

Leadership Development: A Closer Look at Leadership in the Military

Leadership within the Household

Growing up in a military household has brought both victories and challenges. There is a sense of pride and practicality that underlies everything that goes on. If you wish to go on a jaunt across the local countryside, then one must spend an hour the night before mapping out a route and making a list of equipment to take. This behaviour has led to some amazing trips, as the preparation has allowed us to go on longer and more exciting hikes. However, the amount of effort put in means that it is difficult to be spontaneous and laid-back. You cannot easily wander over to the local coastal path, there needs to be a plan involved. This example demonstrates the basic positives and negatives of a military lifestyle, and how this leadership style affects everyday behaviour. Growing up in this environment has affected how I approach projects and teamwork. The details of this are expanded upon in the next few sections.

The Practices and Problems with Military Leadership

In the military, you will find a wide range of leaders and leadership styles. Different people are expected to lead at different levels, so there is a broad range of training available to make this hierarchical structure practical and applicable. The main acronym used in the Royal Marines leadership training is JUBWICK (Judgement, Bearing, Willpower, Integrity, Courage, and Knowledge). (Taylor, 2020) These six skills are qualities that a leader is meant to have, where the expectation is that the person in charge will be acting as a role model. They are out in front. They are setting the standard. Instead of a civilian managerial stance of saying "you will do this", the Royal Marines build their core beliefs on the saying "we will do this". It is the classic difference between being a leader and a manager, as discussed on many occasions over the 2 years of Laidlaw leadership training. It is an important distinction, but in the military, it could mean the difference between life and death.

There are three main approaches to leadership in the military, and these three styles are swapped between depending on the situation. (Wepman, 2020) The hierarchical structure is strict and gives those in a higher band a rigid control on which of these styles is best to apply.

Authoritarian

Authoritarian leadership is normally what you imagine when you think of a military leader. If you have ever seen Full Metal Jacket, you may be familiar with the drill sergeant figure roaming up and down the line of recruits, screaming in their faces and keeping everyone silent and still. This is not an accurate representation of authoritarian leadership. It is usually applied during basic training to teach obedience and respect, but it does not include yelling or abuse. Rather, it is about strictness and unyielding power.

This sort of leadership can be chosen by commanders to apply during combat or emergency missions. It would include telling the team the exact details of the operation, like who is doing what job, the timings, the groupings, what the mission is and how it is broken down into different phases. This is because in these sorts of situations, there is not enough time to debate orders or come to a consensus. Doing so could cause injury to civilians or troops, property damage to the surrounding area, or mission failure.

However, this approach brings with it discontent and disenchantment from subordinates. The lack of representation or power in the proceedings will lead to frustration as their voices are not being heard. Authoritarian leadership is recommended to be applied for short intervals only, so the rigidity does not make followers unmotivated.

Democratic

As the name would suggest, Democratic leadership is where leaders will consult with one or more followers to make decisions. This style offers the most autonomy to subordinates and is useful for promoting camaraderie and teamwork within the unit. The team members will be able to pick up and develop their skills by getting opportunities to take an active role and make decisions. This type of leadership is used after basic training is complete, and its aim is more towards skill advancement and forming coherence in the unit. However, this leadership style will not get much use out on the field as making decisions will take much more time and it is difficult to make compromises with everyone in the unit. It is purely for training purposes.

Free-Reign

The Free-Reign style of leadership is the middle ground of other two. There is freedom in decision making, but it is all under the supervision of a leader. An example of this type of

leadership in use is when a Commander is given a task by his superior. The superior officer gives a mission, and the commander can then use their own knowledge, experience, and training to achieve the mission. The delegation of responsibility gives competent team members experience in leading and relying on their own skills and can also provide more time for the leader so they can move on to more important tasks. If you have somebody on the team who has expertise in a particular subject, it would be sensible to delegate those types of tasks to the subordinate who has more knowledge on how to complete the job than the leader. Free-reign leadership maintains the hierarchical structure of control but allows the experts to perform duties without interruption. It is the typical form of leadership used for mission command, mainly on routine operations, but it can also be used in non-operational scenarios.

