A Case Study of What Was at Stake During the USS Roosevelt’s Covid-19 Outbreak
Navigating the Tensions of Leading Under Conditions of Crisis and Uncertainty

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Abstract

This article examines two leadership cases of Captain Brett Crozier and Acting Secretary of the Navy Thomas Modly during the crisis caused by Covid-19 conditions aboard the USS Theodore Roosevelt. Based on consideration of over 1,400 definitions of leadership and examining leadership literature published in the 10 top-tier journals between 2000–2020, the research team further explored 74 leadership domains. Transformational, adaptive, authentic, destructive, and toxic leadership were selected as frameworks for analysis of the cases. The study showed that Crozier’s leadership aligned more with adaptive, authentic, and transformational frameworks while Modly’s words and actions embodied more elements of transactional, destructive, and toxic leadership. In the face of ethical and leadership challenges, Modly and the Navy put forth shifting narratives and justifications for their actions, while Crozier’s message remained steadfast and clear. The study concludes by noting how Crozier’s values and actions hold more promise for leading under conditions of crisis and uncertainty by modeling classical Aristotelian concepts of arete and phronesis—dimensions of ethos—accounting for how individuals respond to critical moments in the life of a community in authentic, adaptive, and transformational ways.

Keywords: adaptive, authentic, character, destructive, leadership, toxic, transformational, crisis
Introduction

On March 31, 2020, the San Francisco Chronicle published a letter from Captain Brett Crozier, commander of the nuclear aircraft carrier, USS Theodore Roosevelt, pleading with his superiors for relief for his Sailors who were at risk of contracting the Covid-19 virus. After touring the Pacific to demonstrate the US commitment to defend regional allies, the aircraft carrier had docked in Da Nang, Vietnam for a scheduled stop. Within days of leaving Da Nang, one person was diagnosed with the Covid-19 virus after returning to the ship. Given the cramped quarters of the aircraft carrier the virus began to spread quickly. Crozier pleaded with his immediate superior, Rear Admiral Stuart P. Baker, commander of the multi-ship task force (including the Roosevelt) to address the issue in a scheduled visit to Guam. However, the chain of command could not take immediate action due to the unprecedented crisis. Tensions between Crozier and Baker “prompted Crozier to send a four-page letter pleading for help.”1 Initially, Crozier had followed the chain of command notifying his superiors of his situation. However, the letter was sent as an unclassified email to ten Navy personnel (sent to three admirals and courtesy copied to seven other captains) and subsequently leaked to the press.2 Crozier’s concise reasoning for his urgent request, quoted widely, brought public criticism of the Navy. Crozier wrote, “we are not at war. Sailors do not need to die. If we do not act now, we are failing to take care of our most trusted asset—our sailors.”3

The publicity portrayed the Navy as callous and unresponsive in the face of the Covid-19 crisis. Acting Secretary of the Navy Thomas B. Modly was “furious” with Crozier’s actions and decided to relieve him of his command. He justified the decision with the claim that Crozier had shown “extremely poor judgment.” However, when Crozier departed the ship, his crew gave him a warm send off, clearly indicating enthusiastic support for his leadership. Videos of the sendoff circulated in social media, further embarrassing Modly and the administration. In an attempt to respond directly to the situation, Modly flew from Washington, DC to Guam—a 35-hour flight, which cost American taxpayers $243,116.65—spoke for 15 minutes to the crew and then departed, a move that “stunned Pentagon officials.”4 A week later, in the aftermath of the negative publicity of his response, Modly submitted a letter of resignation to Secretary of Defense Mark Esper.

These two examples of leadership practice merit close examination for the lessons they offer in how to respond effectively, first under conditions of uncertainty and second, from within a hierarchy of authority that simultaneously authorizes command of those below and requires respect of command.
from those above. Electronic versions of the documents containing the words of the key actors in the cases, e.g., official memos or recordings of speeches served as the artifacts for study. We examined the letter Crozier initially sent to his superiors asking for guidance and his subsequent letter that was leaked to the public after the first request for medical support was unanswered. We looked at documents detailing Modly’s actions after the leaked letter, his fifteen-minute speech to the crew of the Roosevelt, and news coverage of the event. Additionally, we examined Admiral Burke’s investigation report, Admiral Gilday’s endorsement, and roughly 1,800 pages of investigative documents contained in the report’s appendices. Examining the controversy using these artifacts provided a rich source of exchanges that illustrate the competing value systems reflected in the messages and actions of the two leaders as well as the subsequent actions taken by the Navy and Department of Defense.

First, we establish that Crozier faced extraordinary challenges in confronting the Covid-19 crisis aboard the Roosevelt to describe the leadership demands of the situation. Second, drawing on an interdisciplinary review of leadership literature, we present and apply two models of leadership, one that represents positive or constructive leadership qualities of Crozier and one that reflects a more negative or destructive type of leadership in the actions of Modly. Third, we illustrate how the political context revealed Crozier’s positive leadership values in responding to the crisis and how those of Modly were motivated by self-interest. Fourth, we present a model of ethical leadership that advances a reflective thinking process by which leaders must navigate complicated situations and competing tensions to show how Crozier’s words and actions constituted leadership practices capable of holding communities together in times of crisis and uncertainty. Fifth, we examine Burke’s final report, which has not hitherto been done in a critical manner. Finally, we discuss the actions previously addressed in terms of leadership concepts drawn from Aristotle’s Rhetoric to explain the role communication plays in enacting noble values. We close our study by discussing what is at stake in choosing between these models of leadership and how difficult it is to balance the demands of serving those below and above one in the chain of command.

Part 1: Leading Under Conditions of Uncertainty and Crisis

The complexity of Crozier’s situation justified the interdisciplinary approach of combining leadership and communication. Crozier faced a problem where he lacked absolute power over an organization but held enormous power within a hierarchy of leadership often infused with some degree of politics. While Crozier commanded the crew of the nuclear aircraft carrier—a
command of great responsibility for the power the ship held as a military asset, the investment of national resources the ship represented, and the role it played within the task force—he was only one commander of many ships in the task force. Also, he answered to a chain of command that superseded him; he could not speak or act in any way that impeded or undermined his commander’s intent and the missions assigned to him as a commander within the task force without risking his commitment to the chain of command. Therefore, his communication practices as a leader had to both command the respect of those he led and respect the power of those he served.

Crozier’s situation also required him to adapt to the situation that had evolved from fulfilling his mission with a stop in Da Nang and scheduled maintenance in Guam while conducting routine standard operating procedures to an unprecedented health crisis on board the ship. The pandemic threatened the ship’s combat readiness within the multi-ship task force and generated uncertainty among the crew, other commanders in the task force, and the military hierarchy within which Crozier’s authority was situated. Crozier could not rely on routine communication practices to lead in this situation because it required him to adapt in a competent way to serve both the health needs of his crew and the military chain of command, a balancing act of concerns where the failure to communicate effectively might make a difficult situation worse.

