DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE MISSION DRIVEN LEADERSHIP

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FOREWORD

Leadership within the Department of the Air Force is rooted in a tradition of service, innovation, and the shared commitment of military and Civilian Airmen alike. As the operational landscape grows more complex, the effectiveness of our civilian workforce has never been more vital. Civilian Airmen bring continuity, technical expertise, and a deep well of institutional knowledge that strengthen every mission, every unit, and every Airman they support.

The Department's shift toward competency-based development reflects an understanding that leadership is not defined by positional authority, but by the deliberate cultivation of behaviors that drive organizational excellence. When understood, practiced, and refined, Foundational Competencies serve as a unifying language across career fields, ranks, and roles. They equip Airmen to make sound decisions, collaborate across diverse teams, imagine future possibilities, and uphold the values that anchor our profession.

What distinguishes this book is its clarity in connecting theory to lived experience. Readers will encounter the practical context, examples, and analytical frameworks needed to internalize and apply competency-based leadership. The material honors the complexity of

leadership while ensuring it is accessible to every Airman committed to growth.

As the Department of the Air Force continues to adapt to rapidly shifting challenges, this work supports the development of leaders prepared to meet them. It reinforces the timeless truth that great organizations are built on the strength of their people. That leadership, when continuously fostered, enables excellence at every level.

It is my hope that this text will serve not only as an academic resource, but also as a catalyst for reflection, dialogue, and professional development for Civilian Airmen across the Total Force.

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PREFACE

The Department of the Air Force continues to evolve in response to a complex global environment, emerging technologies, and the growing demands placed on its military and civilian members. The mission of the Civilian Leadership Development School is to develop the next generation of Department of the Air Force civilian leaders through a mission-focused learning program grounded in DoD principles while fostering a robust succession management pipeline. The Civilian Associate Degree Program fulfills this mission by providing curriculum and instruction for DAF civilians to reach their full leadership potential. As Civilian Airmen assume increasingly critical roles in mission support, leadership, and organizational continuity, the need for a clear, accessible, and research informed guide to their development has never been more essential. This text was created to provide that guide.

Grounded in Air Force doctrine, leadership scholarship, and competency-based development, this book offers a comprehensive exploration of what it means to lead as a Department of the Air Force civilian. It bridges theory and practice, connecting foundational leadership concepts with the Department's Foundational

Competencies to illustrate how leaders grow, influence others, innovate, and strengthen their organizations. Each chapter is intentionally designed to help Civilian Airmen understand not only what is expected of them, but **why** those expectations matter and *how* they can develop the behaviors necessary to meet them. This text also acknowledges that leadership is a dynamic, lifelong journey. Whether one is new to federal service or a seasoned professional, the competencies outlined here serve as a roadmap for continuous improvement.

This book fulfills a crucial need in relating the DAF Foundational Competencies to the leadership skills deemed critical to the Department of the Air Force. It does not serve to replace any previously written text regarding the Foundational Competencies. Instead, it takes the knowledge provided by established doctrine and presents readers with practical tools they can use to become the caliber of leader the Air Force seeks. Ultimately, this book aims to empower Civilian Airmen to lead with confidence, character, and clarity of purpose. By strengthening individual and organizational capability, we advance the mission of the Department of the Air Force and honor the trust placed in those who support and defend our nation.

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DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE LEADERSHIP THEORY AND COMPETENCY DEVELOPMENT

JAMICHAEL HILL BEARD

Air Force doctrine asserts that Airmen are distinguished by their dual understanding of airpower and leadership. Although efforts to conceptualize leadership trace their origins to political and military thought, the inherently interdisciplinary nature of leadership has led to its examination across nearly every domain of human activity in which influence is present.[1] Within the Department of the Air Force (DAF), leadership is defined as "the art and science of influencing and directing people to accomplish the assigned mission".[2] The characterization of leadership as both an art and a science is instructive: as an art, leadership requires creativity, imagination, and the application of personal judgment, whereas its scientific dimension reflects its foundation in systematic study, observation, and disciplined inquiry.[3] This dual identity underscores the expectation that effective leadership is deliberate, reflective, and informed by both experience and evidence.

Air Force doctrine further emphasizes that leadership is not innate but rather cultivated through ongoing exposure, education, and training. Leaders motivate and inspire others by shaping an environment that promotes achievement, self-esteem, recognition,

and belonging conditions that facilitate productive interaction and mutual understanding. Despite its ubiquitous use, leadership remains conceptually complex and resistant to a single unified definition. Ralph Stogdill notably observed that "there are almost as many definitions of leadership as there are persons who have attempted to define the concept".[5] Contemporary scholars, such as Kevin Kruse, conceptualize leadership as a social influence process directed toward a goal and manifested through a wide range of styles and behaviors[6]. The absence of a universally accepted definition reflects the evolving and multifaceted nature of leadership research, which consistently highlights the diversity of theoretical approaches developed to explain the complexities of the leadership process.

CATEGORIZING LEADERSHIP THEORIES

Scholars continue to approach leadership from multiple theoretical orientations. Some conceptualize leadership as a trait or set of inherent characteristics, whereas others examine leadership through behavioral, relational, cognitive, or situational lenses. The Trait Approach, one of the earliest models, sought to identify the personal attributes associated with admired social, political, and military leaders. Leadership has also been examined as a capability, suggesting that individuals, whether through innate predispositions or learned experiences, can develop leadership proficiency. Other perspectives conceptualize leadership as a relationship, emphasizing communication, influence, and shared authority between leaders and followers. This approach embeds leadership within ethical considerations, recognizing the obligation of leaders to collaborate with followers in pursuit of shared goals.

The behavioral perspective shifts attention from characteristics to observable actions, noting that leaders typically enact two primary categories of behavior: task-oriented and relationship-oriented. Effective leadership requires a judicious balance of both. Leadership has also been framed as a skill, defined as an expertise that enables

individuals to accomplish organizational tasks effectively. This perspective democratizes leadership by recognizing that skills can be learned, practiced, and refined over time.

Theory	Definition
Trait Approach	This approach is based on research suggesting that some individuals possess innate traits that make them effective leaders. It is also applied as a tool for personal awareness and growth.
Skills Approach	This approach places the leader at the center, focusing on their competencies and abilities, and underscores that leadership can be cultivated rather than being an innate quality.
Behavioral Approach	Rather than centering on leader characteristics, this approach examines their behaviors, highlighting the ways leaders integrate task and relationship actions to achieve influence.
Situational Approach	This approach provides leaders with guidance on adapting their behaviors to situational demands. Leadership is most effective when leaders can accurately diagnose followers' developmental stages and apply a corresponding leadership style that aligns with the task at hand
Path-Goal Theory	This model emphasizes a leader's duty to guide and coach followers toward their goals, choosing a leadership style that fills gaps in support. Motivation stems from competence, confidence in rewards, and finding value in the work.
Leader-Member Exchange Theory	This theory views leadership as a process built around the interactions between leaders and followers, placing the leader–member relationship at the center of effective leadership.
Transformational Leadership	This approach examines the process by which leaders inspire followers to accomplish extraordinary outcomes. Transformational leaders are regarded as catalysts for change who model ideal behaviors, craft and communicate a clear organizational vision, empower followers to exceed expectations, build trust, and instill meaning in organizational life.
Authentic Leadership	Emerging in response to societal demands for integrity and trust in leadership, this approach emphasizes transparency, moral grounding, and responsiveness to the needs and values of followers.
Servant Leadership	This approach underscores the importance of leaders focusing on followers' needs, fostering empowerment, and facilitating their full development. Servant leaders are characterized by their commitment to placing the interests of followers above their own.
Adaptive Leadership	This approach examines how leaders foster follower learning, innovation, and adaptability in response to dynamic and complex situations.
Team Leadership	With this approach, the main role of a leader is to guide the team toward its goals by actively monitoring how the team is doing, diagnosing any issues, and acting when needed. This perspective is very practical, focusing on real-world teams and how to make them more effective.

Table 1: Common Leadership Theories (Note. *From Introduction to Leadership, by P. Northouse, 2024)*

DEVELOPING THE MEANING OF COMPETENCIES

Competencies represent the observable behaviors, knowledge, skills, abilities, and other characteristics required for successful job performance. Early definitions emphasized inherent personal attributes associated with effective performance. By the mid-1990s, scholars had advanced more structured conceptualizations, describing competencies as clusters of related knowledge, skills, and attitudes that influence performance, are measurable against established standards, and are capable of improvement through training and development.

The Department of the Air Force defines competencies as measurable and observable patterns of knowledge, skills, abilities, behaviors, and other characteristics required to perform institutional or occupational functions effectively. [9] Competency frameworks are designed to create coherent alignment between employee behavior and organizational strategy. Regardless of definitional nuances, competencies consistently prioritize observable, performance-based behavior.

COMPETENCY-BASED SYSTEMS: LEADERSHIP APPLIED

Competence is distinct from personality traits, which are relatively stable and often resistant to change. Competencies represent applied leadership; they are the behaviors through which individuals achieve standards of performance. Because competencies are valuable, difficult to imitate, and essential to organizational success, they function as strategic organizational resources. Nevertheless, competence alone does not guarantee performance outcomes, particularly when contextual, environmental, or personal factors intervene.

Foundational competencies represent the set of accepted and valued behavioral expectations required for success across diverse DAF missions and occupational roles. These competencies are rooted in clusters of knowledge, skills, abilities, and other characteristics and play a critical role in individual and organizational performance. Competency-based systems enhance operational efficiency, reduce training time, and support strategic talent management by articulating the behaviors required for organizational success.[9]

Competency models provide a shared language, enabling organizations to translate strategic objectives into expected behaviors. They support talent management processes across the Total Force, including recruitment, retention, assignment, professional development, and evaluation. Because competencies are transferable, their utility extends across occupational boundaries, job roles, and even personal contexts. Competency-based development thus enables Airmen to cultivate self-awareness, identify developmental needs, and accurately chart pathways toward enhanced performance.

AIR FORCE FOUNDATIONAL COMPETENCIES

The Department of the Air Force must posture itself for dynamic and uncertain security environments ranging from non-state threats to great power competition. Although the DAF continues to attract highly capable talent, the contemporary "war for talent" requires the strategic application of authorities and innovative personnel practices to sustain workforce readiness.[10] Airmen must therefore demonstrate proficiency beyond technical skill; they must understand the behavioral expectations associated with career success.

The Air Force Foundational Competencies, developed through a structured, multi-phase scientific process, replaced earlier institutional competency frameworks. Each competency includes a label, definition, proficiency scale, criteria, and observable behaviors.

The competencies are organized into four categories:

- **Developing Self:** lists competencies that focus on self-improvement
- **Developing Others:** lists competencies that inspire your peers and subordinates
- **Developing Ideas:** lists competencies related to imagining the future today
- **Developing Organizations:** lists competencies that focus on the pursuit of organizational excellence

Competency	Definition
Accountability	Demonstrates reliability and honesty; takes responsibility for the actions and behaviors of self and team
Perseverance	Displays grit in accomplishment of difficult long-term goals; works strenuously toward challenges; maintains effort and interest over years despite failure, adversity, and plateaus in progress
Communication	Effectively presents, promotes, and prioritizes varied ideas and issues both verbally and non-verbally through active listening, clear messaging, and by tailoring information to the appropriate audience
Decision Making	Makes well-informed, effective, and timely decisions that weigh situational constraints, risks, and benefits
Information Seeking	Demonstrates an underlying curiosity; desires to know more about things, people, oneself, the mission or issues; an eager, uncompromising learner
Flexibility	Adapts to and works with a variety of situations, individuals, or groups effectively
Resilience	Negotiates, manages, and adapts to significant sources of stress or trauma
Initiative	Does more than is required or expected to improve job results; takes action appropriately without prompting
Self-Control	Keeps emotions under control and restrains negative actions when under stress

*(The rows above are grouped under the row label: **Developing Self**)*

Developing Others	**Teamwork**	Collaborates effectively with others to achieve a common goal or complete a mission task
	Develops People	Invests in other to maximize their contributions to the mission by inspiring and providing an environment of continual feedback and learning opportunities
	Service Mindset	Desires to help or serve others to meet their needs; makes and focuses efforts to discover and meet others' needs
	Leadership	Inspires, builds, and sustains others' motivations and morale to accomplish the mission; organizes people and actions

Developing Ideas	**Analytical Thinking**	Identifies problems, evaluates alternative perspectives and solutions, makes effective recommendations, and identifies courses of actions
	Digital Literacy	Uses technology to identify, critically evaluate and synthesize data and information; explores, creates and manages digital context; and appropriately interacts in a virtual environment
	Creative Thinking	Develops new insights into new situations; questions conventional approaches
	Fostering Innovation	Builds a culture of behaviors and business practices that encourages, champions, and rewards creativity and informed risk-taking; is open to change
	Influence	Intends to persuade, convince, or impress others to elicit their support to make specific impacts or achieve effects on others

Developing Organizations	**Resource Management**	Carefully and responsibly administers resources placed under a member's control with the intent to maximize readiness and lethality and improve organizational performance
	Results Focused	Demonstrates concern for working well or for competing against a standard of excellence
	Change Management	Adapts, helps other adapt, or implements change with the goal of ensuring unit goals are properly aligned to the desired end state
	Strategic Thinking	Considers and organizes activities and resources to achieve a desired goal; thinks on a large and small scale, long and short term
	Precision	A concern for order, quality, and accuracy with an underlying drive to reduce uncertainty in the environment

Table 2: *Airman's Foundational Competencies Definition*
Note. From "Air Force Handbook 36-2647: Competency Modeling" (2025)

PROFICIENCY LEVELS

Proficiency within each competency is structured across four tiers—basic, intermediate, advanced, and expert. These levels include criteria developed by subject matter experts and describe observable behaviors that increase in sophistication as individuals progress. The model reinforces leadership development as a continuous process, offering Airmen a roadmap for self-assessment and growth. By linking experience to behaviors, the DAF empowers individuals to take ownership of their development and supports organizational adaptability in identifying talent for emerging mission requirements.

THE CIVILIAN WORKFORCE

DAF Policy Directive 36-81 Total Force Human Resource Management Governance establishes the framework for Total Force human resource management, integrating active duty, Reserve, Air

National Guard, Space Force, and civilian personnel within a unified approach to talent development.[11] Civilian members of the DAF have experienced substantial evolution in their roles, increasingly assuming responsibilities once held exclusively by military personnel. Their continuity, technical expertise, and institutional knowledge are indispensable to mission success across global contexts.[16]

As the federal government's largest civilian employer, the Department of Defense relies heavily on the contributions of Civilian Airmen, whose expertise supports readiness, lethality, and innovation. Civilian Airmen contribute leadership, followership, mentorship, training, and innovation to the Profession of Arms. Civilian Airmen must therefore understand their roles in Mission Command, embodying Air Force Core Values and applying the Foundational Competencies. Although the competencies are presented categorically, they exist on a continuum and manifest dynamically across individuals and contexts.

CASE STUDY: "OPERATION CROSSWIND"

The 41st Air Base Wing prepared to support a NATO exercise involving aircraft from multiple allied nations. The exercise, "Operation Crosswind," included airfield operations, logistics coordination, cybersecurity protocols, and public affairs outreach. Mr. Devon Price, a GS-13 civilian logistics planner with more than 10 years of experience, was assigned to co-lead the preparation effort alongside Captain Linda Zhao, an Air Force officer newly assigned as the wing's logistics operations lead. Their team included junior military members, senior civilians, and contractor personnel.

Two weeks before the exercise, Mr. Price and Capt. Zhao identified a critical flaw in the fuel delivery plan that could have delayed aircraft readiness by several hours during the exercise. The issue stemmed from miscommunication between supply and maintenance teams. Tensions arose during planning meetings. Junior personnel were

hesitant to speak up, while senior civilians resisted altering established procedures. Time was limited. Both leaders had to act quickly.

APPLYING THE FOUNDATIONAL COMPETENCIES

1. Self-Awareness & Self-Control (Developing Self)

Capt. Zhao maintained composure in tense discussions, while Mr. Price reflected on how his leadership style could affect morale.

2. Communication & Teamwork (Developing Others)

They held an open forum to encourage input from all ranks and roles, emphasizing respect and collaboration.

3. Accountability & Mentorship (Developing Others)

Mr. Price took responsibility for the oversight while also mentoring a new Airman on how to navigate interdepartmental coordination.

4. Decision Making & Innovation (Developing Ideas)

The team brainstormed a workaround using a mobile fuel distribution unit borrowed from a nearby base. The solution proved unconventional but effective.

5. Organizational Acumen & Joint Perspective (Developing Organizations)

Capt. Zhao explained how their solution supported both U.S. and NATO operational timelines, aligning their efforts with joint mission goals.

6. **Digital Literacy & Change Management (Developing Organizations)**

A young civilian analyst introduced a real-time logistics tracker, which improved visibility and responsiveness. The leaders endorsed its use and briefed senior leaders on integrating the tool into future operations.

The Result: The fuel issue was resolved. The team received commendation for their initiative, flexibility, and professionalism. More importantly, the experience strengthened trust and communication across the joint civilian–military team. Senior leaders highlighted the project as an example of effective application of Air Force Foundational Competencies.

Case Study Discussion Questions

1. Which foundational competencies were most important in resolving the issue?
2. How did the civilian and military leaders complement each other's strengths?
3. What role did emotional intelligence (self-awareness, self-control) play in this scenario?
4. How can leaders encourage innovation and change in environments that resist it?
5. What strategies helped foster teamwork across generational, rank, military, and civilian divides?

CONCLUSION

Leadership within the Department of the Air Force is both scientific and artistic, requiring continual learning, reflective practice, and intentional development. This chapter examined the complexity of leadership theory, emphasizing that no singular framework fully encapsulates its scope. Instead, leadership development must be grounded in rigorous theory, connected to practical application, and

oriented toward preparing Airmen—military and civilian—for the demands of a dynamic global environment.

The Foundational Competencies provide a shared framework for aligning individual behaviors with organizational objectives. As the Air Force evolves, these competencies will remain central to cultivating leaders who are adaptable, accountable, and committed to excellence. This text recognizes leadership as a dynamic developmental process and offers an in-depth exploration of the Foundational Competencies, illustrating how they inform leadership practice across the continuum from novice to expert. It also equips civilian leaders with practical tools to enhance their effectiveness in service to the Nation.

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DEVELOPING SELF: EVOLVING TOWARD COMPETENCY

ANTHONY C. CAIN

LEADERSHIP AND COMPETENCY DEVELOPMENT

Despite the number of theories, books, articles, workshops, consulting practices, websites, social media channels, and self-help programs dedicated to developing leadership competencies, organizations continue to struggle as they seek to recruit, train, and develop effective leaders. Developing leaders is also one of the most important requirements for personal and organizational success. One text identified fifteen separate approaches or theories for leader development (Northouse, 2022). Establishing a global definition of the term *leadership* introduces complexity, as authors and researchers have sought to identify the characteristics most evident in successful leaders and desired in prospective leaders. Some even find the term *characteristic* problematic because, on the one hand, it implies that leaders are "born," not made. On the other hand, the term can imply that there are proven formulas that may be taught or absorbed from books or seminars. Because this proliferation of ideas, perspectives, and techniques often falls short when organizations and individuals attempt to apply them to real-world situations, the leader

development industry remains relevant and poised for new entries. Researchers and scholars continue to devise studies aimed at explaining why one theory or approach works—or fails—at producing effective leaders. Even assuming agreement on definitions and terminology is possible, leading effectively becomes difficult when practitioners attempt to put into practice the advice, formulas, and supposedly "proven" methods that form the consensus on how to produce leaders and how to lead individuals and groups.

What seems evident when surveying the literature in the field is that no single approach will suffice for developing effective leaders. Some leaders may even have difficulty articulating how they attempt to lead others, despite being recognized for their effectiveness in doing so. What also seems clear is that leadership is more than "traits" or "characteristics"; it requires individuals to go beyond simply acquiring "skills"; it cannot be reduced to "transactions," "exchanges," or "contracts" between leaders and followers; leaders must do more than communicate organizational "goals," "values," and "objectives"; leaders who focus on "serving" their constituents may fall short at times when the organization is under stress or the external environment requires rapid, radical action or change; applying a "full range" approach leaves leaders open to criticism for choosing the wrong technique for the situation; and advocates of "authentic" leadership subtly imply motivations that are somehow not authentic. In short, the literature forces practitioners and would-be leaders to pick and choose from a menu of theories and approaches—most of which have resulted in effective leadership, but which have also fallen short—to cobble together a leadership approach that not only results in organizational success, but also propels the aspirant leader toward career success. The stakes could not be higher.

The U.S. Air Force—and, indeed, the Department of Defense—has adopted competency development as its preferred approach for human capital development in general, and specifically for producing leaders equipped for the challenges of organizational effectiveness in a national security context. This approach has several

advantages. First, the structure provided by the Service—Developing Self, Developing Others, Developing Ideas, and Developing Organizations—within which the competencies are nested is either common or closely analogous to similar structures across other government agencies and organizations. Therefore, individuals who develop competency using the Air Force's structure will not have to unlearn or abandon their competencies in favor of a different approach if they transfer to another agency or organization. Second, while the Air Force's competency list attempts to be comprehensive, it recognizes the primary role of the leader by identifying more competencies—nine—in the Developing Self component than in the other areas. In other words, even if an individual is not in a leadership role or position, by concentrating on gaining competence in the nine areas of Developing Self, that individual will become a more effective employee and will also be preparing for future leadership responsibilities. Finally, the competency development approach inherently rejects a "pass/fail" mindset. Competency implies a range of performance that should adapt and improve over time. One author defined competency in terms of motives, traits, self-concept, knowledge, and skills (Spencer & Spencer, 1993). Organizations may assess competency along a continuum—the Air Force construct uses Basic, Intermediate, Advanced, and Expert categories to distinguish between levels of competence (AETC/A3J, 2022). Even within each competency level, there are gradations of competence, which allow recognition of where an individual's competency lies at a given moment, acknowledge progress along the continuum, and impart an expectation that every individual will aspire to greater competency. This approach rejects notions of individuals having "arrived" in favor of one in which individuals continually evolve. The concept of the nexus between *self* and *evolution* becomes the focus of this chapter.

There are also potential weaknesses to the competency development approach. Perhaps the most dangerous involves treating competencies as synonyms for "traits" or "skills." Adopting such a

checklist mentality toward competency development risks robbing individuals—and the organizations they serve—of more motivated, capable, and competent leaders and prospective leaders. The idea of a checklist or menu of skills places responsibility on the leader to choose the right skills to cope with the challenges of the moment. This mechanical approach risks paralyzing the leader in moments of crisis, or it may damage the leader's credibility among subordinates as they witness the struggle to select the "right" skill at the "right" time. It can, therefore, de-emphasize the complexity inherent in any leadership endeavor, leaving the leader without the competence to adapt in changing or unfamiliar circumstances.

A second potential weakness, related to the first, is that competency development can—and likely will—require significant time and resource investment. This is true of any serious attempt to develop human capital. If, however, the current generation of leaders is committed to developing the next generation that will assume responsibility for their organization's mission, a strategic approach to leader development is essential. This requires identifying goals and objectives and investing organizational resources in developing individuals for future leadership roles and opportunities. Finally, as with any endeavor that involves human complexity, failures and setbacks will occur. Leaders must resist the temptation to abandon development initiatives when results fall short of expectations. In such circumstances, it is prudent to learn from experience; to recall that competence exists along a continuum; to assess effectiveness in terms of progress toward higher levels of competency in concert with mission effectiveness metrics; and to apply lessons learned to adjust subsequent iterations of leader development. If the overall goal is to produce a cadre of future leaders, creating a "one mistake" environment will result in hesitant, risk-averse individuals and groups—the exact opposite of what is required for future organizational success.

Just as work is a specialized form of culturation with its own psychosocial context, leadership is an even more specialized form

within that context. Competencies—and, more specifically, leadership competencies—signal to members of institutions the kinds of behaviors and characteristics that are appropriate, valued, and, indeed, necessary for individual and institutional success. Despite this institutional context and its overarching importance, individuals develop competencies. As becomes evident in subsequent paragraphs, the ways in which individuals construct their conception of self have profound effects on how they interact within organizations and, therefore, on how competent they become in the work environment.

THE "SELF" AND COMPETENCY DEVELOPMENT

Because the essential component of leadership development centers on developing the *self*, individuals should understand what constitutes the concept of self, where they reside along a developmental continuum, and how that position may affect their attempts to become more competent leaders. Additionally, understanding where individuals are on a developmental continuum equips aspirant leaders with greater insight into the attitudes, behaviors, and characteristics their team members bring to the organization. Acquiring such understanding of self and others involves familiarity with psychological theories of the self and recognition that each member of the organization is on a distinct evolutionary journey. Interpreting a person's interactions, contributions, and apparent attitudes without, at a minimum, considering what has influenced the evolution of their self may result in misreading the reasons behind performance outcomes, attitudes, and interactions with other team members. The result can range from miscommunication to dysfunction to outright rebellion. Conversely, entering the leadership environment with a deeper understanding of one's own—and others'—evolutionary journeys may enhance individual and team cohesion and performance.

There are, of course, many books and studies in the field of psychology that concentrate on how individuals evolve and mature. Robert Kegan's *The Evolving Self: Problem and Process in Human Development* stands out in that it presents a meta-theory of how people experience the various stages of personhood from birth through maturity (Kegan, 1982). In the years since its publication, Kegan has continued to study and refine his theory and has applied it to leadership and organizational culture in collaboration with Lisa Laskow Lahey and others (Kegan & Lahey, 2001; Kegan & Lahey, 2009; Kegan, Lahey, Miller, Fleming, & Helsing, 2016). This body of work, considered in light of the Air Force's organizational competency development approach, provides leaders and prospective leaders with theory, insights, and frameworks to inform and guide effective leader development.

Kegan describes his approach as building on the work of Jean Piaget and labels it "constructive-developmental." By this, he asserts that the process of human evolution is iterative and often uncomfortable, resulting in each individual constructing a view of self and the world that may not be consistent with—or shared by—others. Because his research and theory development relied on observing patients in clinical settings, his work can initially appear to focus on dysfunction within the evolutionary process. A closer reading, however, suggests that Kegan's ideas are broadly applicable. As individuals move from one stage of development to another, there is, according to Kegan, a dialectical process: moving from comfort, to conflict brought on by environmental demands that create distress and require change and maturation of the self, and then, after reaching a new stage, returning to comfort with greater maturity.

When transitions occur in safe and supportive environments, individuals can resolve tensions, conflicts, and troubling episodes, becoming healthy, productive contributors to their families and other groups. When transitions occur in traumatic environments that deny opportunities for healthy growth, development may be delayed, damaged, or permanently derailed (Kegan, 1982). There are,

obviously, times in a person's life when behavior is inconsistent with age or station. Such instances may indicate that the individual is in transition from one stage to another; they may also suggest that, under stress or conflict, the individual has not yet developed the characteristics of higher levels of maturity others expect—and some individuals never do.

The implications and advantages for leaders and leader development are clear. Just as one would not expect or demand that a child behave in ways beyond her years or abilities, placing individuals into leadership roles before they have acquired sufficient personal insight and maturity invites failure. The maturation process for the individual self—and for those aspects of self related to leadership identity—is not linear. Through experience, trial and error, and reflection, leaders adjust to their environments, grow comfortable with self, acquire higher levels of competency, and become more adept at leading within organizational environments marked by chaos, uncertainty, conflict, and change. During critical transitions between stages, it is natural for individuals to seek prior levels of comfort and security. When environmental demands for change persist, individuals eventually adapt, seeking comfort and maturity at a new and higher level. This progression aligns with Kegan's theory of the evolving self and offers insight into how leaders mature: as they interact with their environments, they develop confidence and competence, while organizations increasingly recognize their value to the enterprise.

Kegan's theory emphasizes that some degree of conflict is a natural—and essential—feature of psychological evolution. This is unsurprising, as growth inherently involves movement from a familiar state of comfort into unfamiliar territory. Anxiety, uncertainty, and even fear are normal reactions to such transitions. For Kegan, the key distinction between those who cope effectively with evolutionary change and those who struggle—he deliberately avoids value-laden terms such as "normal," "dysfunctional," "psychotic," or "abnormal," which could prejudice therapeutic

intervention—appears to be the environment. Indeed, it is the pervasive influence of the environment that compels individuals to grow, adapt, and mature across the lifespan. Common characterizations of people coping with change, whether judgmental or descriptive, reflect perceptions of how effectively they manage environmental pressures: "she is mature for her age"; "he's adjusting well to college life"; "she's struggling at work"; "he's obviously under a lot of pressure."

As new environments—or changes within existing ones—exert pressure on individuals to adapt or develop new abilities, a natural period of disequilibrium emerges. According to Kegan, the maturation process—the evolution of the *self*—equips individuals to cope more effectively with such environmental changes. As children, people require substantial external support and affirmation to navigate new developmental stages (more on Kegan's stages follows). Encouragingly, each level of maturity appears to confer increased confidence, reducing fear of future change. In effect, individuals become more competent at managing external pressures that demand adaptation. At the highest levels of maturity, people often seek change proactively, recognizing the benefits of learning, growth, and adaptation. As with many elements of Kegan's theory, this insight carries significant implications for competency development. Rather than serving as an end state, each stage along the competency continuum can function as a springboard toward greater leadership effectiveness and efficiency.

KEGAN'S STAGES OF THE EVOLVING SELF

Before exploring competency development further, it is useful to outline the structure of Kegan's theory. His framework is comprehensive, describing human evolution from infancy through adulthood in considerable detail. While childhood and adolescent stages influence how individuals encounter work environments, their specific developmental dynamics are not directly applicable to

discussions of adult leadership or competency development in most cases. However, the structures and insights Kegan proposed for lifelong self-evolution apply across all stages and can inform how the Developing Self competencies evolve. In workplace settings, individuals may not have fully negotiated the transition from adolescence into adulthood, rendering some professional interactions problematic. Although such individuals may not be candidates for leadership roles, leaders may need to intervene to clarify expectations or improve performance. Accordingly, a deeper understanding of Kegan's theory equips leaders to better interpret employee behavior. With this caveat, the following paragraphs outline Kegan's theory of self-evolution.

Kegan proposed five stages of evolution (see Figure 1) occurring along a spiral—or "helix"—continuum (Kegan, 1982). Although maturation may be natural, it is neither easy nor automatic. The upward-spiraling helix suggests movement influenced by inertia, requiring considerable individual effort to progress from one stage to the next. Kegan describes this process as one of seeking balance through negotiated "truces"—between the individual and the environment, the individual and others, the individual and self, and between impulses toward independence and inclusion. As Kegan explains, "we move back and forth in our struggle with this lifelong tension; that our balances are slightly imbalanced" (Kegan, 1982, emphasis in original). The visual model also allows for regression, in which individuals revert from a higher stage to a lower one or exhibit less maturity than expected—what Kegan describes as "people who are chronologically adult [and] are psychologically adolescent" (Kegan, 1982). The spacing between stages conveys that individuals may remain at each stage for extended periods, independent of chronological age. Stagnation can occur at any stage if individuals fail to adapt to evolving environmental demands, though it may be more common at the later stages of the helix. The placement of each stage reflects an underlying psychological tension favoring independence on one end of the spectrum and inclusion on the other.
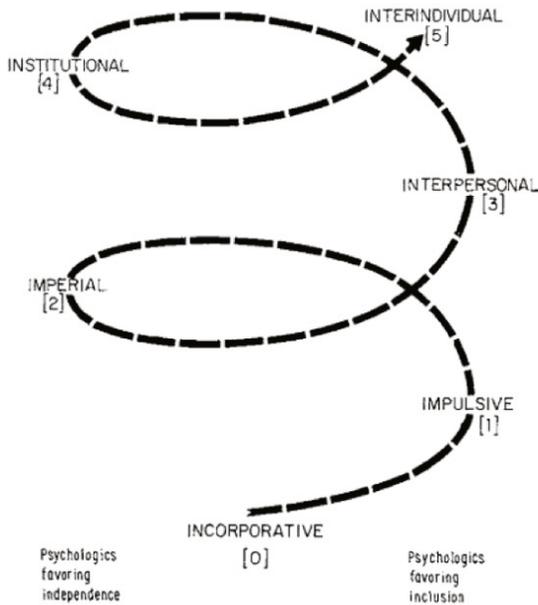
Figure 1: A Helix of Evolutionary Truces (Kegan, 1982)

Within each stage, Kegan describes an underlying structure that explains how individuals interact with subject and object within the prevailing environment. According to Kegan and Lahey, "Any way of knowing can be described with respect to that which it can look at (object) and that which it looks through (the 'filter' or 'lens' to which it is subject)... A way of knowing becomes more complex when it is able to look at what before it could only look through" (Kegan & Lahey, 2009, emphasis in original). In the Incorporative stage, infants sense and move reflexively (subject) and have no purpose or object beyond the need for close contact and sustenance. In the Impulsive stage, as individuals acquire control over their bodies, sensing and moving reflexively becomes object, while interaction through impulses and perceptions becomes subject. Children at this stage are not yet able to connect with people or objects outside their immediate field of view. In the Imperial stage, individuals continue to interact with the world through impulses and perceptions (subject),

though in broader ways, while expanding their object focus by developing and expressing needs, interests, and wishes.

In the Interpersonal stage, as the environment expands to include individuals and groups beyond the immediate family, people shift their object focus to needs, interests, and groups, while exploring interpersonal and mutual (subject) means of fulfilling those needs. Early kindergarten and elementary school experiences often create environments conducive to evolution at this stage. The Institutional stage retains interpersonal and mutuality concerns, but now as object, while subject evolves toward authorship, identity, psychic administration, and ideology. Given the tendency of adolescents and teens to gravitate toward ideals, causes, and fantasies—and to view them through personal and group lenses—it is unsurprising that individuals at this stage may appear intent on changing the status quo and reshaping their world. The Interindividual stage again shifts what was subject in the Institutional stage—authorship, identity, psychic administration, and ideology—to object, while subject evolves toward interindividuality and the interpenetrability of self-systems. This is the stage at which individuals become effective life partners, employees, and leaders.

If this were the entirety of Kegan's theory, it would offer limited relevance to leader development. There is, however, significantly more nuance and detail within each stage of the evolving self. Focusing on the three highest stages—the interpersonal, institutional, and interindividual—helps anchor the discussion in adult and leadership contexts. Some may argue, based on Kegan's adolescent and teenage case studies, that the interpersonal stage is too rudimentary for examining civilian leader development within the Department of the Air Force. There are, nevertheless, compelling reasons to include it. First, military organizations encompass a wide range of ages across both military and civilian personnel systems. Leaders equipped with an understanding of how individuals transition from the interpersonal to the institutional stage may be better prepared to manage the conflicts and challenges

accompanying that shift. Second, Kegan notes that regression to earlier stages is neither abnormal nor unusual—particularly when individuals feel unprepared to function at higher levels of maturity. Finally, subsequent research by Kegan and Lahey suggests that individual maturity and performance frequently lag behind organizational needs and expectations (Kegan, Lahey, Miller, Fleming, & Helsing, 2016). This gap indicates that a central leadership challenge may involve helping followers move beyond their comfort zones toward higher levels of psychological and intellectual maturity, thereby increasing their competence, value, and performance for the organization.

THE INTERPERSONAL, INSTITUTIONAL, AND INTERINDIVIDUAL SELF

Kegan argues that one of the most powerful forces driving individual evolution is change in the environment. For children, this may include changes in home circumstances, childcare, school, or local surroundings. Environmental change can also involve shifts in physical, emotional, or psychological conditions. Importantly, the environment can either hinder or facilitate growth by shaping how individuals navigate the challenges brought about by change, thereby easing—or complicating—the transition toward higher levels of maturity.

As individuals transition toward the Interpersonal stage, they often expand relationships through one-on-one connections, such as the "best friend." Over time, these nearly exclusive relationships broaden to include others who share similar environments or life circumstances. As maturity advances toward the Institutional stage, relationships may further expand from exclusive dyadic connections toward group-based affiliations. When such groups become the sole source of social interaction, they may signal a substitution of group comfort for the security previously found in one-on-one relationships. Individuals who cling to interpersonal comfort

mechanisms may be perceived as loners or "antisocial" until they are willing to move beyond the previous stage and engage more fully with shared environments. Such transitions are essential for functioning effectively within larger organizational settings.

