



Promoting Critical Thought

A Response to the Center of Army Leadership's Rebuttal to "Empirically Based Leadership"

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THE MOST VALUABLE lesson I learned from my time at the Intermediate Leadership Education (ILE) course is the importance of consistently applying critical thought, especially as it relates to evaluating our own behavior as leaders. This essential skill has taken on far greater significance to me in light of the complexity and diversity of problems our military currently faces at all levels of leadership: shrinking budgets, strategic realignment, force restructuring, establishing the profession of arms, increased suicide rates, and the list goes on. These issues further highlight the saliency of this invaluable lesson—a lesson that compelled me to write the article “Empirically Based Leadership,” published in the *Military Review*, January-February 2013. In response to my article, Colonel Tom Guthrie from the Center of Army Leadership (CAL) authored a detailed and thoughtful response that was published in the same edition. While I disagree with many of his points, methodology, and conclusions, I believe that such discourse and constructive dissent is essential to promoting critical thought—the ultimate intent of my original article as well as this current one.

In an effort to remain true to this objective, I respectfully contend that Colonel Guthrie’s article contained several flaws in forming the basis of his rebuttal. Beginning with the most significant, his rebuttal contained a dearth of *published, peer-reviewed* scientific data to support his position. His references are almost exclusively from presentations, reports, or technical manuals, not professional journal publications that require critical, objective analysis by scholars in the same field (i.e., peer reviewed) prior to publication.

While I valued his detailed explanation of the development process behind the Leadership Requirement Model (LRM), his description of the process and claims that it is “empirically validated” does not make it so, especially in the absence of published peer-reviewed data to support that claim. I greatly appreciate the tremendous time, effort, and research expended in developing

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PHOTO: U.S. Army 2LT Jeffery Russell, 1st platoon leader, Baker Company, greets Afghan children in the village of Sader Kheyf, 17 March 2012 (U.S. Army, SSG Jason Epperson)

the LRM. Further, I readily acknowledge that the time and research in constructing my own article pales in comparison. Clearly, this is an important limitation that readers should consider in reviewing my original article. However, both Colonel Guthrie's article and Field Manual (FM) 6-22 source notes section substantially lack empirical support from peer-reviewed journals to support LRM as an "empirically validated" model.¹ Neither does the manual contain any description of the developmental process in formulating its basis. If there exists such support for LRM's development process, to my knowledge it has not been published and Colonel Guthrie's article did little to redress the issue.

In his article, he claims "the model underwent a comprehensive content, construct, and criterion-referenced validation...all of which was ignored by McDonald."² This statement implies that I was exposed to the information but chose to disregard it. I respectfully point out that it is impossible to ignore information that has not been published in professional journals, which was the primary focus of my paper. Further, I strongly contend that it is the responsibility of the author(s) of such an FM with claims of empirical validation to publish the appropriate references, *not* the responsibility of subsequent consumers to seek out those authors in order to understand the empirical basis, as suggested by Colonel Guthrie.³

In no way did I intend to imply that the LRM lacks empirical value or that it is irrelevant to being an effective Army leader. Both personally and professionally, I place great value on the attributes contained in the LRM. In fact, in my original article I concluded that many of the attributes identified by the LRM are empirically related to leadership efficacy based upon my review of the published peer-reviewed data. I simply offered recommendations that either certain attributes or contextual factors receive increased emphasis or consideration be given to reconceptualizing the three categories—not the wholesale revision of the model as implied by Colonel Guthrie.

"Empirical validation" requires that an acceptable scientific method be applied, the results subjected to critical peer-review, replication of results through additional studies, and *publication* of those studies, which is critical to further scrutiny and transparency to the greater scientific

community.⁴ While Colonel Guthrie noted the LRM model has been validated through extensive research and follow-up studies, his failure to cite published accounts from the larger body of peer-reviewed research significantly undermines claims of "empirical validation."

