Shared Leadership in the Military: Reality, Possibility, or Pipedream?

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Shared leadership involves building a broader and deeper capacity for leadership that goes beyond a formally appointed leader. Several models of team leadership are reviewed, distinguishing between the leadership of teams from leadership in teams. Shared leadership is a variant of the latter in which everyone on the team is responsible for leadership and where leadership emerges through patterned interactions of team members. Overall, shared leadership appears to be a possibility for the military—and one that is needed because of the increasing complexity of missions—but efforts need to be undertaken to incorporate it into formal training and doctrine.

The context in which leadership is enacted in organizations today is changing at a rapid pace. In addition, it has been argued that the problems and challenges

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faced by most organizations have been getting increasingly complex. This is certainly the case for military organizations. Not only are the threats to the nation's defense more difficult to predict (think asymmetric warfare and terrorism), but the very nature of the missions have changed, from traditional warfare to humanitarian aid and peacekeeping and everything in between. It has also been noted that there is significant *task migration* in the military from senior to more junior leaders (Brown, 2003; Reed, Bullis, Collins, & Paparone, 2004). As a result, there is an increasing likelihood that no single leader will have all the answers or even be able to make sense of the more significant challenges that are encountered. Thus, there is an intense need for examining leadership across most domains as a way of increasing the overall capacity for effective leadership in groups and organizations.

Of all the recent developments in leadership theory and research, perhaps none shows as much promise as the topic of shared leadership. Although shared leadership is not a unitary theory, it does take a unique perspective on leadership as compared to more traditional approaches. Shared leadership is defined "as a dynamic, interactive influence process among individuals in groups for which the objective is to lead one another to the achievement of group or organizational goals or both" (Pearce & Conger, 2003, p. 1). A key difference between shared leadership and more traditional approaches is that the source of influence can be located anywhere within a group or team, can be directed anywhere in the unit (upward, downward, or lateral), and can change in a dynamic fashion rather than being centralized (formally or informally) in a single individual (i.e., "the leader").

The purpose of this article is to examine the viability of shared leadership in the military environment. We will do this by first looking at what we know about shared leadership by looking at several models (the reality of shared leadership). Of importance here is the distinction between the leadership *of* teams and leadership *in* teams. We will then examine how shared leadership could be developed, and the implications for the military (the possibility of shared leadership). This will be done by examining the challenges and opportunities for the development and enactment of shared leadership in military teams, by studying relevant doctrine and reflecting on typical practices in two branches of the U.S. military (Army and Air Force). Next, we will address how much shared leadership currently exists and how the military might (if possible) incorporate the concept of shared leadership within its linear leadership structure (the pipedream of shared leadership). From this perspective, shared leadership in the military may be more of a pipedream than either a reality or possibility. Finally, we will discuss some considerations that must be addressed in order to increase shared leadership in a military context (moving toward reality). Our central thesis is that the military might be acutely in need of shared leadership in certain cases; however, its systems, processes, doctrine, and—perhaps most importantly—culture are ill-suited to reap the benefits of shared leadership.

THE REALITY OF SHARED LEADERSHIP

The conceptualization of shared leadership is not particularly new. It has its origins in the early 20th century with management scholars such as Mary Follett and Elton Mayo (Pearce & Conger, 2003), as well as a faction of social psychology in the mid-20th century (e.g., Gibb, 1954). But it is only fairly recently that the approach has attracted researchers interested in scientifically testing the key tenets of shared leadership. One apparent reason why it is gaining interest from both researchers and practitioners is that it helps to fill a void left by most of the traditional, leader-centric approaches to leadership. Specifically, in traditional leadership approaches focusing on the decision-making and influence skills of a single leader (who is usually formally appointed), limits are quickly and more commonly reached in terms of potential effectiveness.

Vertical Leadership Models

In terms of this notion of reaching limits, a particular quandary with traditional leadership approaches is that if the leader cannot make sense of a given challenge or situation, or cannot decide what form of behavior to take or solution to implement, there can be no leadership (Drath, 2001). That is because leadership is thought to flow from the leader to a set of followers. Under such a framework, there is no scenario for leadership to be shared among others in the group even when critically needed, no possibility of multiple leaders, and little or no possibility for upward influence to occur. While this might be considered to be the most conservative form of traditional leadership, it is fairly common across different domains, including the military. It is also typical of how many people think about leadership—or what their respective implicit leadership theories guide them to think (Keller, 1999; Offermann, Kennedy, & Wirtz, 1994). If the leader is stuck, then leadership is unlikely to take place in the group, because of this over-reliance on this one leader for the necessary leadership functions, such as setting direction, building commitment, and creating alignment (Drath et al., 2008).