In later research, Kegan and Lahey associated the more mature expressions of the interpersonal stage with a mental capacity they term the "socialized mind." Individuals operating at this level often become effective team members and followers, closely embedding their identities within organizational missions or cultures and forming strong psychological and emotional attachments to ideas and beliefs (Kegan, Lahey, Miller, Fleming, & Helsing, 2016). These individuals tend to value established rules and routines and often find comfort in predictable structures. In complex or ambiguous situations requiring innovation or organizational adaptation, however, they may experience discomfort or threat. Such situations might include changes in team composition due to retirements or personnel rotations, traumatic events such as the loss of a colleague, or instability resulting from budgetary or policy shifts. As with all self-evolution, these struggles are marked by an individual's inclination to resist personal change in response to new environmental demands.

From a theoretical perspective, Kegan would characterize such reactions as conflicts that may catalyze progression toward the Institutional stage. Difficulties arise, however, when individuals respond to discomfort by resisting change or erecting barriers to creativity and progress. Leaders must be able to recognize how team members respond to situations that demand adaptability and flexible thinking. Rather than abandoning individuals who struggle with unfamiliar circumstances, leaders should intervene early to help them process the need for change. This typically involves establishing a foundation for more mature coping strategies, rather than offering a one-time solution to the developmental tension inherent in stage transitions. Progress may be measured not by immediate advancement to the next stage, but by successfully

navigating the current challenge. Kegan and Lahey caution that some developmental plateaus may persist indefinitely—there is no assurance that all individuals will reach the highest levels of maturity.

For those who successfully transition from the Interpersonal to the Institutional stage, new capacities for coping with complexity create opportunities for both personal and organizational growth. Individuals at the Institutional stage are generally better equipped to handle unfamiliar situations because they have developed psychological, emotional, and cognitive tools for managing uncertainty. Rather than viewing solutions in binary terms, they are often comfortable considering multiple viable options. Such individuals tend to see themselves as invested in a profession or career, rather than merely holding a job. This professional self-concept often motivates engagement in activities that expand personal "tool kits," such as pursuing advanced degrees, licensure, or certifications—not solely for promotion or compensation, but to enhance professional standing. Individuals at this stage frequently assume mentoring roles, formally or informally, and begin to recognize the value of professional networks, including those extending beyond their immediate organization or career field.

The potential exists for individuals at the Institutional stage of maturity to become aloof, isolated, or judgmental—particularly toward those not operating at the same level. When such individuals occupy leadership positions, they must have mechanisms and relationships in place to remain aware of how their behaviors and attitudes affect others. Commitment to a profession or career is commendable; however, becoming a workaholic or expecting others to demonstrate the same level of commitment can sow the seeds of organizational dysfunction. Leaders at the Institutional stage may also become so focused on their own careers that they neglect their responsibilities to subordinates. When this occurs, organizational morale can suffer, professional and other forms of development may stagnate, and otherwise productive team members may become

sufficiently frustrated to seek employment elsewhere. The key point is that regardless of an individual's position on Kegan's emotional maturity helix, there is no implication that advancement to a higher stage of self automatically produces improved performance or leadership. As maturity advances along the helix, the potential for positive effects and interactions increases. With each advancement in maturity, however, an equally complex set of vulnerabilities emerges —vulnerabilities that may result in personal conflict, diminished performance, or even career failure.

Kegan characterizes the highest level of self-evolution as the *Interindividual* stage. Not all individuals will reach this level of maturity. For those who successfully transition from the Institutional stage, focus shifts toward broader questions of meaning. In Kegan's words, "Rather than expressing itself in terms of a loyalty or fidelity to an abstracted system-preserving form (of the self or the actual public institution), responsibility would be more saliently a matter of taking responsibility for one's construction and transformation of the form" (Kegan, 1982). Individuals at this stage may be perceived as change agents, innovators, strategic thinkers, or disruptors. For those operating at the Interpersonal level, such characterizations may carry negative connotations, as they suggest questioning or challenging the status quo. For individuals at the Interindividual stage, however, the self-concept generates an impulse toward change—not for its own sake, but to improve organizational form, enhance individual and organizational performance, or explore new missions, products, or opportunities. Even when outcomes fall short of expectations, individuals at this stage tend to perceive value in examining what succeeded and what did not, viewing learning itself as an opportunity to refine both their construction of self and the form of the institution.

OPERATIONALIZING THE EVOLUTION OF THE SELF

Kegan's theory offers a compelling and elegant description of how humans mature at the foundational level of self—how individuals construct perceptions of who they are and how those perceptions shape interactions with others and with the world. Translating these insights into the more specific domain of organizational performance, however, proved more challenging. Because the primary drivers of self-evolution—an individual's developmental stage and environmental change—are also central to organizational dynamics, Kegan and Lahey focused subsequent research on applying the theory to derive insights that support higher levels of individual and organizational competence and performance.

One of the first challenges in operationalizing the theory involved the perception that certain individuals and organizations are resistant—or even immune—to change (Kegan & Lahey, 2009). In such cases, resistance appears to block evolution, innovation, or movement toward change. Members of these organizations may describe themselves as too invested in existing systems to alter course, invoking defensive rationales such as, "The way we do things has brought us success; why change what works?" Other responses may be more direct and confrontational: "That may work elsewhere, but it will never work here." Regardless of form, resistance to change often reflects discomfort with new environmental conditions. Individuals may perceive proposed changes not merely as alternative ways of performing tasks, but as threats to their self-concept. Leaders, depending on their own stage of maturity, may interpret such resistance as a challenge to their authority.

Resistance to change is often subtler than overt fear or anxiety associated with leaving one's comfort zone. Research suggests that individuals frequently construct elaborate survival mechanisms that paradoxically undermine desired change outcomes. Consider change

initiatives in which participants leave meetings or offsite events expressing agreement on the need for change, commitment to required steps, and confidence in collective effort. In many such cases, leaders later express frustration that, despite widespread buy-in, little has actually changed. Kegan and Lahey's research indicates that individuals may simultaneously endorse change while activating internal systems designed to preserve the status quo. Recognizing these change-prevention systems, increasing individual awareness of them, and replacing deeply embedded, change-resistant elements of the self are often prerequisites for achieving organizational change objectives.

When leaders misread resistance, responses can range from draconian to ineffective, with harmful consequences for individuals and organizations alike. One response involves identifying perceived ringleaders and marginalizing or removing them from the organization. Such an approach can deprive the organization of experience and talent, intimidate remaining members, and foster a culture of conformity. Rather than promoting innovation and performance, a "marginalize and purge" strategy typically produces the opposite effect. Leaders who employ this approach may mistakenly equate compliance with effectiveness, creating toxic environments that demand obedience rather than adaptability. In contexts requiring flexibility and innovation, this style of leadership is ultimately ineffective.

At the opposite end of the spectrum are strategies of appeasement and coddling. These approaches allow resistance to persist, delay or prevent necessary change, and often portray leaders as weak or indecisive. Assuming the need for change is legitimate, appeasement effectively transfers control of the organization to those unwilling to adapt. While such groups may feel temporarily validated, the long-term organizational costs often render these outcomes Pyrrhic victories. Leaders who confuse being liked with being effective may later discover that the goodwill they believed they had accumulated was illusory. When change eventually becomes unavoidable, they

may be forced to adopt more drastic measures that undermine trust and confidence.

THE COMPETENCY DEVELOPMENT CHALLENGE: DEVELOPING SELF

With this theoretical foundation and its practical implications for understanding how individuals change and mature—how they experience the evolution of self—it is now appropriate to examine the Department of the Air Force's Competency List. The remainder of this chapter focuses on the first category: *Developing Self*. The term *developing* implies movement from a current state toward a future one, suggesting that the present state can be improved through intentional effort to enhance competence in specific areas. This, in turn, requires awareness of several factors influencing competence. Foremost among these is an individual's level of psychological and emotional maturity. For example, an individual operating primarily at the Interpersonal stage of self-evolution may need to progress toward a higher stage to achieve greater levels of certain competencies. A person who completes assigned tasks and waits for further direction—a potential indicator of Interpersonal-stage functioning—may require support to expand Information Seeking behaviors and develop greater initiative. Similarly, an individual who relies heavily on routine and predictable schedules may struggle to demonstrate Flexibility when tasked with planning or supporting complex projects.

Second, once individuals develop awareness of their current stage of development and level of competency, research suggests a corresponding effort must be made to identify change-prevention mechanisms that actively work to derail desired outcomes. For example, when confronted with a difficult task requiring sustained effort, does the individual demonstrate Perseverance, or does she allow less important projects to consume the time and attention required for higher-priority work? Similarly, as deadlines approach

and stress intensifies, does the individual exhibit Resilience, or does he fold under pressure, thereby reducing or eliminating his contribution to the team's ability to accomplish the project?

Finally, there should be periodic review and assessment of where individuals stand with respect to the evolution of self across the nine competencies. This process should certainly include dialogue between employee and supervisor, but individuals should also seek additional perspectives on self and competency. Kegan and Lahey recommend a "720-degree" feedback loop "involving key people in your private and public life" to reveal how deeply rooted self-constructs influence all forms of social interaction. This approach acknowledges that the construction of self—whether described through a competency framework or an evolutionary helix—permeates every aspect of life. Remaining within comfort zones by allowing negative elements of self-construction to persist can cause significant harm, regardless of context. The following sections outline the nine Developing Self competencies in the Air Force Competency List through the interpretive lens developed by Kegan and Lahey.

ACCOUNTABILITY

Former President Harry S. Truman famously kept a sign on his desk reading, "The Buck Stops Here." This phrase reflected Truman's belief that accountability is inseparable from authority and responsibility. According to the Air Force, the competency of Accountability is evident when one "demonstrates reliability and honesty; takes responsibility for the actions and behaviors of self and team" (AETC/A3J, 2022). This competency aligns closely with the Service's Core Value of Integrity and, at the Intermediate level, explicitly incorporates the Core Values. In group discussions, few would dispute that honesty and reliability are essential to good order, discipline, and organizational effectiveness. Yet organizations still experience breakdowns in accountability that signal either immaturity in this competency or outright rejection of it. The

following real-world example illustrates how failures in accountability can ripple through an organization.

An audit of an organization's Government Travel Card (GTC) program revealed that a civilian employee frequently failed to pay the balance on his GTC. When counseled by his supervisor, the employee acknowledged the lapse and promised to bring the account current. The supervisor monitored the account but observed that the employee again failed to make payment as promised. A subsequent in-depth audit revealed that the employee had used the GTC for personal expenses, including a vacation to a theme park, charging tickets, lodging, food, and souvenirs. The supervisor confiscated the employee's GTC and initiated disciplinary action that ultimately resulted in termination of employment.

Although this scenario is not typical, it demonstrates a clear rejection of the Core Value of Integrity and a refusal to accept accountability for misconduct. Beyond the loss of employment, the consequences extended throughout the organization. The supervisor spent significant time documenting the issue, consulting with personnel and legal advisors to ensure appropriate and fair action, reprogramming travel procedures to mitigate risk, and developing a lessons-learned initiative to prevent recurrence. The organizational and individual costs were substantial.

At the opposite end of the spectrum, during an Inspector General (IG) inspection, a civilian supervisor learned that inspectors might have identified a significant issue within her otherwise high-performing division. Tensions were already elevated due to the nature of IG inspections, and concerns that the issue could negatively affect the unit's overall assessment heightened stress levels further. The supervisor first convened an all-call, directing personnel to remain focused on mission execution and framing inspections as opportunities for organizational learning and improvement. She then met with the unit commander to disclose the potential issue. During this discussion, she framed the matter as her own failure to identify

the problem earlier rather than shifting blame to subordinates. Together, the leaders agreed that no action could be taken until the IG findings were finalized and developed a plan to address possible outcomes while maintaining mission focus.

Unlike the GTC case, in which an employee's failure to accept accountability resulted in termination, this scenario illustrates exemplary accountability at the supervisory level. The supervisor took ownership of the issue, protected her team, and elevated the concern appropriately. By choosing transparency over concealment and responsibility over blame-shifting, she reinforced the commander's trust and confidence. While neither leader welcomed the possibility of a negative IG finding, both recognized the importance of learning from the situation. As a result, the organization was positioned to improve its effectiveness through disciplined reflection and corrective action.

The Air Force defines Basic proficiency in Accountability as adhering to standards and looking after fellow Airmen and their families (AETC/A3J, 2022). Viewed through Kegan's framework, these behaviors align closely with the Interpersonal stage of development. Individuals at this stage may struggle with teamwork, may rely heavily on explicit rules, and may find it difficult to navigate ambiguity where standards are not clearly defined. Such individuals may be "in" the Air Force without yet being fully "of" the Air Force—understanding and following rules without fully internalizing them as personal ethical commitments.

At the Intermediate level, individuals "follow through on promises and commitments and embody the Air Force Core Values of Integrity, Service Before Self, and Excellence in All We Do" (AETC/A3J, 2022). As they transition to this stage, individuals increasingly internalize Core Values and align their identities with unit and Service missions. Their perspective shifts from "my job" or "my technical specialty" toward "my career" or "my profession." Rather than evaluating challenges solely through the lens of personal impact, Intermediate

practitioners apply rules and—more importantly—principles to navigate ambiguity. In doing so, they develop not only stronger Accountability but also increased capacity for greater responsibility and leadership. As their self-concept becomes more complex, they gain comfort operating in demanding environments without the discomfort typical of earlier developmental stages. While individuals may remain at the Intermediate level for extended periods, leaders and mentors should remain alert to opportunities that encourage continued growth, preventing stagnation at this critical stage of development.

People with Advanced levels of Accountability competency "do the right thing, even when it is unpopular or difficult. They also admit shortcomings and mistakes" (AETC/A3J, 2022). Many individuals at this level remain within Kegan's Institutional stage of evolution, yet they clearly operate at elevated levels of Accountability competency. This aligns with Kegan's observation that not every individual reaches the highest level of self-evolution. Because of their advanced competence, these individuals are trusted team members who frequently serve in both formal and informal leadership roles. They are recognized for their principled approach to organizational challenges and valued for addressing issues consistently and effectively. Leaders often look to individuals with Intermediate and Advanced levels of Accountability to form a core of trusted team members, relying on them to mentor Basic and Intermediate practitioners toward greater competence. Leaders understand that those who have evolved to Advanced levels of Accountability will deliver difficult messages—even at personal cost—and that willingness makes them invaluable in both personal relationships and organizational roles.

At the Expert level of Accountability, individuals "lead by example, model professionalism and excellence in every endeavor, and take personal responsibility for unit performance" (AETC/A3J, 2022). At this level of self-evolution, individuals may remain at the highest levels of the Institutional stage or may evolve toward what Kegan and

Lahey later describe as the *self-authoring mind* (Kegan & Lahey, 2009). Experts in Accountability frequently question the status quo as they seek to reframe fundamental assumptions underlying organizational values and ethics. They pursue improvements in Accountability behaviors by articulating issues in ways that are accessible to less experienced practitioners. Their focus remains on preserving what works while preparing the organization for future challenges for which existing Accountability frameworks may be insufficient. With one hand firmly on the controls of the present, they look ahead to prepare the next generation for challenges that lie just beyond the horizon.

Nearly every Service Academy and commissioning program emphasizes Accountability through a core honor statement: "I will not lie, cheat, or steal, nor will I tolerate among us those who do." Accountability is so central to institutional health and survival that each Service has embedded it deeply within its organizational culture. Like the Core Values, Accountability occupies a unique position among Developing Self competencies. This overview of evolving behaviors highlights the organizational effects of having individuals operating simultaneously at different stages of self-evolution and competency. Leaders must devote the time and attention necessary to detect lapses in Accountability and to prevent individuals exhibiting harmful behaviors from undermining unit effectiveness, cohesion, and morale.

PERSEVERANCE

A headquarters division was tasked with developing and submitting a comprehensive report detailing all aspects of a major command's mission. The external agency requiring the report would determine whether the mission was being executed in compliance with established legal, strategic, and operational standards. Years of budget and personnel reductions—including sequestration and furloughs—had reduced the division's authorized manpower from a

high of fifteen positions to a low of three, eventually stabilizing at six billets after a prolonged rebuilding effort. The campaign to restore manpower authorization coincided with the requirement to produce the report, making mission compliance the primary driver of resource justification.

The division chief assigned discrete portions of the report to each team member, with no overlap in responsibilities. This multiyear effort required personnel to align daily activities with long-term objectives while simultaneously addressing routine and emergent tasks. The workload was heavy and unrelenting, and stress intensified as the deadline approached. Despite repeated obstacles, the team overcame each challenge and delivered the report on time. The resulting evaluation affirmed that the command met or exceeded standards across all assessed areas. The team had persevered through sustained pressure and years of demanding work to accomplish its mission.

According to the Air Force Competency List, Airmen competent in Perseverance "display grit in accomplishing difficult long-term goals. They work strenuously toward challenges, maintaining effort and interest over years despite failure, adversity, and plateaus in progress" (AETC/A3J, 2022). As with other competencies, individuals can evolve toward higher levels of Perseverance. This definition acknowledges the presence of conflict or adversity that demands a response. Those who persevere overcome challenges; those who cannot summon the required grit often yield to immediate pressure. Groups naturally gravitate toward individuals with high levels of Perseverance because of their demonstrated capacity to carry work through to completion. Perseverance also relates closely to Resilience, as both competencies presuppose stressors that require sustained engagement. The connection to Kegan's theory of self-evolution is evident, particularly in the potential for both positive and negative developmental outcomes.

Individuals demonstrating Basic competence in Perseverance "persist after criticism and keep at it when trying to learn something challenging" (AETC/A3J, 2022). Kegan's framework assumes that individuals must persevere through stress and conflict to evolve toward higher levels of emotional maturity. High-performing organizations frequently cultivate cultures that leverage stress and conflict to improve performance. Such organizations often require individuals to articulate their contributions to mission success. Value is not measured solely by past accomplishments, but by recent and sustained performance. Conversely, a single misstep can negate years of strong performance. The Air Force's warfighting mission reflects this intensity through the Core Value of Excellence in All We Do.

For Civilian Airmen at the Basic level of Perseverance—particularly those without formative military training experiences—the uniformed Air Force's demanding feedback culture may feel intimidating. Success in such environments requires more than minimal perseverance; it demands sustained engagement in the face of critique and pressure.

At the Intermediate level, individuals "display commitment to achieving difficult work goals in challenging environments and overcome setbacks to achieve goals" (AETC/A3J, 2022). Effective performance at this level generally corresponds with maturation at the Institutional stage of development. The critical link lies in the relationship between work goals and environmental stressors. As illustrated in the earlier example, the division's workload remained constant despite personnel shortages. The familiar directive to "do more with less" reflects one of the most persistent perseverance challenges in modern organizations. Individuals at the Institutional stage often demonstrate higher Perseverance because they align organizational success with personal success, framed in terms of career development and professional identity. This integration of self and mission contributes to reserves of determination that sustain performance during prolonged adversity.

Individuals who "model perseverance in pursuit of long-term goals and maintain focus on extended projects" demonstrate Advanced competence in Perseverance (AETC/A3J, 2022). Such sustained commitment suggests progression beyond earlier developmental stages. The capacity to model perseverance, combined with an awareness of its importance to organizational health, indicates that these individuals may be approaching—or have reached—the Interindividual stage of self-evolution. Through continual self-assessment and sensitivity to organizational needs, they intervene at critical moments to reinforce faltering performance, often at personal cost. These interventions exemplify how Advanced practitioners model effective behavior. More importantly, by investing energy and confidence in others, they transfer perseverance indirectly, strengthening individuals and teams whose resolve may waver. Timely modeling and intervention frequently determine whether complex, long-term projects ultimately succeed or fail.

Perseverance Experts "help others regain motivation and commitment to long-term goals after major setbacks. They overcome initial objections, persuade others to provide support or tangible resources for long-term goals, and sustain passion and commitment over long periods of time" (AETC/A3J, 2022). It is one thing to build on success after success; it is another thing entirely to rebuild individual and team functioning and cohesiveness after setbacks and outright failures. Winston Churchill, one of history's greatest leaders, rallied Britain following the disastrous defeat of Allied forces after Germany invaded France in 1940. Churchill's legendary speech to the House of Commons on 13 May 1940 truthfully laid out the task at hand when he said, "I have nothing to offer but blood, toil, tears, and sweat." He ended with a call to arms and a clear vision of the ultimate goal: "You ask, what is our policy? I can say: It is to wage war, by sea, land, and air with all our might and all the strength that God can give us…You ask, what is our aim? I can answer in one word: It is victory, victory at all costs, victory in spite of all terror, victory no matter how long and hard the road may be…" (Churchill, 2003). Although few

leaders may have Churchill's perseverance competency, to function as experts at this competency, they must have clear assessments of the situation and the need to intervene. They must carefully time and craft their interventions to lift individuals and teams out of the tendency to despair and reveal to them reserves of perseverance they did not know existed.

Experts at perseverance do not acquire their competency naturally. Like all competencies—and as Kegan argues, all stages of self-evolution—perseverance and maturity develop in response to coping with intense environmental pressures. Those who adapt, evolve, and overcome create reserves of perseverance upon which they can draw when the next project threatens to go off the rails. Individuals who evolve toward more mature constructions of the self mobilize their reserves of perseverance to assist individuals and groups in their organizations to do what may seem impossible. When the literature in the field of leadership describes high-performing individuals and teams, it often does so in terms of how they perform under the stresses of adversity. Perseverance is an essential competency that produces high performance.

COMMUNICATION

Individuals who exhibit communication competency "effectively present, promote, and prioritize various ideas and issues, both verbally and non-verbally, through active listening, clear messaging, and by tailoring information to the appropriate audience" (AETC/A3J, 2022). There is no characteristic of leadership that is more ubiquitous than communication. Because of their position, leaders communicate all the time—even when they do not think they are communicating. People continually watch leaders, listen when they speak, interpret their body language, and read what they write. The amount of work and effort that goes into getting the right words into any formal communication attempt can be staggering. Despite such efforts, however, those who receive the message may not

understand, appreciate, or interpret the message in the way intended by the leader—especially when organizations experience stress or conflict. Nearly every person who has attended a meeting where leaders have spoken about situations, policies, or goals has had someone ask, "What do you think she meant by that?" The implication of such questions is that the message was somehow unclear or that there was some ulterior motive concealed within the effort to communicate with the organization.

At a basic level, people who are competent at communication can "convey information clearly and concisely to team members. They can use pictures to convey what words cannot clearly convey" (AETC/A3J, 2022). Even at this level, there are multiple layers of competency required to succeed in organizational settings, requiring at least an institutional construction of self-identity. Conveying information requires active listening to understand the requirements of the task. Being clear and concise implies the ability to craft and refine communication products (e.g., briefing slides, background papers, emails, letters, and other forms of communication) to achieve the desired outcome. Using pictures (or other tools) instead of words implies a degree of empathy with the audience, the capacity to anticipate ways that the communication attempt can go astray, and the foresight to correct issues with the message before a problem occurs. Regardless of the format or medium, basic levels of competency in communication also presume that first drafts or first attempts are never satisfactory; competent communicators always refine their products and their message before submitting them to the intended audience.

Individuals with intermediate competency in communication "communicate with sensitivity to others' needs of the moment and tailor messaging and briefings to address identified audience concerns" (AETC/A3J, 2022). Developing a level of empathy for the audience, regardless of the venue or medium used for communication, requires a maturity that goes beyond merely interpersonal interactions with those in the group or organization.

Even those at the earliest stage of institutional maturity may not have developed the requisite levels of sensitivity to others' concerns and needs to communicate effectively during times of stress and conflict. Often, there are no easy ways to deliver unwelcome news or messages; delaying or avoiding the conversation, however, rarely makes things better. Similarly, delivering unwelcome messages often works better face-to-face rather than at a distance—despite the discomfort that accrues to the bearer of bad news. Those with intermediate levels of communication competency earn credibility and trust within their organizations by taking the time to focus their communication opportunities on the message and on the individual. Especially when the message is unwelcome, the communication exchange can be sensitive, well thought out, and effective.

When a person reaches advanced competency levels with communication, they can "recognize non-verbal reactions of their audience, anticipate audience concerns, and adjust presentations accordingly. They can convey complex information in a clear and concise manner" (AETC/A3J, 2022). Being able to "read the room" is not adequate to achieve advanced communication competency. Being able to read the room, know what to do, and then act at the right moment reflects advanced competency. Some speakers always seem to capture their audience's attention. They know how to alter the pace of their presentation, the inflection and tone of their voice, and the intensity of their comments to carry the audience on a mutually agreeable journey through their message. Such speakers are said to have charisma or natural speaking skills, but rarely do people acquire such competencies without intense preparation, rehearsal, and practice.

All public speakers have experienced situations in which audience members have appeared not to pay attention; some may even appear to be sleeping during the presentation. This can distract the speaker and other members of the audience, but at a minimum it means that the person not paying attention or sleeping may not be receiving or benefiting from the message. Should the speaker stop the

presentation and chastise the offending audience member? Doing so could permanently derail the presentation for all the other audience members who appeared to be paying attention. Should the speaker ignore the person? This could also send a signal that the presentation was not important enough to demand the entire audience's attention. If the venue allows the speaker to move around, a better approach might be to move to different places during the presentation to keep all audience members alert and engaged. Such a technique presumes that the speaker knows the material well enough not to be tied to a podium or to the front of the room.

Expert communicators "present complex information articulately to persuade others about a contentious issue. They voice differing options without triggering a defensive response. They also mentor others on strategies for improving communication messaging" (AETC/A3J, 2022). It is not a coincidence that much of this level of competency deals with communication opportunities that may be fraught with conflict. When answers are not clear, when the context involves deeply held conflicting viewpoints, and when emotions run high, the leader must be at an emotional stage of development—the interindividual stage—that allows him or her to remain above the fray. Choosing sides, revealing one's personal opinions, and encouraging divisive behavior works directly against conflict resolution or consensus problem solving. Being able to comprehend and articulate all sides of an issue in terms that all parties understand and accept is an essential competency at the expert level. Recognizing and diffusing tensions and other negative issues also creates pathways toward solutions and resolution. Those at the interindividual stage of self-evolution take it as their mission to mentor communicators with the competencies necessary to resolve conflict and solve problems before they generate organizational crises.

DECISION MAKING

Prussian military theorist Carl von Clausewitz included a brief discussion of the effects of information on decision making in war in his classic treatise *On War*. Clausewitz compared the flow of information in war to a series of waves that build and crash on the commander, or the decision maker, creating confusion, uncertainty, and fear. The unreliability of most information compounds the decision-making problem for the commander because of the forces of fog, friction, and chance. According to Clausewitz, "Many intelligence reports in war are contradictory; even more are false, and most are uncertain. What one can reasonably ask of an officer is that he should possess a standard of judgment, which he can gain only from knowledge of men and affairs from common sense" (Clausewitz, 1976). Clausewitz observed that competency in decision making relied on experience and maturity rather than on more complete information.

Decision-making competency involves "making well-informed, effective, and timely decisions that weigh situational constraints, risks, and benefits" (AETC/A3J, 2022). Modern leaders have so much information available to them that there can be a tendency to multiply the effects Clausewitz describes by delaying decisions until more complete information arrives. This "paralysis by analysis" can do irreparable harm to an organization's mission effectiveness. Conversely, making hasty decisions without careful consideration of how the consequences will affect mission success can be equally harmful. The art of leadership, in part, is in knowing when a decision is necessary and when a decision can be deferred until more information becomes available.

Basic competency in decision making requires "investigating the facts as part of the decision-making process and allowing sufficient time to gain others' input before making a decision" (AETC/A3J, 2022). By focusing on facts rather than opinions, team members can improve the quality of their inputs to decision-making forums. This type of

inquisitiveness resides most effectively in those who have reached or exceeded Kegan's institutional stage of maturity. Unlike the interpersonal stage, with its focus on self-reinforcing groups, feelings, and moods, those at the institutional stage are more concerned with the organization's goals, objectives, and mission success—primarily because they have come to identify or closely align their life goals with those of the organization. This level of self-concept is necessary to sift through irrelevant information that could influence the quality of decisions in negative ways. Only by analyzing information objectively through the lenses of goals, objectives, and mission can those at the basic level of competency become trusted in decision-making endeavors.

At intermediate levels of competency in decision making, individuals "take time to consider the risks and benefits of a situation before making a decision. They identify key decisions within an area of responsibility" (AETC/A3J, 2022). As individuals gain experience and maturity in decision-making roles, they become more competent at evaluating how the quality of the available information influences possible decisions. Rather than seeing only one possible path to the desired outcome, they begin to see alternative paths, each with risks and benefits. At early stages of intermediate competency, such insights may appear intuitive, but as the individual becomes more mature and competent, the weighing of risks and benefits evolves into an ingrained methodology that may apply to nearly any decision-making activity. Along with greater competency comes more consistent, reliable decision-making input. Higher levels of trust that accompany increasing levels of competency help prepare the individual for moving through the institutional stage of maturity toward the interindividual stage.

Individuals with advanced levels of decision-making competency "leverage appropriate decision-making techniques—such as identifying root causes, involving others, and gathering information —to weigh rationally all information when uncertain" (AETC/A3J, 2022). What makes such behaviors advanced is not the activities—

those at intermediate, and even basic, levels of competency also engage in such activities. What separates individuals at the advanced level of competency from those with lower levels is the speed and systematic way in which they acquire, assess, and integrate information into their decision-making processes. In other words, after integrating the experiences of making decisions under stressful conditions, individuals with advanced competency become more proficient and efficient at knowing when and how to act in pursuit of organizational goals and objectives. They have a seemingly intuitive grasp of a wide array of information, appear to be voracious consumers of information, and their ability to see connections, risks, and benefits seems intuitive. In fact, their competency has developed to a point at which the pace of their decision making exceeds those with lower levels of competency.

At expert levels of competency, individuals "coach others as they solve problems, make well-thought-out decisions under time pressure, and identify known and unknown variables before making decisions" (AETC/A3J, 2022). Working through coaching and mentoring relationships suggests that expert decision-making competency requires interindividual levels of maturity and self-concept. The impulse to engage in deeply personal relationships by developing competency in others gives expert decision makers opportunities to fulfill personal aspirations while also creating layers of depth and breadth in the organization. Furthermore, the emphasis on discerning the influence of known and unknown variables on the quality of decisions requires higher levels of competency and maturity. The impression created by the description of such expert decision makers is one of methodical, measured, deep analysis with the ability to know when a decision must be made compared to when it is advisable and even necessary to wait for more, better information. The twin roles of expert decision makers—developing the organization and ensuring quality decisions—describe people who have reached the pinnacle of their careers and are also at the peak of maturity and self-concept. Matching such individuals with

the right organizations can ignite performance and lead to outstanding results.

INFORMATION SEEKING

Writing in 1993, Peter Drucker, the renowned leadership and management scholar, perceived a radical change in requirements for future leaders. The intersection of global economic interactions with increasingly advanced technologies would not only spawn new methods for businesses but would also simultaneously render established practices irrelevant. Drucker wrote, "The educated person will therefore have to be prepared to live and work simultaneously in two cultures—that of the 'intellectual,' who focuses on words and ideas, and that of the 'manager,' who focuses on people and work" (Drucker, 2001). Hollywood producer Brian Grazer places an even greater value on curiosity. Reflecting on his career, Grazer wrote, "Curiosity has been the most valuable quality, the most important resource, the central motivation of my life. I think curiosity should be as much a part of our culture, our educational system, our workplaces, as concepts like 'creativity' and 'innovation'" (Grazer & Fishman, 2015). Drucker and Grazer approach the concept of personal and organizational success from different perspectives, but both agree that education and curiosity—in a phrase, information seeking—is a prerequisite for any semblance of success.

The Air Force competency of information seeking echoes Drucker's valuing of education and Grazer's valuing of curiosity. Those who exhibit the competency of information seeking "demonstrate an underlying curiosity; desire to know more about things, people, oneself, the mission, or issues; an eager, aggressive learner" (AETC/A3J, 2022). Such people are producers and consumers of information and knowledge. The scope of their interests is wide and diverse as they seek different perspectives on how to understand complex issues and phenomena. Information seekers learn to ask complex questions that demand multifaceted answers; they also

remain suspicious of quick, easy answers that reflect established bureaucratic positions. By their nature, those with high information seeking competency levels are lifelong learners. In today's information environment, however, the amount of information available overwhelms those who remain tied to old ways of learning. Not only does the information seeking learner have to be an avid reader, but in the global information society in which we live, acquiring and maintaining high levels of information seeking competency requires multi-source, multi-media, multi-temporal, and multi-domain facility with information storage, transmission, acquisition, and analysis mechanisms. The complexity inherent in the nature of today's information ecosystems could make this competency the most important one to acquire and nurture for aspiring leaders.

At the basic competency level, individuals who exhibit information seeking "ask direct questions and consult available resources. When needed, they ask questions to clarify information" (AETC/A3J, 2022). This Air Force characterization of the basic competency level implies a transactional relationship between the individual and information. If the individual's store of information is inadequate for the assigned task, the solution is to ask questions or consult applicable sources. Curiosity and inquisitiveness appear limited to the information required at the moment, with little concern for larger implications of the task or its connections to other mission elements. As with other competencies, individuals at the institutional stage of development who have forged connections with the organization will be most comfortable at the basic level of information seeking competency. Organizations need individuals at this level who can be depended on to research information required for the day-to-day operations that occupy most of the mission.

Individuals who acquire intermediate information seeking levels "call on others who are not personally involved to get their perspectives, background information, or experiences. They ask probing questions to get to the root of a situation or problem"

(AETC/A3J, 2022). This broadening of inquisitiveness appears to align with an individual's maturation toward higher institutional and interindividual stages of development. By expanding the search for information, those with intermediate competency enrich their understanding of the issue under investigation and simultaneously encounter connected fields of inquiry. Rather than expecting binary responses to inquiries, intermediate information seekers begin to be suspicious of such answers and begin probing with more sophisticated questions to tease out the nuances of cause and effect. Their search does not end at "What?" answers, but instead expands into "Why?" "How?" "Why not?" and other questions that lead to unexpected issues that often have unanticipated effects on mission success. In the process of tracking down questions and answers, they begin to create personal repositories of knowledge and information —some of which overturn or call into question prior knowledge or conclusions.

Advanced information seeking competency involves "pursuing opportunities for additional information that may be useful in the future. [Often such practitioners] ask important questions that others are reluctant to ask or answer" (AETC/A3J, 2022). With an ever-widening search for information, advanced information seeking competency often brings the individual into conflict with the status quo. Pushing institutional and organizational boundaries creates environmental stress and conflict that can drive individuals back toward an institutional stage of maturity. Alternatively, for those with determination and courage, recognizing new ways of addressing problems may ignite self-evolution that leads to new solutions that tear down established organizational doctrines or structures. The difference between destruction for its own sake and innovation, in part, lies in the interindividual stage of development, in which an individual values the institution's survival over its present form or organization. The challenge for revolutionary thinkers is in their ability to overcome the inevitable resistance that will rise from those within the organization who have vested interests in the status quo.

Information Seeking experts display competency at "coaching and guiding others to appreciate the importance of continuous learning. They personally establish ongoing systems or habits for gathering various kinds of information. They identify their own areas of deficit while planning and setting goals and devising strategies for learning" (AETC/A3J, 2022). At this level of competency, individuals typically have integrated information seeking into their regular routines. They acquire, process, analyze, disseminate, and archive information according to wide-ranging personal and institutional goals and strategies. They respond enthusiastically to those who inquire about why and how their information seeking ecosystems contribute to career and organizational success through coaching, mentoring, and other initiatives designed to pass on their insights to others. At the highest levels of competency, such individuals perceive connections between individual information seeking and organizational structures—they often develop and implement attempts to foster institutional learning. To the degree that such initiatives succeed, individuals within the organization acquire greater competency as the organization also becomes information based.

