THE LANDPOWER ESSAY SERIES

LPE 20-2 / JANUARY 2020 • PUBLISHED BY THE ASSOCIATION OF THE UNITED STATES ARMY

A Strategy for the Development of Principled Professionals

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Introduction

Samuel Huntington's timeless words in *The Soldier and the State* remind us why the military must maintain a focus on being professional: "professionalism distinguishes today's military member from the warriors of previous ages. In our society, the businessman may command more income, the politician may command more power, but the professional commands more respect."[1] The U.S. armed forces maintain the trust of the American people and the international community through a combination of professionalism and character. Retired Marine Corps General Joseph F. Dunford, former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, once said that "as military professionals, our most important asset is the trust of and credibility with the American people. We must always safeguard our professional integrity."[2] Although the military has some doctrine to codify what entails professional attributes and desirable attributes of its members, it does not have a comprehensive strategy and framework for professional development. The effect is that military professionalism is arguably being eroded.

In the opening of a *Foreign Policy* piece that calls into question the military profession, Army Major Matthew Cavanaugh bluntly states: "the Profession of Arms is decaying (weakening or fraying — as opposed to a relative decline), and the primary causes are neglect, anti-intellectual bias, and a creeping, cancerous bureaucracy."[3] Recent years have seen arguments that illustrate neglect in the form of gross lying, anti-intellectualism in the form of failed foreign policy and bureaucracy as the baseline for mismanaged talent.[4] As the military is the smallest it has been in the past 20 years, coupled with ever-busy operational commitments, many believe that it is not equipped with the adequate manpower or time to properly engage in leader development. This view fields a cycle of prioritization that focuses on what is *urgent* while neglecting what is *important*. Dwight Eisenhower once said that "we are almost compelled to give our first attention to the urgent present rather than to the important future," delineating urgent tasks as those that demand immediate attention (deadlines, emails, daily actions, etc.) and important tasks as those that contribute to long-term goals.[5] With this in mind, it is critical to continue developing our personnel with respect to the long term.

The military needs a common framework across all domains, experiences and personnel structures from which to operate. As values-based organizations, this common language must be derived from core professional attributes. This paper seeks to outline the current state of affairs regarding professional development. As such, this work focuses on principle development as a specific subset of professional development. Principles are fundamental truths that are foundational to the ever-evolving set of characteristics that become the system of beliefs and patterns of behavior that codify our professional persona. The Army's doctrine—specifically the "three Cs" of character, competence and commitment—is used as a frame for understanding how one component of the armed forces currently codifies professionalism doctrinally and where it falls short.[6] This lens is also used to help show why the key scientific principles of adult personality development, specifically moral/ethical development, should be considered for developmental strategy. Finally, this paper introduces a framework for implementing a strategy for principle development.

The Three Cs of the Army Profession

In May 2008, the Army chief of staff established the Army Center of Excellence for the Professional Military Ethic. In 2010, it became the Center for the Army Profession and Ethic (CAPE) and was realigned to fall under the U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command and its Combined Arms Center. In 2019, CAPE merged with the Center for Army Leadership. Today, the Center for the Army Profession and Leadership (CAPL) is located at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. CAPL's three ethical characteristics of the Army professional—character, competence and commitment—provide a focal point for this paper and the language for the explanation of strategy development.

The first C, character, is the personal qualities distinctive to an individual. *Character* is not synonymous with *personality*; rather, it is specifically focused on the attribute of moral excellence and firmness.[7] As such, the Army defines character as the "dedication and adherence to the Army Ethic, including Army Values, as consistently and faithfully demonstrated in decisions and actions."[8] This definition has a few key words, namely *dedication*, *adherence*, *faithfully* and *demonstrated*. These terms highlight that character is derived from what an individual believes, espouses and enacts daily. Leaders are deciders, and decisions are judged via one's character; research reveals followers believe that leaders with integrity will make decisions and take actions based on values and verifiable facts, which then obviates any possible hidden agenda.[9] Ethical leaders inspire confidence in those around them.[10] *Army Doctrine Reference Publication (ADRP) 6-22, Army Leadership* ascribes the four components of character as the following:

1. The internalization of values
2. Empathy
3. Commitment to the warrior ethos/service ethos
4. Discipline[11]

To understand these components, a scholar must be willing to accept a few assumptions. The current doctrinal approach to individual development is based on three important assumptions regarding how servicemembers, and specifically leaders, cultivate the force:

