

First Sergeant

Weak-Tie of the Air Force Leadership Triad

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Introduction to the Problem of Practice

The intent of this article is to discuss the role of the Air Force first sergeant through the lens of a theoretical investigation based on an in-depth literature review, empirical observation, and experiential knowledge. It is worth declaring early that as of the initial writing of this article, the author was assigned as a command first sergeant. Consequently, limitations for the impact of this biased perspective were constructed by introducing peer review to validate the trustworthiness and credibility of the methods and conclusions.

To provide the greatest level of accessibility, the author formatted this article to improve information consumption and increase contextual applications into operational environments. The initial discussion begins with the role and elements of the Air Force leadership triad, followed by an analysis of the role of the first sergeant. Next, the article moves to the unique characteristics of the first sergeant in the triad, specifically that they work outside their Air Force Specialty Code

(AFSC). Then, the article describes the elements of diversity, the causative factors, effects, and the social network subset of weak-ties. These weak-tie networks are reviewed in terms of the leadership triad and the overall network effect on the unit and the Air Force. Finally, the article incorporates a brief look into Utility Theory and the constraints to diversity and weak-tie networks to form the analysis to demonstrate the scope of the theoretical framework. The overall construction of the research and theoretical investigation has been approached through the Socratic model: (1) what point of view is or should be present; (2) what is the purpose of the line of thinking; (3) what is the underlying question at hand; (4) what is the relevant evidence; (5) what assumptions are being made; (6) what guiding concepts, theories, or laws exist; (7) what can be inferred or implied from the existing evidence; and (8) what consequences or implications are present.

Leadership Triad

The squadron is the “beating heart of the Air Force” as described by the current Air Force chief of staff, Gen David L. Goldfein, and he put enough emphasis behind that belief to make it the number one priority for his tenure—to “revitalize the squadrons.” In that vein, it is important for all Airmen of every grade and AFSC to understand the leadership triad that is central to the successful operation of a squadron.

The Air Force leadership triad is a dynamic team composed of the commander, chief, and first sergeant, who fill the roles of decision maker, subject-matter expert, and human resources advisor, respectively. The first two components—the commander and chief—have a relatively constant relationship and performance expectations irrespective of the unit of assignment. Although the specific mission of the unit varies between squadrons, the commander makes the decisions. The chief, as the pinnacle of enlisted development and resident expert on available mission resources, has a relatively constant role across squadrons in the superintendent role.

The first sergeant, however, can come from any other AFSC as a senior non-commissioned officer (SNCO) and fills the leadership requirement on a range of topics from health, morale, welfare, training, readiness, mentorship, and discipline. The needs of the unit and commander determine how loosely or strictly defined each of those broad categories can be interpreted.

As the focal point for readiness in the squadron charged with providing the commander a mission-ready force,¹ the first sergeant interacts with key leaders across the installation on behalf of the commander. The first sergeant must attend and serve as the commander’s proxy at the Commander’s Review Board, Sexual Assault Review Board, Community Action and Information Brief, Status of Discipline, Arming and Use of Force, Installation Staff Meeting, and Alcohol, Drug

and Treatment Program treatment team meetings, among other decision-making meetings. The first sergeant works hand-in-hand with the Chaplain Corps, Airmen and family readiness center, mental health, housing, civil engineers, security forces, family advocacy program, medical treatment facility, urinalysis program manager, base honor guard, Office of Special Investigations, inspector general, equal opportunity office, military equal opportunity office, public affairs, and many other agencies internal to the Air Force and outside support entities like Child Protective Services, Department of Corrections, Chamber of Commerce, United Way, and Red Cross. The duties of first sergeants take them across disparate resources as they attempt to uphold the belief: My business is people; everyone is my business.

The first sergeant position can reasonably be construed as important across the enterprise based on the breadth, depth, and flexibility of the scope of responsibility. Why then would the Air Force place such trust and authority integral to mission success in the office of an SNCO with little experience in the operating environment specialty code? Why would the third component of the triad not be a member of the unit who speaks the same language, shares a common developmental background, and has a similar mental map of unit needs? What is the reason for bringing in the outsider? The proposed answer of this article is in the social network utility of weak-ties and cultural cross-pollination.

First, for clarity: a weak-tie is not a pejorative. Second, this is a theoretical exploration of a deeper contextual understanding to the purpose and implications to the member, unit, and Air Force of first sergeants operating outside their career field. Unlike the Air Force model, the Army imbeds first sergeants within units derived of their primary military occupation specialty (MOS). Should the Air Force adopt the Army system? Is the current system elucidated by the complex-adaptive service culture of the Air Force?