FLEXIBILITY

Personal productivity expert David Allen uses a karate metaphor to describe his desired end state for dealing with competing demands for his creativity and attention. "In karate there is an image that's used to define the position of perfect readiness: 'mind like water.' Imagine throwing a pebble into a still pond. How does the water respond? The answer is, totally appropriately to the force and mass of the input; then it returns to calm. It doesn't overreact or underreact . . . Clearing the mind and being flexible are key" (Allen, 2001). Acquiring flexibility competency gives individuals the ability to "adapt to and work with a variety of situations, individuals, or groups effectively" (AETC/A3J, 2022). Much like David Allen's "mind like water" metaphor, being flexible implies a sense of calm while assessing the situation, the resources, and the personnel available to confront the

scenario. Competency with flexibility inherently requires taking time to act in appropriate ways to achieve mission effectiveness rather than merely reacting.

At the basic levels of competency with flexibility, individuals "change the approach when the current approach is not working. Often, they modify their approach based on feedback from others" (AETC/A3J, 2022). Even at this level, there is a suggestion of the applicability of David Allen's metaphor by sensing the environment before acting. On one hand, basic flexibility competency requires the presence of mind to know when something is not working as expected or desired. On the other hand, remaining open to feedback—even seeking feedback as part of the assessment process—is an essential component of this competency. Individuals who remain at the interpersonal stage may interpret critiques of their performance or their approach as attacks on who they are rather than as indications that their approach is not producing the desired outcome. Reaching levels of self-concept that allow one to remain open to evaluation and critique in the interest of mission effectiveness suggests that one must be at the institutional stage of maturity.

At intermediate levels of flexibility competency, individuals "prioritize, consider alternatives, and respond quickly and effectively to unexpected, rapidly changing conditions. They change their behavior or approach to suit the situation" (AETC/A3J, 2022). The critical assessment inherent in this level of competency distinguishes it from the basic level. Often, however, the speed at which change occurs can depend on the context in which the person finds him or herself. For scenarios in which the lag time between one stage of a situation and the next event in the scenario can be days or even weeks, regardless of the time between events, individuals at the intermediate level of flexibility competency will often analyze the available information to build the most accurate assessment possible of current and potential future outcomes. It may be as important at this level to know when not to change directions as it is to know when to change directions. Building proficiency with the interplay

between action, assessment, and adjustment is essential to acquiring intermediate flexibility competency.

Individuals with advanced flexibility competency "respond proactively to unexpected or ambiguous situations, opportunities, or risks. In static environments, they find and implement constructive methods to exercise flexibility" (AETC/A3J, 2022). Observers of emerging, accelerating technological and social trends describe the disruptions that occur as new capabilities erase former practices, structures, and technologies. Thomas L. Friedman describes one such trend—the emergence of cloud computing—as a supernova that is transforming life, governments, economics, and social networks in dramatic ways. He writes, "The flows of knowledge, new ideas, medical advice, innovation, insults, rumors, collaboration, matchmaking, lending, banking, trading, friendship forging, commerce, and learning now circulate globally at a speed and breadth we have never seen before" (Friedman, 2016). Such a world is filled with ambiguity, opportunities, and risks. This requires individuals to become sensitive to emerging trends that reach beyond their specialty fields to perceive connections between their organization's mission and new ways of operating. Under such conditions, flexibility and curiosity operate together.

Individuals who achieve expert flexibility competency "challenge others to treat new situations or risks as opportunities for learning or growth. They proactively anticipate major changes to the context and environment and effectively adapt in advance of the changes. They make large or long-term adaptations in their own or partnering organizations in response to the needs of the situation" (AETC/A3J, 2022). One of my mentors observed that there are always opportunities—even in a time of dramatic budget and personnel reductions. Approaching every situation from the perspective of seeking opportunities to advance the organization's mission rather than from a perspective of preserving the status quo is one of the keys to achieving expert flexibility competency. Knowing where the opportunities lie and then adapting the organization to take

advantage of those opportunities can create discomfort among some members of the organization, but when compared to the potentially worse discomfort of being subject to the trauma of change being imposed by unexpected events, experts with flexibility prefer to set their own conditions rather than have the conditions imposed on them. This level of competency interacts closely with initiative, as will become evident later in the chapter.

RESILIENCE

Many authors have written about the disruptive effects that will occur because of the myriad changes in the economy, technologies, social systems, and other sectors of our world. One author observed, "What happens when an unstoppable force (the future) meets an immovable object (our brains)? The end of the world as we know it" (Somers, 2012). Shelves of books focus on preparing organizations, companies, corporations, and government agencies to cope with the effects of rapid, unforeseen change. Fewer books deal with preparing individuals to be more resilient under the same pressures that affect their organizations. It seems as if the waves of change affect the companies without touching the employees who do the work for the companies. The reality, of course, is very different. Every ripple of change exerts direct effects on the people of organizations— sometimes those effects produce opportunities; sometimes they produce tragedies. As one author observed, "Resilience doesn't necessarily mean anticipating failure; it means anticipating that you can't anticipate what's next and working instead on a sort of situational awareness" (Ito & Howe, 2016). The advantage of being resilient is not in merely weathering the storm caused by disruptive changes, but in adapting to new conditions to ensure personal and organizational success.

Resilient people are competent at "negotiating, managing, and adapting to significant sources of stress or trauma" (AETC/A3J, 2022). Resilience is not just about weathering the immediate storm, but it

also requires continuing to perform in the long periods following the storm's aftermath. Adaptation is necessary because rarely can individuals and their organizations return to pre-trauma conditions —consider how communities have had to adapt after major hurricanes, fires, or disease outbreaks. People who react quickly to provide emergency services, begin recovery efforts, clear roads and bridges, ensure food and medical supplies are available, and help reestablish normal routines are necessary for immediate and long-term recovery. The same is true for any organization that faces significant challenges, change, or unanticipated threats. Members of the organization must mobilize their resilience competencies to weather the event and continue accomplishing the organization's mission.

Basic levels of resilience competency require "dealing with stressful situations one step at a time and maintaining an evident work-life balance" (AETC/A3J, 2022). Falling back on established routines— taking things one step at a time—is an essential component upon which to build more sophisticated resiliency competencies. At the basic level, however, there is also an assumption that resilience relies on healthy lifestyle practices. If individuals have few social, spiritual, and wellness outlets beyond the routines of work, they are less likely to develop the resilience competencies required when stressful situations inevitably arise. The opposite of resilience—fragility—will likely occur in the absence of effective work-life balancing mechanisms. Even simple initiatives, such as taking short breaks to walk away from the problems of the moment, developing the habit of drinking recommended amounts of water throughout the day, and focusing on getting recommended periods of sleep, will begin to build reserves of resilience.

Individuals with intermediate levels of resilience competency "come through difficult times with little trouble and recover quickly from a singular stressful event" (AETC/A3J, 2022). This level of resilience builds on the basic level. Without effective preparation mechanisms and coping habits, the recovery time following stressful situations

will be longer and more difficult. As Joi Ito and Jeff Howe observed, "The classic illustration of resilience over strength is the story of the reed and the oak tree. When hurricane winds blow, the steel-strong oak shatters, while the supple, resilient reed bows low and springs up again when the storm has passed. In trying to resist failure, the oak has instead guaranteed it" (Ito & Howe, 2016). In high-performing organizations, individuals with intermediate resilience competencies serve as centers of calm within storms—they perform steadily while coping with pressures and stress, and they require less, if any, downtime as things return to the new state following the event.

Advanced levels of resilience competency rely on "using innovative techniques to overcome complex traumatic or stressful events." Like those with intermediate competency, individuals with advanced resilience competency "recover quickly from ongoing stressful events" (AETC/A3J, 2022). Although most of this chapter has focused on civilian employees, an example from a military context will help illustrate how individuals with advanced levels of competency ensure mission success and help create shared identities—despite ongoing stress and trauma. During World War II, theU.S. Army Air Forces Eighth Air Force bomber crews carried the fight into the teeth of German air defenses. "Most of these men suppressed their anxiety and continued to fly, admitting their fear and talking shamelessly about it with crewmates . . . Most frightened Airmen among the approximately 25 percent that beat the odds and lived achieved enough mastery over stress to continue to fight resolutely, even heroically" (Miller, 2006). Some memoirs of ground and air combat indicate that some survivors operated on the assumption that their fates were sealed and that they would eventually die. Others appeared to remain optimistic about their futures. Either way, the common thread in such individuals was their resilience in the face of overwhelming odds, their ability to focus on the mission, and their recovery after their combat experiences were behind them.

No one with a balanced self-concept voluntarily seeks out stressful or traumatic events. Individuals with expert resilience competency,

however, may find themselves repeatedly in such situations as they achieve career success. Experts in resilience "model a positive approach to overcome stress or significant trauma. They recover quickly when traumatic or highly stressful events occur in rapid succession. They adapt to subsequent stressful events increasingly well and their experiences with stress have demonstrable positive effects on their self-development" (AETC/A3J, 2022). There is a clear connection between higher resilience competency and self-confidence, as indicated in the Air Force's definition of resilience experts. This symbiotic relationship between competency and confidence is one of the hallmarks of effective leaders. In the movie *The Replacements*, Gene Hackman's character exhorts the quarterback played by Keanu Reeves, "When the game is on the line, winners always want the ball" (Deutch, 2000). Resilience experts neither rush toward stressful situations nor shrink from them. Instead, they rise to the occasion with the confidence that they can lead their organizations through whatever challenge the situation presents.

INITIATIVE

In any organization, no matter how large or small, there is always more work that needs to be done than there are people to do it. The colloquial adaptation of the Pareto Principle holds that 80 percent of the work is done by 20 percent of the people. This implies that a large portion of an organization's members appear either to be not performing their jobs as effectively as they should or that a few of the workers overperform. The reality is probably not as stark as the 80/20 rule seems to describe, but most of us have been in organizations in which there are a few key contributors who always seem to be magnets for more tasks and who are always involved in the core aspects of the mission. One reason for this is that there are always people who appear to identify their personal success strongly with the organization's success, and such people take initiative to contribute significantly to the organization's mission. The Air Force Competency List definition of initiative describes individuals who

"do more than is required or expected to improve job results. Such people take action appropriately without prompting" (AETC/A3J, 2022). Regardless of the 80/20 rule's implied inefficiency, organizations rarely succeed without the contributions of each member—regardless of where they are on the spectrum of initiative competency.

Individuals with basic initiative competency "complete assignments without close supervision and display good effort when performing assigned tasks" (AETC/A3J, 2022). This level of competency goes beyond merely doing one's job. There is an expectation of close attention to detail, following through, and even an expectation that the individual will seek to improve the product or its associated processes. The emphasis on the organization's success suggests that those who have reached the institutional stage of maturity will have the requisite self-concept to cooperate with other workers—even if it means requesting assistance or admitting deficiencies in knowledge or skills—to achieve the organization's goals and objectives. Closely linking personal success and reputation with the organization's outcomes can motivate individuals to take initiative even when it involves risks or uncertainty.

Building on basic initiative competency, individuals who evolve toward intermediate competency "recognize and act on present opportunities or address present problems. They take action to create opportunities or to avoid problems" (AETC/A3J, 2022). The shift at this level of competency from completing assignments toward more active sensing of the environment and acting to address immediate or emerging situations marks a higher level of awareness and competency, and typically accompanies more responsible positions in an organization. Lieutenant General Hal Moore (USA, ret.) wrote, "There's always one more thing you can do to influence any situation in your favor—and after that one more thing, and after that…The more you do the more opportunities arise" (Moore & Galloway, 2009). This observation carries the implication of how individuals with intermediate initiative competency view their roles in their

organizations. At the intermediate competency level, individuals have learned to view taking initiative as the engine for generating opportunities that contribute to success.

Looking beyond the problems of the moment to anticipate and forestall potential future problems—and to seize potential opportunities—indicates advanced levels of initiative competency. At this level, individuals "put in extra effort to complete work when not required and act quickly and decisively when the norm is to hope a problem will resolve itself" (AETC/A3J, 2022). As with many other advanced level competencies, to reach this level, individuals must have matured toward higher stages of institutional—and probably the interindividual—stage of self-concept. The challenge presented by keeping an eye on the horizon and being proactive helps individuals with this level of competency redefine their self-concept and their roles in the organization.

Initiative competency experts "inspire others to contribute more than the job requires. They exceed mission requirements to achieve higher-level mission goals and put in extraordinary effort by working outside the norm to get the job done" (AETC/A3J, 2022). The nexus between the interindividual stage of maturity and expert initiative competency is evident in the above description. Initiative experts not only contribute to high-performing organizational success through their efforts, but they also tend to replicate themselves within their organizations. This occurs in part because of the energy they generate through their work ethic and their efforts—success both breeds and attracts success. Such individuals, operating from the interindividual perspective, create intense relationships with others that open opportunities to coach, train, and mentor others toward higher levels of initiative competency. When initiative experts are present in organizations, mission success can seem to be a foregone conclusion.

SELF-CONTROL

Rudyard Kipling wrote the following observation about handling one's emotions in a crisis in the first stanza of his timeless poem, *If*:

> **If you can keep your head when all about you**
>
> **Are losing theirs and blaming it on you.**
>
> **If you can trust yourself when all men doubt you,**
>
> **But make allowance for their doubting too;**
>
> **If you can wait and not be tired by waiting,**
>
> **Or being lied about, don't deal in lies,**
>
> **Or being hated, don't give way to hating,**
>
> **And yet don't look too good, nor talk too wise . . .**
>
> — KIPLING, 1943

Kipling's admonitions describe the competency of self-control—"keeping one's emotions under control and restraining negative actions when under stress" (AETC/A3J, 2022). His poem outlines several behaviors that distinguish a young, impulsive individual from those that characterize more mature persons. As with perseverance and resilience, acquiring the highest levels of self-control competency is an evolutionary maturation process brought about through the influence of changes in the environment.

At the basic level of competency, individuals who exhibit self-control "resist the temptation to engage in inappropriate involvement in impulsive behavior and communicate concern without raising their voices" (AETC/A3J, 2022). Unfortunately, the proliferation of social media, with its anonymity and lack of direct accountability, may prevent competency development for those individuals who should be transitioning from the interpersonal toward the institutional stage

of self-evolution. Routine interactions within groups and teams can bring on the types of internal conflict Kegan describes, as less mature individuals experience the give-and-take inherent in the work environment. Leaders should recognize indicators of lower levels of maturity and competency with respect to self-control in team members and prepare engagement plans with appropriate levels of mentoring, assistance, and, if necessary, interventions to prevent those with less mature competency from exerting negative effects on group cohesiveness.

Individuals with intermediate levels of self-control competency "wait until an appropriate time to present ideas and re-engage in discussions or other processes calmly after initial conflict" (AETC/A3J, 2022). The ability to restrain one's emotions and to reflect and analyze before launching into an argument is indicative of someone who has evolved toward the institutional stage of maturity. Such individuals have often become more comfortable with perspectives that differ from their own and are willing to examine their beliefs, assumptions, and conclusions before exchanging opinions with other team members. The intermediate level of self-control competency evolves, in part, because individuals begin to identify with and consider the organization's mission as a primary concern when potential conflicts arise or when other members of the team propose differing opinions. It would not be too strong an assertion to suggest that one of the prerequisites for aspiring leaders is that they must be at the intermediate level of self-control competency before being entrusted with greater leadership responsibilities.

At advanced levels of self-control competency, individuals "remain visibly calm in stressful situations when others are not remaining calm. Such individuals control strong emotions or other stress and take action to respond constructively to the source of the problem" (AETC/A3J, 2022). Leaders with this level of competency conduct themselves with the belief that the members of their organizations are stronger than they believe themselves to be. When their organizations confront

daunting—or even hopeless—situations, they refuse to give in to the temptation to quit or collapse under the pressure. By doing so, they give people in their organizations the strength to conquer their fears and see the organization through its challenges. As Kegan observes, people at the interindividual stage of maturity recognize that isolated individuals may be unable to maintain self-control when subjected to intense pressures, but by fostering an organizational culture of interdependence, the organization will function more effectively. Through the organization's collective strength, everyone will be able to draw on reserves of self-control they would not experience in isolation.

TOWARD A DEVELOPMENT CULTURE

The underlying constant in any developmental scenario is change. According to Kegan and Lahey, and practical experience, humans do not always change voluntarily or willingly, even when personal survival is at stake (Kegan & Lahey, 2009). If the preceding presentation of the intersection between self-concept and competency illustrates anything, it is the daunting complexity involved in acquiring and evolving the nine Developing Self competencies. Leaders should consider how to address the complexity systematically to help their people achieve higher levels of competency. In doing so, their developmental strategies should have a tight connection to mission outcomes and organizational cohesion.

Development does not occur without some intentional program, plan, or intervention. It can also be stalled in the absence of such initiatives. Kegan's theory of the evolving self relies, in part, on environmental influences that require the individual to adapt and change. When such change occurs, it is frustrating or impossible for the individual to remain within the environmental constraints of lower levels of maturity. The same can be said for competency development. If an individual has higher levels of competency than a

position requires, the organization may get a higher dividend on the individual's contribution, but the price could be individual frustration, demoralization, and, eventually, departure for more fulfilling employment elsewhere. The key for leaders involves recognizing the nexus between self-concept and competency and then working with individuals to develop and leverage the maximum contributions of everyone toward the organization's goals and objectives.

The literature in this field suggests several principles for designing a developmental strategy. First, everyone in the organization—from the leader to the least-ranking member—should benefit from development initiatives. Second, just because everyone should benefit from development does not mean that the organization should have a one-size-fits-all approach. Third, the evolutionary nature of self-concept and competency suggests that any development approach will take time and therefore must become embedded in the life cycle of the organization. Fourth, group interaction, feedback, and cohesion are invaluable for meaningful development to occur. Finally, the setting for specific developmental interventions is a crucial component of the strategy. The following paragraphs will briefly examine each principle.

Everyone should benefit from development. Assuming that the leader's goal is to see tangible improvements in organizational and mission performance, one of the most visible ways to lend credibility to developmental strategies is to apply them to everyone in the organization. Kegan and Lahey provide several examples from their consulting experiences in which even chief executive officers (CEOs) of large corporations actively engaged with developmental initiatives aimed at overcoming resistance to change (Kegan & Lahey, 2009). Without the CEO's commitment to and participation in the effort, the other members of the organization would not have engaged with or benefitted from the program. Furthermore, lower-ranking members of the organization were watching to see if the "bosses" were

participating in the developmental effort before they committed to participating.

A corollary to the first principle is that the developmental strategy should fit the organization's needs at every level of the hierarchy. Some of the interactions will require individuals to be open with personal insights and revelations. Protecting confidentiality and preserving dignity is essential to preserving trust and credibility. Perhaps most importantly, however, is the recognition that what Kegan and Lahey describe as a Deliberately Developmental Organization (DDO) "is deliberately developmental because it intersects continually with its members' developmental position, whatever that position is, offering invitations for them to grow beyond the limits of their current mind-sets, if they are ready for the move" (Kegan, Lahey, Miller, Fleming, & Helsing, 2016). Even if the scope is limited only to an individual's self-concept (or maturity), meeting the individual where they are is essential to ensuring success for any interaction. When considering the nine Developing Self competencies, each with four possible levels of development, it becomes even more important for the developmental approach to align with when and how the individual "is ready to move."

One of the reasons so many developmental initiatives fail, or simply fade away, is that they are not embedded deeply in the culture of the organization. Consequently, the organization does not allow individuals or the developmental program the time necessary to produce meaningful change. Time can have at least two components. First, is the time devoted during the working life of the organization for recognizable developmental activities. If the organization's leaders do not carve out time in the schedule to devote to developmental activities, the message to individuals becomes clear—this is not a priority. Second, leaders must have realistic expectations for how long it may take to realize visible gains. Some people may respond quickly and make impressive leaps in performance and competency. Others may remain at the same level but improve their competency. As Kegan and Lahey explain, "Not everyone is always ready to

undergo the transformation it takes to climb to a new plateau. There is also a kind of human progress in making our way further along the horizontal line" (Kegan, Lahey, Miller, Fleming, & Helsing, 2016). Leaders must be able to recognize progress in whatever form it takes and remain committed and patient enough to celebrate the progress when it occurs.

While self-evolution occurs within an individual, it is rarely achieved solely by self-study. As Kegan pointed out in *The Evolving Self*, the impetus for moving from one stage of maturity to a higher stage comes from interacting with the environment—typically with other human beings (Kegan, 1982). As Kegan and Lahey later described, "… an organization's actions—its communities and its practices— intersects with individuals, wherever they are in the developmental journey" (Kegan, Lahey, Miller, Fleming, & Helsing, 2016). Subsequent research appears to correlate with Kegan's insights, suggesting that group interaction focused on enhancing leader competencies—applied over time—significantly improves leadership competency and performance (Fusco, O'Riordan, & Palmer, 2015; Florent-Treacy, 2009; Berkovich, 2014). Designing group activities to elicit specific developmental outcomes and sustaining group cohesiveness between developmental interventions appears to provide the support necessary to capitalize on growth opportunities.

The setting within which development occurs is as important as the structure and content of the developmental intervention. In today's chaotic, fast-paced environment, leaders who commit to developing people in their organizations must remove the day-to-day distractions that naturally compete with and dilute anything not directly connected with the mission. That means, in the first place, that leaders must couch the mission in terms of developing the human capital resources of the organization. If the operations of the enterprise require specific settings and equipment, then so does the development aspect of the mission. Whether development activities occur in offices, auditoriums, break rooms, or at off-site locations, leaders must ensure the venues are appropriate and sufficient to

achieve developmental objectives. Individuals must "disconnect" from the day-to-day business (phone calls, text messages, chat, email, or other media) to maximize the benefits of each developmental opportunity.

CONCLUSION

This chapter began with the observation that the stakes could not be higher for today's organizations that confront accelerating levels of change and complexity. The organizational task of developing people is inextricably linked to mission success. Rather than merely focusing on training and education to produce new skills or refined insights, today's workforce requires increasingly complex competencies founded on highly developed self-concepts. Research suggests that the kinds of competencies and the degrees of maturity lag the requirements if our organizations are to succeed at meeting daunting environmental, social, operational, and strategic challenges. According to Kegan and Lahey, "we now call on workers to understand themselves and their world at a qualitatively higher level of mental complexity . . . Needed now are leaders who can not only run but also reconstitute their organizations—their norms, missions, and cultures—in an increasingly fast-changing environment" (Kegan, Lahey, Miller, Fleming, & Helsing, 2016). Developing Self competencies are imperative if our organizations are to achieve their missions.

The evolution of the self and the development of competencies are inextricably linked because competencies are not merely traits or abilities. The nine competencies focused on Developing Self in the Air Force competency list require individuals to be aware of the need to evolve toward higher levels of maturity if they are to maximize their potential in each of the competency areas. Research has shown that this type of developmental journey works best in concert with healthy, interactive group feedback. To evolve and to sustain personal growth, individuals must open themselves up to how others perceive

them—at work and at home—while also remaining willing to change in response to others' suggestions. Often, the context of organizational change brings enough dissonance to push individuals out of their comfort zones, but a person's defense mechanisms also can function effectively to prevent meaningful evolutionary growth. When this occurs, people can stall temporarily or even remain at permanent plateaus on their evolutionary path. Research also suggests that, barring significant interventions aimed at overcoming individual immunity to change, most organizational change efforts falter because they lack the insight and tools to help people overcome their deep-seated defense mechanisms.

Air and Space Force members who aspire to higher levels of competency must comprehend the ways in which their self-construct both enables and limits their potential to reach their personal and professional goals. Gaining a realistic assessment of where one is on the continuum of self-evolution, linking that assessment to specific competency development, and then devising workable plans to develop—to evolve—toward more mature, competent levels requires being willing to confront deeply held conceptions of who one is, how one interacts with others, and the steps necessary to deconstruct the present state in favor of striving for a new, higher state of maturity and competency. The literature suggests that not only are such journeys potentially long and difficult, but that in the end, individuals who have assumed the risk of such journeys experience positive career results along with unexpected positive results in self-perceptions, self-constructs, and self-confidence.

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3

DEVELOPING OTHERS: INSTITUTIONALIZING EXCELLENCE

ANTHONY C. CAIN

Effective organizations do not simply accomplish their missions well. The ability to replicate outstanding performance—despite unanticipated changes in resources, operating contexts, and personnel—distinguishes perpetually high-performing organizations from merely excellent ones. The formal and informal leaders who make up superlative organizations invest time, energy, and resources to develop others within their organization. They have internalized the axiom, "Give a person a fish and he will eat for a day. Teach a person to fish and he will eat for a lifetime." Leaders create a culture of excellence in their organizations that becomes self-replicating and self-sustaining by mobilizing the competencies of Developing People, Teamwork, Service Mindset, and Leadership. Such organizations create and sustain morale, camaraderie, and a sense of confidence such that, no matter what challenge comes along, the members of the organization will rise to the occasion.

People do not learn, acquire competency, or become better leaders by simply reading or taking courses. They learn through training, education, and experience—and by combining the knowledge gained through those venues with reflection, feedback, and

correction. Much, but not all, of the responsibility for evolving toward greater competency falls on the shoulders of the individual. Development is a shared responsibility within organizations that is essential to sustaining mission-oriented performance. Senior members of the organization must also take responsibility for teaching, training, mentoring, and incorporating new and junior members to become integral contributors to the team. Only through focused, deliberate, and consistent development can organizations move from the merely effective to become high-performing entities.

The preceding chapter focused on how individuals develop their self to become more effective mission contributors and leaders. Within each Developing Self competency, the advanced and expert levels of competency leverage the more mature and sophisticated construction of the self to contribute to higher performance for others and for the organization. Even at higher intermediate levels of competency, the focus turns toward institutional goals and outcomes, which results in intervening to identify and correct errors or deficiencies in performance. The interactions between those with higher competency levels and those at lower levels create opportunities for forging rich relationships conducive to developing, training, mentoring, and leading.

As with all competency development endeavors, the key becomes not merely completing a transactional exchange—for example, showing a coworker how to complete a task or correcting an error. The goal instead requires focusing on specific competencies and moving with purpose from lower levels of competency toward higher, more complex levels. Each interaction thus creates opportunities for developing self, developing others, and developing more effective organizations. Developing others is a leadership responsibility requiring the ability to assess where individual members and the collective membership of an organization are in relation to the Developing Self competencies. Creating high-performance organizations requires not only excellent technical performance of job skills, but also combining technical excellence with deploying

and enhancing the levels of Self competencies. This foreshadows the competencies required for Developing Organizations to the extent that organizations are comprised of groups of individuals brought together to accomplish a common mission or purpose. Mission accomplishment in such interactions forges relationships and bonds that come to characterize an organization's culture of excellence.

ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

The literature focused on organizational effectiveness includes significant research on organizational culture. An assumption behind much of the literature holds that effective organizations are characterized by positive cultural traits or characteristics, while poor-performing organizations have deficiencies in the organizational culture that hinder or prevent desired performance. Often, the credit or blame for the culture of an organization rests with the leader—and when this happens, the leader usually becomes characterized as being "good" or "bad" because of the organization's performance. There is obviously some correlation between the leader's influence and the organization's culture. There are also situations in which a leader who has performed effectively in the past cannot overcome an organization's negative cultural characteristics, or, conversely, in which a leader who may be deficient in many areas benefits from a high-performing, self-regulating organizational culture. The goal would seem to be for leaders to foster the types of behaviors and actions that enhance and sustain superior performance. This may be harder than it appears to be on the surface.

The literature suggests that culture is difficult to identify and even more difficult to replicate. One author suggested, "Perhaps the most intriguing aspect of culture as a concept is that it points us to phenomena that are below the surface, that are powerful in their impact but invisible and to a considerable degree unconscious" (Schein, 2004). The typical measures of organizational effectiveness may not indicate the "invisible, unconscious" aspects of the culture

that drive interpersonal relationships and overall performance. Often, a single individual can exert such an effect on an organization that she or he defines the culture (for good or ill). Removing such an individual can turn a toxic culture into a more peaceful, cooperative organization. By the same token, removing an individual the organization relies on can create a void that leads to temporary organizational paralysis or even collapse.

Institutions often seek shortcuts to creating effective organizations by assembling "dream teams" of top-performing individuals in their fields or specialties. Such overt attempts to "engineer" an effective organizational culture can prove ineffective, suggesting that culture is more than simply a sum of its parts. Members of "dream teams" may focus on their careers or reputations to the detriment of the organization and the mission. Such individuals may be unable to subsume their egos or personal agendas to that of the organization or even the mission. They are unable to develop others because it would require ceding some degree of power, authority, or recognition of their brilliance, expertise, or contributions to their segment of the mission. Rather than creating a high-performing organizational culture that leverages the best available experts and performers, the organizational culture can become dysfunctional and mired in interpersonal conflict. Team members who need development can instead become scapegoats for the conflicts that inevitably arise out of the clashes among other members of the team. Organizational effectiveness spirals downward in proportion to the degree of entrenched dysfunction that characterizes the overall organizational culture.

The literature suggests that one of the most important requirements for creating an effective organizational culture involves leveraging corporate knowledge and learning—in other words, creating a "learning organization." According to one author, "any organization has only one truly unique competitive advantage: its knowledge . . . Knowledge must be accessible and shared to have value. People need the means and the motivation to share generously. They need the

skill to identify and spread the ideas of value and to avoid being sucked into a swamp of useless information" (Goldsmith, Morgan, & Ogg, 2004). The difference between information (unprocessed or filtered bits of data) and knowledge (information refined by individuals into mission-oriented solutions) is significant. The authors observed that organizations often become enamored with technical or technological solutions which, because they de-emphasize the human element, rarely convert data and information into knowledge.

Interactions between and among people in organizations foster relationships that result in knowledge creation and can lead to innovative, mission-focused outcomes. Connecting people to one another within the organization, focusing them on mission outcomes, and challenging them to elevate information into knowledge is one of the most important developmental tasks confronting leaders in any organization. Effron observes, "The fundamental, undeniable fact is that knowledge is intrinsic to human beings and is gained only by participating in an experience or having contextual understanding of that experience" (Effron, 2004). Framing experiences or creating contextual understanding of experiences should involve mission-oriented activities to reinforce positive organizational culture and to provide opportunities for competency development. The leader, therefore, should have strategies aimed at creating experiences within the organization's mission with outcomes defined in terms of highlighting opportunities for individual competency development and organizational learning.

There may be other reasons for leaders to create group experiences. Surowiecki concluded, "If you put together a big enough and diverse enough group of people and ask them to 'make decisions affecting matters of general interest,' that group's decisions will, over time, be 'intellectually [superior] to the isolated individual,' no matter how smart or well-informed he is" (Surowiecki, 2004). This suggests that leaders may enhance their teams' performance, individual competency development, and organizational learning by relying on

the team to tackle even seemingly mundane issues or problems. Each time the team works through a scenario or problem, individuals gain new experience and knowledge, and the team forges tighter bonds and connections that prepare them for future scenarios. This suggests that, rather than treating each new scenario as a unique or stand-alone experience, the leader's role is to frame scenarios, tasks, and problems as opportunities for honing the team's collective problem-solving abilities.

Surowiecki described three types of problems, or opportunities, that may help leaders frame scenarios and problems to maximize learning potential. The first type of problem—cognition problems—has definitive solutions (Surowiecki, 2004). For this type of problem, team members must contribute specific knowledge and experiences to the scenario. This does not mean that solutions or answers will be binary or limited. It also does not mean that the path to solutions or answers will be simple or quick. Consider scenarios the team has never encountered before, situations for which multiple outcomes appear possible, or for which much of the information is unknown or incomplete. Team members must rely on prior individual and organizational knowledge to connect aspects of the problem that may not have obvious or even feasible relationships. Relying on existing cognitive resources, the team must create new knowledge, perceive new relationships between aspects of the scenario, and be able to project possible definitive outcomes that achieve mission objectives.

Team members bring the sum of their past experiences, knowledge, and creativity to the problem-solving task, but the group fuses the multiple inputs from individual members. In effective groups, the collective energy of the group combines, filters, and adapts individual inputs to create options and solutions that no single individual could devise in isolation. Surowiecki's hypothesis is that even when existing and specialized knowledge is present, the group should resist the temptation to rely solely on such expertise to arrive at the eventual solution or recommendation. Instead, the team should leverage

expert knowledge as only one source for creating better cognitive solutions than those available from a single individual.

The second type of problem—coordination problems—also relies less on existing or specialized knowledge and more on the group's ability to resolve what may be competing or contradictory demands. The goal may be to achieve some mutually beneficial outcome that is not immediately obvious to the participants. "Coordination problems require members of a group . . . to figure out how to coordinate their behavior with each other, knowing that everyone else is trying to do the same" (Surowiecki, 2004). Unlike cognition problems that have a definitive solution, coordination problems may appear initially to have no solution (depending on how far apart the parties that make up the problem may be) or the solution is so complex that it may appear to be infeasible or impractical. These types of scenarios may be most applicable to groups and group techniques such as brainstorming, wargaming, or focus groups. Leaders must guide the groups in ways that not only keep the attention focused on developing options and solutions, but also maintain an awareness of when possible valid solutions are being offered. Under the pressure of deadlines and schedules, groups may not be able to perceive how close to viable solutions they are—it is the leader's job to help the group recognize and seize victory when it becomes available.

The third type of problem groups encounter—cooperation problems—can be the most difficult because these types of problems may involve deep-seated conflicts among groups or individuals. "Cooperation problems involve the challenge of getting self-interested, distrustful people to work together, even when narrow self-interest would seem to dictate that no individual should take part" (Surowiecki, 2004). By their very nature, these types of problems or scenarios will likely require multiple iterations and may benefit from the multiple points of interactions that groups can bring to the experience. Moving the relationship away from entrenched, non-negotiable positions toward areas of mutual benefit and common ground takes time and considerable willingness on the part

of the participants to see a potential better future. To the extent that these types of scenarios occur in the normal cycle of the organization's missions, the leader must develop the team's ability to deal with them efficiently and effectively. This requires developing individuals with high levels of competency and creating an organizational culture in which the group can mobilize quickly to respond to the situation. The longer entrenched positions prevail, the less likely any individual or group will be able to shift the scenario toward a mutually agreeable outcome.

The key assumption behind Surowiecki's hypothesis that crowds (or groups) arrive at better solutions more frequently than individual experts is that the group conforms to specific conditions. To be effective at providing richer, more accurate options and solutions, the group must first have diverse opinions (Surowiecki, 2004). This does not mean that the group must conform to some ideal or prescribed set of socially engineered characteristics or demographics, but instead that it should be comprised of individuals who bring a variety of knowledge, experience, and insights to the scenario. This is logical if the goal is to broaden access to knowledge beyond that provided by a single expert or small group of specialized experts. Second, the group must be independent. While problems are always bounded by predetermined conditions, solutions should not be. Leaders should carefully frame the scenario for the group to distinguish between the boundary conditions and acceptable solutions. If there are constraints on possible outcomes, leaders should frame those as boundary conditions at the outset to give the group independent thinking and problem-solving authority.

The third characteristic of effective problem-solving groups is decentralization. This implies that the group may access and integrate information from a wide range of sources—even from outside the organization—to devise optimal solutions. Airmen have a better understanding of decentralization than most because of the doctrinal tenet of centralized control–decentralized execution. Decentralization provides a mechanism for filling gaps in the group's

knowledge and may help enrich the ultimate proposed solution or options. Surowiecki suggests that larger groups tend to produce higher quality recommendations than do small groups. Decentralization is one way inherently smaller groups can overcome limitations in their knowledge and perspectives. In leadership terms, this can be analogous to a military mission-type orders scenario in which the leader provides initial guidance and trusts subordinates to achieve effective mission results. The final characteristic of effective problem-solving groups is aggregation. At some point in the process, the group must arrive at a solution or recommendation that addresses the assigned scenario. This requires individual members of the group to collaborate in ways that elevate the desired outcome over individual positions or preferences. In organizations where group assignments are not the norm, this may require the leader to identify or appoint a group leader who has authority to force the group to arrive at an aggregated recommendation. In more mature organizations, the members of the group may be competent enough to arrive at viable options without requiring the forcing function of a group leader (Surowiecki, 2004).

