The ADOO Loop

A Decision-Breaking Cycle of Toxic Followership

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Toxic followership lurks unacknowledged across governmental organizations, endangering America's national defense and corrupting bureaucracies from within. Employing an iterative pattern to avoid, deviate, obstruct, and observe (ADOO), toxic followers undermine leaders and defeat missions from inside an organization or team. This study presents two historic examples showcasing toxic followership at the highest levels of US national security. The ADOO loop examines decision-breaking behaviors through the lens of personal agency. Mitigating toxic followership can assist leaders in rebuilding team dynamics, restoring decision-making functionality, and galvanizing the national security enterprise by recognizing and neutralizing this previously unacknowledged threat.

When strategies fail, nations lose wars, or plans collapse, the blame often falls upon flawed leadership caused by overzealous ambitions, incomplete awareness, or inept commanders. This approach ignores the possible roles of those who operate under the leader, those followers whose actions can negatively impact the overall strategy. Just as teamwork can boost a leader's desired outcomes, toxic followership can undermine a leader's decision-making cycle with adverse consequences. Optimizing team dynamics while preserving desired decision-making systems mandates understanding toxic followership and mitigating decision-breaking behaviors.

John Boyd's four-phased loop for decision-making depicts an idealistic and iterative cycle wherein competitors seek to observe, orient, decide, and act (OODA) more rapidly against one another to gain relative advantage and achieve objectives.[1] Unfortunately, this model fails to incorporate systems considerations: it focuses on simple unitary actors while discounting follower agency, the complexities of team dynamics, and the inertia inherent to bureaucracies. The OODA loop enables a reductionist approach to tactical engagements—that is, making sense of fighter aircraft fundamentals in a dogfight—while neglecting to incorporate strategic and operational realities.

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1. Frans P. B. Osinga, "The Enemy as a Complex Adaptive System: John Boyd and Airpower in the Postmodern Era," in *Airpower Reborn: The Strategic Concepts of John Warden and John Boyd*, ed. John Andreas Olsen (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2015), 58.

A modification of Boyd's acronym, the ADOO loop—avoid, deviate, obstruct, and observe—provides a model in which decision-making effectiveness is iteratively decreased through toxic followership mechanisms that actively undermine a commander's intent. This model derives from case study analyses of the leader-subordinate incompatibilities between President Abraham Lincoln and General George McClellan, and of the widespread team dysfunctionality within President Ronald Reagan's administration relative to the Iran-Contra Affair.
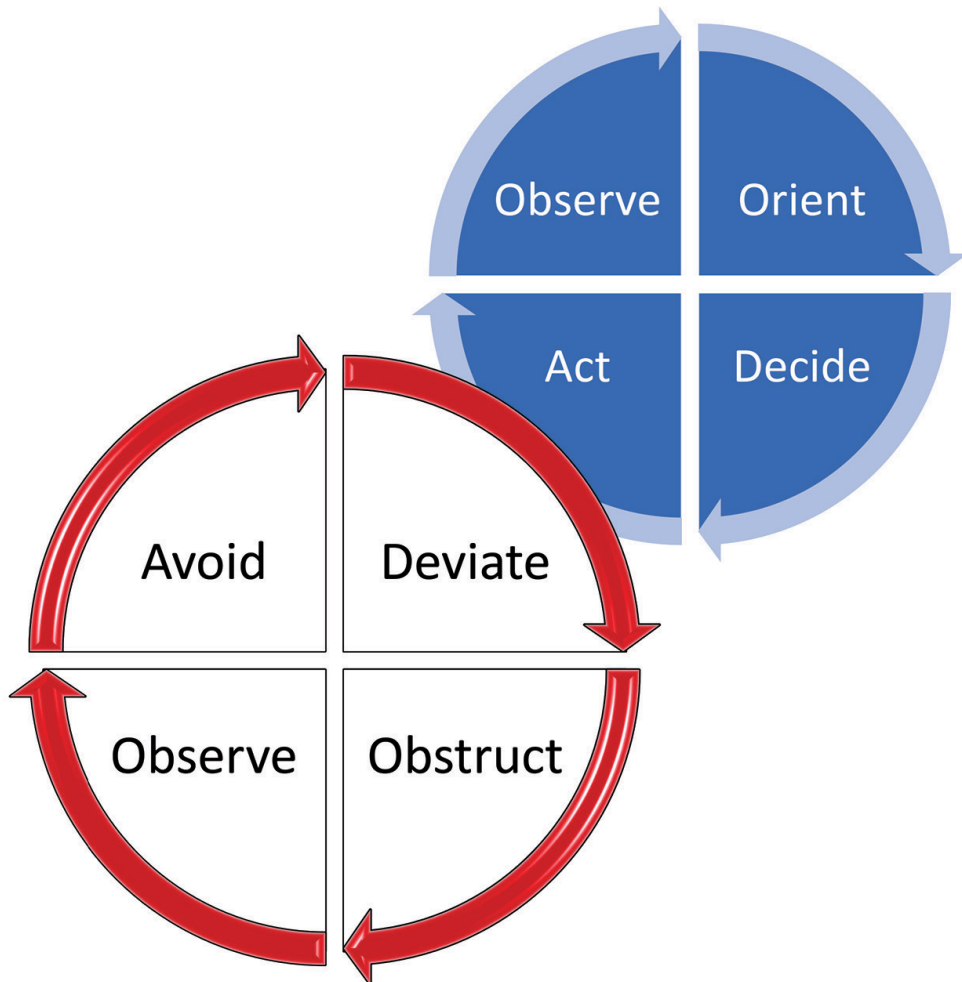

