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MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

TITLE:

QUIET CONFIDENCE: THE NEXUS OF INTROVERTED PERSONALITY
TRAITS AND EFFECTIVE MILITARY LEADERSHIP

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Executive Summary

Title: Quiet Confidence: The Nexus of Introverted Personality Traits and Effective Military Leadership

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Thesis: Military leaders with introverted personality types can be as successful, if not more successful, than leaders with extroverted personality types, particularly when such individuals understand their own strengths and weaknesses in order to best leverage their capabilities.

Discussion: Statistics indicate that American society is dominated by extroverts, and there is an ostensible bias against introverts in the United States military. Research studies, using personality trait models such as the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) and Five Factor Model (FFM), have shown extroversion to be a positive leadership trait, with little consideration of the effectiveness of introverted leaders. Notwithstanding ongoing fiscal constraints coupled with increasing global threats, the military must learn to leverage the maximum leadership potential from all personality types and remove biases that are barriers to success. Common threads drawn from the multitude of leadership definitions - influence, group, and success - combined with military attributes of effective leaders - loyalty, integrity, and ethos - indicate that introverted personality traits can be highly desirable in a military leader. Behavioral tendencies such as intense focus, inward reflection, and humility can make individuals with introverted personality traits extremely effective military leaders.

Conclusion: Introverted military leaders must understand their natural tendencies and work to their strengths. They also must be aware of their weaknesses and adapt accordingly. The MBTI and FFM are two accessible tools that can provide insight into personality traits. Armed with knowledge of their natural tendencies and how to best apply them, introverts can excel in an extroverted world.

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A leader is best when people barely know he exists, when his work is done, his aim fulfilled, they will say: we did it ourselves. - Lao Tzu

Leadership is practiced not so much in words as in attitude and in actions. - Harold S. Geneen

Introduction

In today's rapidly evolving national security environment, effective military leadership is more critical than ever. The United States faces growing threats from near-peer aggressor states and non-state actors alike. As new threats emerge and rising states bolster their defenses, the defense budget of the United States continues to decline. For example, the Chinese defense budget is expected to rise from \$143 billion (USD) in 2011 to \$259 billion in 2020. Similarly, Russian spending will increase from \$57.2 billion (USD) in 2011 to \$108.3 billion in 2020. In the same period, United States spending is forecast to decline by 25%, from \$720 billion to \$540 billion.¹ As such, the United States military is continually forced to do "more with less."² Sound leadership is required to sustain military innovation and combat capability in the face of decreased funding and increased threats.

The nature of military culture inherently favors extroverted personality types. For example, working as part of a group or team and participating in official ceremonies or social events are foundational facets of military life. The common perception of an extroverted leadership style - dominant, loud, boisterous, charismatic, and outgoing - is not necessarily consistent with quality results. This perception contributes to a bias against introverts that manifests itself in a way similar to any other bias, such as gender, race, or age. Regarding gender bias, leadership scholar Peter Northouse states, "any substantial leadership style differences between women and men should not disadvantage women and can even offer a female

advantage.”³ This same relationship exists between the introvert/extrovert dynamic with respect to leadership capabilities.

Introverts can excel in an extrovert-dominated environment, and in fact, introverted traits can be leveraged into exceptional military leadership. The key points for such leaders are to understand the strengths and weaknesses of differing personality types and apply them appropriately. If the US military is going to hold its competitive advantage in the future, it must harness the leadership capabilities of all personality types in an operative manner. Moreover, as an institution built on integrity and honor, the military should seek to avoid biases and maximize leadership opportunities for all qualified members.

A number of characteristics can contribute to the leadership success of individuals with introverted personality traits in military environments. Behaviors such as humility, introspection, and focus can make introverts powerful leaders. Nevertheless, there is an overlap in leadership ability between introverts and extroverts, and both types can adapt when required. Thus, military leaders with introverted personality types can be as successful, if not more successful, than leaders with extroverted personality types, particularly when such individuals understand their own strengths and weaknesses in order to best leverage their capabilities.

In order to build a case for the effectiveness of introverted leaders in the military, this paper first provides background information on the problem facing introverts in an extroverted environment. Next, this paper discusses the preferences and energy sources of introversion and extroversion and reviews two pertinent personality-type models: the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) and the Five Factor Model (FFM). Subsequently, this paper defines leadership and power sources on a broad scale, and then narrows focus to define military leadership through current doctrine. Finally, this paper analyzes how the tendencies of introverts coincide with

commonly accepted traits of effective military leadership, and highlights paths to success for introverted military leaders.

