



A COMMANDER'S FIRST CHALLENGE: ESTABLISHING A PATHWAY OF
TRUST

GRADUATE RESEARCH PAPER

Jesper R. Stubbendorff, Major, USAF

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AIR UNIVERSITY

AIR FORCE INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, Ohio

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Jesper R. Stubbendorff, MS

Major, USAF

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Jesper R. Stubbendorff, MS
Major, USAF

Committee Membership:

Lt Col Robert E. Overstreet, PhD
Chairman

Abstract

This research focuses on the concept of systematically engineering a pathway of trust for squadron commanders in the Air Force. Leadership is the most important characteristic that a commander brings to their organization and has a significant impact on the effectiveness of his or her unit. The goal of a commander is to be able to influence their people to achieve a desired end state. In order for a commander to be able to influence an individual they need to have a relationship with that person and the key to that relationship is trust. Specifically, this research focuses on the concept of Swift Trust and how a commander can quickly establish trust with their Airmen. Trust is vital to a commander in the Air Force based on what a commander may ask an individual to do and sacrifice. By focusing on the antecedents and outcomes of trust, this research investigates what a leader specifically needs to do in order to quickly establish trust within their unit. Through focus groups and interviews with officers and senior non-commissioned officers in the Air Force, this research supports the need for a commander to quickly develop trust with members of their unit and offers a systematic pathway for building trust. The data highlights and demonstrates the importance of trust within a military organization and what a commander can do in order to quickly earn and maintain the trust of his or her unit.

To my wife and kids, thanks for providing the motivation and encouragement

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Jesper R. Stubbendorff

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A COMMANDER'S FIRST CHALLENGE: ESTABLISHING A PATHWAY OF TRUST

I. Introduction

Background

The Air Force Doctrine Document (AFDD) on Leadership and Force Development states that trust is “the vital bond that unifies leaders with their followers and commanders with their units” (AFDD1-1, 2011: ii). Trust has been identified as “the new core of leadership” (Green, 2012). With the understanding that trust is extremely important to being an effective and influential leader, we can apply this importance directly to an Air Force squadron commander. Not only is trust vital to being an effective leader and commander, but this trust needs to be established quickly based on the nature of the military, which demands effectiveness and excellence immediately.

Swift Trust is a unique form of trust that occurs between groups or individuals brought together in temporary groups or teams to accomplish specific tasks, often under certain time constraints (Fahy, 2012). Swift Trust was first coined by Meyerson, Weick and Kramer (1996) and has become more and more popular as a discussion and research topic in recent years. Swift Trust implies that trust can be developed quickly in certain environments and organizations. With the current environment in the Air Force where squadron commanders typically serve for only two years, Swift Trust may provide an avenue for increased operational performance and positive employee job attitudes (i.e. organizational commitment and job satisfaction).

Deployed commanders must build trust within their units even more quickly than a commander in a traditional unit given the compressed timelines of down-range

command tours. Typically, deployments are between 4 and 12 months with a mix of personnel from units around the world. In a deployed environment, the unit is in a heightened ready state and usually closer to a combat zone. In these environments, unit members typically show up prepared for combat on day one and have little to no time to acclimate to their new unit and members of their unit. There is very little time to get to know each other and in addition to being in a deployed environment, the operational requirements and mission sets usually carry greater ramifications. This means that there is less room for error and individual actions can either save or take a life. The pressure of being deployed is much greater and so is the threat to one's life.

Effective leadership is extremely important to an Air Force squadron. A squadron commander is responsible for hundreds of individuals, vital missions which directly affect national security, and a wide array of physical resources and equipment. This issue of trust is a common concern across the Air Force and the military. The Air Force has seen a significant decrease in manning over the past 25 years. This means that the Air Force has to be even more effective since their mission set is increasing, yet their manning is decreasing (Losey, 2015). In December 2015, the Chief of Staff of the Air Force, General Mark A. Welsh III, stated that "virtually every mission area" faces critical manning shortages. He continued, "We can't reach in someplace and grab more manpower to fix a problem anymore. And we have got to figure out different ways of using our people in a more efficient way or we will wear them out. And if we lose them, we lose everything" (Losey, 2015). The Air Force is in fact losing many qualified and exceptional individuals due to their lack of faith and trust in their commanders and the Air Force as an organization (Stahl, 2015). Now is an appropriate time to study this

important issue as retaining the desired individuals in the Air Force is getting more and more difficult. This study may have a significant impact on the Air Force moving forward as command and leadership has significant consequences to the overall effectiveness of the Air Force and the individuals within those organizations.

Problem Statement

If the Air Force does not increase the level of trust with its personnel it may be heading down a road from which it may be incredibly difficult to recover. Research has shown that trust is incredibly important to being a successful leader (Sweeney, 2010; Zand, 1972; Covey, 2008). Trust is even more important to an Air Force commander whose sole purview is to accept the responsibility of sending Airmen into harm's way (AFDD1-1, 2011). In today's Air Force, where manning is lower than it has been at any point, suicides are at an all-time high and where the military is struggling to retain its best leaders; trust is more important than ever. If the Air Force were to increase the level of trust between its commanders and the personnel whom they command, there would likely be a significant increase in effectiveness and efficiency.

Research Objectives and Questions

The focus of this research will be on the establishment of Swift Trust between squadron commanders and subordinates. Air Force leaders must act in a decisive manner in order to influence their subordinates (AFDD1-1, 2011). The goal of this research is to identify tools and practices that squadron commanders can utilize to quickly and effectively establish trust within their organizations. Research has shown that trust is

about relationships (Hunter, 1998) and that a commander needs a relationship with those individuals whom they command in order to have influence over them.

As a result, the following research question has been developed: As trust is an important part of successful command how can a commander build trust quickly?

The following are additional investigative questions that this research will answer:

IQ1: Does a commander have the ability to build, develop and engineer trust?

IQ2: Are there ways for a commander to develop trust quickly?

Methodology

The researcher used focus groups and interviews to gather important primary data regarding Air Force members and their perspectives of trust. The Air Force members were Air Force officers (Lieutenants, Captains, Majors and Lieutenant Colonels) and Air Force senior non-commissioned officers (Master Sergeants and Senior Master Sergeants). These Air Force members represent a sampling of different Air Force Specialty Codes (AFSC) in order to capture the ideas and sentiments of the entire Air Force. The focus group and interview sessions all took place at Joint-Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst. There were three focus group sessions conducted ranging from seven to eight Air Force members per session. Following the focus groups, the researcher conducted one-on-one interviews with five different individuals not in the focus groups. This provided the ability to further quantify specific tasks that commanders can implement in order to quickly establish trust within a squadron and specific steps that a commander can take to build that trust. The emphasis of these meetings was to establish a checklist or a Tactics,

Techniques, and Procedures (TTP) type document to aid commanders in quickly establishing trust within their units.

Scope, Assumptions and Limitations

While this research may be of relevance to all commanders, the emphasis of this research is on the squadron commander in the Air Force. Thus, some of the concepts and ideas expressed may not be directly relatable to all commanders. Additionally, time and feasibility limit the number of Air Force members that could be contacted for this research. Consequently, there are some AFSCs which were not represented in the study. Because it is not possible to interview everyone in the Air Force, there may be additional ideas which are applicable for a commander to utilize in developing quick trust within their unit which this work failed to fully capture. There is also the possibility that the suggestions and ideas generated from the data collection will not be universally accepted; consequently, the ideas may not be applicable to every squadron commander and their unique units.

Implications

The findings of this research have the potential to aid squadron commanders in more effectively leading their squadrons. Commanders will be provided with a document (checklist/TTP style document) with specific examples and ideas from which they can reference and utilize to build and grow Swift Trust within their units. As trust is cultivated and grown within the unit, the unit will become more effective. The trust which has been developed will serve to benefit the individuals within the unit because members of the unit will feel supported and empowered by their commanders.

Additionally, it is possible that an increase in trust will lead to higher retention levels in the Air Force, less suicides, and a stronger and more powerful Air Force.

Summary

The remaining sections include a thorough literature review of trust, Swift Trust, and specifically how that trust can be developed quickly within an organization. There is a review on recent research that has been done regarding trust and its role in leadership. In the methodology section, a thorough explanation is offered regarding the focus groups and the interviews that were conducted with Air Force officers and senior non-commissioned officers. The results and conclusion section summarizes the data and provides recommendations and suggestions to physical actions and steps that commanders can take to quickly build trust within their units.

II. Literature Review

Chapter Overview

This chapter steps through a brief history of trust and what trust is. Following a summary of trust the focus shifts toward Swift Trust and its similarities and differences from traditional trust. Research is then presented on the application of Swift Trust in organizations and the potential benefits and applications of Swift Trust in the military. The literature review concludes with pointing out why it would benefit a squadron commander in the Air Force to quickly build trust within their unit and sets the stage for the methodology section of specifically how a commander can establish Swift Trust to make their unit both more effective and efficient.