In times of uncertainty, authenticity is required for leaders to be believed as credible, trustworthy, competent, and concerned about the values that hold a community together in relation to a common purpose. Trust is essential in the face of the unknown; competence in action and expression is tested as one makes critical decisions about what to do and how to speak to others. Therefore, to respond to the crisis, Crozier was required to constitute followership by speaking truthfully to his crew and by speaking truth to his immediate superiors in the chain of command. Depending on the situation, leadership concepts drawn from the traditions of transformation, adaptation, and authenticity promise to illustrate how Crozier’s messages responded effectively to the complex situation of growing uncertainty.

The next section presents two models of leadership, a positive one reflecting the actions of Crozier and a second one that shows the destructive effects of Modly’s actions during the crisis. Our goal is to show how the situation faced by Crozier drew on the positive qualities of authentic, transformational, and adaptive leadership.
Part 2: Two Models of Leadership

We conceptualize leadership as performed, and the actions respond to the needs of human beings in each situation or over time to achieve common goals. Leadership outcomes are “beyond and yet through person and process, leadership is manifest at any given moment in the field to guide and advance right action.” Defined as more than just occupying a position or having a title as a figure of authority, leadership hopes to positively influence others, build a common vision to address problems, and lift the collective morale of others.

For this case study, leadership is less about a title and more about how leaders use their power, position, and role in influencing others to act under conditions of uncertainty. Leaders must use their communication practices to constitute positive identity and relationships for organizational members, to create change, to adapt to evolving situations, and to reflect authenticity as a human being who cares about those one leads.

Values are embedded in narratives leaders share with followers and followers share about their leaders; the words and actions of leaders enact the values of the community. Communication exchanges between leaders and followers reveal common purpose held by members of communities and organizations. When leaders and followers share common values and evaluate reciprocal actions as observing and renewing such commitments they function as powerful orientations to ethical action, and because such meanings are shared by the team, organization, or community, they constitute a kind of invisible resource that leaders and followers can draw upon in times of crisis and uncertainty. Kegan and Lahey distinguish between agreements that enforce values and agreements that hold the potential for transformation and development of members of an organization. Narratives such as codes of conduct are designed for controlling others, a kind of technical solution to behaviors that fall outside the values of an organization. Such an example of a technical narrative can be seen in the final report from Burke, who claimed Crozier’s performance did not meet the standards of a naval officer. In contrast, we would argue that where narratives of shared agreements exist—because they create trust, orient others to right action, and inspire members to aspire to high standards—help individuals reach their greater potential as human beings in an organization. The case study will show that Crozier’s words and actions reflected a narrative of shared agreement.

The values of leaders are often expressed in messages to followers, and followers are often sensitive to how consistent leaders’ messages are with their actions. Leaders and followers who draw on these narratives and whose behavior is consistent with these narratives, “walk the talk.” The values of an
organization are evident in the way the members of the organization speak and act, are reciprocally renewed (or called into question), and when widely shared as authentic commitments in the words and deeds of both leaders and followers exist as a resource that leaders can appeal to in times of crisis and uncertainty. Leadership absent these qualities fails to serve the needs of the community one leads, especially in times of crisis and uncertainty. In closing our study, we will note how the administration’s narrative undermined the values of shared agreement essential to the well-being of military services.

The research team drew on theoretical frameworks developed for a leadership curriculum tailored for military personnel. Based on an examination over 1,400 definitions of leadership and examining leadership literature published in the 10 top-tier journals between 2000–2020, the team explored 74 leadership domains.\(^\text{11}\)

**Positive Leadership**

Three well-established theoretical frameworks for positive leadership transactions emerged to explain Crozier’s leadership performance: 1) transformational, 2) adaptive, 3) and authentic leadership. To account for the effect of Modly’s communication with the crew of the Roosevelt, we utilized concepts drawn from literature describing destructive leadership, also known as toxic leadership.

**Transformational Leadership**

Transformational leadership centers on how a leader creates positive changes in work performance to benefit both the worker and the organization and is done in a way that is both positive and strengthens or raises individual and group morality.\(^\text{12}\) Transformational leaders empower followers to be creative and motivate them to reach their full potential by achieving goals beyond normal expectations.\(^\text{13}\) The four components that include key behaviors and actions of transformational leadership are: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. Transformational leaders are felt to be charismatic that goes beyond simply grabbing the attention of followers. These charismatic leaders inspire others to commit to a shared vision for the larger organization and deliberately develop the leadership capacity of others. Leaders that are transformative garner a deep trust from subordinates that inspires, motivates, and empowers others to perform beyond their own perceived abilities. Consequently, the morale, values, motivation, and performance of followers are raised to a higher level of moral ground.
One outcome of effective transformational leadership is the shared pursuit of a common objective or collective pursuit of organizational aims. One can think of this outcome as a distributed vision of what the organization aspires toward. The common purpose to rally people and their strengths is used to emphasize how the role of leadership is crucial for organizational success; when rallying around the common objective, the role of leadership can be taken up by anyone regardless of position or title. This “realm of leadership and action encompasses a wholeness of purpose and the transformation of people, wisdom and values within the group, ethics of the purpose, means and ends, and limitless possibilities.”

The role of leadership and the strengths of individuals are emphasized over titles of leader and follower. The “collective capacity” to achieve a common purpose adeptly becomes a motivating force between people. Sometimes this is discussed as invisible leadership, where a leader's vision contributes to eight factors of influence: self-selection/attraction, commitment or ownership, influence/inspiration to contribute, bond among participants, self-agency, taking action or leadership visibly, rising above self-interest, and utilizing opportunities and resources.

Adaptive Leadership

Adaptive leadership is about mobilizing people to tackle tough challenges in organizations, life, and the larger systems in which we operate and, ultimately, thrive; a metaphor of getting on the balcony and being on the dance floor is used to illustrate the duality of challenges; real leadership is about doing both at the same time to focus on diagnosing the situation to face the adaptive challenge (maintaining enough heat for people to do the work in a productive zone of disequilibrium) versus providing technical solutions. Adaptive leadership requires the “productive interaction of different values through which each member or faction in a society sees reality and its challenges.” The adaptive leader clarifies values in conflict and brings attention to progress on closing the gap between values. Therefore, adaptive work is made up of the learning required to identify and speak to the conflict in values with the aim of closing the gap and simultaneously discovering new ways of tackling tough problems. Authority is the actual conferral of power to others to perform a service that includes direction, protection, orientation to role and place, control of conflict, and norm maintenance. In the face of anxiety, it brings equilibrium, and lessens anxiety. Authority can be further defined as power with position as the currency and the capacity to manage the holding environment. Before the adaptive work can begin, the leader must distinguish between technical and adaptive work. Leadership with au-
authority shows adaptive capacity in identifying the adaptive challenge by fram-
ing key issues, disclosing external threats, disorienting current roles, exposing
conflict or letting it emerge, and challenging norms. Without exercising au-
thority through adaptive leadership, the collective capacity of any organiza-
tion or society cannot be achieved.