Aggregated solutions are not consensus solutions. Leaders should monitor group performance to remain aware of groupthink tendencies that either fail to consider more effective options or that lack the rigor that is often necessary to address all aspects of the scenario. According to Surowiecki, leaders should be suspicious when groups arrive at consensus solutions. He wrote, "...the search for consensus encourages tepid, lowest-common denominator solutions which offend no one rather than exciting everyone" (Surowiecki, 2004). One way to sharpen group outcomes and weed out lowest-common-denominator recommendations is to build in "Red Team" assessments of the recommendations before presenting the group's recommendations for leader consideration. The role of the Red Team is to examine the group's assumptions, thought processes, and recommendations to discern where there may be logical flaws or fallacies and to test the strength and efficacy of the

proposed solutions to the scenario. The group can improve its proposal by incorporating Red Team recommendations and, perhaps more importantly, the group will have an opportunity to enrich its knowledge and competency, thus making it better prepared and potentially more effective for the next scenario.

Groups and teams are not always effective—some descend into dysfunctionality. Patrick Lencioni distilled the myriad ways that groups and teams can become dysfunctional into five categories. At a fundamental level, team members can exhibit an absence of trust. This goes beyond mere suspicion or unwillingness to share personal details. "Team members who are not genuinely open with one another about their mistakes and weaknesses make it impossible to build a foundation for trust" (Lencioni, 2002). The level of trust necessary to create an effective team rarely occurs without some intervention or facilitation. This points to a key leadership role in developing organizational culture. The leader must assess the degree to which team members are open and trusting. If group members are holding back or are displaying only superficial levels of engagement and trust, there may not be any overt acknowledgment of the barrier the lack of trust creates. What often happens is that group members perceive the lack of trust and begin to resent it. The dynamic created by cycles of mistrust and resentment erodes group effectiveness and focuses interpersonal relationships and behaviors on negative consequences of the dysfunctional relationships. Lencioni placed absence of trust at the foundational level of team interaction because until trust becomes the defining characteristic of the team's relationships, there can be no progress toward effectiveness.

Because of the damage to personal and team relationships caused by absence of trust, the next dysfunction that occurs is a culture characterized by fear of conflict. This is logical because the absence of trust breeds fear. Group members who cannot trust one another expect conflict to produce negative outcomes that harm the team or themselves. When considering Surowiecki's hypothesis about the effectiveness of group decision-making, the negative effects brought

on by fear of conflict work directly against any potential benefits derived from group interaction. "Teams that lack trust are incapable of engaging in unfiltered and passionate debate of ideas. Instead, they resort to veiled discussions and guarded comments" (Lencioni, 2002). In other words, instead of constructive debate that leads to expanding knowledge and ideas, group members are reluctant to share, discuss, offer constructive criticism, or even listen when it comes to working through the details of a problem or scenario.

The more pervasive and persistent the first two dysfunctions become, the more the team is likely to exhibit lack of commitment to a project (or anything involving the group). Human nature ensures that people seek to distance themselves from unpleasant or threatening experiences. In organizational culture, this means that individuals disengage from even the most routine activities involving groups, but this can be even more destructive to activities requiring group input and interaction. "Without having aired their opinions in the course of passionate and open debate, team members rarely, if ever, buy in and commit to decisions, though they may feign agreement during meetings" (Lencioni, 2002). When this happens, the seeds of insurgency and rebellion in the organization's culture may have already sprouted. Whisper campaigns can start, aimed at discrediting the leader, the group's work, and any recommendations or decisions that arise from the team effort. For individuals who participate—even by listening to the toxic critics—the motivation is more about developing self-protective strategies rather than about the organization's mission effectiveness. Rather than working toward a common purpose, the team members tend to view group interactions as opportunities to gain insight into what the other members (whom they do not trust) are thinking.

When people have not bought into courses of action or recommendations, they naturally seek to avoid accountability for the outcomes of those recommendations. Most people do not mind being held accountable for things they take pride in developing or creating. Dysfunctional teams that lack trust, avoid conflict, and lack

commitment are predisposed to avoid accountability for their products and their actions. Team members develop a degree of paranoia to the extent they feel that when everything begins to fall apart, they will be left holding the bag. The lack of trust inherent in dysfunctional teams means that it is nearly impossible for team members to hold one another accountable for the process of developing ideas or for their outcomes. "Even the most focused and driven people often hesitate to call their peers on actions and behaviors that seem counterproductive to the good of the team" (Lencioni, 2002). Accountability is closely related to integrity; when team members resist being accountable and holding one another accountable for team performance, failures in integrity are likely to follow.

Mission performance is the ultimate outcome required of leaders and their organizations. The combined effects of the previous four team dysfunctions is that team members exhibit inattention to results. By this point, it should be obvious that the toxic organizational culture produced by the previous dysfunctions will prevent individuals from focusing on mission outcomes. No amount of strategy or structure will overcome the negative effects produced by the absence of trust, fear of conflict, lack of commitment, and avoidance of accountability. The organization is at significant risk of mission failure "when team members put their individual needs (such as ego, career development, or recognition) or even the needs of their divisions above the collective goals of the team" (Lencioni, 2002). Unfortunately, leaders who confront all five of Lencioni's dysfunctions have a daunting uphill battle to turn things around.

Dysfunctional teams often require leaders who are able and willing to tear down the entire organizational structure to the most basic levels and begin rebuilding with the right values, processes, and team dynamics. Lencioni's illustration focuses on the leadership team of a company—a "dream team" assembled by the board of directors—that was failing to meet expectations to the point that the company was in danger of becoming bankrupt. The intervention involved bringing in

a new CEO in a last-ditch effort to turn the company around. All five of the dysfunctions existed among members of the "dream team." More importantly, the negative effects of the leadership team's dysfunctional dynamics had permeated interactions throughout the company. Despite the high qualifications of each member of the management team, the new CEO concluded that to save the company, she would have to reassign some members of the team and some would have to go. Leaders who confront such decisions are likely to experience self-doubt and criticism—especially if they conclude it is necessary to dismantle what should be a high-performing team. The trauma caused by such apparent radical solutions pales in comparison to the possibility of mission failure. The lesson for leaders is to take whatever action is necessary to avoid or correct the behavioral symptoms that lead to organizational dysfunction.

Creating an effective organizational culture that is inoculated against the symptoms of dysfunction requires challenging individuals to engage in active learning and competency development. Leaders should create opportunities that provide learners choice, force them to evaluate the consequences of their choices, and then correct their actions and behaviors when choices do not produce the desired outcomes (Ulrich & Smallwood, 2004). By framing mission effectiveness in ways that challenge individuals to learn and become more competent, the leader encourages positive behaviors and group dynamics. In a military context, the practice of conducting after-action reviews focuses individuals and organizations on maximizing learning opportunities, regardless of whether the scenario involves training or real-world operations. The choice-consequence-correction cycle is embedded deeply in the organizational culture throughout military organizations as a mechanism for enhancing competency and mission effectiveness at every opportunity.

DEVELOPING COMPETENCIES

This chapter lists the four competencies in a particular order to suggest that there is a hierarchy within the Developing Others competency. At even the lowest levels of interpersonal interaction, individuals must be able to show others how to progress in their jobs and as members of the organization before moving to more complicated competencies—the highest level of Developing Others being leadership. Regardless of the order in which the developmental effort approaches the four competencies, the effort requires a holistic approach that acknowledges the interaction among the competencies. Sequential, one-size-fits-all approaches will not only fail to produce effective developmental outcomes, but they will also likely discredit the developmental effort in the eyes of the people it purports to serve.

As is probably evident at this point, Developing Others is one of the most important and difficult requirements confronting leaders. As indicated earlier in this chapter, the stakes could not be higher for leaders and the organizations they lead. The literature suggests that purposeful action by leaders aimed at developing people who are active learners and who focus on acquiring and honing competencies will translate into organizational effectiveness and mission success. Heil and Alepin offered the following set of "beliefs" about how leaders should go about achieving this daunting goal:

- Trust is given, not earned.
- People want to do the right thing.
- Freedom is the essence of motivation.
- People are naturally driven to make things better and seek meaning in their work.
- People have a great capacity and need to grow and learn.
- People prefer responsibility to dependency and interest to boredom.
- People seek to be led, not managed.

- People want to work cooperatively toward a shared goal.
- We must communicate as much as possible to as many people as possible.
- People want to belong and feel a sense of pride in their jobs, organization, and associates.
- People desire to be treated as unique individuals in the workplace.
- People desire to feel important, needed, useful, confident, successful, proud, and respected. (Heil & Alepin, 2004)

Leaders can tap into the inherent strengths of their people by incorporating these beliefs in their development initiatives and, more importantly, into their leadership practices.

Scholars have suggested that shifting toward the types of beliefs Heil and Alepin recommend requires authentic leadership. Berkovich observed that "authenticity involves becoming aware of one's 'true self'" (Berkovich, 2014). As leaders attempt to exhibit authentic values and behaviors, they may appear to others as being contrived, selfish, and manipulative—the very opposite of authenticity. As Berkovich describes the dynamic, "Leaders motivated to construct coherent positive self-narratives may engage subconsciously in projective identification of their 'unwanted self' onto others" (Berkovich, 2014). Leading organizations and developing people with the specter of a subconscious, inauthentic self thus complicates the leader's core task. In addition to the competencies involved in Developing Self, Berkovich suggested several necessary characteristics authentic leaders should develop in themselves.

Self-exposure involves being open to constructive criticism and feedback. Not only does such openness provide the leader opportunities to learn and develop, it also communicates to members of the organization that the leader is secure enough to accept feedback and is authentic enough to admit that no one can be right or successful all the time. Closely related to self-exposure is being open-minded. Leaders who surround themselves with sycophants or

reinforce groupthink dynamics cannot be authentic. Authenticity requires actively soliciting multiple points of view—including dissenting opinions—in a search for the most effective outcomes. As one Air Force senior leader observed, "to encourage our people to voice their alternative ideas and criticisms, we have to be confident enough in our people to listen to negative feedback and dissenting opinions, find the best way forward, and then lead in a positive direction" (Lorenz, 2012). Empathy—the ability to understand and experience another's emotions—often does not factor into leadership philosophies because of the pervasive nature of mission focus. Stories of effective leaders, however, invariably involve situations in which the leader has taken time to connect with subordinates in crisis or who are ready to quit. Leaders with empathy, because of their genuine emotional connections, can lend strength at critical times and thus help their subordinates persevere through challenges. Subordinates perceive that leaders with high levels of empathy are caring leaders. By caring for the people in their organizations as exhibited by encouragement, support, and assistance, leaders promote a positive model of the desired organizational culture (Berkovich, 2014).

Respect is an essential element of any interpersonal relationship. More importantly for leaders, there can be no authenticity when members of the organization believe the leader does not respect them or their efforts. Critical thinking may not on the surface appear to be related to authentic leadership, but when considered in light of the importance of critical thinking to organizational effectiveness, leaders must be highly proficient and effective critical thinkers. Scholars have observed, "strong critical thinking is not only useful for commerce, the law, and technology, it's absolutely crucial to a dynamic and thriving culture, and it defines an essential component of any solid education" (Foresman, Fosl, & Watson, 2017). Critical thinking, therefore, is not only essential to solving problems, it also shapes the quality of an organization and its organizational culture. If leaders do not nurture and encourage critical thinking in their

organizations, their authenticity will come into question and their organization's performance will suffer. Contact describes leaders who are present and engaged in the day-to-day operations of the organization. Leaders who are not present, engaged, and visible to their subordinates will likely fall into the trap of deceiving themselves about the authenticity of their leadership. Finally, Berkovich lists mutuality as his final characteristic of authentic leadership. Mutuality implies an ongoing dialog between leaders and their subordinates that aims to promote harmony (Berkovich, 2014).

The preceding paragraphs indicate that leaders must prepare themselves not only for the positional role of leadership, but for the developmental role of leadership. This means that before assuming the position of leader, individuals must have focused on developing competencies and on preparing to develop others. Upon being appointed in an organizational leadership position, individuals must have thought through how they intend to assess the people in their organization, identify areas for correction and growth, and have an idea of how to develop competencies in their people to maximize mission effectiveness. This is a never-ending task—especially in military organizations—because of the relatively short-term assignment cycles. One of the most important outcomes of development is that leaders should expect their subordinates to leave the organization through promotions and developmental assignments. If the leader has developed people effectively, people in the organization will be highly competitive and even sought after for assignments with higher levels of responsibility. These "graduates" of the organization become members of a network that connects the organization to other organizations throughout the enterprise. They become resources for acquiring more information and insights into future problems and scenarios. Rather than trying to hold onto people, one senior leader remarked that he never stopped someone from moving toward another position because it extended his information network by giving him a set of eyes and ears into another organization (Shaud, 2007). As vacancies occur, the developmental

cycle starts again, requiring the leader to integrate new team members and re-energize the development process.

DEVELOPS PEOPLE

Those who exhibit competency in the Develops People category "invest in others to maximize their contributions to the mission by inspiring and providing an environment of continual feedback and learning opportunities" (Air Force Handbook 36-2647: Competency Modeling (Ch. 1, 8 July 2025), 2022). As of this writing, the current Air Force Handbook has deleted the detailed descriptions of each level within the foundational competencies. It is still useful, however, to gauge where a person may be on her or his competency journey. In high-performing organizations, those with a basic degree of proficiency with tasks or who may have insights gained from experience can pass that information along to less experienced and competent individuals. Demonstrating this basic level of competency forges effective working relationships, builds a shared sense of mission accomplishment, and emphasizes standards of excellence expected within the organization. In a very real sense, this basic level of Developing Others lays a foundation for the Air Force Core Value of Excellence in All We Do.

Just as in the previous chapter's discussion of the evolution of the self, individuals who progress toward intermediate levels of competency also take on an institutional perspective. Because of their evolving proficiency at Developing Others, such individuals may become excellent instructors. They actively seek out opportunities to improve performance within the organization and may become essential team members for leading problem-solving scenarios, preparing organizations for inspections, serving on investigation committees, and leading or serving on special project teams. Such individuals add value to the organization not just because they are competent at a variety of mission tasks, but because they have acquired deep knowledge of the organization's history and mission and can impart

that knowledge to develop other team members without using heavy-handed tactics. Such individuals are the "go-to" source across the organization for knowledge on best practices and for solutions to tough problems that less proficient and experienced individuals have not yet encountered. They are often the glue that helps sustain the organization and the engine that helps power the organization toward excellence and success.

Building on the strengths of the intermediate Develops People competency, those with advanced proficiency begin to look for structured, deliberate ways to affect the organization's performance. To find evidence of individuals operating at advanced competency levels, look for those who design training programs, create learning opportunities for the entire organization, or discuss ways to integrate new and innovative methods or technologies that enhance proficiency across the organization. As one might expect, those with advanced proficiency levels typically seek out key formal and informal leadership roles within the organization. They pay close attention to day-to-day performance through mentoring and coaching, but they also have long-range perspectives and can anticipate emerging organizational needs. Senior leaders often rely on such individuals for advice on forming teams to prepare for over-the-horizon issues and problems. Such individuals inoculate their organizations against the unknown by preparing individuals and groups to cope with the unexpected.

Individuals at expert Develops People competency focus on a wide range of methods to create and sustain high performance in their organizations. Individual team members and their performance are obviously important to organizational performance, but expert leaders seek to optimize development resources and efforts over extended time periods. Institutionalizing an organizational culture that prioritizes learning and improving performance characterizes the values of organizations led by those with expert proficiency levels. One of the most difficult challenges confronting those at the expert proficiency level is in creating learning opportunities for

members of their organization and then stepping back to let them learn from successes and failures. Gen (ret.) Stephen R. Lorenz wrote, "As a leader, you set the tone of the organization and give your folks the tools to succeed; then you must get out of the way and let them do their jobs!" (Lorenz, 2012). When leaders who are experts at Developing Others turn their energies toward raising the proficiency of each individual in the organization, the results are often impressive.

TEAMWORK

There are few activities in life that do not require teamwork. One may think of "solitary" sports in which single competitors stand off against one another, but every such endeavor requires a support team that includes coaches, trainers, doctors, and there are always family members who attend practices, cheer from the stands, and are there to congratulate or console after the event is over. The military is organized around teams and groups that combine their talents and efforts to accomplish assigned missions. Leaders have a dual responsibility—they must form teams to accomplish the mission, and they must develop their subordinates to become team builders. The first links directly to mission accomplishment and the second lays a foundation for future mission success by creating a pool of competent leaders who are ready to assume greater responsibilities as they mature and progress in their careers.

As a competency, Teamwork is not hard to define. It is the ability to "collaborate effectively with others to achieve a common goal or complete a mission task" (Air Force Handbook 36-2647: Competency Modeling (Ch. 1, 8 July 2025), 2022). As seen in the previous chapter, the various constructions of self among an organization's members can complicate team and group dynamics. Individuals at the interpersonal level of maturity may not function as effectively as team members because their perspective is too inwardly focused, or they may identify closely with one or two members of the

organization who may not be members of their assigned team. Leaders must be aware of the interpersonal and group dynamics, be prepared to help forge effective working relationships, and also be prepared to intervene in the event the group stalls or begins to fall apart. At the same time, there should be individuals who have matured enough to become team builders—those individuals need encouragement and mentoring as much as those who struggle to work effectively as members of the team.

Carol Dweck contrasted people with a fixed mindset with those who have a growth mindset. Using data from hundreds of clinical interviews, surveys, and group studies, Dweck concluded that people with fixed mindsets perceive nearly every situation as calling for "confirmation of their intelligence, personality, or character" (Dweck, 2006). Such individuals often do not work well in groups and teams because of their need for constant affirmation. They cannot cope with situations that call into question their knowledge, skills, or competency—rather than seeing their contributions as valuable to the team effort, they must be in the spotlight and they must provide the solution. On the other hand, people with a growth mindset view every situation as having the potential for them to learn and improve —their perspective emphasizes the opportunity to learn, evolve, and adapt through "passion, toil, and training" (Dweck, 2006). Not surprisingly, those with a growth mindset view team activities as being filled with possibilities for learning, improving, and growing. The leader's task is to use team activities to guide individuals toward higher Teamwork competency levels regardless of their mindset.

People with basic Teamwork competency can participate in and contribute to scenarios requiring team interactions. As they progress and become more comfortable with the team and its activities, they begin to acknowledge contributions made by other members of the team rather than focusing only on their own role and performance (Air Force Handbook 36-2647: Competency Modeling, 2022). For those evolving toward a growth mindset, each new team experience provides an opportunity to expand their competency and their inner

knowledge about themselves. One author noted, "When life's conditions offer a 'role' I had not counted on, I try to bring to it my highest level of competence and mindfulness. Many times it becomes an unanticipated source of creativeness and personal growth" (Horne, 2011). When someone who was previously at a basic level of Teamwork competency offers such an insight, they have likely transitioned to an intermediate level of competency.

As is often the case with competency development levels, individuals at the intermediate level gain enough competence and confidence to help others around them. This is especially important to the success of any teamwork endeavor. Those with intermediate Teamwork competency actively help others and freely share information with the team (Air Force Handbook 36-2647: Competency Modeling, 2022). Their goals are defined in terms of the team's ability to function and in terms of the overall goal. Individuals operating with intermediate Teamwork competency sense when the team and its individual members are struggling, when the team is losing energy and creativity, or when the path to the goal seems unattainable. They know when the team needs a break, can find ways to relieve the tension, and know how to ask questions that reframe the problems to help the team adjust its perspectives. Those with intermediate Teamwork competency are more than cheerleaders or team builders —they are essential to the success of any teamwork scenario.

All teamwork has an inherent potential for conflict among team members. The pressures of high-stakes outcomes for organizations and careers, the unknown, risk, and the fear that, despite the team's best efforts, things could turn out badly, ratchet up the stress levels. Even among high-performing organizations, teams can unravel; but not all conflict is bad. Individuals with advanced Teamwork competency can recognize emerging conflict and are adept at engaging with the team to resolve the conflict before it has a detrimental effect on the team's work (Air Force Handbook 36-2647: Competency Modeling, 2022). Advanced Teamwork leaders may be able to use the conflict to spark new ideas and insights that

contribute toward more positive and productive outcomes. The art of this type of leadership involves knowing when and how to intervene. On the surface, the team could appear to be in crisis; in reality, the team members may simply be working through a problem. Intervening in the crisis may get the team unstuck; intervening in the problem-solving activity may sap the team's energy and momentum. Individuals with advanced Teamwork competency must remain engaged with the effort to know the difference between the two possibilities and how to react to each scenario.

Leaders with expert Teamwork competency come by their knowledge, skills, and abilities by virtue of years of practice and hard, painful lessons borne out of successes and failures. Their competence and their credibility are evident because they model the types of teamwork behaviors they expect from those in their organizations. They are adept at motivating, guiding, directing, and correcting teams to achieve major goals. Rather than seeking to avoid conflict in teamwork, those with expert competency recognize that it is part of the process—and they use the energy and dissent to sharpen the team's output (Air Force Handbook 36-2647: Competency Modeling, 2022). As Lencioni suggested, part of the teamwork expert's portfolio involves forming, evaluating, and managing the team. By keeping the team's focus on the mission, the teamwork expert may find that the team appears to need little intervention. If that turns out to be the case, the expert Teamwork leader will likely focus on capturing lessons from the experience to prepare the team for the next project, scenario, or crisis.

As suggested earlier in this section, there is no activity one could encounter in an organizational role that does not involve teamwork. Building effective teams is an essential duty of leaders at every level because the organization's continued success and mission performance ultimately rely on its ability to form effective, agile, and responsive teams that can quickly focus on the goal of the moment. For leaders to be effective, they must play with the team they have— that means leveraging Developing Others competencies to use the

teamwork scenario to push the members to higher competency and performance levels. By framing the project or scenario as both a mission requirement and a developmental opportunity, the members of the organization can amplify the individual and organizational learning outcomes.

SERVICE MINDSET

Service is at the heart of being in a military organization. Retired General Stephen R. Lorenz emphasized that service is not what we do—it is who we are: "Harking back to the days when civilians referred to someone who joined the military, oftentimes they didn't say that 'he joined the Air Force,' or 'he joined the Army.' Instead, they said, 'He joined the service.' Why? Because that's what we're all about—service to others . . . There is no distinction between being in the military and serving—they are one and the same" (Lorenz, 2012). The challenge for competency development lies in linking the natural tendency to view organizational life through a selfish lens (my career, my promotion, my job, etc.) and instead to instill an ethic, a mindset, and a practice of "helping or serving others to meet their needs, making and focusing efforts to discover and meet others' needs" (Air Force Handbook 36-2647: Competency Modeling (Ch. 1, 8 July 2025), 2022). When the organizational culture exhibits a service mindset, there will be few instances of people waiting to be told what to do. When they finish their tasks, they will take the initiative to seek out where they can help others with the work that will inevitably be going on throughout the enterprise. Such organizations have a momentum, energy, and expectation of excellence that sets them apart from those that merely get the job done.

At a basic Service Mindset competency level, individuals connect directly with mission accomplishment by connecting to others in the organization. The evidence that they are doing so is that they no longer wait to be assigned the next task or job—they instead "express genuine concern for the welfare of others and lend a

helping hand to team members when needed" (Air Force Handbook 36-2647: Competency Modeling, 2022). By exhibiting a genuine desire to help others, those with basic competency contribute directly to building a positive and resilient organizational culture. Rather than merely being "in" the organization, they transition toward becoming "of" the organization. The relationships that emerge because of the service interactions lay foundations for perseverance and endurance when the organization comes under stress.

Individuals with intermediate Service Mindset competency, like other intermediate competencies, sustain the fabric of their organizations. Such individuals "make themselves available when others are going through a critical period and express positive expectations about others" (Air Force Handbook 36-2647: Competency Modeling, 2022). They are the encouragers, the motivators, and often become the informal leaders of the team. When the organization comes under pressure, those with intermediate Service Mindset are poised to lend energy, excitement, and encouragement to help get the team through rough periods. They sense when individuals are struggling and take the initiative to investigate how things are going before the individuals withdraw into a self-protective shell.

If these behaviors and characteristics sound like leadership, that is because Developing Others is essential to performing effectively as a leader. The literature suggests strong connections between servant leadership, authentic leadership, and Service Mindset. One text included several characteristics of servant leadership that align directly with Service Mindset, including: listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, foresight, stewardship, commitment to others' growth, and building community (Hughes, Ginnett, & Curphy, 2022). By modeling Service Mindset, those with intermediate competency contribute directly to a positive organizational culture and lay foundations for individual and organizational resiliency. Their efforts establish reservoirs of strength and perseverance that help sustain

high performance when the organization experiences crises or long periods of stress.

When stress inevitably manifests itself, whether on a personal or an organizational level, less mature, competent individuals may exhibit negative reactions. Their behaviors may seem contradictory—some withdraw or lash out depending on the levels of stress and the ways in which their coping mechanisms work or fail. Keeping the mission in focus and operating in the knowledge that the current situation is only a temporary condition is essential to getting through such tough times. Individuals with advanced Service Mindset competency "continue to provide a high level of support to others, even when they are rude, mean, or fail to appreciate efforts to meet their needs. They seek to identify win/win solutions that meet the needs of others" (Air Force Handbook 36-2647: Competency Modeling, 2022). These types of individuals become the organization's peacemakers. They avoid zero-sum scenarios defined by winners and losers and instead try to guide people away from rigidly held positions for the good of the organization. They know inherently that conflict is inevitable, but they use the unifying power of the organization's mission as a pathway to model behaviors that resolve conflict without resulting resentments and grudges. As their influence sets the tone for the organization, members of the team migrate away from selfish, entrenched positions and behaviors toward more service-oriented values that enhance the mission and elevate the performance of the organization.

The Air Force's Core Value of Service Before Self reflects the commitment that members make to accomplish missions that defend our national security and prosperity. It is not a superficial slogan or bumper sticker but is instead embedded deeply in how Airmen fulfill their shared oath to do whatever it takes to get the job done. Those who acquire expert Service Mindset competency become "trusted advisors to help others identify new or different approaches to address their needs. They provide advice and counsel . . . even when disagreeing with strategies and goals. They act to support higher level

organizational goals, even when such goals may negatively affect their career or personal goals" (Air Force Handbook 36-2647: Competency Modeling, 2022). Regardless of their rank or positions within the organization, Service Mindset experts are able to elevate the interactions among the members of the organization by framing conversations around how the situation affects the mission. They have a rich set of insights and experiences with which to educate, inspire, and motivate those with lower competency levels to achieve more than they believe possible. Such individuals are never surprised at how members of their organization continually rise to the occasion to deliver high performance—they typically express wonder and amazement that they are allowed to be a part of such high-performing teams.

LEADERSHIP

Military organizations can confuse success with tactics, battles, strategies, or technologies as indicators of leadership. Performance in operational art certainly relies on leadership, but leadership is only one component of operational excellence. As one leader expressed it, "leadership is the challenge of inspiring the people in an organization on a goal-oriented journey" (Lorenz, 2012). This definition mirrors the Leadership competency definition found in the Competency Modeling Air Force Handbook (Air Force Handbook 36-2647: Competency Modeling (Ch. 1, 8 July 2025), 2022). By including mission-oriented goals, the people in an organization, and the social-emotional component of inspiration, the competency merges elements of science, art, organizational culture, and competency development. Preparing members of the organization to lead at every level is, therefore, an essential competency required of any leader, regardless of which level of the organization the activity occurs.

Individuals with basic Leadership competency may not occupy formal leadership positions within the organization. As they evolve and mature, they move beyond taking ownership of their assigned

element of the mission and begin to ensure that other organizational tasks are done—and done well. They also seek to fill gaps in the organization, thus ensuring that the practical needs of the organization are met (Air Force Handbook 36-2647: Competency Modeling, 2022). In any organization, there is always more work to do than there are people to do the work. Individuals with basic Leadership competency take the initiative to help with tasks that go beyond their immediate assigned responsibilities. In a very real sense, they evolve toward defining their responsibilities as anything that contributes to accomplishing the organization's mission. This means they learn the duties, roles, and responsibilities that fall outside their specialties. Formal leaders in the organization recognize those who develop in this way and reward their initiative by expanding their responsibilities and earmarking them for more advanced developmental roles and opportunities.

Building on basic competency, those with intermediate Leadership competency begin to expand their leadership role and influence. Such individuals develop mentoring relationships with new members of the organization, with individuals who may be struggling to learn their jobs, and with individuals who show potential to become leaders. Intermediate Leadership competency implies the ability to "take steps to address mediocre work or below average effort from others. They protect the organization and its reputation in the larger organization or in the community" (Air Force Handbook 36-2647: Competency Modeling, 2022). Because of their well-earned credibility and reputation, such individuals are key assets for senior leaders as they seek to inspire excellence within the organization. Their professionalism, bearing, technical proficiency and expertise, and leadership qualities set the example for others in the organization to follow.

Although not stated throughout this chapter, the emphasis is on all Airmen, not just the uniformed components. Leading from within their organizations, Civilian Airmen are essential to the success of the Air Force mission. Retired General Stephen R. Lorenz wrote, "They

are invaluable experts whose hard work and good, honest feedback help us to learn and improve. Although the advice may not always be something we want to hear, such counsel is what everyone should expect. After all, in most cases our civilian force has probably seen the pitfalls and potential second and third-order consequences of our well-intentioned decisions before" (Lorenz, 2012). Senior leaders, therefore, rely on the leadership competency of all members of their organization—especially when the mission may be at risk of compromise or failure.

Individuals with advanced Leadership competency, like other advanced competency elements, have evolved skills and abilities to monitor and ensure organizational performance and mission success. By motivating and inspiring others to achieve mission success, they help senior leaders create buy-in for the organization's policies, mission, goals, organizational climate, and initiatives (Air Force Handbook 36-2647: Competency Modeling, 2022). Such individuals are active leaders in the sense that to know where to apply their influence, they must engage with members of the organization. Through observing, listening, and discussing the organization's current and future state with individuals, groups, and teams, they learn where things are going well and where they are at risk of going off the rails. Through authentic engagement, they not only build a rapport with the organization's members, but they also create opportunities for improving unit cohesion, reinforce the credibility of the overall mission and vision, and have opportunities for detecting and correcting problems before they become serious or insurmountable. Not every organization has someone with advanced Leadership competency, but when such individuals are present, the organization seems to have a culture and momentum that ensures high performance and mission success. Senior leaders should assess whether their organizations have members with advanced Leadership competency. If they are present, leverage their influence as much as possible and develop their competency to the highest level possible. If they are not present, acquire advanced leaders from

outside the organization while simultaneously enriching the pool of leaders by developing intermediate leaders from within the organization.

Expert Leadership competency is essential for creating and sustaining a high-performing organizational culture. Leadership texts tend to focus on the "what" aspects of leading—the scientific techniques, programs, traits, theories, and other aspects of leadership that are important but incomplete when it comes to organizational effectiveness. Expert Leadership competency relies on blending the scientific elements of leadership with the ability to develop others to greater leadership competency, blending various strategies that promote team performance, morale, and productivity, and instilling in the organizational culture a compelling sense of shared vision, excitement, enthusiasm, and commitment to group and mission success (Air Force Handbook 36-2647: Competency Modeling, 2022). Expert Leadership competency attracts and develops individuals with talent, thus supporting sustained performance. Because the organizational culture is aimed at excelling in all aspects of the mission, senior leaders trust the organization will get the job done and repeatedly assign important and tough missions to the organization. This creates a self-sustaining cycle—the unit excels at accomplishing a mission, which inspires the members' confidence, improves experience, develops competency, and enhances the unit's reputation. Because of excellent performance, the unit often becomes the first choice for future tough assignments, which repeats the cycle. Those with expert Leadership competency develop people and organizations to thrive under such cycles.

CONCLUSION—DEVELOPING OTHERS FOR MISSION SUCCESS

It should be evident by now that Developing Others is a leadership responsibility. One may expect motivated individuals to seek out opportunities for learning and growth, but the impetus for creating and sustaining high-performance organizations rests with leaders. Similarly, defining and shaping an organizational culture that consistently seeks excellence is also the leader's responsibility. When team members perceive that the leader focuses on training, educating, and equipping them to achieve excellence, they become motivated to produce excellent results. As development efforts begin to bear fruit, the organizational culture evolves toward sustaining high performance. While the dynamics involved in such interactions may appear to happen almost by accident, they nearly always occur because an expert leader has taken stock of the organization and has deployed purposeful developmental strategies aimed at taking the members of the organization to higher levels of competency and performance.

Leaders have an advantage in the quest to raise the bar on organizational culture and mission effectiveness. Nearly every organization is filled with people who already want to succeed. Few organizations are so dysfunctional that the members are willing to jeopardize their careers and futures to guarantee mission failure. Using this inherent advantage, leaders can design and deploy mechanisms aimed at enhancing individual and organizational learning. One observer noted, "People are natural learners—asking, observing, searching, speculating, theorizing, and experimenting all the time—but many adults have little confidence in their learning abilities and feel anxious when pressured to learn more" (Connor, 2004). The leader's challenge is to overcome the lack of confidence by encouraging teams and individuals to become aggressive learners. The Air Force structures its learning approach around training, education, and experience opportunities. These institutional

pathways help leaders at all levels to design mechanisms for building competency to achieve greater mission effectiveness.

To develop a learning organization, however, leaders must go beyond the institutional pathways by using every opportunity to develop competency in the members of their organizations. "If formal education fulfills its duty to help strengthen mental pathways, build frameworks, create options, and widen perspectives, informal learning can then support the day-in and day-out culture building and skills development needed in a rapidly changing, increasingly competitive global marketplace" (Connor, 2004). The implication here is that leaders must recognize and leverage the informal learning that occurs as a natural part of the operational rhythm of their organization. In some cases, the informal learning occurring in one part of the organization can become a model for the entire organization. In other cases, the lessons from informal learning initiatives can be scaled and adapted to become formal learning programs that fill gaps in organizational knowledge. The leadership art in each instance is for the leader first to recognize effective informal learning, assess its impact on the organization, and then decide whether and how to promulgate it through the organization. In most cases, the leader's intervention will be to provide resources (time, manpower, funding, etc.) to increase the developmental potential for the organization.

The final element in deploying a developmental approach requires assessing the effectiveness of learning initiatives. This applies to every developmental opportunity—formal and informal. If an individual attends a formal in-residence training or education course, leaders should perceive a marked increase in their ability to perform as a result of graduating from the course. Similarly, internal developmental initiatives should result in measurable increases in specific competencies. Leaders should know the expected outcomes of every developmental initiative and be prepared to collect feedback to measure the results of the developmental investments. By consulting with supervisors within

the organization, the leader can solicit specific feedback aimed at measuring progress toward higher levels of competency. When developmental initiatives produce markedly better outcomes, they should receive preferential treatment for future opportunities. When the outcomes are not as evident, leaders should seek additional feedback to determine if the problem is institutional or if an individual had some barrier that prevented the desired outcome.

Because of the resources involved, training and education often receive the lion's share of attention in developmental approaches. While both are important, the imbalance ignores the conclusion reflected in the literature that some of the most effective leadership development initiatives come from experience. One source provided several conclusions that point to the critical nature of experience in leader development:

1. To the extent that leadership is learned at all, it is learned from experience. In fact, about 70 percent of variance in a person's effectiveness in a leadership role is due to the results of her experience; only 30 percent is due to heredity.
2. Certain experiences have greater developmental impact than others in shaping a person's effectiveness as a leader.
3. What makes such experiences valuable are the challenges they present to the person.
4. Different types of experience teach different leadership lessons.
5. Some of the most useful experiences for learning leadership come in the jobs we're assigned to, and they can be designed to better enhance their developmental richness.
6. Obstacles exist to getting all the developmental experiences we desire, but we can still get many of them through our own diligence and with some organizational support.
7. Learning to be a better leader is a lifelong pursuit with many twists and turns. (Hughes, Ginnett, & Curphy, 2022)

Considering the potentially outsized result from leadership development experiences, it is reasonable to suggest that creating and capitalizing on experiential learning as a mechanism for developing competency may result in the widest, most productive developmental effects for any organization.

The complex developmental task suggested above expands the definition and scope of leadership. "Good leaders must be able to operate at three different interpersonal levels: a peer, a subordinate, and a supervisor. Most people focus only on the supervisory aspect of leadership, but the ability to work effectively within a peer group benefits all associated organizations . . . Such symbiotic relationships help all organizations move forward toward achieving their goals and objectives" (Lorenz, 2012). Designing, deploying, and assessing comprehensive developmental strategies for the organization requires functioning across all three interpersonal levels Retired General Lorenz described. Connecting within the organization to design the developmental approach is an essential and ongoing first step. Looking outside the organization for resources and opportunities is also vital to maximizing the opportunities for developmental experiences.