Another way of conceptualizing this traditional perspective is to view it as the leadership *of* teams. Figure 1A provides a visual depiction of how this is typically conceptualized. There is a team of independent peers organized in a relatively autonomous fashion with an external leader who is not in the team but rather acts apart from it. These kinds of organizing structures are also called self-managed work teams. A paradox of sorts in this approach is that supposed "self-managed" teams usually have a formal external leader who makes key decisions about personnel, manages the team's resources and boundaries, and intervenes when unexpected problems or events occur (Morgeson, 2005; Morgeson & DeRue, 2006). Other perspectives on the leadership of self-managing work teams have also reinforced the notion of a single external leader (e.g., Stewart & Manz, 1995).
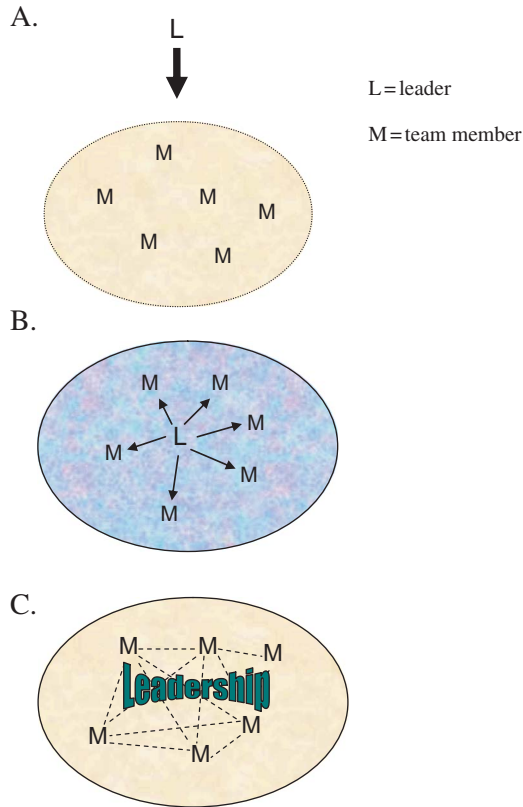
FIGURE 1   Illustrations of external team leadership (A), internal team leadership (B), and shared leadership as an outcome of patterned social interaction (C). (color figure available online)

Still other work has focused on the notion of team coaching as a means of enhancing team effectiveness (Hackman & Wageman, 2005). Although we know the most about these particular forms of external team leadership in terms of empirical research findings, they would not be considered to be forms of shared leadership (Mathieu, Maynard, Rapp, & Gilson, 2008).

A subtle but important distinction from the external leadership model depicted in Figure 1A is that of internal team leadership. Instead of the leadership of a team, this model is based on the leadership *in* a team. As illustrated in Figure 1B, the leader is an individual who is part of the team and either is formally appointed or emerges informally within the team as a result of superior influence or other

transformational behavior (Bass & Riggio, 2006), through demonstrating person-
ality characteristics such as extraversion (Judge, Bono, Ilies, & Gerhardt, 2002),
or matching the majority of the team's implicitly held prototype of an effective
leader (Lord, Foti, & Phillips, 1982). Nonetheless, leader effectiveness in the inter-
nal model is still thought to stem from the functional approach that was also used
to describe external leader effectiveness. Overall, there are more similarities than
differences between these two models.

What these leadership models have in common is that the source of leadership
is always vested in an individual leader. In this way, the leader is someone who
acts on followers or other team members. As noted previously, a distinct limita-
tion of both of these models is that when a leader is stymied as to what course
of action to pursue or how to get others to commit to a chosen course of action,
then there is either a gap in leadership, or no leadership. In the context of the mil-
itary environment, where military rank is constantly salient, this can be especially
problematic, since a lower-ranking member would not feel comfortable stepping
in and usurping the formal leader's authority (for practical as well as disciplinary
reasons). The potential drawback of such a rigid form of vertical leadership is that
over-dependence could be fostered, which can be disastrous in times of crisis with
an incapacitated leader (cognitively, emotionally, or physically).

Shared Leadership Model

There is a third possible model that is a variant of the internal leader model.
Instead of leadership flowing from a leader directly to a team or a set of individual
team members, leadership emerges through the patterned interactions of group
members (Figure 1C). In this way, leadership is conceptualized as an outcome of
effective social processes and structures (Salancik, Calder, Rowland, Leblebici, &
Conway, 1975) rather than solely as an input from the individual leader helping a
team perform more effectively (e.g., Morgeson, DeRue, & Karam, 2010; Zaccaro,
Rittman, & Marks, 2001). This form of team leadership capacity is viewed as
an emergent state that develops over time; is dynamic in nature (i.e., continually
evolving or devolving), and it varies as a function of team inputs (e.g., team mem-
ber resources and capabilities), processes (e.g., teamwork), and outcomes (e.g.,
team learning; Day, Gronn, & Salas, 2004). This is shared leadership in its purest
form in that there is no single recognized leader. Leadership "exists" in the con-
nections and relationships among team members rather than being resident in the
actions or behaviors of any one individual (also see Carson, Tesluk, & Marrone,
2007, Figure 1). In this manner, leadership serves as a resource that is drawn
from the team to address complex challenges requiring adaptability, learning, or
different forms of sensemaking (O'Connor & Quinn, 2004).

Among the advantages of having a developed level of team leadership capacity
is that it frees up the external leader to focus on other things, such as identifying

external threats and opportunities, and also broadens the overall leadership reper-
toire of a team. Members of the team are no longer dependent on a single leader to
solve their problems or set the direction for the team. Enhanced team leadership
capacity should therefore also contribute to the resiliency of teams under condi-
tions that contribute to disorganization and the collapse of sensemaking (Weick,
1993).