Defining Trust

Trust, as a topic of study, has a long history and a diverse background. Much has been written and discussed regarding trust and exactly what it is and its importance. Consequently, there are many definitions and varying opinions as to what trust is and what it is not, and exactly how it should be defined. For example, when asking someone, “What is trust?,” it can oftentimes be difficult for a person to describe exactly what it is. It is often easier for an individual to answer with what trust is not. This is why trust is commonly referred to as “being broken” and rarely referred to as “being kept, built, or strengthened” (Bass, 2008).

In order to further discuss trust, it is important to first define exactly what trust is. As previously stated, there are many formal definitions of trust and they all focus on the relationship or interaction between people and it being associated with a positive

outcome. Throughout this research paper, trust will be defined as it is by Fulmer and Gelfand as a “psychological state comprising willingness to accept vulnerability based on positive expectations of a specific other or others” (2012: 1174). This definition of trust states that there are positive expectations associated with trust. For the purpose of this research, trust is always positive and if trust is broken or nonexistent, then that is a negative. Although there are many slightly different definitions of trust, most of the definitions include a willingness to accept vulnerability, along with the positive expectations and outcomes that come from trustworthiness. For these reasons, trust is commonly referred to as being something positive. For example, “I trust that they will do the right thing” or “just trust me.” In these examples there is an expectation of trust which is doing the right thing or having a positive outcome. Even when someone says, “I do not trust them at all,” the person making the claim is certain (or positive) that the individual they are referring to will fail them or let them down. Thus, the negative phrase (do not) in front of the word trust provides the negativity.

When referring to trust within an organizational unit or squadron, the psychological state (referenced in the definition of trust) can be used to refer to the unit’s shared psychological state. With this understanding and definition of exactly what trust is, trust can be further investigated with a clear picture of specifically what is being discussed. It is now possible to more deeply examine trust and its importance to being a successful commander and leader.

According to author and scholar Patrick J. Sweeney, trust is vital to leadership because the level of trust followers have in a leader directly impacts their willingness to accept that leader’s influence (2010). At the same time, a leader’s trust in followers

makes him or her more open to their influence (Sweeney, 2010). Trust in leader–follower relationships specifically facilitates open communication, mutual cooperation, mutual dependence, and empowerment. All of these techniques and attributes contribute to the establishment of positive relationships which greatly enhance both individual and group effectiveness (Sweeney, 2010).

General Norton Schwartz, the 19th Chief of Staff of the Air Force, stated that “trust is the vital bond that unifies leaders with their followers and commanders with their units. Trust makes leaders effective” (AFDD1-1, 2011: ii). Stephen M.R. Covey in his book, *The Speed of Trust*, stated that “the first job of a leader—at work or at home—is to inspire trust. It’s to bring out the best in people by entrusting them with meaningful stewardships, and to create an environment in which high-trust interaction inspires creativity and possibility” (2008: 319). The Chief of Staff of the Air Force, General Mark A. Welsh III, stated that in order for the Air Force to operate in the future, the Air Force of today needs “airmen who are ready and responsive, and demonstrate general qualities such as critical thinking, adaptive behaviors, innovation, creativity, collaboration, social networking skills, emotional and cognitive intelligence, initiative, and resilience” (AFFOC, 2015). These are the exact qualities that Covey (2008) describes as being the products of trust. Essentially, today’s airmen need trust. They need to know that their commanders and leaders trust them, which will in turn motivate, inspire, and empower them. Both scholars and military leaders alike believe that trust is important to being a successful leader.

Swift Trust

Traditionally, the most widely accepted understanding of trust has been that it is something that takes time to develop, build, and strengthen (Fahy, 2012). However, research into temporary groups and systems has identified a large degree of trust is established early in relationships (Fahy, 2012). Swift Trust is a unique form of trust that occurs between groups or individuals brought together in temporary groups or teams to accomplish specific tasks, often under certain time constraints (Fahy, 2012). Swift Trust was first coined by Meyerson, Weick and Kramer (1996) and implies that trust can be developed quickly.

Swift Trust is formed quickly out of necessity in order to manage the issues of uncertainty, risk, and perceptions between groups or teams. Based on the concept of temporary team-based designs, Swift Trust (and distrust) develops in a large part due to the diversity of team membership, limited history working together, task non-routineness, complexity, and interdependence (Meyerson, 1996). All of the conditions mentioned above are present in an Air Force squadron. One may not initially think of a squadron as temporary, but due to the constant inflow and outflow of individuals and the limited amount of time that an individual is actually assigned to a squadron (typically 2-4 years), the only semi-permanent aspect of the squadron is the patch, the mission, and its physical location and infrastructure. The concept of Swift Trust takes trust out of the personal form and instead focuses trust based on actions and tasks. Thus, Swift Trust becomes a strategy for groups or individuals as a means to manage vulnerability based on their roles rather than focusing on interpersonal relationships that may not yet have had time to form (Fahy, 2012).

As stated, Swift Trust focuses on the trust that is built through actions and tasks rather than through personal relationships, which traditionally take time to establish (Meyerson, 1996). After time, the trust built through accomplishing tasks and the trust built through building relationships begin to mesh together and become one in the same. This is the traditional form of trust that people conventionally think of when describing trust. Swift Trust explains how trust can be built or engineered quickly by replacing the time required to build traditional trust through action.

Application of Swift Trust

In Fahy's (2012: 30-31) research, he identifies several themes applicable to the formation of Swift Trust specific to military organizations which are listed below:

- o Swift Trust formation is affected by perceptions of different organizational goals.
- o Organizational culture of military affects Swift Trust negatively.
- o Negative perceptions of other organizations hinder Swift Trust formation.
- o Swift Trust is enhanced by action-based tasks.
- o Swift Trust grows as small tasks are accomplished.
- o Swift Trust is more easily developed when based on subject matter expertise.
- o Swift Trust can be affected by the equitable distribution of group assignments, both in terms of the number of assignments and the quality of assignments.
- o Swift Trust may be less likely if temporary group members are drawn from large labor pools.
- o The prospect of future interaction makes Swift Trust more likely.

- o Initial meetings between team leaders to identify roles and assigns tasks increases Swift Trust.
- o Standardizing procedures and utilizing common language institutionalizes Swift Trust.
- o Leaders positively influence Swift Trust development through regular, consistent communication with the temporary group.

Communication is essential to the establishment and development of Swift Trust. Research has shown that leaders who meet regularly and communicate consistently have a more positive impact on Swift Trust than those leaders who fail to do so (Hyllengren, 2011). Commanders have many opportunities to regularly and consistently communicate with their Airmen. One example of regular communication between a commander and his subordinates comes in the form of a Commander's Call (a meeting with the commander and all members of his or her unit). This is where a commander can relay information, keep unit members informed on current issues, recognize great accomplishments and outstanding performers, update members on the commander's mission and vision for the organization, and express how effectively or ineffectively the unit is achieving that mission and vision. It is also an opportunity for the commander to receive feedback from unit members in order for the commander to better lead the squadron and remain informed on how unit members are feeling and members' current issues and concerns. These Commander's Calls are essential for a commander to keep a pulse on the squadron and for the squadron members to feel that they can relate with and get to know their commander.

Research has also shown that organizations can learn through repeated interactions with individuals that other members of their organization are trustworthy (Beck, 2012). This is especially true when those individuals and unit members (who

need to establish trust) work side-by-side and together demonstrate their willingness to work toward collective organizational goals. These individuals are capable of building Swift Trust by bonding and organizing together towards a collective objective. As unit members work together and strive towards a common goal, these behaviors suggest a certain openness and vulnerability to the others. These traits foster and enable a more rapid development of trust. Essentially, traditional trust has been developed quicker through the establishment of Swift Trust. Swift Trust initially takes the place of traditional trust establishment based on unit or team members working together with a focus on common goals and objectives.

Trust at its core is about relationships (Hunter, 2000). This is why communication is such an important aspect to building trust and especially when trying to build it quickly. As the commander is out amongst their troops, spending time with them, directly communicating with them and building relationships with them, trust will be built more rapidly within the unit. When a commander has the trust of the people within his or her organization, he or she now has a greater ability to influence them. When a service member has a relationship of trust with their commander, the member now knows that their commander cares about them and understands them on a personal level. The service member knows that their commander has their best interests at heart and the Airman are more willing to accept the influence of their commander even if they do not understand why they are being asked to do something. Airmen are willing to fight even harder for their commander and for the mission of the unit when they have complete trust in their commander. Perhaps most important, the Airman are fighting out of love and respect for their commander and not out of fear or simply because they were ordered to

do so...they are fighting because they want to. It is important for Airmen to follow direct orders and to follow those orders implicitly, even if there is no trust. However, when there is trust, the Airmen have complete faith in their commander and doubt and uncertainty about the situation is overcome based on their relationship of trust.

