

*The Impact of Using  
Civilian Management Techniques in the Military*

by

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"The most essential element of combat power is competent and confident leadership. Leadership provides purpose, direction, and motivation in combat."<sup>1</sup> This idea of leadership is being challenged by the encroachment of civilian management techniques which focus on managing a corporation, not leading soldiers, airmen, and sailors into battle. Although some of the techniques espoused by civilian corporations as effective management techniques are quite useful, completely taking on board a civilian management system may prove detrimental to military effectiveness, discipline, and leadership. General S. L. A. Marshall states in "The Dilemma of Leadership and Management," an essay published in *Military Leadership in Pursuit of Excellence*, "(S)erious questions have been raised about the limitations created by management and supervisory principles, particularly as they appear to have inhibited the bold, decisive characteristics of many key figures in our military structure."<sup>2</sup>

Historically commanders within the military have been given latitude to lead and manage their organisations as they deemed appropriate. This allowed them to use their own style of leadership within a broad framework. Commanders were able to use traditional military techniques, civilian management techniques, or a combination of the two, picking the best, or in some cases the worst, techniques. Regardless of the methods used the proof of their effectiveness was, and should be, determined by how well their units performed during formal evaluations and, more importantly, during conflict.

The military's primary mission has always been to defend the United States. While this still holds true, it is possible that the move towards civilian management techniques has actually begun to undermine military leadership. This subsequently appears to have affected morale and discipline, and could potentially have a negative effect on the outcome of any future conflicts and the ability to carry out core military tasks. One of the pivotal concerns within the debate regarding whether this has actually occurred lies in the differences between the concepts of leadership and management.

The technical nature of the Air Force has created a propensity towards using civilian management techniques more than the other military branches. However, since the Air Force is still a military organization, this raises questions about the appropriateness of nearly completely using civilian management techniques instead of traditional military techniques.

**Management Techniques  
as a Tool for Leaders**

Management techniques should not be used in lieu of proper military leadership. Instead, it should be used as a tool for leaders. Mission accomplishment is the ultimate test, and leaders should be given the latitude to use the leadership and management style they deem appropriate to accomplish that mission.

There are distinct differences between the military and civilian management methods; one area which highlights these differences is terminology. For example, in military lexicon "mission" is "(T)he task, together with the purpose, which clearly indicates the action to be taken and the reason therefor. In common usage, especially when applied to lower military units, a duty assigned to an individual or unit; a task."<sup>3</sup> A mission is normally short-lived and narrow in scope, and is determined by the next higher unit. For example, a Security Force's squadron commander may be given a mission by his or her commander to "defend X Base against terrorist attack, in order that air operations can be conducted unhindered." The squadron commander would then give specific sub-unit missions to the various flights within the squadron. Since military operations are fluid, the commander may give sub-units missions on a daily, or sometimes more frequently, basis. Examples would be, "'A' Flight is to conduct surveillance operations over the road junction at grid coordinate TL990100 to detect enemy movement, in order that 'B' Flight can take offensive action against the enemy." Once the operation is over, or sometimes concurrently, the commander gives new missions to the sub-units. Mission statements are always given by "one-up" and never made by a commander independently. However, mission statements in a civilian company "describes its reason for existence. Mission statements are broad and expected to remain in effect for an extended period of time."<sup>4</sup> The company itself develops the mission statement, normally by an internal planning team not by the next higher unit. Civilian mission statements are designed for companies whose mission may not change for many years. Likewise, the sub-units within those companies will not change missions frequently. They will accomplish the same task as long as the company creates the same product. Using civilian terminology, as with management techniques in general, within a military setting creates confusion among the more junior, who may not be able to differentiate between the appropriate use of military or civilian techniques. Terminology is only one example of the differences between the two. There are many other fundamental differences which make it difficult to accept management techniques wholesale within the military. The development of leadership skills is another of these fundamental areas.

By using management techniques, leadership skills may be stifled. "Leaders cannot, must not, bind themselves to a one-answer, one-method scientology. They must discover the method best suited to motivate and employ each soldier."<sup>5</sup> They cannot learn to be the bold, decisive, leaders the military must have to succeed, particularly during a crisis, by using civilian management techniques.

