for a warrior ethos—the question of who we are as an organization has nagged on through a series of incomplete analyses and unsatisfying answers. With the concerted focus of so many talented people over such a long period of time, one is left to wonder why the Air Force has not yet cracked this nut.

The central premise of this paper is that the lack of adequate resolution to the Air Force’s identity question has primarily been a failure of perspective. Institutional identity is, in fact, an incredibly complex, multifaceted construction of recursive variables, shared understandings, feedback loops, and unique perspectives. What the chief of staff of the Air Force considers an identity problem is likely to be light-years away from a senior Airman’s definition of the exact same phrase. To varying degrees, a fundamental communication gap has existed between the Air Force’s top echelon of leaders and the teeming mass of individual active-duty, Reserve, National Guard, and civilian Airmen, each of whom gets his or her own vote in the ultimate strength and consistency of the Air Force identity.

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The author submitted this paper as a thesis to the School of Advanced Air and Space Studies in 2010, and the discussion reflects the Air Force’s military leadership structure at the time of writing.

## INTRODUCTION

This paper does not arrive at a solution for strengthening or codifying Air Force identity. Rather, the extent to which it is deemed successful will be in its ability to convince readers to rethink their perspectives on Air Force identity in light of the analytical framework presented here. Most fundamentally, if the Air Force hopes to institute real changes that help it adapt to the current and future security environment, senior Air Force leaders need to develop an appreciation for the recursive relationship among identity, image, and culture. The multitiered analysis of the Air Force's institutional identity presented here serves three purposes:

- (1) To uncover potential gaps between senior leaders' and rank-and-file Airmen's perspectives on the Air Force's identity,
- (2) To point out where these gaps have led previous organizational change efforts astray, and
- (3) To offer suggestions about change processes that can help the Air Force overcome some of its past mistakes.

## Who Cares?

After almost 15 years of continuous study of what he terms *high-performing systems*, Peter Vaill concludes that one of their most frequently appearing attributes is a clear sense of shared identity and purpose. "They know why they exist and what they are trying to do," he observes. "Members have pictures in their heads that are strikingly congruent."<sup>4</sup> More specifically, strong organizational identities have been directly linked to the following positive organizational outcomes: cooperation and altruism, commitment and loyalty, acceptance of change, acceptance of organizational goals and values, organizational citizenship behaviors, and reduced turnover intentions.<sup>5</sup>

Of particular note is the 2006 study of the dynamics of shared organizational identities undertaken by Zannie Voss and her colleagues. Their assessments of identity gaps among organizational leadership concludes that "organizational success was less likely, both in terms of resources brought into the organization as well as how efficiently resources were used, when top leaders believed in different identities."<sup>6</sup> Richard Pascale offers a compelling, although not easily quantifiable, explanation for this phenomenon: "When an organization instills a strong, consistent set of implicit understandings, it is effectively establishing a *common law* to supplement its *statutory laws*. This enables us to interpret formal systems in the context for which they were designed, to use them as tools rather than straitjackets" (emphasis in original).<sup>7</sup>

In short, everyone with a vested interest in the success of an organization should care about the state of its institutional identity. The organization's identity lies at the heart of so many different measures of institutional performance that, at the very least, it deserves a top-notch exploration of its state and its far-reaching effects on every aspect of the organization.

## A Method of Analysis

This study began primarily as a response to the portions of Ehrhard's *An Air Force Strategy for the Long Haul* in which he identifies and provides recommendations to combat the Air Force's institutional identity crisis. While Ehrhard's analysis is insightful and yields a number of valuable policy recommendations, his prescription falls into the all-too-common trap of unknowingly treating only half the problem, which, by itself, is unlikely to achieve the results he hopes for.

The analytical framework adapted for this paper draws heavily upon the organizational identity work of Mary Jo Hatch and Majken Schultz, who articulate a parsimonious and highly adaptable model of organizational identity and the dynamic relationships among identity, image, and culture.<sup>8</sup> Their model is supplemented with insights gleaned through Kevin Corley's 2004 exploration of the hierarchical differences in perceptions of organizational identity to describe two differing, yet interdependent, identity viewpoints, termed the *managerial perspective* and the *rank-and-file perspective*.<sup>9</sup> Finally, after incorporating ideas from Edgar Schein's landmark work, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, it is apparent that identity change in large organizations can only be successfully accomplished if leaders take both the managerial and the rank-and-file perspectives into consideration when planning their courses of action.

In applying these concepts to the US Air Force, Ehrhard's work is analyzed in context with several other initiatives characteristic of the managerial perspective of identity. Also examined is Air Force identity from the rank-and-file perspective, particularly emphasizing events in which the actions of former US Air Force chief of staff (CSAF) Gen T. Michael Moseley worked in direct opposition to recommendations that could reasonably have been gleaned from an understanding of this identity perspective. Finally, Moseley's initiatives are compared to those of Gen Norton Schwartz shortly after his first term as CSAF. His plan's fit with the change model proposed in this paper is assessed. Overall, this study comprises a call for further research using a holistic model of institutional identity and implementing change only with a

clear respect for the divergent perspectives of the panoply of people—both inside and outside the Air Force—with a vested interest in answering the overriding question, who are we as an organization?

### Organization

Chapter 2 provides a theoretical framework for the exploration of the Air Force's institutional identity. One of the most striking features of Ehrhard's analysis is its use of essentially a theoretical approach to the subject. While a theoretical analysis can be enlightening because of its unconstrained approach to a topic of study, it can also leave potentially valuable areas of research and analysis unexplored because it ignores maps that are available to help navigate the conceptual landscape. This appears to be precisely what happened in Ehrhard's case; he seems overreliant on personal experience and intuitive reasoning. The work of previous identity and cultural researchers and theorists help organize the reader's thinking about the complexities of institutional identity and guide the rest of the paper.

Chapter 3 focuses on the managerial perspective of identity as it relates to the Air Force. Beginning with the strategic conundrum that all of the military services within the Defense Department face, the chapter opens with a brief discussion of the paradoxical mandate to cooperate to achieve the most effective application of military power while simultaneously competing for a finite pool of scarce resources. Highlights of Ehrhard's analysis of the Air Force identity crisis are examined through the lens of Corley's study on organizational culture and shown to typify views held by upper levels of organizational hierarchies. Moving beyond Ehrhard's work, further evidence of the managerial approach in the Air Force's daily life and recent history is enumerated and assessed—including the role of opinion-research initiatives, the Air Force symbol, and Air Force advertising campaigns.

Chapter 4 turns to the other end of the spectrum: the rank-and-file perspective of identity as it relates to the Air Force. A discussion of Air Force culture, past and present, is put into the context of its meaning to the Airman of today's Air Force. Moseley's identity-change efforts are then reviewed as a means of dramatizing their discontinuity with the theorized identity perspective of the rank and file. Considered next is how someone with this identity perspective might have interpreted Moseley's involvement in the scandal surrounding the award of the Thunderbirds Air Show Production Services contract—also known as Thundervision. This example is used to demonstrate an

event counterproductive to developing the type of institutional identity that he desired.

Finally, chapter 5 briefly analyzes Schwartz's different style of identity change, shown to be a better fit with the dynamic organizational identity model this paper proposes. Organizational identity change is, indeed, possible for the US Air Force as long as organizational leaders attempt to institute it by balancing the strategic and image concerns of the managerial approach with the cultural and meaning concerns of the rank-and-file approach.

### Notes

(All notes appear in shortened form. For full details, see the appropriate entry in the bibliography.)

1. Ehrhard, *Air Force Strategy*, 28.
2. Builder, *Icarus Syndrome*, 3.
3. As quoted in Faulkenberry, " 'Global Reach-Global Power,' " 25.
4. Vaill, "Purposing of High-Performing Systems," 26.
5. Dutton, Dukerich, and Harquail, "Organizational Images and Member Identification," 255; Ashforth and Mael, "Social Identity Theory and the Organization," 35; Reger et al., "Reframing the Organization," 576; Schneider, Hall, and Nygren, "Self Image and Job Characteristics," 410; Dutton, Golden, and Shortell, "Beauty Is in the Eye of the Beholder," 526; and Cole and Bruch, "Organizational Identity Strength," 600.
6. Voss, Cable, and Voss, "Organizational Identity and Firm Performance," 750.
7. Pascale, "Paradox of 'Corporate Culture,'" 34.
8. Hatch and Schultz, "Dynamics of Organizational Identity," 989-1018.
9. Corley, "Defined by Our Strategy or Our Culture?," 1145-77.



## Chapter 2

# A Dynamic Theory of Institutional Identity and Change

Although the study of individual identity has a long and storied tradition in psychological research, it was not until 1985 that Stuart Albert and David Whetten published their landmark work that has defined the boundaries of organizational identity research for more than 25 years.<sup>1</sup> Albert and Whetten define *identity* as that which is central, enduring, and distinctive about the character of an organization, and this framework has been the cornerstone of almost all treatments of identity since.<sup>2</sup> From this seed of an idea, however, the field has blossomed into a myriad of nuanced approaches, measurement designs, and confounded models of identity change.<sup>3</sup>

The aim of the discussion in this chapter is to reduce the din of these competing formulations of organizational identity by describing the integrated theoretical framework that guides the remainder of this paper. One of the most commonly debated elements of organizational identity theory revolves around the “enduring” element of Albert and Whetten’s definition.<sup>4</sup> While significant evidence has been gathered to support the argument that identity is not as stable as originally theorized, the work of Mary Jo Hatch and Majken Schultz was adopted for this study due to their elegant and parsimonious articulation of identity as the central intersection of a two-way recursive loop between image and culture.<sup>5</sup> Their Organizational Identity Dynamics Model is described first, including the external feedback loop between identity and image and the internal loop between identity and culture. Next, the challenges of multiple-identity organizations and internal and external influences in developing organizational identities are explored. Returning to Hatch and Schultz’s model provides a backdrop for Kevin Corley’s insightful study of the radical discrepancies in the way that the elite versus the rank and file in a hierarchical organization perceive organizational identity.<sup>6</sup> Finally, elements of Edgar Schein’s view of organizational change are examined to establish guidelines appropriate for judging the likelihood of various types of cultural change initiatives achieving their objectives.<sup>7</sup>

## The Dynamics of Organizational Identity

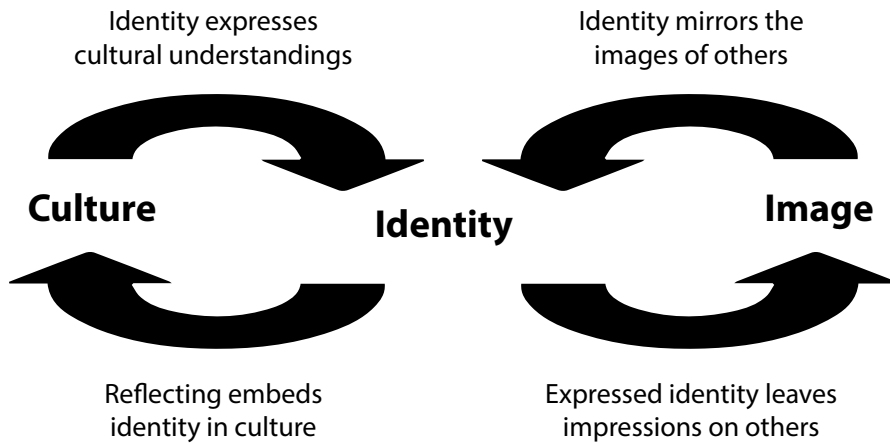
Despite the widespread conceptualization of identity as those characteristics of an organization collectively understood as central, enduring, and dis-

tinctive, organizational researchers over the years have also explored cases in which some identities are less central, more malleable, and less distinctive than commonly believed.<sup>8</sup> Kurt Lewin laid theoretical foundations for understanding this common type of dynamic interaction in his 1951 *Field Theory in Social Science*. “Lewin’s major intellectual contribution was the understanding that elements are rarely stable in the way that this term is usually understood,” according to John Meyer, Jean Bartunek, and Catherine Lacey in “Identity Change and Stability in Organizational Groups.” They add that “even when it appears that a phenomenon is stable, this stability is only masking the dynamic activity that is keeping the phenomenon in its current state of expression.”<sup>9</sup>

For more than 15 years, Hatch and Schultz collaborated to help unravel the dynamic process of organizational identity creation and evolution. This creative partnership resulted in the Organizational Identity Dynamics Model (fig. 1), juxtaposing organizational identity in the middle of a dual-feedback loop between an externally oriented understanding of the organization (labeled *image*) and its internally oriented understanding (labeled *culture*).<sup>10</sup> Their model is an organizational abstraction of George Mead’s 1934 characterization of individual identity as a social construction arrived at through two distinct, but connected, processes: individual comparison against the perceived views of others on the one hand and an internalized, largely tacit sense of self on the other.<sup>11</sup> Within this context, Hatch and Schultz define *image* as “the set of views on the organization held by those who act as the organization’s ‘others.’”<sup>12</sup> Conversely, they define *culture* as “the tacit organizational understandings (e.g. assumptions, beliefs and values) that contextualize efforts to make meaning, including internal self-definition.”<sup>13</sup> Identity, therefore, is the answer to the question, who are we as an organization? It is derived from organizational processes that mirror our impressions of how others see us when reflected against the unwritten beliefs and assumptions of our organizational culture.

The single most fundamental concept of this model is the constant flow of perception and comparative judgments among each of the elements included. The theoretical roots of this process extend back to Jerome Bruner and Leo Postman’s 1949 study on perception demonstrating that one of the most basic processes of human perception is to compare all new experiences against an existing set of expectancies.<sup>14</sup> They wrote, “Expectancies continue to mold perceptual organization in a self-sustaining fashion so long as they are confirmed. It is when well-established expectancies fail . . . confirmation that the organism may face a task of perceptual reorganization.”<sup>15</sup>





**Figure 1. Organizational Identity Dynamics Model.** (Adapted from Mary Jo Hatch and Majken Schultz, "The Dynamics of Organizational Identity," *Human Relations* 55, no. 8 [August 2002]: 989–1018. Used by permission.)

In organizational identity theory, Jane Dutton and Janet Dukerich were the first to report this phenomenon in their 1991 reference to an incongruity between the public image of the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey and its organizational identity.<sup>16</sup> In line with Bruner and Postman's work,

- (1) identity was a key constraint on how Port Authority employees interpreted organizationally relevant information (in the same manner as the expectancies mentioned above);
- (2) image was used as a mirror to compare what employees believed about themselves with what they inferred others believed about them; and
- (3) once the incongruity between image and identity was identified, the discrepancy required resolution, leaving employees with the options of either taking action to influence their external image or adjusting their identity to the reality of their image.

Hatch and Schultz argue that a similar process occurs between identity and culture, emphasizing the psychological importance for organizations to believe that they are a reflection of the things that they value.<sup>17</sup> Some scholars assert that managing discrepancies among differing images of an organization is an indispensable skill of organizational leadership.<sup>18</sup> In 2000 Gioia, Schultz, and Corley incorporated the discrepancy-resolution concept into a comprehensive theoretical model.<sup>19</sup> For the practical consumer, John Balmer, Guillaume Soenen, and Stephen Greyser acted on this premise to produce the

AC2ID test, focused specifically on helping organizational leaders first find and identify discrepancies among various imaginings of organizational identity and then chart their way through a variety of prescriptive techniques to help bring them back into congruency.<sup>20</sup>

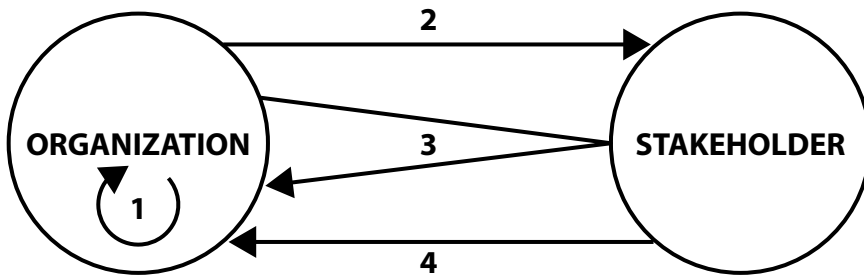
Discussed next are the two distinct feedback loops of the Organizational Identity Dynamics Model: the external relationship between organizational identity and image and the internal relationship between organizational identity and culture.

### **The Connection between Identity and Image**

Members of organizations are regularly confronted with images of the organization, whether they come from direct interaction with other people or through media such as television, newspapers, and the Internet. Hatch and Schultz argue that members' exposure to external images has increased over time because of the massive growth of information technology, including the Internet, as well as a general degradation of organizational barriers caused by organizational efforts to draw stakeholders into closer, more personal relationships than before.<sup>21</sup> What distinguishes this portion of their model from its other half is its focus on the organization's external environment and the organization's relationship with external actors, often referred to as stakeholders.<sup>22</sup> Deciding which stakeholder opinions are most important is a key task for an organization and is highly subject to an organization's assessment of the stakeholder's power, legitimacy, and networking capacity as well as the urgency of the issues that the stakeholder represents.<sup>23</sup>

One challenge of the vast amount of literature on image management is clarifying terms and meanings among the many interdisciplinary scholars researching identity and image. In response, Tom Brown and his colleagues synthesized existing research and theory on the multiple viewpoints of a single organization's identity.<sup>24</sup> Their framework (depicted in fig. 2) includes the following four fundamental questions that face all organizations as they interface with their environments:

- (1) Who are we as an organization?
- (2) What does the organization want others to think about the organization?
- (3) What does the organization believe others think of the organization?
- (4) What do stakeholders actually think of the organization?