Another key takeaway from Fahy's (2012) research is that as tasks and goals are accomplished (however small or miniscule they may seem), trust grows. The more tasks performed and accomplishments that are achieved, the quicker trust is built within the organization. Accomplishing organizational tasks and projects requires teamwork and communication. As these tasks and objectives are being accomplished, not only are the individual tasks being accomplished, but another product or accomplishment is that trust is being built within the unit. A great example of this principle is Squadron Officer School (SOS) for the Air Force. During this course, individual flights (teams consisting of approximately 12 officers) take on a Leadership Reaction Course (LRC) where they are required to accomplish a challenging task or obstacle that is timed. These obstacles require a significant amount of teamwork and communication. These tasks are impossible to accomplish individually and require the collective efforts of the team. The LRC is accomplished early on in SOS because the LRC brings the flight members together by quickly building trust through the accomplishment of tasks requiring communication and teamwork. In addition, during the LRC the "leader" during each obstacle changes requiring flight members to be both a leader and follower. Situations like these are manufactured and created to build trust within a group. There is no reason that a commander cannot create and accomplish similar tasks in order to facilitate, establish, and build trust within their unit.

Many of Fahy's (2012) findings linking the formation of Swift Trust and the military are aspects that a commander controls within his or her unit. Commanders control how often they meet with their unit members and influence what types of interactions individual unit members have with each other. Commanders control and influence the culture of their unit by how they lead their organization and the atmosphere which they establish. Commanders need to focus on eliminating negativity and setting a positive tone and atmosphere in their unit. Commanders need to be fair, transparent, and distribute tasks and assignments equitably. Although the military is a large organization, one can be assured that a military member will again encounter someone they know and have worked with previously in the future. Credibility is one of the most important traits of a military member and something they hold close and deeply value. Thus, most Airmen strive to put forth their best effort and embody the Air Force core values of integrity first, service before self, and excellence in all we do. Based on all the aspects of a squadron that a commander controls, they have a significant ability to influence the amount of trust that is present within his or her unit.

According to Stephen M.R. Covey (2008), trust is the one attribute that has the ability to change everything. If it is absent or lost, it has the ability to destroy the most powerful government, the most successful business, or the most influential leadership. On the other hand, if it is developed and created it has the potential to create unparalleled success and prosperity. Unfortunately, it is the "least understood, most neglected, and most underestimated possibility of our time" (Covey, 2008: 1). Covey further stated that "contrary to what most people believe, trust is not some soft, illusive quality that you either have or you don't; rather, trust is a pragmatic, tangible, actionable asset that you

can create—much faster than you probably think possible” (2008: 2). Trust is most definitely something that a commander or a leader can do something about; they can create and grow it.

There has been a wealth of research done in the academic community on leadership and trust, and how the two are related (e.g., Bass, 2008; Joshi, 2009; Hyllengren, 2011). Over the past two decades there is also research on the concept of Swift Trust and the idea that trust can be built (or should be built) quickly in certain environments and under certain conditions. However, this research has primarily been conducted with a focus on the business world and the private sector (Fahy, 2012). Research is also lacking when focusing on specifically what can be done within organizations to systematically engineer and to explicitly build Swift Trust. This is especially true when specifically focusing on the Air Force and other military organizations.

Research has proven that trust can be engineered, built and strengthened through cycles of interactions where each partner (in this case the squadron commander and Airmen) demonstrates a willingness to be vulnerable to the other party (Zand 1972). Trust develops and deepens each time a partner behaves in a cooperative manner when the other individual is vulnerable (Zand 1972). This research reiterates that through certain experiences and actions trust can be built, engineered, or strengthened. The Air Force has the ability (and the necessity) to provide leaders and commanders with the applicable skills and tools necessary to engineer situations and opportunities where each Airmen demonstrates a willingness to be vulnerable, thus building trust. According to

Zand (1972), commanders and leaders must be vulnerable if they want to build trust with others.

In the military, the idea of “being vulnerable” is usually thought of as a negative. For example, the military does not want to be vulnerable to cyber-attacks or vulnerable to other forms of attack or weapon systems. The military always wants to be able to control the fight and to have the proper defensive measures to oppose and defeat everything which it encounters. Thus, the idea of an individual being vulnerable does not come naturally to a military leader. However, the vulnerability required to build trust is on a personal level and it does not imply that a person is weak, incapable or inferior. It does not mean that subordinates cannot or will not follow orders or that subordinates will not respect their commander. Vulnerability represents that a person is human, that they are not perfect, which makes that person relatable by opening them up. Vulnerability then turns to transparency and when an individual is transparent they become trustworthy and a relationship of trust can be built with others.

The research presented thus far has shown that trust is important to being a successful commander and that a commander has the ability to influence the level of trust within his or her unit and may be capable of doing so quickly. However, a commander (or anyone for that matter) cannot directly control trust. In other words, since trust is a relationship, it takes at least two people to establish trust. Just because a commander wants someone to trust him or her does not mean that someone will. Even though a commander has authority over someone, this does not ensure that they have the trust of that individual, nor does it give them the ability to force the establishment of trust. Rousseau and her colleagues explain that trust is “a psychological state comprising the

intention to accept vulnerability based upon positive expectations of the intentions or behavior of another” (1998: 395). It is up to each individual to decide (or accept) if they are going to trust someone. It does not matter who a commander is, they cannot force someone to trust them, regardless of rank or position. However, what a commander can do is influence another individual’s decision to trust them. A commander needs to earn the trust of those they command. This is again why it is vital for a commander to be personable and have a relationship with those individuals whom they command and lead, because trust and authority are not the same thing (Blakey, 2015).

A study performed by Sweeney (2010) at West Point showed that leaders can leverage the trust reevaluation process that results from preparing to lead a group into a new environment. This is especially true when the new environment increases the vulnerability or risk to the group members’ welfare. Again, leaders can specifically take advantage of or create opportunities to demonstrate their abilities to enhance group members’ trust in them. These same opportunities are the opportunities that squadron commanders in the Air Force need to create and take advantage of in order to lead the most effective organization possible.

Sweeney specifically stated that the findings from his study have “implications for trust development models and theories and for leader development and training in organizations that operate in dangerous contexts such as military” (2010: 85). He also specifically stated that with regard to leader development, “leaders who understand the trust development process and the factors that prompt followers to reconsider trust can develop purposeful strategies to enhance trust with their followers” (Sweeney, 2010: 85). Sweeney (2010) explains the importance of a commander’s understanding of how trust is

built and the ability that a commander has to build trust within their unit. This ability to enhance trust will inherently increase a leader's ability to influence or lead.

As Covey stated, trust is something that can in fact be created, and contrary to what most people believe, trust can be created quickly (2008). Both of these ideas are contrary to what most people tend to believe and it needs to be emphasized. Many scholarly and military leaders also believe that trust cannot be built quickly, that it takes time and that nothing can replace the time which is required to build trust (Beck, 2014). Retired Air Force Lieutenant General Michael Short is a strong proponent of trust and the important role that trust has in being an effective leader. However, even he believes that "you can't surge trust" (Short, 2015). This is a common claim of many researchers and military leaders, who routinely state that both time and repeated interactions are necessary to successfully build trust (Beck, 2014). However, as Beck points out in his research, trust was developed in the Columbia Space Shuttle Response Effort without the element of time (2014).

During the response efforts to the Columbia Space Shuttle disaster in 2003, trust was initially established by situation based scenarios. After the situation based scenarios, trust was then further developed through relationship-based scenarios (Beck, 2014). Again, this is where Swift Trust reveals itself first, in the situational scenarios that the responders found themselves in. It was only after ample time, that the Swift Trust gave way to conventional trust. Initially, there was not time for traditional trust to form between the responding team members. However, the response team began working together immediately and this teamwork and working toward a common goal essentially replaced the time constraint required to build trust.

Swift Trust is most prevalent when a group faces complex tasks and must make quick choices in uncertain situations (Meyerson, 1996). In these situations, group members cannot make choices based on previous experiences and repeated events to build their trust (Beck, 2014). The early stages of trust are typically developed in direct reaction to the situation faced by the collective group. As Beck reports in the Columbia Space Shuttle Response Effort, “Swift Trust enabled groups to adapt to the situation, take further coordinated actions, and build relationships that formed the basis of more conventional trust, which characterized the remainder of the collective effort” (2014: 1242).