1. Servicemembers and leaders know what is right and want to live ethically.
2. Consistent ethical conduct develops strong character.
3. Leaders will develop personal character commensurate to their increasing responsibilities through self-guided study, reflection, experience and feedback.[12]

The problem with these assumptions is that they place an inappropriately excessive burden on servicemembers for their own self-development. Data from the 2011 Center for Army Leadership annual survey indicates that a third of Army leaders do not understand "specifically what they need in order to develop as a leader."[13] Based on these assumptions, one might find a receptive audience for a more involved role in character development. Continued issues in the ranks of midgrade and senior leaders provide substantial anecdotal evidence to the usefulness of these data.

Competence is the next component. The Army defines competence as the "demonstrated ability to successfully perform duty with discipline and to standard."[14] Again, specific key words are used, such as *demonstrated*, *successfully* and *discipline*. In this context, competence is not solely about education or how many courses one has attended and passed; it is about getting the job done to specs. Success then stems from competence; one cannot make the right decisions that lead to achievement without the intellectual aptitude to be smart and execute.

Research into leadership in dangerous/combat situations reveals that competence is the primary indicator of a few vital factors: leader effectiveness, adaptive skill sets and depth of understanding.[15] Today's ambiguous threat environment requires knowledgeable professionals who display the utmost competence. This competence must involve respect to both *capability* (gross intellectual aptitude put toward a singular or prototypical application—think learned and applied knowledge) and *capacity* (synthesized application of capability in varying environments, contexts or circumstances—think adapted and leveraged knowledge). For example, the routine procedures to fire a weapon and accurately hit a target at a range develop a capability. Taking the same weapon and figuring out a way to fire at a surface to ricochet bullets to hit a target develops capacity. Studies in combat indicate that servicemembers rate competence the highest quality for a leader to have because it directly indexes a leader's decisionmaking ability to ensure mission accomplishment while minimizing risk.[16]

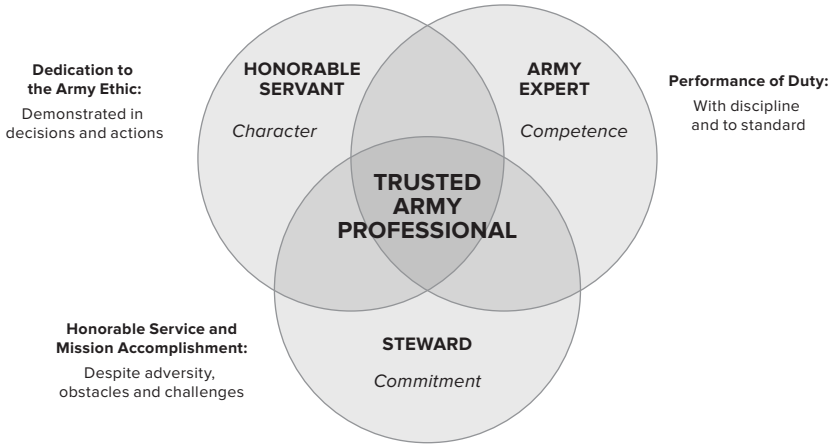
The final "C" is commitment. The Army's definition of commitment is the "resolve to contribute honorable service to the Nation and accomplish the mission despite adversity, obstacles, and challenges."[17] This definition ties character to competence through the ideas of demonstration, adherence to discipline and accomplishment of the mission. A few words to highlight here are *resolve*, *contribute* and, interestingly, *despite*, which is highlighted because of the context of its use. For people to be truly committed, they must prove their commitment in the context of struggle. But commitment to what? It may seem obvious to commit to the organization and its people, but which takes precedence? An oft-used phrase is "mission first, people always," but this aphorism does not help differentiate which is a priority. Both *horizontal loyalty*—left and right, peers, friends, coworkers, etc.—and *vertical loyalty*—up and down, chain of command and subordinates—are important factors with respect to commitment.[18] The key is understanding that the institution will outlast all of its members. While members forge bonds with each other, they must consistently put those horizontal allegiances in the context of upholding a vertical fidelity to something bigger than themselves.

Commitment is also a crucial component as it is one of the three social-psychological outcomes of influence, which include commitment (I would love to do it), compliance (I will do it because you say so) and resistance (I will not do it).[19] Leaders and influencers must horizontally connect with others to build hard-earned vertical commitment.