**Figure 2. Key viewpoints of identity and image.** (Adapted from Tom J. Brown et al., “Identity, Intended Image, Construed Image, and Reputation: An Interdisciplinary Framework and Suggested Terminology,” *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science* 34, no. 2 [Spring 2006]: 100. Used by permission.)

The answers to these four questions differentiate their four proposed terms of *identity*, *intended image*, *construed image*, and *reputation*. Of note, Brown’s term of *reputation* directly correlates with what Hatch and Schultz call *image*.<sup>25</sup>

This model helps clarify the transfer of information described in the identity-image portion of Hatch and Schultz’s Organizational Identity Dynamics Model. Seeking to affect the answer question 4—what do stakeholders actually think of the organization?—organizations will engage in the process of impressing.<sup>26</sup> David Whetten and Alison Mackey argue that one of the key motivations of organizations’ impressing behavior is to define themselves as distinctive when compared to other organizations in their environment.<sup>27</sup> Impressing is generally viewed as the active process of image management that organizational leadership and designated organizational spokespeople undertake; however, some scholars clearly indicate the potential for unintended actions to make a significant impression on stakeholders as well.<sup>28</sup> Although many scholars focus on impression management in terms of an organization’s identity claims of what it is, equally important is the organization’s process of differentiating itself by disidentifying with associations or identity groupings to clarify what it’s not.<sup>29</sup>

The other half of the external model—mirroring—is depicted in Brown’s diagram as question 3, what does the organization believe others think of the organization? Whetten and Mackey characterize this process as the organization’s attempt to receive feedback regarding its impressing efforts.<sup>30</sup> This feedback process is important for a variety of reasons, among the most significant the fact that organizations’ impressing efforts often do not provide the only data available to stakeholders about them. Instead, their images are likely to be influenced by media reports as well as the opinions of people and organiza-

tions that run counter to the organization's intended image.<sup>31</sup> Particularly important for an understanding of the mirroring process is its demonstrated effect on the organization's identity, most notably because "organization members perceive the prestige of the organization as it is externally perceived."<sup>32</sup> For example, Dutton, Dukerich, and Celia Harquail relay a story describing how Exxon's identity was significantly shaken as a result of the feedback it received in the wake of the 1989 *Valdez* disaster off the coast of Alaska.<sup>33</sup> Additionally, in 2005, Luis Martins conducted a compelling study of this feedback loop, demonstrating that the actual identity effect of corporate reputation rankings varied based on cultural factors unique to each of the organizations rated.<sup>34</sup> This and other links between identity and culture are reviewed next.

### **The Connection between Identity and Culture**

The second feedback loop in the Organizational Identity Dynamics Model depicts the internally referential relationship between an organization's identity and its culture. Hatch and Schultz argue that this relationship is both critical to an understanding of organizational identity and significantly understudied.<sup>35</sup> According to Schein, one reason for this situation is that organizational culture resides primarily in the unspoken assumptions and norms of an organization. He states that "perhaps the most intriguing aspect of culture as a concept is that it points us to phenomena that are below the surface, that are powerful in their impact but invisible and to a considerable degree unconscious."<sup>36</sup> That is not to say that organizational culture is inaccessible, however. Through the processes of reflecting and expressing, organizations both imprint their identity onto their cultures and create artifacts that reflect their cultures, in turn impacting their identities.

According to Hatch and Schultz, "Organizational members not only develop their identity in relation to what others say about them, but also in relation to who they perceive they are." Furthermore, after receiving external images through the previously described mirroring process, organizational members reflect on the consistency of these messages with their embedded cultural norms and values.<sup>37</sup> As Robert Jervis's milestone work, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics*, indicates, ample research supports the idea that the more often people process information that confirms their expectations, the stronger those expectations become over time.<sup>38</sup> In general, people expect that others' perceptions of their organization will be consistent with their own culturally based ones; therefore, the degree to which these

expectations are fulfilled shapes and molds the strength and character of an organization's culture.

In the final path in their model, Hatch and Schultz explain how organizational culture finds expression through artifacts that weave their way back into the organizational identity.<sup>39</sup> They describe a variety of examples of these types of artifacts, such as corporate dress, rituals, and designs and symbols. Schein emphasizes that it is not often easy for outsiders of an organization to fully interpret the cultural roots of the artifacts they encounter, but "if the observer lives in the group long enough, the meanings of artifacts gradually become clear" through processes of socialization.<sup>40</sup>

Moving from the basic dynamics of organizational identity, the next two sections focus on some challenges organizational leaders face as they attempt to shape their organizations and lead them towards the successful accomplishment of their goals. The first of these, multiple-identity organizations, involves how the interactive dynamic between individual members and the group as a whole can lead to the development of fractured identities and cultures. The second challenge arises from organizations that fail to balance the inherent tension of organizational identity dynamics by overemphasizing either the views and expectations of external stakeholders or their own internal cultural reflections. These related dysfunctions lead to what Hatch and Schultz respectively describe as hyperadaptation and organizational narcissism, discussed in a subsequent section.<sup>41</sup>

## The Challenge of Multiple-Identity Organizations

The theoretical structure presented above is a highly simplified, and somewhat idealized, rendering of one aspect of organizational life; however, it should not take disasters like the Enron collapse, Hurricane Katrina, the Japanese surprise attack on Pearl Harbor, or space shuttle *Columbia's* disintegration to realize that not all organizations function optimally all the time. In fact, it is easy to take the opposite position. Peg Neuhauser, who uses the term *tribal warfare* to describe a common state of conflict among organizations' cultural subdivisions, claims that "managers spend anywhere from 25 to 60 percent of their working day dealing with conflicts or fallout from people-related problems."<sup>42</sup> This level of conflict can clearly have a profound impact on organizational identity dynamics and can represent an enormous drain on the resources of the organization.

If leaders are to have any chance of harnessing the strengths and minimizing the hazards of multiple organizational identities, they must understand

their origins. To do this, they should distinguish between identity (the thing) and identification (the process). Next, by drawing on self-categorization and optimal distinctiveness theories, one can begin to paint a picture of how individual values can motivate group members' identification processes. Finally, an exploration of reward structures can show how organizations institutionalize their values and create structural incentives that shape both the type and level of individuals' identification with the organization.

What is sometimes lost in discussions about organizations is that the individuals in them are each motivated by a unique combination of experiences, needs, and aspirations, and each makes individual choices of what organizations to be a part of and how much of themselves to commit. To reiterate the definition used in this work, an *organizational identity* is that which is held by a group to be central, enduring, and distinctive about an organization. Identity, therefore, is a collective set of characteristics negotiated and agreed upon by a group of people. Identification, on the other hand, is an individual behavior in which a person perceives oneness with or belongingness to a group to the point that he or she begins to blur the distinction between the personal self and the organizational self.<sup>43</sup> Marlene Fiol suggests that "identification processes are the critical linking pins that bind these independent levels of identity."<sup>44</sup> According to Denise Rousseau, this identification can take place on a superficial, task-oriented level—which she terms *situated identification*—or on a level that has deeper implications on a person's self-concept across roles and over time—which she calls *deep structure identification*.<sup>45</sup>

This process of defining the self through one's membership in groups is thoroughly explained in Henri Tajfel and John Turner's social identity theory and its related extension, self-categorization theory.<sup>46</sup> What is most significant for this discussion, however, is what the theories describe about the hierarchical nesting of personal and social identities for each individual.<sup>47</sup> According to self-categorization theory, "individuals can categorize themselves on different levels," Rolf van Dick and his colleagues observed, "as unique individuals (personal level), as group members distinct from members of other groups (intermediate or group level), or as a human being in comparison to other species (superordinate level)."<sup>48</sup> Fundamental to this process of identification on various levels is the fact that social identities are chosen. As Marilynn Brewer notes, "Individuals may recognize that they belong to any number of social groups without adopting those classifications as social identities. Social identities are selected from the various bases for self-categorization available to an individual at a particular time. And specific social identities may be activated at some times and not at others."<sup>49</sup>

This issue of selective identification takes on a particularly challenging aspect for extremely large organizations because it has been identified that the larger, more geographically separated, and diversified an organization is, the higher the likelihood that the shared understandings of both culture and identity will begin to form fault lines among clustered groups of like-minded people.<sup>50</sup> Brewer provides a social-identity-theory-inspired explanation of this situation in her 1991 article introducing optimal distinctiveness theory.<sup>51</sup> She describes how all people find themselves in a paradox that creates internal tension within individual identification processes. “At the heart of this paradox rests a basic conflict between two fundamental human motivations,” explains Matthew Hornsey and Jolanda Jetten about the theory, “the need to experience group belonging and the need to feel like a differentiated individual.”<sup>52</sup> In balancing the two competing needs, people tend to identify most completely with organizations that are large enough to be substantial but exclusive enough to be prestigious. Among the eight different strategies for achieving optimal distinctiveness portrayed by Hornsey and Jetten, one very common within large organizations is subgroup identification—the process of identifying more closely with one of the many formal or informal groups of an organization than with the superordinate organization itself.<sup>53</sup> These groups could include anything from divisions or work groups to professional roles or personal friendships. The nature of the subgroup itself is not important, only that the group is deemed to optimize one’s fulfillment of both belonging and distinctiveness needs and is perceived as appropriately salient to the specific social context from which one is operating.<sup>54</sup>

While many factors can influence a particular person’s patterns of identification with an organization, one of the most substantial is the nature of its formal and informal reward structures.<sup>55</sup> In fact, Shelley Brickson cites reward structures as one of the key elements determining the salience of the various levels of the organization with which workers identified.<sup>56</sup> While many research studies have focused on the effects of rewards on individual behavior, Charles O’Reilly and Sheila Puffer are among the few who extended their work to explore the effects of positive and negative sanctions on group members other than those specifically involved.<sup>57</sup> In their now-landmark 1987 article, Jeffrey Kerr and John Slocum particularly address the unique relationship between rewards structures and corporate culture that is of significance to this paper. They contend that “much of the substance of culture is concerned with controlling the behaviors and attitudes of organization members, and the rewards system is a primary method of achieving control.” They add that “the reward system—who gets rewarded and why—is an unequivocal statement of the corporation’s values and beliefs. As such, the reward system

is the key to understanding culture.”<sup>58</sup> Kerr and Slocum identify two distinct reward systems—performance- and hierarchy-based. Although elements of both systems can be evident in the same organization, they emphasize that differing reward systems within different parts of an organization will reinforce distinct behavioral norms and belief systems, which can actively develop and reinforce organizational subcultures and countercultures.<sup>59</sup> Of particular note is that rewards that stem from subjective appraisals of conformity to organizational norms, as are found within the hierarchy-based system, specifically reinforce the cultural relationship between the person responsible for giving the sanctions and those receiving them.<sup>60</sup> Kerr and Slocum observe that hierarchy-based reward structures tend to reinforce a *clan culture* in which “the individual’s long-term commitment to the organization (loyalty) is exchanged for the organization’s long-term commitment to the individual (security).”<sup>61</sup> Rousseau asserts that this type of trust-based relationship is ideal for the development of deep structure identification.<sup>62</sup>

In summary, multiple-identity organizations present a number of unique challenges to the development and maintenance of organizational identity and culture. At the root of these challenges is the fact that every individual makes unique decisions about what level of the organization to identify with and how substantially the social identity is incorporated into one’s own self-concept. Organizations, in turn, institutionalize their values and norms into differing types of reward structures that have the power of reinforcing patterns of behavior. This reinforcement often leads to the development of fractured cultures, consisting of a variety of organization subcultures and countercultures all competing for salience within the identity patterns of organizational members.

### **The Challenge of Balancing Internal and External Identity Focus**

Having explored some of the roots of multiple-identity organizations, I return to Hatch and Schultz’s model for two purposes: (1) to highlight some of the challenges associated with a failure to appropriately balance an organization’s focus between image and culture, and (2) to demonstrate the tendency for different levels of the organizational hierarchy to err on opposite sides of this equation. Because of the dynamic and fluid nature of the overall model, they believe that “when organizational identity dynamics are balanced between the influences of culture and image, a healthy organizational identity results from processes that integrate the interests and activities of all relevant stakeholder groups.”<sup>63</sup> They state that organizations placing too much emphasis on the external identity-image link are engaging in hyperadaptation by responding to every single stimulus from the environment while abandoning

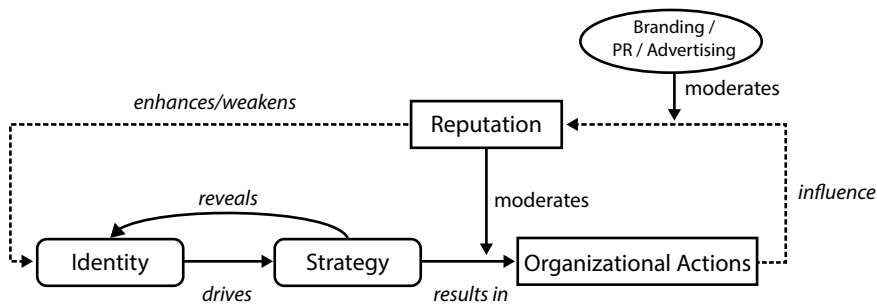


or disregarding their cultural heritage.<sup>64</sup> Conversely, they describe the phenomenon of organizational narcissism as the tendency for an organization to focus almost exclusively on its own culture and artifacts without seeking referential feedback from its stakeholders.<sup>65</sup> The descriptions of these two complementary pathologies of excess provide a useful jumping-off point to explore Corley's research, in which he highlights the proclivities for different echelons of a hierarchical organization to exhibit each of these.

Over the course of an 18-month embedded, explanatory case study, Corley observed and catalogued individual and institutional perceptions of organizational identity in a global technology-service company undergoing a significant structural transition. His inductive analysis of the data revealed massive identity discrepancies along hierarchical lines, with the sharpest contrasts evident between those people at the top of the hierarchy and those at the bottom. He discovered wildly divergent perspectives between these groups' conceptualizations of (1) the nature of organizational identity, (2) what constitutes an identity discrepancy, and (3) what forms the basis for successful identity change.<sup>66</sup> Put in terms of Hatch and Schwartz's analysis above, Corley discovered that managers showed a high proclivity to engage in hyperadaptation while those at the bottom of the hierarchy emphasized the other half of the model, with tendencies to engage in organizational narcissism.<sup>67</sup> On the one hand, this distinction might seem self-evident given the two groups' respective functions in the organization. The most significant red flag in this case, however, was that the two groups with the greatest conceptual discrepancies showed no indication that they even recognized their differences of perspective. This left the organization open to significant gaps of communication and repeated misunderstanding between the organization's strategic leaders and the workforce powering the engine of organizational progress.<sup>68</sup> The managerial and rank-and-file perspectives are described next.

### **Managerial Perspectives on Identity**

According to Corley, for the executives he interviewed, "who they were as an organization was reflected in what the organization's mission and purpose was, how it distinguished itself from its competitors, and how the organization was compared with its rivals in the competitive landscape of the industry."<sup>69</sup> As figure 3 shows, the managerial perspective on identity is essentially a more detailed expression of what Hatch and Schultz describe as an identity-image relationship.



**Figure 3. Identity-strategy relationship as seen by a senior executive.** (Adapted from Kevin G. Corley, “Defined by Our Strategy or Our Culture? Hierarchical Differences in Perceptions of Organizational Identity and Change,” *Human Relations* 57, no. 9 [September 2004]: 1158. Used by permission.)

As noted earlier, one of the key elements of the identity dynamic is the discovery of discrepancies among different imaginings of an organization’s identity.<sup>70</sup> Corley discovered that organizational managers had the tendency to define identity discrepancies almost exclusively as they exist in the organization’s external environment—namely, between the image they intended to transmit to external stakeholders and the image they construed them to hold. This perspective was particularly noticed in executives’ commonly held belief that the media misrepresented the company and continually spread inaccurate information about it.<sup>71</sup>

Finally, in accordance with executives’ preoccupation with image-related identity issues, Corley discovered that “those at the top of the hierarchy saw [organizational] labels and images as the building blocks of a new identity, and acted in accordance with this belief.” Of particular concern with this obsession with the symbols of identity was that very few of the executives Corley interviewed even recognized the possibility that their newly minted and distributed labels and identity statements could mean different things to different people.<sup>72</sup> This lack of understanding served to accentuate the massive intellectual and emotional disconnect between the conceptions of senior executives and the rank-and-file workers within the organization.