The fact that time is essential to establish and build trust is a common misconception. Although there is value to having time to build and develop trust, it is not essential nor the most important factor. As the Air Force educates its commanders on how they can effectively create and build trust within their units, the Air Force will become even more effective and successful. Trust is a force multiplier and it is more than just a warm and fuzzy feel good story to tell. It has been proven that trust can enable individuals to be more effective collectively as it strengthens bonds and unifies the organization. Likewise, if trust is non-existent or lacking, it can prove to be devastating.

For example, when the United States military was departing Iraq in 2011 they provided the Iraqi Army with state of the art weapons, vehicles, guns, and military training. The Iraqi Army was given essentially everything that they needed from a physical standpoint to be successful once the United States (U.S.) military left the country. However, when the Iraqi Army encountered enemy forces and militant groups such as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), they fled and deserted their posts

(Schmitt, 2014). The Iraqi Army had the superior weapons, but yet they would abandon their weapons and equipment and run away. The U.S. military gave the Iraqi Army virtually everything, but the one thing that the U.S. could not give them was trust, loyalty, and commitment (Smith, 2015). In fact, the Iraqi soldiers were wearing civilian clothes underneath their uniforms and would strip to their civilian attire to make it that much easier to flee and escape (Schmitt, 2014). This again shows the importance of trust and that it cannot be taken for granted and it is something that must be taught, created, and built. At the same time, trust can be as important (or even more important) than equipment, training, and physical resources (Bass, 2008).

In a 2000 study, Kurt Dirks studied assertion that a team's trust in a leader has a significant effect on the team's performance. Dirks examined 355 NCAA basketball players and their trust in their coach. He found that a player's trust in their coach correlated .57 with future performance and .60 with past performance of their teams (Dirks, 2000). Perhaps even more of a significant finding was that although the team's talent and experience added to the prediction of performance, "trust in the leader was an antecedent as well as a consequence of successful performance of these teams" (Bass, 2008: 261).

As history tells us and as Malcolm Gladwell recounts in his book *The Tipping Point*, on April 18, 1875 two men set out to warn the American colonists that the British were set to attack Lexington and planning to arrest the patriot leaders Samuel Adams and John Hancock. The two patriots selected for the important mission were Paul Revere and William Dawes. They were dispatched and sent out to warn the communities surrounding Boston that the British were on their way so that the local colonial militias

would be ready to meet the British. Revere's path was a northern route which took him through the towns of Charlestown, Medford, North Cambridge, and Menotomy. Dawes' route was a southern one and he was responsible for warning the towns west of Boston that the British were also preparing to attack. When the British began their advance on the morning of April 19th, they encountered two distinct levels of resistance. The British soldiers who marched through the towns alerted by Paul Revere were met with fierce resistance and were driven back by the colonial militias. The British soldiers who passed through the towns that were alerted by William Dawes passed through with virtually no resistance at all.

Why was this the case and how did it happen? Dawes was carrying the identical message that Revere was, yet when the British advanced through the towns that he alerted, the British met no resistance. It is said that Revere was better tied in to the local community and that he knew the proper people to contact and alert of the impending British attack (Gladwell, 2002). Revere was unquestionably more connected with the community and he had previously built relationships with the local leaders and militia members. In turn, they trusted him. Paul Revere carried the same message as that of William Dawes, both incredibly important, yet the result was very different. The local militia members knew Paul Revere, they had a relationship with him and they trusted him. This is the key as to why Revere was successful in his mission and Dawes was not.

In order to effectively create, establish, and then utilize trust, it must be taught, much like we teach new soldiers how to fire, clean, and care for their weapon. Much like we teach young aviators how to become a pilot and proficiently fly an aircraft. One cannot assume that all Airmen know and understand trust, what it is and how it is created.

The Air Force needs to train and teach trust, in the same fashion it teaches job skills and focuses on operational training.

In an interview with Retired Lieutenant General Michael Short, he laid out six steps essential for a commander to quickly build trust within their unit (2015). They are:

1. The commander needs to make clear what their intent/agenda is.
2. Be human, as a commander you will make mistakes, tell your people when you do.
3. As a commander, I will seek input on everything...if I have time. If there is no time, then trust me.
4. Tell me if you think I'm wrong, if I disagree then support me 100%. It's a two-way street.
5. As a commander I will look for opportunities to prove my trust.
6. As a commander, I must accept risk.

Due to the dynamic nature of the combat and deployed environment and the potential risk that Airmen encounter (including putting one's own or other lives on the line) in order to accomplish the organization's mission, mutual trust is demanded between leaders and soldiers. This trust is required in order to ensure leader and organization success (Ulmer, 1989). When considering the effectiveness of a leader, a platoon sergeant in the 101st Airborne Division expressed his view about the importance of trust and a commander. "If your men trust you, they will follow you into any situation" (Sweeney, 2010). The feelings of this platoon sergeant are certainly the sentiments shared by many others in the military. It clearly displays the importance of trust and its relationship to being an effective commander and leader.

A one or two-year period of command is not a lot of time for a commander to build trust with their Airmen. There is an adage that trust takes a lifetime to build and only a second to lose. There is obviously not a lifetime to build trust with an Air Force squadron commander and this situation is exasperated even more as new members of the unit are constantly joining the unit. It is imperative for a commander to be able to build and establish trust quickly so that they have the ability to properly influence and lead the unit. This is why it is imperative for commanders to have the ability to build Swift Trust within their units.

Summary

This chapter explained what trust and Swift Trust are, why they are important, and how trust makes leaders more effective. Real-world examples were shared showing how trust makes a leader and those who are being led much more effective in accomplishing their goals. The chapter explained why the establishment of Swift Trust can be extremely beneficial, if not essential, for a squadron commander in the Air Force. The stage is now set for the methodology chapter where research was conducted to specifically determine how a commander can quickly establish trust in his or her unit. The goal of this research will be to establish a pathway and a framework that commanders can follow to quickly establish trust with their Airmen.

III. Methodology

Chapter Overview

The nature of this paper and the research which has been conducted is qualitative in nature. The purpose of qualitative research is to focus on and better understand a particular social situation, event, role, group, or interaction (Locke, 2013). In this case, qualitative research is essential in order to delve deeply into Swift Trust and a commander's ability to build trust quickly with their Airmen. Qualitative research is essentially an investigative process where the researcher gradually explains a social phenomenon by contrasting, comparing, replicating, recording, and classifying the object of study (Miles, 1994). One unique characteristic of qualitative research is that the data which is collected is descriptive in nature. This descriptive data is primarily recorded in words, rather than numbers (Locke, 2013).

The qualitative research methods which were utilized in this research were focus groups and individual one-on-one interviews. Focus groups and interviews are very closely related. A focus group is essentially an interview where participants are interviewed together and they are able to make additional comments beyond their own original responses as they hear what the other participants have to say.

Focus Groups

A focus group is an interview with a small group of people on a specific topic. The groups are typically six to ten people with similar backgrounds who participate in the interview together for one to two hours. Normally in a given study, the researcher uses a series of different focus groups in order to get a variety of perspectives and increase the

confidence in whatever patterns emerge. The focus group is typically used when targeting a specific issue or area of concern which directly impacts and affects those who are being interviewed (Patton, 2002) or when exposing users to a new product or service to judge their reactions and their opinions on the product (Nielsen, 1997). A majority of the research that has been done on trust has used surveys (Sweeney, 2010) or scenario-based approaches (Adler, 2007) as their method to gather data.

Focus groups have several distinct advantages over other research methods. Focus groups make data collection cost-effective. Information can be gathered from eight people in the same time period required for a one-on-one interview, which could significantly increase the sample size. Focus groups are widely accepted within marketing research because they yield believable results at a reasonable cost. Focus groups also enhance the data quality based on the interactions among the participants. The participants essentially provide checks and balances on each other, which tends to normalize the data. At the same time, focus groups allow the researcher to quickly identify consistent or shared views as well as the extreme and diverse opinions (Patton, 2002).

Several other distinct advantages of focus groups are that they are a socially oriented research method which captures real-world data in a social setting with an emphasis on group interaction. Focus groups are flexible and have high face validity, meaning that they measure what they are intended to measure. A final reason that the researcher chose to utilize focus groups is that the group dynamic tends to bring out aspects of the topic and reveal information about the subject that may not have been anticipated by the researcher or emerged from individual one-on-one interviews. Focus

groups are ideal when the researcher has open-ended questions and desires the research participants to explore and identify the issues that are important to them in regards to that particular issue (Kitzinger, 1995).

With all the positive aspects of a focus group, there are also several limitations to focus groups. Due to the group setting of a focus group, there can be difficulty in asking a lot of questions and giving ample time to all respondents. The interviewer or moderator of the focus group also tends to have less control over the session and needs to manage the session to ensure that it is not dominated by one or two individuals. Additionally, the participants may be reluctant to voice their opinions if they feel they are in the minority and due to the number of participants confidentiality cannot be assured. Thus, it is best to avoid personal or highly controversial topics (Patton, 2002). Finally, the data gathered in a focus group can prove to be difficult to analyze due to its qualitative nature.