Diversity and Weak-Ties

As in the classic “Sesame Street” song, “One of These Things Is Not Like the Others,” the first sergeant is the unmatched item. What does this mismatch mean in terms of differentiation and diversity? What is diversity, and does the first sergeant meet the criteria for adding diversity to the leadership triad? What is the effect to the member, the triad, the unit, and the Air Force? To uncover the answers to these questions, it is necessary to understand diversity and its role in the interdependent behaviors between entities.

Diversity in Context

As described by social scientist and University of Michigan complexity science professor Scott Page in his 2011 book *Diversity and Complexity*, whether in reference to biology, economy, ecology, or organizations, diversity is the “differences across types.”² In the case of the triad, both the commander and chief are derived from a similar background based on functional expertise. Since the first sergeant is not, there is differentiation across the type, and it can be viewed as diversity within this context. Although the sample size of a single individual is small, the overall impact to the three-person triad is one-third composition by diversity index. How can that diversity be measured, and what is the impact of this additive element within the triad if the first sergeant does represent a diverse element?

In complex-adaptive systems, such as the Air Force, the individual entities, rather than whole organizations, adapt to changing situations. Thus, a higher degree of heterogeneity translates into increased potential for adaptation. This predisposition toward maximum individual adaptability is expressed in the Air Force mission-command model of empowering to the lowest possible level and subscribing to centralized command with decentralized execution. The evolutionary potential for the adaptation of organizations and organisms follows similar patterns so measurement can be quantified through standard mechanisms—variation, entropy, distance, attributes, and population composition.³

In terms of the first sergeant within the triad, the most appropriate determination of differentiation is attribute measure. The commander and chief share commonalities derived from a shared developmental background and the associated cultural setting, so the differentiating factor is the first sergeant’s attributes outside of those shared, experientially-driven attributes. These typological attribute measures are useful for capturing differences between ecosystems, economies, organizations, networks, and other complex-adaptive systems.⁴ As the parameters of this article are restricted to a theoretical investigation, the application of attribute diversity indexing will be left for future researchers in this field.

In what ways does diversity impact the evolution of an organization? Evolutionary adaptation occurs through mutation, crossover, inversion, transfer, recombination, and representational diversity.⁵ There are differences between purely evolutionary systems like biology and creative processes such as organizations. The latter include intention and intelligence in the selection process that removes an element of chaos and provides a more stabilized approach. Additionally, the levels of diversity depend on the network structure, rates of adaptation, and interactions, which drive the specialization and synergistic effects of diversity.⁶

According to Scott Page, there are two specialization effects of diversity—responsiveness and competitiveness. There are also at least five synergistic effects of diversity—collective knowledge, redundancy, degeneracy, modularity, and cross-cutting cleavage. This article will address the specialization effects as well as the synergistic effects of collective knowledge, redundancy, and modularity as they are the most relevant to the discussion of the first sergeant's role in the triad.

Specialization is the increased specific ability common to complex systems. In organizational context, this means that since the rate of return on training decreases over time, the easiest tasks are learned early. More difficult tasks take longer and constitute a small segment of a job, and specialization allows individuals to become increasingly focused on the smaller segments of the tasks so as to increase overall skill. The law of requisite variety states that the level of diversity must equal the level of perturbations to maintain organizational stability. To meet that expectation, specialization in potential areas of disturbance must be developed. Since the unknown future problems will require unknown levels of diversity, such diversity must be creatively inserted into the organization intelligently with intent to mitigate those potentials. In the Air Force, this is modeled by introducing a first sergeant to the leadership triad with a dissimilar AFSC background from the other two members.

Benefits of Diversity: Resilience, Plasticity, Point of View, and Cross-Pollination

The Air Force, like any other organization, must remain responsive to internal and external environmental factors to remain dominant. As originally stated by Italian Air Force strategist Gen Giulio Douhet and subsequently adopted by the US Air Force, flexibility is the key to airpower. Continuous organizational innovation, frequently aligned with continuous process improvement, is necessary for longevity and success. Problem sets, challenges, and barriers do not remain static, nor should solutions.

Diverse entities that interact in a network or contact structure are interdependent and can stabilize and adapt resulting in a more dynamically stable organization robust to perturbations since variation moderates the effects of shocks.⁷ *Robustness*, like resilience in social constructs, is the ability of a system to maintain functionality in the face of some change or disturbance. *Stability* is the tendency of a system to return to an equilibrium given a dynamic environment.