### Rank-and-File Perspectives on Identity

At the other end of the spectrum, Corley’s study paints a very different picture of the world when viewed from the perspective of rank-and-file workers. Their focus was not on the organization’s strategic position in respect to other organizations. Rather, “‘who they were as an organization’ was

reflected in the values and beliefs that guided organizational behavior and determined which actions were the most appropriate in a given situation.<sup>73</sup> This emphasis on shared organizational values and norms is precisely what Hatch and Schultz describe as organizational culture.<sup>74</sup> Because of this perspective, rank-and-file members of the organization tended to view the organization's identity as much more stable, much less influenced by the views of outsiders, and much harder to change than did the executives.<sup>75</sup>

The stability that rank-and-file members believed to be inherent in their organization's identity also gave rise to their very different perspective on identity discrepancies. Rather than focusing on image disconnects among external stakeholders, lower-level employees expressed significant concern about discrepancies as they existed across time.<sup>76</sup> This type of fascination with legacy identities was also explored by Ian Walsh and Mary Ann Glynn, who further demonstrate how organizational identities sometimes outlive the organizations themselves.<sup>77</sup> In Corley's work, organizational members identified discrepancies both with the past (who we were as an organization) and the future (who we are becoming as an organization).<sup>78</sup>

Finally, regarding the tools necessary to bring about organizational change, members from the bottom of the hierarchy tended to eschew the trappings of labels and slogans and were much more concerned about the meanings underlying the labels and how those meanings were demonstrated through executive and organizational actions.<sup>79</sup> This difference between the views of organizational leadership and the rank-and-file workers represents the most significant gap between these two subcultures of the organization. Organizational leaders "did not see that their initial attempts at formal identity change were not well received by the rest of the organization," Corley observes. "Those change efforts did not take because they were not backed up by the necessary behavioral changes that would have helped spell out what the new identity labels meant and how the remaining old identity labels had been re-defined."<sup>80</sup> The environment of organizational change described here was one in which actions certainly spoke louder than words, and organizational leaders would be well served to take note of the lessons provided here when embarking on their own forays into managing effective organizational change.

## Effective Organizational Change

Hatch and Schultz's Organizational Identity Dynamics Model makes it eminently clear that organizational identity represents a key node at the nexus of a complex relationship between the unspoken assumptions and values captured in an organization's culture and the varied perceptions and images that

an organization's many external stakeholders hold. Corley's observations of the hierarchical differences in the perception of organizational identity support the assertion that organizational leaders are well equipped—or at least predisposed—to address the challenges of the identity-image relationship because “their day-to-day responsibilities [involve] issues such as the organization's vision and mission, satisfaction of various stakeholder groups, [and] strategic decision-making.”<sup>81</sup> Where they were shown to fall short, however, was in their understanding of the deep-rooted and culturally based perceptions of organizational identity as it was understood by members of the lowest echelons of their organization. The assertion presented here is that the executives described in Corley's research are not unique. This is a position that Schein shares in his classic on the subject, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*. The final section addresses specific elements of Schein's work to suggest ways that organizational leaders can shift their focus partly away from the world of external stakeholders. Doing so promotes a more balanced approach to organizational change that takes into consideration the very real and powerful forces of their organizations' cultures.

The first step in developing this approach to change and culture is understanding that there is no such thing as an empirically good or bad culture. Instead, Schein maintains that the yardstick for judging organizational culture is the extent to which it is functionally effective in helping the organization conquer the two sets of problems that face all groups, regardless of size: “(1) survival, growth, and adaptation in their environment; and (2) internal integration that permits daily functioning and the ability to adapt and learn.” Overcoming these two problems requires leaders to institute organizational change. Schein encourages organizational leaders to focus their organizational change efforts by setting concrete goals for the problems they are trying to fix; culture change cannot be the goal. “One of the biggest mistakes that leaders make when they undertake change initiatives is to be vague about their change goals and to *assume* that culture change will be needed,” he claims (emphasis in original).<sup>82</sup> Organizational culture provides the context in which all group members operate, and in this regard the culture can either enable or hamper the organization's pursuit of its goals. However, Schein clarifies that cultural changes are merely the means to the ends, not the ends themselves.

Schein argues that organizational culture evolves with the organization, primarily as a mechanism to create stability and reduce uncertainty for members of the organization. He observes that

the human mind needs cognitive stability; therefore, any challenge or questioning of a basic assumption will release anxiety and defensiveness. In this sense, the shared basic assumptions that make up the culture of a group can be thought of at both the individual

and the group level as psychological cognitive defense mechanisms that permit the group to continue to function. Recognizing this connection is important when one thinks about changing aspects of a group's culture, for it is no easier to do that than to change an individual's pattern of defense mechanisms.<sup>83</sup>

Because of this, organizational leaders need to understand that change will be successful only when group members perceive and embrace a clear and compelling need for change. Schein further indicates that when organizations have a proven track record in which their cultural assumptions have helped them achieve success, they are "unlikely to want to challenge or reexamine those assumptions. Even if the assumptions are brought to consciousness, the members of the organization are likely to want to hold on to them because they justify the past and are a source of their pride and self-esteem."<sup>84</sup>

Change, therefore, is not something that organizational leaders can impose in spite of the culture, but rather by appreciating the importance of the culture and the perspectives of the people who have been a part of its evolution. To cheapen Abraham Lincoln's words somewhat, culture is also something that is "of the people, by the people, and for the people."<sup>85</sup> "Much has been said of the need for vision in leaders, but too little has been said of their need to listen, to absorb, to search the environment for trends, and to build the organization's capacity to learn," Schein suggests. "Only when they truly understand what is happening and what will be required in the way of organizational change can they begin to take action in starting a learning process."<sup>86</sup>

Executives need to have a clear performance goal in mind and a healthy appreciation for the important stabilizing role that culture plays in their organizations before they are ready to lead them through the challenges of change. In pursuing this change, Schein's insights in the following three areas are instructive.

The role of subcultures is the first of these. Subcultures develop as a natural product of task specialization and adaptation, particularly in large organizations. Schein states that "building an effective organization is ultimately a matter of meshing the different subcultures by encouraging the evolution of common goals, common language, and common procedures for solving problems." He adds that the goal is not to stamp out subdivisions within an organization but rather to find ways to integrate and harmonize them in ways that help the organization adapt and survive. In fact, when one of the subcultures becomes too dominant, the organization cannot survive.<sup>87</sup>

The role of promotion and rewards is the second area. Reward structures are one of the most important ways that organizations institutionalize and demonstrate their unspoken organizational values. Steven Kerr indicates that "numerous examples exist of reward systems that are fouled up in that behaviors which are rewarded are those which the rewarder is trying to *discourage*,

while the behavior he desires is not being rewarded at all” (emphasis in original).<sup>88</sup> Leaders need to assess their reward and promotion structures constantly to ensure they are reinforcing the kinds of values and behaviors they think they are, he said. Schein reasons that changing the reward and punishment system is also one of the quickest and easiest ways to begin to change aspects of the culture. However, these changes must be undertaken with care because, like all actions, the signals associated with rewards and punishment can be ambiguous and hard for newcomers and outsiders to interpret.<sup>89</sup>

The role of actions and meanings is the third area. Schein highlights that leading organizations through periods of change is extremely challenging work requiring high levels of perception and insight, motivation, and emotional strength and often taking a long time to accomplish. Ultimately, culture will be embedded in the organization by much more than the leader’s words and messages; members of the organization will observe and interpret leader actions and draw conclusions about what the leader—and by extension, the organization—values.<sup>90</sup>

Conducting successful organizational change will be hard for any leader, but it will be impossible for those leaders who fail to appreciate and balance the incredibly powerful roles of both the perceptions of external stakeholders and the culture the organization’s members share. In light of the identified propensity for leaders to underestimate the importance of the cultural elements of change, Schein aptly proposes that “the culture cannot be changed directly, unless one dismantles the group itself. A leader can impose new ways of doing things, can articulate new goals and means, can change reward systems, but none of those changes will produce culture change unless the new way of doing things actually works better and provides the members with a new set of shared experiences.”<sup>91</sup>

## Notes

1. Albert and Whetten, “Organizational Identity,” 263–95.
2. Gioia, Schultz, and Corley, “Organizational Identity, Image, and Adaptive Instability,” 63.
3. See Ravasi and Van Rekom, “Key Issues in Organisational Identity,” 118–32. Also, find a two-page table listing over 20 of the most influential organizational identity studies and highlighting their methodological differences in Oliver and Roos, “Beyond Text,” 346.
4. Gioia, Schultz, and Corley, “Organizational Identity, Image, and Adaptive Instability,” 63–81.
5. Hatch and Schultz, “Dynamics of Organizational Identity,” 989–1018.
6. Corley, “Defined by Our Strategy or Our Culture?,” 1145–77.
7. Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*.
8. See Gioia, Schultz, and Corley, “Organizational Identity, Image, and Adaptive Instability,” 63–81, for a noteworthy assault on the perceived stability of organizational identity.
9. Meyer, Bartunek, and Lacey, “Identity Change and Stability,” 21.
10. Hatch and Schultz, “Dynamics of Organizational Identity,” 991.

11. Mead, *Mind, Self, and Society*, 175–78.
12. Hatch and Schultz, “Dynamics of Organizational Identity,” 995.
13. *Ibid.*, 996.
14. Bruner and Postman, “On the Perception of Incongruity,” 206–23.
15. *Ibid.*, 208.
16. Dutton and Dukerich, “Keeping an Eye on the Mirror,” 517–54.
17. Hatch and Schultz, “Dynamics of Organizational Identity,” 1000.
18. Price and Gioia, “Self-Monitoring Organization,” 208–21.
19. Gioia, Schultz, and Corley, “Organizational Identity, Image, and Adaptive Instability,” 69.
20. AC2ID is an acronym that stands for the five identity types in their model—actual, communicated, conceived, ideal, and desired identity. See Balmer and Soenen, “Acid Test of Corporate Identity Management,” 69–92; and Balmer and Greyser, “Managing the Multiple Identities of the Corporation,” 72–86.
21. Hatch and Schultz, “Dynamics of Organizational Identity,” 990.
22. Scott and Lane, “Stakeholder Approach to Organizational Identity,” 44.
23. *Ibid.*, 47–50.
24. Brown et al., “Identity, Intended Image, Construed Image, and Reputation,” 99–106.
25. Hatch and Schultz, “Dynamics of Organizational Identity,” 995.
26. *Ibid.*, 1002–4.
27. Whetten and Mackey, “Social Actor Conception of Organizational Identity,” 396.
28. Corley, Cochran, and Comstock, “Image and the Impact of Public Affairs Management,” 53–68; Price and Gioia, “Self-Monitoring Organization,” 208–21; and Aust, “Communicated Values as Indicators of Organizational Identity,” 515–34.
29. Mullaney, “Like a Virgin,” 1–24. See also Elsbach and Bhattacharya, “Defining Who You Are by What You’re Not,” 393–413.
30. Whetten and Mackey, “Social Actor Conception of Organizational Identity,” 401.
31. Hatch and Schultz, “Scaling the Tower of Babel,” 13–14; and Corley and Gioia, “Identity Ambiguity and Change,” 173–208.
32. Illia and Lurati, “Stakeholder Perspectives on Organizational Identity,” 297.
33. Dutton, Dukerich, and Harquail, “Organizational Images and Member Identification,” 241.
34. Martins, “Model of the Effects of Reputational Rankings,” 713.
35. Hatch and Schultz, “Dynamics of Organizational Identity,” 996.
36. Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, 8.
37. Hatch and Schultz, “Dynamics of Organizational Identity,” 1000.
38. Jervis, *Perception and Misperception*, 125.
39. Hatch and Schultz, “Dynamics of Organizational Identity,” 1002.
40. Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, 27.
41. Hatch and Schultz, “Dynamics of Organizational Identity,” 1006–13.
42. Neuhauser, *Tribal Warfare in Organizations*, 1.
43. Ashforth and Mael, “Social Identity Theory and the Organization,” 34. See also Gautam, Van Dick, and Wagner, “Organizational Identification and Organizational Commitment,” 310.
44. Fiol, “Capitalizing on Paradox,” 653.
45. Rousseau, “Why Workers Still Identify with Organizations,” 218–27.
46. It is beyond the scope of this paper, but for detailed descriptions of the social identity and self-categorization theories, see Brown, “Social Identity Theory,” 745–78; Hogg and Terry, “Social Identity and Self Categorization,” 121–40; and Turner et al., “Self and Collective,” 454–63.
47. Foreman and Whetten, “Members’ Identification with Multiple-Identity Organizations,” 622.

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48. Van Dick et al., "Utility of a Broader Conceptualization," 172.
49. Brewer, "Social Self," 477.
50. For example, see Bouchikhi and Kimberly, "Escaping the Identity Trap," 20–26.
51. Brewer, "Social Self," 477–79.
52. Hornsey and Jetten, "Individual within the Group," 248.
53. Ibid., 251–52.
54. Van Dick et al., "Category Salience and Organizational Identification," 274–76. For an example of this idea supported in a field study outside common laboratory settings, see also Transue, "Identity Salience," 78–91.
55. Rousseau, "Why Workers Still Identify with Organizations," 218–27.
56. Brickson, "Impact of Identity Orientation," 87.
57. O'Reilly and Puffer, "Impact of Rewards and Punishments," 41–53.
58. Kerr and Slocum, "Managing Corporate Culture," 99.
59. Ibid.
60. Hewlin, "And the Award for Best Actor," 636–37.
61. Kerr and Slocum, "Managing Corporate Culture," 99.
62. Rousseau, "Why Workers Still Identify with Organizations," 222.
63. Hatch and Schultz, "Dynamics of Organizational Identity," 1005.
64. Ibid., 1010.
65. Ibid., 1008.
66. Corley, "Defined by Our Strategy or Our Culture?," 1155.
67. Ibid., 1173.
68. Ibid., 1170–71.
69. Ibid., 1157.
70. Dutton and Dukerich, "Keeping an Eye on the Mirror," 548–49.
71. Corley, "Defined by Our Strategy or Our Culture?," 1160–61.
72. Ibid., 1165–66.
73. Ibid., 1157.
74. Hatch and Schultz, "Dynamics of Organizational Identity," 996.
75. Corley, "Defined by Our Strategy or Our Culture?," 1169.
76. Ibid., 1162.
77. Walsh and Glynn, "Way We Were," 262.
78. Corley, "Defined by Our Strategy or Our Culture?," 1162–63.
79. Ibid., 1166.
80. Ibid., 1168.
81. Ibid., 1156.
82. Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, 18, 334.
83. Ibid., 32.
84. Ibid., 312–13.
85. Lincoln, Gettysburg Address.
86. Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, 410.
87. Ibid., 199, 289.
88. Kerr, "On the Folly of Rewarding A," 769.
89. Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, 127–28.
90. Ibid., 246–62.
91. Ibid., 335.



## Chapter 3

### **A Manager's Approach to the US Air Force Identity**

All organizations are challenged to find their places in a world of stakeholder views, opinions, and actions. As presented in chapter 2, those in the senior levels of hierarchical organizations characteristically understand their organizations' identity through the lens of these external relationships. In this regard, the United States Air Force is little different from for-profit companies competing in the private sector. This chapter addresses the application of the managerial approach to identity within the Air Force. While senior Air Force and private-company leaders might share the same perspectives on organizational identity, the organizations themselves operate in a very different environment with dissimilar measures of success.

The chapter opens with a brief discussion of the strategic conundrum faced by all of the Defense Department's military services as they balance the national mandate to cooperate for maximum effectiveness in the application of national military power with the survival requirement to compete for a finite pool of scarce resources. Once the strategic stage is set, we review Thomas Ehrhard's analysis of the Air Force identity crisis along with his recommendations to improve relationships with external stakeholders, such as Defense Department and congressional leadership, the other military services, and the think-tank and intellectual communities.<sup>1</sup> Beyond Ehrhard's work, additional examples of the managerial approach in the Air Force's daily life and recent history are presented. These include the role of opinion-research initiatives, the development of the new Air Force symbol, and the implementation of strategic communication advertising campaigns.

### **The Strategic Paradox of Military Organizational Dynamics**

The US military services face a strategic conundrum. On the one hand, they are charged with cooperating as a joint team on battlefields across the globe, wielding the most awesome destructive power ever known to humanity as they prosecute the nation's wars. Theirs is a profession of life and death where the slightest failure can lead them to fulfill what Sir John Hackett termed the *unlimited liability clause*, demanding their ultimate sacrifice.<sup>2</sup> They are the agents behind Kenneth Waltz's famous assertion that "in international politics force serves, not only as the *ultima ratio*, but indeed as the first and constant one."<sup>3</sup>

On the other hand, the services' institutional desires for survival and efficacy transform them into intense rivals and fierce competitors when it comes to laying claim to the finite pool of public resources allocated for defense spending through the congressional budget process. While it might appear that such a rivalry is no different from separate divisions of a corporation competing over limited funds, what makes this different from an image perspective is that these debates are not kept locked away behind the closed doors of the boardroom. Instead, they turn into wars of words that take center stage in the public sphere, showing up everywhere from public speeches and open-door congressional hearings to the pages and electrons of the mass media. What particularly exacerbates this situation is that the service secretaries are given a relatively free hand to advocate their unique perspectives directly to members of Congress. Under each of their respective sections of Title 10 of the *US Code*, the service secretaries are empowered as follows: "After first informing the Secretary of Defense, the Secretary of the [insert service name] may make such recommendations to Congress relating to the Department of Defense as he considers appropriate."<sup>4</sup> Designed to facilitate the free flow of information between the military and Congress, this privilege has also had the side effect of spurring debates that reverberate throughout the public sphere. These public spectacles can cause serious—and sometimes unpredictable—effects on the images that stakeholders develop about the services individually and the Defense Department collectively.