**Authentic Leadership**

Initially, authentic leadership was about how leaders display transparency
through actions regardless of the situation and viewed as a foundational con-
cept in positive leadership, authentic leadership has influenced transforma-
tional, ethical, and servant leadership. While authentic leadership has a
strong moral developmental focus of the leader for the development of au-
thenticity in followers, authentic leaders are aware of their strengths and
weaknesses and are acutely present to knowledge, beliefs, and values of self
and others. The theory has evolved to examine how leaders bring their au-
thentic self to the various roles they perform in life, i.e., transparency in ac-
tion versus transparency of self. While there are tensions between compet-
ing viewpoints on the intrapersonal, interpersonal, and transparency aims,
authentic leaders are considered self-aware, process positive, and capable of
engaging in reflective thinking to enhance their leadership practices.

**Destructive Leadership**

Destructive leadership is the systematic and repeated behaviors of leaders
that undermine and destroy the motivation, interest, and well-being of oth-
ers, including messages that sabotage organizational goals, resources, and ef-
fectiveness. A leader with Toxic Leadership Syndrome abuses others with
their authority for their own self-interest, which is both individually and or-
ganizationally harmful. Three commonly agreed upon elements of a toxic
leader are: lack of concern for the well-being of subordinates, a personality
(behavior) that negatively impacts others/the organization, and a belief by
subordinates that the leader is motivated out of self-interest. The term “toxic
leadership” is linked with several dysfunctional leadership behaviors. Toxic
leaders are poisonous to others and the organization as they use their posi-
tional power to control situations in ineffective ways. In the military, toxic
leaders are individuals who, by their behaviors and regard for self over others,
inflict immediate and enduring harm on the individuals, units, larger institu-
tions, and even the nations that they lead.

A case study approach was used to investigate the complex human actions
consisting of leadership and communication to understand the phenomenon
of leadership. To illustrate the “rich and holistic account of the phenomenon,” we examined the words and behaviors of two key leaders—Crozier and Modly—using the six frameworks of leadership and values. We were interested in how the meaning of the actors was “best captured through the use of qualitative nuances of its expression in ordinary language.”

Case #1: Crozier’s Leadership: Adaptive, Authentic, and Transformational

We do not know for certain what words Crozier may have shared to the crew of the Roosevelt about the crisis of the Covid-19 outbreak onboard, but we do have two documents that contain the words Crozier sent to ten fellow Navy personnel that were published in news outlets where the Sailors and crew of the Roosevelt were able to read them. These words articulated a response that embodied transformational leadership and an adaptive approach to a complex problem with Crozier presenting his thoughts and concerns in an authentic way. The fact that hundreds or more Sailors gave Crozier a cheering ovation when he debarked the ship after being relieved of command is evidence that the Sailors of the Roosevelt viewed the content and message of those documents in a very positive manner.

Crozier appealed to the pride of Sailors and fellow naval officers by stating up front and unequivocally in both documents that if required the Roosevelt could “set sail and be ready to fight and beat any adversary that dares challenge the US or [it’s] allies” as a statement of inspirational motivation. And yet at the same time, Crozier demonstrated deep care and concern for his Sailors. He pleaded that keeping “over 4,000 young men and women on board the TR is an unnecessary risk and breaks faith with those Sailors entrusted to our care” and that remaining on ship was “putting Sailors’ lives at risk.” He then explained the inadequacies of the quarantine areas and isolation rooms and stated that every Sailor on the ship regardless of rank should be considered “close contact” according to Navy Administration. In the memo, Crozier went ever further in detailing the facets of life on the Roosevelt that made its environment highly conducive to the spread of Covid-19: “large amounts of Sailors in a confined space; open, shared berthing; shared restroom facilities; confined, shared workspaces and computers; shared messing for large numbers; meals cooked/food provided by exposed personnel,” and other tasks demanding consistent close contact.
ation makes it clear that Crozier understands the reality and concerns his Sailors faced about remaining on the ship.

Crozier also acknowledged his own failure in handling the outbreak with honest reflection saying,

I fully realize that I bear responsibility for not demanding more decisive action at the moment we pulled in, but at this point my only priority is the continued well-being of the crew and embarked staff. As you know, the accountability of a Commanding Officer is absolute, and I believe if there ever is a time to ask for help it is now regardless of the impact on my career.  

The self-awareness and vulnerability shared in that statement to his peers and supervisors showed Crozier as an authentic leader with genuine care and concern for his people and becomes a powerful statement transforming others to a higher level of self-worth.

Crozier's call to his fellow officers invoked elements of transformational leadership as motivation and foundation for moral action. He promoted wholeness of purpose in reassuring them of the war fighting and readiness capability of the Roosevelt despite the pandemic and addressing them with, “Fellow Naval Aviators, it is with the utmost respect that I write to you requesting assistance. I consider all of you incredible leaders and I’d gladly follow you into battle whenever needed.” At the same time, he appealed to their sense of stewardship as captains over their Sailors by referring to Sailors as their “most trusted asset,” further appealed to this purpose by saying “we owe it to the thousands of Sailors onboard, and those outside watching, to take decisive action now.” This kind of invocation of Sailors and their loved ones serves as a clear example of Crozier working to build a “collective capacity” to achieve the higher purpose of caring for the Sailors of the Roosevelt.  

The situation represented an adaptive problem: Crozier faced imminent spread of Covid-19 on board a very crowded aircraft carrier that was docked at a US territory with its own local laws and customs and which was also undergoing its own lockdown in response to the Coronavirus. Normal Naval staffing processes for finding accommodations for sailors on land were unable to find adequate lodging for the vast number of Sailors on the carrier, meanwhile the knowledge about the Coronavirus’ contagiousness from cases like the Diamond Princess cruise ship was increasingly painting a dire picture of the likelihood of widespread infection on the Roosevelt. “All efforts to date have been inadequate and are unnecessarily putting Sailors lives at risk,” he wrote as he faced the dilemma of needing to debark all but roughly 500 of the over 4,000 sailors to maintain readiness at the expense of showing vulnerabil-
ity on one of 11 US aircraft carriers deployed near one of the country’s near-peer adversaries. The situation exposed a gap in values between notions of acceptable loss in a military organization versus protecting human assets. The situation required an adaptive solution to clarify values with the hope of mobilizing the additional assistance Crozier required. Crozier sought to close the gap in values in very plain terms with his message: “we are not at war, and therefore cannot allow a single Sailor to perish as a result of this pandemic unnecessarily,” later reiterating again “a war is not imminent.”