Focus group participants are generally selected based on their relevance and relationship to the topic of study. Typically, focus group participants are not chosen in an attempt to statistically represent a meaningful population (Kitzinger, 1995). However, for this research, the researcher felt it important to capture a representative sample of the various Air Force Specialty Codes (AFSCs) and the different squadron mission sets in the Air Force. It is hoped that the concepts derived from the focus groups and interviews will apply to all types of squadrons and organizations, regardless of their mission sets.

Interviews

One-on-one interviews provide the researcher with the ability to identify things which cannot be directly observed. It is difficult to observe feelings, thoughts, and

intentions without specifically asking an individual. The purpose of an interview is to enter into another person's perspective. Interviews allow the researcher to gather data when it is difficult to directly observe the participant. For the scope of this research it is impossible to observe every individual who participated in the focus groups on a daily basis to see how their commander is building trust with them. Additionally, interviews allow participants to provide historical data. Interviews also allow the researcher to have control over the questions being asked (Creswell, 2014).

There are some limitations to interviews. The quality of information obtained during an interview is mostly dependent on the ability of the interviewer (Patton, 2002). Additionally, interviews tend to provide indirect information filtered through the views of interviewees. There is also the factor that information is gathered in a designated place rather than the natural field and that the presence of the researcher may bias the responses (Creswell, 2014).

Research Methods

Focus groups and interviews were selected for this study in order to collect data on Swift Trust and how squadron commanders in the Air Force can develop and grow Swift Trust within their organizations. The use of focus groups and interviews will allow the researcher to capitalize on individual ideas, while building upon the ideas and comments of others. Once the focus groups are complete, the ideas from all the focus groups will be compiled and consolidated into specifics for the individual interviews.

The interviews will be coupled with the focus groups in an attempt to best answer the research question of: As trust is an important part of successful command, how can a

commander build trust quickly? Focus groups and one-on-one interviews were selected by the researcher as the primary data collection methods based on the qualitative nature of the research and their ability to gather information on trust while leveraging the ideas of others. This will provide the ability to further quantify specific steps that commanders can take in order to establish and build Swift Trust within a squadron. All of the focus groups and interviews were conducted at the Joint Base-McGuire, Dix, Lakehurst (JB-MDL).

Data was gathered from the focus group sessions and the one-on-one interviews in order to establish a framework for how a squadron commander can build and grow Swift Trust within their unit. This framework was then compared and vetted against academic research to put together a document which will provide specific ways for a squadron commander in the Air Force to establish and build Swift Trust within their organization. The questions and talking points as initiated by the researcher towards each focus group can be referenced in Appendix A.

Demographics

Three focus groups were conducted. The first focus group consisted of eight Senior Non-commissioned Officers (E-7 to E-9). There were three Master Sergeants and five Senior Master Sergeants. Their AFSCs included aerial port, maintenance, material management, and Commander's Support Staff. Senior Non-Commissioned Officers (SNCOs) were selected as one of the focus groups because they are leaders of the Non-commissioned Officer Corps and they deal closely with both the commander and the Airmen on a daily basis. They offer a unique perspective as to what the enlisted force

sees from their commander and have been in the Air Force for anywhere between eight and thirty years. The SNCOs in this focus group had an average of 18 years of military experience.

The second focus group consisted of eight Company Grade Officers (O-1 to O-3). The Company Grade Officers (CGOs) AFSCs included pilots, intelligence, logistics, cyber, and medical. CGOs provide the unique perspective having been in the Air Force typically between one to ten years and are the backbone of the officer corps. They are tasked with running the mission and carrying out the orders of the commander on a daily basis, mostly at the operational level. Two of the officers in this focus group were prior enlisted and the average time in service for the entire group was five years of military experience. Four of the CGOs were currently serving at their first duty station.

The final focus group was the Field Grade Officer (FGO) focus group. Six of the seven FGOs in the focus group were squadron commanders, with the seventh already selected to begin command in four months. They were all of the rank of Lieutenant Colonel (O-5). The squadrons they command included flying squadrons, support squadrons, maintenance squadrons, and contingency response squadrons. Lieutenant Colonel Squadron Commanders have typically been in the Air Force between 14 to 20 years, with the average for this focus group being 17 years. Squadron commanders bring the most diverse perspective to the research as they are currently squadron commanders and are the ones who are currently attempting to establish or are working to maintain trust with their Airmen. They are at the forefront of this research and the exact individuals who this research is attempting to benefit the most.

The one-on-one interviews provided the opportunity to refine the data collected from the focus groups. It allowed the researcher to re-attack and finalize findings which were not identified or discussed in every focus group. The interviews essentially provided closure and refinement and allowed for the recommendations of the three different focus groups to be vetted by a single source multiple times. The interviewees were selected and came from the same demographics which comprised the focus groups.

Five interviews were conducted and they lasted between 25 to 40 minutes each. The emphasis of these interviews was to verify the data gathered from the focus group sessions and to establish a quick reaction checklist or a Tactics, Techniques and Procedures (TTP) type document to aid commanders in quickly establishing and then maintaining trust within their units. The checklist would point out and reference effective and efficient ways that a Commander can quickly establish trust with their unit. The discussion topics for the interview will come directly from the participants' inputs from the focus groups which has been validated and supported by academic literature. Both the focus group sessions and the one-on-one interview sessions were recorded. This provided the opportunity to directly, although anonymously, quote the participants.

Validity and Reliability

Validity and reliability can be somewhat controversial in qualitative research due to the difficulty in showing reliability and validity in the traditional sense of quantitative research (Creswell, 2013). In this research, internal validity was derived from the convergence of the data. Over the course of three focus groups, five interviews, and an extensive literature review, there was convergence of the data, which is detailed in

Chapter 4. External validity focuses on the generalizability of the data and the extent to which the results apply to situations outside the scope of this study (Leedy, 2013). This is a slightly more problematic issue since the research focused on an Air Force Squadron Commander's ability to build trust with his or her Airmen. Although the research focused on the Air Force, many of the conclusions and results would likely apply to leaders in other military organizations, and possibly to organizations outside of a military setting.

The reliability of this research was strengthened through the multiple focus groups and interviews and their consistency of results. During the data collection process saturation was also achieved, where there were no new ideas or results being obtained following the completion of the focus groups and interviews. Although an exact replication of these results in another setting cannot be guaranteed (which is the case for almost all qualitative research), the results obtained from this research should be very consistent amongst another similar research setting.

Summary

The qualitative research methods utilized in this research were focus groups and individual one-on-one interviews. Focus groups were ideal for this study as they facilitate the quick identification of consistent or shared views as well as the extreme and diverse opinions (Patton, 2002). Three focus groups consisting of SNCOs, CGOs, and FGO squadron commanders were utilized for this research as well as five one-on-one interviews. The focus groups served as the primary means to gather the data and the

interviews then served to verify the data gathered and key concepts of how a commander can quickly build and maintain trust with their Airmen.

IV. Analysis and Results

Chapter Overview

This chapter combines the current research from Chapter 2 with the data and observations (primary evidence) that were gathered from the focus groups and interviews. The intent of this chapter is to specifically identify how a commander can build trust quickly with his or her Airmen. Specific steps and focus areas are laid out which will aid commanders in building trust. The final chapter of this paper will summarize the results and provide a visual framework (Appendix B) to assist commanders with building trust.

Data Analysis

Data were collected from both the focus groups and interviews and from a detailed literature review. In detail, over seven hours of interviews with 28 individuals equaling 130 pages of transcripts and 2,100 pages of reviewed literature have gone into this research. The data collected from the focus groups and interviews was so dense and rich that the researcher decided to “winnow” the data, which is a process of focusing in on some of the data and disregarding other parts of it (Creswell, 2014). Specifically, this research focused on the most pertinent and relevant information directly applicable to the research questions. The most common themes and ideas that kept reappearing in the three different focus groups and interviews is the foundation of this analysis and results chapter (Appendix A). The research literature and the data collected provide validity for the observations presented in this chapter. The researcher specifically aggregated the data collected from the focus groups into four main themes or areas which emerged after a thorough analysis of the data. These themes emerged from the data collected during the

focus groups and interviews and have been validated by the in-depth literature review. The four prevalent themes within the data collected and the specific stages that a commander needs to work through to build trust are: engage, connect, serve, and lead. These four steps provide a framework for what a commander needs to do in order to quickly build trust with their Airmen.