The three Cs contribute to trust in the Army professional. The basis for trust is a congruence of honesty (freedom from deceit or fraud) and integrity (adherence to principles, morals and ethics). Trust is the convergence of the three Cs (see figure 1). However, remaining trusted as a profession does not come only from identifying and codifying these components. Without a strategy for properly evaluating, developing and inculcating these components, we have only words, definitions and doctrine. Strategy without doctrine or theory is akin to planning and executing without commander's intent or guidance.

Figure 1

Trust: Essential for Mission Command



Source: Derived from the upcoming *Army's Framework for Character Development*. One of the authors was on the project team for development of the strategy.

Adult Moral/Ethical Development

To address both a doctrinal and strategic approach while also ensuring the best chance for developing individual principles, leaders should seek to understand the theories of adult development, specifically moral and ethical development.[20] Having a common context, such as the three Cs, provides a foundation for using a theoretical approach for development. Undoubtedly, developing effective, morally sound leaders is important. However, using good science to inform a developmental strategy is even more important, as any doctrine proposed "has significant limitations that potentially overlook highly influential factors, similar to flaws in relying exclusively on anecdotal evidence."[21]

As such, the development of principled professionals should be based on moral and ethical underpinnings that are supported by sound, theory-based research. One cannot overlook the contemporary science that undergirds moral and ethical development because "far too many leadership training and developmental programs are atheoretical and are not grounded in what [research dictates] about adult learning." As David Day, Stephen Zaccaro and Stanley Halpin said in their book: "Experience alone is a poor teacher." Appropriate use should be made of relevant theoretical perspectives.[22]

In contemporary social and behavioral science, theoretical models emphasize that human development is conceptualized by dynamic and mutually influential relations—within and across levels of organization of the developmental system—that constitute the basic process of human behavior. These levels range from physiological, psychological and relational and include further social, cultural, ecological and historical contexts. Any model of

principle development should use a dynamic, relational, developmental, systems-based approach to understand change across the life span and should involve both an open, self-constructing (autopoietic) system and integrated/holistic system.[23]

Principles are based in "the entire set of positive traits that have emerged across cultures and throughout history as important for the good life."[24] As such, a focus on the development of one's principles should encompass both the ideas of performance (e.g., striving for excellence) and morality (e.g., striving for ethical behavior). Given these parts, integration of the two would yield a subcategory that would include honesty, authenticity and integrity. Thomas Lickona, director of the Center for the 4th and 5th Rs (Respect and Responsibility), and Matthew Davidson, the center's research director, define this specific subset as "speaking the truth but more broadly presenting oneself in a genuine way and acting in a sincere way; being without pretense; taking responsibility for one's feelings and actions."[25] Adult moral and ethical development, then, should focus on having principles as well as enacting both the performance and moral aspects of said principles through the display of ethical strength as evidenced by honesty, authenticity and integrity.

