Virtual Influence

Leveraging Social Media as a Leadership Tool

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THERE ARE OVER 7 billion people in the world today, and over 1.2 billion of them have a Facebook account, more than 550 million subscribe to Twitter, and over 1 billion visit YouTube each month.[1] These sites belong to the category of social media, or a "collection of online platforms and tools used to share content, profiles, opinions, insights, experiences, perspectives, and media itself, facilitating conversations and interactions online between individuals or groups of people."[2] People often use social networking interchangeably with social media, but social networking is the act of using platforms of social media.[3] Although their definitions are rapidly evolving, both involve collaboration, interactive dialogue, and making connections.[4] Social networking is not a new concept or term; people have done it in person for centuries. However, social networking using social media is not much older than a decade, especially in the Army.

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The Army and Social Media

Army social media pioneers Col. Tony Burgess and Col. Nate Allen had the foresight and motivation in February 2000 to transfer their after-hours, front-porch conversations about their company commands into a virtual front-porch community that evolved into the Company Command Forum.[5] The Army created many other forums modeled after this one, which serve as collaborative sites where personnel can seek help, learn, share, and make connections.

The U.S. Army's Office of the Chief of Public Affairs formed an Online and Social Media Division in January 2009.[6] The division focuses on the effective use of social media to provide relevant and timely information to vast audiences as news and content delivery becomes portable, personalized, and participatory.[7]

As evidenced by membership numbers, many uniformed and other personnel have embraced these collaborative tools, but significant numbers avoid or ignore their possibilities. Although there is no substitute for face-to-face communication, social media is a powerful tool Army leaders should leverage and integrate to extend and enhance their leadership influence. This essay examines concepts of leadership and the phenomenon of social media and how leaders can leverage and integrate the social tools available across the modern human landscape.

Whats and Hows of Leaders and Leadership

There are countless definitions of leadership and descriptions of what leaders must do, but most agree that leaders should be able to influence others to take action by using a variety of measures. Organizational-culture professor Dr. Edgar Schein argues the function of leadership is to perceive functional and dysfunctional elements of an existing culture and manage evolution and change so the group can survive in a dynamic environment.[8]

Harvard professor and cognitive psychologist Dr. Howard Gardner defines leaders as individuals who significantly influence the thoughts, behaviors, and/or feelings of others.[9] In the book *In Extremis Leadership: Leading as if Your Life Depended On It*, retired Brig. Gen. Thomas Kolditz stated that leaders can profoundly influence followers in life-threatening

contexts.[10] These small samplings of definitions all suggest *influence* is critical to leadership, and this point appears valid. Now consider what leaders do with this influence.