Management techniques are an attempt by civilian companies at a "leadership formula." Ideally, in civilian companies daily decisions are made by the workers, while "(L)eaders set the vision, policies, priorities and strategies. Their responsibility is to foster an environment that inspires trust, teamwork and pride." "Mid-level leaders provide training and resources, and facilitate continuous process improvement."<sup>6</sup> Nowhere in that description is a statement that leaders are to make decisions, or even solve problems. Consensus taking, nominal group techniques, and multi-voting are good management techniques in a civilian company, but are not appropriate in a

military setting. Industry attempts to push decision making to the lowest possible levels, encouraging workers, instead of lower-level supervisors and managers, to plan and establish processes. The military uses a similar concept; however, there is a great deal of responsibility laid on lower-level leaders. The leaders make the decisions, not the subordinates. If subordinates are permitted to make daily decisions on how an operation is run during peacetime, they may expect to use the same "management methods" during war or contingencies. If a leader attempts to use another technique, such as directing a specific method be used, it has the potential of creating confusion, discipline, and morale difficulties. Writing on the increasing emphasis on management within the military, General Edward Meyer states "(E)xcellence in its theories and principles became an alternative to leadership. Unfortunately forgotten was the fact that employees of Sears Roebuck and Company or General Motors Corporation were not asked to give up their lives for corporate cost-effectiveness."<sup>7</sup>

Civilian management techniques encourage leaders to "manage by fact," and not use intuition in order to make decisions. "Young potential leaders who have been schooled to believe that all elements of a problem are rational and technical, reducible to words or numbers, are ill-equipped to move into an area where intuition and empathy are powerful aids to problem solving."<sup>8</sup> The impact this has on leaders is that they do not learn to use judgement and intuition on a regular basis. When the time comes for quick decisions to be made they will not be able to do so because the skill has not been developed. Under civilian management the use of traditional military problem-solving techniques, such as the Estimate of the Situation is discouraged in lieu of team decision making and discussions. Leaders do not have the opportunity to give "orders," instead they are expected to make suggestions. Additionally, since the workers make the decisions, they, the workers, are not afforded the opportunity to observe the decision-making process of their superiors. The subordinates become unsure of whether a leader can make the appropriate decision at a critical time, furthering doubt about the leader's ability.

The use of civilian management techniques, therefore, impacts directly on the ability and, consequently, the credibility of its leaders. The loss of credibility, most importantly perceived by subordinates, has a direct impact on their willingness to obey the orders of their leaders. "Strong personal leadership is as necessary today as at anytime in our history. That which soldiers are willing to sacrifice their lives for - loyalty, team spirit, morale, trust and confidence - cannot be infused by managing. The attention we need to invest in our soldiers far exceeds that which is possible through any centralized management system."<sup>9</sup>

The military must have leaders that will take charge of situations and infuse their subordinates to take the courses of action necessary to accomplish the mission. The military should not have managers who permit and encourage subordinates to make decisions concerning daily operations. "Eventually, a co-ordination committee, hardly the ideal agent for centralized control, achieved some degree of order and co-ordination."<sup>10</sup>

### **Traits of a Leader**

"Leadership and management are not the same thing, but they overlap. It makes sense to include managing in the list of tasks leaders perform."<sup>11</sup> An understanding of formal leadership practices has existed since the beginning of structured military organizations, if not earlier. "Classical

notions about leadership are rooted deep in the human psyche, presumably going back to the origins of man as a social animal and to his earliest attitudes to authority and received wisdom."<sup>12</sup> Although tenets of management are quite ancient, "theory and formal instruction in the principles of management are ... recent developments. The Warton School began formal studies in the 1880s."<sup>13</sup> The Management Handbook states the "study of management coincided with three important developments: Growth of large corporations...separation of management and ownership...(and) development of new theories."<sup>14</sup> It goes on to say that leadership is "closely related to, distinct from, management. ...Managing is the formal process in which organizational objectives are achieved through the efforts of superiors and subordinates."<sup>15</sup> Leading, according to the Management Handbook, is the process by which a person with power is able to influence the behavior of others in some desired way.<sup>16</sup> Significantly, it states "(M)anagers have power by virtue of the positions they hold."<sup>17</sup>