Figure 1. Toxic followership

Toxic Followers

The ADOO loop models toxic followership. This concept derives from the definition of toxic leadership—destructive or dysfunctional supervision that spreads within a team

or an organization.[2] Toxic followers intentionally apply detrimental behaviors to undermine leader intent and degrade team effectiveness relative to desired organizational outcomes.

The complexities inherent to modern products and services mandate cross-functional teams to leverage the varying skills and technologies spanning business, government service, and political arenas.[3] Teams achieve results by working toward common goals and incorporating diverse perspectives to validate the idea that the whole of an organization is greater than the sum of its individual parts. Despite the overwhelming benefits of working as a group, negative behaviors, which endanger effectiveness either immediately or over time, can readily manifest within a team.

Toxic followership expands beyond mere laziness or shirking behaviors. Instead, toxic followership deliberately breaks an organization's decision-making cycles by deviating from a leader's intent while reorienting team efforts toward alternate outcomes.[4] Toxic followers act in pursuit of personal agency, ignoring team or leader equities while focusing on increasing personal power, diminishing superiors' authority, or serving a combination of personal and hierarchical status interests.[5]

Despite an overarching intention of breaking or corrupting a decision, the toxic follower keenly desires to preserve the existing decision-making apparatus. System preservation ensures toxic followers retain bureaucratic status and influence as the organization exists to achieve objectives beyond the capacity of an individual actor or leader.[6] Throughout their formation and maturation, bureaucracies develop unique characteristics subject to the regulations, norms, and member traits.[7] This identity enables the bureaucracy to displace organizational aims via traits of toxic followers and create an entirely divergent purpose over time.[8]

Toxic followers thrive in bureaucracies because these organizations and their collective systems can subvert original aims while deriving an internal identity through process inertia, risk aversion, and authority deferment. Tempering the complete destruction of a bureaucracy is the understanding that eliminating a decision-making cycle altogether endangers the bureaucracy. Instead, toxic followers seek to erode the process from within

2. Alan Goldman, *Transforming Toxic Leaders* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 168.

3. W. Gibb Dyer Jr., Jeffrey H. Dyer, and William G. Dyer, *Team Building: Proven Strategies for Improving Team Performance* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2013), 12.

4. Adam K. Greene, "Building a Foundation on Sand: The Demise of Leaders Resulting from Toxic Followership" (Fort Leavenworth, KS: School of Advanced Military Studies, 2016), 5, https://apps.dtic.mil.

5. See, for example, Gene Dixon, "Getting Together," in *The Art of Followership: How Great Followers Create Great Leaders and Organizations,* ed. Ronald E. Riggio, Ira Chaleff, and Jean Lipman-Blumen (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2008); Ira Chaleff, "Creating New Ways of Following," in *Art of Followership,* 74–75; and Robert E. Kelley, *The Power of Followership: How to Create Leaders People Want to Follow and Followers Who Lead Themselves* (New York: Doubleday Currency, 1992), 110.

6. Robert K. Merton, "Bureaucratic Structure and Personality," *Social Forces* 18, no. 4 (1940): 563.

7. Merton, 563.

8. Merton, 563.

by deviating from a leader's intent or corrupting the system so thoroughly that the leader entirely abandons any efforts towards positive change.[9]

Toxic followership exists beyond formal bureaucratic structures. The capacity for subordinates to challenge hierarchical structures with destructive or dysfunctional behaviors to undermine a superior's intent can exist within any team or group of teams.