The Leadership Institute's founding chairman, Dr. Warren Bennis, proclaims leaders provide direction and meaning, generate trust, create a sense of hope, optimism, and investment in the future, and act to get results.[11] Combine these ideas with previous concepts of leader influence and compare them to the Army's definition. According to recently published Army Doctrine Publication (ADP) 6-22, *Army Leadership* (August 2012), leadership is the process of "influencing people by providing purpose, direction, and motivation to accomplish the mission and improve the organization."[12] This gives one an idea of what leaders *do* with their influence, but there is more to explore in the *how*.
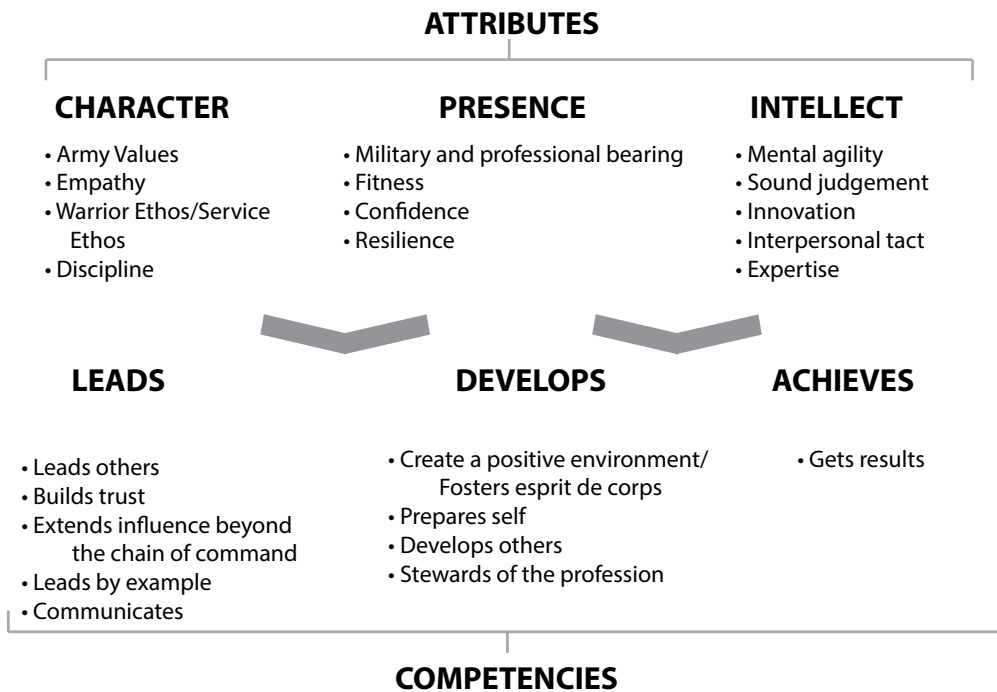
Some argue power is the key ingredient for a leader to influence others. In 1959, sociologists John French and Bertram Raven claimed that the five sources of power in organizations included coercive, referent, legitimate, expert, and reward power.[13] Coercive power comes from influencing others via threats, punishments, or sanctions.[14] Referent power comes from interpersonal relationships cultivated with others in the organization, and is
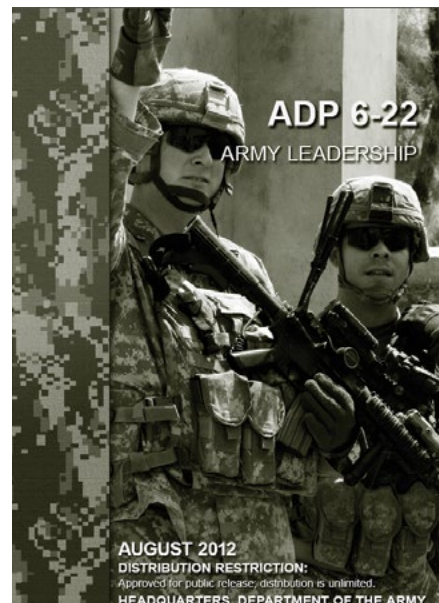
ADP 6-22, *Army Leadership.*

the most influential form of power.[15] Legitimate or positional power comes from a rank or status in an organization's hierarchy, like a squad leader or company commander.[16] Expert power comes from possessing knowledge or expertise, and is also powerful in influencing others.[17] Lastly, reward power comes from influencing through incentives like bonuses or positive evaluations.[18] Leaders use these different types of power to influence others, but there are guidelines for how to do so properly.

In the Army's doctrinal publication 6-22, *Army Leadership* (August 2012), the Leadership Requirements Model discusses the attributes and competencies leaders need to be effective in a reciprocal influence process between leaders and followers.[19] The Center for Army Leadership extensively researched and developed this model with an expert panel over several years, undergoing the scrutiny of scientific validation, multiple senior leader reviews, Army-wide staffing, and it continues to undergo

ATTRIBUTES

CHARACTER
• Army Values
• Empathy
• Warrior Ethos/Service Ethos
• Discipline

PRESENCE
• Military and professional bearing
• Fitness
• Confidence
• Resilience

INTELLECT
• Mental agility
• Sound judgement
• Innovation
• Interpersonal tact
• Expertise

LEADS
• Leads others
• Builds trust
• Extends influence beyond the chain of command
• Leads by example
• Communicates

DEVELOPS
• Create a positive environment/ Fosters esprit de corps
• Prepares self
• Develops others
• Stewards of the profession

ACHIEVES
• Gets results

COMPETENCIES

The Leadership Requirements Model, ADRP 6-22.

empirical validation.[20] The Leadership Requirements Model competency of "Leads" includes building trust, extending influence beyond the chain of command, leading by example, and communicates, while the competency of "Develops" includes creates a positive environment/fosters esprit de corps, and develops others.[21] Leaders should maximize their influence in each of these competencies to be influential and effective, and tools like social media can assist in this effort.