Given shared leadership's apparent importance and relevance for potentially
enhancing team effectiveness, some questions to address are how to develop team
leadership capacity, and whether it is appropriate or even possible to develop in
military contexts? Specifically, what are the potential challenges and opportunities
associated with military applications of team leadership capacity? These questions
will be addressed throughout the remainder of the article.

THE POSSIBILITY OF SHARED LEADERSHIP IN THE MILITARY

Developing Shared Leadership

At a conceptual level, Day et al. (2004) proposed that the development of shared
leadership in the form of team leadership capacity was part of a continuous, ongo-
ing cycle. Team member resources in the form of individual knowledge, skills,
and abilities provide the initial inputs. The level of teamwork that develops is a
function of these initial resources and is augmented (moderated) by the amount
and type of formal interventions that the team is exposed to, as well as the leader's
resources in terms of his or her knowledge, skills, and abilities. The resulting level
of teamwork that is developed is instrumental in shaping overall team learning
capacity, which, in turn, is positively related to team leadership capacity (primar-
ily in the form of shared leadership). This capacity for leadership is then available
to the team as a resource that can be used in addressing those complex adaptive
challenges that require leadership to adapt or perform effectively (especially in
the military environment; Heifetz, 1994).

From this perspective, Day et al. (2004) view the development of team lead-
ership capacity to be mainly the result of the amount of learning capacity in a
team, which is a function of the level of teamwork that develops. Individuals
are important, because both so-called followers as well as the team leader bring
important resources to bear with regard to building teamwork. What this approach
does not address are some of the additional contextual forces that can either foster
or impede the development of shared leadership or team leadership capacity.

Rather than focusing on the actual structure of a team or organization, another
approach is to examine the underlying social architecture in the form of norms and
expectations that guide the way in which team members interrelate. Identifying
those norms that help to create a healthy psychological space for learning (Kolb &

Kolb, 2005) would also be important levers for enhancing shared leadership. Day (2007) identified three such norms: (a) low power distance, (b) high psychological safety, and (c) a strong learning orientation.

Power distance reflects the core value surrounding how power should be distributed among team or organization members. A personal or cultural norm of high power distance accepts that power is distributed unequally and that it is acceptable for certain members of the unit in question to hold greater power due to their rank, position, or title. Low power distance norms promote a more egalitarian stance, which would be more likely to value participative and shared leadership approaches. Results from the Project GLOBE study indicated that those national cultures with low power distance norms or values had members who reported being more likely to encourage the empowerment of subordinates (House, Hanges, Javidan, Dorfman, & Gupta, 2004), which enhances the likelihood of shared leadership to develop more broadly and deeply.

Psychological safety refers to how comfortable members of a team are in taking interpersonal risks with each other (Edmondson, 1999). This can take various forms, including admitting mistakes or ignorance on a given topic, or questioning the assumptions or assertions of another team member, even one of greater formal or informal status. The essence of this norm is that learning in an interpersonal context often requires people to make themselves vulnerable to others, which is difficult to do when there is a basic lack of trust. The research of Edmondson and her colleagues has demonstrated that among cardiac surgical teams, those whose members were comfortable speaking up and making suggestions, asking questions, or admitting mistakes were more successful in learning a new surgical procedure than those teams in which people felt uncertain or uncomfortable acting this way (Edmondson, Bohmer, & Pisano, 2001). In those cases, the learning environment was stifled rather than nurtured.

The final team norm discussed by Day (2007) was that of a learning orientation. This comes from work done on basic human motivation processes that influence learning (Dweck, 1986). A performance orientation focuses on demonstrating competence in safe and relatively nonchallenging environments, taking few risks and making few errors, and demonstrating proficiency on a task using as little effort as possible. Conversely, a learning orientation focuses more on the mastery of a task, seeking challenges to develop competence, taking reasonable risks, and accepting mistakes if they contribute to learning. Essentially, a learning orientation goes beyond the motivation to demonstrate proficiency in terms of committing the fewest errors to reaching a deeper understanding of the nuances of a particular domain, with the overarching goal of building expertise.

So far, the focus on these particular norm sets in teams (power distance, psychological safety, and learning orientation) has been mostly at a conceptual or

theoretical level. But recent research has focused on examining empirically the antecedent conditions that foster the development of shared leadership, as well as the influence of shared leadership on team performance (Carson et al., 2007). Those authors operationalized the antecedent conditions in ways both internal and external to the team. The *internal team environment* consisted of the dimensions of shared purpose (willingness to share the team's leadership responsibilities), social support (efforts to provide emotional and psychological strength to team members), and voice (degree to which the team members have input into how the team carries out its purpose). At the external level, *team coaching* focused on those actions of an external leader that were supportive in nature and reinforced the team's autonomous leadership.