The first case study exploring toxic followership is the leader-subordinate dynamic between Lincoln and McClellan during the American Civil War. This case study highlights the role of individual agency and the deliberate mechanisms toxic followers employ to undermine decisions. The second case study analyzes team dysfunctionality through the Iran-Contra Affair during Reagan's administration. This case study explores the behaviors within a bureaucracy that corrupt an organization's aim and ingrain inertia into decision-making processes, behaviors that ultimately fostered scandal at the highest levels of American governance. The behaviors and processes inherent to toxic followership are captured in the ADOO loop model of avoidance, deviation, obstruction, and observation which can then illuminate corresponding measures to mitigate follower toxicity and restore decision-making effectiveness.

Leader-Subordinate Dysfunction: Lincoln and McClellan

The dogmas of the quiet past are inadequate to the stormy present.

Abraham Lincoln, December 1, 1862[10]

When Lincoln was elected to the US presidency in 1860, he faced monumental challenges in containing secession, regulating federal institutions, and assembling teams of civilian and military leaders capable of ending the burgeoning Civil War. With military experiences limited to brief service in the Illinois militia, Lincoln initially relied heavily on the military expertise provided by General Winfield Scott, the commanding general of the United States Army at the Civil War's onset.[11]

Having served as the commanding general since 1841, Scott developed the Union's grand strategy to defeat the Confederate rebellion. Despite his military aptitude, Scott did not have the physical capacity to command troops on the battlefield.[12] As the first of Lincoln's generals during the Civil War, Scott's interactions with the commander-in-chief were often strained but never toxic.

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9. Paul S. Adler and Bryan Borys, "Two Types of Bureaucracy: Enabling and Coercive," *Administrative Science Quarterly* 41, no. 1 (March 1996): 61.

10. Abraham Lincoln, "Annual Message to Congress," December 1, 1862, *Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, ed. Roy P. Basler et al. (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1953).

11. James Lewis, "The Black Hawk War Phases, Black Hawk War of 1832," Northern Illinois University Digital Library, accessed December 14, 2023, https://digital.lib.niu.edu/.

12. John S. Eisenhower, *Agent of Destiny: The Life and Times of General Winfield Scott* (Oklahoma City: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999), 360–63.

As a veteran and victor of the Mexican-American War, Scott held a military reputation that nearly propelled him into the presidency in 1852, when he earned the Whig Party's nomination but failed to garner widespread support, ultimately losing the election to Democrat Franklin Pierce.[13] After the election, Scott resumed his duties as the commanding general of the Army—remaining politically connected but committed to defending the United States even after his native Virginia seceded from the Union.[14]

The Civil War challenged the status quo responsibilities of and relationship between the president and his commanding general. Tracing back to America's revolutionary development, the duty to outline overarching political interests fell to the chief executive, while campaign execution and tactics belonged to the general.[15] Whereas the US Constitution codified the president's status as commander in chief, the predominant responsibilities for organizing, training, and equipping armies devolved to Congress.[16]

Prior to the Civil War, the Mexican-American War anchored this civil-military norm as then-President James Polk outlined the war's political objectives, Congress funded the military forces, and Scott executed the campaign abroad.[17] Throughout the Civil War, Congress imposed War Department Committee oversight and budgetary constraints to balance constitutional responsibilities across the government.[18] Yet despite Congress' adherence to the existing wartime norm, the Civil War strained the paradigm of civilian and military relations as Lincoln immersed himself in tactical affairs when his generals failed to deliver desired outcomes. These inadequacies included stalled campaigns, divergent political aspirations, and competing personal agendas that hindered Lincoln's decision-making process.

In 1861, given Scott's age and poor health, Lincoln appointed General Irvin McDowall to lead the Union advance toward the Confederate capital at Richmond.[19] Supported by Congress, Lincoln ordered this attack despite Scott's concerns that the Union Army was not ready for combat.[20] McDowall's sound defeat at the First Battle of Bull Run stunned the Union and forced Lincoln to reassess his Army and its leadership.[21] By November 1861, Lincoln had fired McDowall, approved Scott's retirement, and appointed McClellan as commander of the Federal Army.[22]

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13. Elbert B. Smith, *The Presidencies of Zachary Taylor and Millard Fillmore* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1988), 237–39.
14. Eisenhower, *Agent of Destiny*, 355.
15. Samuel P. Huntington, *The Soldier and the State* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1957), 156–57.
16. Huntington, 169.
17. Huntington, 181.
18. Huntington, 170.
19. Brett F. Woods, *Abraham Lincoln: Letters to His Generals, 1861–1865* (New York: Algora Publishing, 2013), 9.
20. Ronald C. White Jr., *A. Lincoln: A Biography* (New York: Random House, 2009), 429.
21. Woods, *Abraham Lincoln*, 9.
22. Woods, 38.