The Phenomenon of Social Media

The availability and usage of social media has exploded in the past decade, shortening cultural divides and giving people unprecedented access to information and each other. Since Facebook's founding in 2004, membership numbers have skyrocketed to more than 1.2 billion across the world.[22] These membership numbers are more meaningful considering countries such as China,

Iran, Pakistan, and Uzbekistan intermittently block their citizens from using Facebook.[23] This means that almost a quarter of the world's population is not regularly allowed to access the site, yet membership numbers continue to climb.

In 2005, only 8 percent of American Internet-using adults admitted to using social networking sites, but that proportion jumped to 72 percent by August 2013.[24] Geography is now less of a communication obstacle than bandwidth. In less than a decade, social media created a world that is indeed flat, yet thickly connected.

Twitter, a micro-blogging social networking site founded in 2006, now has more than 115 million active monthly users.[25] Twitter members' 140-character blog updates or "Tweets" inform, collaborate, and influence others across the world. YouTube, a video-sharing website founded in February 2005, currently boasts 1 billion unique user visits each month, 100 hours of video uploaded worldwide every minute, with millions of new subscriptions daily.[26]

Sites like these allow messages to traverse the globe as fast as the Internet can take them, potentially influencing people and populations quicker than a virus. In fact, "going viral" is a term used for a post or update shared rapidly and to a great number of people because of its content. Examples include the "Gangnam Style" video, the "Harlem Shake" series, or the "What Does the Fox Say?" video.[27] If these sound familiar, that illustrates the point and power of social media. If not, "Google" those to demonstrate the ease of information access for today's generations.

Current Leadership Needs

Given the explosion and reach of media sites available, Army leaders can and should creatively leverage and integrate social networking as a leadership tool. The Center for Army Leadership's Annual Survey of Army Leadership reports published in May 2012 and April 2013 noted a need for leaders to improve in the areas of communication, extending influence beyond the chain of command, developing others, and fostering esprit de corps or building teams.[28] These constructs are linked, where attention to any of them will most likely impact others. In today's Army, many operations are decentralized and require a great deal of trust and understanding between leaders and their followers. This has lent itself to a larger focus on the German *Auftragstaktik* philosophy, which has evolved into *Mission Command* in the U.S. Army. With the Army's shift to *Mission Command*, leaders should leverage all organizational enablers at their disposal, such as social networking.

Social media can facilitate and enable communicating and extending influence if done correctly. Two principles of the mission command philosophy are to build cohesive teams through mutual trust and to create shared understanding.[29] Social networking can enhance both trust and understanding exponentially.

Trust and Social Media

Trust is the feeling that members of a team can depend on one another and their contributions are valued.[30] Army Doctrine Publication 6-0 states trust is gained and lost through everyday actions, and it comes from successful shared experiences and training.[31] The interaction of the commander, subordinates, and soldiers through two-way communication reinforces trust.[32] If there is more than one level of rank between a soldier and leader, chances are the soldier may not physically observe the daily actions of that leader. As an example, when in company command, I only truly spoke with my brigade commander on four occasions. Based on the limited contact we had, I could not determine the nuances of his leadership style, and it is doubtful he could assess mine. I trusted him as a member of the profession, but that trust was based on the legitimacy initially inherent in Army leaders until proven otherwise. This trust only went so far, and did not allow me to share an understanding of his actions or leadership.

Referent Power through Social Media

The reach, power, and influence of social media are profound. Recalling the bases of power, leaders can build referent power through social media. If leaders engage members in conversation, no matter how seemingly inconsequential, they begin to build referent power by association.[33] Consider if a leader walked by and told you "good job" for something you did or said. The Facebook "Like" function for posts virtually translates to the same gesture, but amplifies because every member of the page can see it.

Competence and the Expert Base of Power

Retired Col. Pat Sweeney, one of the leading theorists and researchers of trust and leadership in dangerous contexts, conducted a study with soldiers across Iraq that indicated leader competence was the most important attribute for influencing trust in combat.[34] Army competency is akin to French and Raven's expert base of power, where followers choose to follow leaders who demonstrate expertise or proficiency in a field. If soldiers do not see leaders often, leaders can demonstrate proficiency or expertise through photos, video, or dialogue on social media. If leaders actively participate in the social media community and submit high quality or original content, members may see the leader as an expert in their particular field over time.[35] A few photos or remarks cannot prove competence in a virtual world, but can definitely augment it if that competence is authentic, especially in geographically decentralized operations. If leaders cannot be with their soldiers in all locations at all times, this is an alternative. Face-to-face communication and observation are preferable, but leaders can enhance and promote the climate of trust and the competency of their command by using social media. Connections made between leaders and followers are what make these tools so potentially powerful.