As one scholar notes, these clashes sprang up almost immediately after the advent of powered flight because before then "the water's edge provided a natural boundary for fixing lines of responsibility between land and sea warfare." However, it was in the wake of World War I that the interservice sparks really began to fly.<sup>5</sup> Onto the public stage burst Brig Gen Billy Mitchell, whom Williamson Murray said "found himself the darling of the media."<sup>6</sup> Because of his outspoken criticism of the General Staff, Army leadership saw Mitchell and other senior Army Air Corps members as "firebrands."<sup>7</sup> Mitchell exhibited a talent for panache and showmanship through his public bombing experiments against defunct naval ships, including the captured German battleship *Ostfriesland*, followed closely by running mock air raids on cities along the Atlantic coast to demonstrate their vulnerability to hostile air attacks.<sup>8</sup> He continued his public attacks on the Navy both up to and after his highly publicized court-martial for insubordination and conduct unbecoming an officer, convinced up until his death in 1936 that aviation—both military and civil—would be the cornerstone of America's future success.<sup>9</sup>

Although the rivalries would fade into the wings during the crucible of World War II, they were never far offstage, particularly as the war in the Pa-

cific began to wind down and Army Air Forces commander Gen H. "Hap" Arnold "personally willed his B-29s to crush Japan and force its surrender" to properly position the force for its postwar independence bid.<sup>10</sup> In the wake of the 1947 order that signaled the successful conclusion of the US Airman's 40-year quest for independence, the public acrimony once again reached fever pitch as budgetary battles between the Air Force and the Navy led to the now-legendary "revolt of the admirals."<sup>11</sup> The clash over acquiring the Air Force's six-engine B-36 bomber or the Navy's \$188 million supercarrier led a senior Navy official to leak fabricated accusations of contractual irregularities to the press, spurring weeks of public congressional testimony where each of the services fought tooth and nail to denigrate the other.<sup>12</sup>

The challenges of balancing the paradoxical demands of peacetime versus wartime cooperation would continue almost unabated for the next 35 years. Ian Horwood paints a stark picture of these contests, asserting, among other things, that during Vietnam the Air Force blocked the Army from procuring potentially lifesaving close air support platforms while also remaining "disinclined to provide close air support in the manner desired by the Army," with "a detrimental effect on the combat efficiency of tactical airpower."<sup>13</sup> Despite largely unrealized efforts to reform in the wake of Vietnam, operational interoperability problems would continue to plague the services as they attempted to execute high-profile missions throughout the 1980s, including the failed hostage rescue attempt in Iran, invasion of Granada, and retaliation bombing of Libya.<sup>14</sup>

Mounting concerns over the ability to conduct coordinated joint operations as well as the quality of military advice available to the president led ultimately to the Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986.<sup>15</sup> Ironically, the act implemented reforms strikingly similar to those Eisenhower sought in 1958—but was unable to achieve—the last time the Defense Department had undergone any kind of significant reorganization.<sup>16</sup> In the intervening 24 years, the overwhelming success of Operation Desert Storm has faded to a barely audible whisper behind the din of more than eight years of apparently interminable conflict in Afghanistan and Iraq, leaving many to question whether Goldwater-Nichols went too far—or not far enough.<sup>17</sup> Regardless of one's position on the issue, however, the fundamental nature of the paradox is unchanged. This inescapable tension between bureaucratic competition and operational cooperation is the single dominant feature of the Air Force's relationships with its most influential stakeholders in the other services, the Defense Department, Congress, and ultimately in the minds of the American people, who might not understand the dynamics of the game but are nonetheless afforded a front-row seat for the fireworks.

## The Ehrhard Prescription

Given this backdrop of the Air Force's stakeholder environment, Ehrhard's perspectives and recommendations in *An Air Force Strategy for the Long Haul* become clearer. This section highlights the elements of Ehrhard's work directly relevant to concerns he raises about the Air Force's institutional identity. Therefore, this study doesn't address matters such as his projections about the future international security environment—while those are interesting and worthy of further debate. The following analysis facilitates an emergent recognition that Ehrhard's work—though produced when he was not employed by the Air Force—remains true to the manager's perspective on identity as described in Kevin Corley's 2004 exploration of the hierarchical differences in perceptions of organizational identity.<sup>18</sup>

### Defining the Problem

Ehrhard's biggest concern about the state of the Air Force and its ability to meet the challenges of the future security environment is the Air Force's current crisis of institutional identity. He states that "this crisis is not just perceived by outsiders, it is also felt by its members, many of whom have observed or even become a part of an ideological malaise within the Air Force that seems to have accelerated in the past eight years."<sup>19</sup>

He identifies three separate components, or manifestations, of the crisis. First, the Defense Department has usurped the Air Force's control over its key acquisition programs despite the Title 10 responsibility assigned to the secretary of the Air Force for organizing, training, and equipping the force.<sup>20</sup> This loss of institutional control began in the wake of the allegations that Darleen Druyun—the Air Force's second-most senior procurement official—had "unfairly steered billions of dollars to Boeing as she sought jobs at Boeing for herself, her daughter, and son-in-law."<sup>21</sup> Ehrhard alleges that repeated problems with the aerial refueling contract reversed trends towards a brief loosening of Defense Department oversight, and he emphasizes that no other military service is subjected to the level of contractual restrictions under which the Air Force currently operates.<sup>22</sup>

Second, the Air Force's lack of representation at the senior levels of joint combatant commands has removed key opportunities for Airmen to exert control over when and how Air Force forces are employed in military operations.<sup>23</sup> Rebecca Grant echoed this concern in 2008, highlighting that out of 110 theater commanders appointed since World War II, only four have been Airmen.<sup>24</sup> Ehrhard asserts that the absence of Airmen in leadership positions

“reveals the Air Force’s rather profound lack of institutional influence compared to the other three services.”<sup>25</sup>

Finally, Ehrhard characterizes the Air Force as overwhelmed by the adversity of procurement cutbacks, the influence of the other services’ strategies, and the simultaneous replacement of the Air Force secretary and chief of staff [CSAF], which he said led to a “lack of a stimulating vision of its future role.”<sup>26</sup> Others, including Col Dennis Drew, have attributed the absence of a compelling vision to pervasive anti-intellectualism within the Air Force. Drew contends, “For 20 years I have watched the crème de la crème of the Air Force officer corps come to Air University’s Air Command and Staff College (ACSC) and Air War College (AWC). For the most part, these officers have been appallingly ignorant of the bedrock foundation of airpower thinking, virtually oblivious to airpower theory and its development, and without any appreciation of airpower history and its meaning.”<sup>27</sup>

### Key Recommendations

From these three broad symptoms of the problem, Ehrhard proposes a number of “steps the Air Force might take to reinvigorate and establish [the] service as a viable, influential force in the defense policy debate.”<sup>28</sup> Clearly, Ehrhard’s focus is on how the Air Force, as a unitary actor, can engage with its key external stakeholders in an ongoing conversation about the current and future employment of the military element of national power. Although he did not organize them this way, his recommendations can be recast into three broad aims:

- (1) Build trust with Defense Department leadership to regain Title 10 autonomy.
- (2) Build joint-service trust through flawless accomplishment of the Air Force’s assigned missions and improvement of the Air Force’s interface with the joint planning system.
- (3) Shape the marketplace of ideas by recapturing joint warfare conceptual and operational development.

**Build DOD Trust.** Regarding the first aim, Ehrhard expresses grave concerns that the Office of the Secretary of Defense had lost confidence in the Air Force’s ability to generate requirements and purchase major weapon systems, such as a new aerial refueling tanker and a replacement combat search and rescue helicopter. “For a service to have its number one acquisition program [the tanker] managed by OSD is embarrassing to both the Air Force and OSD,” he asserts. “[Rehabilitation] should focus in the near term on the full

restoration of Title 10 'equip' authority for all service air and space programs." Ehrhard stresses that the Air Force needs not only to rebuild its ailing acquisition corps and ensure it has appropriate senior leader oversight but also to repair its broken requirements generation process, "especially in the way it communicates with contractors about what it wants, and how it manages contract modifications." A second initiative designed to allow the Air Force to get out of the acquisitions penalty box is to restore the tight linkages between senior leadership and the functions of science and technology research as well as research and development. Ehrhard asserts that the Air Force needs to recapture the technologically engaged relationship and visionary insight of leaders like Hap Arnold and Thomas White while also nurturing officers with the appropriate academic credentials along "a technology-centered career path that could lead to four-star rank." He fears that because of a lack of senior leaders with advanced degrees in engineering or science, the Air Force has "essentially outsourced important investment decisions to mid-level technologists in the hope that they produce something useful absent strategic direction." He suggests the Air Force play the role of a venture capitalist, investing in promising technologies, assisting in the expensive testing of prototypes, and displaying the strategic vision and fiscal discipline to kill weak programs. "The world's preeminent air force cannot survive on a diminishing diet of air and space technology development," he claims. "Reviving this cornerstone establishment by revitalizing its people, focus, and relevance must be a high priority for those interested in the Air Force's long-term rehabilitation."<sup>29</sup>

**Build Joint-Service Trust.** The second aim, building trust among the Air Force's joint partners, is tied to the service's selfless and flawless accomplishment of the unique missions that have been entrusted to it on behalf of the American people. Most importantly for Ehrhard, this means first restoring the Air Force's attention on maintaining the readiness of the nation's nuclear arsenal by reinstituting Strategic Air Command (SAC)-era practices such as no-notice alerts, high attention to detail, and low tolerance for error. These elevated levels of accountability must be coupled with valuable career incentives, a "SAC-caliber" feedback and internal review system, and "a reinvigorated nuclear force posture vision more in tune with the future security environment." Another mission area he highlights as requiring improved development is the staffing and operational integration of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV)—dubbed remotely piloted aircraft (RPA) in the current lexicon. Ehrhard pinpoints developing a dedicated UAV career field to serve as the institutional advocate for continued acquisition and development of the technology. Finally, Ehrhard recommends that the Air Force reevaluate how it can present forces to the joint war-fighting community to better integrate

with the standing joint global force and operational planning constructs. To do this, Ehrhard suggests that the Air Force “abandon the combat wing concept and adopt the AEF [air and space expeditionary force] construct as the core of its future force planning methodology” and enable a modular tailoring of the capability that could serve as an easily understandable parallel to a Navy strike group or Army brigade.<sup>30</sup> While Ehrhard’s recommendations in this category have significant structural and internal ramifications, clearly his focus again is less on the cultural aspects of his proposals and more on what the Air Force needs to do to repair some of the damage to its relationships with its joint war-fighting partners.

**Shape the Marketplace of Ideas.** Finally, Ehrhard observes that “the Air Force, compared to the other services, now exerts marginal influence on the development and implementation of joint operational strategy” and recommends that the most promising way to change this is to “develop and advocate compelling ideas.” To do so, he emphasizes that the Air Force must first improve its officer education on the fundamentals of national security history, structure, processes, and institutions—including in-depth examination of the other three services. Additionally, he argues that graduate education of its officers through civilian institution programs needs to be a significantly higher priority for the service, citing that no current three- or four-star Air Force leader at that time held a degree from a tier-one educational institution. These two initiatives, Ehrhard asserts, would help provide the Air Force with the intellectual foundation necessary to develop innovative operational concepts applicable to the full spectrum of joint military operations rather than just those niche areas related to air and space. Ehrhard recommends that the Air Force seek to expand its intellectual horizons with high-end asymmetric warfare, opposed network operations, Global Positioning System independence, AirSea Battle, distributed operations, counterproliferation, and homeland defense. The purpose of this widespread education and advocacy, according to Ehrhard, is to begin the “long-term rehabilitation of Air force ideology, doctrine, messaging, and relationships with other key organizations” in a revitalization of former CSAF Gen Mike Ryan’s Developing Aerospace Leaders (DAL) initiative, which suffered a premature death at the hands of the post-9/11 operational environment.<sup>31</sup>

Ehrhard’s recommendations are in keeping with the perspective Corley attributes to senior executives in that they are geared toward developing the Air Force’s relationships with key external stakeholders, such as leadership in the Defense Department and senior policy makers across the federal government.

## Public-Image-Focused Identity Initiatives

While relationships with key elements of the federal government clearly have wide-ranging effects on the Air Force's ability to gain funding and accomplish its mission, the true lifeblood of the organization is the dwindling pool of qualified youth, thousands of whom are required to feed the service's ranks each year. To convince them of the value of a career in the military—which turned into an all-volunteer force in 1973—the military services have discovered that they must develop relationships with two critical groups of people. First are the potential recruits themselves, but just as important are influencers—the parents, coaches, guidance counselors, and others who wield enormous power in the decision-making process of these young adults.<sup>32</sup>

Following the post-Vietnam War slump in military recruiting, 1999 marked a watershed year for these relationships when the Air Force failed to meet its recruiting goals for the first time since 1979.<sup>33</sup> A number of explanations emerged, including the record-performing economy, widespread civilian job availability, and the ongoing round of projected base closures, as well as a decline in the 18–22 year-old population by almost 20 percent between 1980 and 1999.<sup>34</sup> Reaction within the Air Force was swift and significant. For the first time in its history, the Air Force purchased paid television advertising, following the trail the Army so famously blazed with its “Be All You Can Be” jingle in 1981.<sup>35</sup> Use of the medium of television—more than tripling the Air Force's annual advertising budget from \$22 million to \$76 million—was meant to complement massive military pay raises proposed by both President Clinton and Congress and an almost 30 percent increase in Air Force recruiters.<sup>36</sup> This shocking turn of events also marked a fundamental change in the way that senior Air Force leaders looked at the organization's relationship with this key group of external stakeholders, as total Defense Department advertising spending increased by 150 percent between 1999 and 2007, the Air Force portion of which also increased.<sup>37</sup> This changed perspective prompted Air Force leadership to take unprecedented steps over the next decade to manage external images of the Air Force. Three of these initiatives included (1) a new reliance on scientific public-opinion data to assess external image, (2) the design and marketing of a radical new Air Force symbol, and, later, (3) the development and execution of a massively expanded advertising program comprehensively targeting influencers directly rather than recruits, as had been the norm for previous campaigns.



## External Market Research

At this time, Air Force leaders appreciably increased their emphasis on the amount and quality of scientific public-opinion research data necessary to support a proper assessment of the Air Force's image among key external stakeholders. In particular, they hired a full-time professional research consultant into the Secretary of the Air Force's Office of Public Affairs (SAF/PA) to provide critical expertise for the function, previously accomplished by active-duty public affairs officers.<sup>38</sup> Public-opinion research initiatives gained in both frequency and sophistication over the next several years, with SAF/PA initiating 24 separate formal externally focused research projects between 1999 and 2005.<sup>39</sup> In the fall of 2005, the Air Force again upped the research ante. One month after taking over as the new CSAF, Gen T. Michael Moseley ordered a major public communication reorganization, increasing the headquarters staff from 59 to 110 and creating a new two-star director of communication over the organization.<sup>40</sup> One of the specific CSAF vectors for the new director of communication was to improve the research data and analysis function of Air Force communication programs.<sup>41</sup> Over the subsequent years, research reports were conducted and eventually formalized into a series of communication research bulletins, over 100 of which were distributed through the Air Force public affairs community between 2007 and 2009.<sup>42</sup>

Air Force external research initiatives over the 10 years highlighted here cover a wide variety of research topics, but three streams of research emerge. First, Air Force leaders were keenly interested in comparing public opinions of the Air Force to those of the other military services and the Defense Department in general. For example, in 2005 SAF/PAX (Air Force Public Affairs, Strategy and Assessments Division) produced a report of a longitudinal analysis comparing the public's propensity to associate various attributes with each of the military services using four waves of data starting in early 2003, just before the initiation of major combat operations in Operation Iraqi Freedom.<sup>43</sup> Gauging public perceptions of the differences among portions of the Defense Department was a key interest item, with at least four communication bulletins dedicated specifically to these comparisons.<sup>44</sup> Second, in 2007 and 2008, the Air Force went beyond simple measurement of attitudes and developed a series of conceptual models in an attempt to better segment public audiences by identifying those most likely to support the Air Force and explaining the specific causal relationships between these audience segments and their attitudes.<sup>45</sup> This analysis was used to assist in the targeting of key recruiting influencers through the "Above All" advertising campaign discussed in a subsequent section. Finally, as the strategic communication model firmly

took hold within the Air Force headquarters, a substantial portion of the public research effort focused on maintaining clear situational awareness on specific issue-related perceptions and tracking the data through trend analysis to capture quantifiable evidence of the effects of Air Force communication activities. For example, when Moseley initiated the Air Force Weeks program in 2007, research consultants conducted pre- and post-event surveys of community members to assess the program's effectiveness.<sup>46</sup> Research focus also highlighted key ongoing public and Defense Department debates, such as the troubled tanker and rescue helicopter contract processes, unmanned aerial system development efforts, and incidents involving the Air Force's mishandling of nuclear weapons during this period.<sup>47</sup>

### The Air Force Symbol

The 1999 recruiting shortfall also prompted the Air Force to design and market a radical new Air Force symbol to become its visual representation to all internal and external audiences. The Air Force hired New York advertising agency Siegel & Gale, charging it with the task of researching and designing the new image, logo, and tagline.<sup>48</sup> After almost a year of research and planning, the Air Force unveiled the new Air Force symbol (fig. 4) in January 2000. "We want to ensure our core identity is part of our culture and is understood by our own people and the citizens we serve," said the CSAF, General Ryan. "As we enter the 21st Century, our identity—who we are, what we do, and what we believe—will represent both our heritage and our future."<sup>49</sup>



**Figure 4. US Air Force symbol.** (Reprinted from Air Force Trademark and Licensing Program, US Air Force media gallery, <http://www.trademark.af.mil/downloads/mediagallery.asp?galleryID=6592>.)