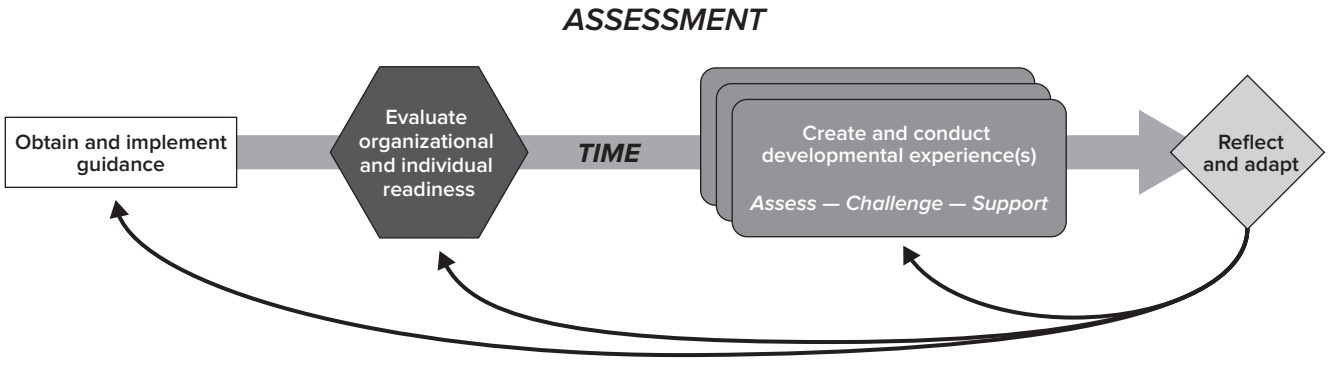
A Framework for Principle Development

Without a framework to enact the theoretical understanding, contemporary science would be difficult to translate at best and at worst would never benefit the servicemember. To meet the needs of servicemembers' moral and ethical development, an energized focus toward individual and organizational fundamental principles is required. As such, it is imperative that the right developmental experiences are crafted. Crafting these experiences should be grounded in a common language and understood through a scientific approach, hence why this work delves into both the three Cs and adult developmental theories. Understanding the three Cs and adult moral-ethic theory allows leaders to move toward a developmental model by providing a structured *why* as opposed to a random collection of good ideas or their own experiences alone. However, a strategy remains incomplete without the *how*. Discussing theory and lauding professional values simply does not fit the bill.

Before delving into a specialized framework for planning and application, it is important to lay out how the components of the proposed Principled Professional Developmental Model (PPDM) came together to form what is in figure 2. The components of the PPDM adhere to the steps of the basic scientific method: observe the problem (obtain and implement guidance), ask a question and/or form a hypothesis (evaluate individual and organizational readiness), conduct an experiment (create and conduct developmental experiences), accept/reject the hypothesis (reflect and adapt) and start the cycle anew. To be more specific, the first two components adhere to the first two steps of the military decisionmaking process: receive the mission and conduct mission analysis.[26] The third component, in which experimentation is needed, uses the components of a developmental experience from the Center for Creative Leadership.[27] Finally, as with any process, project or scientific experiment, time to properly reflect, adapt and assess is necessary before moving forward. Explanation of each component follows figure 2.

Figure 2

The Principled Professional Development Model



Professional development is never simply a forgone conclusion; Day, Zaccaro and Halpin remind us that people do not simply positively develop with time—some decline, some stay the same and some develop quicker than others.[28] Leaders are born and made. To address both types of needs, we must use a systematic approach. Hence, a framework is especially critical for organizational development, because without a framework for the understanding and implementation of strategy, any organizational change approach is whimsical at best.[29]

The PPDM's features provide broad direction and guidance with which leaders can design and apply tailored training at the unit level to focus their own development plans. As a simple parallel, our nation has a national security strategy, but each Combatant Command has a theater campaign plan. The same approach is proposed here: using this framework, unit leaders can discover how to build their own subunit-level principle development plan. There is no single right way to put together such a plan; every program will depend on the experience, interests and needs of individual organizations, as well as the skills of the leaders enacting it and its context.[30]

Part One: Obtain and Implement Guidance

To effectively develop plans, each subordinate unit's efforts must be nested within the appropriate command's overarching charter. Leadership must clearly articulate and establish the plan's purpose, intent and end state(s). Regardless of format, it is imperative that a unit's character development plan be the product of shared understanding and an agreed upon structure prior to dissemination and implementation. Just as subordinate units' tactical and technical tasks are nested within a higher organization's tasks, so too should their plan for character development.

Part Two: Evaluate Organizational and Individual Readiness

Prior to crafting events or actions, both the unit and the individuals must be prepared and willing to participate. Without the appropriate buy-in from leaders and subordinates, any program has little chance for success. The potential for experiential growth can be easily diminished if readiness is not considered, both at the individual and unit levels. In order to help determine readiness, two critical milestones should be met: identify and designate leaders entrusted with facilitating the program; and initiate and maintain honest and transparent dialogue with all involved.

Part Three: Create and Conduct Developmental Experience(s)

Once overall readiness has been determined, development experiences can be built and enacted. These experiences are not one-time events; they must be iterative and nested. It is incumbent upon leaders to deliberately craft continuous developmental experiences that assess, challenge and support both individual and organizational growth. To assess is to find out what is really needed. To challenge is to create developmental friction through deliberate and realistic growth activities. To support is to create conditions for success via resources, emotional and physical care, and accountability.