Enhancing Communication

A network is a group of people or things interconnected for a purpose. Social and technical networks enable leaders to communicate info, create connections with others, control forces, strengthen those connections, encourage more participation, and help lead to successful operations.[36] In *Taking the Guidon: Exceptional Leadership at the Company Level*, authors Tony Burgess and Nate Allen declare, "Excellent communication—up, down, and sideways—is fundamental to a motivated and effective unit."[37] Social media can enhance communication not only within a unit, but also across networks of their families, future members, departed members, and anyone else interested.

Leaders can develop and leverage various social networks to exchange information and ideas, build teams, and promote unity of effort.[38] The "social" part of "social networking" implies two-way communication as the minimum. To engage people and reinforce the team concept, leaders should cultivate social dialogue and prepare for it. Social networking facilitates nearly instant feedback from all levels, and not all feedback will be positive. However, that might make it more valuable. Members can voice opinions, and leaders can solicit ideas for the betterment of the organization. The conversation alone serves to increase member participation, engagement, and buy-in, no matter what decisions may result from the dialogue.

For example, when I had the privilege of working for the 72nd and 73rd Commandants of Cadets at the U.S. Military Academy, each made it a regular practice to post cadet and academy photos on their professional Facebook pages. The commandants commented on events occurring at the academy, explained some of their command decisions, and lauded members of the Corps of Cadets for their many varied accomplishments. Graduates and parents thanked them daily for the information, and that resulted in more photos and information sharing. Both commandants stayed less than two years; however, the combined total of their site members in that short time was over 9,000. While many of the 9,000 followers were undoubtedly duplicates, the numbers clearly demonstrate social media's communication reach and its potential influence on others.

On 1 March 2013, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Martin Dempsey posted a two-minute message on YouTube about sequestration.[39] In just a few days, his message reached over 9,500 viewers, and the comments posted under his video were overwhelmingly positive and appreciative that he took the time to transmit his message. Additionally, hundreds of the viewers reposted his video on their personal pages, and others also reposted the message. There is no telling how many received his message, but his reach was considerable. Incidentally, over 39,000 people currently follow his Facebook page, which means 39,000 people can see what he does daily, read his thoughts on emergent issues, and unknowingly build trust in someone they will probably never meet.[40]

Influence Potential in the Army

In May 2013, 89 percent of all Internet users ages 18-29 reported using social networking sites.[41] Moreover, social networking sites were used by 78 percent of Internet users aged 30-49, 60 percent for those aged 50-64, and 43 percent for those aged 65 years and older.[42] As of late November 2013, 98.6 percent of the active duty Army ranged from ages 18-49, with slightly more than 1 percent at the ages of 50 and beyond.[43] To give some Army perspective, general officers typically range from 50 and beyond and colonels from the early 40s and beyond. If one makes the broad-based assumption that Army personnel reflect the general population in social networking habits, then over 83 percent, or 439,000 active duty members between 18-49 years of age use social networking accounts in some form. However, only 60 percent of the most senior leaders do, so they do not have a substantial, far-reaching communication element in their arsenal to employ.

As social media is a significant and growing part of today's society … leaders should seriously contemplate leveraging its benefits and connecting with the culture they lead, if for no other reason than shared understanding of how subordinates are communicating.

Another leadership study discovered one of the most critical factors to effective, influential leadership was that followers viewed their leaders as highly representative of their group.[44] Given a choice, group members often prefer leaders who display prototypical characteristics of their group above those who display positive qualities that separate them from the group.[45] As social media is a significant and growing part of today's society

and used by more than 444,000 total active duty members in the Army, leaders should seriously contemplate leveraging its benefits and connecting with the culture they lead, if for no other reason than shared understanding of how subordinates are communicating. Besides the simple knowledge of how to use such sites and the language associated, leaders have the opportunity to show subordinates how "human" they really are. The humanness in leaders oftentimes endears them to their followers, and social sites can help paint the authentic picture for them, resulting in higher identification with followers and increased influence with those they lead. Failing to use these tools, however, can result in informational and social isolation.