The Air Force spent more than \$800,000 to research and develop the new logo and hoped to use it to visually unify Air Force communication and overcome the widespread inconsistency that research exposed.<sup>50</sup> The logo was rolled out before its final approval along with a proposed slogan—World Ready—so that the Air Force could test the waters of public opinion before it made any irrevocable choices.<sup>51</sup> According to press reports, the slogan “fell flat in initial soundings.”<sup>52</sup> Air Force Public Affairs conducted research on both the internal and external perceptions of the new symbol in both 2001 and 2007, and although acceptance of the symbol was initially slow in coming, the final report showed that audiences widely recognized and supported the new symbol.<sup>53</sup>

### The “Above All” Advertising Campaign

The third example of Air Force attempts to manage its external image did not yield the same success of the previous two examples. Suffering from what it perceived to be a widespread lack of awareness of the important contributions the service made to national security, the Air Force launched a \$26-million advertising campaign in February 2008 under the tagline “Above All.”<sup>54</sup> In what the advertising trade publication *AdWeek* called “an oblique approach to recruiting,” the campaign focused specifically on changing perceptions among the influencer audience of parents, counselors, and coaches rather than the potential recruits directly.<sup>55</sup> According to budget documents uncovered by *Air Force Times* journalists, “the goal is that each [of 220 million] adults [in the target audience] over a year’s span will see 30 Air Force advertisements, from ads on Web sites to full-page newspaper ads to prime-time television ads.”<sup>56</sup> The new slogan is admittedly a bold one, but so are Airmen,” said Col Michael Caldwell, Air Force Public Affairs deputy director, in an Air Force press release. “This campaign captures the professionalism of our Airmen, our technological edge, and our ability to meet today’s threats while at the same time prepare for future challenges.”<sup>57</sup>

Almost out of the gate, the campaign was met with scathing criticism from both unnamed Pentagon officials and within Congress. Rep. John Murtha called the advertisements “outrageous” and allegedly questioned whether the campaign represented an illegal lobbying effort on the part of the Air Force.<sup>58</sup> “Across the Pentagon, the new motto was seen as boasting of a different kind of exceptionalism, one that put the Air Force above the rest of the military when the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan demanded that all the branches work together in new ways.”<sup>59</sup> Finally, a number of blogs and public Web forums were noted to have picked up on the similarity between the slogan Above All and

the portion of the German national anthem most popular among the Nazis—“*Deutschland über Alles*.”<sup>60</sup> The ironic thing is that senior Air Force leaders had identified this potential connection in December, but production schedules had already been delayed, and the decision was made to go ahead with the campaign as designed against the recommendation of experts stationed in Germany.<sup>61</sup> In the end, both the secretary and the chief of staff of the Air Force were forced to answer extremely pointed questions from congressional leaders during their testimony on Capitol Hill for the Air Force’s annual posture hearings. For example, Rep. Allen Boyd of Florida asked Secretary Michael Wynne, “Can you briefly tell the committee why the Air Force felt compelled to run these ads, which, to some, appear to be the kinds of ads that an advocacy group would run, when, in fact, it’s specifically prohibited in law?”<sup>62</sup>

In deconstructing the disaster that the campaign ultimately became, it is an underreported fact that the slogan’s rollout plan originally included three full months of communication activities focused specifically on socializing the slogan among Air Force internal audiences before launching it in the media; however, production and bureaucratic pressures delayed final approval of the program, and the campaign was eventually launched with the internal and external audiences simultaneously.<sup>63</sup> The objectives of the internal campaign were threefold: (1) focus all Airmen on one vision of the brand, (2) create enthusiasm and pride among all Airmen, and (3) foster belief and support in new brand positioning by enabling Airmen to participate directly in the launch.<sup>64</sup> Central to the internal campaign was a 50-second video—too long for television but perfect for conveying the context of the phrase Above All.<sup>65</sup> The video was eventually hung on the Air Force Portal. However, the massive multimedia campaign of e-mails, base-paper advertisements, news articles, and face-to-face briefings was essentially boiled down to one Air Force press release sent to the media and posted on the Air Force website.<sup>66</sup> One is left to wonder whether more serious attention to the internal campaign would have put the Air Force as an institution in a better position both to frame the campaign’s public discussion and to respond to the inevitable questions.

## Conclusion

The above discussion is not intended to judge whether image management techniques have any empirical value or potential efficacy for the Air Force. In fact, the theoretical framework presented in chapter 2 supports the assertion that fully half of the equation lies in the realm of stakeholders and construed images. The theory, however, also asserts that senior leaders within large organizations who tend to focus primarily on external images without dedicat-

ing the same level of effort to their organizational cultures are ultimately doomed to fail in the development of internally consistent and stable organizational identities. What should be clear from the information provided in this chapter is that the Air Force operates in a stakeholder environment fraught with inescapable conflicts of purpose that need to be balanced delicately to succeed in the long run. What should also be clear is that both senior Air Force leaders and think-tank policy pundits are highly attuned to these challenges and spend a great deal of their attention on strategies to help the Air Force successfully navigate this unpredictable environment of stakeholder relationships. The remaining question, however, is whether they dedicate a commensurate level of skill and energy to understanding and shaping the largely unspoken norms and values that define the Air Force's culture. This question is the subject of chapter 4.

#### Notes

1. Ehrhard, *Air Force Strategy*, 48–62.
2. Hackett, *Profession of Arms*, 23.
3. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, 113.
4. Title 10, *US Code*, “Armed Forces,” vol. 10, secs. 3010 (Army), 5013 (Navy), and 8013 (Air Force).
5. Trest, *Air Force Roles and Missions*, xi.
6. Murray, “Strategic Bombing,” 107.
7. Trest, *Air Force Roles and Missions*, 22.
8. *Ibid.*, 34–36.
9. Ehlers, “Note on Billy Mitchell and His Book,” v.
10. Wolk, *Reflections on Air Force Independence*, 105.
11. For a detailed accounting of this five-year chapter of aviation history, see Barlow, *Revolt of the Admirals*.
12. Trest, *Air Force Roles and Missions*, 125–35.
13. Horwood, *Interservice Rivalry*, 178.
14. For an excellent review of the lessons from these operations as well as British air operations in the Falklands, see Anno and Einspahr, *Command and Control and Communications Lessons Learned*.
15. Locher, “Has It Worked?,” 99.
16. Trest, *Air Force Roles and Missions*, 240. Maj Greg H. Parlier also addresses this topic in his interesting research paper, “Goldwater-Nichols Act of 1986.”
17. For a variety of perspectives on this debate, see the June 2006 edition of *Armed Forces Journal*, <http://armedforcesjournal.com/2006/06>.
18. Corley, “Defined by Our Strategy or Our Culture?,” 1145–77.
19. Ehrhard, *Air Force Strategy*, 48.
20. *Ibid.*, 28.
21. Leslie Wayne, “Is Boeing the Enron of the U.S. Air Force? Heads Roll as Web of Cozy Deals Unravels,” *International Herald Tribune*, 17 December 2004. This article contains a sig-

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nificant discussion of the broader ethical implications of the scandal and its effect on former Air Force secretary James Roche.

22. Ehrhard, *Air Force Strategy*, 28.
23. Ibid.
24. Grant, "Why Airmen Don't Command," 46. For an earlier analysis on this subject, see Belote, *Once in a Blue Moon*, a reprint of his 1999 School of Advanced Airpower Studies thesis.
25. Ehrhard, *Air Force Strategy*, 28.
26. Ibid., 29.
27. Drew, "Educating Air Force Officers," 38.
28. Ehrhard, *Air Force Strategy*, 48.
29. Ibid., 48–54.
30. Ibid., 54–56, 60–62.
31. The entire Summer 2001 edition of *Aerospace Power Journal* is dedicated to various perspectives on leadership, including one specifically emphasizing the DAL initiative by Thirtle, "Developing Aerospace Leaders for the Twenty-First Century," 52–57.
32. Paula Span, "Sell All That You Can Sell," *Washington Post*, 22 March 1992, final edition, W20.
33. Sig Christenson, "Air Force at 20-Year Low in Recruiting, Could Revive Draft; For First Time, Military Conscription Would Include Women," *Washington Times*, 6 July 1999, A1.
34. Bill Maxwell, "The Unfilled Ranks," *Washington Times*, 9 October 1999, A12; and Paul Brent, "Air Force to Launch TV Ads for the First Time," *National Post*, 5 February 1999, national edition, C11.
35. Brent, "Air Force to Launch TV Ads," C-11; and Span, "Sell All That You Can Sell," W20.
36. Steven Lee Myers, "Air Force Turns to Ads after Drop in Recruiting," *New York Times*, 10 February 1999, A14.
37. Dertouzos, *Cost-Effectiveness of Military Advertising*, ix.
38. Belk, "After-Action Report."
39. Air Force Public Affairs, Strategy and Assessments Division (SAF/PAX), "USAF Projects Continuity Files," working files.
40. Freedberg, "Air Force Aims for Fresh Image."
41. Lessel, "Strategic Communications Strategy," working briefing, 21.
42. SAF/PAX, "Communication Research Bulletin Index."
43. Everett, "Public Perceptions of the Military."
44. SAF/PA, *Communication Research Bulletin* numbers 34, 67, 71, and 86 focused specifically on intraservice attribute comparisons.
45. SAF/PA, *Communication Research Bulletin* numbers 9, 24, 33, 40, 41, 76, and 78 reported on the development of these audience segments and conceptual models.
46. SAF/PA, *Communication Research Bulletin* numbers 1, 5, 13, 19, 20, 21, 35, 59, 69, and 82 were assessments of Air Force Week programs.
47. SAF/PA, *Communication Research Bulletin* numbers 37, 46, 51, 53, 60, 68, 81, 88, 96, 97, and 99 reported on these types of efficacy assessments.
48. Chura and Snyder, "U.S. Air Force Rethinks Identity," 8.
49. "Air Force Identity, Symbol in Transition," USAF press release.
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## Chapter 4

### **The Rank-and-File Approach to the US Air Force Identity**

While senior Air Force leaders expend enormous amounts of time and energy on the institutional realities of the external world, the balance of the force—more than 830,000 active, Guard, Reserve, and civilian Airmen—live in a completely different world.<sup>1</sup> As Kevin Corley shows in his 2004 study, the rank and file live in a world of inferred meaning, temporal discrepancies, and the powerful, unspoken assumptions that form the stable backbone of the Air Force culture.<sup>2</sup> This chapter explores this critical perspective on the Air Force's institutional identity. Reviewed first is the central, defining characteristic of the Air Force's cultural structure—the oligarchical domination of the institution by tribal groups representing highly specialized functional subcultures. After exploring the structure's origins and identity effects, the tendency of the Air Force's rewards system to reinforce specific career-field identities rather than an overarching Air Force identity is discussed. From these framing issues, the next section turns to the former chief of staff of the Air Force, Gen T. Michael Moseley, and three related cultural change initiatives he attempted to institute during his truncated tenure as the Air Force's top Airman. These initiatives are framed as an ill-advised attempt to unilaterally overlay a dominant subcultural mythology across the varied, competing cultural experiences of the vast majority of Airmen. Finally, even if Moseley's change initiatives had not proven fundamentally incompatible with the cultural base of the average rank-and-file Airman, Moseley's involvement in the "Thundervision" scandal is presented as an example of how discrepancies between the rhetoric and behavior of senior leaders can have significant identity consequences for those at the bottom of the hierarchy.

### **The Roots of the Air Force Culture**

According to Corley's study, in lower levels of an organizational hierarchy, perceptions of the institution's identity are based on an emergent interpretation of the organization's and its leaders' behaviors, which forms a tacit understanding of the group's beliefs and values.<sup>3</sup> The thesis offered here is that most Airmen's perspectives are framed by a ubiquitous emphasis on their specific functional identities rather than by a superordinate identity of the Air Force—an umbrella identity that uniquely captures the essence of all the varied subgroups beneath it. This frame stems from the Air Force's longstanding tradi-

tion of being led by one narrow, but powerful, dominant subculture for the vast majority of its independent existence.<sup>4</sup> Understanding the long-term effects of this concentration of power on the Air Force's culture requires exploring how the Air Force got to this point in the first place.

Numerous scholars have attempted to describe the Air Force's culture and, by extension, central elements of its institutional psyche. Probably the most iconic of those works is Carl Builder's 1994 treatise on the ideological underpinnings of Airman culture, *The Icarus Syndrome*. Builder's inductive exploration of the fracturing of the Air Force into functional tribes characterizes the cause as a loss of ideological focus on the basic theories of airpower, resulting in the original means of the theory (the airplane) being mistaken for the only means to accomplish its theoretical ends.<sup>5</sup> Other researchers characterize the evolution of the Air Force as a sometimes misguided ideological struggle fueled by the rhetoric of a core of Airmen. This group is convinced that airpower can win wars through independent strategic bombing, with no obligations to conduct subordinate missions for the other services.<sup>6</sup> While these arguments have an undeniable humanistic appeal, their reliance on relatively subjective, personality-driven explanations of the causes of certain events undermines some of their value when attempting to transfer their lessons into the future. Thomas Ehrhard's doctoral dissertation comes closer to providing a useful theory by naming the structural and power dynamics of the service as key causal factors of organizational behavior.<sup>7</sup> Unfortunately, although he observed the high concentration of pilots within the leadership of the Air Force and used that factor as an independent variable for other actions, he declined to speculate on its definitive causes.<sup>8</sup>

Critical insight into the power dynamics of American public institutions such as the Air Force can be found in Frederic Mosher's *Democracy and the Public Service*. "In most public agencies which have been in operation for some time," Mosher argues, "there is a single occupational group whose knowledge, skills, and orientations are closely identified with the mission and activities of the agency. . . . [This group becomes a core] at the center of the agency, controls the key line positions, and provides the main, perhaps the exclusive, source of its leadership."<sup>9</sup> Further into his description of this commonly occurring core of professional leaders, he continues, "Among subgroups there is normally a pecking order of prestige and influence. The most elite of them is likely to be the one which historically was the most closely identified with the end purpose, the basic content of the agency."<sup>10</sup> Framed in this light, the question of concentrated Air Force leadership becomes less about the leaders themselves and more about the narrowing definition of the Air Force's end purpose. Of the vastly diverse set of advantages that entering

the third dimension can bring to the modern battlefield, why is it that only one of them came to dominate the US Air Force? This process is best explained by an analogical detour.

In the mid-1300s, several successive waves of plague spread across Western Europe in what came to be known as the Black Death, killing as much as one-third of the total population over the course of several years. According to Joseph Byrne, "Knowledge, skills, experience, relationships, and raw person-power were all lost at a throw, in many ways crippling a generation and more."<sup>11</sup> In the wake of this dramatic population shift, human coping mechanisms conspired to yield a subtle but fundamental shift in the societal structure of the day. Norman Cantor indicates that "the main social consequence of the Black Death was not the advancement of a worker's protocommunist paradise but further progress along the road to class polarization in an early capitalist economy. The gap between rich and poor in each village widened. The wealthiest peasants took advantage of the social dislocations caused by the plague and the poorer peasants sank further into dependency and misery."<sup>12</sup>

The aftermath of World War II provided a similar experience for the budding US Air Force, yielding an almost identical consolidation of power among a small group of institutional survivors. In June 1944, the US Army Air Forces was the largest of the three services, numbering 2,372,293 people.<sup>13</sup> Postwar demobilization would reduce that number to 300,000 by May 1947 and US defense spending from 40 percent of the gross national product in 1944 to 4 percent by 1948.<sup>14</sup> This time was the Air Force's Black Death, and as the available resources became more and more scarce, segments of the survivors scrambled to consolidate their power just as the peasants of medieval Europe. The wealthiest peasants in the Air Force at the time, however, were not simply pilots; they were that smaller group of pilots who could deliver the nation's newest and most destructive weapon. Nuclear weapons—not an ideological fascination with the Air Corps Tactical School doctrine of long-range industrial bombing—were the scarce resource that redefined the Air Force's purpose. As Bernard Brodie observes, "People often speak of atomic explosives as the most portentous military invention 'since gunpowder.' But such a comparison inflates the importance of even so epoch-making an event as the introduction of gunpowder."<sup>15</sup> Within his first year in office, President Eisenhower articulated that the nuclear weapon was to be the backbone of all US defense policy. Up to that point, the only people who could successfully deliver on his policy of massive retaliation were the bomber pilots of Strategic Air Command.<sup>16</sup> Although the United States had been working on the development of long-range missiles to carry nuclear warheads for some time, it was not until the summer of 1955 that the president ordered development of the

intercontinental ballistic missile to become the highest national priority.<sup>17</sup> By then, the die had already been cast in the power dynamics of the budding US Air Force. Put simply, it was the president, and by extension the American people, who redefined the Air Force's central purpose as SAC's nuclear delivery mission. If Mosher's analysis holds any truth, the ascendancy of a corps of leaders associated with this mission was therefore inevitable.