Developing Others is not just a leadership activity or task. It is the core responsibility leaders must excel at if they wish to be effective leaders. Retired General Stephen R. Lorenz expressed his philosophy developed over a lifetime and a career of leading in the Air Force: "I always approach each new assignment or responsibility with two main goals: to leave the campground better than I found it and to make a positive difference in people's lives. Working toward these goals—in concert with the Air Force's core values—helps us all to be servant leaders, focusing on others ahead of ourselves while accomplishing the mission" (Lorenz, 2012). Leaving the campground better than when you found it means improving the installation, the unit, the organization—not for credit or reward, but because we only get one chance to make a difference. Make the most of each chance to make things better than when you arrived. Making a difference in

people's lives means doing whatever is necessary to help, teach, heal, or comfort those who share the mission with you. Developing Others to achieve greater competency in the disciplines of Develops People, Teamwork, Service Mindset, and Leadership is one of the most important ways individuals can contribute to mission and organizational success.

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4

DEVELOPING IDEAS

LENETTA BANKS WILLIAMS

The Department of the Air Force is no stranger to the concept of idea generation and development. In fact, the Air Force emerged as a separate service when Airmen proposed the theory—and idea—that airpower could fundamentally alter how nations wage wars. Consequently, according to historian Robert Frank Futrell, the military highly regards ideas as its lifeblood (Futrell, 1974). In 2014, the Air Force unveiled the "Airmen Powered by Innovation" initiative to supersede three concepts—Innovative Development through Employee Awareness, Productivity Enhancing Capital Investment, and Best Practices programs. The intent was to expand the role of Air Force Smart Operations for the 21st Century. In doing so, the Air Force continued a long-standing tradition of supporting idea generation from within.

The Air Force Innovative Development through Employee Awareness, or IDEA Program, was originally titled the Suggestion Program after WWII. Since 1947, the IDEA program has successfully encouraged and rewarded forward thinking and solutions. The program sought to collect and evaluate ideas from all lines of effort to produce the best ideas. The program's philosophy encouraged

employees on the front line of their technical areas to develop, refine, and innovate to improve mission effectiveness. Suggestions for new methods or changes to existing practices are evaluated by higher headquarters subject-matter experts; IDEA submissions that streamline processes or cut costs are subsequently adopted. As an incentive, employees whose IDEA submissions result in cost savings and safety improvements may receive recognition and monetary rewards for "conserving manpower, materials and money" (Prestik, 2009). Building on the IDEA program's success, current programs such as AFWERX connect the Department of the Air Force with the small business and start-up communities to foster innovation. The mission of AFWERX "accelerates agile and affordable capability transitions by teaming leaders in innovative technology with Airman and Guardian talent" (AFWERX, 2024). The Air Force heritage and continuing support for generating innovation and ideas led to a force developmental approach—competency development—which included "Developing Ideas" as a major component.

THEORETICAL CONNECTIONS

True innovation is difficult to achieve. Physicist and philosopher Thomas Kuhn described the evolution of ideas in his landmark study, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. Kuhn posited that revolutionary scientific breakthroughs do not happen through a gradual accumulation of information because the current paradigm—what he called "normal science"—constrains the ability of researchers to envision new ideas and methods. Prevailing paradigms are useful because they work. According to Kuhn, paradigms both bound the problems in a particular field and explain how the field works. Innovation occurs when the paradigms of normal science no longer produce the results expected within the field's boundaries. The breakdown of normal science paradigms creates a need for innovation—or, in Kuhn's terms, a scientific revolution. Innovation then produces a new paradigm that comes to define new boundaries for normal science (Kuhn, 1962).

While Kuhn focused on scientific revolutions, his observations are valid for any endeavor that relies on a foundation of established theory and practice. For example, military organizations ground their doctrine in a combination of theory and historical experience. Doctrine represents a current paradigm—the "normal science" of how best to apply military power in support of national security goals and objectives. Professionals perceive that their doctrine remains valid as long as it produces the desired outcome, such as victory in war or national security. If the paradigm holds, there is no impulse to innovate or change. In fact, modern military organizations invest significant resources to indoctrinate their members with the current paradigm through mechanisms such as professional military education, wargames, exercises, and by publishing doctrine.

When the paradigm becomes outdated or fails, military organizations seek explanations through historical study, after-action reviews, and other evaluation mechanisms. Because of the deeply embedded nature of paradigms within organizations, it is difficult for leaders to accept fundamental shifts in how the organization conducts its business. Kuhn proposed that innovation or revolutionary change emerges from one or more of several sources. First, a complete, often catastrophic failure of the existing paradigm can produce change. In the military's case, the proliferation of modern artillery, automatic firing small arms, and chemical weapons during World War I combined with mass mobilization and rapid mobility using railroads radically altered the battlefield and greatly increased casualties. Military professionals concluded that the paradigm that favored mass offensives was no longer viable when considered in light of the emergence of new technologies. Second, Kuhn observed that individuals who were either working outside the paradigm or who had not yet become vested or accepted by the field often produce revolutionary ideas that overturn existing structures. American Airmen, working outside the Army's existing paradigm during the 1920s and 1930s, proposed that airpower could dramatically change how wars are fought and won. Finally, the

innovative merger of one or more fields can produce a paradigm shift that results in revolutionary change. The convergence of the technology of the airplane catapulted the advancement of airpower as a force, doctrine, and mission (Kuhn, 1962).

The key point to recall is not only how innovation and change occur, but what happens because of paradigm-changing initiatives. Innovation, or fundamental change, nearly always destroys the existing paradigm in favor of a new way of doing business. Because of this, the representatives of what Kuhn called "normal science" will seek to slow innovation to preserve the existing paradigm, its organizational power, and individual positions. Innovation, in other words, often brings conflict and stress to organizations—herein lies the challenge for leaders. While the potential for achieving leaps of effectiveness exists, there is also a significant potential for equally dramatic failures. Paradigm shifts—true innovation—are relatively rare and can bring great cost and risk to organizations. Leaders must be discerning enough to recognize the potential for enhancing success while also protecting the organization from catastrophic failures. There is nothing wrong with expanding the boundaries of "normal science" without seeking to supplant the existing paradigm. Kuhn acknowledged that most of what occurs is in the realm of "normal science"—fortunately, tectonic paradigm shifts are relatively rare phenomena. The trick for leaders is to recognize and encourage evolutionary ideas while remaining aware of the potential for revolutionary ideas to emerge. Leading organizations through both types of change is one of the greatest leadership challenges (Kuhn, 1962).

COMPETENCY DEVELOPMENT STRUCTURE

The Foundational Competency Developing Ideas category is a compilation of DAF competencies that give life to future endeavors, comprised of four competencies: Analytical Thinking, Digital Literacy, Creative Thinking, Fostering Innovation, and Influence. Each competency is defined within its category and further identified on the continuum of proficiency from the basic to the expert level. "Analytical Thinking identifies problems, evaluates alternative perspectives and solutions, makes effective recommendations, and identifies courses of action. Digital Literacy uses technology to identify, critically evaluate, and synthesize data and information; explore, create, and manage digital content; and appropriately interact in a virtual environment. Creative Thinking develops new insights into new situations and questions conventional approaches. Fostering Innovation builds a culture of behaviors and business practices that encourages, champions, and rewards creativity and informed risk-taking; is open to change. Influence intends to persuade, convince, or impress others to elicit their support to make specific impacts or achieve effects on others" (AFH36-2647, 2023).

ANALYTICAL THINKING

Analytical Thinking in its purest form has been a solid foundation within this competency and numerous problem-solving methods. Analytical Thinking is a tool used to deduce the different parts of a situation into useful information and develop solutions. This thought process majors in a mindset that examines facts to find strengths and weaknesses of thoughts to generate ideas and solve problems (Amar, 2005; Leron & Hazzan, 2009). Analytical thinking skills are the building blocks for critical thinking (Suyatman; Saputro, Sulistyo; Sunarno, & Widha, 2021).

Thomas Kuhn proposed the concept of "normal science" to describe how scientists typically work to solve an inquiry. Normal science,

operating within an established paradigm, applies proven analytical thinking to identify a problem, incorporate theories, develop hypotheses, and test potential solutions. The hypothesis testing is inherently iterative. Even when a hypothesis appears valid, the process requires multiple proofs of validity before the problem solver can accept a solution as a complete answer to the problem. In many cases, the potential solution is only valid under certain conditions. Changes in variables will require more hypothesis development and testing. This is the essence of Kuhn's normal science—and it lends confidence in the validity of existing paradigms. The more a paradigm "works" for the problems in the field, the more trusted and stable it becomes for practitioners.

During the analytical process, anomalies and inconsistencies often begin to appear. When a breakdown occurs, the normal process itself begins to seem inadequate. As the DAF competency of analytical thinking develops from the basic to the expert level, Kuhn's theory begins to unfold before our eyes. Also, as the basic and normal processes wane in their effectiveness, thinkers are then forced to evaluate new ideas (Kuhn, 1962).

PROFICIENCY CONTINUUM

Basic

Within the DAF framework, the basic competency level of Developing Ideas evaluates the ability to sustain the application of competency over time. At the lowest level of understanding, basic problem-solving skills are required to organize the thought process surrounding an idea. An Airman or Guardian at the basic level has the ability to break the problem into simple tasks or activities. In addition to dismantling the problem, the analytic thought process should lead the individual to prioritize tasks by order of importance (AFH36-2647, 2023).

Intermediate

The intermediate competency level of analytical thinking matures the decision-making process to one that can sustain this application over time and in many different situations. When presented with a complex task, the individual at an intermediate level is skilled at using a systematic approach to focus information and itemize it into manageable parts. During this phase of analysis, the individual possesses the skill to ascertain various causes for the current state, while at the same time listing the consequences of each action item toward the solution (AFH36-2647, 2023).

Advanced

The advanced competency level of analytical thinking moves forward in the sustainability of managing complex issues. The new approach links connecting issues within the leadership challenge. The individual is able to address the various trends and complex angles that arise within the problem. When analyzing the complexities surrounding the problem, the individual can not only offer solutions but also anticipate the risks and look forward to next steps (AFH36-2647, 2023).

Expert

The expert competency level of analytical thinking culminates in sustaining the application on exceptionally complex situations. An individual analyzing at this level can model, guide, and teach others to develop ideas with specific techniques and tools. This individual, while versed in current problem-solving tools, may also develop new techniques unique to analyzing the specific problem. Drawing several solutions and the ability to weigh the value of each solution is a key indicator of the expert level of analysis (AFH36-2647, 2023).

CASE STUDY

Ms. Jones, an experienced Civilian Airman, has taken a position to lead the Commander's Support Staff of a Fighter Squadron. The section has a staff of four who support more than three hundred military and Civilian Airmen. The commander removed the former section leader due to poor performance, theft, negligence, and a failed inspection. After onboarding into the squadron, the commander tasked Ms. Jones to "clean up the CSS!" in preparation for an upcoming inspection. The commander shared the past inspection results and mentioned that other leaders have complained that the staff is rude, incompetent, and unavailable during customer service hours.

When meeting with the staff, Ms. Jones found them to be bright and solid employees who were devastated by their inspection results. The group explained how poor leadership from the former section commander contributed to most of their issues. The team was left with a goal of becoming compliant and inspection ready in a very short amount of time.

Basic

- How can the new section leader use analytical thinking to tackle this mountain of non-compliance?
- What level of competency on the analytical thinking continuum does Ms. Jones begin to develop ideas?

First, Ms. Jones begins with simple problem-solving skills on the basic competency level of analytical thinking. This back-to-basics approach involved collecting data, interpreting inspection feedback, and meeting with each employee individually to identify all perspectives. She then broke down the problem further into categorized tasks aimed at developing a solution that would bring the office into compliance. The inspection results' line items could easily be broken down into equal parts and corrected with an appropriate

timeline leading to the goal. However, the problem is complex, and a simple solution does not address the subsections within the overall problem. A skilled leader will need to pull from behaviors found within a higher competency skill set. In this example, not only is the staff recovering from a failed inspection, but they are also recovering from a derelict leader.

Intermediate

- Is the leader able to use a systematic approach to focus information and itemize into manageable parts?
- Is the leader able to discover various causes for the current situation?

Ms. Jones moves forward in her approach to the intermediate level by investigating the various causes of the problem. While systematically categorizing common themes from employee feedback, Ms. Jones noticed the root causes of noncompliance. Most of the inspection failures occurred within the past year due to the specific directions or as a result of new processes implemented by the former section leader. The staff members were trained, competent, and lauded in their individual professional development. Prior to their new leader's tutelage, the staff won awards for their best practices. When the new leader arrived and made sweeping changes without their consult, the team began to falter. The employees documented their disagreement with the changes. The section chief ignored employee expertise and warnings as the former leader rushed to change policies based on advice outside the squadron from unrelated organizations.

Advanced

- Is the leader able to address the various trends and complex factors that arise within the problem?
- Is the leader able to anticipate the risks and look forward to next steps?

The keen insight that a leader must have is more than simply understanding the regulations and analyzing the results of a failed inspection. The leader must be able to look at all the points of view and unintended consequences of each decision made. This thought process takes the leader to the advanced level of competency. The nuanced need to rebuild trust in leadership that ignored their training may contribute to ongoing performance and morale problems. As Ms. Jones continued to examine trends, a common theme of abandonment sabotage emerged. The supervisor ignored employees' warnings against improper practices, so the Airmen stopped warning their leaders and allowed the processes to fail. The mission was not being accomplished, and they consistently removed themselves from the results. Ironically, although the commander fired the former section chief, the employees continued to suffer the consequences of their leader's actions and decisions. Their reputation and standing within the squadron suffered, leaving many feeling as if they were scapegoats for the actions of others.

Besides the obvious result of failing the inspection, Ms. Jones found another area where leaders failed their employees. Junior team members were no longer encouraged or permitted professional development training under the former leader. From the team's perspective, the director budgeted for officer and high-ranking civilian professional development training, yet the rest of the team's requests were denied. When the team attempted to train themselves by closing the office for a few hours to conduct in-house training, department heads complained. The director stated the need for them to be available for customer service hours. In-house training that would require closing the section for any length of time was strictly forbidden. The team admitted that this stance made them feel unimportant and uneducated on new administrative trends.

Ms. Jones collected and considered the themes surrounding the support staff's demise. Lack of trust, appreciation, training, and respect for the regulations left a void in the organization. The support staff desperately needed training and office hours to update and file

backlogged paperwork outside of customer service hours. A former leader resolved this by halting in-house training and did not prioritize professional development. This resulted in the staff being out of compliance and unprepared for the inspection, which directly resulted in an unsatisfactory outcome indicating that the section was not accomplishing the mission. Armed with these insights, Ms. Jones considered how the lack of training and trust in the leadership team —particularly in her supervisory position—affected the mission. Her solution, after meeting with the employees, included a multi-level approach to bring the Commander Support Staff back to mission readiness: (1) correct all inspection compliance areas; (2) rebuild trust in the leadership team; (3) complete and encourage professional development training. Ms. Jones created a plan, sought permission from the commander, and advocated on behalf of the team to implement these three solutions.

After carefully weighing the options, Ms. Jones concluded that the value of a well-trained and highly efficient team greatly outweighed the need for customer service hours. To address the compliance issues, she systematically codified the inspection and tasked applicable team members to develop action plans to correct deficiencies in their respective areas. The team would meet daily to discuss corrections, train, and file the backlogged paperwork. Ms. Jones used a suggestion from the team to throw a filing pizza party, where the team would shut down the office and all work together to tackle the endless boxes of filing. The team mentioned that their former leader never "got his hands dirty" to help or train them in administrative work. They were not even sure if their boss was capable or knowledgeable of their jobs, which is why the new processes he proposed were not effective. Ms. Jones's approach would offer an opportunity to raise morale, build trust, and boost the credibility of the leadership team. Finally, with the commander's approval, customer service hours would end, and instead one administrator would be available for customer service issues during office training times.

Expert

- What new techniques were developed and modeled to the employees to analyze the specific problem?
- How did the leader weigh the value of several solutions?

Assessment

1. What is the primary function of analytic thinking in problem-solving?
2. What mindset is central to analytical thinking?
3. In the DAF framework, what ability is evaluated at the basic competency level of Developing Ideas?
4. What distinguishes the intermediate level of analytical thinking from the basic level?
5. What skill is added to the intermediate level that helps individuals focus and itemize information?
6. At the advanced level of analytical thinking, what is an individual capable of doing in relation to complex issues?
7. Beyond offering solutions, what additional ability is characteristic of the advanced level?
8. What is a key indicator of the expert level of analytical thinking according to the source?
9. What unique capability is mentioned for an individual at the expert level, in addition to being versed in current problem-solving tools?
10. Can the leader decipher the cause of the problem? Can the leader list the consequences of each action item towards the solution?
11. Can the leader pinpoint trends within the problem? Can the leader offer solutions but anticipate the future risks?
12. Can the leader conclude problem analysis with several solutions? Does the leader have the ability to weigh the value of each solution?

DIGITAL LITERACY

The concept of digital literacy requires using "technology to identify, critically evaluate, and synthesize data and information; explore, create, and manage digital content; and appropriately interact in a virtual environment." As technology proliferates and paradigms shift, Airmen rely increasingly on digital tools to collect, analyze, and disseminate information. These constant changes shape how DAF leaders process information and adapt in the digital environment. The Air Force emerged from an adaptation of a transportation technology to achieve military results. The development of the airplane paved a new role in warfighting and force support (Futrell, 1974). Identifying the technology of flight to become the foremost airpower tool is the best example for the existence of the Department of the Air Force.

Modern day technology such as Artificial Intelligence (AI) is on the leading edge of the latest paradigm shift. AI is integrated into all aspects of the Department of the Air Force mission. Logistics, intelligence, predictive maintenance, and manpower are a few examples of where AI enhances mission accomplishment. To work effectively with DAF AI tools such as Dark Saber and the deployment of Non-classified Internet Protocol Generative Pre-Training Transformer (NIPRGPT), the DAF encourages two principles to help govern the new platforms: Responsible AI Tenets and DoD AI Ethical Principles. The ethical principles that govern proper AI use include policies that are responsible, traceable, reliable, and governable. The Responsible AI (RAI) foundational tenets include Governance, Warfighter Trust, AI Product and Acquisition Lifecycle, Requirements Validation, Responsible AI Ecosystem, and an AI Workforce (Hicks, 2021). Combining the DAF ethical principles with the foundational tenets of AI helps produce an appropriate shift to digital literacy with all the ethical standards to safeguard the mission.

To further add fidelity to the AI platforms, the Air Force Doctrine Note 1-25 on Artificial Intelligence, developed April 2025, serves as a

supplement to Department of Defense policies on AI. The doctrine unifies best practices, expert opinions, and predictive analysis of AI topics that will affect near future operations. The doctrine identifies the new standard for AI competency: "USAF personnel must be AI fluent to integrate its capabilities into operations. In the context of this doctrine note, AI fluent implies proficiency beyond simple literacy. Airmen should not just possess a basic AI understanding, but they should comprehend the application, interpretation, and effective navigation of AI systems" (AFDN, 2025, p. 10).

DoD personnel are expected to use AI within the following constraints:

- **Responsible:** Operate AI technology with proper judgment and intention that align with core values and conduct becoming of a Civilian Airman.
- **Equitable:** AI capabilities will take precautions to deploy in an equal manner without unintended bias.
- **Traceable:** AI should be established and utilized in a transparent method so that employees have the suitable technological understanding to operate the systems. This includes an open path of information to the data sources and designs.
- **Reliable:** The AI capabilities are clearly defined, safe, and subject to testing for usability throughout their maturation.
- **Governable:** AI capabilities are designed to possess compatible functionality while simultaneously avoiding inadvertent outcomes. Systems are designed to be able to counteract and disengage.

The Air Force sees AI as rule-based programming and machine learning to approximate human thinking. While the AFDN clearly outlines the capabilities of Artificial Intelligence, the doctrine equally denotes the limitations of the technology. AI does not question the validity of input nor critically think through consequences of

decisions. Because of this dichotomy, the human interface is never ignored within the DoD AI framework. The Air Force expects a Civilian Airman to be AI fluent and develop within the digital literacy competency. The RAI foundational tenets help guide the Airmen through the proficiency continuum of competency development within digital literacy. Much of these concepts are new to the average Civilian Airman, as DAF created the digital literacy competency in 2021 and the DAF AI doctrine in 2025. However, resources within the DAF MyVector system are available to all Airmen. Specifically, the Digital Literacy assessment reveals gaps and recommends education and training resources for improvement. Resources such as online training courses, articles, books, and videos are free and available to DAF teammates. The assessment results individualize the starting point for the proficiency continuum in digital literacy (Flack, 2025).

PROFICIENCY CONTINUUM

Basic

Civilian Airmen at the basic level sustain the application of digital literacy over time. Two tenets of Responsible AI that carry out the basic level competency are Warfighter Trust and Governance. The requirement to follow organizational guidelines for using technology and electronic devices is at the heart of the basic level of competency. Civilian Airmen must be digitally literate in basic computer skills and technology akin to their career field. In addition to the capacity to learn unique systems, understanding AI basics is required by all personnel. Organizations require Airmen to take part in online training and seek assistance for technology advancement. Maintaining cyber awareness is a key part of the DoD Ethical Principles that govern proper AI use. All operational security and guidance stand as the common points of entry into the world of AI within the workplace. These foundational behaviors are essential for the initial stages of data literacy, enabling individuals to "read data" by distinguishing good from bad data and identifying essential elements

of a dataset. Such skills support descriptive analytics, which addresses the question, "What happened?" by laying a foundation for understanding connections between variables. The healthy foundation of these basic computer skills and cybersecurity protocols ensures Airmen are prepared for the next level in their competency development.

Intermediate

Digital literacy at the intermediate level expects an Airman to handle a variety of routine technological situations, including navigating the Internet and typing with common shortcut keys. Furthermore, those Airmen with access to databases and computer systems protect information from social networking sites and online forums. This proficiency begins to support diagnostic analytics, which looks deeper to understand "why" a specific connection exists. These behaviors align with "working with data," where personnel know how to move and clean datasets to improve analysis.

Advanced

Individuals at this level apply the competency over time in complex situations, such as conducting simultaneous research across multiple modalities; they select the method of digital communication based on situational need. Advanced Airmen use many digital resources at the same time to conduct research. Such individuals are engaging in "analyzing data" to derive insights and are capable of predictive analytics, which attempts to forecast "what will happen later based on trends." They also demonstrate sophisticated communication skills by selecting digital communication mediums based on situational needs, including the need for nonverbal cues, maintaining a record of communication, or managing simultaneous conversation. This level of digital literacy highlights the need for multisystem compatibility. The leader's mindset must include using proper AI modalities and online meeting platforms to create a welcoming environment in which various stakeholders work together to achieve the mission with enhanced technology. Industry,

government agencies, and training and education centers interact with DAF organizations with an expectation of advanced digital literacy. The mission may dictate that digital literacy competency continues to the next level of development to effectively communicate with other organizations.

Expert

At this level, leaders guide others with advice on technology; they deploy self-taught new digital products and synthesize new and former digital tools and systems. Expert Civilian Airmen are characterized by behaviors that involve proactive engagement and leadership in the digital sphere. These individuals provide others with advice on new digital technologies, possess the ability to figure out new high-tech digital products and services without help from others, and can synthesize newly gathered digital information with previous information to form comprehensive insights. Such expert behaviors, particularly those related to digital exploration and critical evaluation of information, were identified as strong differentiators for career success. At this expert level, individuals confidently "communicate the insights derived from the data to answer relevant questions and drive decisions." This includes performing prescriptive analytics, which provides informed "therefore" statements and answers, "What should we do now?" by offering courses of action to drive desired outcomes. The MyVector assessment, therefore, plays a vital role in identifying and fostering these higher-level competencies by including specific behaviors that most strongly differentiate supervisor-rated potential for Air Force career success, guiding Airmen towards continuous digital development throughout their career.

Case Study

Maria, a civilian Air Force acquisition specialist, allowed her digital literacy to evolve throughout her career. At the basic level, Maria's digital activities centered on fundamental tasks: she diligently followed organizational protocols for the use of electronic devices

and knew to get help for computer system problems, as needed. After confiding in her supervisor that she felt technologically behind the new generation of employees, he encouraged her to commit to professional development goals through the DAF e-learning system. She fulfilled her professional development requirements by taking the MyVector digital literacy assessment. This tool discovered Maria's gap in computer training and offered courses on standard software word processing, AI fluency, and presentation tools.

As Maria gained experience and confidence in her ability to learn and operate workspace technology, she progressed to the intermediate level. Here, she began to take initiative, often using the Internet to learn on her own to discover more efficient ways to perform her duties. For instance, she taught herself advanced features in spreadsheet software (Excel) to automate routine reports, saving significant time for her team, and actively used common shortcut keys, such as copy, paste, bold, undo, search, or print screen, to minimize typing. Furthermore, she became acutely aware of online security, meticulously protecting personal information shared on social networking sites or other online forums in line with organizational guidelines.

Maria's roles and responsibilities within the acquisition field advanced, requiring a more sophisticated application of digital skills. At the advanced level, she routinely used many digital resources at the same time to conduct research for complex projects, critically evaluating the reliability of Internet sources to ensure data integrity. When the commander tasked her to run lead on a project combining multiple organizations, she selected the most appropriate digital communication medium based on the situational needs. Maria used her expertise to determine when video teleconference was necessary for conveying nonverbal cues during sensitive discussions, or email was better for maintaining a formal record of communication. Maria's team leadership and mastery of the technology culminated in an award for successful mission accomplishment and innovative best practices.

Finally, Maria reached the expert level, becoming a digital leader within her organization. She proactively provided others with advice on new digital technologies and possessed the unique ability to figure out new high-tech digital products and services without help from others. Her expertise was evident in her capacity to synthesize newly gathered digital information with previous information to form comprehensive insights. Maria's continued dedication to professional development was recognized as a strong differentiator for her career success.

Assessment

1. What is the core concept of digital literacy?
2. At the basic level of the proficiency continuum, what types of foundational behaviors are essential for data literacy?
3. What is one historical example given in the source of how technology led to an adaptation for the Air Force?
4. Which level of the proficiency continuum for digital literacy involves "analyzing data" to derive insights and is capable of predictive analytics?
5. List three of the DoD AI Ethical Principles that govern proper AI use.
6. The Air Force sees AI as rule-based programming and machine learning, but what are two significant limitations of AI noted in the doctrine?
7. What specific resource within the DAF MyVector system helps Airmen identify gaps in their digital literacy and recommends education and training?

CREATIVE THINKING

The Creative Thinking competency refers to the ability to develop new concepts with novel ideas. By questioning conventional norms, groundbreaking philosophies are made available to decision makers (AFH36-2647, 2023). While the stereotype surrounding military operations may be that Airmen are to follow commands and bureaucratic regulations mindlessly, nothing could be further from the truth. The Department of the Air Force continues to make innovation and creativity consistent goals. Efforts to undermine antiquated mindsets and to encourage creative thinking have come through processes like Quality Air Force in 1987 and the Continuous Process Improvement model in 2019 (Beach, 2016; Lopez, 2005). General David Goldfein, former Chief of Staff, often mused, "There is a long line of Airmen waiting to be innovative and tell us how to do things better. There's an even longer line of old folks, like us, waiting to tell them no" (Moyer, 2020, 1).

Air and Space Force leaders, therefore, highlight creativity and innovation as core combat capabilities. Fostering creative thinking, aside from being an academic skill, stands out as an operational superpower. Creative thinking is the key to enabling leaders to make decisions effectively in complex situations (Davitch & Folker, 2017). Simply following and executing standard procedures are not enough to keep the leading edge during unpredictable and unprecedented situations. Leaders with a creative thinking mindset should regularly support opportunities for Airmen to exercise creative and innovative thinking.

The Department of the Air Force is no stranger to unprecedented times when crises arise, and leaders must support subordinates who propose alternative concepts. On every level, creativity is required to bridge the gap between ideal training environments and harsh realities. Future budget, manpower, and time constraints are constant rivals to progress. Only leaders with a pool of creative thinkers adding

to potential solutions in new and innovative ways will be able to answer the call.

New solutions become revolutionary because they sweep away the old ways of performing "normal science" as the old paradigm no longer solves the problems. According to Kuhn, revolutionary change requires leaders who can challenge assumptions and reimagine approaches that lead to new solutions. The ability and freedom to think creatively opens possibilities for dynamic results within complex environments. The leader maintains the responsibility to create and champion systems that allow for creative solutions. The bureaucratic and autocratic systems of the past do not lend themselves to the open mindset needed to create new solutions to complex problems. The leader simply steps back from the solution set and asks, "Is there a better way?" Allowing the mind to open to unique concepts when current models fail leads to creative thinking (Kuhn, 1962).

In 2005, during an Air Force conference at Andrews Air Force Base, various leaders came together to discuss ways to embrace the Lean model (Lopez, 2005). During this conference, Assistant Secretary Pete Dominguez remarked on the purpose of "balancing needs with the need for innovation and imagination and for streamlining processes and changing how we operate" (Lopez, 2005, p. 1). Creative thinking is vital to the Air Force's Lean initiative, which included identifying waste, redesigning processes, adapting civilian practices, empowering Airmen, and fostering innovation and imagination to achieve a more efficient and effective Air Force. The Lean Model in and of itself is not creative; rather, creativity is the key ingredient to the model. It takes creativity to develop new ideas, models, and processes such as the Lean model. Creativity and innovation are not synonymous. Research shows that creativity is a skill that one can develop through practice and changing habits; innovation is the application of the creative ideas (Hokason, 2018).

TYPES OF CREATIVE THINKING

Creative thinking shows up in various forms as one builds the skill to process ideas in new ways. Creative thinking includes analysis, open-mindedness, problem-solving, organization, and communication (Doyle, 2024).

- **Creative Analysis:** The start of the thought process begins with observation. Analysis opens the possibility for new discoveries as a creative thinker decides how to take in data, problem sets, or information.
- **Open-Mindedness:** The next phase of thought must use an open-mind concept to remove old paradigms and biases. Old concepts and structures that lead to the same results will not produce creative thinkers. An open mind makes room for new and unique pathways to success.
- **Problem Solving:** Creative problem-solving methods are certainly part of creative thinking. However, in its entirety, the mindset of the creative is one who, when faced with a problem, first aims to solve it. Seeking solutions and figuring out a way through a challenge is vital to the creative thinker.
- **Organization:** A creative thinker who is effective must be able to organize their thoughts and present them in a useful way. Creative thinkers must not stop at idea generation; their leadership expects them to be astute at coordinating their novel ideas and processing them so that the organizations they serve can understand and implement their discoveries.
- **Communication:** The communication skills necessary for a creative thinker are two-fold. A creative thinker must have a large capacity to first listen and gather data. The amount of information needed from various directions to understand a problem and investigate the research creatively is a major part of the communication skillset. The secondary communication skill is the ability to deliver the creative ideas to the organization in a usable format.

A creative thinker sends and receives information clearly and effectively. Let's investigate the skills and characteristics that develop our Airmen into the creative thinkers who have the next new idea at the top of their minds.

Basic

In line with the Air Force Handbook on Competency Modeling, the basic level of creative thinking presents an Airman who can access creative thinking skills regularly and over long periods of time. Ideas are not simply generated spontaneously; rather, a creative thinker is intentional about applying this skillset toward regular tasks and new situations. A calculated approach to developing new solutions by thinking creatively while using former successful ideas is the goal of the creative thinking process (AFH36-2647, 8 February 2022). Identifying waste within the Lean process involves identifying and eliminating anything that doesn't add value to the core mission. This requires a critical and creative assessment of existing processes to determine which steps are unnecessary or inefficient (Lopez, 2005).

Intermediate

As Airmen develop through the competency of creative thinking, they become able to apply a chosen set of principles over time as well as in different situations. One can take a commonly taught concept, develop its complexities, and apply it to a current situation. The intermediate creative thinker is apt to inquire within the existing models and produce alternative methods (AFH36-2647, 8 February 2022). An Airman at the intermediate level starts the redesigning process by identifying both the value-added steps and those that can be removed. Redesigning workflows to optimize efficiency necessitates creative problem-solving and the ability to envision alternative ways of doing things.

Advanced

On the advanced level of creative thinking, one continuously works within multifaceted situations toward novel solutions. This level of

creativity involves looking at a problem from various aspects using different perspectives. This thinker can analyze data points previously assumed to be unrelated and recognize new and useful connections (AFH36-2647, 8 February 2022). During this advent of the Lean Process, the Air Force recognized the value of bottom-up innovation. Proper emphasis must be given to Airmen and the creative acumen of those closest to the processes (Lopez, 2005). An advanced creative thinker has a fearless mindset that runs away from stagnant processes and runs toward the most effective best practices.

Expert

The highest level of competent behavior in creative thinking models the ability to instruct others to produce more creative thinkers. Such leaders encourage others to question conventional norms and pursue new approaches to problem solving. An expert in this arena continuously applies creative thinking within extraordinarily difficult conditions. Where connections between existing data points seem unrelated to others, an expert in creative thinking compiles existing information into innovative concepts (AFH36-2647, 8 February 2022).

Case Study

A great example of employing creative thinking to reimagine a system is found in the technical education classroom. In 2019, a civilian educator in the 82nd Training Wing Faculty Development Flight at Sheppard Air Force Base introduced the "flipped classroom" model to technical training courses. The gap between the training environment and real-world exposure continued to widen with advancing technology; therefore, Air Force technical schools expressed a need for technical school graduates to perform better in the workforce. The traditional classroom and methodology of lecture, hands-on laboratories, and paper assessments no longer measured up to the training expectations. Technical schools noticed that graduates were no longer meeting the standards in the updated real-world mission. For example, students in complex maintenance courses were not retaining theory taught in the traditional lectures.

Following the lectures, students participated in hands-on laboratories to practice new techniques. The hands-on demonstrations and laboratories further exposed the students' insufficiencies and inability to apply theories and concepts from previous lessons. Students constantly being remediated and retaught course material further delayed training timelines.

Taking a page out of the civilian education book, instructors implemented the flipped classroom model commonly practiced in secondary education. This began with students watching interactive e-learning modules such as animations, 3D models, and quizzes before class. Classroom scenario-based discussions, group problem-solving exercises, and facilitated troubleshooting simulations followed the multi-layered initial exposure to the concepts. The flipped classroom emphasized concepts of active learning, tailored pacing, and critical thinking. Rearranging the order of learning—by relying on pre-classroom work to lay the educational framework to build upon inside the classroom—made room for preparation and confidence throughout the learning process. The results showed improved student performance in many areas. Test scores rose by 20 percent and retraining rates dropped. Moreover, students reported higher confidence during practical exams. This innovative concept is not new to education; however, thinking outside the box and allowing this concept to be added to military technical training is the creative thinking that leaders should encourage (Ingle, 2019).

Assessment

1. How can a leader promote out-of-the-box thinking?
2. How can team members discern when a current approach is not working?
3. What workplace factors discourage the implementation of new ideas?
4. How can team members remain receptive to new ideas, concepts, and problem-solving methods?
5. How can team members help create and sustain innovation?

6. How can team members discourage creativity and innovation in the workplace?
7. What is the core ability associated with the Creative Thinking competency?
8. What may result as a consequence of questioning conventional norms?
9. Why is creative thinking particularly important during times of crisis management?
10. At the basic level of creative thinking, how are ideas generated?
11. What is a key capability of an intermediate creative thinker?
12. How does an advanced creative thinker approach problems?
13. What is the distinguishing characteristic of an expert in creative thinking?
14. How does an expert creative thinker use existing data points?

