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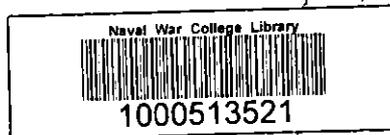
MILITARY LEADERSHIP STYLES IN TRANSITION

by

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Lieutenant Commander, U.S. Navy

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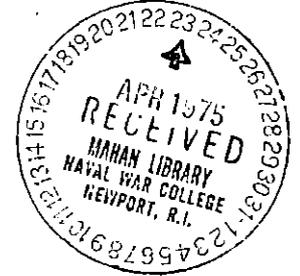
IN TRANSITION

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ABSTRACT



Military managers are confronted with different situational leadership roles due to the wide range of their assignments. Consequently, the military leadership style should be reevaluated particularly in light of some of the following causative factors which affect leadership styles: organizational contributors, sociological factors, civilianization, and futuristic trends. Several styles of leadership from the literature are discussed which are tailored to meet specific leadership situations. A natural leadership style is proposed for the military manager which is comprised of the following elements: individual adaptation, mission-orientation, role-playing, shared-power, and the integrative role. Finally, some limitations are pointed out in the advocacy or acceptance of a specific leadership style.

## Introduction

Today's military manager is faced with a range of situational leadership roles which is perhaps unheard of in any other managerial circles. The range of assignments an active duty officer may expect throughout his career may include operational billets in a combat zone to Washington duty. In the same vein, personnel interaction may vary from an almost total military environment to a civilian one. This wide range of duty assignments will tax the flexibility and adaptability of all military managers. Consequently, an officer should take a close look at his leadership style -- "his predictable ways of coping with the realities of the work environment."<sup>1</sup> Increasing demands will be placed on all levels of military managers in the future due to technological and social changes which according to some sources will require differential leadership styles.<sup>2</sup> An attempt will be made in this paper to address the military leadership style by: (1) considering some of the causative factors affecting leadership, (2) identifying several classes of leadership styles, (3) providing an approach to the leadership style dilemma, and (4) recognizing the limitations inherent in any specific approach.

## Changing Times

Organizational change within the military establishment centered around the human resources aspect has been one of the

predominant factors affecting the managerial role of the officer corps. Consider, for example, the impact of the deluge of Z-grams after Admiral Zumwalt's ascension to the CNO. A rather staid and stogy Navy, bounded by years of tradition and experience, was suddenly shelled with buzz words from the behavioral scientist's lexicon. The rights, dignity, and worth of the individual seemed to transcend the Navy's mission which eventually resulted in subsequent messages reemphasizing the paramount purpose of the Navy. The important point is that the Z-grams were, in essence, the onset of participative management in the Navy. The traditional chain-of-command communications from senior to subordinate, down the line, was forshortened through the mass communications media. All levels of the Navy, down to the newest recruit, were afforded the opportunity to read, evaluate, and interpret the import of each and every Z-gram. Needless to say, confusion was rampant among military managers resulting in a wide range of individual command actions until some semblance of order was eventually reestablished.

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Another important organizational change affecting the military manager's leadership style is the All-Volunteer Force. The unknown variables concerning these personnel recruited under this concept include the numbers and quality of the personnel, the fulfillment of their hopes and expectations from the recruiting process, and their eventual contribution in an

environment where personnel strength may be slashed to fund various program mixes under austere funding. Military leadership will be faced with the dichotomy of satisfying personnel demands and at the same time with maintaining a maximum state of operational readiness with dwindling resources. The possibility also exists that personnel may remain on active duty longer with the resultant effect of a more stable and mature personnel structure which could conceivably enhance the professionalism of the Navy. In any event, the officer's perception of these new recruits and how he reacts to their attitudes towards the Navy will have considerable impact on their acclimation and eventual retention in the service.