Diversity strengthens the resiliency of an organization to negative stimuli. Diversity enhances responsiveness, the ability of the system to respond to disturbances.⁸ This capability is an extension of the law of requisite variety—the need

for specific skill sets to be available to respond to the specific type of disturbance. The potential responses must be proportionate to the diversity of disturbances so the organization can remain resilient and ready.⁹ The military uses exercises and theater campaign plans to test and execute the validity of our responsiveness to multivariate opponents across a wide spectrum of domains. To sense and meet these emerging factors and requirements, some levels of redundancy are necessary.

Redundancy and diversity are interrelated as diversity provides unique levels of redundancy rather than duplication. Consider the coverage provided by using two security alarms—one that detects motion and the other physical access. The capacity to detect an actual breach is increased based on the specialization and sensitivity of each detector so that if either fails, the other offsets the lapse to meet the intrusion disturbance. In this way, diversity-driven redundancy decreases institutional fragility and enhances robustness. This antifragility, so-called by Nassim Taleb in his economic research in the 2007 book *The Black Swan*, is an organizational reflection of the social concept of resiliency. Antifragility, as expressed through diversity in response to positive internal or external stimuli, increases the probability of emergent innovation and in response to negative internal or external stimuli, diversity increases the probability of stabilization and robustness of the organization.¹⁰ In what ways does the first sergeant's diversity in the triad specifically alter the organization of assignment?

Point of view. The individual capacity to process information is limited and is shaped by perspective and bias that sculpt how reality is partitioned and interpreted.¹¹ As stated by Scott Page, "Cultural blindness limits the ability to see how information in one context can be useful in an alternate context for a different purpose."¹² Adding a diversity element to increase group heterogeneity, such as the first sergeant within the triad, increases the partitions by adding a new perspective and bias which allows for recombinations of existing ideas in unique ways. These recombinations are a source of evolutionary innovation and organizational adaptation.

In 1998, Martin Weitzman demonstrated in his research that recombinant growth relies on the fact that even a relatively modest number of ideas produces many combinations.¹³ If even a fraction of those combinations bear fruit, then an organization can continue to innovate and grow. Thus, the injection of a single individual such as a first sergeant, into a highly interdependent structure like the triad can produce unexpected growth and innovation.

There is a limit to the effectiveness of adding elements of diversity, and it is described by *Utility Theory*. The theory defines the decreasing return on each additional differentiation element. Having an engineer on a train is important. Having two is helpful. Having 17 is unnecessary. Utility Theory asserts that the initial

differentiation has more utility than the second. In common terminology, “more is better but increasingly less so.”¹⁴ There is an optimal level of variation in a complex system, and the deciding factor is the organizational growth stage: exploration or exploitation?

Exploration and exploitation. Innovation and growth are based on exploration and exploitation described in James March’s 1991 organizational behavior model, which depicts organizations as being in one of the two information leveraging states. During exploration, research and experimentation are high whereas in exploitation, the information derived is leveraged to benefit the organization.

Organizations must explore until it is time to exploit the innovations, and in order to explore, it is imperative the widest array of diversity is available for probing of future exploitation. Failure to adapt in this manner exemplifies an organizational brittleness antithetical to resilience. In the Air Force, the inclusion of the first sergeant adds elements of diversity, flexibility, and resilience to counteract potential organizational brittleness. One of the unique characteristics of having an imbedded first sergeant is the transfer of their skills to the triad and the reverse. In fact, upon the execution of the reverse, the first sergeant can then transfer those skills across functional barriers to their previous functional alignment and work as a cross-pollination of ideas throughout the Air Force.

Cross-pollination. Do not compare apples and oranges, mix them. In ecology and organizations, some attributes from individuals and units are transferable and separable in their functions. The separability of the attributes refers to the ability of those attributes to be used in areas outside the original functional area. The sequence of attribute information being transferred to another entity as a favorable attribute strengthens the diversity of the network and improves the potential for survivability. In the context of the triad, this would be demonstrated by a first sergeant from an outside career field utilizing attributes from their previous work to meet the new functional area of the triad.