Another flaw in Colonel Guthrie's article is his apparent misunderstanding of the intent of my article as reflected by his narrow discussion of "redundancy." In beginning his discussion on the issue, Colonel Guthrie asserts that I violate the scientific principle of parsimony in applying it to the

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LRM, which he defines as "the value of seeking the simplest explanation for phenomena."⁵ I strongly concur with his contention for the application of this principle to the model. However, he suggests that I violate this principle by referencing "several 'new' factors" for inclusion in the model and that I recommend "adding many constructs."⁶ In my original article, I conclude by making three recommendations based upon my review of the published literature: more balanced emphasis on leadership attributes already contained in the LRM, further consideration of reconceptualizing the major categories, and greater emphasis on leaders understanding and using social contextual factors.⁷ Nowhere in my article is there a recommendation for "adding many constructs." Additionally, recommendations are intended to be just that—recommendations. As with any set of recommendations or suggestions, all or some can be disregarded, considered, applied, used to stimulate greater thought, or some combination of the last three. In my original article, my hope was to at least stimulate greater thought, but any consumer of *Military Review* who takes the time to read my original article could obviously opt to disregard my recommendations.

Within the introductory section, my first stated objective was to “compare relevant research on key individual characteristics or traits of effective leadership to those characteristics established within FM 6-22.”⁸ In other words, in order to identify the most important factors, my intent was to explore the published professional literature on leadership attributes and compare those to the attributes already contained within the LRM, *not* to create or establish new ones. Clearly, if there is empirical support in the literature for a particular attribute, there is going to be “redundancy” in my discussion of it.

Third, Colonel Guthrie mischaracterizes much of my discussion on emotional intelligence (EI), resiliency, and social identity. My discussion of the literature in these areas primarily supported the inclusion of many of the attributes already contained in the LRM. However, in *my opinion*, based upon my review of peer-reviewed data, the LRM does not provide adequate emphasis or clarity to those attributes most clearly related to leadership efficacy. For example, EI has been one of the most studied concepts in relation to leadership effectiveness within the professional literature on leadership.⁹ In my article, I concluded that those attributes most related to EI in the LRM received inadequate emphasis, and as such, consideration be given to reconceptualizing the major categories to reflect the research. This is not the first time this type of criticism has been published in *Military Review* directed toward the LRM in regard to EI.¹⁰

Along the lines of mischaracterization, Colonel Guthrie appeared to be selective in the information he used to support his position, while ignoring other data. For example, he claimed that I exaggerated the relationship between EI and leadership effectiveness by describing the relationship as “strong” when the author of a source article referred to it as “moderate.”¹¹ Colonel Guthrie’s characterization of the author’s description is not entirely accurate and failed to consider the article in its full context. The author, Dr. Lane Mills, described the relationship as “moderately strong,” ultimately reaching the same conclusion that additional consideration be given to EI as a component of leadership effectiveness.¹² Colonel Guthrie also focused on this mischaracterization of a singular article while failing to address the other articles referenced in the same section.¹³

In discussing resiliency, Colonel Guthrie asserted that the current definition is sufficiently defined and applied beyond combat. However, he cites only parts of the FM 6-22 that support his view on resiliency while omitting other sections that primarily frame its application to a combat environment. As with EI, this is not the first time the LRM’s definition of resiliency has been criticized as being too narrowly applied to combat, and consequently, requiring further revision.¹⁴

Finally, in concluding his article, Colonel Guthrie again made it clear that he did not appreciate the stated intent of my original article, or alternatively, provide any substantive peer-reviewed empirical support for his position. In his response, he asserted that I failed to “make a cohesive argument or provide supporting evidence that [my] recommended constructs are indeed the most critical factors that contribute to effective leadership.”¹⁵ At the risk of being redundant, as previously stated, I concluded my article with three recommendations:

- More balanced emphasis on leadership characteristics clearly linked to an empirical basis.
- Reconceptualizing the three major categories to reflect this research.
- Greater emphasis on utilizing social contextual factors.¹⁶

While I did recommend placing certain attributes in a separate domain to better reflect the research, the main underlying thread in all three recommendations was for a more balanced emphasis on those factors most relevant to effective leadership, more so than the addition of specific constructs.