Results gathered from 59 consulting (i.e., nonmilitary) teams indicated that both the internal team environment and external coaching were positively related to the perceived development of shared leadership. Furthermore, there was a significant interaction between these internal and external antecedents, such that coaching was particularly important to the development of shared leadership for those teams lacking a strong set of internal norms (i.e., the internal team environment was unsupportive). Results also demonstrated that the level of shared leadership in a team was positively and significantly related to team performance as rated by the teams' respective clients.

There are points of convergence as well as divergence in these two perspectives on shared leadership. Both Day (2007) and Carson et al. (2007) highlight the importance of psychological safety—termed social support and voice by Carson et al.—but diverge in some other important ways. Day's perspective was on the development of important team norms that are thought to foster the development of shared leadership, whereas Carson and colleagues introduce the notion of shared purpose (which is not a team norm), as well as external resources in the form of team coaching. Taken together, this work suggests a rapidly developing knowledge base with regard to the development of shared leadership and team leadership capacity. Specifically, there are relevant internal team factors, as well as coaching behaviors, provided by an external team leader that are important antecedents to the development of shared leadership. The Carson et al. (2007) study also suggested that external coaching was especially important when the internal team climate was relatively unsupportive (i.e., lack of shared purpose, poor social support, no voice). Findings also suggest that across a number of different contexts shared leadership is positively related to team performance. Thus, shared leadership can be developed, and it is generally a good thing in terms of enhancing team effectiveness. There may still be questions about what particular conditions foster its development, especially within military contexts. Thus, a question that we next turn our attention to is whether or not there is an opportunity for shared leadership in the military.

Doctrinal Perspectives on Shared Leadership

In attempting to understand whether there is a sound basis for shared leadership in the military, we will focus on two specific branches—Army and Air Force. These particular branches were chosen because it has been suggested that they have very different cultures and possibly different pervasive leadership styles (Mastroianni, 2005–2006). Another reason is that the Army and the Air Force each have codified doctrine with regard to leadership (relevant Navy doctrine refers to command and control rather than leadership). Our approach is twofold. First, we will examine respective Army and Air Force leadership doctrine for aspects that either support or hinder the development of shared leadership capacity. Second, we will share the perspectives of the present coauthors, who have firsthand observations with regard to how leadership works at the ground level (or in the sky, as the case may be). We will conclude with an overall prognosis with regard to the likely development of shared leadership capacity in these two branches of the U.S. military, as well as offer suggestions on how this state of affairs might be improved (if necessary).

One thing to note is that both Army and Air Force doctrine tend to equate leadership with the actions of an individual leader. The Army defines leadership as "The process of influencing people by providing purpose, direction, and motivation while operating to accomplish the mission and improving the organization" (Department of the Army, 2006, pp. 1–2). The Air Force definition of leadership is a bit more succinct but is similar to that of the Army: "The art and science of influencing and directing people to accomplish the assigned mission" (United States Air Force, 2006, p. 1). One implication of this emphasis on influence and direction is that leadership development essentially boils down to the development of individual leaders (Day, 2000), with little or no attention to the developmental needs of broader collectives such as teams. The point of relevance is that if the respective doctrine promotes solely the notion of individual leader development, then it is difficult to think about leadership as a broader team capacity issue (Day et al., 2004). As stated in Army doctrine (1–1), "All Army team members . . . must have a basis of understanding for what leadership is and does." But if leadership is seen as something that an individual leader does, then that constrains the thinking and enacting of more inclusive leadership models.

Army doctrine.   There are several noteworthy aspects with regard to Army leadership as codified in its doctrine (Department of the Army, 2006) that may have strong implications for shared leadership. The team-based nature of the Army is recognized in terms of the Army as a team as well as a team of teams; in addition, for these teams to function optimally both leaders and followers need to develop mutual trust and respect, recognize each others' talents, and willingly

contribute for the good of the organization (3–48). It further distinguishes formal (rank- or position-based) from informal (experience- or knowledge-based) leadership. Doctrine is clear that whereas informal leadership plays an important role in the Army, "it should never undermine legitimate authority" (3–51).

Army doctrine also explicitly discusses shared leadership, defined as a process whereby multiple leaders rely on combined knowledge and individual authority to achieve a common goal or mission. In short, shared leadership "involves sharing authority and responsibility between two or more leaders for decision making, planning, and executing" (Glossary-4). The Army also expects leadership from everyone regardless of designated authority or position, because every leader has the potential to assume ultimate responsibility (3–67). Nevertheless, the underlying implication is that shared leadership involves leaders *with* authority. Although shared leadership and informal leadership are recognized as legitimate forms of leadership (within reason), the ultimate responsibility for leadership falls on the shoulders of individual leaders.

Despite this apparent leader-centric focus, Army doctrine also recognizes that "no Army leader is irreplaceable" no matter how senior or central (3–70). Thus, it is critical that leaders empower subordinates and delegate authority as a way to develop them as leaders (3–69). Along with that comes the possibility that less experienced subordinates will make mistakes. Using tools such as after action reviews helps subordinates to learn from their mistakes and enhances an overall learning orientation. As doctrine states: "Good soldiers and conscientious leaders learn from mistakes" (3–68).

