Aligning Air Force Leadership Roles
The Limitations of Enlisted Empowerment

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In 1958, the *Military Pay Act* created two new US Air Force senior enlisted "super grades" of senior master sergeant and chief master sergeant to sanction higher levels of empowerment to the enlisted force.[1] This allowed the assignment of roles "once reserved for the commissioned officer corps" that included tasks "where authority falls just short of. . . officers or warrants."[2] It was at this point in Air Force history where the formalization of enlisted force empower-

ment began and created a "trend of channeling airmen with fewer [technical], but broader [management] skills" into these new top grades. [3] This path left the two most senior enlisted ranks with a doctrinally undefined amount of organizational power and created positions with greater flexibility across Air Force organizational design. This was an outcome of great operational benefit. However, despite a change in roles, the traditional strict hierarchal organizational design remained and left a clear divide between the officer corps (both commissioned and warrant) and enlisted members. This left those empowered enlisted leaders in roles without the organizational power to fulfill all tasks assigned (e.g., the power to implement or affect key strategic-level decisions).

Shortly after the creation of the super grades, the Air Force divested the warrant officer ranks for two primary reasons: redundancy and fiscal savings. The two new enlisted super grades created technical expert redundancy while the reduction of warrant officer authorizations allowed fiscal savings as both warrant and commissioned officers are parts of total officer authorizations allowed per service;[4] thus, the removal of the warrant officer corps led to a direct increase in the number of authorized commissioned officers. Additionally, the warrant officer corps' removal left a leadership dichotomy between commissioned officers and noncommissioned officers (NCO) of the enlisted force, a binary choice that led to future increases in enlisted force empowerment. Moving forward to the 1970s, the Air Force was facing significant force reductions and adopted the unofficial motto: "Do more with less."[5] This strategy sought to increase productivity despite decreasing resources, the retention of all assigned missions, the sustainment of performance expectations, and required empowered enlisted leaders, a strategy that remains to date.[6]

Since its birth in 1947, the Air Force has focused on creating technically-proficient enlisted Airmen, and as such, enlisted education levels have slowly risen through the decades.[7] This created an enlisted force inspired by doing more with less to seek higher education levels while attaining a traditional depth of experience, which in turn provided a more capable enlisted component ready and able to receive even higher levels of enlisted empowerment. This perpetuated a self-sustaining cycle of steadily increasing enlisted empowerment, an effect most evident in smaller, highly technical, and emergent career fields.[8] Fast forward 70 years to 2017 when the Air Force Personnel Center reported a total force, decade-long exponential rise in enlisted education levels (see fig. 1),[9] and enlisted leaders are provided an ever-increasing list of career-broadening opportunities. . . so the cycle continues. Today's highly capable enlisted Airmen are even more adept at filling organizational roles left vacant by commissioned officers—not a bad situation to be in as an Air Force.

Percentage of Enlisted Airmen with a Bachelor's Degree or Higher
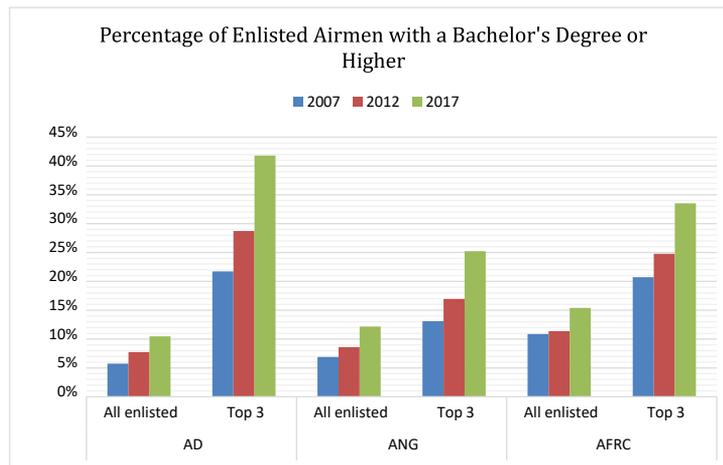
Figure 1. Enlisted education levels from 2007–17

Despite these ever-evolving enlisted roles and regardless of individual competency or an assigned role, an essential military organizational design places significant limitations on both power and responsibility available to enlisted leaders.[10] Fundamentally, both enlisted and officer members must master leadership, and the enlisted Airman is no less of a leader than an officer. However, doctrinally both leaders are two sides of the same coin; officers lead force guidance and direction while enlisted lead decision advisement and mission execution. Accordingly, this investigation seeks to explore how fundamental military form limits enlisted empowerment function due to existing military organizational design, a complex endeavor best explored via theoretical contextualization framed on a vignette provided by the explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) career field.[11] As a small, highly technical career field heavily reliant upon emergent technology and empowered enlisted leaders, EOD offers an opportunity to connect theory with application.