There are a multitude of unique cultures and mission-specific leadership practices and perspectives across the Air Force. These are evolutionary products of generations of Airmen honing these professional adaptations to their particular operating environments and expectations. As described in the above segment on diversity, innovation and adaptation comes through the introduction of new information. First sergeants have the opportunity to carry information from their primary AFSC to the new unit and pollinate the unit with the tools and techniques. Reciprocally, once imbedded on a series of tours outside their AFSC, when they return to their original functional assignment, first sergeants have been exposed to the tools and techniques of the host units and can carry them, like antibodies, to their primary AFSC for a better coverage of lessons-learned and

best practices across the enterprise. In this way, first sergeants can act as the enlisted version of a residency program by adopting and cross-pollinating both leadership and management skills and techniques.

This is beneficial to the squadron by leveraging a new perspective at an intermediary leadership level. Mission-command, or centralized control and decentralized execution, is hinged upon the principle of delegation to act. As such, Airmen are empowered to handle problems at the lowest possible level. So, by the time an issue reaches the squadron level, it has been iteratively addressed through increasingly expert solutions common to that unit by practitioners from front-line journeymen to seasoned flight chiefs. When it arrives at the triad then, the base can provide the decision maker with the deepest, most innovative, and nuanced solution sets. On one leg of the base is the chief, the expert in all aspects of the functionalities of the unit. On the other side, the first sergeant with a vastly different background and perspective divorced from the common bond tying the commander and chief. This level of individualized variance across types can only be reached with the flexibility to explore, innovate, and depart from expected.¹⁵

These examples, rationale, theory, and conclusions are not intended to indicate that first sergeants are the only, or even the largest progenitor, of innovation. They are a highly susceptible source for such ideas based on position and experience. The mutually beneficial exchange of information and cultural norms between individuals, units, and AFSCs described herein as cross-pollination was termed *symbiogenesis* by the ecologist Lynn Margulis in her 1967 paper.¹⁶ *Symbiogenesis* is the symbiotic envelopment of one microorganism by another whereby each one retains its integrity through a radical interdependence that enhances the functioning of both. The key terminology is *radical interdependence*, which implies a trusting relationship of vulnerability that allows each component to rely on the other in a way that improves the operations for both entities. In terms of the leadership triad, this translates to the inculcation of the first sergeant's background and experience into the new team as well as the resulting transformation achieved by the first sergeant from absorbing components of the triad's culture. Diversity then provides a significant adaptive benefit to organizations through evolutionary mechanisms, which can be scaled for utility at the triad level. Although diversity broadly describes the benefit of differentiation within an organization, this conceptual model lacks contextual specificity that incorporates the social network of the leadership triad. In order to increase the granularity of this theoretical investigation, relevant social networking models, concepts, and laws must be applied to the specific scenario of the cross-functionally aligned first sergeant operating in a trusted leadership role within the squadron triad.

Weak-Ties

Organizations are networks of interconnected people moving toward the same goal. Strong-ties are those relationships built between like-minded people of similar background with a common, shared perspective. These relationships are wrapped around a shared language, cultural norms, expectations, and perspectives.¹⁷ The strong-ties are closely knit together because of the array of similarities that bind them together. These strong-ties, so-called by Mark Granovetter because of the density and intensity of the connection points and bonds within a social network, create a tapestry of commonalities across the unit.¹⁸ Personnel within the group identify with a key characteristic of the unit, such as the Air Force ammunitions culture: “if you ain’t ammo, you ain’t...” These shared identification beliefs become ingrained in the membership and are reverberated throughout the unit to build a culture. These strong-ties are important, integral even to the construction of the focused culture of a unit toward mission success around a resolute drive and cohesive bond.¹⁹ There are significant correlations between sense-of-belonging and these social network strong-ties; however, these will not be addressed in the scope of this article.

Weak-tie relationships are those competent, confident colleagues who have infrequent interaction but have access to important information, resources, and perspectives.²⁰ In his seminal work, *The Strength of Weak-Ties*, Granovetter asked Boston West-Enders about the manner in which they secured their current employment. The findings, since replicated and in numerous domains, showed that the vast majority of people were hired based on information from people outside of their close network. These weak-tie relationships had the benefit of different knowledge, in this case alternative employment opportunities, which benefited the study participants. Since weak-ties are not beholden to the same common thought process ingrained from a shared background, weak-ties present new information or unique ways of perceiving the same information based on their differentiation.

In order to be accepted as a competent, trusted colleague despite an absence of background commonality, a visible indication distinguishing the bearer as having a special position with unique qualities can be helpful. The Air Force has made specific allowance for this potential. The French lozenge, or diamond, one of only three devices affixed to enlisted rank insignia, differentiates the first sergeant as such a trusted advisor irrespective of background.