The statement was clear: the value set of acceptable loss that justified keeping Sailors in dangerous close quarters for readiness was based on circumstances of imminent conflict that, in Crozier’s eyes, were not present. We do not know what internal conversations and discussions came from Crozier’s call for help. We do not know why Crozier felt that he could not issue a direct order not to make the memo public, or why he did not inquire about updates on Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidelines for accommodations in Guam, or why he did not use top secret channels, or why he choose to neglect to include the fleet commander in his email. It seems like those actions would be an easy fix. A great deal of Burke’s report appears to be a political decision in search of a post facto justification (but obviously not all). Was Crozier trying to draw attention to the situation that might embarrass leadership? Crozier claimed he had not intended for the email to be made public, but what we do know is the memo was leaked to, and published by the San Francisco Chronicle on March 31. On April 1, the Navy ordered the Roosevelt evacuated with a skeleton crew to remain on board, and on April 2 Acting Secretary of the Navy Modly relieved Crozier of his command. Overall, the analysis indicates that despite unanswered questions, Crozier’s words and actions aligned more with adaptive, authentic, and transformational leadership attributes. After several days of Crozier’s name in the press as the one attempting to manage the crisis, it then became Modly’s name and actions in the spotlight.

**Case #2: Modly’s Response—Exemplification of Destructive Leadership**

The Navy defines leadership as “the art, science, or gift by which a person is enabled and privileged to direct the thoughts, plans, and actions of others in such a manner as to obtain and command their obedience, their confidence, their respect, and their loyal cooperation.” Leadership, then, would include the influence and relationships among leaders and followers who intend changes that reflect shared purpose. Here, we argue that Modly’s re-
response to the situation destroyed morale, damaged relationships, and wors-
ened the already challenging situation. To account for the negative response
to Modly’s message, we turn to concepts derived from the study of destructive
leadership.

The destructive and toxic nature of Modly’s leadership can be observed in
his actions and words, his interactions with Crozier and the Roosevelt crew,
and in how the US Navy finally responded to the mess Modly made. Upon
arrival, Modly spoke to the crew for 15 minutes, criticized Crozier as naïve
and stupid, and indicated that they did not need to like Crozier (although it
seemed from the video of the sendoff that the crew deeply respected Crozier).
The New York Times reported that when the speech was over, “Mr. Modly had
effectively drawn an invisible line between him and the more than 4,800 crew
members of the Roosevelt, one crew member said.”43 Another stated that “Mr.
Modly did not tour the ship, and practically no one, especially those in the
lower ranks, even saw him. He was gone in less than 30 minutes” and did not
answer any of the questions the crew had submitted before his arrival.44 His
words as well as the crew’s reactions to his speech circulated in press reports
and on social media, painting an unfavorable picture of the moment.

The combination of Modly’s actions and words created a destructiveness
that was immediately felt across the ship and reverberated across the water to
shores of the United States.45 The flight to deliver the remarks in person to a
disheartened crew, the quick, cold delivery of the speech, the refusal of an-
swering questions in an authentic way, the rapid departure without interact-
ing with the crew—these actions were transactional in nature and void of the
transformational nature and inspirational motivation of constructive leader-
ship. The collective transactions and the lack of understanding of what kind
of leadership was needed in the moment all contributed to fertile grounds for
the destructive nature of toxic leadership. Modly was destructive in how he
sabotaged Crozier and tarnished relationships and morale. Power comes from
inspiring a common vision in transforming others to a higher level of actions
and self-worth. Yet, Modly choose to act with power from positional author-
ity, which manifested in authority without leadership and in a “power-over”
instead of a “power-with” attitude.46

There was a clear difference in the common objective shared by those in
uniform and those who viewed the situation from afar. Adaptive leadership
calls us to understand both the adaptive challenges of our times and the dif-
fering sets of values in play. Modly responded with a technical solution (firing
Crozier) to the adaptive challenge on the Roosevelt that caused the pandemic.
He did not understand the different sets of values and did not take the neces-
sary leader actions to close gaps around the values held by the people in uni-
form and his own values that stemmed from positional authority. His actions towards self-interest to make a stand and demean the character of Crozier and the US Navy in general were superimposed over the health and safety of the people on board the ship. Lacking a sense of judgment about timing, Modly failed to address the real challenge and the opportunity for moral excellence (arete) and prudence (phronesis) were also lost.

Modly’s words may have caused the worst damage, as the values of the Navy, the culture of the crew, and a model of good leadership were not spoken to nor lived in how the speech came alive. The approximately 2,480 words in Modly’s speech to the crew contained the word leadership twice, and there was a lack of a clear foundation of values or leadership inherent in Navy regulations or Naval leadership, education, and training manuals. Modly makes a claim of not wanting to be disruptive, yet it is the tone of the speech along with the reactions of Roosevelt’s crew that tells the destructive nature of his communication patterns. With words like “naïve” and “stupid,” the tone of the speech was an insensitive admonishment to Crozier while talking down to the crew. Unlike their positive relationship with Crozier, Modly’s hostility is extended to and felt by the crew. During the speech, crew members can be heard jeering and expressing verbal reactions like “He [Crozier] was only trying to help us.” The humiliation, lack of concern for the well-being of the crew, the negative impacts on the crew and the Navy, and an increasing belief by many that Modly acted out of self-interest using his positional authority resulted in his actions being felt beyond Crozier and the crew. Modly’s immediate and enduring harm effectively drew a red line of toxicity that Navy leadership responded to within days.

What was seen, heard, and felt by many was poor leadership or, at best, leadership without character. The lack of moral excellence and ethos as a leader calls Modly’s character into question. Two days after Modly returned stateside from disparaging the crew, the Secretary of the Navy and the Secretary of Defense accepted Modly’s resignation. Modly would no longer play a role in the story, yet his actions and suspicions about his motives continued to influence the Navy’s reaction to the incident.

Part 3: Leadership Interests vs. Political Interests

The decision to relieve Crozier of his command developed into competing narratives to account for Crozier’s leadership and the administration’s actions. Here, we show that the Administration’s narrative used to justify disciplinary action shifted over time—undermining its consistency—was flawed in its final form, and that Crozier’s narrative remained consistent and reasonable.
While civilian leaders always have the power to remove military officers from command, the question to ask is which leadership narrative should citizens and soldiers choose, and on what basis? To answer the question, the section after this discussion of political interests offers a deeper examination by unpacking two sets of ethics and leadership tensions at play using an ethical leadership framework. After demonstrating the ethical qualities of Crozier’s leadership values, we close the paper by arguing that his behavior offers a model of leadership practices that should be preferred over those demonstrated by Modly and the prior administration for their capacity to hold communities together in times of great uncertainty and crisis.