Enlisted Empowerment in Application

In military organizational design, enlisted members of the NCO ranks fulfill two key roles: they "complement the officer [and] enable the force" by bridging the gap between "command guidance and mission execution."[12] To this end, enlisted empowerment "allow[s] officers to better function in leadership positions [to] develop and lead strategic vision while the enlisted Airmen carry out those visions."[13] In this context, *empowerment* rightfully infers organizational power and authority are not inherent to enlisted leaders as military organizational design defaults both power and authority to the commissioned officer.[14] In this manner,

empowered enlisted leaders are delegated control of task inside of mission (content) while control of the larger function (context) is reserved for the commissioned officer corps. Current Air Force guidance only provides a clear separation of empowerment content and context as it pertains to direct combat authority succession.[15] However, due to the Air Force's over the horizon force projection, the vast majority of enlisted Airmen will not encounter this situation throughout their entire careers. This leaves a vaguely articulated boundary between content and context for the vast majority of empowered enlisted leaders assigned indirect combat roles—roles that can, and do, include strategic control over the efforts of individual members, teams, units, and career fields.[16]

Of the three successive levels of warfare and leadership; tactical, operational, and strategic,[17] strategic efforts have the greatest need for a singular vision and voice. This vision and voice must derive from a set of well-developed leadership skills and combine with a comprehensive understanding of the broad interorganizational ties between subordinate, peer, and parent organizations.[18] To this end, broadening, developing, and enhancing strategic inter- and intraorganizational leadership is the primary developmental goal of the commissioned officer corps.[19] To complement the officer's breadth, enlisted members maintain a significant depth of experience and serve as the technical experts and advisors in their assigned arena with a primary developmental goal of creating technically proficient subject matter experts.[20] These complimentary developmental goals create strong leadership teams but do not create individuals with interchangeable roles. Officers are trained to maintain organizational stability and visionary leadership, whereas enlisted are trained to find technical solutions to desired future states with planning granularity to account for all associated tasks. The difference in viewpoint becomes readily apparent when enlisted leaders must rise to fill role gaps in strategic leadership as seen in small career fields without holistic officer representation.

To frame the Air Force EOD vignette from its 1947 beginnings, the predominant source of strategic vision and voice collectively stemmed from 15–20 EOD chief master sergeants and retired chiefs filling government service civilian leadership roles. In just the past 17 years, this lack of organizationally-aligned leaders (officers) resulted in the floundering, hindrance, and deferral of several strategic change initiatives including, the fielding of an Air Force EOD-led joint task force intermediate combat headquarters element, the creation of an initial skills training pipeline, a formalized integration with Special Operations Forces, the realignment of personnel basing locations, and the creation of distinctive uniform items. Although, these outcomes cannot be completely attributed to poorly aligned empowered enlisted leaders, the fact that not one major change occurred creates doubt if enlisted leaders are even capable of sponsoring these kinds of organization-

wide changes. Although this use of empowered enlisted leaders to fulfill strategic leadership roles in small career fields does not directly create issues of great concern when several minor issues are layered together from a historical perspective, an abstract enterprise-wide theme worthy of discussion emerges.[21] Accordingly, this work ties four minor themes together: the assignment of career-field officers, force management and leadership development at the career-field level, alignment of leadership roles with individuals assigned, and cultural alignment of leader types across organizational levels. This discussion aims to illuminate an abstract mismatch between the organizational form and function of empowered enlisted leaders.