Although far from an exhaustive review of Army leadership doctrine, the above nonetheless provides limited but noteworthy examples of the importance and relevance of shared leadership. In terms of the subtitle of the present article, it appears that shared leadership is at least a possibility if not a reality using Army leadership doctrine as the touchstone.

Air Force doctrine.   The Air Force doctrine on leadership and force development (United States Air Force, 2006) acknowledges on the very first page that "any Air Force member can be a leader" and that individuals "simultaneously serve as both leaders and followers at every level of the Air Force" (p. 1). The point is made repeatedly in this section that leadership does not equal command and that exercising positive influence in the organization can be done without being the commander.

Leadership in the Air Force consists of three main components according to doctrine: (a) core values, (b) competencies, and (c) actions. Most of the details of these components pertain to individual-level phenomena (e.g., integrity, influence, personal excellence); however, under the core value of organizational excellence it

is noted that "leaders foster a culture that emphasizes a *team mentality* while maintaining high standards for accomplishing the mission" (p. 8, emphasis added). Loosely interpreted, team mentality might include the subcomponent of shared purpose, which has been shown to be antecedent to shared leadership (Carson et al., 2007).

The second chapter of Air Force leadership doctrine pertains to issues of force development. The development process is described as a deliberate one that seeks to produce the right capabilities to meet the Air Force's operational needs. The focus is on "developing leaders who thoroughly understand the mission, the organization, and the tenets of air and space power" (p. 13). The overarching goal of force development is to "prepare Airmen to successfully lead and act in the midst of rapidly evolving environments, while meeting their personal and professional expectations" (p. 14). This provides a flavor for the heavy orientation toward the importance of preparing individual leaders as a way to enhance broader force development. This is not unusual or incorrect, in that many nonmilitary organizations focus on developing their leadership "bench strength" or their leadership "pipeline" through the development of individual leaders; however, it also does very little to promote shared leadership or develop an overall team leadership capacity.

Chapters 3 and 4 provide an overview of the force development process and the role of education and training in this process. Of all the components of the force development process—force development definition, renewal, development, and sustainment—all are conceived at the individual level regardless of the level of the organization to which it is directed (tactical, operational, or strategic). The overall approach can be summarized from the conclusion to the doctrine that re-emphasizes how leadership is fundamental to the Air Force: "Leadership and force development must continue to provide the Air Force with its most valuable resource: its people" (p. 36).

In summary, Army and Air Force leadership doctrine tend to focus on the development of individual leaders as a means of providing for the ongoing leadership needs of their respective branches. Army doctrine in particular addresses the notion of shared leadership directly and explicitly. But does that mean it is a reality or merely a possibility? The next section will address specific, nondoctrinal challenges to developing shared leadership in the Army and Air Force.

IS SHARED LEADERSHIP A PIPEDREAM?

What About Shared Leadership in the Military?

This doctrinal focus of individual leader development has been effective since the beginning of the U.S. military. The core premise is that through effective

leader development (i.e., schooling, training, developmental assignments, professional military education, operational rotation, deployments) you can literally plug any leader into any given situation and have effective leadership (or at least the potential for effective leadership). This has been standard practice and has resulted in the longevity and sustained success of our military. However, with the increased use of teams as a key element within organizations (Burke et al., 2006) and the changing nature of warfare, is the focus on individual leader development still the most appropriate strategy for teams?

Zaccaro and Bader (2003) propose that restructuring work into teams sets up organizations to be more adaptive to what is going on around them because the team will have broader experiences, more capacities, and larger networks to draw upon. If this is the case, is individual leader development (independent of the team context) an effective strategy in utilizing the potential benefits that these teams could bring to the organization? Might there be situations in the military where the idea of shared leadership could take advantage of such benefits for team functioning while at the same time maintaining the discipline and hierarchy of the military structure? That is the core question that is the focus for the remainder of the article.

In order to answer this question, however, one contextual issue needs to be addressed. As part of this discussion of shared leadership within the military there must first be recognition of its predominant leadership structure. Specifically, the structure is one that is based on rank and the chain of command. More specifically, the military model of leadership is based on position (and the rank associated with that position) and personal experience (which helped the individual to attain that rank). Rank is sacrosanct and must be attended to at all times. Within a military team, the formal leader is designated or appointed based on rank and will typically outrank the other members of the team regardless of whether they are external or internal to the team. Even in a situation where there are multiple individuals with the same rank there is a clear delineation of who is the most senior at a particular rank. This will sometimes even occur through an explicit conversation detailing individual dates of rank (what day the individuals were promoted to their current rank).

Associated with the issue of rank is that certain protocols are considered appropriate when dealing with someone of a higher or lower rank. For example, if the team leader is the same rank as other members on the team, deference is given to that formal team leader with respect to the other team members. Also, there is the principle of the chain of command. When actions are taken, strict adherence must be given to the appropriate chain of command for the team/organization. For example, a team member would not think about "jumping the chain" by going to the team leader's boss (or higher) without first addressing the issue with the team leader. To do so would likely invite career suicide.

Barriers to Shared Leadership

These two factors (rank and protocol) create inherent barriers to the notion of shared leadership within the military and help to illustrate the explicit power distance issues that can be found in the military structure. The questions of "Who is in command" and "Who is the leader of this group/team" are easily answered. This does not mean that there are no informal leaders that may also exert influence on the functioning of the team. However, when it comes right down to it, rank wins and leadership in and of the team is clear.