The Administration’s Shifting Narrative

The Department of Defense comments about, and reactions to, the crisis unfolding on the Roosevelt evolved in a manner that suggests they were responding to the political needs of the Trump administration. The initial response of superiors was of immediate support and based on limited knowledge of the various actors and their activities. Next, a narrative was advanced that began admitting an irregular procedure but asserted that when an officer is accused of serious shortcomings an investigation usually takes place before they are potentially relieved of command. This narrative, too, seemed supportive of Crozier in that it espoused due diligence of an investigation and gave him presumptive innocence pending findings that say otherwise. Shortly thereafter, however, Modly relieved Crozier of command before the completion of an investigation. After Modly’s resignation, a preliminary Naval inquiry recommended Crozier’s reinstatement, but this report was not acted on immediately and was left for review in the Department of Defense.49 There is some speculation that Naval leaders were trying to figure out what would please the president and hesitated to act on restoring Crozier to command as they pursued wider inquiry into the actions taken on the Roosevelt.50 The Department of Defense then called for a more extensive investigation that would take longer and involve a systematic investigation by the Navy, which ultimately produced a detailed report that sought to justify removing Crozier from command.

Modly’s justifications for firing Crozier do not stand up well to critical scrutiny. He defended firing Crozier for writing the letter as a violation of the chain of command but then proffered the inconsistent argument that “it would be a mistake to view this decision as somehow not supportive of your duty to report problems, request help, protect your crews, challenge assumptions as you see fit.”51 The message here seems contradictory and incoherent,
as if some other reason for firing Crozier was at play, and perhaps it was. The changing political desires of the president might explain Modly’s shift from immediate support for Crozier to his criticism in 48 hours after the email was published and ultimately to Modly firing Crozier before the investigation was complete despite being advised by naval officers that an investigation usually precedes such decisions. Moreover, it would also explain his 180-degree turn after his comments on the Roosevelt stirred up more public criticism of the firing. Seven hours after speaking to the crew of the Roosevelt he stated, “I stand by every word,” but then the next day he reversed himself, saying “I do not think Captain Brett Crozier is naive nor stupid. I think and always believed him to be the opposite.” Speculation about his motives was widespread in the press. David Ignatius reported that Acting Secretary of Navy Modly’s decision might have been motivated by political considerations:

It is not clear what role Trump may have played in Crozier’s ouster. Modly told one colleague Wednesday, the day before he announced the move: “Breaking news: Trump wants him fired.” Defense Secretary Mark T. Esper apparently obtained White House approval for a preliminary investigation into Crozier’s conduct, a probe that Modly preempted with the firing. Esper appears to have left the final decision about how to handle the matter to Modly, who last month was passed over as Trump’s permanent choice for the job.

Media coverage, however, has noted that the political implications of the decision to relieve Crozier of command also affected how the Navy and the public make sense of the controversy going forward:

The three-month saga of the Theodore Roosevelt also offers a window into how the military has tried to adjust to the wishes of an unpredictable commander in chief. Captain Crozier was fired in part because of fears that President Trump wanted him gone, and not knowing how the president feels about reinstating the captain has cast a shadow over the Navy’s actions ever since.

Rather than placing Modly’s initial response to Crozier’s action in context, Burke’s report only acknowledged Modly’s initial decision to relieve Crozier of command and conceded that the investigation was directed to avoid discussion of Modly’s actions: “This investigation was not directed to evaluate the A- SN’s decision to fire the Teddy Roosevelt Commanding Officer, and in fact, in briefing, the investigating team was counseled to specifically stay away from this topic.” Placing Modly’s actions out of bounds prevented a consideration of the larger political forces that might have been at play in these cir-
cumstances leaving questions about leadership practices in such difficult situations unexplored by the military’s leaders.

**Political Concerns Trumped Concerns for Personnel**

Such political considerations were raised when Secretary of the Navy Kenneth J. Braithwaite and Chief of Naval Operations Admiral Michael M. Gilday presented the report of the investigation completed by Admiral Burke. The shifting narratives and timing of his firing suggest that the decision to relieve Crozier was not based on a judicious assessment of his performance in command according to the Navy’s values as asserted by Admiral Burke in the final report but in response to a desire to please President Trump. Crozier’s decision to “send up the red flare” that drew initial thanks from superiors threatened the Trump administration’s public image. Press reported that “his punishment is viewed by some in the military as indicative of the government’s handling of the entire pandemic, with public officials presenting upbeat pictures of the government’s response, while contrary voices are silenced.”

Reports similar to these promoted a narrative in the press that the Trump administration was not adequately responding to the threat presented by the pandemic, and the shifting narratives from the Department of Defense suggest that Captain Crozier was fired because his “letter ran headlong into the administration’s narrative that it had everything under control.”

Reporters questioned whether the leaked email accounted for the recent investigation and wondered whether different standards were being applied to different ranks. Several examples of double standards were raised. Crozier was criticized for not driving the decision and not disembarking those at risk off the ship, but Burke's report acknowledges that Crozier was communicating his needs up the chain of command out of urgency and that the solution he advocated was the one that was ultimately adopted in response to the crisis. Crozier was criticized for addressing concerns over comfort for his crew by seeking comfortable hotel accommodations when he should have settled for whatever space was available to get crew members with the virus off the ship despite acknowledging that hotel accommodations would better meet CDC guidelines for quarantine standards. Crozier was criticized for failing to social distance properly during the crisis when the original impetus for Modly to fire him was embarrassing the administration with his urgent request for support. Burke's report acknowledged the difficulty in social distancing on an aircraft carrier and uncertainty of knowing the best solutions in confronting an outbreak of a novel virus faced by Crozier but holds Crozier accountable to
high standards applied only to him while accounting for and defending the
decisions of commanders above him in the chain of command in his report. Admittedly, Burke’s report identified shortcomings in Crozier’s communica-
tion in that he failed to include the fleet commander in his ill-fated email,
failed to express his sense of urgency when asked by his superiors if he was
getting the support he needed, and that he should have conveyed his concerns
for urgency in a phone call rather than sending a memo that might be used by
political opponents to embarrass the administration. However, the narrative
advanced by Burke’s final report appears self-serving for those above Crozier
in the chain of command. Those authoring the final report, because they are
in positions of power and have been given the authority to investigate, can
claim authority over how to construct the narrative that interprets Crozier’s
actions. That narrative can either be aligned with Navy values or not, depend-
ing on how those in power decide. However, the shifting narratives of the
Department of Defense and Modly are not accounted for in the final report,
and Modly’s role in making the decision to fire Crozier is excluded from con-
sideration in the charge to the investigators. These omissions obfuscate any
understanding of the larger political context in which Crozier’s firing took
place—namely, that the decision to fire him came from Modly who is ap-
pointed by, and accountable to, the president. Next, we offer a discussion of
how leaders might navigate the tension of leadership and ethics in complex,
uncertain, and crisis filled situations to place Crozier’s words and actions in a
more positive, transcendent narrative that runs counter to that featured in
Burke’s final report.