Once the professional elite has been clearly defined and ensconced in power, Mosher asserts, its hold on power would be nearly unshakable without completely redefining the purposes of the organization.<sup>18</sup> In particular, its power is felt and maintained through tight controls over the budgetary process. During the Eisenhower age of fiscal conservatism, not enough money would be available for both the nuclear and conventional airpower missions, and the national priority was clear—particularly to the bomber-pilot elite at the helm. Although the Air Force's Tactical Air Command “received funding to develop 23 different fighter aircraft types from the end of World War II to 1954, it would receive only one new production series aircraft from 1955 to 1964.”<sup>19</sup> As Julie Duck and Kelly Fielding demonstrate in their 2003 study of organizational leadership, when members perceive that organizational leaders from a different subgroup show favoritism for their own tribes, identification with the superordinate group diminishes substantially and is supplanted by a commensurate identification with their own subgroup.<sup>20</sup> It is, therefore, through the dominance hierarchy created in the Air Force's formative years that the clear and definitive fracturing of the superordinate Air Force identity occurred, supplanting it with appreciably higher levels of identification with individual career fields instead.

Finally, although the roots of the tribal fracturing of the Air Force identity can be discerned, one could be easily left to wonder how these divisions perpetuate themselves over generations of Airmen flowing through the organization. The most substantial clue to that puzzle can be found in the Air Force personnel system. Mosher indicates that one of the most influential methods of organizational control in public institutions is the administration of rewards and punishment through their personnel systems. He adds that “a basic drive of every profession, established or emergent, is *self-government* in deciding policies, criteria, and standards for employment and advancement, and in deciding individual personnel matters” (emphasis in original).<sup>21</sup> Further, personnel systems

determine the standards and criteria for entrance; the policies and procedures of assignment; the appropriate work content of elite corps positions; the criteria for promotion. They . . . set up the machinery for personnel operations, usually including boards, all or a majority of whose members are drawn from the corps itself. They also superintend the policies

and operations of personnel management for other employees, including other professionals, who are not in the elite, yielding as little as they must to civil service requirements, to other employee groups, to outside professional interests, and to political pressures.<sup>22</sup>

The ruling elite's dictates and decisions certainly influence the fundamentals of the Air Force's entire personnel system. However, individual career fields control the flow of a considerable stream of rewards within that community and serve as incentive for career-field loyalty and long-term subgroup identification. Most significantly, this stream of rewards includes nomination for command opportunities, selection for assignments, and endorsement for special-duty and educational opportunities—all accomplished within career-field specific developmental teams.

The vast majority of the Air Force's incentives are founded on what Jeffrey Kerr and John Slocum identify as a hierarchy-based reward system. They observed that "in the hierarchy, superiors defined and evaluated the performance of subordinates. . . . Superiors were free to define those aspects of a manager's role that would be considered important. Thus, performance criteria could vary according to who one was working for."<sup>23</sup> This highly subjective nature of judgment and rewards creates uncertainty for ratees and drives them to develop stronger relationships with their supervisors to better understand, predict, and conform to these unwritten expectations.<sup>24</sup> According to Denise Rousseau, these relationships open the door for the exchange of particularistic rewards—such as status or other symbolic sanctions—that can markedly affect employees' deep structure identification with the organization. She notes that "a positive feedback loop exists." Moreover, "once particularistic rewards are exchanged and identification begins, individuals are likely to become concerned with the broader interests of the organization, including its reputation, survival, and continued success, which generates activities and resource exchanges . . . that foster further identification."<sup>25</sup>

For junior Air Force members seeking advancement, career-field development teams are the fonts from which almost all major rewards flow. Consequently, cultural identities initially fractured by SAC's meteoric rise to power have been continually reinforced through the unending feedback loop of non-material exchanges between Airmen and their career-field leadership. Without a fundamental reengineering of this reward structure, there is no reason to believe that career-field identification will lose any of its strength in the future.

## Warrior Ethos from the Desk of the Chief of Staff

When Gen T. Michael “Buzz” Moseley, a career fighter pilot from the Air Force’s then-dominant subculture, was sworn in as the Air Force’s 18th chief of staff on 2 September 2005, he came armed with a vision—“the reinvigoration of rich Air Force warrior culture.”<sup>26</sup> Within weeks, Air Staff officials announced that utility uniforms—flight suits, battle dress uniforms, or the newer Airman battle uniform—would be the official uniform of the day for Airmen in the Pentagon. “Wearing our (battle dress uniforms) and flight suits as our duty uniform every day will serve as a constant reminder to us and those who we come in contact with that our job is to support our fellow warriors,” said Lt Gen Arthur Lichte, assistant vice chief of staff for the Air Force.<sup>27</sup> The term *warrior ethos* became the latest in a series of buzzwords to sweep first the Air Staff and then the Air Force. By November 2005, basic military training for all enlisted Airmen had been transformed to incorporate a “warrior first” mentality, facilitated in part by issuing every Airman an M-16 rifle on the first day.<sup>28</sup> “We don’t want Airmen to be in a position ever again that when they’re deployed into harm’s way, they don’t know what to do with an M-16 or how to put on their chemical decontamination suit,” said Col Gina Grosso, commander of the Lackland AFB unit responsible for all Air Force basic training. “Everyone has to be a warrior now.”<sup>29</sup> In November 2008, the training was extended by two weeks—to eight and a half—to further enhance the graduates’ warrior skills before they enter the Air Force and are deployed to any of the world’s current combat zones.<sup>30</sup> In Moseley’s own words, “We are war fighters. . . . From the pilots who drop bombs on target in Iraq and Afghanistan, to the security forces person protecting a forward-deployed base, to the combat search and rescue teams risking their own lives to save others, Airmen are contributing to the fight each and every day.”<sup>31</sup>

Not everyone agreed. According to one Airman, “I sit at a desk in front of a computer. I qualify on a weapon only when I deploy. When I deploy, I sit at a desk in front of a computer. This makes me a ‘warrior’? Now, be honest, what percentage of Airmen can actually say they are ‘warriors’? I have a lot of respect for those that are. But if we’re to be honest, the vast majority of us aren’t.”<sup>32</sup> One Airman made this analogy:

I and most of the people I work with are Ford Focuses. We’re not flashy or sexy, but we get good mileage and accomplish our mission competently, dependably, and safely. Then someone comes along and slaps a Ferrari bumper sticker on my rear and says, ‘Hooah, you’re a Ferrari now! Feel the power!’ I’ve still got the same engine under the hood, [and I’m] still driving the same route in the same manner. To anyone who looks at me, I’m

still quite obviously a Focus. But for some strange reason, some seriously deluded people are going to keep insisting I'm a Ferrari.<sup>33</sup>

To be clear, these comments neither denigrate the term *warrior* nor assert that it has no rightful place within the Air Force. Quite the opposite, in fact, they describe an uncomfortable discontinuity between the powerful connotations of the word and the reality of the daily lives these Airmen live. They seem to place value on the warrior idea; however, they are clear that the label is an anathema to their daily Air Force experiences. Air Force polling throughout the period consistently reports that about half of Airmen chose "I feel like a warrior" over both "I don't feel like a warrior, but I wish I did" and "I don't feel like a warrior, and I don't want to" when given the option.<sup>34</sup> Through the power of modern market research, however, rephrasing the question to ask whether Airmen agree that "today's Airmen have *earned the right* to be called 'Warriors'" [emphasis added], the portion agreeing or strongly agreeing shot up to 64 percent.<sup>35</sup>

Evidencing Moseley's belief that clothes make the (Air)man, on 18 May 2006 Air Force officials announced a second element of the Warrior Ethos initiative when they unveiled prototypes of a new high-necked service coat (fig. 5), reminiscent of Billy Mitchell's iconic official photos of the early 1920s (before his court-martial for insubordination). Citing "informal feedback" that the service dress should have a "more 'military,' and less 'corporate' look and feel," Brig Gen Robert Allardice said, "The Uniform Board has come up with some options to explore these concepts, and the initial prototypes are direct descendants of our heritage, rooted in Hap Arnold and Billy Mitchell's Air Force."<sup>36</sup> By March of 2007, Allardice announced that the Air Force had decided on which version of the new jacket would be field-tested later that fall. "We talked extensively to Airmen, both in the field and through the Air Force Uniform Board process, and this is something they've repeatedly asked for," Allardice stated. "We want a service dress that clearly represents our pride as Airmen and history as a service, and we want to make sure we get it right. That's one of the reasons we're referring to the proposal as the Heritage Jacket."<sup>37</sup> In an interesting display of solidarity, when Allardice's replacement, Brig Gen Floyd Carpenter, announced the test locations for the Heritage Jacket several months later, he said the same thing . . . verbatim.<sup>38</sup> Capt Jonathan Pellow, the program manager for the Heritage Jacket program, apparently did not receive the memo. Rather than following suit with the generals and citing extensive informal feedback as motivation for the program, Pellow simply said, "General Moseley wanted the coat updated to reflect Air Force heritage."<sup>39</sup>



**Figure 5. Prototype heritage jacket.** (Reprinted from “New Service Dress Prototypes Pique Interest,” Air Force press release, 18 May 2006.)

The official wear test of the jacket was delayed several times, eventually rescheduled for summer 2008; however, no final decision on whether to proceed was made before Moseley’s sudden departure.<sup>40</sup> Although many of the test participants liked the proposed changes to the jacket, the feedback also conveyed another consistent theme—why tinkering with the uniform was given such a high priority in light of the serious problems the Air Force was facing with the ongoing war and the mistaken transfer of nuclear weapons in August.<sup>41</sup> “Being a nation at war, I’m not sure what message changing our service dress coats sends,” submitted one participant. “Especially [considering] we’re in need of more funds to upgrade airframes. Recommend putting service coat on hold to later date.”<sup>42</sup> The program hung in limbo for the next year, until Moseley’s successor, Gen Norton Schwartz, directed in May 2009 that “no further effort be made on the Heritage Coat project.” Schwartz noted that the Air Force needed to focus on elements of the uniform problem that kept people from successfully accomplishing their operational tasks. “It is



paramount that we provide fully functional and appropriate uniforms for our Airmen as they carry out our worldwide, joint mission,” Schwartz stated. “It’s critical that we respond to Air Force uniform needs since they affect every Airman, every day—so we need to get it right.”<sup>43</sup> The sigh of relief from the force was palpable. In a survey immediately following Moseley’s dismissal, Airmen were asked the open-ended question, “What’s one program, initiative or point of emphasis the old USAF leaders put in place that you’d like to see the new leaders reverse or set aside?” The new service dress uniform topped the list.<sup>44</sup>

Completing his hat trick of ill-fated culture-change initiatives, on 25 April 2007, Moseley introduced an Airman’s Creed in a letter to all Airmen. Moseley claimed that “over the years, we have become so technically proficient and specialized that we sometimes drifted from our core essence and let our functions override our mission-focus and war-fighting orientation.”<sup>45</sup> He further stressed that

the Airman Warrior tradition was built by heroic visionaries and practitioners—such as Mitchell, Arnold, Chennault, Doolittle, LeMay, and Schriever—who charged us to believe in and advocate the value of air power for the Nation. They left us a spirit that fosters initiative, innovation, and forward thinking. They left us an institutional belief in leading by example, from the front, and assuming the full measure of risk and responsibility. They left us a heritage of valor, honor, service, and sacrifice. This legacy—the contrails they left behind—defines who we are, shapes what we do, and sets the vector for our future. We stand on the shoulders of giants.<sup>46</sup>

Although Moseley envisioned the Airman’s Creed as a set of unifying principles for all Airmen, it was inspired by an editorial written by a lone senior master sergeant at Seymour Johnson AFB for his base newspaper. “It soon circulated Air Force-wide,” SMSgt Clayton French later said. “General Moseley did contact me, stating that my words put him ‘on fire to create a single Air Force, one that we can be proud of.’” From the time Sergeant French wrote the article to Moseley’s distribution of the official creed to replace all creeds, only three months had passed. “I was invited to be on the small team that created ‘The Airman’s Creed,’” French said. “The whole process was done via e-mail, and much of it is shrouded with mystery; a whole lot of e-mailing back and forth and asking, ‘What do you think of this?’, etc., and then one day it was completed without a final, ‘What do you think?’”<sup>47</sup> The creed was immediately plastered on glossy posters and laminated cards and distributed throughout the Air Force, particularly at enlisted professional military education programs, such as Airman Leadership School, the NCO Academy, and the Senior NCO Academy.

In a move eerily reminiscent of George Orwell's "Ministry of Truth," Moseley declared, "Our new Airman's Creed will replace all existing Air Force-related creeds."<sup>48</sup> He was particularly referring to the noncommissioned officer and senior noncommissioned officer creeds, which many enlisted members had the tradition of reciting at their promotion ceremonies to staff sergeant and master sergeant. The Airman's Creed states,

I am an American Airman.  
I am a Warrior.  
I have answered my Nation's call.

I am an American Airman.  
My mission is to Fly, Fight, and Win.  
I am faithful to a Proud Heritage,  
A Tradition of Honor,  
And a Legacy of Valor.

I am an American Airman.  
Guardian of Freedom and Justice,  
My Nation's Sword and Shield,  
Its Sentry and Avenger.  
I defend my Country with my Life.

I am an American Airman.  
Wingman, Leader, Warrior.  
I will never leave an Airman behind,  
I will never falter,  
And I will not fail.

In his effort to create a unifying identity for Airmen, Moseley actively sought to extinguish the cherished traditions of a large portion of the force. Contrast that with the US Army, where the 2003 Soldier's Creed is somehow able to peacefully coexist with the 1975 Noncommissioned Officer's Creed.<sup>49</sup> In October 1972, Sergeant Major of the Army Silas Copeland provided this particularly poignant insight: "A code of ethics . . . cannot be developed overnight by edict or official pronouncement. It is developed by years of practice and performance of duty according to high ethical standards. It must be self-policing. Without such a code, a professional soldier or a group soon loses its identity and effectiveness."<sup>50</sup> Relating his dissatisfaction with the way the Airman's Creed was developed, one Airman called it "a generic creed that reads like a cult initiation chant . . . and that glorifies the warrior flyboy with comic-bookish descriptions" of the past. Another Airman wrote, "When we were handed the Airman's Creed, we didn't develop it, we weren't passing down tradition and expectations to our future leaders. It was forced upon us as we were told that our professional creeds that we developed, the NCO Creed, the

SNCO Creed, etc. were to be abolished. We sat by idly and let it happen.”<sup>51</sup> Official Air Force polling also demonstrated an inconsistent level of identification with the Airman’s Creed. According to a SAF/PA *Communication Research Bulletin*, “More than half of respondents (62–69%) feel that the Airman’s Creed applies a ‘great deal’ to aircrews, enlisted, maintainers and officers. Fewer than half of respondents (29–48%) feel that it applies to active-duty office workers, USAF retirees and civilian employees.” Airmen expressed that they especially had “no connection” to the line asserting that they were the nation’s “sentry and avenger.”<sup>52</sup>

The purpose of the above discussion is not to judge whether or not today’s Airmen would benefit from being socialized into an institutional culture that places more value on the warrior tradition. Moseley’s aims are not the subject of this paper: his process for achieving them is. The examples chosen—the widespread application of the warrior label, the Heritage Jacket, and the Airman’s Creed—demonstrate how Moseley’s method for pursuing his stated aims prove themselves to be ineffective in light of the theoretical framework and considerations presented in chapter 2. Corley’s work clearly associates each of these initiatives with the mentality of top managers and in direct contradiction to the frames of reference of rank-and-file workers.<sup>53</sup> Each focuses on the forms of culture rather than the substance beneath it. In this regard, Corley attributes the following to a senior vice president in the company he profiled—it could just as easily have come from Moseley: “Those labels are very meaningful because they set our strategy; they set a direction for the company [insert ‘Air Force’]. They really say, ‘This is what we want to be.’”<sup>54</sup> While Moseley’s perspective is understandable given his position, it brings to mind echoes of the book title *Men Are from Mars, Women Are from Venus*.<sup>55</sup> That is, there is no indication that Moseley ever entertained the possibility that the rank-and-file Airmen’s concepts of identity might be either wildly divergent from his or equally valid from their own unique perspectives. One is reminded of Corley’s admonition that “the findings of the current study suggest that members of organizations must proactively consider the possibility that their sense of ‘who the organization is’ differs from that of their colleagues, and that these differences may lie at the heart of perceptual differences regarding the necessity for change in the organization.”<sup>56</sup> Moseley’s very framing of the goal—the reinvigoration of a rich Air Force warrior culture—almost precludes the possibility that anyone not sharing his perspective on Air Force culture would be permitted to engage in the change process. In fact, in direct contradiction to Edgar Schein’s advice (see chap. 2), Moseley had defined changing the Air Force culture as the ends rather than merely the means to a more substantial end.<sup>57</sup> This failure to articulate a clear organiza-

tional—rather than a cultural—need for change, as Schein also suggests, was likely a contributing factor in the overwhelming ineffectiveness of these initiatives.<sup>58</sup>