Background

American society tends to favor extroversion. According to author and Harvard alumnus Susan Cain, being an extrovert is mandatory for success at Harvard Business School, where team study is required and answering with confidence in group discussions is more important than being correct.⁴ Furthermore, a 2006 *USA Today* study found that 65% of executives see introversion as a hindrance to leadership, and only 6% believe that introverts are better leaders.⁵ With extroverts making up 75% of the population by one estimate,⁶ it is clear that extroversion dominates; however, there remains a capable 25% of the population that must learn to function in an extroverted environment.

Personality and leadership models also tend to support extroversion. For example, the Five-Factor Model is made up of the “Big Five” personality traits: neuroticism, extroversion, openness, agreeableness, and conscientiousness. In this model, introversion is not even considered as a trait to measure leadership, except for the supposition that it is the inverse of extroversion and therefore a negative trait. An analysis of leadership and personality studies conducted between 1967 and 1998 found a significant link between the Big Five and leadership. According to Northouse, “Specifically, in their study, extroversion was the factor most strongly associated with leadership. It is the most important trait of effective leaders.”⁷ Other trait approach studies, ranging from 1948 to 2004, list multiple personality traits that are desirable for effective leaders, the most common of which are “sociability” and “extroversion.”⁸ Among these studies, there are no mentions of traits such as introversion, introspection, or humility.

According to Swiss psychiatrist Carl Jung's idea of "psychological symbiosis," collaboration between extroverted and introverted types cannot work unless they develop a "mutual psychological understanding."⁹ Attempting to force one personality type to operate from the opposite perspective can lead to an unbalanced sense of self-awareness. Researchers Matthew Kuofie, Dana Stephens-Craig, and Richard Dool expand on Jung's thesis:

To take that idea into modern day, our society has "forced" the introverted personality type to live in an extroverted world. When one is forced to obtain a worldview that operated from their underdeveloped function (i.e., introvert leader functioning in an extroverted environment), it can cause conflict and perhaps cripple one's ability to live up to their full potential. In opposition to forcing an introverted leader to fit the mold of an extroverted stereotype, strides can be taken to nurture the introvert in an environment that realizes their potential as employee[s] and leaders.¹⁰

The preceding evidence illuminates the problem for introverted individuals in modern US society, which ostensibly projects into the military. Facing a bias against introversion, individuals with introverted qualities must be able to understand their own personality traits in order to gain positions of responsibility and effectively lead.

Introversion vs. Extroversion

The terms *introversion* and *extroversion* are rooted in the 1920s research of Carl Jung, who founded analytic or Jungian psychology. According to Jung, introverts are characterized as those who are analytical, reflective, and reserved, gain energy from ideas, and are exhausted by social situations.¹¹ Introverted leaders typically let others speak first and take time to consider decisions before they act. Furthermore, introverted personality types often choose solitary work, are detail-oriented, cautious, introspective, and think before speaking.¹² In contrast, extroversion

has been described as a trait in which individuals gain stimulation and gratification from the exterior world instead of within one's self. The extroverted person can often be characterized as charismatic, social, larger-than-life, visionary, and team-oriented. Typically, extroverts gain energy from other people.¹³

One of the keys to understanding the two personality types is to understand that they are preferences. Introversion and extroversion operate on a sliding scale, with different levels of extremes, and many people have aspects of both traits but prefer one or the other. According to Kuofie et al, "A preference does not mean an absence of functioning or inability to take on the traits of the other, less preferred traits."¹⁴ Furthermore, in reference to behavioral preferences, Dr. John Kello states, "traits really are 'preferences,' and not immutable limitations."¹⁵ This means that an introvert can exhibit extroverted traits when necessary; it would just require some degree of discomfort.

Table 1 summarizes differences between introverts and extroverts based on Jung's work. These characteristics are used for the remainder of this paper.

Table 1. Introverts vs. Extroverts¹⁶

Introverted Traits	Extroverted Traits
- Draw energy from their inner world	- Draw energy from the outer world of people and activity
- Prefer to communicate in writing	- Prefer to communicate by talking
- Work out ideas by reflecting on them	- Work out ideas by talking them through
- Learn best by reflection and mental practice	- Learn best through doing or discussing
- Focus in-depth on their interests	- Have broad interests
- 25% of population	- 75% of population

Another important aspect for understanding introversion and extroversion lies in how the types gain energy. Introverts are often mistaken as shy when they withdraw from social

interaction. In reality, introverts expend more energy than extroverts by socializing and therefore require periods of solitude to regain energy. Conversely, extroverts expend energy when alone and require the company of other people to regain their energy. Thus, introverts can be as social as extroverts, but they will drain energy while the extrovert gains energy. In order to understand how qualities of introversion and extroversion contribute to personality and drive behavior, an analysis of personality type models is necessary.