In the first two areas, the discussion of officer career field assignment and force management at the career field level involves management of career-field families and requires two distinct skill sets, "substantive knowledge of the career field and the knowledge of how to manage a dynamic, closed, hierarchical personnel system. The latter management skill, generic across career fields, is generally missing in operational level management."[22] This finding resulted in the creation of developmental teams with a focus on functionally similar clusters of career fields.[23] However, in implementation, this solution did little to aid highly specialized, low-density, high-demand career fields with limited access to qualified officers beholden to a larger suborganization officer corps. Once again, EOD offers a unique opportunity for study as they currently are not assigned a dedicated officer corps with holistic functionality throughout the career field; a fact that leaves Air Force EOD heavily reliant upon empowered enlisted leaders. This limitation is not new, as several previous authors have indicated a lack of holistic officer leadership results in long-term impacts to Air Force EOD command structure,[24] missed opportunities to strengthen officer presence in the Air Force EOD career field,[25] and the operational-level benefits of growing an EOD qualified general officer in any branch,[26] a group of proposals that to date has not generated any consequential changes to the Air Force EOD organizational structure.

Unlike the first two, the next two areas—the alignment of leadership roles with individuals assigned and cultural alignment of leader types across organizational levels—are more closely aligned and are the substance of this investigation. Holistically, organizational design benefits from an authentic alignment between leadership role and the individual assigned to fill that role. This alignment creates positive impacts despite cultural differences between micro-organizations and suborganizations to create significant beneficial outcomes in command and authority relationships between micro-, sub-, and parent organizations.[27] In the Air Force EOD vignette, I propose the current limited use of organizationally aligned officers, in both the quantity and roles of assignment throughout the career-field

organizational structure, creates a value and culture mismatch resulting in a significant amount of strife, frustration, and ineffective action (including change sponsorship, future-based influence, and strategic alignment of efforts).

In pursuit of this proposal, this work leveraged purposeful sampling[28] of two National Defense University (NDU) books, *The Noncommissioned Officer and Petty Officer* and *The Armed Forces Officer* organized inside a Competing Values Framework to provide a pragmatic, yet doctrinally sound perspective; a combination that adds both credibility and viability to potential findings as related to a single main question with two supporting research questions (RQ).[29]

- **Main Question:** Are there organizational form factors that limit empowered enlisted leaders from completing the functions associated with assigned roles?

- **RQ1:** What management skill values prevail for enlisted and officer leaders?

- **RQ2:** In what culture archetypes do officer and enlisted leaders most align?

Consequently, the author humbly aims to stir Air Force policymaker thought and spur action to align small, critical career fields with holistic commissioned officer representation while returning high levels of effectiveness to enlisted leaders assigned empowered roles.

Definition of Terms

Form, function, culture, climate, and empowerment are fundamental components of organizational design; *function* includes "the factors, benefits, characteristics, and features that are combined to provide utility," whereas, *form* describes the structural "characteristics that provide the architecture through which functional [utility is] delivered."[30] *Culture* is, "the foundation of the social order that we live in and the rules we abide by" or more simply "the way things are."[31] Culture is split into three organizational levels: macroculture, subculture, and microculture; *macroculture* is a national culture with "occupations that exist globally" whereas *subcultures* are "occupations, such as medicine, law, and engineering, [that] transcend organizations" and create distinct cultural impacts within parent organizations and finally *microcultures* include "small coherent units within organizations, units such as surgical teams or task forces that cut across occupational groups and are, therefore, different from occupational subcultures."[32] In the Air Force context, *culture* is the foundation for both enlisted and officer values and is grounded in three Air Force Core Values: Integrity First, Service before Self, and Excellence in All We Do.[33] Of note, there is a distinct difference between culture and climate; culture refers to "the way things are" whereas *climate* refers to "indi-

vidual transitory attitudes about" culture.[34] Finally, although e*mpowerment* is not officially defined by the Department of Defense or the Air Force, the National Defense University offers, "encouraged to think, behave, decide, and action on their own;" a definition in close alignment with the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* offering, "to give official authority or legal power to; enable; to promote the self-actualization or influence."[35]