Several years ago, I worked for a gentleman we will call Lt. Col. William James. James came from a particularly secretive operational community and adamantly refused to consider opening or leveraging social media sites for professional or personal use. As a result, he was unaware of many organizational changes not advertised elsewhere and restricted in social awareness. He was largely unmindful of social media's general benefit to organizations and the limitless ways it could enhance information sharing, communication, or connections. By not availing himself of the media, his intelligence, competence, abilities, and influence were underutilized. While he was an incredible leader, this is comparable to refusing to use a cellular phone or email in modern functioning. Although the most competent and inspirational leaders across time never had or needed such things, many of those leaders accessed the best weapons or technologies available in their times to enhance desired effects. Today, James is the garrison commander of a post whose Facebook site has over 159,000 subscribers, or "Likes." It is difficult to dispute the reach and potential impact of such a site, even for a non-user.

Maximizing Tools in a Resource-Constrained Environment

Leaders can leverage social networking tools to train, develop, and mentor subordinates, especially in a resource-constrained environment. Sequestration is official, and the federal government shut down for 16 days in October 2013 because of fiscal legislation disputes. As deployment operating tempo slows and units return to

milSuite

> About
> My Account
> Rules of Conduct

Search

milBook
Connect, Create, Collaborate

milWire
Choose, Add, Plug In

milWiki
Discover, Learn, Organize

milTube
Watch, Upload, Share

eureka
Suggest, Encourage, Improve

Why use milSuite?

Every day, milSuite helps servicemen and women, DoD employees and contractors locate information, connect with other professionals and share knowledge. Through milBook groups and communities of interest that connect people, milWiki articles on a range of DoD topics, milTube videos that support training and education and user contributions to milWire - milSuite is changing the way members of the DoD collaborate - for the better.

Recent News

milTube 1.0.6 patch has been deployed!
For more information on this patch see my original Wire post here Read more

milSuite is a collection of online tools and applications originally produced within the PEO C3T MilTech Solutions office for the purpose of bringing online collaborative methods and secure communities to the entire

Department of Defense's milSuite.

home station, competition for limited resources will continue to rise. Leaders must overcome and maximize dwindling resources to maintain readiness. Organizations can increase their competitive edges by tapping into knowledge inventory, creating ways to increase access to knowledge stores, and promoting and rewarding knowledge sharing.[46] Continuously sharing information, lessons learned, institutional knowledge, and expertise is more important than ever, and social media can enhance these practices. For example, Xerox developed a collaborative social media site in 2010 that allowed repair technicians to share insights and observations with each other.[47] This collaborative portal, named *Eureka,* resulted in a 5-10 percent parts and labor cost reduction, which translated to an annual cost savings of $30 million.[48]

Training and Collaboration

There are tools available leaders can utilize to enhance training and collaboration. For example, viewing videos can be educational and instructive for various tasks. The Iron Major Crossfit website out of Fort Leavenworth posts daily workouts with YouTube links so members can watch how to do exercises properly, or define a DU, HSPU, T2B, or KB. Similarly, milTube is a secure, Department of Defense (DOD) version of YouTube, where users post military-related videos intended for training personnel in various skills. The DOD's milSuite website is a collection of online tools such as mil-Tube, milBook, milWire, milWiki, and Eureka.[49] Many of these sites are similar to commercial counterparts, but most are secure and full of communities of professionals waiting to share, connect, and receive information.

Oftentimes, peer-to-peer, grass roots knowledge sharing is extremely influential. Forums such as Company Command Net, S3-XO Net, Platoon Leader Net, FRG Leader, and NCO Corps allow members to pose questions and share insights, videos, and other resources. Topics range from taking command to managing funds in family readiness groups and myriad other topics. These forums allow members to contribute to the group, connect with others with similar experiences or interests, and develop personally through these interactions.[50]

A lack of close interpersonal relationships through virtual space has shown not to be an issue when the community that its online members belong to has a strong identity, such as Company Command Net.[51] Consider viewing customer ratings online for a product one plans to purchase. One may not know any of the product reviewers, but the shared interest in the same product helps personnel overcome trust issues arising from the lack of strength in participant ties.[52] In fact, virtual relationships have sometimes proven more useful, preferred, and executed than other relationships.

