



# Mastering the Art of Military Leadership

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Whenever I facilitate a classroom discussion on the Leadership Requirements Model with future sergeants major, someone usually asks, “How did you develop yourself?” More specifically, they want to know the opinion of a senior sergeant major on mastering military leadership. Interestingly, fellow classmates always join in to ensure that the question is not redirected or answered in the form of another question — as though there’s some great secret held by nominative command sergeants major. To be sure, it’s a slippery slope for the capstone instructor. Most nominative command sergeants major respond with what worked for them. However, what worked for me may not necessarily work for others.

Nevertheless, many are baffled when I say there are no secrets or shortcuts to success in the profession of arms. Truth be told, when you have not yet learned a compe-

tency or attribute, those who have mastered it appear to know professional secrets. But even in the most logical sense, secrets are not determinants of success. The fact is many professionals simply fail at higher levels of leadership because they don’t apply the elements of the LRM. As Johann Wolfgang von Goethe said, “Knowing is not enough; we must apply.”

To put it in perspective, it’s essential that we recognize the three major paradigms, or misconceptions, that perpetuate leadership secrets. The first centers on the *Behavioral and Path-Goal Leadership Theories*, which focus on a leader’s “attempt to explain distinctive styles used by effective leaders.” There are task-orientated noncommissioned officers who assume that civilian education development (specifically in reading, writing and math) is not a necessity for excellent performance

# Army Leadership Requirements Model Attributes and Competencies



Figure 1

and becoming a successful NCO. As a result, they become fragmented leaders and passive followers who feel constantly constrained.

The second myth is a misconception of leadership styles and personality. Those who hold this view base their assumptions on *Leadership Trait Theories*, and are victims of the fallacy that “leaders are born, not made.” This belief is reinforced when the individual possesses effective leadership traits such as attractiveness, aggressiveness, being articulate, possessing high-energy or self-reliant. They also assert that their military qualifications and experience alone should prepare them to lead at the next level.

The third paradigm perpetuates a negative stereotype of situational leaders and managers. Though there are definable differences between the two, they are mutually supportive. As such, the two paradigms overlap because great leaders are excellent managers, and exceptional managers are successful leaders. In essence, we are all managers — whether it’s managing our personal finances, families and development, or an organization’s resources, personnel and training. Ironically, foregoing reasons are why many professionals often fail. They simply lack an understanding of themselves and leadership theory paradigms.

My response to the “How did you develop?” question is this: A successful leader’s transformation from expert to master is not one of happenstance. It begins with a profound sense of purpose that is cultivated through years

of personal and professional development and effective followership. *This* is the mysterious secret that enables great leaders to master the art of military leadership. According to ADP 6-22, “Army Leadership,” it results in “the process of influencing people by providing purpose, direction and motivation to accomplish the mission and improve the organization.”

If you subscribe to the Army’s definition in ADP 6-22, you can realize that leadership is an inside-out process that is predicated upon the Army Values — and exercised through the LRM. These values are symmetrically nested within each competency (Leads, Develops and Achieves) of the LRM and are the heart and soul of the artful leader.

The problem is, during the Information Age, learning priorities are shifting more toward technology rather than intellect to solve complex problems. Magnanimous solutions and creative

ideas don’t lie within the next advanced computer or weapon system, because computers don’t have intuition. It lies within a leader’s mind — his or her ability to think critically, creatively and intuitively — which gives the leader the mental agility to thrive in complex situations. However, a leader cannot engage in intuitive problem solving without field experience. Experience is what allows leaders to make sense of “gut feelings.” As one would expect, it’s a balance of academic knowledge, field experience and emotional intelligence that develops intuitive skills.

Undeniably, advanced technology does instigate change. It has negated neither the Principles of War nor Army doctrine. It simply has added several layers of complexity. However, the LRM leverages technology to *get results* in the contemporary operational environment, especially against creative and adaptive adversaries. Once the root cause of the problem is identified, the solution lies in finding creative new ways of doing old things.

That’s what the application of the LRM does. It reduces the decline in critical thinking and redefines the “basics” by harmonizing decision-making styles (decisive, hierarchic, flexible and integrative) with operational design and military decision-making process concepts. More notably, it accounts for the dimensions of human behavior in regards to ethical dilemmas. It’s not revolutionary; it’s the art of military leadership.

Applying the art of military leadership is unlike any other profession in that the leader often works within the complex operational variables of political, military, economic, social, information, infrastructure, physical environment and time (PMESII-PT) that habitually conflict with one another. Not to mention the fact that decisive-action operations, in their most basic sense, leverage complexity to combat complexity, and civilian educational development and critical thinking allow us to think within these variables. This is how artful military leaders solve ill-defined problems.

Drawing on the LRM (Figure 1), one can visualize how leadership attributes and competencies are applied to address PMESII-PT. It is an integrated two-pronged approach to mastering the art of leadership. Accordingly, the LRM systematically integrates sudden insights from the Situational Leadership Model to address complexity. This artistic process is the harmonious matching of character, presence and intellect to the appropriate leadership style. Decision-making and communication styles are also used to achieve the desired results.

Additionally, the model centers on four logical hypotheses (Figure 2A & 2B) to link behavior to the follower’s ability and motivation. As explained by management experts Paul Hersey and Ken Blanchard, the primary purpose explores the motivations of the follower. According to the Situational Leadership Model, situational leaders say if a follower is unable and unwilling; the leader needs to display high task orientation to compensate for the follower’s lack of ability and low relationship orientation to get the follower to understand what needs to be done. Therefore, the situational leader can intuitively apply the appropriate leadership style (directing, participating, delegating, coaching) based on the follower’s readiness level.