**Part 4: Unpacking the Crisis: Two Tensions of Leadership**

*and Ethics*

Exploration of the investigative reports—namely, personal statements of
Crozier and his leadership team archived in Burke’s report—reveal that the
Covid-19 outbreak on the ship created two sets of tensions relating to leader-
ship and ethics: (1) the tension between dealing with the escalating Covid-19
deteriorating effects on personnel and the pressure to remain operationally
ready (people vs. mission), and (2) the tension between leading down and in
(internal to TR Aircraft Carrier) vs. leading out and up (external to 7th Fleet
and senior Navy leaders). It was around these two tensions that Crozier’s ac-
tions were criticized, and ultimately it was arguments based on these two ten-
sions that he was relieved from command and subsequently not reinstated.

The first tension exists in many organizations. In the armed forces, it tee-
ters back and forth depending upon the situation (war vs. home station).
Over the past decade there seems to be a swing toward the people side, e.g., the increasing expectations of military and their families for improved services, the increase in Department of Defense budgets on family care programs, the Air Force's focus on teaching the human domain, and the Army and Air Force implementing a coaching culture.

The second tension could be understood with the aid of the understanding the ethical capacities at play between self, team, and organization, as depicted in Figure 1, the Ethical Leadership Framework, originally found as part of the Air University Quality Enhancement Plan. The Ethical Leadership Framework situates the ethical capacities (absorptive, adaptive, and decision-making) in each of the three levels of self, team, and organization.

Examining Crozier's leadership within this framework offers leadership practitioners a way to envision the interests at stake from multiple levels: 1) within the unit, 2) within the larger chain of command, and 3) within the larger context of civil-military relations. Members of the military serve civilian leaders and therefore, their actions should serve the values of the larger civilian community, that of the nation, and as well transcend narrowly constructed political or self-interests to ensure the highest values of the community are served.

![Figure 1: Ethical Leadership Framework](image-url)
If the strategic and ethical leader capacities manifest in the team domain, then Crozier could have been acting, making decisions, and adapting in a challenging environment (people vs. mission) that was ethically in the best interest for his team (TR people) rather than himself or the organization (US Navy). And although Crozier's actions could have aligned with the higher organization (and he argued that it did), the fact that the email went public and generated public criticism and scrutiny at the same time the Navy was attempting to answer Crozier's concerns, albeit, in a deliberate, bureaucratic way, caused further isolation of the people and their own sides of competing issues, to which no good resolution could occur.

Both tensions coexisted and interrelated during the crisis. Crozier was dealing with rising tensions related to Covid-19 and mission readiness along with increasingly tense relationships with his chain of command. He was facing rapidly escalating challenges—increasing sickness, quarantines, testing, medical care, places to put the sick, keeping those who were unexposed healthy, travel restrictions, stop-loss movements (Sailor travel, leave, and job change cancellations), maintaining constant communication updates with Navy senior leaders, his own people, and the myriad of concerned leaders on Guam, and more—all while simultaneously dealing with decreasing numbers of healthy, trained personnel to continue operations.

In a note to his superiors, Crozier clearly states the challenges of “ROM (Restriction of Movement) separation IAW NAVADMIN 083 or CDC guidance” onboard his ship, and Admiral Burke partly acknowledges this tension in an email saying, “We realize the frustration this will cause, and we are working hard to mitigate those frustrations as much as possible amid a constantly evolving situation. Your calm, steady leadership will be essential. The CNO [chief of naval operations] and I thank you and your teams in advance.”

Crozier sent constant emails nearly hourly to several different individuals regarding the pandemic, maintaining operational readiness, and concerns over cooperation with Guam officials. In his testimony, Crozier’s XO (executive officer) states,

We saw good initial movement after the email, but once it was leaked to the press it created a great deal of unhelpful attention. I know RDML Menoni (CJRM) from prior service, he texted me after CAPT Crozier was relieved and we talked. He told me the leak to the press was not helpful with the local government or hotel management.

Several colleagues applauded and sent a BRAVO ZULU (aka well-done message) to Crozier “for doing what is right and putting your Sailors first.” While senior naval leadership seemed more focused on protecting operational secu-
rity and the bureaucratic challenges of managing/communicating policies for health protection conditions, Crozier was attempting to balance protecting the health and lives of his people, which may have been inadvertently elevated over safeguarding operational security in the eyes of senior Navy officials. On March 31, Crozier’s emails and concerns were reported in the *San Francisco Chronicle*, and when Crozier’s emails went public, the tense military situation rapidly escalated and, consequently, turned political. In an interview for the investigation, Crozier’s XO commented:

I think that the CO was relieved because of a political decision by Acting SECNAV Modly or possibly at the OSD/POTUS level. Modly was initially supportive (stated this is what we want our commanders to do or something to that effect) and then drastically changed his stance in 48 hours or less.66

While never stated or found among the documents researched, it seems that Crozier had lost trust in the chain of command from an ethical standpoint where the mission became more important than people, or the health of people was out prioritized for the sake of operational readiness. When serving in the military, losing trust and/or integrity with the chain of command is ethically harmful and morally debilitating, and the sense of simultaneously having to fight Covid-19 and Navy bureaucracy was evident in Crozier’s testimony:

I sent the email with the intent to bring a sense of urgency to what was a rapidly deteriorating and potentially deadly situation. We estimated having at least 500–600 positive COVID-19 cases at the current pace of infection (this estimate was low and less than half the actual number of positive cases). Even at a significantly lower mortality rate of 1% (compared with current 3–4% trends throughout the world at the time), we estimated that five to six Sailors could die if we didn’t take immediate decisive action. […] I believe everyone involved was well intentioned, but some up the chain of command were proceeding more slowly than I would have liked and getting unnecessarily wrapped up in the status quo of COA [course of action] development. From my perspective, even just one more week of routine planning would have resulted in another week of exponential growth in positive cases and greater risk to more Sailors. […] My perspective was that we were tackling this problem relying on normal routine staff work, and as a result a critical decision was not forthcoming in a timely and decisive manner – so I sent up a red flare. Flag Officers always say, “if you need help, let us know.” I sent it to the flag officers on the email because I know they are biased towards ac-
tion, can make quick decisions, and I knew they could solve the problem on behalf of the Sailors. The Air Boss replied immediately and said thanks for “the red flare” and implied that he would assist in getting the help needed - that was my intent.67

There has been debate on the risk of operational security due to the unclassified methods of communicating over email (called Nonsecure Internet Protocol Router or NIPR) versus the more secure version of communication channels (called Secure Internet Protocol Router or SIPR). Crozier alludes to the unintended consequences of sending his concerns via the unclassified email network:

I used the NIPR to send the email on 30 March because we had been working everything on the unclassified net, to include the AADMINS, and daily COVID-19 reports on the number of positive cases. […] The request was urgent in nature and quicker to read on a government smartphone. I didn’t think everyone would be up on SIPR and a timely response was desired. The email and attachments were only sent to those individuals listed in the initial email. […] In hindsight, there was higher risk that the letter would end up in the open press by sending it on an unclassified network, but that was not my intent. It was not a classified document, and it could have still made its way to the press once it was released on either platform. I also didn’t anticipate it would create difficulties with the Governor of Guam who ultimately approved the request to move Sailors ashore. The isolation of Sailors ashore in hotel rooms would have seemed to assist the Governor and Guam considering the vast vacancies in hotel rooms on the island and resulting unemployment.68

Thus, there were two sets of ethics and leadership tensions at play: mission vs. people and leading up vs. leading down. Crozier had an ethical dilemma in trusting and relying on his chain of command while also being the person best positioned to take care of the Sailors under his charge. That tension coexisted with his ethical obligation as a leader to take care of his people by leading down and inward while also being obligated to lead upward and out if that was what was required. In times of crises, leaders have made tough decisions, and the one constant throughout this saga was a clear and consistent message coming from Crozier: “a Navy official familiar with the situation but not authorized to speak publicly about it said that the captain had repeatedly asked his superiors for speedy action to evacuate the ship. His letter, the official said, came because the Navy was still minimizing the risk.”69 This stands in stark contrast to the shifting narratives coming from Modly and from the Naval
inquiry and later investigation and serves as two separate and distinct ways of leading during a crisis.

**Part 5: Criticisms of Burke’s Final Report**

Burke’s final report admitted the unusual and unprecedented circumstances of Crozier’s situation but did not apply them in sensitive ways to Crozier’s judgments at the time. The final report was completed with the luxury of time and resources without acknowledging that such concern and resources were not provided to Crozier and the *Roosevelt* in time of need. Modly’s decision to relieve Crozier of command was the precipitating event for the investigation and therefore should have been included for consideration because it opened up the possibility of politics trumping professionalism, yet the investigators claimed they were told explicitly to exclude it. Excluding consideration of Modly asserted, implicitly, that the focus of the investigation should solely be on Crozier’s leadership rather than the relationship between Crozier and the military chain of command represented by Modly given his actions.

Burke’s report also did not acknowledge that the medical risk to the *Roosevelt*’s crew was already known to the crew’s family members through social media before the restricted communications order was given. Nor did Burke’s report acknowledge that the potential for public criticism of the administration was already developing despite the administration’s desire to appear in control of the situation. The report admitted that the ultimate solution to the problem was what Crozier recommended, yet it constructed a record of available beds on a daily basis as the crisis unfolded to create the impression that Crozier was negligent in getting crew off the *Roosevelt* without proving the accommodations were CDC compliant. It also failed to note that had Crozier acted as the final report claimed he needed to it would have compromised the health of the crew and the readiness of the *Roosevelt* for active duty.

The report did not incorporate Crozier’s reasons for utilizing a nonsecure channel of communication, an action that drove the situation to appropriate action and could, thus, be seen as true to the Navy’s values in a more supportive interpretation of the facts. Nor does it address Crozier’s portion of the message that claimed the *Roosevelt* could still fulfill its mission if there was no way to respond to his requests. It admits Crozier did not intend for the message to be released for the public but still seems to hold him accountable for the criticism received by the administration. It also neither addresses Crozier’s immediate commander’s reluctance in supporting Crozier nor accounts for the absence of his commander’s leadership in the time of crisis. While the final report advises that the communication issues facing the Pacific Com-
mand should be addressed, only Crozier seems to be held accountable for failures in communicating effectively. This seems to suggest that only those with less power in the chain of command are responsible for effective communication, that those with greater power can neglect or ignore those needing support as long as it in the interests of those with greater power. Thus, the Navy leadership's claims that Crozier did not act in accordance with Navy values seem flawed.

Part 6: What's at Stake?

To close our discussion, we draw on classical concepts of political leadership expressed in the communication practices of rhetoric to reveal what is at stake in such moments of crisis and uncertainty. We think turning to these classic concepts of leadership and character provide a way to think about navigating the tensions of self, team, organization, and ultimately, the larger community of which the military is only a part.

For Aristotle, leadership ability is tied to how well a person's language choices demonstrate both moral excellence—arete, and prudence—phronesis—considered as the ability to adapt one's practices to the needs of command. For leaders, Aristotle argued that one's actions might positively influence the members of the community when they demonstrate moral excellence—arête. Leaders trusted with great power like that of the command of a nuclear-powered aircraft carrier (or a carrier task force, or a fleet, or any military unit), should aspire to the highest moral ideals reflected in the community so that their actions lead to and fulfill to the greatest degree possible that moral vision for the community. Phronesis is a kind of moral practice, problem solving with words and actions in a complex situation where the values of the community are at stake and how one responds to the situation is as important as the action or policy that is recommended. Moral excellence and the capacity to respond competently to preserve values are at the heart of leading but rely on communication practices that enact the values of the community in authentic, consistent, and moral ways. Often, these concerns are integrated with concepts of character, integrity, values, or in rhetorical terms, one's ethos as a leader.71

The character of the speaker, ethos, plays an important role in persuading one's audience to accept their message. In discussing the value of ethos, Aristotle noted, “we believe good men [sic] more fully and more readily than others: this is true generally whatever the question is, and absolutely true where exact certainty is impossible and opinions are divided,” and that a speaker's “character may almost be called the most effective means of persuasion he
possesses. For Crozier, his character was clearly at stake in this moment of command. The Covid-19 crisis was in its early stages. Leaders up the chain of command, including that of the Federal government and the president, were not yet sure how to respond. Opinions were divided. Crozier’s immediate superior officer, Baker, was unsure whether it made sense to address the outbreak. Above Baker, the chain of command was moving slowly in its deliberations about what to do. Also, at stake was the original goal of showing force in the Pacific as a signal to the Chinese leaders that we were willing to contest Chinese influence in the region. For the Roosevelt to call in sick, worse—overrun with the Covid-19 virus—would certainly send the wrong message to China and thus undermine the original purpose of the mission. What would the Acting Secretary of the Navy say? What would the Secretary of Defense say? What would the president say?

Another element in this situation was the sense of uncertainty of how and when to respond to this crisis. For communication scholars with a background in classical rhetoric, knowing when to respond involved a sense of judgment, kairos. Timing and judgment are related, however. One needs to know how to recognize when a situation has evolved or emerged that requires a response, if not in decisive action then in words that will persuade those with appropriate authority to take needed action. Having a sense of judgment about kairos, knowing when to speak to address a problem is also related to phronesis. Waiting until the virus had spread throughout the ship rendering the Roosevelt incapable of responding to command would have reflected poor judgment especially since Crozier was aware of the highly contagious nature of the disease. Speaking too early, persuading those above him in the chain of command to take action that might later be judged as unnecessary for the health of the crew, and negating the original mission as a show of force would have reflected poor judgment. Thus, the sense of phronesis is related to both knowing what to say, how to say it, whom to address, as well as a sense of when it is best to do so for maximum effect. Often, all that leaders have to guide them in these moments is their sense of values, vision, and purpose—they must judge when to speak, how to craft their message, and to whom they must appeal in remaining true to their character. This sense of judgment, however, arises from a leader’s interpretation of events: “Kairic time, therefore, marks opportunities that might not recur, moments of decision. Whereas chronos-time is absolute, universal, and objective, kairos is interpretive, situational, and thus ‘subjective’.”