Mentorship and Social Media

Mentorship is the voluntary and reciprocal developmental relationship existing between a person of greater experience and a person of lesser experience, characterized by mutual trust and respect.[53]

A study comparing face-to-face mentoring against online mentoring found that, although the participants (both mentors and mentees) desired the mentorship, dedicating time to the face-to-face endeavor was a barrier because they lacked the motivation to conduct frequent mentorship engagements.[54]

The study concluded a community approach to mentoring using open social networking tools spread the mentoring load, allowed mentees to have more than one perspective on an issue, and increased access to knowledge and networking opportunities.[55]

As a second lieutenant, I unknowingly met my future mentor at the Joint Readiness Training Center while she commanded a battalion my unit supported. I was drawn to her expertise, knowledge, and presence— the fact that she was a female transportation officer graduate of West Point and

being from Hawaii, just as I was, probably did not hurt either. She humored me by giving me her perspectives on everything from the profession to family, and still does today. However, since the Army does not PCS mentors and mentees to the same locations, deploys personnel on different cycles to different theaters, and scatters personnel to different time zones, most of the mentoring I receive is online through media such as Facebook. A mentoring relationship that began face-to-face continues through social media for more than a decade now, and I am eternally grateful.

Virtual mentoring also provides a platform for demonstrating appropriate online behavior, just as inviting junior leaders over for dinner helps model appropriate social behavior. While working as a tactical officer at West Point, I mentored a young cadet who had posted inappropriate photos of herself on Facebook and struggled with the balance of dressing appropriately without sacrificing femininity. During our mentoring, I allowed her to "lurk" on my Facebook page where she could see pictures of what many other professional female officers wore, how they conducted themselves in their off-duty time, and on-line. Years later, I lurked on her page and she is the epitome of professionalism, at least from what I can see in the virtual world. If you compound the time required for mentoring with the wide geographic dispersion of uniformed personnel and consider the benefits of virtual mentorship, social networking as a mentorship tool increases in usefulness.

Developing and Displaying Unit Culture

Social networking can be a simple but powerful tool for building teams and fostering esprit de corps. An important part of leadership is developing the culture of a unit. One level of culture includes the artifacts in a unit, or visible products of the group.[56] Several examples are its language, technology, published lists of values, rituals and ceremonies, and physical architecture of its environment.[57]

During the PCS process, a common question soldiers have is what their future unit will be like. This is an inquiry regarding the unit's culture. Methods of answering this question historically included asking colleagues for insights or knowledge of the unit, "Googling" the unit, going to the unit's official

website, or other largely rudimentary methods. If one is lucky enough to find a social media site, the richness of the information, character, and realness of the unit increases exponentially.

For example, I discovered I would be joining the 16th Combat Aviation Brigade four months from writing this essay. Upon receiving my assignment, I did the usual inquiries, and then found their unit Facebook site. Because pictures are worth a thousand words, I viewed a streaming book of what the unit had already accomplished, indicators of its morale, and the priorities for the organization. In one week, I discovered the unit was the largest combat aviation brigade in the Army, had just fielded the Army's newest Apache aircraft, had completed a mission command systems integration exercise, and addressed community complaints of aircraft noise. Through this site, one can scroll through the unit's historical photos, familiarize with the people and facilities of the unit, and get a sense of its climate. Whether cognizant of it or not, the unit is already bringing future members into their team months ahead of arrival. Whether I knew it or not, I was also learning the unit's culture through its visual/virtual artifacts and preparing a foundation for transitioning.

Enhancing Esprit de Corps and Building Teams

Esprit de corps is the common spirit existing in the members of a group and inspiring enthusiasm, devotion, and strong regard for the honor of the group.[58] We often think of it in terms of morale and climate, and its presence or absence affects motivation and trust.[59] Leaders who set the conditions for a positive climate are much more effective at maintaining a high level of esprit de corps. One way to do this is by establishing an inclusive climate, or one that integrates everyone, regardless of differences.[60] Another is by encouraging open and candid communications.[61] A social media archive or collaboration site provides a space that captures shared experiences and memories, which can be key for building and maintaining esprit de corps. By availing such social sites to the public, leaders maximize inclusivity. By managing the conversations on social networking sites and reinforcing professionalism in conjunction with psychological safety, leaders can encourage open and candid social dialogue that may never initiate in person. Sometimes the best ideas come through the safety of the network.