In an attempt to support his position, Colonel Guthrie claims “through CAL research we believe strongly that the Army leader core competencies and attributes are positively associated with leader effectiveness.” He goes on to describe the “validation of 360 assessment instruments” and “criterion-referenced validation” in support of his claim, but again, does not provide a single peer-reviewed publication to support this particular position or support for these methods as the most effective in measuring the relationship between the LRM attributes and leadership efficacy. Ironically, my original article provided greater empirical support from professional journals for many of the attributes currently contained in the LRM than Colonel Guthrie did in his rebuttal. He finally concludes that if

my “factual inaccuracies and gaps in assumptions are not corrected, [it] could harm operational performance and cause millions of dollars to be spent unnecessarily. . . .”¹⁷ Although I appreciate Colonel Guthrie assigning such strategic significance to my article, I am highly confident that the vast majority

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of *Military Review* consumers who take the time to read my original article will apply appropriate critical thought to its content and place it within the proper context.

Clearly, Colonel Guthrie and I differ in our opinions as to the intent of my article, the empirical basis, and its contribution to the broader body of knowledge. While I disagree with much of his rebuttal, I am grateful for his clarity and articulation of his position, which has provided me further opportunity to promote, and most importantly, apply the lesson I valued most from ILE. More important than defending my position, winning an academic argument, or even obtaining a highly respected writing award, is the promotion of critical thought among leaders. Regardless of how individuals will fall on these issues, my hope is that *Military Review* readers will continue this process of critical analysis and always strive to apply critical thought to their actions, especially in relation to those they lead. **MR**

NOTES

1. Department of the Army, FM 6-22, *Army Leadership* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, October 2006), source notes 1 through 3.

2. COL Tom Guthrie, “Center for Army Leadership’s Response to ‘Empirically Based Leadership,’” *Military Review* (January-February 2013): 68.

3. *Ibid.*, 67.

4. Fred N. Kerlinger and Howard B. Lee, *Foundations of Behavioral Research*, 4th Edition (New York: Harcourt Publishers, 2000).

5. Guthrie, 69-70.

6. *Ibid.*, 69.

7. MAJ Sean McDonald, “Empirically-Based Leadership: Integrating the Science of Psychology in Building a Better Leadership Model,” *Military Review* (January-February 2013): 9-10.

8. *Ibid.*, 2.

9. Daniel Goleman, *Emotional Intelligence* 10th Edition (New York: Bantam Books, 2006).

10. Gerald F. Sewell, “Emotional Intelligence and the Army Leadership Requirements Model,” *Military Review* (November-December 2009): 93.

11. Guthrie, 70.

12. Lane B. Mills, “A Meta-Analysis of the Relationship Between Emotional Intelligence and Effective Leadership,” *Journal of Curriculum and Instruction* 3(2) (November 2009): 29.

13. Paul T. Bartone, Jarle Eid, and Scott Snook, “Big Five Personality Factors, Hardiness, and Social Judgment as Predictors of Leader Performance,” *Leadership and Organization Development Journal* 30 (6) (March 2009); Thomas Dwane, “Examining the Relationship between Emotional Intelligence and Leadership Effectiveness of Navy Human Resource Officer,” *Proquest Dissertation Publishing* (September 2011); Daniel Goleman, *Emotional Intelligence* (New York: Bantam Books, 1995).

14. Gerald Sewell, “How Emotional Intelligence Can Make a Difference,” *Military Review* (March-April 2011): 79.

15. Guthrie, 71.

16. McDonald, 9-10.

17. Guthrie, 72.

Small Unit Actions in Afghanistan

A New, Interactive History

The Combat Studies Institute (CSI) has released its first multimedia interactive historical study titled *Vanguard of Valor: Small Unit Actions in Afghanistan, Enhanced Edition* which is now available in the Apple iBooks format. The new iBook offers eight immersive accounts of combat actions in Afghanistan. This iBook is CSI's first work that tells the Army's story in a fully interactive manner. The chapters in the book include features such as 3D digital terrain views, video from combat actions, interactive digital models of weapon systems and vehicles, and interactive maps and charts.



once 2d Platoon's location was determined, as a safety precaution 3d Platoon opened fire on the escaping insurgents with their M-240s nearly a kilometer away.