A Commander Needs to be Engaged

As previously noted in the literature review, in order to build trust a leader needs to meet with their people and to communicate with them regularly and consistently (Hyllengren, 2011; Sweeney, 2010; Hunter, 2000). The exact same sentiments were shared by all three of the focus groups. A squadron commander in the Field Grade Officer (FGO) focus group stated that “leadership is a contact sport.” A commander cannot lead without getting out with their troops and doing the job with them. Time spent with an Airman on the job shows that the commander values the Airman individually and values what that airman is doing. In fact, the focus groups said that sometimes the most important thing that a commander can do is to “simply show up.” A FGO who recently returned from the AMC Commander’s Course said that the 4-star general in charge of AMC was present for almost the entire week-long course. The General was present in almost all the briefings and the FGO stated, “His presence alone, his just showing up was enough. He did not have to say it was important, we knew it was important to him because he was there.” Here, the AMC Commander built trust as he showed that he valued the training the new squadron commanders were receiving and that it was important and significant for him to be there.

When a commander is present with their Airmen it also provides the opportunity for communication to take place and is an opportunity to provide feedback to an individual. Both communication and feedback were mentioned multiple times by all three focus groups as being highly significant to a commander's ability to build trust. In an interview, a squadron commander stated that being "consistent with your communication and then following through with the message that you communicated is a demonstration of your trust." Additionally, this communication should happen sooner rather than later. A commander or leader cannot afford to waste a single opportunity to communicate with their people or delay getting to know their unit. A commander cannot wait a month or more to deliberately communicate with their Airmen. Hyllengren has shown that leaders who meet regularly and communicate consistently have a more positive impact on Swift Trust than those leaders who fail to do so (2011).

All focus groups mentioned that feedback was virtually non-existent, specifically constructive feedback or areas needed for improvement. Feedback is important because it is intended for the individual receiving the feedback and it shows that a commander cares about improving the individual and making them better. A First Sergeant from the SNCO focus groups stated, "most Airmen don't trust their supervisors, I guarantee it, I have seen it." Supervisors "don't tell their people when they are doing good or when they are doing bad" and thus "their people think that they do not care" and trust is decreased or altogether lost. The Air Force struggles with providing constructive (or real) feedback and holding individuals accountable when they make a mistake. A mistake provides an incredible opportunity to hold someone accountable, which builds

trust. Not holding people accountable is a lost opportunity to build trust and shows inconsistency, which in turn decreases trust.

A Commander Needs to Connect

The most common and adamantly mentioned factor that a commander needs to build trust quickly was to be transparent. Every focus group repeatedly mentioned the need for transparency. Transparency implies openness, communication, and accountability. This means that a commander cannot have hidden agendas, they need to be thorough in all that they do, and they need to explain their decision making process whenever possible. Some people may argue that a commander does not need to explain their decision making process or why and how they came to a certain decision. There are times when this may be true; when a decision requires immediate action and there is no time for an explanation or when discipline is involved. A SNCO stated that commanders “lose trust when they are not being fair and consistent. Nobody is saying that you need to treat everybody the same, because we are not all the same, but you need to be consistent.” When a commander is not transparent, they need to know that the Airmen will talk and come to their own conclusions as to why a certain decision was made. At the same time, the more trust that a commander has built with their Airmen, the more benefit of the doubt their Airmen will provide to the commander.

The need to be vulnerable and show vulnerability was also mentioned by every single focus group to include every squadron commander in the FGO focus group. This is extremely telling and important to note. Virtually all the literature which discussed building trust, mentioned that a leader needs to be vulnerable in order to build trust (e.g.,

Gelfand, 2012; Fahy, 2012; Rousseau, 1998; Zand, 1972). Specifically, Zand (1972) stated that commanders and leaders must be vulnerable if they want to build trust with others. A maintenance squadron commander stated, “Vulnerability must be shown as a commander. Showing your own vulnerability and imperfections is really important as is admitting when you make mistakes openly.”

As mentioned in Chapter 2, there is some resistance and hesitance to the idea of a commander being vulnerable. Some people relate being vulnerable to having a weakness, being susceptible to something, or having a flaw. What vulnerability means in this case is that the commander needs to build a relationship with their Airman and by so doing the commander opens himself or herself up to criticism, essentially showing that they are a “real” person with flaws. They are essentially humanizing themselves which is both respected and appreciated by subordinates. Vulnerability is necessary to build trust, it creates authenticity and a genuineness which is needed to inspire and lead. Another squadron commander stated that “explaining why we didn’t go where I thought we were going to go. For example, I know that I said X is going to happen, X is not going to happen and this is why.” is one of the most important things that he has to do as a commander. He continued, saying that as a commander you need to be “frank, open and honest. That is what engenders trust.”

If a commander does open themselves up and truly gets to know their people, trust can be built much quicker and much more effectively than when they do not. In order to do this, commanders need to take every opportunity to communicate with their people and build a rapport. As one squadron commander mentioned, “you cannot lead from your office.” Commanders cannot afford to sit in their office and keep their

distance, they cannot afford to waste one day not communicating with their Airmen. A key here is to get to know your subordinates on a personal level and not just a professional level. A commander needs to know about a subordinate's family, where they are from, what motivates them, etc. Of course this relationship cannot turn unprofessional or turn into fraternization, but it is essential to get to know your people on a personal level to truly connect with them. As one squadron commander stated, "trust is earned and it starts with sponsorship, or your first interaction with an individual in your organization. Your people need to know who you are, what you stand for, and what you are about." Once this connection and relationships are established, your trust is being earned."

A Commander Needs to Serve their Airmen

The key for a commander to serve their Airmen is to empower them. Commanders need to empower Airmen was another constant theme that was mentioned throughout the focus groups and interviews. It was an especially passionate theme amongst the SNCOs and the CGOs. This again is very telling; they were essentially saying that their commanders are not empowering them or their subordinates enough. The ability to empower individuals can at times be very difficult. To empower someone means that you are entrusting them to carry out a task and to give them the power to make the required decisions while accomplishing that task. Across all the focus groups it was clear that the commander needs to turn over control to that individual and then back them up and defend them when they are going about accomplishing the task. As one CGO mentioned, "all Airmen have competencies and you need to empower them to carry

those out. This allows them to go to the next level and then you can turn up the intensity.” Empowering an Airman improves performance, builds confidence, and perhaps most importantly, builds trust (Sones, 2013; Sweeney, 2010).

In order to properly empower a subordinate, the commander needs to have done their job to properly know and train that individual so that they can trust them to effectively carry out the task. The commander cannot micromanage this process; if they do they will lose the trust that they were trying to build. A commander can still (and must) direct and follow-up with the individual they empowered, but they need to be very careful to not take back the power or authority they delegated. If a commander does take back the authority that they delegated to the individual (and this take back of authority and power was unwarranted), then the individual will feel betrayed and micromanaged and trust will be diminished. Not only will trust be lost with that individual, but the entire squadron will see how the commander treated the entrusted individual and the entire squadron will lose trust in the commander as well.

The commander is still the commander and they are still in charge and responsible for the task that they empowered to another individual. If they see the situation taking a turn for the worse, then they need to take action. If possible, this action should be taken privately, so not to embarrass and humiliate the person they empowered and give that individual an opportunity to correct and heed advice (if time and conditions permit). A commander can afford to give more autonomy when an individual is planning a holiday party than they can give to an individual planning a combat mission. Either way, if a commander is empowering an individual to accomplish a task, they essentially trust them to properly carry out that task. These situations are essential to building trust and the

more that a commander empowers an individual to accomplish a task the quicker trust will be built. Empowerment and task accomplishment are key components and essential to establishing Swift Trust.

Another key component to building trust is to develop your people both personally and professionally. This shows that you care about your people as individuals and you do not just care about them because they are essential to mission accomplishment. Airmen need advice on multiple aspects of life (e.g., marriage, finances, education, future job opportunities, etc.). They need to know that their commander cares about them as a person. If their goals do not necessarily fall in line with the goals of the Air Force or the individual unit, then the commander has an opportunity to influence that individual or to help guide them to make the best decision for themselves, their family, the unit and the Air Force. An Operational Support Squadron (OSS) squadron commander stated, “The only thing I really care about is...the people in my squadron to become better people and to be doing great things wherever [that may be]...and for them to say that I made myself a better person.”

A Commander Needs to Lead

Naturally, a commander always needs to lead, they are always a leader and their leadership is always on display. The key to complete the trust cycle is to take action, for the commander to act on everything that they have been saying and portraying to their Airmen. If a commander does not act on what they say, trust is diminished or lost completely. If a commander says that something is important then they need to show that it is important by taking action. A key element to action is to clearly identify roles and

responsibilities and to set expectations. While this seems easy since every member of a unit is assigned a position number and “job” on the Unit Manning Document (UMD), it is not that simple. Every Airman needs to understand what is expected of them and expectations need to be clearly laid out. A Logistics Readiness Officer (LRO) in the CGO focus group stated that Airmen “need to know what your expectations are, otherwise they cannot meet your expectations and now trust is lost.”