A third organizational change which bothers many commanding officers is the increasing limitations of non-judicial punishment. No longer does "Captain's Mast" have the traditional awe which undoubtedly acted as a damper on violations of the UCMJ.. The recommended approach appears to be centered around heading off trouble before it gets started through consultation, grievance hearings, and periodic committee reviews. This behavior modification approach to solving disciplinary problems is time-consuming, frustrating, and sometimes unsuccessfull -- but a necessary technique in this period of enlightened management. At the same time, there presently appears to be a shift back towards some of the fundamental approaches to behavioral responsibility where the individual owns up to his own actions rather than changing the organiza-

tion to suit the individual. These apparent shifts in organizational intent cannot go unnoticed by the astute officer who has to renew and redirect his energies to different nuances of similar behavioral problems among military personnel.

Finally, the last organizational contributor which will be considered is project management -- the mechanism through which the services manage the development, acquisition, and support of major weapon systems. The framework within which an officer operates in this type of organization is a novel experience for the newly initiated. No longer is authority derived from a direct line position, except within the project itself. The modus operandi of a manager in a project office is dependent upon his technical ability, forcefulness, initiative, and communication skills to impose his direction and desires on other individuals and activities who are not under his control. For an individual used to operating in a conventional military line organization, the apparent lack of authority, responsiveness, and "can do" attitudes of the players, is a confusing experience often leading to personal frustration, stress, and strain. The military manager's attitude in this position can be positive and open by learning the ropes on how best to work within the bureaucratic system or, conversely he can take a negative approach by resting on his laurels and regale in his sea stories until his tour is over. Obviously, the latter approach is one which the services can ill afford.

There are a number of sociological factors which should cause most officers to reassess their leadership style. While these factors primarily affect the older managers, they apply equally to the new officer who may have been attracted to the services because the organizational conservatism and norms were consistent with his own. One of these factors is the civilian attitudes and perceptions of the younger generation entering the services. In the early 1960's, Likert stated that people are less willing to accept the close supervision and pressures which existed during the 50's.<sup>3</sup> A variant of this outlook today could be tersely phrased -- "do your own thing." The apparent implication of this phraseology approach to the work ethic is that conformity and following orders will be accepted with less alacrity than in years past. But in reviewing the changes in the social structure and expansion in mass communications, today's youth have been exposed to a range of vicarious experiences which has resulted in both more sophisticated and better educated individuals than previous new accessions. Additionally, these new Navy men and women are generally more articulate and outspoken on issues which have personal consequences. In their youthful haste for quicker response time, there is an increased tendency for bypassing the traditional chain-of-command and a desire to rap with "the man." Small wonder why a commanding officer today probably considers himself more of a personnel manager rather than a warfighter.

While this illustration did not apply across-the-board to all military organizations, it is indicative of the throes the Navy was going through to accommodate the nuances of participative management. For the middle manager, in particular, the message was quite clear that the traditional management techniques were not working.

The advent of equality for women has particular significance for today's military manager. In the enlisted ranks the previous sex barriers which prevented entry into most rates is slowly disappearing. Wave officers are now called women officers and it is not inconceivable that in the future there will be only officers differentiated only by the obvious social amenities. Furthermore, women military personnel can expect that "equal pay for equal work" will be extended to practically all levels in the foreseeable future. As the number of highly qualified women officers enter the various managerial ranks, competition will become keener and adaptation to understanding a broader range of viewpoints will become more important.

A causative factor of increasing portions which affects the military leadership style is the trend towards civilianization in the defense establishment. Oftentimes, civilian personnel are stereotyped by our more narrow-minded colleagues as "do-nothing sandcrabs" who put in their eight hours a day. This generalization does not apply across-the-board and many dedicated civilian personnel take work home or work overtime

without accepting compensatory time-off. The officer who has any preconceived notions about civilian personnel or other predispositions is due for a rude awakening. One obvious source of organizational stress is that a military manager spends two or sometimes three years in an assignment while the less mobile civilian provides the organizational continuity and stability. There is the inherent tendency for a new manager to change the system, oftentimes for short-term goals, without realizing that only lip service is provided to these changes. The initial perception of many civilians of long-time standing is that the military manager lacks the technical ability to automatically take-over a new job. The military manager who has the ability or background to move into a new job involving civilian personnel will find negative interaction minimized. Whether working with, for, or over civilian personnel, the trappings of military rank are far less important than the ability to exchange ideas in a give-and-take atmosphere. Moving into a quasi-civilian environment requires that a military manager take a serious reevaluation of his leadership style assets.