McClellan was a distinguished military officer and successful businessman who volunteered at the onset of the Civil War and rapidly earned an appointment as the commander of the Department of the Ohio.[23] Connected to political and military leaders alike, McClellan quickly rose through the ranks while developing his own elaborate plans to defeat the Confederacy.

After his subsequent command over the newly formed Army of the Potomac in Northern Virginia, McClellan began to quarrel with his former mentor, Scott.[24] With divergent strategies toward prosecuting the war, McClellan's forceful attitude and organizational acumen gradually secured the previously mentioned appointment to commanding general of the Army and promulgated Scott's corresponding retirement.[25]

As commanding general, McClellan refined a pattern of toxic followership throughout 1862. Focusing on securing resources and political support from Congress, McClellan infuriated his commander in chief as Lincoln grew exasperated at the lack of action from the Army of the Potomac.[26] Despite frequent meetings between the two, and with direct orders to advance, McClellan continued to delay the offensive in the Eastern Theater.

Lincoln's decision-making process and McClellan's decision-breaking preference degraded the Union's strategic effort. Oriented toward political outcomes and accelerated by factors ranging from preserving the cohesion of the remaining United States to developing the conditions to ensure the European powers stayed out of the war, Lincoln required military action.[27]

Notwithstanding at least 57 meetings between the duo, McClellan avoided Lincoln's direct orders, opting instead to consolidate and amass his forces.[28] Similar behaviors within Lincoln's cabinet and across Congress enabled McClellan's inaction and resulted in Lincoln firing his secretary of war and publicly asserting the first presidential-directed general order for action.[29]

Despite Lincoln's clear guidance, McClellan continued to obstruct his commander in chief—overtly insulting the president and simultaneously disregarding Lincoln's intent. McClellan exerted personal influence within Lincoln's cabinet through Salmon Chase, the secretary of the treasury and McClellan's political patron.[30] Thus, by subverting his leader's guidance and tainting the overarching bureaucracy, McClellan formed a pattern of behavior that drove Lincoln to establish his own war council and eventually strip

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23. Stephen W. Sears, *George B. McClellan: The Young Napoleon* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1988), 72.

24. Carl Sandburg, *Storm over the Land: A Profile of the Civil War* (New York: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1942), 62.

25. John F. Marszalek, *Lincoln and the Military* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2014), 24.

26. Marszalek, 33.

27. Marszalek, 23.

28. Stephen W. Sears, "Lincoln and McClellan," in *Lincoln's Generals,* ed. Gabor S. Boritt (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 37*;* and Marszalek, 25.

29. Marszalek, 25

30. Sears, "Lincoln and McClellan," 23.

McClellan of the title of commanding general, leaving him with only the Army of the Potomac and finally coercing an advance through the Peninsula Campaign.[31]

The relationship between Lincoln and McClellan continued to devolve throughout the Peninsula Campaign as the Union finally went on the offensive in Virginia. McClellan's halting operational tempo, strained by intelligence errors, ceded the tactical initiative to the Confederacy while frustrating Lincoln's strategic objectives.[32] In July 1862, Lincoln boarded the USS *Ariel* and conducted his own battlefield assessment.[33] Inspecting the Army of the Potomac, analyzing the terrain, and assessing the enemy situation, Lincoln reoriented his understanding and decision-making processes to the operational realities.[34] During this visit, McClellan subverted his commander in chief's guidance, pursued his personal political agenda, and issued an ultimatum voicing the preservation of the institution of slavery directly to the president.[35]

Breaching civil-military protocols, McClellan's toxic behaviors and operational failures prompted Lincoln to appoint General Henry W. "Harry" Halleck as general in chief and eventually fire McClellan altogether in September 1862, when the latter failed to obey presidential orders, once again, after the Battle of Antietam.[36]

The relationship between Lincoln and McClellan progressively eroded throughout the Civil War. As Lincoln refined his strategic understanding and corresponding decision-making processes, McClellan actively pursued his own agenda for political gain. McClellan exhibited the toxic follower methodology of avoiding the president's intent, deviating efforts toward self-interests, obstructing bureaucratic functionality, and observing Lincoln's countermoves in an iteratively decremental cycle. This dysfunctional relationship demonstrates the toxic follower methodology inherent to the ADOO loop, as negative effects increase exponentially when toxic followership manifests in a team environment. Such a team dynamic, distinct from a leader-follower dynamic of the Lincoln-McClellan case, is illustrated through the Iran-Contra Affair.