Once expectations are laid out, the commander then needs to hold people accountable to their jobs and responsibilities and provide feedback as to how they are doing. The commander needs to follow through on what they have said in staff meetings and Commander’s Calls. A commander needs to constantly ensure that their own actions and guidance are in line with the goals and missions of the unit. Commanders need to reward and recognize those individuals who are effective in carrying out the goals and the mission of the unit.

The idea of failing forward was also a key from the focus groups. A squadron commander stated that “as a leader, if you instill a culture where failing forward is okay and allow people to learn from and make mistakes, then they will be more prone to trust leadership understanding that it is okay to take risks.” Commanders need to encourage their Airmen to take the initiative and to be creative and think outside the box. In order to do this, the Commander needs to allow their Airmen to take risks. These have to be smart, calculated risks, with the permission of and in communication with the commander. If an Airman will be punished for a simple mistake or for taking a smart, calculated risk, then they will not innovate and push the envelope to make the unit or the Air Force better. As was mentioned several times in the focus groups and the interviews,

what is important here is that the commander needs to encourage critical thinking and some degree of risk taking in order to become more effective (Fisher, 2010).

Another key to leading is to seek out feedback and address issues as they arise. The commander needs to be open to new ideas and needs to know the “pulse of the squadron.” Great ideas can come from a young Senior Airman or a new Lieutenant. Rank does not equate to an individual’s ability to think critically or have great and creative ideas. As commanders allow their Airmen to fail forward and take risks, they are empowering them and building trust. As commanders empower them, they need to support them and defend them when they take risks and attempt to make things better. As this process takes place trust is being built and the unit will become more effective.

Summary

The intent of this chapter was to specifically identify how a commander can quickly build trust with his or her Airmen based on relevant literature and primary evidence obtained through focus groups and interviews. As a result, specific steps and focus areas were presented to aid commanders to build Swift Trust. The four prevalent themes and the specific stages that a commander needs to work through to build trust are: engage, connect, serve, and lead. These four steps provide a framework for what a commander needs to do in order to quickly build trust with their Airmen. Appendix C provides a visual representation of these steps and how they build on each other and Appendix D captures some of the most relevant and important information regarding a commander’s pathway towards building trust.

V. Conclusions and Recommendations

Chapter Overview

Trust is more important today than ever before in the Air Force and the men and women in the Air Force have voiced these concerns. The literature review and qualitative research offered in this paper have shown the importance and significance of building trust and have also provided the Air Force with a way to move forward. The results of the research and the Swift Trust Framework (Appendix C) which has been created as a result of this research has the ability to help commanders build trust with their Airmen and make their units and the Air Force more effective.

Conclusions of Research

The goal of a commander is to be able to influence his or her Airmen. A commander has the ability to influence their subordinates based on the fact that they are the commander and their authority and direction must be adhered to. However, a commander will be more effective if their subordinates have a desire to be influenced by the commander. Research has validated that trust is about relationships (Sweeney, 2010). A commander needs a relationship with their subordinates in order to be able to effectively influence an individual. This is why trust is so important to a commander. In the Air Force, a squadron commander is typically only the commander for two years. In a deployed or combat environment, that command tour is typically shortened to just one year, making the establishment of Swift Trust even more significant.

If Air Force senior leaders would focus on and emphasize the importance of building Swift Trust within Air Force organizations and provide commanders with the

tools necessary to do so, these organizations and the Air Force as a whole would function more cohesively. Individual organizations would operate with a single purpose and be more effective.

Trust can increase the capability of a unit without having to increase their manning, funding, or physical support. This ability to make a unit more effective without having to spend money, take additional time, or develop additional regulations is highly valuable. The military is constantly under tight budget and manning constraints and has to continue operations or increase operations tempo while working with fewer resources.

Every focus group and individual interviewed stated that the lack of trust in the Air Force is a big problem and that it is inhibiting the Air Force's ability to be effective. Although this is a small sample, the fact that every Airmen mentioned it as a problem gives it a level of credibility. The focus groups and interviews represent a cross-section of the Air Force today spanning multiple AFSCs, ranks, and ages. It provides the Air Force with important insight into the perspectives of what Airmen believe and what areas might need to be improved. It is clear from the focus groups that today's Airmen believe that there are trust issues in the Air Force. However, the focus groups also provided avenues and steps that can be taken by commanders to rebuild the trust which appears to have been lost, to some degree, by commanders in the Air Force. Moreover, the Air Force cannot afford to waste time building that trust and there are certain steps that the Air Force can take now.

The Air Force needs to take steps to systematically educate all Airmen about the importance of trust and how it can be effectively built and maintained. Furthermore, current and future commanders need to understand its importance and the significant

effect it can have on their squadrons. As one squadron commander stated it, “without trust my squadron could not run.” Education here is the key. If the Air Force does not educate and deliberately address trust, the Air Force is consequently saying that it does not value it. However, we know that the Air Force values trust and thinks that it is important. We know this because Air Force Doctrine Document 1-1 specifically states, “Trust is the vital bond that unifies leaders with their followers and commanders with their units. Trust makes leaders effective” (AFDD 1-1: ii). However, simply stating that trust is important, in and of itself, is not enough. Trust needs to be taught, discussed, and reinforced. This is where the Air Force can make important improvements.

The Air Force has taken some steps to address this problem, but more still needs to be done. In March of 2015, the Chief of Staff of the Air Force General Mark Welsh directed the activation of the Profession of Arms Center of Excellence (PACE). “PACE is tasked as the Air Force champion laser focused on infusing Air Force Core Values within the Profession of Arms.” PACE is “committed to developing Air Force personnel with a professionalism mindset, character, and core values required to succeed today and well into the future” (PACE). PACE has a course which is entitled “Professionalism: Enhancing Human Capital.” They travel throughout the Air Force and teach about the importance of commitment, loyalty, and trust. This is a great program which General Welsh has chartered and provided to the Air Force. While PACE is an important first step, the Air Force must remain committed to developing and providing several more opportunities where trust can be better understood and skills developed for building trust can be learned.

Recommendations for Action

The Air Force has courses that all squadron commanders, group commanders, and wing commanders must attend. The squadron commander courses are run by the current Major Commands (MAJCOMs) in the Air Force. They are all slightly different and focus on what the respective MAJCOM Commanders believe to be important for their squadron commanders. The group and wing commander courses are owned and run by the Chief of Staff of the Air Force and all group and wing commanders attend the same course at Air University. Within these courses for squadron, group, and wing commanders there should be a dedicated block of time to discuss trust, the importance of a commander building trust with their Airmen, and how they can do so quickly. The researcher recommends that this instruction and discussion with commanders is at least a dedicated two hour block of time. The instruction should be a discussion where commanders can express their views on trust and discuss what they have seen work as far as establishing trust between Airmen. Commanders should be presented with handouts (Appendix C & D) for reference and be reminded that relationships between people are as important as the technical skills that their units are responsible to obtain. The commanders then need to take what they have learned and discuss it at their own Commander's Calls, staff meetings, and training sessions. It needs to be something that is constantly discussed and focused on.

There also needs to be a dedicated time during all Air Force level Professional Military Education (PME) courses, similar to the commanders' courses to discuss trust and how it can be built quickly and maintained. It is important for all Air Force members to understand the significance of trust and trust's key to mission accomplishment. A

squadron commander stated, “this would be my recommendation, fix PME! Stop wasting our time on some of the stuff we do there and start learning about how I communicate and lead and how people around me lead and communicate. That would have been phenomenal.” Trust needs to become second nature to individuals, something that is constantly considered and focused on. As this begins to happen, commanders will be able to better relate to their Airmen and be able to better motivate them and truly demand greatness with an expectation of truly receiving greatness in return.

Appendix C and D are intended to be used as reminders and educational tools for all commanders as to how they can effectively build trust with their Airmen. They can be removed and laminated to facilitate discussion and serve as a reminder to the importance of trust and how it can be built and developed. Building trust is not in and of itself a difficult task. The difficulty lies in constantly remembering that your people are your number one asset and that they need to be treated as such whether it be an extremely strenuous and difficult situation or a low key unit function.

Recommendations for Future Research

This research is just the beginning of what is needed. More could be learned from a longitudinal study which could follow up with commanders on what things worked for them in regards to building trust and what things did not work. Approximately 18 months after a commander has taken command they should be issued a survey to gather those results in an effort to help improve and guide future commanders.

Future research should include a broader sample set of the Air Force population, to include a greater portion of the Reserve and Guard Air Force members. Future studies should also include the sister services of the Army, Navy, and Marine Corps.

This research focused on the importance of building trust and doing so quickly; however, this research did not focus on repairing trust once it is lost or broken. It would be helpful and important to research the requirements and context that apply to regaining trust once it was lost as opposed to building it initially.