Part Four: Reflect and Adapt

Growth is not automatic. Reinforcement of new capacities and knowledge learned in developmental experiences is what sustains growth. Both structured and unstructured reflection must occur for learners to best derive lessons learned.[31] Deep reflection stimulates connections with other experiences. Revisiting learning moments inspires this type of stimulation. Reviews and other crafted feedback loops eventually result in change if revision is made to adapt new methods for each of the previous components (hence the model's arrows). This process ensures progress by managing change in the organization, as "individuals act and organizations function on the basis of the information received."[32]

Part Five: Time and Assessment

These components are ever-present. Development takes time; it cannot be rushed and requires constant analysis. Assessment affords situational awareness. Progress must be reviewed, validated and tracked to completion. For organizations that are lacking in one or more of the above components, the integration of a character development plan may necessitate a slower, more hands-on approach, whereas a unit that assesses its progress as optimal, the process can be much quicker. Leaders must establish a system for continuous feedback at all levels to ensure their efforts are synched and purposeful.

The check and balance at each level involves engaged leadership. Ensuring that leaders and followers have the education, time and resources needed to safeguard both professional development and organizational success is of

the utmost importance; without a focus here, any strategy becomes significantly less effective. But, with persistence toward gaining a shared understanding around the development of principled professionals, leaders can withstand the storm of the supposed decay of the military profession. With a shared understanding via organizational values, adult developmental theory and a framework derived from the PPDM, success of a developmental strategy could be maximized. This success would come in the form of two conditions that should arise.

First, individual-level professionalism should become visible across the spectrum of leaders and followers. Influencers and key communicators must stress the professional adherence to codes and principles at the level of each individual uniformed member. Second, a professional commitment to organizational-level characteristics beyond the individual also becomes apparent. This commitment to the organization should be clear. Once individuals understand where they fit, members should ensure that everyone involved also is supportive of and tied to the organization's ethical culture and climate.

Conclusions

At least since 9/11, America's armed forces have been engaged in a period of constant conflict. In its simplest essence, the military culture is based on an adherence to professionalism, at every instance a core commodity that is arguably the most stabilizing factor in times of difficulty and challenge. But it is also a dichotomous entity that is underpinned by individual personas and organizational climates. A person's professionalism pushes him or her to valorous acts on the battlefield, while it also restrains them from stupidity in a neighborhood bar, just as a unit's culture can pull together community service efforts in one instance and lead to toxic environments in another. With this understanding, military leaders must focus and plan for the development of the organizational attributes its members aspire to both espouse and enact. No plan is perfect, but in the absence of perfection, a few final guiding principles should help leaders move forward and decide how to maximize the individual- and unit-level developmental experience.

First, it must be understood that *leaders develop leaders*. The best way to provide purpose, motivation and direction for character development is to be a moral exemplar. First-line leaders and staff members must display the appropriate attitudes and behaviors that inspire all to live ethically. Leaders must invest the maximum time and focused attention not only to train but also to challenge all team members.

Second, recognize that character development *is a continuous process*. Professional development is unique for each teammate. As such, it requires multiple experiences under the tutelage of leadership. Leaders should continually remind others that development is not limited to simple counseling or pre-mission training cycles. Developmental experiences can also include on-the-spot, informal and other events that happen throughout a typical day. Every interaction is a developmental opportunity.

Third, everyone should also understand that development *is a mutual responsibility*. Ethical leadership climates are taken seriously, so why take ethical decisionmaking for granted? Once each leader takes ownership of his/her own development, every organizational member must also teach, coach and inspire each other as they navigate the process of leader development. Shared understanding can only come from shared responsibility.

Finally, to truly integrate a strategy like this into organizations, leaders must realize that the promotion of positive development *must be deliberate*. They must clearly define developmental goals for the appropriate facets of leadership. Leaders and followers must be "all in" to ensure activities and policies support the overall development of principles without undermining or impeding the day-to-day mission. Great outcomes may involve elements of serendipity, but permanent change comes from deliberate effort.

The desired end state should be for all organizational members, immaterial of job or skill set, both civilian and servicemember, to embody the principles needed to build, maintain and lead credible and reliable units of professionals who can thrive both at home and abroad. It is unknown what the rest of the century has in store for America and its armed forces, but it will surely at times be uneasy. America may find itself in constant conflict, much of it violent, and the U.S. armed forces are going to add a lot of battle streamers to their service flags. In the age of information warfare and media globalization, the military's actions will always be on display. America's servicemembers must continually develop the professionalism to stand their ground morally and ethically. In doing so, they "will always surprise the critics, both domestic and foreign, who predict our decline."[33]

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