This idea of position and rank authority should be of no surprise for such an organization. When tasked with missions such as national security, force protection, and combat operations, there needs to be a delineated leader that is in charge of the team and related outcomes. When actually accomplishing the military mission, there is little room (or often time) for intricate discussions of all possible alternatives for the given situation. When bullets are flying and bombs are dropping, the leader is responsible for making decisions for the team. If the leader is incapacitated, the next individual in the chain of command (in most cases) will take charge and the team will continue with the mission. There is no discussion or voting as to who has the most knowledge or skill. It comes down to who has the rank and position to take over. The conundrum is that complex, high-threat, and rapidly evolving unfamiliar situations are precisely the circumstances that can overwhelm the leadership capacity of the single designated leader and heighten the need for shared leadership capacity within the team. This shared leadership capacity, even when bullets are flying, sets up some redundancy in the leadership system by diffusing leadership within the group to get away from the possibility of a "single point of failure" if the leader is somehow incapacitated or killed.

Another barrier to shared leadership is the deeply ingrained up-or-out culture of the military. The basic idea is that you earn success individually in the military. If you perform well and do the "right" things (e.g., have certain jobs, multiple deployments, specific training) you get rewarded. If you do not perform, then you will not move up because there is always a group of your peers who are willing to pay the necessary price to move on. And if you are not able to move up, your time in the service will be limited. For example, with very limited exceptions, you must be a general officer to be allowed to serve more than 30 years in the Army, and you must be a colonel to serve more than 23 years. Everyone in the military has grown up in this traditional up-or-out system and understands how outstanding performers are delineated from average performers by their assignment to preferred positions and speed of movement through the ranks. This is similar to the heroic form of leadership. In other words, the more that one does—assuming it is done well—the greater the number of available opportunities. It is about what someone does, and the rewards are allocated on an individual basis. At

any given time, if a military leader wants to gauge his or her relative effectiveness, comparisons can be made to a host of previous successful leaders to see how one measures up.

This idea is in contrast to the notion of shared leadership. If someone wants to move up in a traditional military context, then the appropriate behavior is seen as being out front leading the team and not in the trenches with them helping to develop shared leadership capacity. The team's accomplishments reflect well on the leader, but only if that leader is seen as personally responsible for those accomplishments. One manifestation of this is the common practice for a new leader within a unit or organizational position to make changes in policy, practice, procedures, and/or organizational structure in order to put his or her own finger-print on the organization and to stake a claim for personal responsibility for any subsequent success.

With all of these barriers, one could raise the question of whether shared leadership has any place in the military at all (i.e., is it just a pipedream?). It is our position that in certain cases shared leadership does indeed have a place in military teams even with such a rigid hierarchy. This is in spite of the fact that shared leadership "creates contradictory demands of leaders who are expected both to set themselves apart—and above—the group, while at the same time interact as an integral part of the group, even as coequals with other members" (Fletcher & Kaufer, 2003, p. 25). If one examines the definition of shared leadership previously offered by Pearce and Conger (2003), and keeping in mind the hierarchical nature of the military, it appears that shared leadership should be inconsistent with the military context and may not serve a useful function in the military environment. If the military model is one that flows from rank, how would one go about examining this idea in such a restrictive context? Or put another way, in such a context, could it or even should it occur? In order to fully answer this question, two examples are provided that may inform this discussion of what shared leadership might look like in a military setting. One example is from the Air Force and one is from the Army.

Air Force example.   Consider a brand new 2nd Lieutenant (O-1) who has just entered the Air Force as a maintenance officer. When she arrives at her first base, she learns that she will be supervising (leading) a team of Air Force members in the course of that job. Within that team are several senior enlisted maintenance personnel, including a Chief Master Sergeant (E-9) with 28 years of active duty service (and multiple deployments) in the maintenance career field. Therefore, everyone on the team is senior to her in terms of military and occupational experience. If she takes the traditional approach of "I outrank everyone on my team" (even though she may only have been on active duty for a few months) "and they will do exactly what I tell them to do," there are obvious and predictable leadership challenges that she will face. Foremost among them is the potential resistance

from the members of her team due to her inexperience and lack of authority in spite of her rank.

But what might her experience be like if she took more of a shared approach to leadership within her team? In this case, there is no doubt among the team as to who has the formal or position authority—she absolutely does by virtue of her uncontested superior rank; however, by acknowledging and availing herself of the experience of those on her team (thereby increasing the leadership capacity in the team), she could have a much different working experience and resulting effectiveness than approaching it strictly from the traditional rank vantage point. This does not imply that she is not using her rank or that it is being undermined. On the contrary, she is using her position as a platform from which to empower the team toward more of a shared leadership capacity. A critical question when dealing with today's military environment is how such an approach might enable or enhance team performance in a garrison versus a wartime operational scenario.