Myers-Briggs Type Indicator

One of the most widely used tools to describe personality is the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI). Based on Jungian psychology, the MBTI was developed by Katherine Cook Briggs and Isabel Briggs Myers to use personality preferences in order to assist women with job placement during World War II. The MBTI is a personality typology that uses ninety-three questions to measure three personality dimensions first suggested by Jung (extroversion-introversion, sensing-intuition, and thinking-feeling), in addition to a fourth dimension added by Briggs and Myers (judgment-perception).¹⁷ Table 2 provides a description of the MBTI elements.

Table 2. MBTI Elements¹⁸

Psychological Types	Focus and Preference
Extroversion (E)	People who prefer extroversion tend to focus their attention on the outer world of people and things
Introversion (I)	People who prefer introversion tend to focus their attention on the inner world of ideas and impressions
Sensing (S)	People who prefer sensing tend to take in information through the five senses and focus on the here and now
Intuition (N)	People who prefer intuition tend to take in information from patterns and the big picture and focus on future possibilities
Thinking (T)	People who prefer thinking tend to make decisions based primarily on logic and on objective analysis of cause and effect

Feeling (F)	People who prefer feeling tend to make decisions based primarily on values and on subjective evaluation of person-centered concerns
Judging (J)	People who prefer judging tend to like a planned and organized approach to life and prefer to have things settled
Perceiving (P)	People who prefer perceiving tend to like a flexible and spontaneous approach to life and prefer to keep their options open

MBTI behavioral preference is indicated by one of the letters in each of the four letter pairs, resulting in sixteen possible different personality types. A pair of terms such as Extroversion and Introversion is one dimension of the type. The different types are coded using the first letter of each dimension (with the exception of Intuition, which uses an “N”). Some examples of the sixteen type combinations are ESTP, ISTP, ESFP, ISFP, etc. Leaders should identify their own styles and focus on understanding them.¹⁹

Although the MBTI has been successfully used for decades in a number of applications, it is not without critics. Among the concerns are the use of dichotomous scores and the fact that data is self-reported.²⁰ Additionally, questions have been raised about the conceptual foundations of the model due to the addition of the judgment-perception element to Jung’s original theory. Furthermore, doubts exist on the reliability of the test due to fluctuations in scoring upon retesting.²¹ It is also important to note that while the MBTI labels individuals as either Introverted or Extroverted, their personalities can be somewhere in the middle or they may adapt to the opposing type when required. Nevertheless, the MBTI remains a valuable tool that is accessible to individuals in all career fields and can be used to develop an understanding of one’s own tendencies on the introvert/extrovert scale.

Five-Factor Model

Another important model that can inform personality type as it pertains to leadership is the Five-Factor Model (FFM). The FFM consists of the Big Five personality traits: neuroticism,

extroversion, openness, agreeableness, and conscientiousness. Numerous studies have found that the personality traits associated with the FFM are correlated to leadership.²² Additional studies have found that personality traits relate to military leadership.²³ The FFM traits are defined in Table 3.

Table 3. FFM Personality Traits.²⁴

Big Five Personality Factors	
Neuroticism (N)	The tendency to be depressed, anxious, insecure, vulnerable, and hostile
Extroversion (E)	The tendency to be sociable and assertive and to have positive energy
Openness (O)	The tendency to be informed, creative, insightful, and curious
Agreeableness (A)	The tendency to be accepting, conforming, trusting, and nurturing
Conscientiousness (C)	The tendency to be thorough, organized, controlled, dependable, and decisive

The FFM has gained backing in the personality psychology field due to its robustness, comprehensiveness, and stability. The test scores individuals as “high” or “low” in a given trait, then draws conclusions based on the scores. For example, individuals high in Extroversion (E) often show strong tendencies towards sociable and outgoing behaviors, and, as previously indicated, numerous studies identify extroversion as a desirable leadership trait.²⁵ Additionally, a 2001 study found that high E and high Openness to Experience (O) successfully projected leadership potential.²⁶ According to Judith Johnson and William Hill, “This research suggests that persons high in E are often perceived as leaders by virtue of the behaviors they are likely to engage in...Conversely, people who are easily dominated by others in social or business interactions talk less, prefer being alone, and are less likely to be seen as leaders.”²⁷

The FFM and associated studies can inform understanding of personality, specifically introversion-extroversion, in a number of ways. First, it is important to recognize that the individuals that exhibit high E characteristics are often *perceived* as leaders despite any measure of actual ability. Second, an individual identifying as a low E (or less extroverted) can be made aware of behaviors that may or may not lead to a desired perception. Finally, while a low E score does not automatically equal ineffective leadership, it can highlight areas where a given leader might be uncomfortable and therefore need to focus on in order to maximize leadership potential.