The military defines leadership as a "process by which a soldier influences others to accomplish the mission ... The right leadership gives purpose, direction, and motivation in combat."<sup>18</sup> A good starting place to examine traits of a leader is in the United States Army's Field Manual 7-8: Infantry Rifle Platoon and Squad Field Manual. This particular publication is the "Bible" of small unit leaders. Commanders at the small unit level are the ones who are deeply involved at the operational level, leading soldiers in combat. Although the manual is designed for the Army, the concepts contained within are suitable for use in any military unit. It says of leadership traits: "The skills required of infantry leaders include physical toughness, technical knowledge, mental agility, and a firm grasp of how to motivate soldiers to fight on in the face of adversity."<sup>19</sup>

Some might argue that since the Air Force is technically oriented such leadership skills are not necessary. However, the fact remains that all uniformed personnel are in fact in the armed services and could be called upon to perform a traditionally military role at a moment's notice. United States Air Force military members are that, military, not "civilians in uniform." Winston Churchill realized this during the Second World War and in a memo to his Secretary of State for Air and his Chief of Air Staff stated:

Every man in Air Force uniform ought to be armed with something—a rifle, a tommy-gun, a pistol, a pike, or a mace; and every one, without exception, should do at least one hour's drill and practice every day. Every airman should have his place in the defence(sic) scheme...It must be understood by all ranks that they are expected to fight and die in the defence(sic) of their airfields...The enormous mass of non-combatant personnel who look after the very few heroic pilots, who alone in ordinary circumstances do all the fighting, is an inherent difficulty in the organization of the Air Force...Every airfield should be a stronghold of fighting air-groundmen, and not the abode of uniformed civilians in the prime of life protected by detachments of soldiers.<sup>20</sup>

Even what appears to be a very innocuous trade on the surface could be critical during contingencies. For example, a "personnel specialist" whose primary duty is to maintain military personnel records could find themselves at a Forward Operating Base supporting a war effort. Their duties would be critical to the tracking of military personnel within the theater. These duties would have a follow-on effect accounting for dead, missing, injured, absent personnel, or

locating personnel in emergencies. Supervisors of these "support" units must have the ability to lead their troops as effectively as those on the battlefield. It will be necessary for these supervisors to issue orders to their subordinates, which must be promptly adhered to without a great deal of discussion.

A recent incident highlighting the fact that any uniformed person could easily find themselves involved in conflict is the 1996 Khobar Towers bombing where terrorists placed a vehicle bomb outside a housing complex in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia. "That terrorist act killed nineteen American service members, and hundreds of other service members and Saudis were injured."<sup>21</sup> The targeted service personnel were not Army infantrymen, but United States Air Force personnel of many different trades. The Air Force was ill-prepared to handle the event and had not done as Churchill recommended. They had not rehearsed actions in the event of attack, had no plans and procedures informing personnel how to respond, and did not have leaders assigned to take charge of the situation.<sup>22</sup> However, one staff sergeant used initiative and mission tactics and took charge. The sergeant "had not been told what method to use to evacuate the building in question; indeed, initiating evacuations was not even part of the responsibilities of the roof-top sentries...(T)he sergeant's good judgment and prompt action unquestionably saved lives the night of the bombing..."<sup>23</sup>

The experience of supervisors is the crucial element in sound decision-making. Although Field Manual 7-8: Infantry Rifle Platoon and Squad is a current Army publication, desired traits of military leaders can be found in many other sources. According to Roger Nye in *Challenge of Command*:

In the late seventies, Colonel Dadridge 'Mike' Malone studied and summarized a dozen efficiency report forms used in the armed services of the United States, Canada, France, and Britain. He was in search of a consensus on the traits expected of the military officer, including commanders. There was greatest agreement ... on the need for judgment and initiative, qualities associated more with the mental process of thinking and deciding, than with physical or spiritual aspects of military life. The consensus was also extremely high on the need for professional knowledge, good management of resources, and oral and writing ability.<sup>24</sup>