For some leaders, situational leadership defies conventional wisdom, so they often become comfortable with applying one leadership style to all situations, become indecisive in their decisions and settle for “good enough” performance. On the other hand, artful leaders create committed learning cultures, and understand that success depends on their ability to match their decision-making style, communication style and leadership style to master the art of leadership (Figure 2B).

## The Three Steps of the Situational Leadership Model



Figure 2A

### Choose

#### Leadership Styles

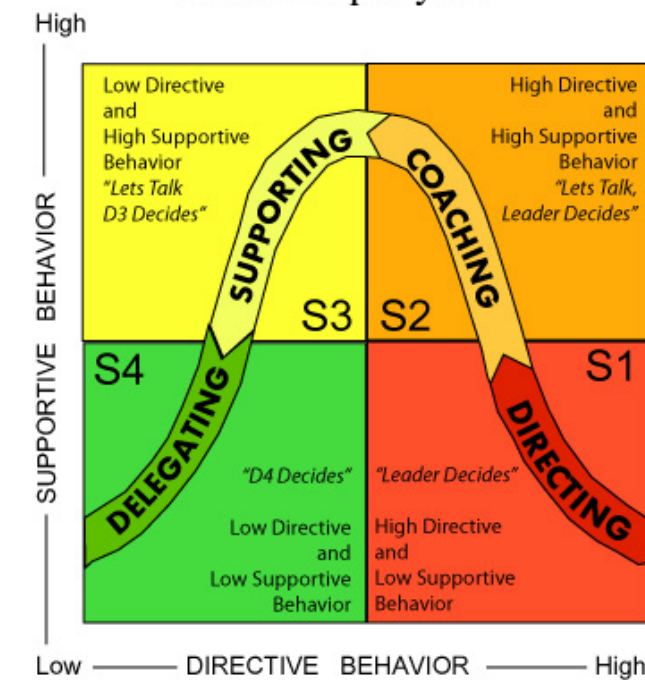


Figure 2B

According to Ohio State University professor Bernard Erven, “Success in leadership comes when the leadership style is matched with the characteristics of the follower.” Moreover, the best leaders understand that situational leadership is an art of choosing — choosing to learn, choosing to think, choosing to change and choosing excellence, 100 percent, every single day of their careers. They know the commander’s intent is the instigator of change, and that it plays a critical role in allowing them to understand patterns of friction and change. Situational leaders rely on their education and experience to solve complex problems that are not problems yet. And they understand that the quality of their thinking lies within their ability to draw logical connections between PMESII-PT. In turn, this creates the right amount of stress to perpetuate a sense of urgency and resolve that is the driving force behind their critical and creative thinking abilities. This motivates them to seek precise solutions to problems that most professionals dismiss as insoluble.

Therefore, NCOs should move from the “Be, Know, Do” mental model to the “Be, Know, Think, Choose, & Do” mindset. For sure, the choices you make today will limit your opportunities in the future.

This is vital because the LRM acts as a driver for creativity and empowerment thus preventing leader development issues, lazy thinking, passive communication and leadership style mismatches that often keep potential leaders from succeeding. In the same way, the LRM naturally purges toxic behaviors and leader trust issues that habitually plague organizational cultures.

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## Decision Making Styles

|                   |                           | INFORMATION USE  |   |
|-------------------|---------------------------|--|---|
|                   |                           | Satisficing (less information)   | Maximizing (more information)   |
| NUMBER OF OPTIONS | Single focus (one option) | <p><b>DECISIVE</b></p> <p>This decision style is direct, efficient, fast, and firm.</p> <p>In public, this <i>action - focused</i> style comes across as <i>task oriented</i></p>  | <p><b>HIERARCHIC</b></p> <p>People using this highly analytical and focused style expect their decisions, once taken, to be final and to stand the test of time.</p> <p>In public, this <i>complex</i> style comes across as <i>highly intellectual</i></p>   |
|                   | Multifocus (many options) | <p><b>FLEXIBLE</b></p> <p>This style is about speed and adaptability. Managers make decisions quickly and change course just as quickly to keep abreast of immediate, shifting situations.</p> <p>In public, this <i>flexible</i> style comes across as <i>highly social and responsive</i>.</p> | <p><b>INTEGRATIVE</b></p> <p>In integrative mode, people frame problems broadly, using input from many sources, and make decisions involving multiple courses of action that may evolve over time as circumstances change.</p> <p>In public, this creative style comes across as highly participative</p> |

Figure 3

In short, the answer to mastering the art of leadership is the meticulous matching of leadership, communication, and decision-making styles to solve problems. And it starts with both the LRM and situational leadership approaches. However, some professionals are missing the leadership developmental link between “intellect” and “getting results.” That link is critical thinking because, without it, inaccurate assumptions, negative stereotypes and archaic mental models will fill in knowledge gaps. Subsequently, it skews our sense of priorities in complex situations as well as our ability to explain intuitive thoughts.

Though simple in concept, many fail at higher levels because they do not apply these fundamental attributes and competencies. In other words, there are no secrets to success in the Profession of Arms. To be sure, a professional does not become a respected leader until he has mastered his art. Any attempt to do otherwise only breeds contempt. ■



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