Where to Begin in the Virtual World

Assuming a leader wants to enhance influence by using social media, there are several ways to begin. The optimal starting point is to review *The United States Army Social Media Handbook*.[62] The U.S. Army Office of the Chief of Public Affairs published version 3.1 in January 2013 and is set to publish an update in early 2014.[63] It appears to be a one-stop shop for all questions regarding the U.S. Army and social media use.

Contents include discussions why leaders or units should establish a social media presence and what different sites are available, an example disclaimer and rules of engagement for posting on sites, operations security considerations, guides for using social media for crisis communications, tips for populating a site, quick reference guides and checklists for how to initiate a site.[64]

The handbook also consolidates various and current Army policies in enclosures to ensure unit success and regulatory compliance.

The United States Army Social Media Handbook.

The next logical step is to determine the goal for this presence, and the strategy for reaching it. This helps define what type of site one is trying to create. Strategy for building trust and extending influence looks quite different from merely providing information. Both can be useful, but it depends on the needs of the particular organization. For example, the Travis Air Force Base Passenger Terminal has a Facebook page dedicated to Space-A travel.[65] Every time there is an available flight, they post the information. They are not necessarily trying to build esprit de corps (although inherent in Space-A travel), not trying to increase buy in or share a vision, and not trying to increase trust. The site provides a cheap, timely means of communicating information for anyone interested and for resolving public questions. It has over 31,000 followers, which demonstrates that useful media can be purely information-based, but again, it depends on the organization. Other considerations in social media planning include second- and third-order effects of the proposed social media presence, such as flattening the hierarchical structure, violations of operations security, or potentially undermining the chain of command. Leaders should war-game different scenarios, as with any other plan, to determine courses of action, ways to address issues, or ways to prevent issues before they surface.

If lacking in one's own social media site development skills, a number of readily accessible individuals are probably familiar enough with the chosen site to initiate it. Scatter plots on social media usage from a Naval officer perceptions study indicated that the younger the service member, the more prolific their use of electronic social networks.[66] The translation here is to consider asking someone younger for help, but ensure they have the basic guidelines for creating a site as per the handbook noted above. The incoming commandant of cadets knew what a powerful tool a professional Facebook site could be at the U.S. Military Academy from his predecessor, but the general was not sure how to create it. "Make me one that models his" was all he had to say, and ten minutes later, he had one

and a quick tutorial on how to use it. However, in researching for this article, I discovered I failed to register his professional Facebook account with the U.S. Army (which now boasts 2,000 officially registered sites).[67] That additional process would only have taken about two minutes to complete. As a result, the Online and Social Media Division would have reviewed the site to ensure it abided by regulations, added it to the U.S. Army Social Media directory, and contacted Facebook to let them know it was an official site. Facebook then would have removed all the ads and banners from the page.

After establishing a site, regardless of the type, it requires thoughtful, continuous, and creative management to be effective. Most of these sites are free to use, but good sites require someone's time and energy to maintain. To be a worthwhile tool, keep posts interactive, provide useful information to the audience, engage that audience by soliciting feedback, and respond to questions. If there is an environment of candor and psychological safety within a site, members may answer each other's questions without leader or unit involvement, and this type of dialogue and sharing of information can translate positive effects into the unit's nonvirtual climate and culture.

At the end of the day, social media and networking sites are just tools leaders can use to build trust, communicate with others, develop others, and extend their influence—all enablers with the power to enhance and augment leadership in conjunction with traditional communication techniques. Social media will not make a bad leader good, just like email or cell phones will not make bad leaders good, but social media can improve and enhance a leader's influence and provide additional tools to leverage in a geographically dispersed, rapidly changing, and resource-constrained environment.[68] The Army has valuable and collaborative stories, information, opinions, and ideas to share, with limitless force-multiplying reasons for doing so. However, it is critical that leaders at all echelons leverage the tools available for maximizing the potential of their units, their soldiers, and themselves. ***MR***

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