## **Judging Leaders' Values from Perceptions of Their Behavior**

Corley's rich description of the predictable variations of workers' perspectives on organizational identity provides valuable insight into the significance of leaders' behavior in shaping the culture of the organization. Beyond their relatively predictable instrumental roles in the organization, leaders are critical for their symbolic roles because employees throughout the hierarchy are keenly aware of leaders' behavior and constantly judge it to refine their beliefs about the organization's culture.<sup>59</sup> "Employees holding positions lower in the organization were more concerned about the meanings underlying the identity labels and how those meanings were enacted through the managerial and organization actions," Corley observes. "For these employees and others changes in the organization's identity were emergent and based in changes to behavior, not language."<sup>60</sup> Gerard George and his colleagues put it most succinctly: "To succeed in the communication and transfer of culture, leaders continually reinforce the key components of the desired culture by their behaviors. The leader's faithfulness to the core values and beliefs that make up the desired culture of the organization elevates the group's trust in the leader, the organization, and the leader's vision of culture."<sup>61</sup> This concept is nearly ubiquitous in the modern conception of leadership, so much so that this key relationship between leadership actions and employee trust is even emphasized in the Air Force's own organizational dynamics handbook. According to the guidebook given to commanders to help them understand and share the results of the 2008 Air Force Climate Survey, "Integrity is believed to be the most significant dimension in developing trust. . . . Leadership behaviors related to the development of trust are identified as consistently acting in accordance with AF core values and ethical standards of behavior, compliance with AF policy and guidance, and following through on commitments to members. . . . If words and behaviors are incongruent, people will pay attention to how you act not what you say. Actions speak louder than words."<sup>62</sup>

Given the importance of integrity and trust, it should not be surprising that the Air Force has taken steps in its research programs to measure and report on these key metrics. Although the numbers dropped several percentage points between the 2005 and 2008 Air Force Climate Surveys, Airmen consistently indicate that they have high levels of trust in their closest commanders

at the squadron or similar level, with trust rating ranging in the upper 70 to 80 percentage points.<sup>63</sup> Views of senior Air Force leaders, on the other hand, were not nearly as positive. On two separate SAF/PA-organized surveys, about 90 percent of Airmen agree that “there’s a pretty clear set of ethical rules and expectations that all Airmen should know and follow.”<sup>64</sup> In May 2008, however, only 61 percent of Airmen agreed that “Air Force senior leaders set a good example of ethical behavior for me and my fellow Airmen.”<sup>65</sup> One month later in the immediate wake of the firings of the chief and secretary of the Air Force, less than half of Airmen agreed.<sup>66</sup> Similarly, on a separate survey, 96 percent of Airmen agreed that “the welfare of our families is an important enabler for Airman’s success in combat,” but only two-thirds of Airmen felt that the Air Force is committed to Airmen’s quality of life.<sup>67</sup> For the theoretical purposes of understanding organizational culture and identity, it is inconsequential whether or not a real integrity gap exists among senior Air Force leaders. What matters in this context is that Airmen—who are the final arbiters on their own judgments and feelings—perceive a gap between the values their most senior leaders espouse and the behaviors they observe. To make matters worse, the confirmation of Airmen’s preconceived expectations by actual events will have a disproportionately large reinforcing effect on their future attitudes and perceptions—as is discussed in Richard Oliver’s landmark work on expectancy-confirmation theory.<sup>68</sup> This is the kind of negative reinforcement that could be expected of Airmen suddenly confronted with allegations of Moseley’s involvement in the Thunderbirds Airshow Production Services (TAPS) “Thundervision” contract award.

On 5 March 2006, *Arizona Republic* reporter Robert Anglen broke a front-page story with the headline “Air Force Chief Tied to Steering of Contract: Tempe Company Protested Deal.” The article alleges that Moseley “pushed a \$49 million publicity project for the Thunderbirds air show that is now being investigated by federal regulators.”<sup>69</sup> The company that received the contract counted the recently retired four-star Air Combat Command commander, Gen Hal Hornberg, among its four owners.<sup>70</sup> Only after a competitor filed an official Government Accountability Office protest in February 2006 did Air Force officials look more closely at the contract and decide to cancel it.<sup>71</sup> At that time the secretary of the Air Force referred the case to the Defense Department Inspector General for further review.<sup>72</sup> Two full years later, once the DOD/IG investigation concluded, Secretary of the Air Force Wynne took direct administrative action against three members of the selection process and referred action for two others to their chain of command.<sup>73</sup>

Moseley was not among those singled out in the report for criminal prosecution—a distinction Moseley claimed to have cleared him of any wrong-

doing.<sup>74</sup> He and Wynne immediately signed a memorandum for all Air Force senior leaders stating, in part, “We must scrupulously avoid the appearance of impropriety or favoritism. . . . Senior leader involvement in the acquisition process, even when unintended, that results in improper influence or unfair outcomes is unacceptable and violates our Core Values.”<sup>75</sup>

Others, however, read the full investigation and reached different conclusions about Moseley’s culpability in the contract process gone awry. Senator Claire McCaskill (D-MO) contacted Wynne—and dissatisfied with his response, later contacted Secretary of Defense Robert Gates—to express her concerns regarding Moseley and his actions in this case. Her memo to Wynne states,

Provided the significant findings already identified, it is incomprehensible to me that no action has been taken to reprimand General Moseley or to evaluate his continued fitness to lead the Air Force. . . . The General’s commitment to upholding the letter and spirit of the law, his respect for subordinate commanders, and his devotion to properly managing tax dollars, let alone his ability to set appropriate priorities for Air Force spending during this time of warfare when budgets are extremely tight, are in direct question. . . . I would like to note, as I did when we spoke, that the message sent in the letter that you cosigned with General Moseley to Air Force leaders regarding senior leader responsibilities in ethics shows a great degree of hypocrisy on General Moseley’s behalf that is astonishing. The letter captures my very own sentiments on these issues, but it should have been sent direct to General Moseley, not have come from him (emphasis in original).<sup>76</sup>

Senators Carl Levin and John McCain, respectively the chairman of and ranking Republican on the Senate Armed Services Committee, requested that the DOD/IG conduct an additional review on whether Moseley was guilty of any “criminal conduct, ethical violations, and failures of leadership.”<sup>77</sup> In July of 2009—three-and-one-half years after the original fraudulent award of the Thundervision contract—the DOD/IG provided a final report substantiating four allegations of Moseley violating the *Joint Ethics Regulation*. The IG’s report concluded that General Moseley

- (1) provided preferential treatment and disclosed nonpublic information to a contractor, Strategic Message Solutions (SMS). . . ;
- (2) created the appearance of impropriety [in the] award of the [TAPS] contract. . . ;
- (3) misused subordinates’ time and Government property . . . ; and
- (4) solicited and accepted gifts from a prohibited source.<sup>78</sup>

Secretary Wynne’s replacement, Michael Donley, “determined administrative action was warranted against General Moseley and administered a letter of admonishment in retirement.”<sup>79</sup>

Moseley maintained his innocence to the last, writing, “I categorically disagree with the findings and I reject the notion of any wrongdoing on my part. . . . As this investigation revealed *no new facts* from the previous 2-plus year investigation, one can only conclude that following the public pressure brought to bear on the DOD/IG by certain officials in the Congress (an elected member and staff) to continue to vilify senior Air Force leadership and find some type of wrongdoing on my part—we find ourselves where we are today” (emphasis in original).<sup>80</sup>

Without delving into the legal specifics of Moseley’s innocence and guilt, the above discussion has sought to illustrate the major discrepancies this situation could have raised in the perceptions of Airmen in judging their leader’s actions in relation to the well-known values and standards of ethical behavior the organization espouses. Take, for example, the following excerpt from the first DOD/IG report: “[One member] stated that being part of the SST [source selection team] was ‘the dirtiest thing I ever experienced.’ He said it was a ‘Kangaroo Court,’ in which it was obvious from the beginning that SMS was going to be awarded the contract.”<sup>81</sup> A second example from the report is the following text of an e-mail from Moseley to the owner of the company:

Dude . . . I’ve talked to lawyers about your idea and I’ve talked to contracting bubbas about getting on with planned good ideas and I’ve got a way huge notion of building a better strategic communication effort. There is a lot o [redacted first name of SMS owner] in this one. I want to chat with you about all this to see what you think. Thanks again for the note & the pics. YOU ARE THE MAN. I’ve watched the movie multiple times. It’s huge and it helps. But, I want to save the comments until we can talk. Thanks my friend.<sup>82</sup>

This e-mail was sent to the owner of SMS one week after he submitted his proposal for the contract and almost three months before the contract was awarded. Finally, there is the e-mail sent from Air Combat Command commander Ronald Keys to Moseley protesting the waste he saw in this contract. “Boss, we asked for bids on this capability and they have come back. I know you said ‘press’ and ‘found’ some FY ’05 right-colored money to be able to acquire this capability. However, this is turning out to be an \$8M per year project . . . something over \$40M for the FYDP [Future Years Defense Program], and I cannot support burning that kind of money to fix something that isn’t broken, when I am not buying fixes to things that are broken.”<sup>83</sup>

In the end, regardless of the verifiable facts of the final award of the Thunder-vision contract to SMS, two things are clear. First, relatively junior-ranking Airmen at both Nellis and Langley AFBs who had been charged with ensuring the Air Force got the best possible value for its contract dollar believed—rightly or wrongly—that the four-star CSAF had selected a single contractor before the request for proposal had ever been issued. Second, Airmen talk—

which, when combined with the power of twenty-first-century social media, fairly ensured that most Airmen heard something about the TAPS contract and knew it was not good, even if they didn't know all of the details. The final, unanswerable question is, What effects do these two facts have on the rank-and-file Airman's trust, not just in Moseley, but in other senior leaders or in the institution of the Air Force as a whole? Even if the repercussions cannot be completely quantified, given the theoretical framework provided above, it is unrealistic to argue that there were none.

### Conclusion

This chapter was designed to offer food for thought about an under-emphasized perspective of the Air Force's institutional identity—that of the rank and file, encompassing the unique observations and judgments of hundreds of thousands of Airmen about the organization and its leaders. To recap, it was first theorized that the dominant characteristics shaping every member's understanding of the institution are the Air Force's highly fractured tribal culture and the excessively concentrated power dynamics resulting from a long-standing tradition of being led by one very narrow but powerful dominant subculture for the vast majority of its independent existence. Next, CSAF Moseley's cultural change vision was presented along with examples of three of the vision's supporting initiatives. It was shown that these initiatives were doomed to failure because of the wildly divergent identity perspectives Moseley held as a representative of the upper echelon of the organization and those of the rank-and-file Airman. Finally, even if Moseley's initiatives had not been scuttled by massive disconnects in perspective, this discussion described how his association with the Thundervision contract scandal could have critically damaged his ability to lead cultural change in the organization because of the deterioration of trust caused by Airmen's judgment of the rhetoric-to-values discrepancies they witnessed. The final chapter tackles the question of whether true organizational change is even possible. Evidence of the change initiatives of Moseley's successor, Gen Norton Schwartz, is presented and evaluated for its coherence with the principles outlined in chapter 2. Capstone concepts for how organizational change should be attempted within the United States Air Force are offered as issues for future exploration.

### Notes

1. Strength totals were calculated from the Air Force Association's May 2010 USAF Almanac issue of *Air Force Magazine*, 52.



2. Corley, "Defined by Our Strategy or Our Culture?", 1169.
3. Ibid.
4. For a discussion of the leadership demographics of the other services, see Danskine, "Fall of the Fighter Generals," 109–15. Danskine argues that the Navy and the Army have a significantly more equitable power-sharing arrangement among their respective tribes and that they represent larger portions of the respective services.
5. Builder, *Icarus Syndrome*, 31.
6. For a perspective on the development of this rhetorical position, see Biddle, *Rhetoric and Reality in Air Warfare*, 289–301. See also Col Mike Worden's characterization of early Air Force efforts at "marketing a vision" in his book *Rise of the Fighter Generals*, 27–46.
7. Ehrhard, "Unmanned Aerial Vehicles," 61.
8. Ibid., 87n166.
9. Mosher, *Democracy and the Public Service*, 122–23.
10. Ibid., 124.
11. Byrne, *Black Death*, 10.
12. Cantor, *In the Wake of the Plague*, 91. Gratitude for this analogical connection goes to Col Robert Ehlers, School of Advanced Air and Space Studies professor, conversation with the author, 13 May 2010.
13. Worden, *Rise of the Fighter Generals*, 13.
14. Ibid., 27.
15. Brodie, *Strategy in the Missile Age*, 147.
16. Craig, *Destroying the Village*, 44–49.
17. Ibid., 53.
18. Mosher, *Democracy and the Public Service*, 134. Also, for an interesting analysis of the employment and maintenance of power by dominant subgroups, see Maynard-Moody, Stull, and Mitchell, "Reorganization as Status Drama," 301–10.
19. Worden, *Rise of the Fighter Generals*, 85.
20. Duck and Fielding, "Leaders and Their Treatment of Subgroups," 396.
21. Mosher, *Democracy and the Public Service*, 134.
22. Ibid., 135.
23. Kerr and Slocum, "Managing Corporate Culture," 100.
24. Ibid., 101.
25. Rousseau, "Why Workers Still Identify with Organizations," 222.
26. Chambers, working briefing, subject: Returning the Air Force to Prominence in the National Security Arena. For more detail on the first two eras of Air Force leadership, see Worden, *Rise of the Fighter Generals*. Worden shows that the Air Force was led by generals who rose in the bomber tribe from its inception through 1973, underwent a struggle for power between fighter and bomber generals from 1973–82, and has been led by fighter generals from 1982 onward.
27. "Air Staff Officials Expand Warrior Image," USAF press release.
28. Romano, "Trainees Learn Attention to Detail," USAF press release.
29. David McLemore, "Air Force No Longer the 'Chair Force,'" *Charleston Gazette* (West Virginia), 30 April 2006, 14A.
30. Joseph, "Air Force Officials Begin Extended Basic Military Training," USAF press release.
31. Bates, "Chief of Staff: Warrior Airmen New Culture of Air Force," USAF press release.
32. "The Airman's Creed—A Closer Look," forum posting, *Military Times*, 5 June 2008, accessed May 2010, <http://www.militarytimes.com/forum/showthread.php?1565053>.

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33. Ibid.
34. SAF/PAX, "ICAG [Internal Communication Assessment Group] #3/4—Slogans, Airman's Creed, Warrior Ethos"; and SAF/PAX, "Trends: Airman's Creed and 'Warrior.'"
35. SAF/PAX, "Warrior Ethos and AFDD 1-1."
36. "New Service Dress Prototypes Pique Interest," USAF press release.
37. Buzanowski, "Air Force Official Discusses Uniform Updates," USAF press release.
38. Buzanowski, "New Service Coat to Better Represent Airmen Set for Testing," USAF press release.
39. Purificato, "Brooks to Serve as Initial Venue," USAF press release. During the time the Heritage Jacket was under development, the author was an executive officer on the Air Staff. Pellum's statement echoes the author's understanding that this was Moseley's personal idea, which was going to be instituted regardless of the feedback received.
40. Ibid.; and Lyle, "Heritage Coat Production Uncertain," USAF press release.
41. Joby Warrick and Walter Pincus, "Missteps in the Bunker," *Washington Post*, 23 September 2007, Met 2 ed., A01.
42. Lyle, "Heritage Coat Production Uncertain," USAF press release.
43. Gray, "New Uniforms," USAF press release.
44. SAF/PA, "Airmen's Opinions and Concerns."
45. Moseley, "CSAF Presents Airman's Creed," USAF press release.
46. Ibid.
47. Pivnick, "Retired First Sergeant Leaves Special Legacy," USAF press release.
48. Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*; and Moseley, "CSAF Presents Airman's Creed," USAF press release.
49. The Soldier's Creed was first published in conjunction with Brig Gen Benjamin C. Freakley's editorial, "Warrior Ethos—Hear of the Infantry," 1–2. Also, for an exploration of the origins of the Army's NCO Creed, see Elder and Sanchez, "Origins of the Creed of Noncommissioned Officer."
50. Copeland, "NCO Must Grow with the Army," 24–25.
51. "Airman's Creed . . . Do Away with It?," forum posting, 31 October 2008, accessed May 2010, <http://www.militarytimes.com/forum/showthread.php?1570177>.
52. SAF/PAX, "ICAG#3/4—Slogans, Airman's Creed, Warrior Ethos." Respondents rated their connection to the phrase "sentry and avenger" as an average of 3.8 out of 7, as compared to other phrases that received scores as high as 5.8.
53. Corley, "Defined by Our Strategy or Our Culture?," 1155.
54. Ibid., 1165.
55. See John Gray's book (New York: Harper Collins, 1992).
56. Corley, "Defined by Our Strategy or Our Culture?," 1174.
57. Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, 334.
58. Ibid., 312–13.
59. Corley, "Defined by Our Strategy or Our Culture?," 1166.
60. Ibid.
61. George, Sleeth, and Siders, "Organizing Culture," 557.
62. Air Force Survey Office, *Air Force Climate Survey Results and Feedback Handbook*.
63. Headquarters Air Force, "2008 AF Climate Survey Results," working briefing.
64. SAF/PA, "Ethics and Core Values"; and SAF/PA, "Airmen's Opinions and Concerns."
65. SAF/PA, "Ethics and Core Values."
66. SAF/PA, "Airmen's Opinions and Concerns."

