Accomplishing the military's strategic vision: leading by design to prevent ethical dilemmas from decreasing soldier performance

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Structured Abstract:

Purpose
During combat deployments soldiers will face several ethical dilemmas. Currently, the military teaches physical structures, such as roadblocks to aid soldiers in making the right decisions. This paper serves to show that leadership through philosophical systems is necessary for organizational performance.

Design
The methods of research were both empirical and interpretative. The values-based system derived from two authors, Dr. Noel Tichy and Dr. Ken Hultman. These authors' write for the business sectors. Their findings were used to see if they had any relevance for the military. This was accomplished through hands-on experience in combat and comparative analysis.

Findings
Organizational success depends upon the values leaders use to achieve their goals. During the Afghanistan and Iraq wars, soldiers were expected to accomplish two different organizational goals. The first was to fight and defend freedom and the second was to create legitimate governments. Leaders must write the values for each organizational goal, agree on the values, place people in charge who believe in them and ensure that every decision reinforces the values.

Originality/value
Writing the values that support organizational goals into an action plan is a new concept for the military. This paper is intended for military leaders at the direct and organizational levels.

Keywords:
Ethical dilemma, Leading by Design, Values-based, Organizational culture, Military Leadership

How soldiers make decisions in combat may determine outcomes that will affect organizational goals. When leaders are in positions where crisis-points are expected, such as in combat, they must in place systems of communication that will assist in directing behaviors toward a desired end-state. This is especially the case for leaders in the military at the direct level where leaders have daily interactions with their subordinates and can directly influence their behaviors. Tichy states, "Winning leaders are keenly aware of the importance that values play in shaping people's behavior." [1] This is part of a leaders responsibility when providing purpose, direction and motivation.

In preparing for war there are no cookie-cutter tools that leaders and soldiers can use to be fully ready for the ethical dilemmas they will face. The use of vignettes is an example leaders and their followers have used. Vignettes are designed to probe the minds of decision makers into thinking about ethical decisions. They are usually in the form of short stories that put the reader into an ethical dilemma. Then the reader must discuss how they would respond. Outside of vignettes military leaders have used physical structures such as stand off measures at a checkpoint. Signs and roadblocks are the decision makers first and second levels of defense. They serve two purposes in that they alert a local national to an upcoming military checkpoint and they increase the time and distance from the local national to the decision maker. Lastly, a more enduring method is an internal structure designed to lead people and systems through carefully selected values. These methods can be used during a life and death decision or used to help guide individual and collective behaviors over the length of a deployment. In my experiences, there can be a tremendous amount of pressure on soldiers after repeated deployments to either lower their ethical standards or their desire to accomplish the overall mission. After three, four and five combat tours soldiers will have faced countless real-life scenarios placing them in the position to make decisions that influence the goal. They will also have been away from family, friends, and their own way of life for just as many years. The mounting pressure of ethical-dilemmas can wear down any person. To aid soldiers in the battle for resiliency we may find support through values-based leadership. In, "Balancing Individual and Organizational Values: Walking the Tightrope to Success" Ken Hultman discusses the importance of balancing individual and organizational values.

In Hultman's book he suggests that, "Culture allows us to organize our efforts with others to meet needs in the midst of change and uncertainty. It emerges whenever people join together to satisfy needs and wants and clarifies how this will be accomplished." [2] After the events on September 11, 2001 the American people united in a common culture to defend our way of life. People all over the United States joined the military. Both the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq soon turned into a counterinsurgency and the military effort transitioned into a mission to win hearts and minds. This indicated a change in the values of the military. No longer were we defending our freedoms we were now building other nations. The American citizens who became soldiers, to defend our freedoms, were now functioning inside a platoon. This is important, when considering organizational performance or dysfunction, because wars are won at the platoon level. [3] At the operational level leaders need to see everything from how we communicate, how others communicate, how messages are passed, tasks are assigned, and the level of value placed on work. The interrelationships between systemic structures (individuals, teams, squads, platoons and higher) influence patterns of behavior and in the end organizational outcomes. [4] If we are going to become soldiers who can influence the hearts and minds of others, and help build other nations, then we need to understand our organizations systems. [5]

Leading during ethical dilemmas
Before ethical dilemmas and any associated injustices of war arise leaders need to establish their expectations for individual values. Individual values must be assessed and balanced with the military's two organizational values, defending our freedom and winning hearts and minds. Leaders must develop clarity on how they will reinforce support for the individual and organizational values during continuous military operations day after day and year after year. To accomplish this leaders can communicate five things: [6]

1. They clearly articulate a set of values for the entire organization or team
2. They continually reflect on the values to make sure that they are appropriate to achieving the desired goals
3. They embody the values with their own behavior
4. They encourage others to apply the values in their own decisions and actions
5. They aggressively confront and deal with pockets of ignorance and resistance

While many organizations have a clear set of individual values it is absolutely critical to lead through values during combat. Individuals during combat may need to be able to adapt from one organizational value to another and adopt its' associated individual values. The points of transition between values can cause tension points and the emergence of an ethical dilemma.