The preceding paragraph is significant because of the statement "good management of resources," which is viewed as a trait of a leader, emphasizes that management is subordinate to leadership. Long before Nye did his work on attempting to determine the important aspects of leadership, the renowned author Clausewitz highlighted the importance of judgment. "Judgment is the ability to combine hard data, questionable data and intuitive guesses to arrive at a conclusion that events prove to be correct. Judgment-in-action includes effective problem solving, the design of strategies, the setting of priorities and intuitive as well as rational judgments. Most important, perhaps, it includes the capacity to appraise the potentialities of coworkers and opponents."<sup>25</sup>

Leaders also "... must understand and use initiative in accomplishing the mission. This means they must know how to analyze the situation quickly and make decisions rapidly in light of the

commander's intent. They must be prepared to take independent action if necessary. The art of making sound decisions quickly lies in the knowledge of tactics, the estimate process, and platoon and squad techniques and procedures."<sup>26</sup> The quick thinking, decisive abilities of leaders is crucial to military success at all levels, in all branches and trades.

Regardless of the individual attributes of a person, the importance of leadership is succinctly stated in Air Force Manual 1-1, Volume II Basic Aerospace Doctrine of the United States Air Force: "Military leaders must foster cohesion, discipline, and a sense of unity in the personnel they lead; these characteristics are necessary for success in combat. Individuals will respond to discipline and will have confidence in their ability to perform if they have respect for their leaders, confidence in their comrades, and a clear sense of purpose for which they fight."<sup>27</sup> The traits outlined above differ greatly from that of a manager.

### **Traits of a Manager**

Significantly, even the advocates of Total Quality Management have difficulty defining traits of managers. Hart and Bogan in *The Baldrige* (a book on how to use the Baldrige criteria to improve "Quality in Your Company" state: "Senior executives lead. Empowered frontline personnel serve customers. But what about those in the middle of the organizational chart? What are they supposed to do? ... The downfall of quality improvement programs is often the ambivalent, ambiguous role middle managers play."<sup>28</sup>

This statement implies that managers are not considered leaders, even within the "Quality" world. Moreover, Deming himself would argue that point; he considers leadership subordinate to management.<sup>29</sup> Under point seven of his fourteen points to improvement (adopt and institute leadership), Deming states "The job of management is not supervision, but leadership." This implies leadership is a tool of managers, contradicting most traditional military writings which consider management a tool of leaders. For example, in *On Leadership*, Gardner states "It makes sense to include managing in the list of tasks leaders perform."<sup>30</sup>

The American Management Association's *Management Handbook* defines management as "the process of getting things done through people."<sup>31</sup> It goes on to say management "involves elements of organization, leadership, communications skills, and the ability to set goals and figure out ways to achieve them."<sup>32</sup> This differs greatly from the military's definition of management which was found in the *Dictionary of Military Terms*. It states management "consists of those continuing actions of planning, organizing, directing, coordinating, controlling, and evaluating the use of men, money, materials, and facilities to accomplish missions and tasks. Management is inherent in command, but it does not include as extensive authority and responsibility as command."<sup>33</sup> It is therefore fair to say then the traits of a manager are effective planners and organizers, technically competent in budget, task assignment, and resource allocation, and versed in the rules and regulations pertinent to their specific trade.

There is a distinct discrepancy in the opinion between "traditionalists" and Deming and his followers regarding whether management is subordinate to leadership or vice-versa. "In most, if not all, of the management literature leadership is treated as a subset of the so-called managerial process, while the military community takes the opposite view."<sup>34</sup> The Quality Air Force

program emphasizes leadership at all levels; therefore, it can be assumed the Air Force considers management subordinate to leadership. The importance of this observation cannot be overlooked, since Deming's view of leadership is crucial to the success of Quality programs within organizations. His view that "the job of management is not supervision, but leadership,"<sup>35</sup> emphasizes the fact that he does expect managers to be leaders when necessary, but not continually, and that leadership is simply one of the many tools of a manager. Commanders at all levels and other military leaders, on the other hand, must continually lead, while using management when necessary to accomplish specific tasks.