Beyond pure innovation, what then is the benefit to diversity and a weak-tie within a social network such as the leadership triad of a unit? First sergeants, as integral members of the leadership triad of the Air Force’s top priority population segment, assert unique perspective and influence through leveraging the

diversity principles of their weak-tie affiliation. What is the benefit to the triad, unit, Air Force, and first sergeants of this weak-tie relationship? The next section explores the positive attributes of weak-ties through the lens of individual, team, unit, and network effects.

Combating Groupthink

Unit cohesion, lack of internal conflict, and smooth operations all seem like inherently good qualities and goals every unit should strive to achieve. While they are admirable qualities in moderation, too far down the scale produces a single-mindedness within a group termed *groupthink* by Irving Janis in 1971.²¹ His original research conducted to uncover the reason why intelligent, rationale individuals failed to exercise their critical thinking skills or even indicate awareness of alternatives in highly homogenous, cohesive groups led to the discovery of the social phenomena of groupthink.

All interactions have positive and negative attributes, and organizational characteristics are not immune to this balancing effect. While highly cohesive groups of similar individuals can add predictability to responses and stabilize the actions within an organization, those same groups tend towards groupthink because new information is discounted in favor of a single prevailing mental map.²² The desire to be part of the group and be perceived as fitting in overrides internal objections among members and at times can obscure the possibility of alternatives. The failure to recognize the presence of an alternative position is the hallmark of groupthink. This is true across many industries and is irrespective of educational background, socioeconomic status, political affiliation, or any other social differentiating factor. In healthcare, employees are empowered to request a “time-out” to highlight anything that seems amiss, to protect patients. After several highly-publicized medical procedure errors, including the errant amputation of the wrong leg of a patient in 2007, these processes were instituted as an acknowledgment of the power of groupthink.

The limiting parameter to groupthink in organizations is the nature of complex, diverse systems to become adaptive through natural departures from norms.²³ Diversity, such as introduced by weak-tie relationships, does not synchronize with the commonality of the perspectives and assumptions of homogeneous group members. As such, they provide impedance to the sheep mentality of unquestioned agreement since they are uniquely positioned to observe the incongruences within a system. This vision further adds innovative capacity to the system in the form of a competent, trusted colleague which forces the group to acknowledge the presence of an alternative. This aspect is in direct contradiction to groupthink and

serves to inoculate the organization from the negative aspects by amplifying differences rather than balancing them.

Units without the capacity to see alternative pathways risk stagnation since change requires new information or new perspectives. Adaptation can occur from the addition, subtraction, or recombination of materials and information to produce differing results. In the case of natural sciences, the change in number and combination of cells alters the created organism from human to rabbit. The determinant factor is the manner in which the cells are combined. In terms of organizational characteristics, creating an ecology of innovation requires access to new information or mechanisms to combine existing information in new ways. Even in an appropriately primed environment, for innovation to occur the success is largely dependent on the quality of interactive resonance between the strong and weak-ties of the triad. Interactive resonance is the reverberation, in this instance an idea, across functional components and the increasing intensity of the reverberation based on resonance. This is representative of the grinding of two tectonic plates together and the resultant structural movement that is amplified by the height of a structure, such as a hotel, during an earthquake. Developing a high degree of interactive resonance requires individuals with very different backgrounds and very different experiences interact in meaningful ways. These prerequisites for interactive resonance are achieved in the Air Force through imbedding personnel with different background AFSCs in the core leadership triad of the fundamental unit of the Air Force.

Can We Get an Expert Opinion?

If the leadership triad is important, and the first sergeant plays a critical role in the triad where weak-ties leverage diversity principles, and diversity enhances innovation, what is the role of expertise? If the first sergeant does not understand the operations as well as an indigenous SNCO, would that asset be a better addition to the triad? This thought process underscores the Army integration of first sergeants operating within their primary MOS.

The Air Force first sergeant is required to understand the unit mission well enough to recognize the implications of any recommendations or advice they provide regarding unit members and the impact to the mission.²⁴ That rationale only addresses the requirement for first sergeants to maintain a moderate level of operational understanding. It does not adequately respond to the question of an expert SNCO in the role instead of a weak-tie. In answering that position, the following December 2017 interview response by Evan Apfelbaum, a Massachusetts Institute of Technology Sloan School of Business professor, is particularly relevant, “difference trumps higher skill levels in homogenous teams, creating bet-

ter performance as well as more accurate prediction of trends.”²⁵ In social network studies, it has been determined that groups of diverse individuals outperform higher intelligence individuals and homogenous groups of higher intelligence people on complex tasks. If the task is mechanical in nature and can be relegated to algorithmic logic without sophisticated problem-solving or critical thinking skills, greater intelligence and experience win. If the problem requires a solution beyond rote mechanistic ability, then diversity surpasses intelligence for complex task completion. This was notably captured in the Duncker Candle Test, originally performed in 1945 and subsequently reproduced at a variety of universities. In the course of the test, individuals with a high IQ were given a problem to solve that required analytic and critical thinking skills. Separately, a group of average to below average IQ individuals with moderate levels of emotional intelligence and diversity were presented the same problem. In the majority of instances, the solution time of the second group was much faster than the highly intelligent group.