Despite its general acceptance, the FFM has numerous criticisms as well. Among these critiques are the model's reliance on simple comparative statements about people and the inability to address aspects of personality function beyond the five traits.²⁸ Furthermore, critics argue that the model is limited by self-reporting, lack of standardized psychological interpretation, and assignment of equal weight to each factor.²⁹ However, similar to the MBTI, the FFM remains a useful, accessible tool for individuals to glean insight into personality traits and their application to leadership potential.

Leadership Defined

Leadership is an abstract term that can be classified and viewed in a number of ways. In fact, in the past sixty years, sixty-five different classification methods have been developed to define the bounds of leadership. For example, leadership can be seen as the focus of a group process, wherein the leader is at the center of group activity. Another perspective focuses on personality, where leadership is defined as a specific set of traits. Still a third viewpoint labels leadership as an act or behavior, specifically the things that individuals do to lead.³⁰

Varying definitions of leadership abound. One of the most widely accepted definitions is Robert House and Ram Aditya's, who state that leadership is "the ability of an individual to

influence, motivate and enable others to contribute toward the effectiveness and success of the organization of which they are members.”³¹ Similarly, Melvin Seeman describes leadership as “acts by persons which influence other persons in a shared direction.”³² Finally, Northouse defines leadership as “a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal.”³³

Several common threads can be seen in the varying definitions of leadership: influence/motivation, groups/organizations, and success/goals. Influence involves how a leader affects followers and is a prerequisite for leadership: “Without influence, leadership does not exist.”³⁴ Moreover, leadership must occur in a group setting. The group being led can be of varying size, but its members must focus on a shared purpose. Leaders concentrate their energies to move the group towards accomplishment of common goals or missions.

Leadership can be viewed either as a trait or a process. The trait definition of leadership maintains that leadership is an innate ability that individuals are born with. Examples of personal qualities that are sometimes considered leadership traits include physical factors (such as height), personality (such as extroversion), and intelligence. The limitation of the trait definition of leadership is that it assumes leadership resides within certain individuals, and therefore cannot be learned.³⁵ Conversely, the process definition of leadership suggests that leadership exists in the interactions between leaders and followers. With the assumption that leadership is a process, leadership becomes available to everyone and can be learned, studied, and improved.³⁶

This paper assumes that leadership is a process that can be influenced by traits. Thus, leadership can be learned, but certain traits can influence success. Specifically, although extroversion is shown as a positive leadership trait, introverted individuals can still be effective leaders by learning leadership. Furthermore, traits of introversion can actually enhance

leadership when properly applied to the leadership process. In his influential analysis of leadership, psychologist Sigmund Freud said that groups crave leadership and therefore are carried “half-way to meet the leader, yet he too must fit in with it in his personal qualities.”³⁷

Figure 1 shows a comparison of the trait and process definitions of leadership.

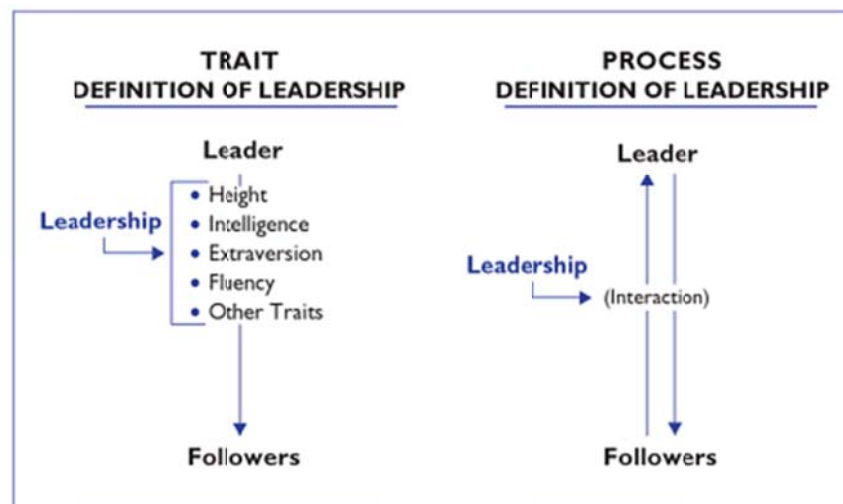


Figure 1: Views of Leadership³⁸

Leadership can also be divided into two forms: assigned and emergent. Individuals with assigned leadership are those who occupy a position of authority in an organization. This type of leadership is prevalent in military organizations due to rank and command structures.