Each military department defines enlisted members and commissioned officers slightly differently. [The] *Air Force Commissioned Officer* is a "warrior, a leader of character, an unwavering defender of the Constitution, a servant of the Nation, and an exemplar and champion of its ideals."[36] Moreover, Air Force officers are charged to align "technical skills, dedication, and energy of hundreds of Airmen. . . to create a team with a singular purpose."[37] The pinnacle of military officer leadership is the role of *commander*; a role that "within the Air Force, only an officer" can fulfill.[38] To complement, *Air Force Enlisted Members* are technical experts with functional and operational specialties who primarily hold leadership roles at the tactical (unit of action) level.[39] As enlisted leaders increase in rank, they increase in leadership role. Enlisted members who rise to the highest rank of chief master sergeant are provided as senior enlisted advisors to commanding officers to provide them advice on behalf of the enlisted force; however, even the most influential enlisted leader in the Air Force, Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force, who holds "the highest enlisted level of leadership" remains only an advisor to the commissioned officer serving as the Chief of Staff of the Air Force.[40] Finally, Air Force *core doctrine: Volume 2 – Leadership* states, "the Air Force's enlisted members provide the Service with the highest degree of technical expertise within their respective functional areas. . . [and] are bound to the ideal of followership."[41]

Both officers and enlisted members execute tasks, functions, and missions at three levels: tactical, operational, and strategic. A military *task* is, "a clearly defined action or activity assigned to an individual or organization,"[42] which is commonly assigned to a military *function* with a "broad, general, and enduring role for which an organization is designed, equipped, and trained" with a goal to complete the military *mission* that "entails the task, together with the purpose, that clearly indicates the action to be taken and the reason therefore" and always consists of who, what, when, where, and why.[43] Execution at the *tactical* level includes individual battles, enemy engagements, and small-unit or crew actions; specifically, "tactics is the employment and ordered arrangement of forces in relation to each other."[44] A definition that infers organizations at this level will have "strict guidelines, procedures and processes to perform their tasks. . . [which] are routine and common like training and exercises and they execute them in the strict chain of command."[45]

At the *operational* level, tasks, functions, and missions include military campaigns and major operations by linking strategy and tactics "to achieve the military end states and strategic objectives."[46] Operational missions and tasks have a "high initiative level in choosing their strategy, their planning, their budget, choosing their technology, and using their resources."[47] Finally, at the *strategic* level, tasks, functions, and missions include the application of national policy and development of theater strategies "in support of strategic end states and develops and uses national resources to achieve them," while focusing on establishing "plans, policy, doctrine, or concept development, experimentation and analysis" to guide the operational and tactical levels.[48]

Empowerment as it Relates to Air Force Organizational Form

Within the context of the DOD, the Air Force is more "future-oriented and technology-focused" than in any other branch of the military;[49] as such, Airmen are trained to be early adopters of ideas and change, a circumstance that offers a unique opportunity to study what roles are best suited for enlisted leaders to effectively hold and which roles are better suited for a commissioned officer. Understanding the current culture or "the way things are"[50] of any organization provides an objective picture to define problems, identify gaps in performance, and create effective goals to assess postchange impacts. In organizational design, the current state of an organization can be expressed as a combination of customer type [military employees], size, location, services offered, and financial health.[51]

Types of Customers. According to a 2010 RAND Corporation report, five types of employees occupy leadership positions in military organizations: commissioned officers, warrant officers, limited-duty officers, civilians, and enlisted members.[52] There is a sixth type of military employee—the contractor. However, this type is omitted from this project as they are not a part of the formal military chain of authority or command; as such, contractors are forbidden from holding positions of leadership.[53] Additionally, this project omitted warrant and limited-duty officer leader types as both are excluded from current Air Force organizational design.[54] This leaves only three options available to fill Air Force leadership roles—commissioned officers, civilians, or enlisted—a determination based upon nature of task assigned (inherently military) and responsibility (authority) required to complete assigned function, mission, and tasks. In order of military preference, this process defaults to officer leadership, the selection of civilian leadership, converting enlisted positions into officer positions, or as the last option empowering enlisted leaders [organizational role change].[55]

Size. The past 63 years have seen a sharp decline in the number of Air Force personnel. Figure 2 consists of Defense Manpower Data Center that indicates this decline and calls attention to the disproportionate reduction of the enlisted force as compared to the commissioned officer ranks.[56] For perspective, in 1954 there were 6.24 enlisted per every commissioned officer, a number that has significantly decreased to 4.25 enlisted per commissioned officer by 2017.[57] Compounding the disproportionate reduction, the vast majority of Air Force officers serve as rated [flying] officers with extremely limited leadership roles until reaching a career midpoint at approximately 10–12 years of service.[58]