FOSTERING INNOVATION

The drive to develop an ethos of constantly evolving best practices that inspire creativity and support informed risk-taking created the competency of fostering innovation. To foster innovation, leaders must bravely propose new systems and concepts and work to refine them, demonstrate their usefulness, and campaign within the organization to help them gain acceptance. The Air Force leader with this competency must encourage exploring unconventional ideas. These ideas turn into systems that will displace outdated models for the future. Organizations aiming to foster innovation must create space for such thinking to emerge. Why? Because the entrenched nature of existing paradigms works to slow or prevent anything that challenges the paradigm (Kuhn, 1962). AFWERX is an illustration of Kuhn's notion that centers of innovation can emerge.

Case Study

One excellent example of this competency in action is the AFWERX Project. Launched in 2017, the Department of the Air Force created an innovation program known as AFWERX that seeks to connect government, industry, and academic leaders. The AFWERX mission is to accelerate agile capability development in the Department of the Air Force. The vision is to "build a culture of innovation across the DAF and enable rapid, cost-effective solutions to warfighter challenges." AFWERX initiated this environment by creating powerful links between startups, small businesses, research institutions, and the Air Force. There are four programs that merged to create AFWERX 2.0 in 2020 that capture the focus of the organization: AFVentures, Spark, Prime, and SpaceWERX. AFVentures uses Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR) and Small Business Technology Transfer (STTR) programs to fund technology from startups and small businesses. SpaceWERX is the portion of the project dedicated to the unique ideas of Guardians within the Space Force. In 2022, AFWERX moved under the Air Force Research Laboratory and further developed into AFWERX

3.0 by integrating with stakeholders to rapidly bring technologies and agile processes to scale. Within five years, the number of AFWERX companies "increased 15-fold and added 1,500 new companies to the Department of the Air Force's portfolio" (Colbentz, 2022, p. 1).

The AFWERX Spark program focuses on connecting the Air Force to grassroots innovation. This group identifies and solves local problems with creative solutions and partnerships. Spark Tank is an annual innovation competition that seeks to foster a culture of innovation among Airmen, Guardians, and senior leadership. Personnel compete at every level to bring new ideas that lead to important improvements in practice and policy. The goal of highlighting each initiative is to accelerate the implementation of each idea and impact the mission in a positive way. The Department of the Air Force hosts the final Spark Tank presentations during the AFA Warfare Symposium to impact the mission. Ultimately, pairing the "tip of the spear" in innovation with our nation's warfighting leaders empowers all personnel to contribute to the improvement of the Air and Space Force mission (AFWERX, 2025).

The Prime division of AFWERX focuses on accelerating emerging technologies from the private sector into Air Force capabilities. For example, the Agility Prime initiative was created in 2020 to connect the Advanced Air Mobility (AAM) industry to the Air Force Air Mobility Command. The AAM vehicles industry includes the private sector as well as the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) and the DoD. AAM vehicles provide the technology behind electric vertical takeoff (eVTOL) and landing eVTOL aircraft. The thought process behind Prime is just as innovative as the AAM technology itself. The goal of Agility Prime is to encourage companies to rise to the challenge and race toward procuring airworthiness certifications, instead of simply competing for funding. This will allow the military market to stress test the technology while benefiting the private sector through exposure and competency (Performance Software, 2020).

The AFWERX and Spark Competition removes barriers of entry to the market. Within this cutting-edge system, all personnel on any level can propose their ideas and gain acceptance from the decision makers. The new concepts and technology are vetted immediately by leadership and connected to the resources or private entity to bring the idea to life (AFWERX, 2022). This unique approach has proven effective in turning ideas into reality within the operational force.

Basic

The proficiency continuum outlines behavioral expectations for each level of development. The primary level of fostering innovation includes the ability to guide others toward a culture of behavior that is open to creativity and informed risk-taking. This mindset persists from individuals proficient in this competency as they seek groundbreaking ideas and concepts from other individuals. The AFWERX project uses a structured methodology to lead Airmen and Guardians to propose and develop innovative concepts; the first step of the methodology focuses on idea submission. In 2023, Airmen submitted more than 230 ideas. Participants submit their proposals through the Guardians and Airmen Innovation Network (GAIN). The GAIN system is not simply a portal to input ideas; it is also a collaboration hub. The platform supports crowdsourcing and collaboration to expand the number of participants who contribute to the proposal. Key players, stakeholders, and experts network to refine ideas. This robust program fulfills the basic level of fostering innovation. The GAIN system is the embodiment of creating a culture that is open to new ideas and poised to bring them to life.

Intermediate

Increasing how often innovation is applied to challenging situations is the key to moving toward intermediate fostering innovation competency. Leaders who foster innovation also seek new and different perspectives from others in the unit. Step two of the AFWERX project focuses on evaluating and improving the quality and feasibility of idea submissions. Subject matter experts and peers

provide feedback and challenge the assumptions included in proposals. The most viable concepts are recognized and moved to the next level. Of the 230 ideas initially submitted, 15 advanced to the next level.

Advanced

At the advanced level, Airmen move from demonstrating the competency across the work center to influencing across the unit. The larger scale impact creates an environment where sharing ideas is welcomed. The creative process is flexible and dynamic and poised to grow. The AFWERX step three is the Semifinals before the competition. During this phase, the field of ideas narrows for further development. During the 2023 Spark Tank, six of the fifteen proposals were selected to move forward to the final competition stage. Consultants and experts are assigned to each proposal to help make the idea successful (AFMC, 2023).

Expert

Experts in fostering innovation regularly model how to plan creatively and communicate through complex taskings. Those who remain on the cutting edge of new methods and approaches are comfortable pushing the envelope toward progress without abandon. Leaders focused on this competency are adept at balancing on the cusp of innovation and guide their teams to function effectively in chaotic and uncertain environments.

The AFWERX final step illustrates the expert level of fostering innovation. The ideas have now been honed to complete proposals supported by experts and crowdsourcing for continued viability. In 2023, the six finalists presented their proposals before a panel of judges and senior leaders at the Air and Space Forces Association Warfare Symposium (AFWERX, 2023). This annual competition occurs during the first quarter of the following year. The structure that the Spark Competition provides the Department of the Air Force allows an idea from the lowest to the highest rank to be placed into

an innovation incubator and developed into policy, technology, and mission improvements (Air Force, 2025). The power of an idea is made tangible by creating an environment that encourages, models, and demands creativity and innovation.

Assessment

1. How does a leader guide others toward a culture of behavior that is open to creativity and informed risk-taking?
2. How does a leader seek new and different perspectives from the others in the unit?
3. How can a leader launch ideas up to higher levels of influence?
4. How can a leader scale up and help create an environment where sharing ideas is welcomed?
5. How does a leader model how to communicate and creatively plan through complex taskings?
6. According to the source material, what is the primary goal of fostering innovation as a competency?
7. How does the intermediate level of fostering innovation differ from the basic level, according to the text?
8. How does the advanced level of fostering innovation demonstrate a larger scale impact compared to the intermediate level?
9. How does the expert level of fostering innovation manifest itself, according to the source?

INFLUENCE AND ADVOCATE

Being competent at influencing and advocating for ideas requires affecting others to support a particular concept or action. Leaders and peers have the potential to influence teammates in the work environment. The pillars of influence are significant leadership skills that can each be developed. A leader who has inspired their sphere of influence holds a particular skill set that, when coupled with integrity, brings about the best in any organization. To wield influence properly, individuals must have a solid foundation of quality leadership skills.

The social and institutional dynamics are highlighted in Kuhn's theory of scientific revolutions. Leaders must influence their peers and leadership chain to bring new paradigms to life. A leader's ability to guide a team through change will ensure that innovative ideas gain traction within the organization (Kuhn, 1982).

The Air Force Research Laboratory Workforce Development outlines leadership skills needed within the competency of influence. Skills such as building trust, listening, consistency, confidence, and compromise are pivotal to influencers. Building trusted relationships is a primary and iterative skill. A person who builds rapport with leaders, teammates, and employees in specific ways will always be a valuable team member. Keys to proper relationship building include trust and transparency. A leader who shares freely and does not seek to hoard and control how information flows to members of the organization builds trust. This solidifies their position as a member of the team who understands and supports the mission. This type of co-worker honestly offers their opinions and ideas. This employee has a record of telling the truth and can be trusted by others to share their true and honest opinions.

Listening skills are essential within any work environment. To influence people toward an idea, one must have a track record of ensuring others feel heard. The feedback loop within any form of

communication becomes one-sided if all parties do not feel heard. Hearing opinions and gathering information from others regularly is the first step to maintaining a positive environment that invites the team to listen to the influencer's ideas. The next step in an effective leader's approach to open communication is to follow through and implement ideas from the team. Listening involves hearing, understanding, sending and receiving feedback, and creating buy-in from the team to incorporate the best ideas into the best solution for mission success. There is also a degree of empathy required to make sure that the leader does not crush the spirit of individuals or the morale of the organization when evaluating ideas.

A leader must be confident in their approach to sharing an idea to be effective. An idea that is shared with self-assurance and accuracy is most helpful in achieving buy-in from the team. The presenter must be prepared with research and a clear understanding of the information presented if they are to skillfully answer questions. A new leader may not be confident in their role through years of experience; however, one should be confident in their training and preparation for the task.

Compromising when necessary is an important key to developing influence. More important is knowing when to compromise and when to stick to your guns. Effective compromise helps build buy-in; ineffective compromise detracts from mission effectiveness. The key for leaders is to know before the discussion occurs what things are up for negotiation and what things are non-negotiable. Being influential does not mean always getting your way.

For example, a director continuously refused to compromise on his training plan for his unit when pressed by the wing commander. The wing commander kept suggesting a different approach, and the director refused to budge—he told the wing commander, "It is my organization, and I think this is the best way to do things. I'll do it my way, and you can fire me if it doesn't work out." In the director's mind, if he compromised on the issue, it would not only result in less

effective mission readiness, it would cede his authority for the mission to the wing commander, thus fatally compromising his role as the leader. Rather, a team member is respected when they can see different opportunities that will achieve the mission. Giving the lead to others who also create a quality approach further builds the relationship by reminding the group that the mission is what is most important—not simply the pride of ownership in the idea.

Consistency within all the aforementioned leadership skills requires regular practice. Integrity, listening, or building trust will not be effective if they are applied inconsistently. A leader who does not always listen or does not deliver on expectations cannot be influential when it counts.

Basic

Over time, individuals with basic Influence competency may work with others to collect buy-in toward a certain concept. They gather data to support their position when communicating with others. A basic influencer might work with colleagues to help create buy-in toward a specific concept. They focus on getting initial agreement and gather data to support their position when communicating with others, presenting facts to help persuade people to accept their recommendation.

Intermediate

An influencer on the intermediate level relies on the expertise of the team to encourage others to support their goals. When met with conflict, individuals with intermediate Influence competency help reconcile opposing views among team members by keeping the group focused on the end goal and appealing to enduring principles. Rather than manipulating the team to achieve the leader's preconceived conclusions, individuals with intermediate competency focus instead on achieving optimal mission outcomes. When faced with disagreements or conflict, intermediate influence leaders demonstrate competency at defusing conflict, reforging team bonds,

and refocusing or redirecting attention toward root causes or challenges that stand in the way of mission accomplishment. This competency relies heavily on other competencies such as team building to preserve and strengthen group cohesion and focus.

Advanced

Individuals who reach advanced levels of influence competency lead with an eagerness to move forward toward the organization's goals. An advanced influencer works to build and reinforce trust among stakeholders for future endeavors. At this level, individuals transition from becoming focused on projects and tasks to becoming vested in making the organization or team function at the highest levels. The energy those with advanced influence competency impart to an organization and its team members often creates and sustains the highest performing organizations. Consider the mutually reinforcing waves of high performance that occur when organizations receive high marks on inspections or perform exceptionally well in assigned missions. Such accolades often find their roots in the influence key leaders exert on an organization. Even more importantly, when such individuals leave an organization, the high performance tends to continue despite the loss of the critical influence of a key leader. Those with advanced influence competency consciously seek to instill their drive for quality and mission effectiveness in those whom they lead. Individuals with advanced influence competency are not characterized solely by current or short-term performance; they also actively work to build trust among team members and stakeholders for future endeavors, recognizing that enduring influence requires sustained relationships and a reputation for reliability and consistency.

Expert

On the highest level of influence competency, one models and imparts to other teammates how to use various strategies that will build support for their causes. Expert influencers often develop complex strategies unique to each situation. Such individuals have

wide-ranging information networks and relationships that contribute to their ability to adapt themselves and their organizations to changing conditions. An expert influencer operates at the highest level, not only building support for their own initiatives but also modeling and imparting to other teammates how to use various strategies that will build support for their own causes. They possess the skill to develop complex strategies unique to each situation, adapting their approach based on context to effectively persuade, convince, or impress others to elicit support.

Case Study

Mr. Brown, a civilian personnel specialist in a flying unit, was tasked by the commander to adjust staffing levels within the Intelligence Flight. The plan involved moving an information technology (IT) specialist position into the Sensitive Compartmented Information Facility (SCIF). The move would allow the Intelligence Flight to maintain its own systems with a dedicated member of the information technology team. Mr. Brown quickly created a path to gain information to complete the task. Separate formal and informal meetings were conducted to collect and organize the input of all parties involved in the task. Mr. Brown met with the squadron commander, Intelligence Flight commander, Intelligence Flight NCO, Information Technology superintendent, and the Information Technology NCO. The Intelligence Flight commander was in favor of the move. He found that sharing the information technician with the rest of the organization constantly left the flight with constant IT calls and unreasonable waiting times. The IT support mission was impacted by continuous delays as the Intelligence Flight waited for IT personnel to respond to requests to the central support system.

The flight commander recalled that in years past the Intelligence Flight had a position within the SCIF for an IT specialist. In addition to this past situation, the feedback from the other intelligence officers also lauded similar IT and intelligence support at previous units. The information technology specialist in question was very excited to be

moved into the SCIF to provide dedicated support to the Intelligence Flight. He had a passion for cybersecurity and the intelligence career field. The information technology supervisor was not happy about losing manpower and stated that support for other units would be degraded by this change. The Intelligence Flight commander was indifferent about the move but hopeful that having a dedicated technician would cut down on maintenance delays. While this request seemed simple on the surface, the personnel specialist directed to complete the task found the reality much more complex.

As Mr. Brown began to coordinate with the affected organizations to complete the move, he met with the Intelligence Flight NCO to explain important details about this move. The Flight NCO expressed concerns that any lack of training and proper security clearance could violate higher-level instructions—and could also be illegal. The Flight NCO was uncomfortable explaining this important detail to the Flight commander because, according to the NCO, the Flight commander had previously ignored such concerns. Mr. Brown, however junior in rank, knew the seriousness of the matter and coordinated a meeting between the three factions: the commander, Intelligence Flight, and Information Technology section. Prior to the meeting, he armed himself with the laws, regulations, and policies surrounding the move. As he discussed the upcoming meeting with the commander and explained that there may be regulatory or legal issues concerning the move, the commander immediately took the information into consideration and cancelled the meeting and manpower move completely. The commander appreciated Mr. Brown's willingness to inform him of directives that he had not considered and emphasized that above all else he did not intend to risk security for convenience. The commander then directed the unit to address the root of the issue and create a better system to utilize the IT technicians and reduce inoperability and wait times.

Assessment

1. How was the task officer able to influence the commander without the leverage of rank and experience?
2. How do you approach sharing information on a new topic and influence support for your ideas?
3. Describe a time when you actively listened to understand differing viewpoints and how this helped you gain support for your idea.
4. How do you prepare to convey a message with confidence and skillfully answer questions to persuade others?
5. Describe a time when you had to compromise or adapt a specific point. How did this help you move forward on a shared objective?
6. How do you ensure consistency in your work interactions and work to build reliability?
7. What is the core definition of the "Influence and Advocate" competency?
8. According to the source, what is one key way to build trusted relationships for influencing others?
9. Why is active listening important when trying to influence others?
10. How does consistency contribute to a person's ability to influence?
11. What is a benefit of being confident when presenting ideas?
12. Does being influential mean always getting your way? Explain briefly.
13. At the basic level of influence, what is a key action taken to gain support for an idea?
14. What distinguishes an intermediate level influencer in gaining support?
15. What is a characteristic of an expert-level influencer?

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DEVELOPING ORGANIZATIONS

ANDREW BOWENS

Introduction

Leaders seek to develop organizations to contribute toward mission effectiveness. There are many actions leaders may take to develop organizations. Leaders may focus on a wide range of areas, including the organization's leaders, personnel, and mission context. Additional focus areas may include the organization's culture, decision making, ethics, character building, communication, and how people handle conflict, negotiation, and crisis. The Department of the Air Force (DAF) has identified five competencies associated with developing organizations: results focused, resource management, change management, strategic thinking, and precision (SECAF DAF Handbook 36-2647, 2022). The following case study demonstrates the use of the five competencies within a DAF mission context.

Developing Organizations Case Study

A Department of the Air Force (DAF) civil service employee applied for and was selected as the leader over a new organization. Senior base leaders informed the new leader that the general mission of the organization the civilian was now leading would be to provide

Aircrew Life Support (ALS) to the new Air Wing of F-35s that would stand up in 120 days. The civilian leader would be responsible for developing the new organization of 30 ALS professionals to support the incoming Air Wing.

Questions to Consider:

1. List what you believe should be the first five actions the new civilian leader should take in developing the organization.
2. How does the new civilian leader ensure the focus of the new organization is on the highest priorities?
3. What resource management considerations should the leader focus on?
4. Describe the change personnel may need to go through in standing up a new organization versus making changes to an existing organization.
5. In what ways can strategic thinking help the new civilian leader and the new organization?
6. How can the concept of precision develop systems to organize and track data, increase order, and improve quality?

RESULTS FOCUSED

Introduction

Effective leaders focus organizations on the most important areas that contribute to mission success. Leaders may choose to shine a light on the results of many different outcomes of an organization that may or may not be the most important to mission effectiveness. Leaders need to constantly ask themselves if they are focused on the right areas while using effective measuring techniques within the organization.

Upon assuming leadership roles, new leaders first need to understand the mission of the organization and how the team they are responsible for contributes to that mission. Next, the leader needs to determine the specific products or services the team provides that contribute toward the mission. After identifying the products or services the team provides, the leader needs to identify ways to measure the results of the team's efforts and whether these results are acceptable and will enable the team to achieve their mission.

Focus Areas

Effective leaders focus on the most important products or services that contribute to mission success. For example, a leader of a new organization reviews the previous leader's notes on what was tracked by the leader. The areas tracked by the previous leader could include personnel turnover, customer service feedback, and employee development. While these focus areas are important, the new leader may ask if they are the most important focus areas. After a period of time, the new leader may determine the focus areas need to change to those the leader and team believe are most important, including specific production of services the team provides, the quality and results or outcomes of those services, and feedback from those who receive the services. The new leader and team still care about personnel turnover, customer service feedback, and employee development but not at the expense of the most important focus

areas. Below are some questions to ask about the most important focus areas:

1. What are you measuring and why?
2. List and describe the most important products or services your team develops. How are these important areas measured?
3. Are the measurements accurate?
4. What goals does the team have in providing products and/or services? Are the goals realistic, achievable, a stretch, etc.?

Results Focused Tools

Effective leaders may choose to use different tools to measure results, including the Balanced Score Card (BSC) (Kaplan & Norton, 1992). BSC includes a focus on four perspectives: learning and growth, internal processes, customer, and financial. BSC uses objectives, measures, targets, and initiatives to align an organization's strategic goals with its mission by using quantifiable metrics to track objectives. Leaders at Headquarters Air Force (HAF) have used BSC data to inform adjustments to processes, policy, financial funding priorities, and manpower allocation on a recurring basis.

Mission

Part of being results focused is understanding the mission. The mission of an organization may be described through a mission statement. A mission statement indicates the purpose of the organization, which differentiates it from others. A mission statement provides the organization focus and direction and may contribute to the success of the organization (Lussier & Achua, 2023). An example of a mission statement from the Civilian Associate Degree Program (CADP) is: "To provide DAF civilians mission-focused education through the Associate of Science degree in DAF Leadership and Management Studies and fulfil the by-law candidate and supervisory requirements, fostering a robust succession management pipeline"

(CADP Handbook, 2026). This mission statement identifies the purpose of CADP in a broad sense and distinguishes it from the purpose of other organizations. Osbourne (2016) warned those developing mission statements: "many of these statements have little to do with what is actually measured, rewarded, or valued. They don't describe reality. They spout clichés and marketing slogans." A leader who is results focused would consider how the organization's outcomes affect the mission, which should be represented in a well-thought-out mission statement. Below are some questions to ask about the mission statement:

1. Is this an honest reflection of our authentic mission?
2. Does it reflect political correctness rather than authentic mission?
3. Is it simple enough to be remembered?
4. Are all leaders, employees, and stakeholders able to recite it?
5. How can the team measure effectiveness in relationship to the mission statement?

Vision

Another part of being results focused is utilizing vision. Vision describes what success looks like for an organization. Vision may be more detailed than a mission statement. It also clarifies priorities and helps organizations focus on the most important results (Osbourne, 2016). "I have always thought that effective vision statements should be aspirational—they should project a desired future reality that causes the organization's members to push for better results. If it doesn't inspire a degree of stretching or dissatisfaction with the status quo, it probably is not visionary enough" (Cain, 2025). An example of a vision statement from the Civilian Associate Degree Program (CADP) is: "To be the first choice for DAF civilians to meet mandatory by-law requirements for undergraduate education" (CADP Handbook, 2026). Leaders' involvement in vision is critical by not only being a part of vision's creation but also communicating it

clearly and repeatedly to keep it at the forefront of the organization. Vision statements also benefit from the team understanding how important they are in working toward the vision. "People who understand how important their part is are motivated to persevere and work with excellence, even in the face of obstacles and problems" (Maxwell, 2011). Vision also benefits from being routinely reviewed for relevancy and achievability. Below are some questions to ask about the vision statement:

1. Is the vision brief?
2. Is the vision achievable?
3. Is the vision full of jargon or clichés?
4. Does the vision focus the organization on the most important results?

Goals

Another part of being results focused is developing goals. Goal setting is important for a variety of reasons. Goal setting provides clarity on what the organization wants; the act of documenting the goal may reduce resistance to the goal, it can encourage people to take action to complete the goal, it focuses the organization on the most important areas, and it may allow the organization to see and even celebrate accomplishment of goals (Hyatt, 2023). Goal setting often includes SMART principles. SMART is an acronym for specific, measurable, actionable, relevant, and time-based goals. An example of a CADP goal using SMART principles is: develop five relevant elective courses that align with program outcomes and secure Air University (AU) approval to offer the first course no later than March 2025. Involving the team in the creation of goals may boost commitment to persist toward goal achievement (Scandura, 2022). It is also important to discuss and measure progress toward goal completion regularly and for the leader to take action when needed to remove barriers to goal completion. An example of a goal progress update based on the example goal is: five elective courses were fully

developed by March 2023 and submitted for AU approval. AU approved the electives in October 2024 and the first two electives will be offered to students beginning in March 2025. Below are some questions to ask about goals in the organization:

1. Are all of the goals connected to the overall mission and vision of the organization?
2. Were SMART principles used in goal creation?
3. Was the team involved in goal creation?
4. Are goal progress discussed and measured regularly by the team?
5. Is goal completion celebrated? If so, how? If not, why?

Values

Another part of being results focused is identifying values. Values indicate how the members of the organization should act when working toward the mission and vision. Identifying core values helps leaders better measure the results of team members against the values standard. The Air Force (AF) has identified three core values for the entire organization: "integrity, service, and excellence" (SECAF DAF Handbook 1, 2024). However, organizations under the AF may want to include additional values that are important to that organization. For example, attention to detail may be extremely important to an organization focused on aircraft maintenance. Another organization may want to focus on the value of justice due to its requirement to investigate or prosecute criminal activity. An AF leader would benefit from identifying additional values that may be critical for her or his organization.

Simply identifying values may not be enough for all members of the organization to embrace them. For example, some members have not held to the AF core values. A think tank was formed by Squadron Officer College (now Squadron Officer School) in 2014 that offered several recommendations to address the issues, including: holding leaders accountable at all levels, promoting core values early and

often, requiring action on climate assessments, utilizing 360-degree feedback for every AF member, and refocusing education on core values. Maxwell (2011) offers ideas on the value of and how to be an authentic 360-degree leader by leading up, down, and across an organization. Below are some questions to ask about values in the organization:

1. Are all of the values connected to the overall mission, vision, and goals of the organization?
2. Was the team involved in values creation?
3. Is everyone in the organization able to articulate the values of the organization and the importance of them?
4. Are values progress discussed and measured regularly by the team?

Results Focused Case Study

A leader had responsibility for a wide range of services including community, medical, family support, civil engineering, and finance services. Additionally, the leader was responsible for command and control and security services in times of emergency. Due to the actions of previous leaders and team members, the unit morale and cohesion were at historic lows. Also, due to recent Air Force mishaps, the unit faced the most rigorous Headquarters Air Force (HQ/AF) and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) inspections ever attempted. Inspectors would significantly outnumber team members of the unit. The leader met with subordinate supervisors to outline the mission, vision, and goals of the unit for the coming year. Below is a partial listing of the mission, vision, and goals of the unit.

Mission: Provide premier community, medical, family support, civil engineering, and finance services to authorized base personnel.

Vision: To be USAFE's best ranked community.

Overall Goals:

1. Receive the highest possible rating on the HQ/AF inspection.
2. Receive the highest possible rating on the NATO inspection.
3. Base personnel rank community higher than any other in USAFE.

More than fifty additional goals were outlined for each section within the organization that directly contributed to the overall mission, vision, and goals. The goals were developed by the leader and subordinate leaders through a series of meetings in which everyone participated. The mission, vision, and goals were then put on posters and distributed to every work center on the base. The posters were also available online. The leader held community meetings with all base personnel to go over the mission, vision, and goals and asked subordinate leaders to do the same for their section goals. The leader of the organization met with subordinate leaders regularly to go over progress of the goals, celebrate goal completion and victories, and to provide support to remove barriers to goal completion. Through a tremendous amount of effort by the entire team, the organization accomplished all of their overall goals and nearly all of the additional section goals. These accomplishments helped raise unit morale and cohesion to the highest levels ever recorded.

Questions to Consider:

1. What are the strengths and improvement areas for the mission of the unit in this case study?
2. What are the strengths and improvement areas for the vision of the unit in this case study?

3. What are the strengths and improvement areas for the goals of the unit in this case study?
4. What do you think about the process of goal development, goal tracking, and focus on results for this organization?

Results Focused Self-Assessment

Below is a listing of observable behaviors to assist in determining how your competency development is progressing in being results focused (SECAF DAF Handbook 36-2647, 2022). Do a self-assessment and determine if you would be considered basic, intermediate, advanced, or expert. Ask your supervisors to also rate your observable behaviors related to being results focused and then compare your observations and discuss what you can do to further develop this competency.

Basic: Sustains application of competency over time.

- Ensures projects within areas of specific responsibility are completed in a timely manner.
- Meets established suspense dates.

Intermediate: Sustains application of competency over time in a variety of situations.

- Accomplishes work projects diligently.
- Actively strives to make a positive contribution through one's efforts.

Advanced: Sustains application of competency over time in complex situations.

- Continually works toward a defined standard of excellence.
- Monitors and evaluates plans; focuses on results and measuring attainment of outcomes.

Expert: Models, guides, or teaches; sustains application of competency in exceptionally complex situations.

- Sets challenging goals for team to increase organizational excellence.
- Formulates innovative strategies to achieve self-set goals and improve performance in all facets of work.
- Sets challenging goals to continually increase personal standards of excellence.

RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

Effective leaders advocate for and manage resources to execute their assigned missions. Significant fiscal pressure upon military budgets means a lot of thought needs to go into what is needed instead of what would be nice to have. Resources should be spent on accomplishing the mission of the organization, acquiring the highest priority items with a solid return on investment, and taking care of the people who accomplish the mission. This section will review the Planning, Programming, Budgeting, and Execution (PPBE) process, the difference between appropriated and non-appropriated funds, local decision making in budgeting, and resource advocacy.*

The Process

The Planning, Programming, Budgeting, and Execution (PPBE) process starts with the President of the United States and Secretary of Defense setting priorities through the National Security Strategy (NSS), the National Defense Strategy (NDS), and the National Military Strategy (NMS), which are normally demand based. The demand is based on a threat assessment, the understanding of what capabilities may be needed to fight current or future engagements, feasibility, and affordability. Current force size, capabilities, capacity, and risk are also considered.

PPBE informs the annual input to the President's Budget (PB) request to Congress. Military Services make decisions about how they plan to spread available dollars among competing missions and functions using the Program Objective Memorandum (POM). Military Services use the Future Years Defense Program (FYDP), which is a running baseline for future changes that links DoD resources and programs and summarizes resources (manpower, forces, etc.) associated, by fiscal year, as approved by the Secretary of Defense. The POM is a budget exercise used to adjust the contents of the FYDP through disconnects, initiatives, and offsets.

It is important to understand what disconnects, initiatives, and offsets are and how they affect the budget. Disconnects constitute approved programs, already in the baseline, with insufficient resources to achieve the approved performance level (a broken program). Options to fix disconnects include adding resources, changing the previously approved performance level, or accepting risk. Initiatives are ideas or needs competing for resources for the first time or a program already in the baseline that requires an increased level of performance. Options to fund initiatives will always require an infusion of resources that link to mission achievement, guidance, and the warfighter. Offsets are programs that will relinquish some or all resources to fund another, higher priority program. Offsets may kill the program but will more frequently reduce the level of performance or result in accepting risk.

Program Elements (PE) are the primary data elements in the FYDP (the basic building block). DoW uses PEs in the FYDP to budget and control resources. A PE describes all the pieces within a program. An example of a PE for the CV-22 is 41318F. PEs are tied to one Major Force Program (MFP). There are 11 MFPs that identify forces and platforms (see below).

1	Strategic Forces	7	Supply/Maint
2	General Purpose Forces	8	Training/Medical
3	Intel/Comm	9	Admin
4	Air and Sea Lift	10	Support to Other Nations
5	Guard/Reserve	11	Special Operations
6	R&D		

Planning is deeply connected to the POM process. There are three inputs required to build a POM: a baseline budget, fiscal guidance, and program guidance. The baseline comes from the last four years of the previous FYDP. Not everything the DAF intends to fund in execution is included in the baseline budget. Execution-year sources of dollars include under-executing programs, supplemental appropriations, and special appropriations such as those for Overseas Contingency Operations. There are no unlinked dollars available; anything added must compete against something already in the baseline for that program's resources.

Fiscal guidance comes from the Office of the Secretary of War (OSW). Fiscal guidance will usually change from year to year. The fiscal guidance documents communicate approved inflation factors to OSD and the Services (e.g., cost of fuel). The DAF usually handles the reduction as a corporate bill to be paid by all participants in the POM. Program guidance comes from the strategic planning process (e.g., National Military Strategy). Programming guidance documents need to be more than a list of wants; they also need to show programmers where offsets might be found.

A purpose of programming is to translate forces (e.g., airplanes) into component parts—for example: fuel, spare parts, people, supporting structures, base support, etc. Some common questions to ask as part of the programming process are:

1. What capabilities must we provide?
2. What will we buy?
3. Where and what will we build?
4. What type of force structure do we need?

5. What is the right force mix?
6. How much manpower will we need?
7. We do not drive the boat—we are one of many factors.
8. Considers resource constraints.
9. What risks are we willing to take?
10. How do we manage within end strength ceiling?

PPBE planners build the Program Objective Memorandum using program elements for Department of the Air Force (DAF) and Department of War (DoW) audiences.

Budgeting is a constitutionally developed process intended to translate DAF and DoW strategic intent for non-DoW audiences without losing intent, priority, or meaning. "Resource-focused planning considers available resources as a limit and looks at priorities, trade-offs, and substitution opportunities to meet the most possible potential demands from a finite resource base" (Mazarr et al., 2019). Senior leaders are charged with making the tough decisions in budgeting on what will and won't receive funding based on available resources.

Executing is the final part of the PPBE process. Executing program funds properly can be informed by asking three basic questions. What was the program supposed to do upon receipt of funding? Answering this question involves considering program expectations, obligation and expenditure targets, and spend plans. Programs have an obligation or legal encumbrance—specified amount for purpose or product. Obligations provide evidence, while expenditure is the authorization for funds from the Treasury resulting from presentation of a voucher or claim. Expenditures provide evidence goods are being provided. What did the program actually do? Answering the next question involves tracking actual obligations and expenditures and execution reviews. Execution levels are tracked monthly and quarterly, by law. The Office of the Secretary of War (OSW) conducts its own reviews of execution progress. Defense Finance and Accounting Service (DFAS) tracks all DoW accounting

data. What adjustments need to be made as a result? Answering the last question includes any re-programming (within same appropriation; most common and restricted to dollars or percentages) or restructuring over the FYDP.

Appropriated and Non-Appropriated Funds

Appropriated funds are those given by Congress for a specific purpose. The PPBE process results in appropriated funds to accomplish or support authorized missions or activities. Non-appropriated funds (NAF) are funds generated by the Air Force. It is important to understand what NAFs are, what non-appropriated fund instrumentalities (NAFI) are, and what their uses are in morale, welfare, and recreation (MWR). DAFI 34-113 (2024) defines NAF as "cash and other assets that NAFI both generate and receive from sources other than Congressional appropriations. They are government funds separate from funds of the United States Treasury, but entitled to the same privileges, immunities, and fiduciary responsibilities. NAF include dividends from Army and Air Force Exchange Service operations; fees, charges, dues, and retail proceeds from NAFI-supported activities; income from NAF concessionaire contracts and commercial sponsors; contributions and donations; and grants from other NAFI. NAF are government funds entitled to the same protection as APF." Non-appropriated Fund Instrumentalities (NAFI) are "instrumentalities of the United States Government, as well as fiscal and organizational entities of the DoD, which provide MWR and MWR-related programs and services. DAF NAFI operate on successor relationships in which higher headquarters non-appropriated central funds are financially responsible for lower echelon NAFI" (SECAF DAF Handbook 34-113, 2024). DAFI 34-113 (2024) defines Morale, Welfare, and Recreation (MWR) capabilities as "those capabilities which for Airmen, Guardians, and their families enhance their quality of life, improve retention, build and sustain resiliency and readiness, and are not the responsibility of other DAF agencies. The DAF uses the terminology capabilities versus programs or activities to emphasize the point that

MWR programs are resources capable of enhancing resiliency and readiness skills for Airmen, Guardians, and their families. These capabilities provide opportunities for connectedness and recharge individuals physically and mentally in an environment that also develops unity and a sense of trust. MWR capabilities include (but are not limited to) the following programs: fitness, sports, library, child development, youth, arts and crafts, auto skills centers, recreation equipment checkout, outdoor recreation, clubs and gaming, bowling, golf, aero club, and other membership programs."

The chart below indicates some differences between NAF and APF:

Below are some questions to ask about NAF:

1. What are the MWR capabilities funded by NAF available to my organization?
2. Is the Unite Program (using NAF) available to my organization? Note: All active duty, reservists, and civilians (APF and NAF) assigned to an Air Force unit are eligible.

APF vs. NAF Primary Differences

NAF Funds	APF Funds
Not appropriated by Congress	Appropriated by Congress
Public Law (10 USC 2783)	Public Law (All of 31 USC)
Guidance directed by DoD & AFI's	Guidance directed by DoD & AFI's
Commercial Accounting	Governmental Accounting
Sources include resale activities, fees & charges, AAFES dividends, interest & donations/sponsorship	Funding distributed to DoD/AF/MAJCOM/Wg/Gp/Sq after appropriation and apportionment
Oversight by FM (NAFFA)/PACA/AFAA	Oversight by FM
Budgeted for annually with quarterly updates – rolling 4 quarters	Budgeted over the FYDP via POM
Run operations execute on cash availability	Executed based on appropriations
Airmen's money	Taxpayers' money

Unite funding can be used for two things: activities and food. The activities must be cohesive or team building in nature, and the food must be in conjunction with the activity.

Local Decision Making in Budgeting

Many Department of the Air Force (DAF) organizations receive a percentage of the Operations and Maintenance (O&M) funding allocated to their base or higher-level organization. The funding may have to provide for all operating, development, TDY, supplies, and other costs for the organization. The leader of the organization may want to know how to make the best use of the limited resources that are allocated. The leader may use priorities, resource advisory, and return on investment to assist with this effort.