If diversity has such a profound impact, then should we inject the highest degree of diversity into the unit in order to maximize innovative potential? In order for any of the positive attributes of innovation to take effect, there has to be parameters to contain and focus the ideas. Chiefs act in this capacity to assess the feasibility of the ideas through the lens of their deep knowledge and network inter-cohesion for social, mental models, resource, and practices. The chiefs act as the counterbalance in the triad to the first sergeants by determining the practicality of the recombinations, additions, and subtractions due to their deep expertise in the field.

Network Effect

If first sergeants are operating as weak-ties within the triad as agents for diversity and innovation, what is the network effect to the unit and Air Force? Is the relevance a linear ratio, or does it conform to exponential power laws? To better understand the impact of the first sergeant weak-tie application and whether it is extended across the Air Force enterprise, consideration must be given to the principles governing networks.

In the early 1980s, Robert Metcalfe presented the original idea behind what later became known as Metcalfe’s Law of Network Utility while working to understand the connectivity within the Ethernet. Metcalfe originally posited the rate at which networks related to the number of nodes increased. Over the course of several decades in research, this was determined as the power law describing network utility. The law has come to describe the exponential increase in social network utility as well as machine-based utility functions. Metcalfe’s Law governs the addition of a node within the network. The nodes, in the instance of social networks, are representative of the interconnections between personnel.

As the homogeneity of a unit increases, the number of repetitious interconnections increases. However, with the introduction of a weak-tie, a new set of unrelated nodes are connected to the network. The relationship of this new nodal interconnectivity and the resultant utility of the network does not have a correlational linear relation. Instead, the new nodes, because they have a series of unfathomable interconnections beyond the superficial introduction to the weak-tie network, bears exponential characteristics based on power laws. Specifically, the square of the new node is the increase in utility value to the overall network or as described by Beckstrom's Law of Network Theory, "the value of a network equals the net value added to each user's transactions conducted through that networked, summed over all users." Thus, incorporating the first sergeant as a weak-tie within the leadership triad exponentially increases their network utility through the unit's access to unique, new connections.

Synthesis

The intent of this article is not prescriptive in nature but rather as a facilitation for understanding the underlying potential of existing organizational structures unique to the Air Force. The conclusion of the theoretical investigation is that the squadron is an important component of the Air Force and the leadership team—the triad—impacts the direction of the squadron. The first sergeant is an integral part of the squadron triad with an intentionally different background, suggesting creative intelligence in the structure of the triad and lends elements of diversity as measured through attributes. Diversity positively impacts the innovation and robustness of the squadron by increasing specializations for responsiveness and competitiveness as well as synergies. The first sergeant, as a unique network subset of diversity in social mediums referred to as weak-ties, leverages the diversity principles through application of exploration and exploitation, point of view partition differentiation, recombination, and attribute transference through cross-pollination at the individual, organizational, and functional levels of the Air Force.

First sergeants, as weak-ties in one network and strong-ties in another, apply experiences and perspectives in both their temporary and permanent environments to affect adaptation through interactive resonance that impacts the cultural capacity and innovative disposition of both units. Although they are not the only source of new ideas and do not necessarily generate them at all, the potential for creating such an environment by imbedding them in the leadership team increases. These innovations can come in the form of alternative approaches to persistent issues, resource recombination for organizational change, disciplinary assessment adjustments, or other mechanisms. First sergeants can affect these changes by using weak-tie network strengths and diversity principles through interactive

resonance, exponentially increasing the information and connectivity of their assignment. Additionally, returning first sergeants to their career fields allows that acquired knowledge from the squadrons they were assigned to be cross-pollinated throughout new career fields, so the impact is broadened. In this way, it is possible for first sergeants to increase the lethality of the force, revitalize the squadrons, and enhance readiness within their spheres of influence and beyond. 🌟

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Notes

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