Location. Location refers both to geophysical and organizational design. Geographic locations are fairly simple as the Air Force currently operates 66 steady-state installations in the continental United States, two in Alaska, one in Hawaii, six in Europe, five in the Asia region, and temporary/expeditionary bases located on every continent of the world.[59] Whereas, organizational design location is based upon member type and grade.
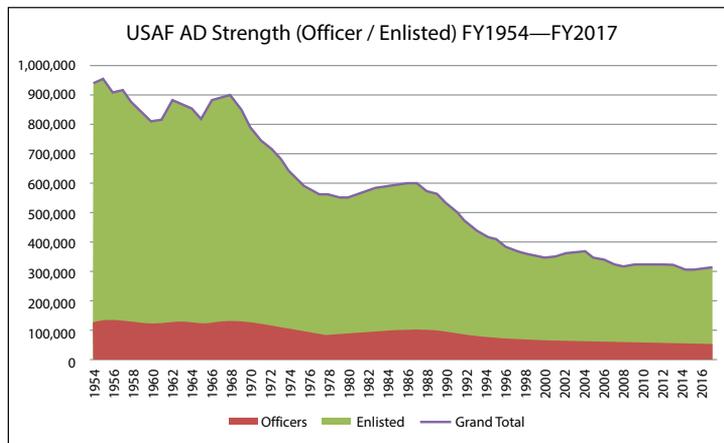
Figure 2. USAF strength from 1954–2017

Services offered. In the early twentieth century, the British Army Gen Sir John Winthrop Hackett stated, "the function of the profession of arms is the ordered application of force in the resolution of a social problem."[60] This definition remains true to the nature of the military force, the execution of the national political will. As previously mentioned, military-centric roles are divided between commissioned officers and enlisted members. Enlisted members are expected to have significant depth of experience and be the technical experts in their arena; conversely, officers are expected to have a broad set of leadership skills combined

with a comprehensive understanding of the broad interorganizational ties between subordinate, peer, and parent organizations.[61] The leadership role by default belongs to the officer; however, "in the absence of a commissioned officer in charge, the experienced (empowered enlisted leader) is assumed to possess the positional authority, qualifications, and ability to step in and lead the mission."[62] The substitution of "empowered leaders" infers organizational power can be temporarily transferred to enlisted leaders.[63] However, authority and accountability remain inherent to, and the sole responsibility of, the commissioned officer corps.

Financial Health. Since 1948, DOD spending has increased in constant dollars while steadily decreasing as related to US gross domestic product;[64] in simple terms, shy of a major theater war, a reasonable expectation would be the sustainment or reduction of current congressional funding levels. This basic understanding of Air Force organizational design allows the overlay of form and function as related to member type.

The Importance of Aligning Organizational Form and Function

Enlisted members and commissioned officers, although differing in both traditional form and current function, combine to create the military leadership system. According to the National Defense University, traditional NCO/petty officer (PO) roles are grounded in complementing the officer corps and enabling the enlisted force. However, due to a "stringent selection process" based upon time in service, expertise, and experience, the most senior NCOs/POs are afforded leadership-role leeway and a function that blurs the officer/enlisted functional divide.[65] Moreover, enlisted members are cautioned that despite an expectation to increase both "civilian and professional education levels. . . (it does not) privilege NCOs/POs beyond their station or position in the organization" leaving these highly educated leaders the delicate function to not disturb "proven organizational integrity or dilute the status of either officers or enlisted personnel;"[66] an organizational design grey area that grows in use with each passing year, yet continues to lack application guidance as to the left and right lateral limits.