Another aspect of the civilian side of the house which affects military managers is labor-management relations. Curiously enough, this area is considered by many officers as the civilian personnel manager's domain. However, any activity which has a contract with a labor union will eventually have

union leaders knocking at the door of the top managers, oftentimes military, to discuss personnel grievances, working conditions, and management favoritism -- just to name a few. This area of human relations is time-consuming, frustrating, and seems non-mission oriented. However, on the positive side labor-management relations can be used as a tool to check the pulse of the system -- the personnel morale, productivity problems, management system weaknesses, etc. In addition, it provides the military manager an opportunity to spread his viewpoints and positions via the informed organization. The officer who has had the opportunity to sit at a labor-management negotiation table, as the author, is doubly rewarded -- not only for the experience it provides but also to observe and participate in the interplay among a variety of adversary forces and techniques. The trend towards increasing unionization of federal employees, particularly white-collar workers, poses a challenging area for further managerial role playing and leadership.

In looking futuristically there is a tendency to linearly extrapolate what we know today to predict or estimate where new military leadership problems will lay. This is not feasible due to the cyclical changes which occur throughout the years caused by the changeover in top Navy management and the ever-changing impact of the civilian social structure. However, there are two areas of particular significance which

could conceivably add another dimension to military leadership styles. First, it is not unrealistic to predict that federal employees will either through legal means or through overt action demand the "right to strike." Although there are currently strong sanctions against strikes by local, state, or federal employees, the crippling effects of strikes by city and state workers has already occurred. Some foreign governments have also been practically brought to a standstill by the walkout of government employees. Needless to say, military leadership of the future must find ways to avert strikes rather than sit passively by after their occurrence. Secondly, the possibility of enlisted unionization, while perhaps somewhat distant, is a distinct possibility particularly if relatively peaceful conditions continue under detente or the SALT negotiations result in mutually acceptable conditions. The West German Navy has experienced enlisted unionization which could spread to other navies of the western world including our own. If and when it occurs, hopefully military leadership will have learned the lessons of the past and not bury their heads in the sand and hope somehow the issue will pass. The earlier military leadership recognizes a problem and takes affirmative action the sooner it goes away.

#### Styles of Leadership

While the causative factors which affect military leadership style provide a convenient frame of reference, the

literature is replete with examples of specific leadership styles to guide all managers in a variety of situational roles. The classical styles of leadership are identified by Sutermeister<sup>4</sup> as autocratic, laissez faire, and democratic. An autocratic leadership style, usually typified by the military, is characterized by a leader who independently determines policy, makes his own decisions, assumes full responsibility, and expects complete obedience in following orders. In management parlance the autocratic leader is production-oriented with little to no concern about people. In laissez faire leadership, the leader provides the materials and lets the individuals or group make the decisions with little control or set limitations. One of the obvious weaknesses of a laissez faire leadership style is the inherent danger of individuals proceeding in different directions. The democratic leader encourages goal setting and group or individual contribution of ideas and suggestions. This people-centered approach is based on democratic principles but generally requires personnel with a higher level of education who can handle a greater degree of freedom from control. Some of the disadvantages of democratic leadership style are that better communications and coordination are required and a higher quality leader is necessary for interaction in this participative management approach. Depending upon the nature and requirements of the managerial situation; the needs, goals,

and expectations of individuals; and the level of leadership skill; different leadership styles may have different consequences for organizational effectiveness.<sup>5</sup>