The leader may first want to ensure they have advocated for all available funding streams. In addition to O&M funding, organizations may be eligible for additional specific civilian education and training funding to address personnel development. The organization may also be eligible for career-field specific or other specialty funding. Unit funds (NAF) are used for team building events for the organization. The leader may also decide to advocate for additional funding by demonstrating a significant return on investment.

Return on Investment (ROI) may demonstrate to senior leaders why the mission of the organization should receive investment. Explaining why may include cost savings, advantages compared to other sources, or why the program is critical for mission success. For example, the Civilian Associate Degree Program (CADP) provides regular updates to all stakeholders on the ROI of investing in CADP. The program has demonstrated investing in CADP saves the DAF up to $5.4M to CivTA, $5.7M for students & $15.3M for State/Local governments or total savings/cost avoidance of up to $26.4M every 2 years. Additionally, CADP meets by law requirements (5 CFR 412.202, 5 CFR 412.201, and 5 U.S. Code 9902).

In addition to demonstrating a significant ROI, leaders of an organization may choose to use other means of resource advocacy for their organization. There are several knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSA) that may be helpful when advocating for resources:

- Highly knowledgeable of their Service organization, capabilities, and business practices.
- Knowledgeable of authorities and legal requirements.
- Knowledgeable of U.S. Government Agencies (e.g., State Department, Department of Homeland Security, etc.) and cognizant of their relationships with your agency.
- Write, read, and conduct research at an advanced level appropriate for work in an executive environment.
- Use well-developed strategic and higher-order critical thinking skills for task assignments and problem solving.
- Is your advocacy consistent with current strategic guidance (DAF Strategic Master Plan, HCA, etc.)?
- Are there any political considerations involved in the resource advocacy?

After all approaches to secure funding have been exhausted, the leader prioritizes what will receive funding in their organization. The process of prioritization may be called "rack and stack" or other similar terms. The senior leader of the organization may ask subordinate leaders to prioritize from most important to least important their funding requirements. The senior leader may then execute funding based on these priorities or develop an organization-wide priority funding process. The leader considers the results focused competency to ensure they are addressing the most important resource areas that contribute to the mission.

Resource Management Case Study

An executive officer (XO) at a directorate within the Pentagon was required to understand the PPBE process and work with a team of finance subject matter experts (SME) within the directorate to put together the requirements for the directorate over the next five years. The team developed a detailed plan of requirements that were accepted into the DAF and DoW PPBE process. However, due to year-of-execution priorities where the SECAF redirected funding away from certain directorates, the XO and finance team had to figure

out how to execute the mission with a 20 percent reduction in funding.

Questions to Consider:

1. What advice would you provide to the XO and finance team on prioritizing requirements with the 20 percent cut in funding?
2. Hypothesize that there may be alternatives to make up for the 20 percent cut by securing funding from other sources. How would you go about advocating for potential other funding sources?
3. What are some best practices for articulating return on investment for an organization to resource decision makers?
4. The directorate experienced lower morale, and the leader of the directorate believed team building may be needed. What are some options for the leader to focus on the morale and team building of the directorate?

RESOURCE MANAGEMENT SELF-ASSESSMENT

Below is a listing of observable behaviors to assist in determining how your competency development is progressing in being resource focused (SECAF DAF Handbook 36-2647, 2022). Do a self-assessment and determine if you would be considered basic, intermediate, advanced, or expert. Ask your supervisors to also rate your observable behaviors related to being resource focused, then compare your observations and discuss what you can do to further develop this competency.

Basic: Sustains application of competency over time.

- Organizes resources to execute the mission.
- Follows Air Force resourcing processes.

Intermediate: Sustains application of competency over time in a variety of situations.

- Manages the allocation of resources in relation to organizational needs.
- Uses available resources wisely.

Advanced: Sustains application of competency over time in complex situations.

- Identifies and implements best-practice resource management techniques.
- Integrates, allocates, and controls resources across offices, consistent with goals and priorities.

Expert: Models, guides, or teaches; sustains application of competency in exceptionally complex situations.

- Teaches best-practice techniques for resource management, formally or informally.
- Develops or improves existing best-practice resource management techniques.
- Sets and redefines priorities, provides guidance, and reorganizes resources to increase capacity to better support strategy, mission, or goals.

CHANGE MANAGEMENT

Effective leaders are able to manage change in ways that contribute to mission success for the organization. Change management may be needed for many reasons, including incorporating new technology, reorganizing personnel, new mission requirements, or changes in processes and policies. This section will review why organizational leaders need to identify the change, make the case for change (which includes identifying potential concerns or resistance and how to address them), implementing the change, and evaluating the change.

Identify the Change

Change can be difficult, so a leader may ask themselves why they should expend a considerable amount of time and resources within an organization to change. Innovation, initiative, and exploring opportunities often will not happen unless a leader creates an environment that is conducive to change. Innovation includes a focus on challenging current processes, policies, and organizational design to determine how to make it better. Taking the initiative involves taking calculated risks to push the organization toward an opportunity for progress and improved outcomes. Change may take considerable effort on behalf of the leader and the entire organization, but without it, the organization may fall into irrelevance (Kouzes & Posner, 2023).

There are several practical ways leaders can identify opportunities for change. Explore feedback from employees (at every level), customers, and stakeholders and determine what can be improved. In addition to formal surveys of these groups, the leader can also conduct longer-form interviews and speak with people from each group to better understand their recommendations. Leaders should look for trends, new technologies being used, and research areas related to the mission of the organization. Trends and new technologies can be seen in media, related conferences, publications, and even organic marketing research. Formal research may be done to review academic and sector-specific changes happening in other organizations with similar missions.

The leader may identify several changes that he or she believes should take place within the organization. It may be wise for the leader to speak with people he or she trusts about the rationale for the changes and get their input. Going through the process of getting feedback on the potential changes can further refine the desired change or demonstrate that more justification is needed for specific changes before it is ready to sell to the organization. There are at least two options the leader has for addressing these desired changes. The leader may choose to try to make the case for the organization to make all the changes at once or roll them out over a period. Below are some questions to ask about identifying the change:

1. Did the leader review feedback from employees (at every level), customers, and stakeholders to explore options for change?
2. Does the identified change propel innovation? If so, how?
3. Has the leader spoken with people he or she trusts about the rationale for the changes? If so, does the leader need more justification for the change?
4. If the leader has identified more than one change, does he or she plan to make all the changes at one time or roll them out over time? What are the pros and cons of each approach?

Make the Case for Change

After identifying the change, the most important role of the leader is to make the case to followers on why the change is needed. Ideally, the senior leader of the organization should make the initial appeal to followers in person, but if that is not possible due to geographic separation, then the leader may choose to use a collaboration tool like Microsoft Teams, Zoom, etc., to show a live video of the leader making a case for change. The leader should also follow up the in-person or collaboration tool appeal for change with an appeal in writing (email, employee-focused website, or memorandum) to the organization.

There are several considerations about the change the leader needs to consider when speaking with employees. When making the case for change, it is important for the leader to articulate the meaningful benefits of the new approach, the urgency for the needed change, explain why the current approach or process is not sufficient, identify the impact the change may have on current personnel, processes, and policy, the timeline to implement the change, and whether or not the leader is open to feedback concerning the change during the implementation and evaluation phase. Leaders should anticipate concerns followers may have about the change and address these. Be cautious of criticizing previous leaders or earlier changes, which may increase resistance and cause the organization to lose focus on the needed change for the future. If some people in the organization were a part of identifying the needed change, then consider sharing this with the organization to increase buy-in from employees. The leader should communicate everything related to the change clearly and effectively. If followers are not convinced the change is needed, it may cause significant resistance to the change. It may also be wise to pre-brief junior leaders in the organization about the change so they can answer questions from employees after the announcement is made. If this option is chosen, ask junior leaders not to speak about the change until the senior leader has had the opportunity to directly address all personnel concerning the change

(Lussier & Achua, 2023). Below are some questions to ask about making the case for change:

1. How did the leader convey the change to the organization? Was it effective? Why or why not?
2. Did the leader convince the team that change was needed urgently? How?
3. Did the leader effectively address potential concerns from employees about the change? What reaction did the employees have toward the change?
4. Are all the employees able to articulate the significant benefits of the new change, the timeline for implementation, and their role in the process? If not, why?

Implementing the Change

There are several considerations for leaders when implementing the change. It is important to have a well-developed action plan to implement the change. When constructing the action plan, it is critical to include input from across the organization to help with buy-in and to address concerns and issues from all areas of the organization. The action plan should address roles and responsibilities for the change, new processes and policies, a timeline for change implementation that includes significant milestones, and an understanding of what success looks like for change implementation.

There are other best practices when implementing change. The senior leader of the organization should hold regular meetings on the progress of change implementation and publicly celebrate when the organization hits milestones toward change implementation. Throughout the entire timeline of the change, leaders should remind employees of the benefits and urgency of implementing the change. The senior leader of the organization may also stand up a guiding team or committee to champion the change among employees, track change implementation across the organization, identify gaps in

resources (both financial and human) and training for employees related to the change, and recommend employee incentives for the change.

After the change is implemented, the leader should consider publicly celebrating with the organization and recognizing those who contributed most to the implementation of the change. Celebrating the implementation of the change will help cement the change into the culture of the organization. Rewarding dedicated followers for their efforts to implement change will encourage these specific followers and demonstrate to the entire organization the value of employees who are focused on change implementation (Schein, 2017). Below are some items to consider when implementing the change:

1. Describe the action plan for the change. Does it include all the recommended contents from this section? Why or why not?
2. What frequency does the senior leader of the organization plan to hold meetings on change implementation? What plans does the leader have for celebrating change implementation milestones?
3. Does the leader plan to stand up a guiding team or committee on change implementation? Why or why not?
4. Describe the plans. The senior leader must celebrate full change implementation and recognize those who contributed the most toward that goal.

Evaluating the Change

After the change, it is time to evaluate the change as a part of reviewing all processes and policies for potential modification or updating. Some questions the leader may want to ask about the specific change include: Is the change realizing the estimated benefits? If not, why? Is the change a part of the organization's culture, norms, traditions, and behaviors? If not, why? Has any

resistance resurfaced against the change? Were there any second- and third-order consequences not originally anticipated? If so, how will the issues be addressed?

In addition to the questions above, there are other considerations when evaluating change. The leader should define clear objectives and metrics for the change and its relationship to the mission and vision of the organization and evaluate these routinely. Clearly evaluate the change's impact on overall organizational performance. Analyze and address feedback on the change from employees (at all levels), customers, and stakeholders. Be wary of confirmation bias, which is favoring previous beliefs or decisions and not fully considering information that contradicts this. A person can reduce the risk of confirmation bias by continually evaluating the change's cost, risk, and benefits to ensure it is worth continuing (Johnson, 2025). Below are some questions to ask about evaluating the change:

1. Describe the process the leader is using to evaluate the change. Are there set metrics that measure the cost, risks, and benefits of the change compared to the organization's mission and vision? If not, why?
2. What frequency does the senior leader of the organization evaluate the change? Is this frequency adequate for evaluating the change?
3. How is the feedback from employees, customers, and stakeholders on the change being addressed?
4. Has the senior organization leader considered the impact of confirmation bias upon the evaluation of the change?

Change Management Case Study

An Air Force education organization focused primarily on education for junior officers and a small number of civilians in Air Force leadership competencies experienced a drift in the curriculum over several years as the faculty made adjustments to cover contemporary issues. Consequently, the curriculum no longer

was focused primarily on Air Force leadership competencies as required by policy. The leaders of the organization decided to re-focus all the curriculum on the purpose of the organization and its mission of providing an engaging educational experience focused on the Air Force's leadership competencies. The leaders held small in-person meetings among faculty and student support personnel throughout the organization over the course of several weeks. The leaders shared what the change included, the timeline for the change, the urgency for the change due to an inspection coming the next year that would evaluate the curriculum based on its purpose, and solicited feedback from employees. The organization re-focused the curriculum on leadership competencies and had the faculty begin teaching the new material six months later. Some faculty resisted the change due to the loss of emphasis on topics championed by former senior leaders but eventually complied with the changes while continuing to resist the new curriculum. Leaders did not conduct follow-up meetings after implementing the change, nor did they continue to evaluate the changes that were made.

Questions to Consider:

1. What are some positive actions leaders took to help implement the change?
2. How could the leaders have improved their approach to change management in this scenario?
3. What actions could the leaders have taken to address resistance to the change?
4. If you were the leader of the organization, how would you evaluate the implementation of the change initiative?
5. How would you address the continuing resistance to change represented by the faculty who had not yet bought into the new curriculum?

Change Management Self-Assessment

Below is a listing of observable behaviors to assist in determining how your competency development is progressing in being results focused (SECAF DAF Handbook 36-2647, 2022). Do a self-assessment and determine if you would be considered basic, intermediate, advanced, or expert. Ask your supervisors to also rate your observable behaviors related to being results focused, then compare your observations and discuss what you can do to further develop this competency.

Basic: Sustains application of competency over time.

- Recognizes the long-term benefits of organizational change.
- Supports and adapts to change initiated by others.

Intermediate: Sustains application of competency over time in a variety of situations.

- Involves others and shares information to build understanding and support for change.
- Demonstrates willingness to make significant contributions to change.

Advanced: Sustains application of competency over time in complex situations.

- Manages complex transitions to successfully bring about desired change results.
- Synthesizes requirements for and implements and assesses change effort.

Expert: Models, guides, or teaches; sustains application of competency in exceptionally complex situations.

- Acts as a valuable change resource/trusted advisor.
- Identifies deeply cherished motives to unite people in making a desired change.
- Helps others understand the vision behind proposed changes.

STRATEGIC THINKING

Strategic thinking focuses leaders toward the future to bring the full resources of the organization to bear to meet its vision. It includes an emphasis on long-term goals that are at the core of the organization and will enable it to meet the mission both today and well into the future. This section will introduce five phases of strategic thinking: creating a strategic mission, vision, and values statement; setting organization objectives; selecting strategy options; executing the strategy; and evaluating and controlling the strategy (Lussier & Achua, 2023).

Creating a Strategic Mission, Vision, and Values Statement

See the Results Focused competency that includes mission, vision, and values.

Setting Organization Objectives

See the Results Focused competency that includes goals.

Note: The term objective and goal may be used interchangeably.

Selecting Strategy Options

There are many strategies that may assist the organization to accomplish its objectives. At the core of the various strategies is conducting a situational analysis, which includes a review of both internal and external environments. Both internal and external

analysis should be updated regularly as they may frequently change. A better understanding of both environments will assist the leader in focusing the organization on the best path for moving forward.

An internal environment analysis includes understanding an organization's strengths and weaknesses. Some questions that may be helpful in conducting an internal analysis include:

1. What strengths does the organization possess that may not be found in any other organization?
2. How do the strengths relate to the mission, vision, values, and goals of the organization?
3. What weaknesses does the organization have and do they impact the mission, vision, values, and goals of the organization?
4. How can the impact of the weaknesses be mitigated?
5. How can the organization utilize the strengths of the organization?
6. What resources need to be invested to accentuate the strengths and potentially address the weaknesses (if needed)?

Understanding the unique capabilities and limitations the organization has will help the leader better position it for the future.

An external environment analysis includes understanding the broader context within which an organization operates. Some questions that may be helpful in conducting an external analysis include:

1. Who are the competitors to the organization and what are their strengths and weaknesses?
2. What are the threats posed by others to the organization?
3. What emerging technologies and trends may impact the future of the environment in which the organization operates?

Anticipate how political, social, cultural, geographic, public opinion, financial markets, and other forces may impact the organization. Positioning the organization to exploit emerging opportunities before competitors and being ready to address potential threats will aid the leader in thinking strategically.

Executing the Strategy

Using the organization's structure, the effective leader carefully considers how the strategy is implemented. The wise leader considers change management principles (see competency) and barriers to strategy execution. The leader may also want to ensure the organizational structure is best aligned to meet the strategy.

Consider how the organization's structure will implement the strategy. Some questions that may be helpful in considering how the organization's structure will implement the strategy include:

1. Which parts of the organization will be responsible for the various components of the strategy?
2. Who are the leaders of those parts of the organization and how will they roll out the strategy?
3. Is the organization's structure optimized for the strategy? If not, what changes need to be made?
4. Is every part of the organization able to articulate how it fits into the strategy and what its specific contributions are toward the strategy?
5. If not, how can this issue be addressed by all stakeholders?

There may be barriers to implementing the strategy, but counterforces can also be applied. Barriers may include structural issues within the organization and a lack of resources (people, financial, etc.) being dedicated toward the strategy. Other barriers may include lack of understanding of the strategy and personnel resisting the strategy. Counterforces to strategy-implementing barriers may include effective leaders being in critical parts of the

organization, well thought out updated policies and processes to support the strategy, fully resourcing the strategy, and providing rewards and incentives to personnel based on the strategy (Lussier & Achua, 2023).

Evaluating and Controlling the Strategy

See the Results Focused competency.

Strategic Thinking Case Study

A Department of the Air Force (DAF) civilian was selected to lead an organization whose mission is to provide depot maintenance, engineering support, and software development for several weapon systems. The civilian leader had a background in functions related to the mission of the organization, but the leader had not worked previously in the specific organization she was now tasked to lead. The new civilian leader had been tasked to provide a strategic plan for the organization.

Questions to Consider:

1. What are some best practices for developing goals, a mission statement, vision, and values statement?
2. Describe the strategy analysis options the civilian leader may want to consider.
3. How would you implement the strategy?
4. Describe how you would evaluate the strategy after it is implemented.

STRATEGIC THINKING SELF-ASSESSMENT

Below is a listing of observable behaviors to assist in determining how your competency development is progressing in being results focused (SECAF DAF Handbook 36-2647, 2022). Do a self-assessment and determine if you would be considered basic, intermediate, advanced, or expert. Ask your supervisors to also rate your observable behaviors related to being results focused, then compare your observations and discuss what you can do to further develop this competency.

Basic: Sustains application of competency over time.

- Considers how hierarchies, roles, and relationships influence specific problems.
- Articulates both short-term and long-term goals.

Intermediate: Sustains application of competency over time in a variety of situations.

- Considers issues from the perspective of more senior leadership.
- Plans for the future rather than leaving things to chance.

Advanced: Sustains application of competency over time in complex situations.

- Anticipates and manages secondary effects of proposed policies, actions, or adjustments.
- Develops plans that support long-term goals and objectives.

Expert: Models, guides, or teaches; sustains application of competency in exceptionally complex situations.

- Teaches others to reframe problems and actively seek out discussions with critics when making key decisions.
- Continually reviews and adopts new strategies to meet long-term goals.
- Recognizes long-term trends to anticipate future challenges not readily apparent to others.

PRECISION

This section will describe the competency of precision. Precision is defined as "a concern for order, quality, and accuracy with an underlying drive to reduce uncertainty in the environment" (SECAF DAF Handbook 36-2647, 2022). This section will review the four categories of observable behaviors for the precision competency: basic, intermediate, advanced, and expert.

Basic

- Follows logical order for completing tasks to meet short-term goals.
- Maintains organized files or materials.

Being able to accomplish tasks associated with goals is a critical component of being a DAF civilian. For example, DAF civilians work from an employee performance plan each year that may include both short-term and long-term goals to accomplish for that reporting period. Some of the goals in the performance plan may be completed rapidly, but others may take several weeks or months to complete. Planning activities over the course of the year through developing a logical order of smaller steps is an important skill set to develop.

There are several considerations for accomplishing a goal that may take several months or longer to accomplish. First, it is important to understand the goal. Check with leadership and stakeholders to understand all aspects of the goal and what is expected. Try to understand why the goal is important and how it is connected to the mission, vision, and values of the organization. Second, create a goal plan that lists a series of tasks associated with accomplishing the goal and anticipates when those tasks should be completed over a period of time until the goal is accomplished. Third, track progress routinely to monitor task completion and adjust the goal plan as necessary to align with emerging barriers and opportunities for goal completion. Part of tracking progress includes using metrics in a meaningful way

that will highlight areas for improvement and if more resources will be required to meet the desired goal completion timeframe.

Keeping organized files and materials is another aspect of the basic level of the precision competency. There are various ways of organizing files and materials. One aspect in organizing is looking for an organizing principle. For example, files may be organized by year, topic, relevance, purpose, and other categories. Materials may be organized in the same way as files but also include size and weight, location, and other considerations. Files and materials that are no longer useful may need to be disposed of to make space for relevant items. A principle in organization is trying to be as efficient as possible while having quick access to the files and materials needed to accomplish the mission. Below are some questions to consider concerning the precision competency[*]:

1. Describe the process you take to complete short-term and long-term goals. Is there any room for improvement in your current process? Why or why not?
2. How do you organize files and materials? Is there any room for improvement in your current process? Why or why not?

Intermediate

- Double-checks accuracy of information and own work.
- Carefully follows directions.

Checking for accuracy is another important aspect of the precision competency. Checking accuracy includes using trusted sources of information that have proven reliable over time. For example, when completing a task associated with a policy requirement, read the policy for yourself. Relying on other people to relay the highlights of the policy and how it relates to the task you are completing could lead to misunderstandings and setbacks. Instead, read the policy yourself and then speak with others who have read the policy,

including your leaders, on the proper application and intent of the policy. When possible, review original sources versus taking action based on second- or thirdhand information.

Another component of checking for accuracy is reviewing your own work. Before sending an email, turning in a project, or submitting a task for evaluation, it is important to check everything over. Some people may prefer to step away from the task and clear their head before going over everything again. Completing this step has the potential to improve the accuracy of work and the performance and reputation of the team member.

Another component of the precision competency is carefully following directions. Consider the example of someone working in life support and ejection systems in various United States Air Force aircraft. It is important in that role to follow the technical orders precisely when conducting work on these systems and have someone else review the work, which significantly increases the chances aircrew could survive aircraft mishaps and enemy fire. Someone in this field may remember when life support and ejection systems that were installed and maintained appropriately allowed aircrew to survive perilous situations, and also when mistakes based on not following technical orders led to the death of aircrew. Carefully following directions can directly contribute to saving lives and contribute to overall mission success. Below are some questions to consider concerning the precision competency:

1. Describe the process you take to check for accuracy. Is there any room for improvement in your current process? Why or why not?
2. In your current role, is carefully following directions important? Why or why not?

Advanced

- Displays broad concern for increasing order and accuracy in existing systems.
- Monitors quality of others' work; checks to ensure that procedures are followed.

Demonstrating concern for increasing order and accuracy in existing systems is another important aspect of the precision competency. There are several processes that can improve this area. Leaders may use current policies or draft new policies to standardize procedures. Automation can minimize human error. For example, artificial intelligence (AI), data mining, or other areas could improve automation. Relevant and continued training contributes to the team's order and accuracy. In physical spaces, leaders may use technologies to track inventory, locate inventory according to a layout that is well thought out for all involved, and track everything according to pre-established metrics and quality control.

Supervisors and team leaders are tasked with monitoring the quality of others' work and ensuring employees follow procedures. Part of accomplishing these tasks includes developing a performance plan for each employee. When developing and implementing performance plans, leaders may use performance management phases which include planning, monitoring, evaluating, recognizing, and rewarding. During the planning phase, supervisors set performance expectations for the performance year and meet with their employees to ensure mutual understanding of the performance plan. The monitoring phase provides ongoing, timely, and constructive feedback to employees relating to the performance elements in their plan, including individual standards or other milestones. The evaluating phase is the end of the appraisal cycle and requires supervisors to rate employee performance against the standards in an employee's performance plan and assign a rating of record. The recognizing and rewarding phase involves providing

incentives to and recognition of employees for individual and team achievement and for their contributions to the organization's mission. Rewards should be an integral part of performance management. The performance management process consists of proactively planning work and setting expectations, continually monitoring performance, evaluating performance in a summary fashion, and recognizing and rewarding good performance. Below are some questions to consider concerning the precision competency:

1. Describe how you show concern for increasing order and accuracy in existing systems within your organization.
2. Describe the performance management process in your organization. Do you or your leaders use the performance management phases? Why or why not?

Expert

- Teaches others how to develop systems to organize and track data, increase order, and improve quality.
- Proactively identifies and acts on opportunities to improve order, quality, and accuracy when others are resistant to proposed changes.
- Develops new systems to organize and track data, increase order, and improve quality.

At the peak of the precision competency is teaching others how to develop systems to organize and track data, increase order, and improve quality. In previous categories (basic, intermediate, and advanced), leaders use existing systems to perform the tasks, but in this category, leaders should develop new systems and teach others how to do this as well. Developing new systems requires an in-depth understanding of the mission, vision, and goals of the organization. It also requires a deep understanding of the internal and external processes that contribute to the services and products the organization provides. It includes conducting an internal

environment analysis identifying strengths and weaknesses of the organization and an external environment analysis to understand the broader environment an organization operates in. Developing new systems builds upon all other blocks of the precision competency (basic, intermediate, and advanced). Developing systems also demands an understanding of existing systems and being aware of opportunities to improve. Part of teaching others requires understanding pedagogy. Pedagogy involves an understanding of teaching, learning theory, the learner, content being taught, values, and the environment the learning is occurring in (Schunk, 2020).

Another part of the precision competency is to identify and act on opportunities to improve order, quality, and accuracy when others are resistant to proposed changes. Being proactive involves being solution- and future-focused, taking initiative to achieve organizational and individual performance goals, and focusing on your sphere of influence. Earlier in this chapter, how to mitigate resistance from others is addressed, including being cautious of criticizing previous changes or leaders, which may increase resistance and cause the organization to lose focus on future change requirements. Additionally, if followers are not convinced the change is needed, it may cause significant resistance. Below are some questions to consider concerning the precision competency:

1. Describe best practices you use or have seen used in teaching others to develop systems to organize and track data, increase order, and improve quality.
2. Do you describe yourself as proactive in your workplace when executing the precision competency? Why or why not?

Precision Case Study

A Department of the Air Force (DAF) civilian was selected by base leaders to assist another squadron in the precision competency. The squadron that needed assistance had faced several challenges related to systems, accuracy, overall quality, and compliance with policies.

Base leaders had recently fired the top three leaders of the squadron and had requested the DAF civilian assist the organization to improve in the precision competency while they recruited and hired new leaders. The DAF civilian was expected to stay with the squadron until the new leaders were in place and accuracy, quality, and adherence to policies had significantly improved.

Questions to Consider:

1. In the scenario above, where would you begin addressing the issues the squadron is currently facing?
2. Describe the initial meeting you would have with key leaders in the squadron on the issues being faced. Walk through a draft plan of how you would help get the squadron back on track.
3. How would you specifically teach other leaders in the organization about the precision competency? How would you handle the members of the squadron who are resistant to the changes you have been asked to make by base leadership?

Precision Self-Assessment

Below is a listing of observable behaviors to assist in determining how your competency development is progressing in being results focused (SECAF DAF Handbook 36-2647, 2022). Do a self-assessment and determine if you would be considered basic, intermediate, advanced, or expert. Ask your supervisors to also rate your observable behaviors related to being results focused, then compare your observations and discuss what you can do to further develop this competency.

Basic: Sustains application of competency over time.

- Follows logical order for completing tasks to meet short-term goals.

- Maintains organized files or materials.

Intermediate: Sustains application of competency over time in a variety of situations.

- Double-checks accuracy of information and own work.
- Carefully follows directions.

Advanced: Sustains application of competency over time in complex situations.

- Displays broad concern for increasing order and accuracy in existing systems.
- Monitors quality of others' work; checks to ensure that procedures are followed.

Expert: Models, guides, or teaches; sustains application of competency in exceptionally complex situations.

- Teaches others how to develop systems to organize and track data, increase order, and improve quality.
- Proactively identifies and acts on opportunities to improve order, quality, and accuracy when others are resistant to proposed changes.
- Develops new systems to organize and track data, increase order, and improve quality.

Conclusion

This chapter reviewed five Department of the Air Force (DAF) competencies associated with developing organizations. The competencies included results focused, resource management, change management, strategic thinking, and precision (SECAF DAF Handbook 36-2647, 2022). DAF civilians who effectively incorporate these five developing organizations competencies into their

workplace will be even better prepared to lead today's and tomorrow's Air and Space Forces.

Definitions

- **Change Management Competency:** "Adapts, helps others adapt, or implements change with the goal of ensuring unit goals are properly aligned to the desired end state" (SECAF DAF Handbook 36-2647, 2022).
- **Department of the Air Force Foundational Competencies:** "Describes a set of accepted and valued competencies applicable to all Airmen (officer, enlisted, and civilian) to achieve success across the wide array of AF missions, roles, functions, and duties" (SECAF DAF Handbook 36-2647, 2022).
- **Developing Organizations:** "Focus on the pursuit of organizational excellence" (SECAF DAF Handbook 36-2647, 2022).
- **Precision Competency:** "A concern for order, quality, and accuracy with an underlying drive to reduce uncertainty in the environment" (SECAF DAF Handbook 36-2647, 2022).
- **Resource Management Competency:** "Carefully and responsibly administrates resources placed under an Airman's control with the intent to maximize readiness and lethality and improve organizational performance" (SECAF DAF Handbook 36-2647, 2022).
- **Results Focused Competency:** "Demonstrates concern for working well or for competing against a standard of excellence" (SECAF DAF Handbook 36-2647, 2022).
- **Strategic Thinking Competency:** "Considers and organizes activities and resources to achieve a desired goal; thinks on large and small scale, long-term and short-term" (SECAF DAF Handbook 36-2647, 2022).

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- The information on the PPBE process from this section was informed by a presentation developed by the HAF/A1 Manpower office and Lt Col Jenny Stewart and Lt Col (Ret.) Nate Tarkowski.
- Information on the performance management phases above comes from Dr. Doris Sartor and her course on Performance Management Coaching.

6

DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE MISSION DRIVEN LEADERSHIP

ANDREW BOWENS

Introduction

In 2022–2023, the Department of the Air Force (DAF) identified two components of leadership within the organization: DAF Foundational Competencies, which are applicable for all officers, enlisted, and DAF civilians; and the philosophy of USAF and USSF Mission Command, which is primarily focused on the role of the commander and the operational combat environment (SECAF SFDD-1, 2025; SECAF SFDP 6-0, 2024; SECAF AF Doctrine Publication 1-1, 2023; SECAF DAF Handbook 36-2647, 2022). In 2024, the USSF introduced its Mission Command approach with some slight variations from the USAF approach (SECAF SFDP 6-0, 2024). This chapter identifies how DAF presents leadership to military and civilian team members through DAF Foundational Competencies and Mission Command leadership philosophies. The emphasis will be to provide a brief analysis and introduce the concept of DAF Mission Driven Leadership that reflects a DAF civilian focus and integrates with the USAF and USSF Mission Command. The chapter will conclude by presenting the concept of DAF Mission Driven Leadership, focusing on the unique characteristics of leadership for

DAF civilians and integrating with the USAF and USSF Mission Command philosophies.

DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE FOUNDATIONAL COMPETENCIES

Introduction

The publication of DAF Handbook 36-2647 (2022) introduced the concept of DAF Foundational Competencies—"…a set of accepted and valued competencies applicable to all Airmen (officer, enlisted, and civilian) to achieve success across the wide array of AF missions, roles, functions, and duties" (SECAF DAF Handbook 36-2647, 2022). The competencies are organized into four broad categories: Developing Self, Developing Others, Developing Ideas, and Developing Organizations. The current configuration includes 23 competencies nested under these four categories. This section will introduce the DAF Foundational Competencies identified in the handbook and provide a brief analysis of the concept of competency development in leadership (SECAF DAF Handbook 36-2647, 2022).

Developing Self

Nine competencies are identified in the Developing Self category: accountability, perseverance, communication, decision making, information seeking, flexibility, resilience, initiative, and self-control. The handbook defines each of the competencies under Developing Self. A chart includes four competency levels for Developing Self (basic, intermediate, advanced, and expert) and examples of observable behaviors for each competency level. An example of a Developing Self competency (accountability) is included below (SECAF DAF Handbook 36-2647, 2022).

Developing Others

The four Developing Others competencies include teamwork, develops people, service mindset, and leadership. The handbook defines each of the competencies under Developing Others. A chart includes four competency levels for Developing Others (basic, intermediate, advanced, and expert) and examples of observable behaviors for each competency level. An example of a Developing Others competency (teamwork) is included below (SECAF DAF Handbook 36-2647, 2022).

Developing Ideas

The five Developing Ideas competencies include analytical thinking, digital literacy, creative thinking, fostering innovation, and influence. A chart includes four competency levels for Developing Ideas (basic,

intermediate, advanced, and expert) and examples of observable behaviors for each competency level. An example of a Developing Ideas competency (analytical thinking) is included below (SECAF DAF Handbook 36-2647, 2022).

Developing Organizations

Five competencies are identified in the Developing Organizations category: resource management, results focused, change management, strategic thinking, and precision. The handbook defines each of the competencies under Developing Organizations. A chart includes four competency levels for Developing Organizations (basic, intermediate, advanced, and expert) and examples of observable behaviors for each competency level. An example of a Developing Organizations competency (resource management) is included below (SECAF DAF Handbook 36-2647, 2022).

BRIEF ANALYSIS OF COMPETENCY DEVELOPMENT

This section provides a brief analysis of the concept of competency development in leadership as advocated in SECAF DAF Handbook 36-2647 (2022). Competency development is based on a skills approach to leadership (Mumford et al., 2000). The skills approach to leadership was introduced by seminal author Robert Katz in the *Harvard Business Review* (1955). Like prior approaches to leadership (e.g., personality-focused approach), the skills approach remains focused exclusively on the leader. The skills approach (and therefore competency development) leaves out two other critical components of leadership: followers and mission context (Lussier & Achua, 2023). In contrast to previous approaches, the skills approach emphasizes that abilities—including attributes, knowledge, and behaviors—may be learned and developed over time, which may improve leadership outcomes (Northouse, 2025).

There are several strengths of a skills (competency development) approach to leadership. The concept is appealing on both organizational and individual levels. Organizationally, it is easy to list specific skills and competencies the organization values and publish them in policy, websites, and other materials widely available to team members. Individually, the concept is appealing since nearly every person can work toward developing specific skills and competencies in pursuit of leader development. Additionally, many leadership education programs focus on a skills or competency approach to leadership that facilitates a structure for development (Northouse, 2025).

There are also several criticisms of a skills (competency development) approach to leadership. The skills approach remains focused exclusively on the leader, leaving out the other two critical components of leadership: followers and mission context (Lussier & Achua, 2023). Additionally, the skills approach does not explain how

development of competencies contributes to leadership performance (Northouse, 2025).

Questions to Consider:

1. Explain the skills (competency development) approach to leadership and what you think about the approach. Give an example of how you can use this approach to facilitate working with team members to accomplish the mission.
2. Which of the DAF Foundational Competencies do you believe are most important? Why?

Department of the Air Force Foundational Competencies Case Study

You have been recently assigned to a DAF Foundational Competency Development group whose purpose is to review the current competencies and recommend new competencies leaders will need in the DAF for the next 10 years. Additionally, you are expected to highlight the strengths and criticisms of using a competency-based concept for DAF leadership development.

Questions to Consider:

1. Explain how you would review the current DAF Foundational Competencies for relevance in the current DAF mission context.
2. Explain your approach for attempting to determine which competencies may be important for the DAF in the next 10 years.
3. Describe the strengths of a competency-based model for DAF leadership development.
4. Describe the criticisms of a competency-based model for DAF leadership development.

UNITED STATES AIR FORCE MISSION COMMAND

In 2023, with the publication of *AF Doctrine Publication 1-1* (2023), the Department of the Air Force released the leadership philosophy of USAF Mission Command—"a philosophy of leadership that empowers Airmen to operate in uncertain, complex, and rapidly changing environments through trust, shared awareness, and understanding of commander's intent" (SECAF AF Doctrine Publication 1-1, 2023). Upon release of *AF Doctrine Publication 1-1*, the Chief of Staff of the Air Force (CSAF) released a memo on USAF Mission Command commending the philosophy to the USAF. On 16 August 2023, the Secretary of the Air Force Public Affairs Office released an article that addressed both the new *AF Doctrine Publication 1-1* and the memo from the CSAF, indicating the guidance focused on the "operationalization of mission command and its application to the Air Force Future Operating Concept, Agile Combat Employment..." (Secretary of the Air Force Public Affairs, 2023). The primary focus of USAF Mission Command appears to be leadership in combat operations, but aspects of USAF Mission Command also apply to the entire Air Force (AF) mission and to all Airmen at all levels. The purpose of this section is to review the principles and concept of USAF Mission Command and provide a brief analysis (SECAF AF Doctrine Publication 1-1, 2023).