Conversely, emergent leadership is not assigned by position, but drawn from positive interaction within the organization. Emergent leaders are able to inspire others in the group without the benefit of assigned power. This type of leadership is also significant in the military, where leadership occurs at all levels, decentralized operations are essential, and group tasks are frequent. Examples of behaviors that account for emergent leadership include being verbally involved, being informed, seeking other’s opinions, and initiating new ideas.³⁹

Power is an important aspect of influencing people. According to social psychologists John French and Bertram Raven, leaders draw power from five bases: referent, expert,

legitimate, reward, and coercive. These power bases are further divided into two categories: positional power and personal power. Positional power, similar to assigned leadership, is derived from a particular office or rank and includes legitimate, reward, and coercive power. On the other hand, personal power, like emergent leadership, is a leader's ability to influence people based on being likeable and knowledgeable. Personal power includes referent and expert power. See Figure 2 for definitions of power bases.

French and Raven's Five Sources of Power	
Positional Power	• Legitimate Power – This comes from the belief that a person has the formal right to make demands, and to expect compliance and obedience from others. • Reward Power – This results from one person's ability to compensate another for compliance. • Coercive Power – This comes from the belief that a person can punish others for noncompliance.
Personal Power	• Expert Power – This is based on a person's superior skill and knowledge. • Referent Power – This is the result of a person's perceived attractiveness, worthiness, and right to respect from others.

Figure 2: Five Bases of Power⁴⁰

Knowledge of the aforementioned leadership concepts is crucial for individuals to realize their leadership potential. Viewing leadership as a process emboldens potential leaders to understand the process and improve their capabilities. Likewise, leaders must understand how their personal traits impact their leadership style. Furthermore, awareness of the sources of power can be used by a leader to highlight deficiencies in the organization or find alternative ways to motivate team members. These important concepts carry over into the definition of military leadership.

Military Leadership

Now that a basic knowledge of leadership classifications and power sources has been developed, leadership in a military context requires further analysis. Similar to leadership

broadly defined, military leadership has been characterized in numerous ways. According to Air Force Doctrine Document (AFDD) 1-1, leadership is “the art and science of influencing and directing people to accomplish the assigned mission.”⁴¹ With respect to leadership in the Marine Corps, Lieutenant General John Lejeune notably described it as, “the sum of those qualities of intellect, human understanding, and moral character that enables a person to inspire and control a group of people successfully.”⁴² Similarly, Army Doctrine Reference Publication (ADRP) 6-22 defines leadership as “influencing people - by providing purpose, direction, and motivation - while operating to accomplish the mission and improving the organization.”⁴³ Elements of each of these descriptions can be merged to bolster an understanding of military leadership; influence, motivation, character, and mission success are all critical features. While these definitions have aspects in common, the US Army definition is most applicable to this study and is used for the remainder of this paper.

Military doctrine goes well beyond basic definitions in extolling the virtues of leadership to military members. AFDD 1-1 stresses the fact that one does not need to be a commander to be a leader, highlighting the value of emergent leadership to the military. The document details three levels of leadership: personal, team, and institutional. Personal leadership focuses on one-on-one communications and the development of personal relationships as a means to influence individuals. Team leadership likewise involves interpersonal relationships but also emphasizes organizational climate and group development skills. Finally, institutional leadership is applied at the strategic level to establish structure, allocate resources, and articulate a vision. Within these levels of leadership lie enduring leadership competencies, which are the skills required to lead effectively at each stage.⁴⁴ Table 4 shows the AFDD 1-1 leadership competencies.