Another example considers a combination of leadership styles such as the continuum of leadership styles proposed by Tannenbaum and Schmidt.<sup>6</sup> Seven gradations of styles ranging from boss-centered leadership, in which the manager makes the decision and announces it, to the other extreme of subordinate-centered leadership where the manager permits subordinates to function within definable limits. The manager must be honest in describing what authority he is keeping and what role he is asking subordinates to assume in solving a particular problem. In addition the manager adjusts his leadership style in light of his perception of the job situation. A somewhat different approach is taken by Fiedler<sup>7</sup> in the development of a contingency model. He asks the question "What kind of leadership style for which situation" or put another way he advocates fitting the leadership job to the man. This engineering approach depends on a predictor called the least preferred co-worker (LPC) measure which the manager subjectively determines for a particular job situation. Based on a relative rating scale, a manager can assess the interaction of his leadership style and the situational favorableness. In applying his contingency model of effective leadership to twenty five diverse investigations, including small military

units, Fiedler concluded that clear evidence existed that situational components determine, in part, the type of leadership style that a particular group requires for effective performance.<sup>8</sup>

Lorsch and Lawrence note in their book entitled Organization and Environment that the literature suggests the utility of divergent managerial styles with a concomitant focus on the one best way to organize in all situations.<sup>9</sup> They propose an integrative style of leadership where integrators are charged with collaboration among departments to achieve unity of effort through the demands of the environment.<sup>10</sup> These integrators are, in essence, project managers who serve as a linking pin between highly differentiated functional specialists. The authors suggest that an effective integrator is one who can assume the thought processes and behavioral patterns of those with whom he works in order to improve communications between departments and thus help solve interdepartmental disagreements.<sup>11</sup> One apparent danger in this approach is an integrator who is too empathetic would soon lose the independency of his role. Assuming an integrative leadership style requires individuals with broad knowledge to deal with orientational ways of thinking and the ability to strike a good balance between the extremes of specialized departments.<sup>12</sup>

The last leadership style to be considered is based on personal observation of military leadership under a variety of situational roles. Labelled "a crisis leadership style"

for lack of better words, it seems to characterize military leadership for putting out fires or getting a job done on time. This style is understandable under some operational situations, but there is a strong tendency for carry-over into the confines of shore-based activities in a peacetime environment. Generally speaking, crisis style leadership is indicative of a lack of planning particularly noteworthy during late Friday afternoon flaps. Another characteristic of this style is the "shot gun" approach where more than one lower level military manager will be assigned the same task, perhaps to insure overkill, to satisfy the higher level manager of the desired results. Inevitably, this latter approach results in wasted manhours and considerable frustration for the competing parties. A better technique would be to assign one man a task, and hold him accountable, rather than running off in several directions at the same time.

#### An Approach

Leadership styles based on theory are oftentimes developed in the intellectual atmosphere of a college laboratory untroubled by the usual pressures of a job situation. However, a good theory can be used to organize numerous research findings and serve as a basis for generalizing good research.<sup>13</sup> But management is a highly individualized art and what leadership style works for one manager in a particular situation may not produce the desired results for another manager

in a similar situation, or even the same manager in a different situation.<sup>14</sup> There is no one best way to manage and no one managerial style is infallible; hence it is proposed that a natural leadership style<sup>15</sup> consistent with the manager's own unique personality to exercise authority in a way which is appropriate to the characteristics of the situation and the people involved.

The natural leadership style is not intended to be a simplistic model but rather it provides a practical framework within which the military manager can adjust to changing leadership roles. As such, this style takes into consideration the key elements for the various situations in which today's military manager is confronted. Perhaps foremost among these elements is individual adaptation which takes into account the expectations, values, and interpersonal skills of the people with whom the manager is interacting.<sup>16</sup> When a manager behaves in ways that do not fit his personality, his behavior is apt to communicate something different from which the manager intended. Consequently, this adaptive technique seeks to minimize the influence of the manager due to his hierarchical position alone. As noted by Likert, a manager's style of leadership is more important in influencing results than such factors as individual attitudes towards the organization or job interest.<sup>17</sup>

A second fundamental element of the natural leadership style is that it is mission-oriented. The primacy of this

factor in an operational setting is sometimes overshadowed by other variables in today's managerial climate, but a military manager realizes that the *raison d'être* of a military organization or activity is to support some overall national security requirement. This higher level objective necessitates that personal desires and goals must, on occasion, be set aside to accomplish what the organization is supposed to do. In essence, there are times when organization's mission, such as in war, becomes the controlling factor.