Army Special Forces example.   An Army Special Forces Operational Detachment Alpha, also known as an A-Team, consists of 2 officers and 10 sergeants. All are Special Forces qualified (i.e., have survived a rigorous screening process and have undergone extensive training and assessment as individuals and as a team). All team members are typically multilingual and cross-trained in two or more specialties. The expectation is that they can operate indefinitely in remote locations with little or no outside support. Of the two officers, the A-Team commander is a Captain (O-3), and the team Technician is a Warrant Officer (WO-1 or above). The senior NCO is a Master Sergeant (E-8) and the remaining team members are either Sergeant First Class (E-7) or Staff Sergeant (E-6). Although the popular image of an A-Team relates to the special missions they may conduct in hostile or denied areas, they also play a major role in training, advising, and assisting foreign counterparts. Among the team they combine expertise in a broad range of communications and weapons systems, demolitions, emergency and routine medical treatment, and other relevant military skills.

In comparison, a typical (non-A-Team) Army Infantry squad conducts, for example, a mounted and dismounted street patrol following standard tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs), with an overlay of current Rules of Engagement (ROE), which specifies circumstances appropriate for and limits on the use of deadly force. A well-trained squad will appear to be an example of shared leadership because different squad members assume different key roles in the course of executing their mission. However, their actions are externally synchronized and orchestrated by the squad leader as well as the TTPs + ROE.

An A-Team, with their high level of individual experience and professional expertise, has a much stronger feel of truly shared leadership. Not only do individuals step forward to take the lead as their functional expertise is called upon, but they are also free to volunteer contributions to planning discussions. The sharing

is undoubtedly facilitated by the cross-training they receive (everyone is prepared to fill at least two functional roles, such as heavy weapons and communications), by the extensive training they receive as a team, and by their self-contained deployment in isolation from higher-headquarters or adjacent-unit support. The A-Team faces a broader range of unpredictable situations than virtually any other military unit, but the shared resources of the team enable them to cope and perform at the highest level. It is important to recognize, however, that the A-Team commander is the designated leader and his authority is unquestioned. This is an example of where traditional vertical leadership and shared leadership coexist in the military and work to support each other in building an overall deeper capacity for leadership.

MOVING TOWARD REALITY

As can be seen from the preceding Air Force and Army examples, there may be a place for shared leadership in the military after all—at least under certain circumstances. We stress, however, that shared leadership would not be appropriate or necessary in every military situation. In light of these examples of how particular forms of shared leadership might look in a military context, the resulting question is one of when this type of leadership might be most effective.

Dynamic Situations and the Opportunity for Shared Leadership

As previously mentioned, it may be in complex, dynamic situations where the maximum benefits of shared leadership in the military are realized. This seems appropriate, as the military is often depicted as a complex adaptive system (e.g., Paparone, Anderson, & McDaniel, 2008). When you consider the myriad of taskings that the military has been called to respond to and the inherent unpredictability of warfare, these complex and ever-changing scenarios are occurring every day all around the world.

One characteristic feature of the operational environment of the military is its dynamic nature. Specifically, the military environment can change radically from one in which the level of experienced intensity is relatively mundane to one in which the intensity level is at the most extreme levels (i.e., sheer terror; see Krulak, 1999 for a description of the rapidly changing application of leadership in the operational military environment). It is under such conditions, where experienced intensity can change in a dynamic and radical fashion that shared leadership may be most valuable for the military. When the environment changes radically from predictability to chaos, as in the case in which a military organization (e.g., platoon, squadron) finds itself suddenly under attack, undoubtedly there is enhanced vulnerability due to increased risk of panic and group disintegration (Weick, 1993). What can hold things together under such intense, life-threatening

conditions is leadership. It is at these points in time that having a deep capacity for leadership might prevent the type of disorganization that can contribute to mission failure and potential loss of life.

But where does this capacity come from and how does it develop? The most common way it develops in the military appears to be in an ad hoc manner rather than through formal training. As discussed previously, neither doctrine nor military culture offers much tangible support for the development of shared leadership. There is little evidence that shared leadership is part of individual or group training efforts either. As a result, it is most likely left to enlightened and progressive individual leaders (ironically) to attempt to develop it in their respective units, which means that if it is developed at all, it is done in an impromptu manner. But without this preparation, the risk is that of putting the entire weight of leadership on a single person, which can have catastrophic results in that "even the best leaders and most team-conscious members can still suffer when structures pull apart [under rapidly changing conditions], leaving in their wake senselessness, panic, and cosmological questions" (Weick, 1993, p. 650). While military leaders have consistently performed admirably under such conditions, are there ways that we can prepare them to be even better?

In summary, it is possible—and probably necessary—even in a rank-conscious organization like the military for shared leadership to have a place. So if there are instances where shared leadership could benefit unit or team performance in the military, would a different development approach be necessary for "leaders" in such teams to take advantage of dynamics that are different from the standard individual leader development provided by the different Services (Fletcher & Kaufer, 2003)? This may in fact be the case. For example, in a recent review of effective leadership in a wartime environment by Air Force Office of Special Investigation (OSI) commanders, several issues emerged that set successful commanders apart from those that were less successful. One of these was central to this idea of shared leadership. It was found that successful commanders were the ones who were able to build well-functioning teams through a process of collaboration and open communication (Pitt & Bunamo, 2008). This is consistent with previous research that has shown that captains of high-performing aircraft crews take the time to engage members of the crew and model a participative cockpit culture (Ginnett, 1993). The use of collaboration and open communication is consistent with the three factors suggested by Day (2007) as being important levers for enhancing shared leadership: low power distance, high psychological safety, and a strong learning orientation.