Principles of USAF Mission Command

There are six primary principles associated with USAF Mission Command: provide clear commander's intent, create shared understanding, exercise disciplined initiative, build teams through mutual trust, accept prudent risk, and use Mission-Type Orders (MTOs) when appropriate. Figure 1 illustrates the principles of USAF Mission Command. Below is a brief overview of each of the principles (SECAF AF Doctrine Publication 1-1, 2023).
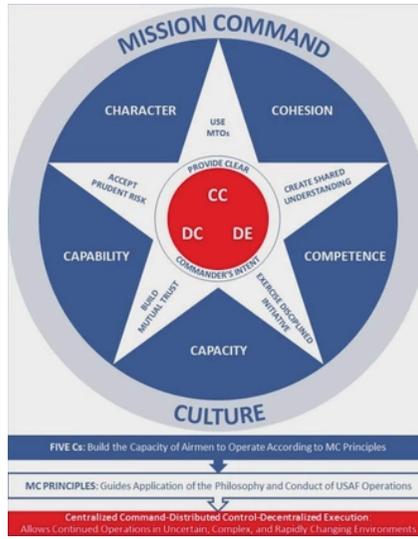
Figure 1: *Principles of USAF Mission Command*

Principles of USAF Mission Command: Provide Clear Commander's Intent

Commander's intent is focused on the operational and strategic context. It is "a clear and concise statement that frames the operation's purpose, its desired end state, and what must be accomplished—not how—to achieve success" (SECAF AF Doctrine Publication 1-1, 2023). Commander's intent guides the mission, outlines expectations, and may include risks, constraints, or restraints. Commander's intent should be clear and refined over time based on operational realities.

Principles of USAF Mission Command: Create Shared Understanding

Shared understanding is a tool to assist commanders in decision making. It includes "a common awareness and comprehension of the operational environment, the organization's competence, the limits of its organic capabilities, and its ability to accomplish the mission" (SECAF AF Doctrine Publication 1-1, 2023). All team members should

be aware of the organization's mission and their unique role in achieving that mission.

Principles of USAF Mission Command: Exercise Disciplined Initiative

Disciplined initiative is a tool to assist Airmen at all levels to exercise greater flexibility while still being able to coordinate at various levels to employ airpower. It is "the proactive application of inventiveness and creativity when existing orders no longer fit the situation or when unforeseen threats or opportunities arise" (SECAF AF Doctrine Publication 1-1, 2023). Competent Airmen must understand commander's intent and the operational environment before exercising disciplined initiative.

Principles of USAF Mission Command: Build Teams Through Mutual Trust

Mutual trust is built over time through shared experiences by team members who are competent and demonstrate integrity. It is a "shared confidence between commanders, subordinates, and partners that demonstrates reliability and competence to carry out the mission" (SECAF AF Doctrine Publication 1-1, 2023). Trust may not happen without leaders creating opportunities for teams to develop.

Principles of USAF Mission Command: Accept Prudent Risk

Assessing and taking risks is often necessary for mission accomplishment in an airpower context. "The complexity of the operational environment and the imperative to delegate authority demands skillful risk assessment" (SECAF AF Doctrine Publication 1-1, 2023). Communicating risks associated with higher operational and strategic efforts is critical for leaders and team members at all levels. Some risks are not appropriate depending on the value of the objective or purpose of the mission, while other objectives may demand the highest level of risk to achieve mission accomplishment.

Principles of USAF Mission Command: Mission-Type Orders (MTOs)

Mission-Type Orders (MTOs) are a technique for writing orders in which commanders empower subordinates to use disciplined initiative to make decisions based on commander's intent. MTOs "focus on the purpose of the operation rather than on details of how to perform assigned tasks" (SECAF AF Doctrine Publication 1-1, 2023). MTOs are based on the priorities of higher-level leaders and may be based on "planning orders (PLANORDs), operation orders (OPORDs), the joint air operation plan (JAOP), and the air operations directive (AOD)" (SECAF AF Doctrine Publication 1-1, 2023).

THE FIVE CS OF USAF MISSION COMMAND

The five Cs associated with USAF Mission Command are character, competence, capability, cohesion, and capacity. Figure XX illustrates the five Cs of USAF Mission Command. The five Cs "constitute the individual and organizational attributes commanders should foster and reinforce to build the individual and organizational capacity required to establish and support a mission command culture" (SECAF AF Doctrine Publication 1-1, 2023). Below is a brief overview of each of the five Cs.

Character

A person of good character has a solid moral foundation, chooses to do the right thing, and is a person of integrity, humility, and selflessness. Edgar Puryear (2002) wrote in *American Generalship*, "Character is everything: the art of command," after interviewing more than a thousand general officers who served in World War II up to 2000. He concluded, "The greatest of all is character, which is everything in leadership. It permeates throughout all the qualities essential for leadership success." In a USAF context, a person of character embodies the USAF core values of integrity, excellence, and service. Character may be further developed through "training,

discipline, and mentorship aimed at reinforcing desired traits" (SECAF AF Doctrine Publication 1-1, 2023), which may be done by the member, supervisors, commanders, and others.

Competence

Competence may be defined as having the will and ability to perform well in a given context. In his book *Resilient Leaders*, General Robert Dees (2013) wrote that wisdom was the bridge between character and competence. Dees indicated wise leaders "carefully weigh their options, learn for a lifetime, invest in others, wait upon the Lord which includes being aware of their inadequacy, have a sense of timing, source of strength, wellspring of vision and sense of pace." Developing competence in the USAF Mission Command context includes education, training, and experience. "A mission command culture cannot exist in an organization whose members do not value and display a commitment to tactical, technical, and intellectual self-improvement" (SECAF AF Doctrine Publication 1-1, 2023). Airmen and Guardians should ask themselves if they have the commitment to develop competence.

Capability

Capability is described by AF Doctrine Publication 1-1 (2023) as "center[ing] on the intra-organizational mechanisms that drive how a unit functions. It includes an organization's framework, processes, procedures, feedback mechanisms, and systems of reward that must function holistically to establish a mission command culture." It is essential for USAF organizations and team members to be capable of performing the mission they are resourced, trained, and tasked to conduct. Leaders at all levels are expected to remove barriers that may limit their organization's capability.

Cohesion

Cohesion may be described as unity, esprit de corps, the condition of coming together, or collective identity. Cohesion is built on mutual

trust, respect, open communication, and positive interpersonal relationships. It builds resiliency and improves morale of the unit (SECAF AF Doctrine Publication 1-1, 2023). Dees (2013) wrote, "Excellent leadership (to which we aspire) integrates disciplines which ensure personal resilience and promote resilience in others and [in the] organization." Leaders who cultivate cohesion within their organization may reap many benefits, including improved resiliency.

Capacity

Capacity is described by AF Doctrine Publication 1-1 (2023) as "a measure or degree to which an individual or organization is able, has the potential, or has demonstrated the ability to operate according to the principles of mission command." There are six principles associated with USAF Mission Command, including providing clear commander's intent, creating shared understanding, exercising disciplined initiative, building teams through mutual trust, accepting prudent risk, and using Mission-Type Orders when appropriate. Training in Mission Command may enhance capacity.

BRIEF ANALYSIS OF USAF MISSION COMMAND

This section provides a brief analysis of the concept of USAF Mission Command as outlined in AF Doctrine Publication 1-1 (2023). There are three primary components of leadership: a focus on the leader, followers, and mission context (Lussier & Achua, 2023). USAF and USSF Mission Command is primarily based on the roles and actions of the commander. A commander is a leader, but not all leaders are commanders. Commanders are defined as commissioned officers entrusted with certain specific responsibilities, including the "lawful authority and responsibility to promote and safeguard the morale, physical well-being, and the general welfare of persons under their command" (SECAF Commander's Responsibilities 1-2, 2014). Commanders are also responsible for certain actions required by law, including:

1. To show in themselves a good example of virtue, honor, patriotism, and subordination;
2. To be vigilant in inspecting the conduct of all persons who are placed under their command;
3. To guard against and suppress all dissolute and immoral practices, and to correct, according to the laws and regulations of the Air Force, all persons who are guilty of them; and
4. To take all necessary and proper measures, under the laws, regulations, and customs of the Air Force, to promote and safeguard the morale, the physical well-being, and the general welfare of the persons under their command or charge (Title 10 USC § 8583).

Since USAF and USSF Mission Command are primarily based on the roles and actions of the commander, both DAF civilian leaders and enlisted leaders would not meet the criteria for commanders. However, DAF civilians and enlisted leaders serve in critical positions of leadership throughout the DAF and may benefit from a specific Mission Driven Leadership concept that integrates with USAF and USSF Mission Command.

The other two primary components of leadership are followers and mission context (Lussier & Achua, 2023). USAF Mission Command includes guidance for followers and mission. Unlike the competency approach to leadership described earlier in this chapter, USAF Mission Command does include some recommended actions for followers (e.g., followers are jointly responsible with commanders for shared understanding) (SECAF AF Doctrine Publication 1-1, 2023). USAF Mission Command also focuses on the mission context. However, USAF Mission Command is primarily focused on the Air Force operational combat mission environment. DAF civilians may benefit from a specific Mission Driven Leadership concept that integrates with USAF Mission Command but is focused on DAF

civilian mission contexts and not on an operational combat environment.

Questions to Consider:

1. Explain the USAF Mission Command approach to leadership and what you think about the approach. Give an example of how you can use this approach to facilitate working with team members to accomplish the mission.
2. Which of the USAF Mission Command principles do you believe are most important? Why?
3. Describe your thoughts on each of the five Cs of USAF Mission Command.

USAF Mission Command Case Study

You have been recently assigned to a USAF Doctrine Development organization whose purpose is to review and update USAF Mission Command as outlined in *AF Doctrine Publication 1-1* (2023) to provide relevant guidance for the next 5–10 years. Additionally, you are expected to highlight the strengths and opportunities for improvement in a USAF Mission Command approach to leadership.

Questions to Consider:

1. Explain how you would review the current USAF Mission Command doctrine for relevance in the current and future USAF mission context.
2. Describe the strengths of a USAF Mission Command approach for USAF leadership development.
3. Describe the opportunities for improvement in a USAF Mission Command approach to leadership.

UNITED STATES SPACE FORCE MISSION COMMAND

Introduction

In November 2024, with the publication of *Space Doctrine Publication 6-0, Mission Command*, and later in April 2025, with the publication of *Space Force Doctrine Document 1, The Space Force* (SFDD-1), the USSF issued the leadership philosophy of USSF Mission Command. USSF Mission Command is defined as: "a philosophy centered on the art of command, the science of control, and the discipline of decision making. This philosophy of leadership characterizes the Space Force approach to command and control (C2) of space operations, through the commander's maximum distribution of control and delegation of authorities, informed by strong military judgment and appropriate to the strategic and operational context" (SECAF SFDP 6-0, 2024). The purpose of this section is to review the principles and concept of USSF Mission Command.

Principles of USSF Mission Command

USSF Mission Command has seven principles and includes all six primary principles associated with USAF Mission Command but does not mention its Five Cs (character, competence, capability, cohesion, and capacity). The principles are to provide clear commander's intent, create shared understanding, exercise disciplined initiative, build teams through mutual trust, accept prudent risk, and use Mission-Type Orders (MTOs) when appropriate. For additional information on each of these principles, see the section on USAF Mission Command. USSF Mission Command adds competence as one of its principles. The Space Force (SFDD-1) provides only a few paragraphs on the concept of USSF Mission Command and does not elaborate on each of its principles; however, *Mission Command* (2024) adds more detail. While USSF Mission Command does not include the USAF Mission Command Five Cs, USSF does have core values that make up Four

Cs (character, connection, commitment, and courage) and lists competence as one of its principles (SECAF SFDD-1, 2025; SECAF SFDP 6-0, 2024).

SFDD-1 ties USSF civilians directly to USSF Mission Command: "Civilians bring specialization, operational stability, and the potential for continuity critical to every Space Force function and area of operations. They provide corporate knowledge, supervision, and management at the tactical, operational, and strategic levels. Civilians fill functional areas that exist outside of Space Force's officer and enlisted career fields. They lead, plan, and manage essential functions through mission command at every level of the Service" (SECAF SFDD-1, 2025). SFDD-1 emphasizes the role USSF civilians have in leading and managing at all levels of the USSF. Education and training may be needed to help civilians understand their role: "Education is key to inculcating a common professional language and a shared understanding of the principles of space operations and mission command" (SECAF SFDP 6-0, 2024). See the section on CLDS for education and training opportunities for civilians.

USSF Mission Command Case Study

You have been recently assigned to a USSF Doctrine Development organization whose purpose is to review and update USSF Mission Command as outlined in *Space Force Doctrine Document 1, The Space Force* (2025) to provide relevant guidance for the next 5–10 years. Additionally, you are expected to highlight the strengths and opportunities for improvement in a USSF Mission Command approach to leadership (SECAF SFDD-1, 2025).

Questions to Consider:

1. Explain how you would review the current USSF Mission Command doctrine for relevance in the current and future USSF mission context.
2. Describe the strengths of a USSF Mission Command approach for USSF leadership development.

3. Describe the opportunities for improvement in a USSF
    Mission Command approach to leadership.

DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE MISSION DRIVEN LEADERSHIP

Introduction

The previous sections of this chapter identified opportunities in the DAF Foundational Competencies and the USAF and USSF leadership philosophies of Mission Command (SECAF SFDD-1, 2025; SECAF SFDP 6-0, 2024; SECAF AF Doctrine Publication 1-1, 2023; SECAF DAF Handbook 36-2647, 2022). DAF Foundational Competencies are based on a skills approach to leadership (Mumford et al., 2000). The skills approach focuses exclusively on the leader and, therefore, Foundational Competency development leaves out the other two critical components of leadership: followers and mission context (Lussier & Achua, 2023). USAF and USSF Mission Command are primarily based on the roles and actions of the commander; both DAF civilian leaders and enlisted leaders would not meet the criteria for commanders (SECAF Commander's Responsibilities 1-2, 2014). However, DAF civilians and enlisted leaders serve in critical positions of leadership throughout the DAF and may benefit from a specific DAF Mission Driven Leadership concept that integrates with USAF and USSF Mission Command. Additionally, while parts of USAF and USSF Mission Command focus primarily on the operational combat mission environment, DAF civilians may benefit from a specific DAF Mission Driven Leadership concept that integrates with USAF and USSF Mission Command but is focused on DAF civilian mission contexts and not on an operational combat environment. This section will introduce DAF Mission Driven Leadership, its theoretical foundation, definition, components, how the concept works, and conclude with a case study.

Theoretical Foundation for DAF Mission Driven Leadership

Several leadership theories, approaches, or models have included aspects focused on organizational goal or mission accomplishment. Since the 1940s, researchers identified a behavioral approach to leadership that included task behaviors focused on organizational goal accomplishment (Northouse, 2025). Later, in the 1960s, the situational approach to leadership would consider the commitment followers have to completing goals within the organization (Blanchard et al., 1993). Researchers may include the situational approach in a group of leadership theories called contingency leadership theories that began in the 1960s and focused on leaders, followers, and the situation or mission context (Lussier & Achua, 2023).

The 1970s included the bulk of research on leadership theories, approaches, or models that have included aspects focused on organizational goal or mission accomplishment. In the 1970s, researchers introduced the concept of path-goal theory, which considered the organizational setting and what leaders provide to followers to reach organizational goals (House, 1996). Also in the 1970s, leader-member exchange theory was introduced, considering how leaders developed in-groups through meaningful professional relationships where team members are motivated to contribute to organizational goal accomplishment (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). At the end of the 1970s, the transformational leadership approach identified how leaders may influence followers to do more than expected toward goal accomplishment and mission effectiveness (Yammarino, 1993). Also in the 1970s, the modern concept of servant leadership emerged to identify actions leaders could take to encourage organizational performance and goal accomplishment (Liden et al., 2014).

In recent years, research continues on leadership theories, approaches, or models that have included aspects focused on organizational goals or mission accomplishment. In the 1990s, the

adaptive leadership approach emerged, considering how leaders help followers overcome situational challenges that may impact organizational goal accomplishment (Heifetz et al., 2009).

A foundation of DAF Mission Driven Leadership is the role of civilian leadership in the U.S. military. The U.S. armed forces have several limits placed upon them, including the requirement to be subordinate and accountable to civilian leaders. The National Security Act of 1947 (later codified as 10 USC 113) created the Department of Defense (now referred to as the Department of War) and the Department of the Air Force and reinforced the principle of civilian control and leadership of the military. The Act also stipulated that a recently discharged regular commissioned officer (within 10 years) may not be appointed as the Secretary of Defense, and the military departments (including the Air Force) are required to be led by civilians. In 2008, Congress reduced the requirement to seven years—only three exceptions to this law have been approved since 1947 (General Marshall in 1950, General Mattis in 2017, and General Austin in 2021) (McInnis, 2021). Recognizing that civilians lead at all levels of the DoW, DAF, USAF, and USSF (including at the top secretariat roles) is an important foundational understanding for DAF Mission Driven Leadership.

DAF Mission Driven Leadership Defined

DAF Mission Driven Leadership is a concept that focuses leaders and team members at all levels on the mission, purpose, values, and vision of the organization. In a DAF civilian context, Mission Driven Leadership empowers DAF civilian leaders to prioritize their oath of office to the Constitution, obey the lawful orders of the President of the United States, enable the Department of War's (DoW) mission of "providing military forces needed to deter war and ensure our nation's security" (U.S. Department of Defense, 2025), DoW principles of lethality, meritocracy, accountability, standards, and readiness (Hegseth, 2025); the United States Air Force mission to "fly, fight and win—airpower anytime, anywhere" (USAF website, 2025),

theU.S. Space Force mission to "protect our country and the freedom to operate in space, keeping it secure, stable, and accessible for military space power and new waves of innovation" (USSF website, 2025), and the unique mission context of the DAF organization the civilian leader supports.

Components of DAF Mission Driven Leadership

The primary components of DAF Mission Driven Leadership are mission, leaders, and followers. The mission component includes mission, values, vision, and USAF Mission Command Five Cs. Under the leader component are the DAF Foundational Competencies. The follower component includes principles of followership and deliberate development. Figure 2 below represents the components of DAF Mission Driven Leadership.

DAF Mission Driven Leadership

Mission

Leader   Followers

- Mission: Oath; POTUS EOs; DOW (DoD) Mission/Principles; DAF Mission; Vision; Values; Mission Command 5Cs
- Leader: DAF Foundational Competencies, Developing: Self, Others, Ideas and Organizations
- Followers: Principles of Effective Followership; Deliberate Development

Figure 2: DAF Mission Driven Leadership

Components of DAF Mission Driven Leadership: Mission

The first component of DAF Mission Driven Leadership is mission. Mission is first as it has primacy over the other components. While the leader and follower components are also critical, the mission component brings everyone together with a unity of purpose. Mission includes a description of itself, vision, values, and USAF Mission Command principles and Five Cs (SECAF AF Doctrine Publication 1-1, 2023).

Mission

The mission provides the organization with focus and direction and may contribute to the success of the organization (Lussier & Achua, 2023). In a DAF Mission Driven Leadership context, leaders continually focus all team members upon the mission, which includes their oath of office to the Constitution, obeying the lawful orders of the President of the United States, enabling the Department of War's (DoW) mission of "providing military forces needed to deter war and ensure our nation's security" (U.S. Department of Defense, 2025), DoW principles of lethality, meritocracy, accountability, standards, and readiness (Hegseth, 2025); the United States Air Force mission to "fly, fight and win—airpower anytime, anywhere" (USAF website, 2025); the United States Space Force mission to "protect our country and the freedom to operate in space, keeping it secure, stable, and accessible for military space power and new waves of innovation" (USSF website, 2025); and the unique mission context of the DAF organization the civilian leader supports.

Vision

Vision describes what success looks like for an organization. Vision may be more detailed than a mission statement. It also clarifies priorities and helps organizations focus on the most important results (Osbourne, 2016). It is critical for leaders to communicate the vision clearly and repeatedly to keep it at the forefront of the organization. Vision statements also benefit from the team understanding how important they are in working towards the vision. "People who understand how important their part is are motivated to persevere and work with excellence, even in the face of obstacles and problems" (Maxwell, 2011). Vision also benefits from being routinely reviewed for relevancy and achievability. The vision of the USAF is "the world's greatest Air Force—powered by Airmen, fueled by innovation" (USAF website, 2025). Numerous DAF commands and subordinate organizations also have vision statements that civilian leaders and team members need to know and understand.

Values

How the mission is accomplished matters. Values indicate how the members of the organization should act when working towards the mission and vision. Identifying core values helps the leaders of organizations measure the results of team members against the values standard. The USAF has identified three core values for the entire organization: "integrity, service, and excellence" (SECAF DAF Handbook 1, 2024). The USSF has identified four core values: character, connection, commitment, and courage (USSF website, 2025). Many organizations under DAF have included additional values that are important to that organization. For example, attention to detail may be extremely important to a USAF organization focused on aircraft maintenance. Another organization may want to focus on the value of justice due to their requirement to investigate and prosecute criminal activity. A DAF civilian leader may benefit from identifying additional values that may be critical for their organization.

FIVE CS

The DAF Mission Driven Leadership concept integrates with USAF Mission Command by incorporating the Five Cs associated with USAF Mission Command: character, competence, capability, cohesion, and capacity. For a more in-depth description of each of the Five Cs, see the section on USAF Mission Command. While some of the above Five Cs are couched in a commander and operational context, DAF civilian leaders may utilize some or all of the Five Cs within the limits of their statutory requirements (SECAF AF Doctrine Publication 1-1, 2023). Pickett (2025) included the Five Cs in a DAF civilian context:

• **Character:** DAF Mission Driven Leaders should model ethical behavior and the Air Force Core Values in all actions and decisions. This sets the standard for the team and encourages them to follow. Leaders should cultivate an environment where every Airman feels

valued, heard, and respected for their contributions. Leaders and team members should promote a culture of open and honest communication in which military and civilian members alike feel comfortable sharing ideas and concerns without fear of reprisal (SECAF AF Doctrine Publication 1-1, 2023).

• **Competence:** DAF Mission Driven Leaders should prioritize the professional growth of military and civilian team members by providing access to training, mentoring programs, and opportunities to attend relevant conferences and workshops. Performance standards should be clearly articulated. Provide regular, constructive feedback to help all Airmen excel. Leaders should identify and leverage the unique skills and knowledge military and civilian team members bring to the table. Leaders empower followers to share expertise and contribute to decision-making (SECAF AF Doctrine Publication 1-1, 2023).

• **Capability:** DAF Mission Driven Leaders can foster collaboration by breaking down silos and encouraging cross-functional teamwork between civilian and military personnel. Integrate civilians into team projects and initiatives. Processes should be streamlined by identifying and eliminating unnecessary bureaucracy that hinders efficiency. Empower civilians to make decisions and take ownership of their work. Leaders need to ensure all team members have the tools, technology, and information required to perform duties effectively (SECAF AF Doctrine Publication 1-1, 2023).

• **Cohesion:** A sense of camaraderie and shared purpose among civilian and military team members. Team-building activities and social events can help strengthen bonds. Open and transparent communication within the team is vital. Leaders should regularly share information, updates, and seek input from all members. Team accomplishments, both big and small, should be acknowledged and celebrated. Recognize individual contributions and foster a positive and supportive work environment (SECAF AF Doctrine Publication 1-1, 2023).

• **Capacity:** DAF Mission Driven Leaders should delegate tasks and responsibilities to members of their teams, giving them the autonomy to make decisions within their areas of expertise. Create a culture where military and civilian alike feel empowered to take initiative, propose new ideas, and seek creative solutions to challenges. Leaders should encourage a growth mindset and support continuous learning by sharing lessons learned, providing opportunities to attend relevant training, and fostering a culture of experimentation and innovation (SECAF AF Doctrine Publication 1-1, 2023).

By embracing the Five Cs, DAF civilian supervisors and managers can create a thriving work environment where civilian personnel feel valued, empowered, and fully engaged in achieving mission success through the principles of USAF Mission Command. DAF Mission Driven Leadership is about fostering a sense of ownership and shared commitment within the Air Force Civilian Service. By promoting the Five Cs, leaders create an environment where civilian expertise is not merely welcomed but is essential to achieving critical objectives. This alignment ensures that the Air Force Civilian Service remains a vital contributor to national security, now and into the future (SECAF AF Doctrine Publication 1-1, 2023).

Components of DAF Mission Driven Leadership: Leaders

The DAF Mission Driven Leadership component of leaders includes the DAF Foundational Competencies. Nine competencies are identified in the Developing Self category: accountability, perseverance, communication, decision making, information seeking, flexibility, resilience, initiative, and self-control. Four competencies are identified in the Developing Others category: teamwork, develops people, service mindset, and leadership. Five competencies are identified in the Developing Ideas category: analytical thinking, digital literacy, creative thinking, fostering innovation, and influence. Five competencies are identified in the Developing Organizations category: resource management, results focused, change

management, strategic thinking, and precision (SECAF DAF Handbook 36-2647, 2022).

One of the purposes of this book is to review the DAF Foundational Competencies in detail, which is included in other parts of this text.

Components of DAF Mission Driven Leadership: Followers

The DAF Mission Driven Leadership component of followers includes principles of effective followership and deliberate development. In the past, leadership theory, models, and concepts focused exclusively on the leader and mission of the organization, completely ignoring followers. Engaged followers are essential to both leader and mission effectiveness. Followers and leaders mutually influence one another (Lussier & Achua, 2023).

Effective followers are those who put the mission first and ethically support the leader. There are several actions followers may take to be effective. Effective follower actions include offering support to the leader, taking initiative, coaching the leader when appropriate, raising concerns when needed, seeking and encouraging honest feedback from the leader, clarifying the follower role and expectations, showing appreciation, keeping the leader informed, seeking deliberate development, and resisting inappropriate influence of the leader (Lussier & Achua, 2023).

Resisting inappropriate influence of the leader is critical when ethical concerns arise. Effective followers do not offer blind obedience to leaders that is disconnected from moral grounding. Some tactics unethical leaders use to try to influence followers include reciprocation (give and take), commitment and consistency, social proof, liking, authority, and scarcity. Reciprocation is a norm of human behavior to repay those who have given something of value. Commitment and consistency occur when someone contributes something small toward a goal or outcome and then may be pressured to offer more toward that goal or outcome. Social proof is

looking to others for how to act or behave. Liking is complying with someone based on liking the person regardless of what they are asking. Authority is complying with someone solely based on their position and not the merits of what they are asking to be done. Scarcity is based on the idea that something may be more valuable if it is a limited opportunity (Johnson, 2025).

Follower Development

USAF and USSF Mission Command emphasize the importance of developing followers (SECAF SFDP 6-0, 2024; SECAF AF Doctrine Publication 1-1, 2023). The DAF Civilian Leadership Development School (CLDS) offers a wide range of development opportunities for both followers and leaders. CLDS educates and trains civilian Air and Space professionals to embody core DoD principles of lethality, readiness, and strategic deterrence. CLDS develops supervisors and managers who act in accordance with the concepts of meritocracy, uphold the Constitution, and hold themselves and their people accountable to executing the mission with efficiency and effectiveness. The mission of CLDS is to develop the next generation of DAF civilian leaders through a mission-focused learning program grounded in DoD principles, fostering a robust succession management pipeline. The vision of CLDS is to be the premier institution for DAF civilian force development, delivering cutting-edge education and training that cultivates a highly skilled, adaptable, and ethical workforce. CLDS provides a comprehensive and mandatory program that fulfills U.S. legal requirements and DAF policy requirements for management succession and systematic training and development of supervisors and managers within the Department of the Air Force.

CLDS is firmly grounded in the following legal mandates:

- **5 CFR 412.202**: "All agencies must provide for the development of individuals in supervisory, managerial and executive positions, as well as individuals who the agency

identifies as potential candidates for those positions, based on the agencies' succession plans."

- **5 U.S. Code 9902(d):** "The Secretary shall develop...a program to provide training to supervisors...at least once every 3 years."
- **5 CFR 412.201:** "The agency...must develop a comprehensive management succession program, based on the agency's workforce succession plans, to fill agency supervisory and managerial positions...the focus of the program should be to develop managers as well as strengthen organizational capability, and to ensure an adequate number of well-prepared and qualified candidates for leadership positions."
- **Policy Considerations:** DoDI 1400.25 v410, section 3h: Requires that each service offer service-specific training, to include new employee orientation and managerial supervisory training.
- **FY 25–26 DAF Human Capital Operating Plan 2.1.6.1:** CLDS is the sole DAF provider for required supervisory/managerial development for all DAF civilians that is reported by law to Congress annually.

CLDS fulfills these legal and policy requirements by offering: DAF New Employee Orientation, New Supervisor Course, Experienced Supervisor Course, Civilian Manager Development Course – Initial, Civilian Manager Development Course – Refresher, and the Civilian Associate Degree Program. For more information or to apply for any CLDS course or learning opportunity, go to https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/CLDS/.

The goal of the Civilian Associate Degree Program (CADP), also known as the Associate of Science in the Department of the Air Force Leadership and Management Studies program, is to provide curriculum and instruction required by law (5 CFR 412.202, 5 CFR 412.201 & 5 U.S. Code 9902). Additional goals include helping DAF civilians reach their

full leadership potential. Courses are designed to teach skills and competencies deemed critical to the Department of the Air Force and are based upon the DAF's Foundational Competencies. Course learning activities are designed to positively impact the student's work center as well as their own professional development. Completion of the program results in an Associate of Science Degree in the Department of the Air Force Leadership and Management Studies. The degree is awarded by Air University and accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges. Eligible DAF civilians can complete the program at little or no cost to the student.

How the DAF Mission Driven Leadership Concept Works

The DAF Mission Driven Leadership (MDL) concept works by leaders and followers understanding and acting upon their unique responsibilities. The MDL concept focuses on the idea that the mission has primacy, but leaders and followers play critical roles. In MDL, leaders and followers share responsibility to put the mission first in their priorities, actions, ethics, and behaviors. MDL emphasizes the mission as including the oath of office to the Constitution, obeying the lawful orders of the President of the United States (POTUS), enabling the Department of War's (DoW) mission of "providing military forces needed to deter war and ensure our nation's security" (U.S. Department of Defense, 2025), DoW principles of lethality, meritocracy, accountability, standards, and readiness (Hegseth, 2025); the United States Air Force mission to "fly, fight and win—airpower anytime, anywhere" (USAF website, 2025); the United States Space Force mission to "protect our country and the freedom to operate in space, keeping it secure, stable, and accessible for military space power and new waves of innovation" (USSF website, 2025); and the unique mission context of the DAF organization the civilian leader supports. MDL also includes the vision, values, and USAF Mission Command Five Cs.

In DAF Mission Driven Leadership, leaders and followers share responsibility for the elements of the mission, which include the following areas:

- Oath of office to the U.S. Constitution.
- Obeying the lawful orders of the POTUS.
- Enabling the DoW mission and incorporating the principles of lethality, meritocracy, accountability, standards, and readiness.
- Enabling the USAF or USSF mission.
- The unique mission of the USAF or USSF suborganization leaders and followers serve in.
- Vision.
- Values.
- Incorporating the USAF Mission Command Five Cs of character, competence, capability, cohesion, and capacity.

In DAF Mission Driven Leadership, leaders are responsible for developing the DAF Foundational Competencies and encouraging development in followers. Nine competencies are identified in the Developing Self category: accountability, perseverance, communication, decision making, information seeking, flexibility, resilience, initiative, and self-control. Four competencies are identified in the Developing Others category: teamwork, develops people, service mindset, and leadership. Five competencies are identified in the Developing Ideas category: analytical thinking, digital literacy, creative thinking, fostering innovation, and influence. Five competencies are identified in the Developing Organizations category: resource management, results focused, change management, strategic thinking, and precision (SECAF DAF Handbook 36-2647, 2022).

In DAF Mission Driven Leadership, followers are responsible for:

- Offering support to the leader.
- Taking initiative.
- Coaching the leader, when appropriate.
- Raising concerns, when needed.
- Seeking and encouraging honest feedback from the leader.
- Clarifying the follower role and expectations.
- Showing appreciation.
- Keeping the leader informed.
- Seeking deliberate development.
- Resisting inappropriate influence of the leader (Lussier & Achua, 2023).

Deliberate DAF civilian development is available from the DAF Civilian Leadership Development School. See https://www. airuniversity.af.edu/CLDS.

DAF Mission Driven Leadership Case Study

You have been selected to be the DAF civilian leader over an organization and desire to incorporate USAF Mission Command, DAF Foundational Competencies, and DAF Mission Driven Leadership into your organization. You realize higher-level leadership fired the previous DAF civilian leader due to a lack of confidence in their ability to lead and their lack of focus on the mission. You have a meeting scheduled next week to discuss these topics with five DAF civilian leaders whom you supervise. About a week after the meeting, you have an all-call scheduled with your entire organization to chart out your path moving forward to get the organization reoriented to its mission.

Questions to Consider:

1. How would you relay the necessity of incorporating USAF Mission Command, DAF Foundational Competencies, and DAF Mission Driven Leadership into your organization?
2. Provide an outline of the goals you would have for your first meeting with the five DAF civilian leaders whom you supervise.
3. Write down your objectives for your first all-call for your organization.
4. Describe the responsibilities each team member has in helping the organization get back on track.

Conclusion

This chapter identified how leadership is presented to DAF team members through DAF Foundational Competencies and the USAF Mission Command leadership philosophy. The chapter concluded with the concept of DAF Mission Driven Leadership, which focuses on the unique characteristics of leadership for DAF civilians and integrates with the USAF Mission Command philosophy. Incorporating all three aspects of leadership (DAF Foundational Competencies, USAF Mission Command, and DAF Mission Driven Leadership) will enable DAF civilian leaders and DAF civilian team members to remain focused on honoring their oath of office to the Constitution and providing the best possible service to the nation.

Definitions

- **Competency:** "Observable, measurable pattern of knowledge, skills, abilities, behaviors, and other characteristics needed to perform institutional or occupational functions successfully" (SECAF DAF Handbook 36-2647, 2022).
- **Department of the Air Force Foundational Competencies:** "Describes a set of accepted and valued competencies applicable to all Airmen (officer, enlisted, and civilian) to achieve success across the wide array of AF missions, roles, functions, and duties" (SECAF DAF Handbook 36-2647, 2022).
- **Department of the Air Force Mission Driven Leadership:** A concept that focuses leaders and team members at all levels on the mission, purpose, values, and vision of the organization. In a Department of the Air Force (DAF) civilian context, Mission Driven Leadership empowers DAF civilian leaders to prioritize their oath of office to the United States Constitution, obey the lawful orders of the President of the United States, enable the Department of War's (DoW) mission of "providing military forces needed to deter war and ensure our nation's security" (U.S. Department of Defense, 2025), DoW principles of lethality, meritocracy, accountability, standards, and readiness (Hegseth, 2025); the United States Air Force mission to "fly, fight and win—airpower anytime, anywhere" (U.S. Air Force, 2025); the United States Space Force mission to "protect our country and the freedom to operate in space, keeping it secure, stable, and accessible for military space power and new waves of innovation" (U.S. Space Force, 2025); and the unique mission context of the DAF organization the civilian leader supports.
- **United States Air Force Mission Command:** "A philosophy of leadership that empowers Airmen to operate in uncertain,

complex, and rapidly changing environments through trust, shared awareness, and understanding of commander's intent" (SECAF AF Doctrine Publication 1-1, 2022).

- **United States Space Force Mission Command:** "A philosophy centered on the art of command, the science of control, and the discipline of decision making. This philosophy of leadership characterizes the Space Force approach to command and control (C2) of space operations, through the commander's maximum distribution of control and delegation of authorities, informed by strong military judgment and appropriate to the strategic and operational context" (SECAF SFDD 6-0, 2024).

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