The enemy, caught totally by surprise, continued running in all directions during the deadly onslaught. In fact after the cease fire,

platoon members discovered a right shoe and a left shoe about four meters apart with a blood trail leading towards a cliff edge. Apparently, one insurgent was either blown out of his shoes or ran right off a cliff. At the CPLR, the Scouts remained prone as handily fire flew over their heads. As soon as they noticed several insurgents running in their direction, they too joined in the fire. Sergeant Nightingale shot two of the enemy with his silenced M-4 potentially saving Sergeant Reese from harm because the enemy was within a few feet of Reese's location. Nightingale then threw a grenade at another insurgent heading south down the trail. Sergeant Carter used both his M-4 and M-203 to fire on the fleeing men. Reese shot another insurgent with his M-110 Sniper rifle and threw a hand grenade in his direction.

After approximately 10 minutes, the men of 2d Platoon ceased fire and began looking for enemy

M110 Sniper Rifle

The M110 Sniper Rifle is a .50 caliber, air-cooled, gas-operated, semi-automatic, bolt-action rifle. It is designed for long-range sniping and is capable of firing armor-piercing incendiary rounds.

M-ATV Mine Resistant Ambush Protected All Terrain Vehicle (MRAP) with Common Remotely Operated Weapons Station (CROWS)

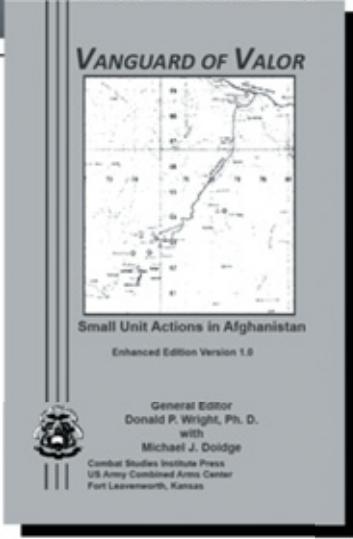
assault line, the first models having been produced less than six months before. These vehicles provided Weber with a truck that could take RPG and IED hits with high crew survivability and provide heavy firepower through turret-mounted weapons systems. The M-ATVs were equipped with a combination of M2 .50 caliber machine guns, M419 automatic grenade launchers, and Common Remotely Operated Weapon Station (CROWS) systems equipped with .50 caliber machine guns. The CROWS system allowed gunners to remotely fire a variety of vehicle-mounted weapons from within a vehicle. However, the nervousness of the system often proved a hindrance. The CROWS had just been fielded and the 2-327th Infantrymen operating them lacked detailed training on the system. Because of an interlinked system design, minor operator errors often shut the system down and when the CROWS went down, so did the whole vehicle. Still, the M-ATVs would be key to a successful advance down the valley road to Gardan.¹⁹ One unit attached to Weber's command that was involved in the operation was 1st Battalion, 22nd Infantry.

Section 2: Task Force Duke

Soldiers from the 3d Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division, known as Task Force Duke, under the command of Colonel John M. Spitzer, deployed to the northeastern portion of Afghanistan along the Pakistan border from July 2008 to June 2009. Their area of operation specifically included Nangarhar, Nuristan, Kunar, and Laghman provinces. Executing Spitzer's counterinsurgency (COIN) strategy within their designated locations, TF Duke attempted to expand security and develop and train Afghan security forces while simultaneously enhancing the governance and economic expansion within their designated regions.¹

Terrain View of Sawtalo Sar Ridegline

Commanded by Captain James C. Howell, Bravo Company of 1st Battalion, 26th Infantry (1-26 IN) and hereafter known as Viper Company, attempted to attain Colonel Spitzer's COIN mission in the Korengal Valley. Realistically, Viper Company's goal was "to keep the enemy tied down in the Korengal so that our battalion could make progress in the Pech River Valley." This was anything but an easy task for roughly 150 Soldiers sparsely dispersed among several Combat Outposts (COPs), Firebases (FB), and Observation Posts (OPs) throughout the Korengal Valley. COPs and FBs differed mainly by the fact that combat outposts usually included the larger 120mm mortars while firebases might feature 82mm or 60mm mortars. Viper Company Headquarters (HQ) and the majority of 2d Platoon, a squad from the Battalion Scout Platoon, a 120mm



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