Another important element of a natural style of leadership is role-playing as an internalization of a manager's behavioral system characterized by Shepherd as "a strategy or set of strategies for a person to employ as he seeks to accomplish his objectives."<sup>18</sup> Some factors influencing a manager's strategies might include his personal values, his needs, his perception of his own capabilities, and his perceptions of those people with whom he works. Subconsciously, the manager is placed in a position of self-evaluation in which he must weigh the effect of his strategies in his own mind if he experiences failure in meeting his objectives or plays out his strategies. Role-playing involves an interpersonal attitude with a recognition that a psychological barrier exists between subordinates and superiors in order to avoid undue frustration of personal needs and job strain. Particularly, in a military environment the ability to employ a variety of personal strategies to achieve objectives is an underlying requirement.

In a military leadership environment there is the tendency for power to reside only at the highest level of the organization. For the natural leadership style, shared power should be an elemental consideration if for no other reason than individuals nowadays desire a role in those factors which affect them and their jobs. This paradoxical concept which is somewhat foreign to the military hierarchy implies that "you have to turn all your so-called followers into leaders."<sup>19</sup> The distinction between the individual and the organization tends to narrow when the individual perceives the compatibility of his role and the organizational goals. A so-called follower who has a vested interest in the organizational health because he is truly a participating member will not only be more productive but he will also achieve a higher degree of self-actualization within the organization.

Lastly, the natural leadership style requires that the military manager assume an integrative role within the organization to ensure that the lines of communication between different departments are kept open and are receptive to new ideas and concepts. Increasing rates of technological change will require a "high differentiation between specialist managers in functional units and tight integration among these units."<sup>20</sup> The Navy, for example, has recently restructured the enlisted job classifications where the top enlisted men are designated as managers; the skilled technicians are called journeymen; and the novices are considered apprentices. With these new job

classifications, the officer will be integrating and solving departmental problems across a spectrum of technical managers each with their own viewpoints framed within their functional areas and job skills. In many ways this situation is somewhat akin to the project manager's role which was previously described.

An underlying assumption of the natural leadership style is that "the traditional patterns of managing are not adequate to cope with change factors in our swiftly developing world, and bold methods are called for."<sup>21</sup> Coping with change caused by changing missions, activity reorganization, and reduced forces entails a flexible and adaptive attitude in the future. The military manager should not become wedded to a specific role or way of thinking that he cannot shift gears when faced with another change. To paraphrase the ancient Greek philosopher Heraclitus -- everything changes -- which is probably more characteristic of a military organization than most others. A forward-looking officer will consider change in a positive aspect and an expected part of his career development is to meet these new and challenging requirements.

Maintenance of a natural style leadership in the face of future change factors will require a certain amount of outside effort by the military manager. In high technology areas, a new engineer is generally considered technically obsolescent after three to five years if he has not furthered his education either through formal course work or individual study

efforts. Likewise, managerial skills will tend to deteriorate over time, although the apparent loss is somewhat slower and subtler than in engineering. Many middle-grade military managers prematurely peak out due, in part, to a lack of additional outside application. Recognizing that all officers cannot obtain advanced management degrees, the services attempt to send a limited number of selected officers to short seminar management courses offered at various civilian universities. These executive management programs typically involving several weeks of total immersion and interaction with managers from private industry are probably of limited value without periodic reinforcement. A more practical approach for the natural style leadership manager to update his managerial skills and to keep abreast of the latest management innovations is to develop the habit of reading for ideas from periodicals such as the Harvard Business Review or Fortune. While many new concepts may have a business flavor, oftentimes these ideas can be adapted to suit the military situation. The extent of individual continuing education imposes an additional time constraint on most overburdened managers, but a few minutes each day to ones avocation is worth the return on investment.