Table 4. Air Force Leadership Competencies⁴⁵

Personal Leadership	Leading People / Teams	Leading the Institution
- Exercise sound judgment	- Drive performance through shared vision, values and accountability	- Shape Air Force strategy and doctrine
- Adapt and perform under pressure	- Influence through win/win solutions	- Command organizational and mission success through enterprise integration and resource stewardship
- Inspire trust	- Mentor and coach for growth and success	- Embrace change and transformation
- Lead courageously	- Promote collaboration and teamwork	- Drive execution
- Assess self	- Partner to maximize results	- Attract, retain, and develop talent
- Foster effective communication		

Army doctrine places similar emphasis on leadership capabilities. ADRP 6-22 utilizes great detail in describing the foundations of Army leadership, civilian-military linkage, leadership and command authority, formal and informal leadership, and leadership attributes and competencies. Similar to Air Force doctrine, Army doctrine stresses three levels of leadership: direct (individual/small group), organizational, and strategic. The document also emphasizes personal characteristics such as loyalty, duty, integrity, courage, and discipline.⁴⁶

Several common themes can be drawn from military leadership doctrine. For example, character is of the utmost importance for the military leader. When operating in an ambiguous or stressful environment, having a solid foundation of integrity and judgment to rely on can be crucial. Similarly, the doctrine describes “Warrior Ethos” as a critical component of military leadership. According to Army doctrine, “The Warrior Ethos refers to the professional attitudes and beliefs that characterize the American Soldier. It reflects a Soldier’s selfless commitment to the nation, mission, unit, and fellow Soldiers.”⁴⁷ In addition to being able to influence others,

military leaders must possess certain intrinsic, intangible qualities that couple with the commitment to serve. Army leadership attributes and competencies are depicted in Figure 3.

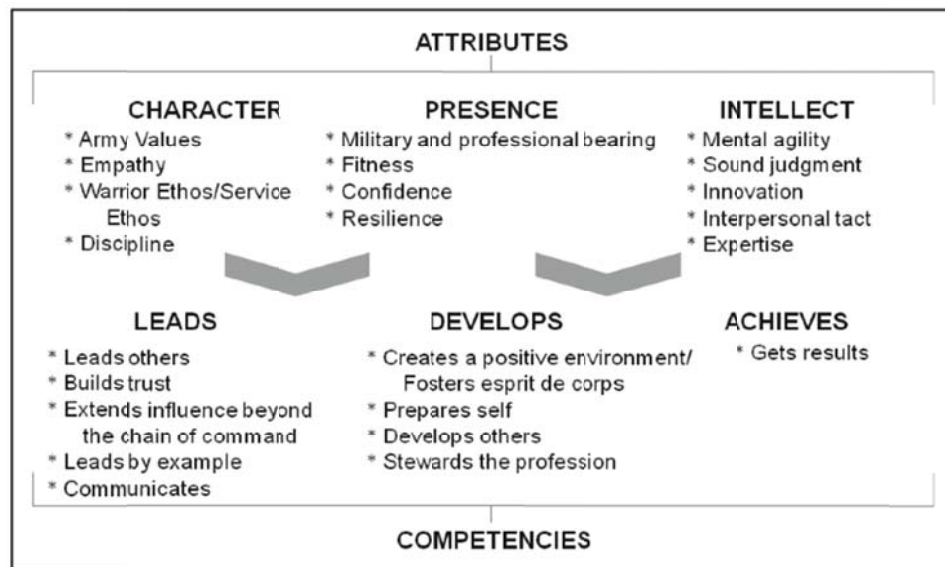


Figure 3. Army Leadership Requirements Model⁴⁸

While the preceding definitions of military leadership have some similarities with the definitions of leadership in general, the military leader must also be cognizant of idiosyncrasies in the military context. The manner in which events are construed in the military is a key aspect of leader influence. Highly successful military leaders have several personal characteristics that enable them to adapt quickly and interpret rapidly evolving and ambiguous situations. According to military psychologist Paul Bartone, such leaders “inspire subordinates and peers to construct similar interpretations of experience.”⁴⁹ Thus, effective military leaders must be able to act without hesitation, with limited information, and motivate others to do the same. The significant point is that military leaders are often forced to act in high-stress situations, and in such situations, their influence on others can be greater.

Military units are inherently group-centered and highly interdependent. Typically, tasks and missions require group effort, and the rank and command structure puts leaders in a position

to assert significant influence over the group. This organization grants military leaders both assigned and emergent leadership as well as positional and personal power. In reference to personality and leadership in a military environment, Bartone states, “By the policies and priorities they establish...the advice and counsel they offer...and perhaps most importantly the example they provide, leaders may indeed alter the manner in which subordinates interpret and make sense of their experiences.”⁵⁰

Leadership in the military occurs at all levels and has many meaningful characteristics. Service doctrine indicates that members of all ranks are responsible for leading as well as following. Assigned and emergent leadership as well as positional and personal power are key components of military leadership. A premium is placed on character in the military, where leaders are tasked to perform under highly stressful conditions; in some cases, poor leadership can be the difference between life and death. Under such conditions, leader influence is magnified. Among multiple other competencies, an effective military leader must inspire trust, lead courageously, communicate a vision, maintain personal fitness and bearing, exercise sound judgment, preserve discipline, lead by example, and win. Ultimately, a military leader’s ability to achieve desired results can impact national security.