Summary

Trust is perhaps the single most important attribute for effective leadership and subsequent command. It motivates and encourages individuals; it makes them more effective and inspires them. Although it is difficult to measure, we know that it exists, we can see and feel its presence. The fact that it can seem difficult to quantify does not mean that we should ignore it or de-value it. To do so would be a grave mistake.

After taking the flag as a commander, that commander's Number 1 priority needs to be building trust with their people. Every day that a commander waits or wastes, is a day lost. It is a lost opportunity to influence and lead.

Data supports that trust is the single most important attribute to getting the mission done. No one mission in the Air Force can be accomplished individually. A flight lead needs to trust that his wingman will be there to cover them. A flight lead needs to trust that his wingman will execute in accordance with the standard tactics as briefed for the mission. This is essential in order to ensure modern air combat effectiveness. However, even before that, the pilots need to be sure that they were

briefed the proper intelligence picture so that they are prepared as they enter combat. The fighter pilot needs to trust that the tanker will be at the proper rendezvous point on time to provide them with the needed fuel. The pilots need to know that the technical orders were properly signed off by maintenance on the aircraft that they are flying and that it will perform properly. There needs to be trust that the parachute the pilot is wearing on his back is properly packed by life support and that it is operational. Trust is the glue that holds all mission areas together. Without it, missions will fail and units will become ineffective. No one person or mission area in the Air Force can function alone or individually.

In the Air Force we often hear the moniker or debate of what comes first, the mission or the people. We need to remember that the Air Force is an all-volunteer force. The people are here because they want to be here, they want to accomplish the mission, which is why they signed up. It is the commander's job to facilitate that mission in getting done; to lead and inspire their Airmen while accomplishing that mission and not to de-motivate or chase them away.

The United States Air Force is a great organization. It is an organization that the researcher cares deeply about and is proud to be a part of. There are many great commanders who motivate, inspire, and build trust with their Airman every day. The researcher has served with, entered harm's way under the command of, and interviewed many of those commanders. Some of the greatest leaders in the world are wearing the uniform today. The Air Force takes great pride in developing Airmen and leaders and trust is a vital step in that process.

Appendix A

SNCO Themes:

Actively be seen
Show Action
Consistent
Relationship
Backing up your people
Feedback
If you say it's important,
show it
Fair
Reliable
Set goals together
Ask, "what can I do
better?"
Expectations (set &
manage)
Empower your people
Mentoring
Take Time
Follow Thru

CGO Themes:

Take Time
Keep your word
Be genuine
Set Roles & Tasks
Authenticity
Personal Touch
Empower People
Show Vulnerability
Screw it up on purpose
Consistency (w/discipline)
Trials → Situations
Stress
Get to know me
Intense Caring
Truly Care
Debrief/Hotwash Tool
Communication
Feedback

FGO Themes:

30 minutes with new
person
Be up front
If we can't get there, be
honest
Sponsorship
Folks need to know you
Show vulnerability
Show mistakes
Communication
Focus on personal &
professional development
Emotional Intelligence
Take advantage of
opportunities
Fail Forward
Consistency
Hold people accountable
Feedback (formal &
informal)
Emotional Intelligence

Appendix B

Focus Group Discussion Questions

1. Who can give me an opinion/idea of what trust is?
 - A psychological state comprising willingness to accept vulnerability based on positive expectations
 - Trust=Confidence Distrust=Suspicion
2. Who can use trust in a sentence?
 - The goal here is to get them to validate that trust is about a **relationship**.
 - The difference between trust and integrity
3. Who can share an example of when trust was increased?
 - This will allow us to validate what trust is.
4. What can we do to build trust and how can we grow trust in the Air Force?
5. What are some specific steps that a commander could take in order to increase the level of trust between themselves and others within the unit?
6. Does a Commander have the ability to build/develop/engineer trust?
7. How can a Commander build this trust quickly?

3 Main Areas:

#1 Define Trust -Relationship

#2 How do we build trust? -CC has our back/CC has to communicate

#3 Opinion on how we can build it quickly

Appendix C

SWIFT TRUST FRAMEWORK FOR COMMANDERS



Appendix D

Keys to Building Trust

- **TRUST TO COMMANDER**
 - The goal of a commander is to influence people to achieve a desired end state
 - Commanders need a *relationship* with people in order to influence them
 - **Trust** is the key to that *relationship*
 - Commanders cannot build **trust** without *engaging* and *connecting* with people
 - Be present and treat command as a contact sport
 - Commit to encouraging/enhancing interaction and communication daily
 - *Serve* them and they will accomplish the mission
 - Commit to the development and empowerment of your people
 - Clearly identify roles and responsibilities and hold them accountable
- **TRUST TO MISSION**
 - Ensure people know what is important to you and your superiors
 - Ensure every member of your unit has a stake in the mission and understands the importance of his/her contribution

Appendix E




A Commander's First Challenge: Establishing a Pathway of Trust

Abstract

This research focuses on the concept of systematically engineering a pathway of trust for squadron commanders in the Air Force. Leadership is the most important characteristic that a commander brings to their organization and has a significant impact on the effectiveness of his or her unit. The goal of a commander is to be able to influence their people to achieve a desired end state. In order for a commander to be able to influence an individual they need to have a relationship with that person and the key to that relationship is trust. Specifically, this research focuses on the concept of Swift Trust and how a commander can quickly establish trust with their Airmen. By focusing on the antecedents and outcomes of trust, this research investigates what a leader specifically needs to do in order to quickly establish trust within their unit. This research supports the need for a commander to quickly develop trust with unit members and offers a systematic pathway for building trust. The data highlights and demonstrates the importance of trust within a military organization and what a commander can do in order to quickly earn and maintain the trust of his or her unit.

Advisor: Lt Col Robert E. Overstreet, PhD

Advanced Studies of Air Mobility (ENS)
Air Force Institute of Technology

SWIFT TRUST FRAMEWORK FOR COMMANDERS

LEAD

- Clearly identify roles and responsibilities
- Set expectations
- Hold people accountable
- Follow through
- Take the initiative (fall forward)
- Seek out feedback and address issues

ENGAGE

- Be present
- Invest time
- Treat command as a contact sport
- Provide feedback
- Communicate/Listen

CONNECT

- Be transparent
- Be genuine/authentic
- Be honest
- Display passion
- Show vulnerability
- Show empathy
- Get to know your people on a personal level

SERVE

- Empower your people
- Develop your people both personally and professionally
- Defend your people
- Truly care about the lives and careers of your people

Keys to Building Trust

- TRUST TO COMMANDER**
 - The goal of a commander is to influence people to achieve a desired end state
 - Commanders need a *relationship* with people in order to influence them
 - Trust* is the key to that relationship
- Commanders cannot build *trust* without *engaging* and *connecting* with people
 - Be present and treat command as a contact sport
 - Commit to encouraging/enhancing interaction and communication daily
- Serve* them and they will *accomplish* the mission
 - Commit to the development and empowerment of your people
 - Clearly identify roles and responsibilities and hold them accountable
- TRUST TO MISSION**
 - Ensure people know what is important to you and your superiors
 - Ensure every member of your unit has a stake in the mission and understands the importance of his/her contribution

Research Focus

The focus is on the establishment of Swift Trust between squadron commanders and subordinates. Air Force leaders must act in a decisive manner in order to influence their subordinates. The goal of this research is to identify tools and practices that squadron commanders can utilize to quickly and effectively establish trust within their organizations.

Research Question

As trust is an important part of successful command how can a commander build trust quickly?

Methodology

Focus groups and interviews were used to gather important primary data regarding Air Force members and their perspectives of trust. The Air Force members were officers (Lieutenants, Captains, Majors and Lieutenant Colonels) and senior non-commissioned officers. These Air Force members represent a sampling of different Air Force Specialty Codes (AFSC) in order to capture the ideas and sentiments of the entire Air Force. There were three focus group sessions conducted with 7 to 8 Air Force members per session. Following the focus groups, the researcher conducted one-on-one interviews with five different individuals. This provided the ability to further quantify specific tasks that commanders can implement in order to quickly establish trust within a squadron and specific steps that a commander can take to build that trust. The emphasis of these meetings was to establish a Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures (TTP) type document to aid commanders in quickly establishing trust within their units.

Results

Trust can increase the capability of a unit without having to increase their manning, funding, or physical support. This ability to make a unit more effective without having to spend money, take additional time, or develop additional regulations is highly valuable. Specific steps and focus areas were developed to aid commanders to build Swift Trust. The four prevalent themes and the specific stages that a commander needs to work through to build trust are: engage, connect, serve, and lead. These four steps provide a framework for what a commander needs to do in order to quickly build trust with their Airmen.

Collaboration

PAGE, Dr. Jeffrey R. Smith, Executive Director




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