Understanding the Military Culture

As noted previously, the military culture is one in which traditionally individual heroics have been held up as the exemplars (even when that individual was leading

a team). When this is coupled together with the rank-salient nature of the military, it is apparent that there could be internal resistance to the idea of sharing leadership. The person in charge is in that formal position because of their past success. In a sense, they have earned that position through successfully completing all of the requirements necessary to advance to a leadership position. Adopting a shared leadership framework for their team, in the general military environment, could be viewed as a weakness or inability to lead the group from the front. While this is certainly not the case (as there are many benefits to a shared leadership approach), it is understandable why a military leader, who has sworn an oath to "faithfully discharge the duties of the office on which I am about to enter," and who literally has their soldier's lives in their hands, would be apprehensive to step out of that leadership role and share that responsibility. Understanding that this resistance is likely to happen is an important contextual factor to consider when thinking about shared leadership in the military.

While the military culture is well established, one way that this could be addressed is through formal education and training. As an example, the military service academies (West Point, Air Force Academy, and Naval Academy) state that it is a mission of theirs to develop leaders. This development takes place through educational classes, experiential exercises, and practical leadership opportunities. Through such a development process, it would be possible to expose these future officers to different forms of leadership and their applications. In a way, this would serve as a priming mechanism for the cadets when they face future leadership positions and can be useful in helping them to develop more sophisticated mental models of what effective leadership is all about (Jackson & Lindsay, 2010). In addition, it may be possible that developing specific leader competencies (e.g., leader self-efficacy; Samuels, Foster, & Lindsay, 2010) could assist these future leaders in being open to the notion of shared leadership throughout their careers.

Researching Shared Leadership in Context

At the current time, there is still a paucity of research on shared leadership in the military. This is not surprising, as there are often barriers to researching this population, and especially this population in an operational environment (i.e., deployed). However, due to the benefits of shared leadership, it is time to start addressing several of the questions posed about an intentional research program.

In order to do this, there must first be a basic understanding as to what shared leadership looks like in a military context. In other words, how does the enactment of shared leadership in the military differ from shared leadership in other organizations (if at all)? It is likely that due to the inherent risk of leading in the military (leading people into harm's way and the associated legal ramifications of

a leader/commander being able to act in that capacity), shared leadership may manifest itself differently across the various military missions and operations. Kolditz (2007) starts to get at the notion of shared leadership when he describes leading teams in what he terms "in extremis leadership." Specifically, he states that teams that operate in harm's way: (a) embrace continuous learning particularly because dangerous situations demand it, (b) are willing to share risks, (c) share a common lifestyle and emphasize shared values rather than material possessions, (d) readily learn competencies that allow them to make rapid and effective decisions, (e) deliberately create team leadership feelings of trust and care, and (f) exhibit and deserve team loyalty (Kolditz, 2007). While there is still much to be done with examining the in extremis framework, it is a good first step in examining how shared leadership, and shared leadership capacity, can exist in the military context.

Next, when is shared leadership likely to occur? Even with the vertical leadership structure of the military, shared leadership is occurring, albeit informally. We have provided several examples, but a question remains as to whether there are other instances where shared leadership is being used successfully. If so, then this would be vital information to have going forward. With the large variance in the military missions that our military forces are being called on to conduct (i.e., Operation Enduring Freedom, humanitarian assistance, etc.), it may be that shared leadership is occurring out of a necessity to adjust to these changing missions and contextual demands. The other part to this is in identifying when it is likely not to occur or to be ineffective. It is clear that there are certainly instances where a linear chain of command structure is more appropriate. These questions are ones that need to be examined empirically to determine the extent of the reality of shared leadership in the military.

CONCLUSION

While there are obvious benefits to shared leadership, there is still some uncertainty as to how these benefits can be translated into a military context. Perhaps the best news is that whereas shared leadership is not yet a reality in all reaches of the military, it is not a complete pipedream either. There are certain areas, such as the Army Special Forces, in which it is more common than in the rest of the military. Some military leaders appear to be more open to and proactive about shared leadership than others, and that might be the biggest challenge facing future development of military leaders and military leadership: How to develop a culture that recognizes the value of shared leadership while also holding onto the traditional rank-oriented and leader-centric system that has served the military so well for so long. What is clear is that if the military does not address this issue explicitly in its doctrine and practices, then it will continue to develop at best in an ad hoc

manner. And that potentially exposes soldiers and airmen and other military personnel to additional risks if team structures begin to pull apart. In the rapidly changing environment of today's military, the idea of shared leadership capacity in teams appears to be an under-used leverage point that would enable our military members to incorporate the benefits of state-of-the-science leadership processes while still acknowledging the inherent benefits of the traditional military rank structure.

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