Team Dysfunction: Iran-Contra Affair

A few months ago, I told the American people I did not trade arms for hostages. My heart and my best intentions tell me that's true, but the facts and evidence tell me it is not.

Ronald Reagan, March 4, 1987[37]

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31. Sears, *George B. McClellan*, 160.

32. Ronald H. Bailer, ed., *The Bloodiest Day: The Battle of Antietam* (Alexandria, VA: Time-Life Books, 1984), 107–13.

33. Walter Coffey, "Lincoln Visits the Virginia Peninsula," Civil War Months (website), July 8, 2022, https://civilwarmonths.com/.

34. Coffey.

35. Sears, "Lincoln and McClellan," 38.

36. Sears, 44.

37. Ronald Reagan, "Address to the Nation on the Iran-Contra Controversy," March 4, 1987, transcript, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library and Museum, https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/.

When Reagan assumed the presidency in January of 1981, he immediately faced Iran- and Nicaragua-related challenges that became increasingly problematic through toxic followership within his National Security Council.[38] America's foreign relations challenges with Iran took a decided turn for the worse during the 1979 Islamic Revolution as allies became adversaries and 52 Americans were taken hostage in Tehran during Jimmy Carter's presidency.[39] After multiple failed rescue attempts and a 444-day effort, the hostages were released to Reagan's newly-inaugurated administration. US-Iranian economic and diplomatic relations further deteriorated during this period as Iran entered an eight-year war with Iraq.[40]

When the Iran-Iraq War was in its second year, officials within the Reagan administration documented an opportunity to restore US-Iranian relations by providing Iran with weapons and military supplies—despite standing arms bans by the United States and regional partners and Allies.[41] Individuals with unbridled ambitions within the Reagan administration actively pursued equipping the Iranian military, in hopes of possibly toppling the theocracy, with the intent to remove Iran from the Soviet Union's Cold War sphere of influence.[42]

As these rogue actors within the Reagan administration formulated ideas for US-Iranian normalization, events in Nicaragua similarly stymied policymakers within the executive branch. In 1981, the revolutionary Sandinista National Liberation Front, which had direct ties to communist Cuba and the Soviet sphere, ruled the government of Nicaragua.[43] Therefore, Reagan voiced support to Contra rebels out of Honduras who sought to overthrow the democratically-elected Sandinistas.[44]

Despite Reagan's objective to arm the Contras and dislodge the Sandinistas, the US government did not support funding an insurgency.[45] By passing three acts of legislation between 1982 and 1984—collectively termed the Boland Amendment—the US Congress directly limited American assistance to the Contras.[46] Despite clear guidance from Congress and no documented presidential imperative, individuals within Reagan's National Security Council disregarded the law in an attempt to promote US interests in Iran and Nicaragua.

The National Security Council was the team primarily responsible for the Iran-Contra Affair. The primary personality in the affair was Robert "Bud" McFarlane, Reagan's former

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38. Vincent Boucher, Charles-Philippe David, and Karine Premont, *National Security Entrepreneurs and the Making of American Foreign Policy* (Montreal, Quebec: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2020), 155.

39. Boucher, David, and Premont, 154.

40. Efraim Karsh, *The Iran-Iraq War: 1980-1988* (Oxford, UK: Osprey Publishing, 2002), 7–8.

41. Boucher, David, and Premont, *National Security Entrepreneurs*, 154.

42. Boucher, David, and Premont.

43. Peter Kornbluh and Malcolm Byrne, *The Iran-Contra Scandal: The Declassified History* (New York: New Press, 1993), 216.