For example, a 200-page commanding officer's primer, titled *Commanding an Air Force Squadron in the 21st Century*, only discussed the topic of officer and enlisted leadership role relationships twice: a 15-page section pertaining to the first sergeant role and a single indirect paragraph referring to trusting NCOs "by giving mission-type orders" and a warning to "listen carefully to your senior enlisted personnel."[67] As an offering to junior officers, new commanders, and officers in general, this primer sorely lacked even a general conversation about the relationship between empowered enlisted leaders and the officer corps, the importance of empowering enlisted leaders, or the appropriateness of transitioning organiza-

tional authority via empowerment to enlisted members. Of note, early in the primer the author appropriately notes the vast majority of Air Force officers are rated flyers who spend the formative first years of their career stovepiped in "flying operations and not given a great deal of experience" leading enlisted personnel.[68]

As a combination of officer and enlisted leaders, the military leadership system is formed by, and heavily reliant on, a strong connection between the two across a broad spectrum of values. On one end of that spectrum, the value of "I look the same as you and thus am a part of you" steers the officer's choice of uniform (flight suit vice Airman Battle Uniform) to create a positive impact on the enlisted view of the commanding officer; whereas, on the other end of the values spectrum "I am one of you by similar feat of skill and intelligence and thus am a part of you" can only be replicated by mutually rigorous attainment of matching qualifications.[69] Of the two ends on the spectrum, the former carries little actual connection between officers and enlisted Airmen while the latter contains deep bonds forged from a mutual struggle toward a difficult goal that a relatively small number will ever reach.[70] Applying this logic to the EOD vignette, EOD-qualified officers fall on the rigorous end of the leader/follower alignment spectrum, officers and enlisted alike attend a 32-week, high-attrition rate initial EOD qualification course with a strong emphasis on teamwork,[71] and is the crucible where both officers and enlisted earn a deep-seated trust well beyond "I look the same as you" could ever hope to reach. Accordingly, enlisted members remain guarded in their trust of non-EOD-qualified Civil Engineer (CE) officer leaders when debates and decisions require delineation between CE and EOD roles. To use an often-cited proverbial military question, if there remained one dollar left to spend, would an EOD-qualified officer and a traditional CE officer see the same priority for the EOD career field? Should they; and would the suborganization (CE) or the parent-organization (the Air Force) want them to?

Relevant theory. The military is a mechanistic organization, operating with a clear set of regulations, rules, and guidelines to direct operational outcomes with clearly defined roles and responsibilities for each organizational position;[72] chiefly, authorities are solely retained by the officer corps. This creates a consistent distribution of authority with the associated distribution of power to maintain both continuity and consistency throughout the entire organizational structure. Additionally, although "individuals at any level of a human organization can, in principle, be assigned the final decision-making authority,"[73] if the parent organization retains authority and subsequent power at too high an organizational level, it will hobble advantages gained from creating a separate suborganizational structure.[74] Finally, as empowered leaders the enlisted force is outside the chain of authority and thus lacks organizational influence via leadership; a situation that

is both disheartening and discouraging for subgroup members.[75] The application of this theory speaks to the "why" there must be limits to enlisted empowerment; enlisted members cannot transition authority, at any level, let alone at the strategic level of leadership.

The consistent distribution of authority and power via organizationally sanctioned channels (officers) to the lowest organizational level will ensure suborganizational leaders are a product of their subculture; a genesis that creates the benefit of sound, informed decision making via the direct connection between leadership, task, and values.[76] This theory strikes at why there are different officer subtypes, and why using a rated flying officer to lead every suborganizational level is not wise as it creates a disassociated leadership hierarchy. Disassociated higher-level managers cannot benefit from the joint learning environment created with a diverse set of subcultural leaders and thus lose the associated increased "ability to pass judgement [aka, decision-making];"[77] the key role of any leader/manager.

Investigating the Problem

Organizational design is based on form and function; thus, the exploration of empowerment must remain rooted in these qualitative terms. Organizations with strong cultures provide for both social and emotional member needs. However, "emphasizing subunit cultural differences. . . can foster alienation and conflict"; conversely, the cultural alignment of leadership within an organization is vital to smooth operations and the key conduit of change.[78]
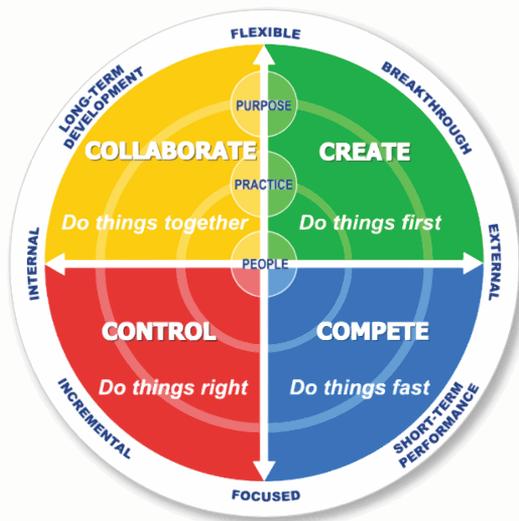
Figure 3. Values overview from Cameron and Quinn (2011) online content