### **The Importance of Management Within the Military**

Management of resources is a crucial element of sound military leadership. "Just as overmanagement(sic) can be the death of an Army, so can undermanagement(sic) which deprives units of essential resources."<sup>36</sup> However, in the military management must be subordinate to leadership, not vice-versa. Leaders must be able to use all of the tools at their disposal in order to achieve the aim. However, using management techniques as a leadership blueprint may be detrimental to morale, discipline, and effectiveness within the military. "Techniques which work well for the management of resources may prove disastrous when substituted for leadership on the battlefield. Conversely, techniques which work well for the battlefield may prove disastrous when substituted for management."<sup>37</sup>

In order for leaders to effectively use such management techniques they must understand the capabilities and limitations of those techniques, just as they must understand other tools of the trade such as weapons. "Management techniques have limitations which leaders need to identify and curb to preclude destructive side effects."<sup>38</sup> This calls for a sound examination of the system prior to implementation. Additionally, leaders must be given the latitude to decide what style works best for them. An eclectic approach, using differing leadership and management types, is often the best. "To command, then, is to manage well when management is called for, to lead well when leadership is necessary, and to carry out orders and enforce regulations when 'going by the book'..."<sup>39</sup>

The Air Force should encourage its leaders to develop their own operating style and incorporate management techniques when appropriate. However, any system used must use the same terminology throughout. Subordinates should not be expected to understand "mission" in both the traditional military and management settings. After so much historical success, perhaps the Air Force ought to adopt military techniques already in use, such as the Estimate of the Situation and using Field Orders, rather than predominantly using civilian management techniques. This will afford leaders the opportunity to practice their military skills while performing management tasks and create an environment where subordinates understand the military process.

Most importantly, leaders at all levels should be encouraged to make decisions based on judgement, intuition, and experience. The only way a leader is going to know if they have these qualities is to use them on a regular basis. By making daily decisions subordinates will also be afforded the opportunity to view their leader's abilities "out of contact." As a result, their confidence in their leaders will be enhanced and they will be less likely to question their orders.

Morale and discipline will consequently remain high and mission effectiveness may increase. Subordinates look for, and expect, strong leadership, particularly in a crisis. "It would seem that management training alone is not enough to develop a cadre of people who can assume and take responsibility for command."<sup>40</sup> Leaders must have the opportunity to lead, not manage.

### **Conclusion**

It is not enough to be a good manager in order to be an effective military leader. Although leadership traits may include managerial skills, it takes much more to be a leader than simply planning and organizing. An effective leader must possess the ability to convince others they should take a certain course of action, not for themselves, but for the unit. "Never forgetting that the purpose of an Army is to fight. And, to fight effectively, it must be led. Managers can put the most modern and well-equipped force into the field. They cannot, however, manage an infantry unit through training or manage it up a hill into enemy fire to seize an objective."<sup>41</sup> However, today's environment necessitates that leaders must also possess managerial skills or at least have the ability to effectively lead others to achieve the management function. "There are leaders who can motivate and inspire but who cannot visualize a path to the goal in practical, feasible steps. Leaders who lack that skill must bring onto their team people who have it."<sup>42</sup> Ideally, though, today's leader must learn how to manage in order to properly equip and maintain their units.

Presiding over the arrangements through which individual energies are coordinated to achieve shared goals sounds like a quintessential management task. But it is clear that most leaders find themselves occasionally performing one or another of the essential chores: mobilizing and allocating resources; staffing and ensuring the continuing vitality of the team; creating and maintaining appropriate procedures; directing, delegating and coordinating; providing a system of incentives; reporting, evaluating and holding accountable.<sup>43</sup>

Many argue over whether leaders are born or learn to be leaders. However, most agree the key to effective leadership is the ability to motivate others. Whether this trait is innate or learned, it must be developed over time, frequently through trial and error. Management, however, is a "system" which is taught. Although there are many differing ideas of the best methods to manage, the basic ideas can be learned in a classroom or by reading books. In a crisis it is extremely important that leaders step to the front to take charge. These leaders must have the skills necessary to encourage subordinates to take action, not for themselves, but for the unit. To be effective at this task, the leaders must have been practiced leadership skills using intuition and judgment, making snap decisions, and giving direction. Without these skills the organization will lack the leadership necessary to succeed. Management training and procedures do not provide these skills alone, but they can provide a tool for effective leaders to use at the appropriate time, in the appropriate setting.

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