44. Kornbluh and Byrne, 216.

45. Kornbluh and Byrne.

46. Bruce D. Hicks, "Presidential Foreign Policy Prerogative after the Iran-Contra Affair: A Review Essay," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 26, no. 4 (1996).

national security adviser, an individual with seemingly unchecked authority.[47] Described by his peers as a career bureaucrat with unquestionable loyalty, McFarlane was a Marine veteran who had served two combat tours in Vietnam.[48] Working as a White House fellow and then as a military assistant during the Nixon administration, McFarlane witnessed Henry Kissinger's whirlwind diplomatic approaches and associated National Security Council effectiveness.[49]

McFarlane's ambitions and dedication to government service brought him to Reagan's attention. While he was not the president's primary choice for national security adviser, McFarlane filled the role vacated by Zbigniew Brzezinski in 1983.[50] McFarlane's failure to establish a robust rapport with Reagan distanced the national security adviser from the president's decision-making processes and associated policy outputs.[51] Despite his lack of personal connection with the president, McFarlane established the groundwork for the Iran-Contra Affair by seizing and exploiting Reagan's concerns over a new Iranian hostage crisis in the summer of 1985.

The 1985 hostage situation was connected to deteriorating US-Lebanese relations that only worsened due to Iranian influence. In 1975, Lebanon entered into a 15-year civil war that was exacerbated by conflicting US-Soviet Cold War interests, escalating Sunni and Shia religious tensions, and the changing situation in Iran.[52] In April 1983, separatists bombed the US Embassy in Beirut; in October of that year, a suicide bomber attacked a US Marine barracks there, killing 241 service members.[53]

The Lebanese Civil War also resulted in the kidnapping of US and European citizens, six of whom were American, which posed a grave concern for Reagan as he met with his cabinet and trusted agents throughout 1985.[54] The Iranian-supported Lebanese Hezbollah militant group held the six American hostages in Lebanon. This new crisis pressured the Reagan administration to restore diplomatic relations with Iran.

As Reagan's interest in rescuing the hostages grew, McFarlane saw an opportunity to kickstart US munitions shipments to Iran and simultaneously support the Contras in Nicaragua. Bypassing the Boland Amendment, McFarlane cobbled together an initiative to have Israel sell its US-provided munitions to Iran with backfill from US stocks, expecting that hostages would be released in Lebanon while financial proceeds would go to the Contras in their fight against the Sandinistas.[55]

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47. Boucher, David, and Premont, *National Security Entrepreneurs*, 154.
48. Boucher, David, and Premont, 156.
49. Boucher, David, and Premont, 157.
50. Boucher, David, and Premont, 158.
51. Boucher, David, and Premont, 159.
52. Rodney P. Carlisle and J. Geoffrey Golson, *Turning Points—Actual and Alternate Histories: The Reagan Era from the Iran Crisis to Kosovo* (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2007), 127.
53. Carlisle and Golson, 127.
54. Carlisle and Golson, 127.
55. Carlisle and Golson, 129.

The National Security Council secured a second fund source for the Contras via Lieutenant Colonel Oliver North, a US Marine detailed to the National Security Council, who routed Saudi Arabian financial support to the Contras via off-shore accounts in the Cayman Islands.[56] Throughout 1985, North and select members of the National Security Council secured numerous nation-state donors as dozens of flights moved clandestine funds to the Contras, and the "enterprise" continued to grow. North hired retired Air Force General Richard Secord to lead the aerial resupply mission that spanned bases across Central America, bridging overt and covert actions with governmental and nongovernmental agencies across the region.[57]

The efforts to equip the Iranians with American munitions—despite an ongoing multinational arms ban led by the United States, its partners, and its Allies—encountered multiple complications throughout 1985.[58] Shipping issues, diplomatic basing hurdles, and logistics roadblocks meant that the US-Israeli effort delivered only a meager resupply of arms consisting of 2,000 antitank missiles, 18 surface-to-air missiles, and limited spare parts.

With only a partial resupply, Iran coordinated the release of just three American hostages. Meanwhile, two more Americans were abducted as North began raising missile costs to increase revenue for the Contras. The operation was spiraling beyond the control of the enterprise, when the Sandinistas recovered a crashed US aircraft containing Contra resupplies, and press leaks in Middle Eastern newspapers unveiled US-Israeli collaboration to arm Iran with munitions.[59]

In November 1985, conscious of the scandal's implications, Reagan publicly outlined the Iran-Contra Affair to the press. He relieved North, accepted McFarlane's resignation, and ordered a wide-ranging investigation called the Tower Commission. The investigation resulted in dozens of indictments and prison terms; the guilty parties included officials in Reagan's cabinet, the National Security Council, and various federal departments and agencies.[60] By unveiling the Iran-Contra Affair to the American public, Reagan acknowledged personal accountability despite not knowing the details and actions undertaken by his toxic followers.[61]

McFarlane demonstrated toxic followership by manipulating Reagan's intent while diverting US policy towards alternate ends. Unlike the Lincoln-McClellan case study, oriented to the leader-follower dynamic, the Iran-Contra Affair depicted toxic followership behaviors within the team environment. McFarlane seized upon Reagan's concern over the hostages to insert a different agenda, rapidly arming the Iranians and the Contras in pursuit of alternate aims.