Reputation alone is insufficient to imbue a speaker’s message with credibility. Aristotle noted that “this kind of persuasion [ethos], like the others [pathos and logos], should be achieved by what the speaker says, not by what
people think of this character before he begins to speak.” Arguably, audiences rely on a pattern of behavior to demonstrate character and because one’s prior reputation is always at stake in any given rhetorical exchange, one misstep can destroy one’s reputation for responding in a way that fails to demonstrate integrity. *Ethos* must be performed, renewed in the daily interaction of leaders. Past performances of noble character do not in any way guarantee future perceptions of integrity. Following Aristotle, “rhetorical persuasion is effected not only by demonstrative but by ethical argument; it helps a speaker to convince us, if we believe that he has certain qualities himself, namely, goodness, or goodwill toward us, or both together.” Each rhetorical engagement is a moment that tests such a proposition—does the speaker have the qualities of integrity himself? Does s/he speak on behalf of the community or a narrower political interest? Further, each action reveals character as Aristotle notes: “We learn the qualities of governments in the same way as we learn the qualities of individuals, since they are revealed in their deliberate acts of choice; and these are determined by the ends that inspire them.” At stake in each moment of interaction are the qualities of leadership, the capacity of the commander to enact the values essential to the mission and the nation whose naval forces one leads. Had Crozier failed to uphold his highest values, charges of his career, short-sightedness, and mendacity in preserving his position would have undermined his integrity, his authority over his men and mento make good judgments, and their trust in his judgment to lead them in times of military conflict. Aristotle explains the power of this appeal enacted through one’s response: “If virtue is a faculty of beneficence, the highest kinds of it must be those which are most useful to others, and for this reason men [sic] honor most the just and courageous, since courage is useful to others in war, justice both in war and peace.”

What we find so appropriate and timeless here is that for Aristotle, as a leading rhetorician of his era, essential to ancient democracies of the golden age of Greece was the integral value of honor, courage is needed in the face of potential loss “both in war and peace.” These qualities inspire individuals to follow others. Two millennia after Aristotle wrote the *Rhetoric*, these same values have been confirmed in research identifying the characteristics that followers admire: honesty, competence, forward-looking, and capable of inspiring others.

**Conclusion and Implications for Leading in Times of Crisis**

We criticize the Navy’s justification for firing Crozier to open a conversation of what is at stake in leadership practices. For the sake of those who serve our
armed forces and our nation, the integrity of leadership should be intact from the highest stations of command to the lowest. Otherwise, those who consider careers in the military services will decline such noble pursuits due to a lack of trust. Commenting on the after effects of the decision to fire Crozier, Kathleen H. Hicks, former member of the Obama administration, noted that “They are fueling mistrust in leader transparency, among service members, families, and surrounding/hosting communities.” Similarly, Representative Ruben Gallego, Democrat of Arizona, acknowledged the impact on morale when senior leaders punish those who speak truth to power: “If the commander is looking out for you and doesn’t go about it the right way he’s going to get punished. It’s dangerous, it’s going to impact morale and retention rates.”

Critics have also placed responsibility on the administration for engaging in a self-serving investigatory process. Lawrence Korb, former assistant secretary of defense under President Reagan, has argued that after initially supporting Crozier for “sending the memo up the chain of command,” Admiral Gilday withdrew his support. In addition to questioning Gilday’s integrity in withdrawing his support of Crozier, Korb argued that:

One sailor on the Roosevelt died but many more would have if Crozier had not put his career on the line by speaking up. The same cannot be said of those military and civilian leaders above him who did not step up and continue to throw Crozier under the bus rather than taking responsibility for their own actions.

Rep. Adam Smith (D-Wash.), chair of the House Armed Services Committee, asserted in response to Burke’s report claiming that Crozier was singularly at fault in the controversy: “The Department’s civilian leadership portrayed Captain Crozier’s decision-making aboard the Roosevelt as the critical weakness in the Navy’s response, but the truth is that civilian leadership was also to blame.” As well, some evidence suggests that a self-serving narrative was at work when the Navy refused to release email messages supporting Crozier’s leadership until journalists filed Freedom of Information Act suits to obtain the emails. These emails showed how Crozier’s crew and other members of the Navy overwhelmingly supported his actions. This calls into question the motives of those in the administration pursuing this investigation and would seem to confirm the value of the leadership practices demonstrated by Crozier.

The problem of speaking truthfully and respectfully, of balancing concerns of multiple stakeholders, multiple goals, and conflicting values will continue to challenge those called upon to lead, especially in times of crisis and uncertainty. Only through the close study of how leaders speak and act in response to crisis situations while reflecting on the principles of commu-
nication and leadership outlined here can leaders begin to anticipate and rely on a strong value system and repertoire of communication skills to address crisis and uncertainty.

In military terms, a commander’s decision at a critical moment when the welfare of the entire command is at stake can either confirm the wisdom of the chain of command or call it into question. How a commander responds in that moment demonstrates that the trust of those who are led is well placed, models for those who are led what moral consciousness informs the command, models for the entire nation how to respond to crisis, and ensures a vision of just civil-military relations:

Heeding the call of public service as a person of ‘good repute,’ his presence and rhetorical competence are a ‘showing forth’ (epi-deixis) of an ethos, a principled self that instructs the moral consciousness and actions of others and thereby serves as a possible catalyst for them to do the same for the good of their community.84

Thus, we close by affirming that Crozier’s leadership upheld the most important values holding together a community of warriors and modeled for the rest of the nation how to lead in times of crisis and uncertainty. Hopefully, we have shown how moral excellence—arête—maps onto leadership concepts of values and vision of transformational leadership, how practical judgment—phronesis—maps onto the concept adaptive leadership, and how ethos—the character of a person enacted in the interaction with those one leads maps onto authentic leadership. Crozier’s words enacted a vision of leadership that was noble, adaptive, and authentic.

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

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**Abbreviations**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
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<tr>
<td>CAPT</td>
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<td>CDC</td>
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<td>CJRM</td>
<td>Commander Joint Region Marianas</td>
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<td>Chief of Naval Operations</td>
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<td>COA</td>
<td>Course of Action</td>
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<td>NIPR</td>
<td>Nonsecure Internet Protocol Router</td>
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<td>RDML</td>
<td>Rear Admiral (lower half)</td>
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<td>ROM</td>
<td>Restriction of Movement</td>
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