It is clearly seen that a lot of decision-making in the military usually falls on an individual making choices and passing that information to a subordinate to carry out. There does not appear to be a lot of diplomacy or discussion between leaders and followers, but a quote from S. Goodwill tells us that this is not always the case. He states “Despite the intensity [of training], the objective was not mindless obedience, but to follow (and question) orders while encouraging initiative and dependability.” (Goodwill, 2016) This will usually only appear in extreme circumstances, but followers are encouraged to consider the consequences and morality of orders given to them but an authority figure. There is more going on than just a rigid control over people, care and effort is given to ensuring abuse of power is not tolerated and safeguards are in place.

The lessons one can learn from looking deeper into military leadership are how to prepare properly, how to focus on a task and how to direct orders to those around you that are most competent at carrying out the task. The ability to switch between different styles of leadership is important, but within the military structure it is still rather limited in scope. For civilians, as most people are, a more diplomatic approach would suit many more situations. The unwavering structure is also not as applicable, as most institutions do not have such a rigid hierarchy and will expect more communication between superiors and subordinates.

As with all leadership styles, there will be lessons to take away and problems to iron out. To find more adaptability and diplomacy another branch of leadership outside of the military must be explored.

Finding Other Leadership Styles

This year, our Laidlaw training looked upon a way of categorising leadership styles into five main categories as seen in Figure 1: Visionary, Coaching, Democratic, Commanding, and Affiliative. The simple groupings meant an easy understanding and visualisation of the topic, and an interest was sparked to delve further into what the categories meant and how to apply their best attributes most effectively.



5 Most Common Leadership Styles

Figure 1 - The five most common leadership styles arranged with their simplified meaning (White, 2019)

The main styles that military leadership falls under is Commanding, so we shall ignore this for the moment as we have already explored it in detail above. The leadership also dips into Coaching and Democratic styles, and these two styles are of most interest to further develop.

Someone whose focus is coaching a team will put large amounts of effort into cultivating and developing the skills, knowledge, experience, and confidence of their followers. (White, 2019) Time will be taken to walk people through tasks and educate them on how best to approach it, so that if later on another similar job turns up, the team member will feel more comfortable and confident in carrying out the task without the aid of a supervisor. It is all about giving

effort and time in the short term to reap the rewards of a content and experienced team in the long term.

Democratic leadership is fuelled by gathering team members opinions before a decision is made. This would include giving feedback and ideas to a leader, which means that there has been a chain of testing the product or task before the result is given. By gathering multiple viewpoints and suggestions, one would usually end up with a much more creative and complex solution as you will get people from all different walks of life commenting on the work. This can result in maximising effectiveness of a solution and making everyone on the team feel like they have participated. There are two ways to put this leadership style into practice. One is having a large brainstorming discussion at the beginning of a task to get as many ideas as possible, thereby allowing the leader to select the most suitable one. The second is for the leader to propose an idea or scheme to the group and asking them to vote on whether it gets implemented, or just give general feedback to make the single idea better. This would take more time and could lead to some conflict, but if respect and time is given to all parties, then the team itself is can be more cohesive and can create the best possible project outcomes.

Coaching, Democratic, and Demanding leadership styles are the ones that are commonly found in industry and workplaces. As these are the types that one is most probable to come across, taking these ideas and gaining experience applying them to different situations is the best course of action to take at this moment in time. The Affiliative and Visionary styles have their time and place but are not as useful for somebody about to enter the workplace. They are more frequently found in social situations or cultural-based pursuits, like leading a church or constructing an activist movement. They are important, but not always the main lesson taken away from the talks given during leadership training.

What Does the Future Hold?

Being able to identify the different leadership styles is a massive step in improving one's ability to lead a group of people. From the information in military sources we see not all styles apply to every situation, so selecting a few approaches to leadership and switching between them allows people to be adaptive. The more leadership styles one is comfortable using means the

more situations one can effectively take charge. Everyone will have different priorities in which style to learn first, but in a military household, some leadership types are already ingrained into the way you interact with the world.

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Note: some of the information presented here can only be found on the MOD network, so some sources have been left out due to inaccessibility and have instead been credited through the interview with J. Taylor.