In recognition of the inevitable changing missions of the services and the demands of individuals as well as those special interest groups requires that the leader is not

bounded by absolutes. Lawless recommends a Theory Z management which recognizes that management styles must adjust to the needs of the organization at whatever stage of evolution is reached.<sup>22</sup> In effect, this suggests that once the leader is aware of a problem that available data is collected and analyzed; a tentative solution is developed; and an experiment is conducted for validation purposes. This seemingly scientific approach to problem solving involves essentially an iterative process of identifying those independent variables which affect the dependent variable, i.e., the problem, and then adjusting those independent variables until some form of acceptable solution is evolved. One cautionary remark prior to experimentation suggested by Herzberg is that the leader check with the organization's old-timers to determine whether an innovation or new job design has been tried before.<sup>23</sup>

The success of a natural leadership style manager will be dependent, in a large part, on the leadership climate or tone set for the organization by top management and the perception of the organization by individuals and groups.<sup>24</sup> The attitudes and administration of organization policies by top management tend to be pervasive; particularly in a military activity, a manager more often than not is under considerable pressure to reflect the leadership climate evident at the higher levels. To achieve cohesiveness within the management hierarchy, it may be necessary for top management to readjust their current

methods of thinking and doing business if the organization is to remain effective in a competitive environment. This point was poignantly demonstrated in the research findings of Fleishman et al., that providing human relations training to supervisors is wasted unless the organization environment including the leadership climate was also strong in human relations.<sup>25</sup>

### Management Realities

There are some inherent limitations in proposing the advocacy or acceptance of a specific leadership style such as the natural leadership style. Where the perceived differences in styles are not great, adaptations to another style may be fairly successful. But as observed by McGregor, changing styles is complex and difficult and in some cases "logical" argument, persuasion, managerial policy changes and even direct pressure are seldom effective in bringing about significant alterations in style."<sup>26</sup> Many military managers undoubtedly will feel themselves in an unsettling transition in leadership styles especially where one of the primary problems is personnel management. The insensitivity to personal feelings coupled with a fear of losing control will turn off many managers on a leadership style with a behavioral science implication.<sup>27</sup> These attitudes are partly due to the technical backgrounds of many managers requiring a logical, systematic approach-which tends to negate sensitivity to

individuals and feelings.

A personal risk is involved for the innovative manager whose leadership style is not in consonance with the leadership climate established at the higher levels. Rocking the boat or accomplishing ones assignment in a way that does not have the approval of a manager's superior may have disastrous consequences. The conservative military leader may desire to minimize any uncertainty affecting his promotion opportunities which is one of the major reward factors for recognition of a job well-done. As a result, some managers will seek a middle-of-the-road approach involving some disjointed combination of classical and behavioral science theory.

The vast majority of military managers have developed the flexibility and adaptability to adjust to changing assignments which entail learning new technical and managerial skills which is considered one of the earmarks of a professional officer. These individuals will take the extra step required to develop their natural leadership style through experimentation, off-duty hour courses, and selective reading. However, there is a wide disparity between culling out those nuggets of managerial wisdom and practical application in the arena of technological change. In the final analysis, "the observational studies of leadership must, in the end, be gauged by empirical evidence."<sup>28</sup>

Lastly, there will exist those military managers who

are reluctant to change preferring instead to rely on the traditional "carrot and stick" or other forms of the reward-punishment methods to improve productivity and to achieve the organizational goals. Some of these managers may even place their reliance on the somewhat outmoded concept of command presence -- "that aura which accompanies the commander wherever he is, extending outward as a force field, often to great distances, by direct and indirect and by formal and informal changes of communication."<sup>29</sup> The charisma-like qualities of command presence seem more in keeping with those exceptional military leaders of past years engaged in combat. Military leaders today and in the future must be in tune with the real world or time will pass them by.

### Summary

The military leadership style dilemma is faced with two basic problems: organizational change involving people and technological sophistication. Military managers who survive in the future are those willing to shed old-fashioned techniques and adopt new styles of leadership with implications for different psychological contracts between the individual and the organization and new communications patterns among people. The officer's "successful adaptation of his leadership style to each situation will determine how effective he is."<sup>30</sup> In addition, his individual qualities and his ability to behave situationally will provide him a firm

basis to maneuver with the changing times. The natural leadership style provides a convenient framework within which the totality of all managerial functions may be accomplished.

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