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67. SAF/PA, "ICAG#5—Caring for Airmen."
68. Oliver, "Cognitive Model," 460–69.
69. Robert Anglen, "Air Force Chief Tied to Steering of Contract: Tempe Company Protested Deal," *Arizona Republic*, 5 March 2006, A1.
70. Department of Defense Inspector General (DOD/IG), *Report of Investigation*, 5.
71. "SECAF Receives DOD/IG Investigation Report," USAF press release.
72. Jon Steinman and Tony Capaccio, "Air Force Seeks Review of Canceled \$49 Million Thunderbirds Award," *Bloomberg News*, 23 February 2006.
73. "SECAF Receives DOD/IG Investigation Report," USAF press release.
74. Moseley to Donley, memorandum.
75. Wynne and Moseley to Air Force senior leaders, memorandum.
76. McCaskill to Wynne, memorandum.
77. DOD/IG, *Alleged Misconduct: General T. Michael Moseley*, 1.
78. *Ibid.*, 45–46.
79. "Air Force Secretary Takes Action on DOD IG Report," USAF press release.
80. Moseley to Donley, memorandum.
81. DOD/IG, *Report of Investigation*, 31.
82. *Ibid.*, 156.
83. *Ibid.*, 237.



## Chapter 5

### **Gen Norton Schwartz and a View of the Future**

On 5 June 2008, the Air Force entered uncharted territory when Defense Secretary Robert Gates made the unprecedented decision to remove both the senior civilian and military leaders of the service simultaneously. Investigations into two separate incidents of the mishandling of nuclear weapons and weapons components assert that a lack of critical self-assessment in the Air Force had exacerbated an ongoing trend of declining stewardship of this essential national capability.<sup>1</sup> “I deeply regret that the issues before us require the actions that I have taken,” Gates said. “While this is a difficult day for the Air Force, for the Department of Defense and for me, it also marks the beginning of a return to the standards of excellence and accomplishment for which the Air Force has long been known.”<sup>2</sup> On 9 June, Gates cancelled the retirement plans of Gen Norton Schwartz and announced his intention to recommend Schwartz for nomination as the 19th chief of staff of the Air Force.<sup>3</sup> As Schwartz assumed the helm of a deeply troubled US Air Force on 12 August 2008, the questions remained—would this new leader depart substantially from the example set by his predecessor, and would his approach be any more successful in helping the Air Force rediscover its institutional identity? This final chapter discusses key elements of Schwartz’s change initiatives and assesses them for their congruency with chapter 2 recommendations. It concludes with an eye to the future and some final recommendations.

The overriding point of the theoretically derived suggestions from the first chapter is that organizational change must come from the identification of organizational solutions to clearly articulated problems. Given a clear and compelling need for change, leaders should seek to implement their plans within the context of a deep understanding of the organization’s existing culture and a clear respect for the value organizational members place on the sense of stability the existing culture provides them. Three specific areas of concern are the roles of subcultures, promotion and rewards, and actions and meanings.

On Schwartz’s first day, he and the acting secretary of the Air Force conducted a press engagement outlining their vision for rehabilitating the wounded Air Force. Their universal theme was simple and clear: regaining “the nation’s trust by applying the ‘back-to-basics’ standards of precision and reliability in the execution of every mission.”<sup>4</sup> The cornerstone of this approach was attention to integrity—keeping the solemn promises each service

member had made to the American people and the nation. "My pledge to all today is that the Air Force will keep the promise to our teammates, our families, and to all our partners who rely on us every day," Schwartz said. "Precision and reliability is our standard, regardless of job or specialty, and we will return the vigor and rigor to all the processes and missions for which we have been entrusted."<sup>5</sup> Schwartz emphasized that the nation was depending on the Air Force to inspire trust and confidence, stating, "I ask you to consider that if America suffers from a shortage of any commodity, it is a shortage of confidence, faith, and sacred trust. Yet integrity is proven to be the most valuable commodity on the market, and unlike other treasures, it never fails, crashes, or collapses on those who invest in it. . . . Your word must be your bond."<sup>6</sup> He stressed that one of the intrinsic promises the Air Force has made is to support the other military services in order to win the nation's wars. "An air, naval, or ground victory alone is insignificant to the overall achievement of national political objectives," Schwartz said. "In the end, only the combined success of the military instrument, in concert with other national levers of power, is truly meaningful."<sup>7</sup>

### **The Early Track Record of General Schwartz**

First, regarding the role of subcultures in the Air Force, Schwartz departed markedly from the pilot-aggrandizing warrior ethos tagline of Moseley, favoring instead a more inclusive perspective on the functional communities and their subcultures. "I think the fundamental thing is that everybody counts," he said. "No one, no job, no specialty is more important than any other. Everyone matters and everyone is an important part of this team." As one reporter observed, "It is the job of Schwartz . . . to mediate between the old and new pilot tribes."<sup>8</sup> Schwartz would consistently warn Airmen, "This is a team sport, and everybody's got to play their position for us to be successful. If we do that, everything else takes care of itself."<sup>9</sup> As chapter 4 highlights, one of the inherent challenges the Air Force faces is its deep-rooted history of narrowly defining itself by one or two specific functions. Schwartz clearly recognized this problem and "pushed to broaden the Air Force's definitions of its core missions beyond strategic bombing and control of the skies."<sup>10</sup>

Although his initiatives in the second area of promotion and rewards were not all-encompassing, Schwartz provided specific direction. Taking a page from Stephen Peter Rosen's theory of peacetime military innovation, he stressed having "career paths along which younger officers specializing in the new tasks could be promoted."<sup>11</sup> Schwartz's view is particularly evident in his

attention to the remotely piloted aircraft field, responsible for the operation of the Air Force's growing inventory of unmanned aircraft such as the MQ-1 Predator and the MQ-9 Reaper. "The Air Force culture must promote a strong and healthy [RPA] community—not a leper colony or an agency of expedience," Schwartz said. "We will do everything we can to ensure our [RPA] units are properly organized, trained, and equipped for today's fight, and prepared for future challenges."<sup>12</sup> Addressing a group of newly trained RPA pilots, Schwartz stated, "You are part of the major new Air Force development of the decade. This cultural change for our Air Force has to do both with the future of these unmanned systems, and how we see ourselves as Airmen. Secretary Donley and I recognize that our Airmen are the linchpin in this shift, and we are giving it our personal attention."<sup>13</sup> Beyond the RPA career field, Schwartz noted that the Air Force's evaluation system—for both enlisted and officers—needed attention. "Not everyone is a five," General Schwartz stated, referring to the highest ranking category on the enlisted performance report. "We need to be honest with ourselves and we need to be authentic how we rate each other."<sup>14</sup>

In the third area, the roles of actions and meanings, Schwartz appears to have a clear and abiding appreciation for the significance of personal and organizational actions in the judgments of both Airmen and the external public. To a group of senior enlisted leaders, he remarked that "another way for us to lead—even more compellingly—is through the example that we set. Every act that we take and thought that we share is instructive, in various degrees, to our Airmen. When we advocate *Integrity*, *Service*, and *Excellence*, we must also live it."<sup>15</sup> That sentiment also carries to the perspectives of external people about the organization. In an address to the Air Force Association he acknowledged, "All of us here today, starting with me . . . will be judged by our ability to meet our obligations and commitments to our Joint teammates, especially those engaged in combat, to our combatant commanders, to our leadership in the Administration and in Congress, and to the American people, who watch our actions closely."<sup>16</sup> Speaking to Airmen at a stop at Joint Base Balad, Iraq, he underscored that "we must, as an Air Force . . . do the right thing and do the right thing right. That's as simple as it gets."<sup>17</sup>

The preceding does not necessarily imply that Schwartz has gotten everything right. For instance, in December 2008, Schwartz announced that the Air Force would no longer use the term *in lieu of*—or ILO—to refer to Airmen deployed to Iraq or Afghanistan to perform tasks not traditionally associated with the Air Force, such as guarding detainees or driving convoys.<sup>18</sup> Instead, he decreed that the new term would be *joint expeditionary tasking*, or JET. "When it comes to being part of the joint fight, the Air Force is all in," Schwartz

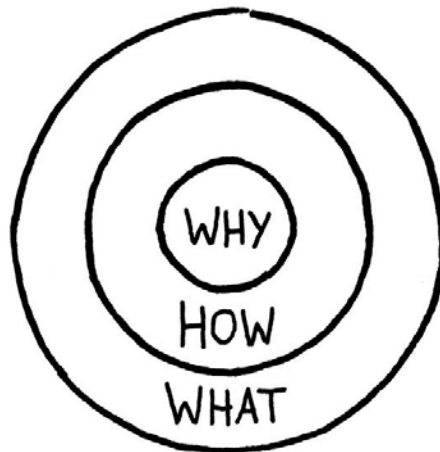
said. “The term JET reinforces our commitment to the joint fight as an equal member of the joint team. The amazing contributions Airmen make around the world every day are not in lieu of anything.”<sup>19</sup> Some Airmen, however, took this as another example of senior leadership manipulating labels without changing the substance of the actions taking place. “I can’t argue with the logic of using Airmen to fill needed billets, as long as there is justification,” one Airman posted on the Air Force website in response to the announcement. “However, I do find the changing of the acronym from ILO to JET to be disingenuous. You need to call a spade a spade and if we’re doing a mission in lieu of an Army soldier, then it should be called just that.”<sup>20</sup> Although Schwartz seems to have developed a plan that avoids several of the tragic pitfalls that consumed his predecessor, his eventual success is not guaranteed. If Schwartz’s focus becomes commonly perceived to be more on terms and labels than on substance and reality, he will still be able to snatch defeat from the jaws of victory.

### **The Path to the Future Starts with Why**

Ultimately, since Schwartz’s chapter of the Air Force’s history is still being written (at the time of this writing), it is too early to tell whether his efforts will be judged successes or failures in the final accounting. As discussed in this paper, however, some of the criteria are clear. He will have to find the appropriate balance between the Air Force’s external image and its culture. Among the other military services within the Department of Defense, he will have to make sense of the paradoxical mandates to cooperate to win the nation’s wars while simultaneously competing for scarce resources in a zero-sum Washington, DC, budget battle. He will have to find an acceptable and durable equilibrium among the many organizational Air Force subcultures, especially considering ways to redefine the organization such that a more equitable power-sharing arrangement exists among the tribes. These are all daunting challenges for Schwartz, but it is not yet clear whether his vision will come to fruition in the form of bona fide changes to the cultural fabric of the Air Force. Quoting renowned author and consultant Peter Block, Schwartz said, “It is not so much the product or service of our workplace; it is the culture and texture and ways of creating community. Our task is to create organizations we believe in and to do it as an offering, not a demand.”<sup>21</sup> Achieving such a lofty goal will certainly be a challenge. Luckily for him, many have already traveled this road, and one person in particular has provided the keys to the kingdom if Schwartz is willing to listen.



Simon Sinek, a recovering advertising strategist with an undergraduate degree in anthropology, has articulated the pathway to precisely the organization Schwartz describes in a simple model he calls the Golden Circle (fig. 6).<sup>22</sup> According to Sinek, “There are only two ways to influence human behavior; you can manipulate it or you can inspire it.” While manipulations lead to transactions between an organization and an individual, inspiration leads to loyalty. Inspiration, Sinek said, comes when leaders communicate from the inside of the Golden Circle rather than from the outside, which is normal for both people and organizations.<sup>23</sup> “Every single company and organization on the planet knows WHAT they do,” Sinek asserts. “Some companies and people know HOW they do WHAT they do. . . . Very few people or companies can clearly articulate WHY they do WHAT they do.” The “why” is the fundamental expression of what an organization values and serves to differentiate the organization in a way that creates connections with people who value the same things. As an example, Sinek uses Apple, which proclaims that its “why” is “everything we do, we believe in challenging the status quo. We believe in thinking differently.” Apple does that by making beautifully designed, simple-to-use, and user-friendly products, some of which just happen to be computers. “People don’t buy WHAT you do, they buy WHY you do it,” Sinek argues. “If a company does not have a clear sense of WHY then it is impossible for the outside world to perceive anything more than WHAT the company does.”<sup>24</sup>



**Figure 6. The Golden Circle.** (Reproduced by permission from Simon Sinek, *Start with Why: How Great Leaders Inspire Everyone to Take Action* [New York: Portfolio, 2009].)

The fundamental challenge facing Schwartz and the United States Air Force is first to recapture and then to articulate the Air Force “why” in a way that is true to the essence of its distinctive culture yet sensitive to the inescapable technological dynamics and political imperatives of the twenty-first century. As a possible starting point, consider this excerpt from Schwartz’s 2009 address to the Air Force Association:

Common to our heritage is the relationship between the aviator and the machine, alone together in the vastness of sky or space. The relationship is etched into our very psyche. It is so powerful an idea, that it has attracted the best and the brightest that the world has to offer to our Nation’s service. It is these people who made us the service of technological innovation; but today, the evolution of the machine is beginning to outpace the capability of the people we put in them. We now must reconsider the relationship of man and woman, machine, and air. We must question, and ultimately answer, manned or unmanned in combat and support aircraft. We must continue to evolve and embrace the culture of technological innovation which has been our hallmark. We have always, and will continue to use this technological innovation to provide for the security of our nation. Technology will allow us to better execute defense, when in the past only offense was viable.<sup>25</sup>

The key measure of merit for the Air Force’s “why” will be its resonance among the Airmen. As Thomas Hughes, a professor at the School of Advanced Air and Space Studies, observes, “The degree to which an idea resonates is the degree to which everyone else was just about to say the same thing.”<sup>26</sup> The “why” of the Air Force has to emerge from the tapestry that is its culture rather than from a zealous—if misguided—minority imposing it upon the majority. It will require a significant effort by a highly committed Air Force to gain a full appreciation of this emergent “why.”

The first step is for those in the highest levels of the hierarchy to engage those in the lowest levels in a direct, open conversation that challenges everyone’s assumptions—those things that each person just knows somehow. The challenge has never been greater. The twenty-first-century Air Force is not the flying club of the early 1900s. With the increasing importance of space, cyberspace, and unmanned platforms, the core Air Force assumption that the Air Force is all about airplanes has suddenly been put into question. For the first time in the history of the Air Force, nothing about the Air Force’s identity is nonnegotiable.<sup>27</sup> Schwartz and other Air Force leaders cannot allow that to deter them, however. Sinek indicates that nothing substitutes for the loyalty inspired when an organization begins with the clarity of “why,” keeps its focus with the discipline of “how,” and resonates authenticity throughout its own people and its stakeholders with the consistency of “what.”<sup>28</sup> Illustrating this premise, he describes how “in the summer of 1963, a quarter of a million people showed up to hear Dr. King deliver his ‘I Have a Dream’ speech on the

steps of the Lincoln Memorial. But how many people showed up for Dr. King? Zero. They showed up for themselves. It was what *they* believed. It was what *they* saw as an opportunity to help America become a better version of itself. It was *they* who wanted to live in a country that reflected their own values and beliefs” (emphasis in original).<sup>29</sup>

The Airmen of the United States Air Force believe. They want to help the Air Force become a better version of itself. They want to be a part of something that reflects their values and beliefs. They are ready to be inspired.

### Notes

1. “DOD News Briefing with Secretary Gates.”
2. Ibid.
3. “Defense Secretary Gates Announces Recommendations,” DOD press release. See also Gates, “Welcoming Ceremony for Air Force Chief of Staff,” address.
4. Randolph, “SECAF, CSAF Stress ‘Back to Basics,’” USAF press release.
5. Ibid.
6. Schwartz, “Country Boy Can Survive,” address.
7. Schwartz, address, Air, Space, and Cyberspace Power in the 21st Century Conference.
8. Greg Jaffe, “Drone Pilots Rise on Winds of Change in Air Force; The Venerable Aviator May Take a Back Seat to Invulnerable Technicians Working on the Ground,” *Washington Post*, 28 February 2010, Met 2 ed., A01.
9. Branum, “Chief of Staff Wraps Up Middle East Tour,” USAF press release.
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28. Sinek, *Start with Why*, 65–69.

29. Ibid., 128.

## **Abbreviations**

CSAF	US Air Force chief of staff
DAL	Developing Aerospace Leaders
RPA	remotely piloted aircraft
SAC	Strategic Air Command
SAF/PA	Secretary of the Air Force, Office of Public Affairs
SAF/PAX	Secretary of the Air Force, Strategy and Assessments Division
SMS	Strategic Message Solutions
TAPS	Thunderbirds Airshow Production Services
UAV	unmanned aerial vehicle



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