Leaders who can articulate both organizational and individual values clearly and who can determine when the transition points are needed greatly help win hearts and minds add value to our presence and accomplish the mission. My first of four deployments was to Iraq in 2004-2005. Immediately upon our arrival our company assisted in the battle for Fallujah. During this operation most of the rules of engagement were lifted, and soldiers were expected to perform their duties. This behavior was permitted because of the type of operation we were conducting. Less than thirty days after the battle we were sent to Mosul a heavily populated and urbanized city in northern Iraq. There our company was placed in a hot spot to handle the emerging insurgency group Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI). Our individual values were to add value to the fledgling government and to give the local people an opportunity for freedom. Shortly after our arrival we realized a local shopkeeper was allowing AQI insurgents to place improvised explosives in front of his store. In fact, there were several streets where this was happening. AQI was attempting to use the people to delegitimize our presence and build their own proxy government. The explosive charges produced damaging results on U.S. forces and their equipment. Some of the charges were powerful enough to open up the bottom hull of our Stryker vehicles as a can opener opens a lid. We were encountering ethical dilemma's because one hand we wanted to be soldiers and defend freedoms and on the other hand we had be civil and work together to establish a new government. This continued from January until the day we left in August. During these months we were in daily contact with the explosive charges or the insurgents and the local people. Constantly, switching from soldier to ally. The requirement of versatility created the emotional need for many to respond with great frustrations. During this time there was one leader who stood out. He was aware of the differences between fighting the battle in Fallujah and the insurgency in Mosul. In clearly articulating these differences he was instrumental to our success. He continually redirected everyone's energies towards combating the problem and not the symptoms. His focus and clarity on what was allowed and what was not was decisive. Through this I learned that clarity of values and systems of reinforcement are the cornerstone from which soldiers use to respond. Hultman supports this claim when he wrote, "Choices are based on values, which are beliefs about what is important in life." [7]

Next, winning leaders must place others in positions of responsibility that can embody both organizational and individual values and encourage followers to do the same. These leaders are able to lead discussions about the importance of these values too. In 2007 and 2008, I was deployed for fifteen months to Baghdad, Iraq. During this deployment we had conducted hundreds of raids and patrols, in the day we were expected to be supporters of the government and at night we were soldiers defending the freedoms of the people. Thanks to one leader our platoon was successful in the constant transition points from one organizational value and its associated individual values to the other. Our platoon took the initiate to embody theses values and act in a way that was different. We took pride in our work and acted in ways and manners so as to earn the respect of the people. We were able to make conscious actions by discussing our daily operations and the effects of our actions on the people. Many times we discussed the humanness of the Iraqi people and the implications of unjust behavior.

Then in the Spring of 2008 there was an uprising in Sadr City with a rogue element of Muqtada al Sadr's milita group. For nearly forty-five days our organizational goal was to defend this city. Several units worked together to lock down the one million people living in Sadr City. Over the course of several weeks no one was allowed to leave their homes and during the evening hours coalition forces were ordered to shot or kill anyone on the streets. Soldiers were expected to be soldiers and many of them had to take another persons life, and they witnessed the consequences of war on themselves, their comrades and families. In dealing with any one of these injustices and their associated ethical dilemmas, soldiers will face two sets of forces: those leading towards safety and those leading towards growth and development. [8] These forces increase the motive to not make the individual transition to the more civil organizational values. After the operation in Sadr City ended our platoon reverted back to business as usual in a counterinsurgency fight. Because of our many discussions on values and over our purpose we encouraged each other to do the right thing. The leader who embodied both values was able to lead others to do the same.