Introversion and Military Leadership

Although leadership studies have historically favored extroversion as a positive leadership quality, traits of introversion can be as effective, or more effective, for leadership in a military environment. Framing leadership as a process naturally implies that various personality types can be effective leaders, however, personality traits can affect a leader’s success. An analysis of the traits associated with introversion and extroversion in Figure 1 demonstrates that traits associated with introverts are actually desirable military leadership qualities.

First, introverts prefer depth of interest over breadth.⁵¹ This means that an introvert will focus intensely on a given problem, which aligns with several of the leadership attributes in Figure 3, including mental agility and expertise. While breadth is also important for a military leader, focus on a given assignment will assist in problem solving. In today's operating environment, leaders face increasingly difficult problems. The preference to focus on a subject in depth will help the military leader shut down the numerous distractions that occur outside of the primary mission objective. However, other issues must be addressed eventually, but they will ostensibly be handled in a prioritized order.

Second, introverts learn best through reflection or mental practice, as opposed to discussion or doing without thinking first. Put another way, extroverts often act before they think, while introverts think before they act.⁵² These traits are consistent with many of the leadership competencies listed in Table 4, including adapting under pressure, inspiring trust, and exercising sound judgment. While this reflection can sometimes lead to slow decision-making for the introvert, it also avoids making hasty decisions. The introvert prefers to reflect on the available information and possible consequences of a given decision before acting. In a military context, reflection can be a valuable tool to avoid the wrong course of action. A leader who acts hastily can potentially take unnecessary risks without considering all of the information or outcomes. However, the introverted leader must realize this tendency and act quickly in situations where time is a factor.

Third, introverts prefer to communicate through written communication.⁵³ This does not mean that they are not capable of verbal communication, but the natural tendency favors written interaction. The modern military has been overtaken by email and memoranda. The introverted leader typically excels in the written word, which is often the best way to communicate in a

timely fashion to large groups. Additionally, written communication is often the primary method to keep superiors informed, so it is critical that such communication is effective. This preference corresponds with the Table 4 leadership competencies of fostering effective communication, driving performance through shared vision, and shaping strategy and doctrine. Moreover, introverts can still excel at verbal communication and speeches, but they must recognize their natural tendencies in order to be most successful. For speeches and briefings in front of large groups where an introvert might normally be uncomfortable, various techniques exist to prepare for success, such as rehearsing in private, developing quality notes, and being well studied.

Fourth, introverts gain energy from periods of solitude and lose energy from socializing.⁵⁴ While this could be viewed as a negative trait for leaders and could negatively impact followers, it is important to understand that it is merely a preference. Introverts can socialize and network as well as extroverts, but they will be low on energy afterwards. If military leaders realize their given type, they can plan accordingly. For example, an introvert can plan periods of office work in between meetings or socials. The additional benefit is that energy will typically be gained in solitude. For the military leader, a preponderance of time is spent writing performance reports or awards or executing other similar office duties. Introverts will emerge from such work more energized and ready to tackle the next staff meeting or promotion ceremony.

Using the Army definition of leadership, which is “influencing people - by providing purpose, direction, and motivation - while operating to accomplish the mission and improving the organization,”⁵⁵ it is apparent that introverted leaders can meet or exceed expectations. While they might not be boisterous and gregarious, introverts can influence people and provide purpose, direction, and motivation in a number of ways. Introverts prefer close personal

relationships over superficial interactions with large numbers.⁵⁶ In this way, the military leader can develop a close understanding of key subordinates and superiors and increase synergy in the organization. Additionally, written communication can be a valuable tool to provide purpose and direction. Finally, introverts can excel at the intangibles required of military leaders. The personal characteristics such as loyalty, duty, integrity, courage, discipline and “Warrior Ethos” occur in introverts and extroverts alike. However, such traits may be intensified in introverts due to their preference for self-reflection and looking inward. The challenge here is for the leader to cultivate these traits in subordinates.