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56. Carlisle and Golson.
57. Carlisle and Golson, 130.
58. Carlisle and Golson, 132.
59. Carlisle and Golson, 134–35.
60. Carlisle and Golson, 135.
61. Reagan, "Iran-Contra Controversy."

In the case of Iran, McFarlane believed rearming the military would promulgate a coup to dislodge the Islamic Revolutionary government. Within McFarlane's team, North pursued his own isolated agenda, deviating from clearly codified US laws established by Congress under the belief that he served the greater good, despite dallying in criminal activities. North's agents, such as Secord who was running the Contra airlift network, became proxies even further removed from the president's decision cycle through masked bureaucratic layers—capable of pursuing alternate and even nefarious ends under the guise of executive fiat.

McFarlane's team exhibited the ADOO loop of toxic followership by avoiding the clear elements of Reagan's guidance while deviating from the law and exploiting suitable gaps in the president's agenda. The team obstructed the truth wherever possible by creating loose subordinate echelons or actively manipulating the press and foreign governments under the guise of US interests. McFarlane's team completed the ADOO cycle by observing their environment and responding to foreign and domestic efforts that nearly cost Reagan his presidency and ultimately failed to dislodge the Sandinistas or achieve regime change in Iran.

Team dynamics accelerated toxic followership, as strong personalities within an organization can distance the team from the leader's intent and decision-making processes. The Iran-Contra Affair case study demonstrates the ease through which a rogue team deviates far enough from the leader's decision-making apparatus that relationships invert, and the leader becomes responsible for behaviors they themselves did not plan or approve.

Whether the leader-follower example or the leader-team variant, the capacity for toxic followership requires active controls to preserve leader decision-making functionality.

Mitigating the ADOO Loop

The four-phased ADOO loop iteratively employs avoidance, deviation, obstruction, and observation to undermine decision-making processes. During the avoidance phase, toxic followers actively disregard a leader's guidance and intent. This leads to the deviation phase wherein followers deliberately pivot to alternate objectives and methodologies that counter the leader's decision.

Followers then obstruct the leader's directed path—understanding that inaction is a proven method for invalidating decision-making effectiveness. The toxic follower completes the ADOO loop by observing and subverting any counteractions by the leader, within the team, or across the bureaucracy. The loop continues, characterized by cycles of a follower or followers incrementally avoiding, deviating, obstructing, and breaking a leader's decision-making cycle to pursue personal agendas.