Regardless of how difficult the mission is when an individual resists the values of the organization the individual must be confronted or replaced. During my fourth combat tour in 2012, we were stationed in the birthplace of the Taliban, which made it difficult to win their hearts and minds. We were in small village outside of Kandahar in Panjaw'i, Afghanistan. Panjaw'i is an agricultural area where the people live off of the produce and profits from their crops. Inside each cluster of villages people make their way through tiny footpaths. The spider web system of footpaths link villagers together. Coalition forces used these footpaths too. In fact the footpaths were almost the only way to get to the interior of a village. Our dilemma was the amount of pressure plate improvised explosives (PPIED) that the Taliban had buried. The PPIED is victim operated as it detonates when it is stepped on. They were their defenses and they slowed our mobility to a crawl. Through careful planning and maneuvering we were still able to conduct patrols. Psychologically it

was horribly tough for the soldiers. Each day, for nine months, we walked out into villages not knowing the outcome. One single step outside of the footprint of the person in front of you could cost you one, two, three or four limbs and maybe even your life. Day after day we saw and talked with the villagers all along they knew where the PPIED's were located. Our organizational mission was to prevent any attack from happening on Kandahar Airfield, which was fourteen miles away. There was no switching from soldier to ally we were in the home to the Taliban. As a result there was a high level of a lack of clarity as to why we were even there. And the psychological affects caused many tension points between being a solider and being an ally. A leader must be able to make transitions even in the toughest of locations and needs to confront those who cannot. A leader who can continue to make these transitions shows discretion, courage and believes in the organization. It may come as a surprise that in 2012 there may be pockets of ignorance but it is true. Out of one hundred and fifty soldiers in our company nearly eighty percent were on their first deployment. Through these deployments I have learned the importance and the power of leading through values.

While the psychological affects of this deployment and on anyone who has deployed more than once are troubling it is in fact the leaders' responsibility to hold his soldiers to the highest of standards. Expecting soldiers to win hearts and minds in the home of the Taliban is a bit of a stretch. Leaders who put units in locations like this must be able to recognize this truth and be able to balance organizational and individual values. When this cannot be done, then it will be time to either change the organizational mission or replace the individual resisters.

Leading by design
The primary function of values, whether for an individual or an organization, is to meet needs. [9] In balancing individual and organizational values leaders can provide purpose, direction and motivation to their followers. The organizational design is to lead individuals and the organization, together, towards growth, stability or defensive postures. Since values serve such a fundamental part of our lives their inclusion should not be excluded from the strategic planning process. In developing an action plan designed to implement values military leaders can synthesize the purpose of organizational development with the military's command and control, hierarchy dominant culture. In a highly complicated effort as is in a counterinsurgency success is dependent on the day-to-day actions of the soldiers.

Noel Tichy and Stratford Sherman in, "Control your Destiny or Someone Else Will," suggest that leaders can lead others and their organizations by a design. [10] To write the organizational design leaders must agree on the values, place people in charge who believe in them and ensure that every decision reinforces the values. [11] Direct leaders in the military must continually reexamine the values that lead their organizations in and out of combat. They must also realize that culture change in an organization happens at the individual level [12] and leaders and followers must personally change for the overall culture to change. Leaders and followers are not separate from culture but instead they are the culture. [13]

Physical and systemic structures, alike are tools that leaders can use to lead their elements with a design. Crisis-points, multiple deployments and a since that the organization does not value individuals can be emotional and overwhelming. Depending on an individual's personality s/he may or may not be prone to responding emotionally. By using physical and systemic structures leaders and followers can rely on measures to counter the overpowering desires of emotion. Leading through values is a process that works to increase a person's judgment and discernment and in the end produce outcomes that benefit the military's strategic vision. It is one-way leaders can work to provide purpose, direction and motivation for their followers.

Notes

1. Tichy, N (2002). *The Leadership Engine.* Harper Business Collins, New York, NY.

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3. Malone, D (1983). *Small Unit Leadership.* Random House Publishing, Canada.

4. Senge, P (2006). *The Fifth Discipline*. Currency, New York, NY.

5. Senge, P, ibid.

6. Tichy, N, ibid.

7. Tichy, N, ibid.

8. Hultman, K, ibid.

9. Cameron, K. and Quinn, R (2011). *Diagnosing and Changing Organizational Culture.* Jossey-Bass, New York, NY.

10. Tichy, N. & Sherman, S (1994). *Control Your Destiny or Someone Else Will.* Harper Collins, New York, NY.

11. Tichy, N, ibid.

12. Schein, E. H (2010). *Organizational Culture and Leadership.* Jossey-Bass, New York, NY.

13. Hultman, K, ibid.