Although research has generally favored extroversion as a positive leadership trait, recent studies have found that changing contexts draws a distinction between the two styles. A 2011 study examined the leader’s level of extroversion relative to employee productivity. According to the results of the study, “introverted leaders produced greater group performance when leading proactive employees whereas extroverted leaders produced greater group performance when leading passive employees.”⁵⁷ The researchers attributed these results to the introverted leader’s inclination to listen and take suggestions from proactive personnel, rather than a desire to exert dominance.⁵⁸ This is significant in a military context, where the majority of subordinates can be assumed to be proactive based on their commitment to duty, and military leaders must often decentralize authority.

There are two keys to success for introverted military leaders: 1) They must recognize and work to their strengths, and 2) They must realize when it is necessary to adapt to a different style. In order to work to their strengths, individuals must first recognize their personality type. The MBTI or FFM are accessible tools that can be used to understand one’s tendencies on the introvert/extrovert scale. The introverted leader can use his or her natural inclinations to an

advantage. Intense focus, solitary productivity, written communication, and strong personal relationships are important strengths that a leader can leverage.

Leaders with introverted personality types must be aware of their weaknesses and adapt when necessary. Weaknesses include hesitancy to act and a tendency to drain energy in social situations. In circumstances where information and time is limited, the introverted leader must recognize the situation and act accordingly. Additionally, introverted leaders should plan their schedule to maximize their energy throughout the day or week. This may be accomplished by planning office work at intervals between social activities, for example.

Regarding the ability to adapt, Kello describes personality type as being like handedness. Although individuals may be firmly right handed, they still have the ability to use their left hand for certain functions, or even exclusively at times. Kello states, “When some ‘extroverting’ is required, most analytical types can do it. It may be tiring (even exhausting), but they can meet and greet, take quick action, and generally get out of their comfort zone - they can go southpaw for awhile, when circumstances require it.”⁵⁹ These are described as “work around” behaviors, and are important for introverted leaders to utilize to compensate for disadvantages and maximize effectiveness.⁶⁰

Conclusion

In the modern military environment, budgets and manning numbers are shrinking while threats and security concerns are growing. Accordingly, military leaders are increasingly asked to improve capabilities while reducing spending. One way to maximize potential is to grow leadership within the military’s respective organizations. Individuals at all levels can be successful military leaders, regardless of personality type. In fact, introverted leaders can be as effective, or in some cases more effective, than extroverted leaders.

The world is dominated by extroverts and the military is prone to a corresponding extroverted bias. With introverts making up as little as 25% of the population, they must learn to excel in an extroverted society. Furthermore, past leadership studies have favored extroversion as a positive leadership trait. However, introverted leaders must be aware of their personality traits and how they impact their leadership style. The responsibility falls to the individual to recognize and challenge the natural bias towards extroverted leaders.

There are a number of tools available to individuals to assess their position on the introvert/extrovert scale. The MBTI and FFM are two popular models that measure introversion as it applies to leadership potential. These assessments, or numerous variations of them, are easily accessed and interpreted. Leaders can use them for self-assessment or as a means for subordinates to gain insight into their own tendencies.

Although leadership has been defined by many scholars in differing ways, several themes are common to most definitions – influence, groups, and success. Moreover, leadership can be viewed as a trait or process. Viewing leadership as a process opens the door for individuals with varying traits to emerge as leaders. However, personality traits can affect one’s leadership style. Additionally, the concepts of assigned and emergent leadership as well as positional and personal power are important for leaders to understand. These ideas apply to military leadership as well. When leadership is defined in a military context, the themes of influence, groups, and success again emerge. However, the military adds intangibles such as loyalty, duty, courage, and ethos. Military leadership carries added weight with the potential for high-stress operating conditions where strength of leadership can be the split between life and death.

While extroverted personalities may be desirable for leaders in certain fields - such as politics, sales, or marketing - the traits that are specific to introversion fit seamlessly with

military leadership. Intense focus and reflection, skilled written communication, energy surplus from independent duties, and development of meaningful relationships are some of the strengths that introverted leaders can exploit. However, such leaders must also be aware of their weaknesses. Energy drain from social situations and hesitancy to make decisions without all the information can be limitations for introverted leaders. When these conditions apply, introverts must recognize their tendencies and act accordingly. While introverts and extroverts alike can exhibit strong predispositions to either side, their tendencies are merely preferences and either one can demonstrate features of the other type when required: opposite handedness may apply. Thus, with knowledge of their personality type and its accompanying strengths and weaknesses, introverted military leaders can be highly effective.

Endnotes

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