Toxic followers seek to preserve the system within which they operate as this system affords a power base and identity. Rather than destroying the system, toxic followers merely promote the status quo by shirking work and increasing inertia within the organization. This methodology directly feeds the ongoing ADOO loop as the toxic followers consistently undermine and break decision-making processes.
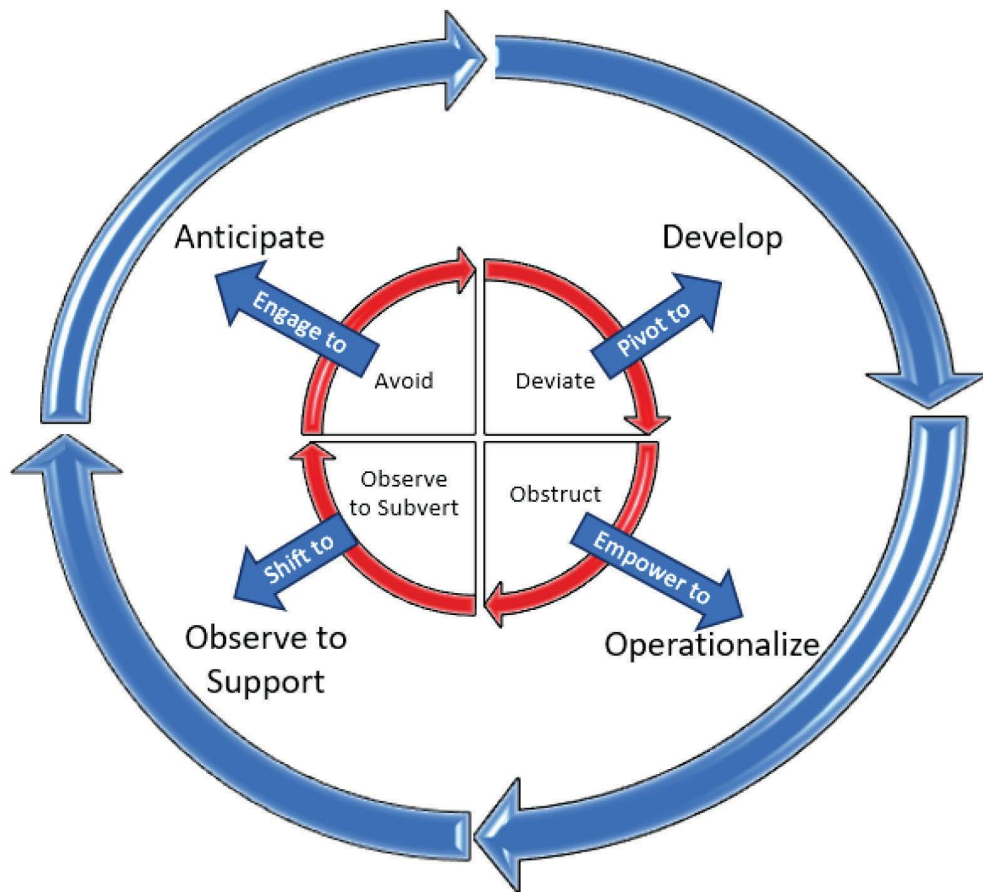
Figure 2. Active Leadership model

Mitigating toxic follower behaviors outlined in the ADOO loop requires deliberate methods within each phase to restore decision-making effectiveness. The Active Leadership model (fig. 2), a different, but desired "ADOO" loop—anticipate, develop, operationalize, observe—targets and reverses toxic follower behaviors in each step of the ADOO loop, curtailing decision-breaking mechanisms while restoring decision-making effectiveness. The model's first phase requires active leadership to pivot behaviors from avoidance to anticipation. Rather than allowing followers to avoid decisions, leaders drive consensus through shared understanding, empowering subordinates to accelerate decision-making cycles even further by fostering anticipation throughout the team.

The Active Leadership model's second phase compels leaders to strengthen follower behaviors away from deviation toward development. Whereas unchecked follower behaviors deviate from the leader's decision-making apparatus, assertive followers develop a decision and accelerate Boyd's observation, orientation, decision, and action cycle inherent

to an effective organization or team. Active leadership conveys intent, emboldens forward-thinking through anticipation, and inspires champions to develop ideas into reality.

In the third phase, the leader pivots teams from obstruction to operationalization. Rather than erecting obstacles to achieving desired aims, an effective follower operationalizes the commander's intent and produces results. This instrumental phase of team dynamics realizes the desired intent and surmounts challenges through collaboration to achieve objectives.

In the model's final phase, leaders propel followers and overarching team dynamics to observe with purpose. Rather than a toxic behavior of observation to shirk, stall, or break a decision, effective teams employ observation through deliberate feedback mechanisms to consolidate gains and focus collective efforts. Debriefing through feedback helps to frame team efforts while focusing bureaucracies back to their originally designed and desired purpose as active leaders mitigate toxic behaviors and optimize performance.

Conclusion

The ADOO loop models the decision-breaking behaviors of toxic followership that impede decision-making effectiveness. Demonstrated by the leader-follower case studies of Lincoln and McClellan during the US Civil War and the team dysfunctionality inherent to the Iran-Contra Affair, the ADOO loop depicts the tendency of toxic followers to avoid, deviate, obstruct, and observe decisions in an iterative pattern. Toxic followers exploit inertia-laden bureaucracies while corrupting team dynamics in pursuit of personal agendas at the expense of organizational success.

Effective leaders mitigate toxic behaviors within each step of the ADOO loop through the steps outlined in the Active Leadership model, which pivots followers from avoidance to anticipation, deviance to development, obstruction to operationalization, and finally, from negative to positive observation. Overcoming toxic followership galvanizes the decision-making cycle inherent to Boyd's OODA loop and ensures vibrant and resilient team performance for the future. ✈✶