The use of an existing value-based assessment tool to organize officer and enlisted leader data inside an established value framework will enable comparison, discussion, and future study (see fig. 3). Officer and enlisted leader data was organized and collected from two National Defense University books, *The Noncommissioned Officer and Petty Officer* and *The Armed Forces Officer* using a qualitative research methodology.[79] This data was depicted on Cameron and Quinn's Competing Values Framework Management Skills Assessment Instrument (MSAI)[80] radar chart (see fig. 4) to enable a thematic comparative analysis to delineate behavior (what you do) vice style (what you think you should do) and assess importance and value of leader skill alignment inside 12 broad management activities.[81] This process identified areas of skill differences (see fig. 5) between officer and enlisted leaders and offers insight into leadership capabilities best-suited for cultivation in each leader type.
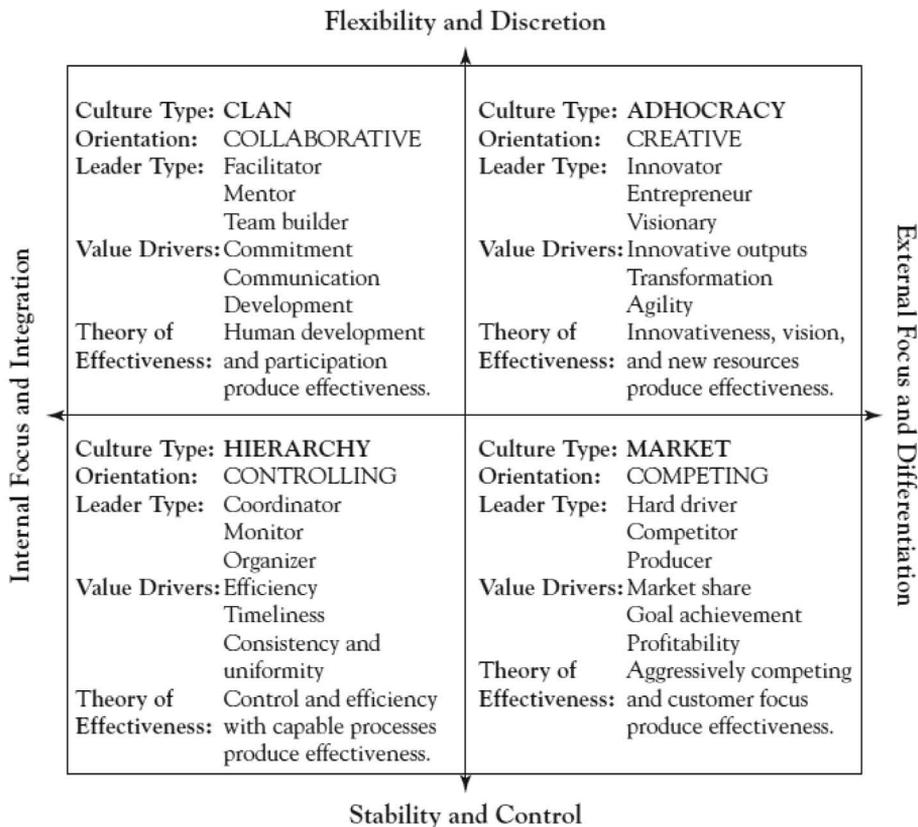
Figure 4. Cameron and Quinn's competing value archetypes

Assumptions and Biases

Two assumptions were required to align the civilian organization framework within the military organizational structure. First, for the *managing teams* skill set, the author included management and leadership skills, attributes, and traits. Managing and leading are two sides to the same coin;[82] however, military leadership books tend to favor writing about more action-oriented leadership vice coordinating and controlling-oriented management and combining the ideologies allowed a more comprehensive assessment of both leading and managing. Second, as the US Constitution charged the military to provide a "common defense" of the nation,[83] the author associated the term *customer* in the *managing customer service* skill set, to refer to the American population. Finally, the entire data set contains the potential for bias stemming from the author's perspective as a 17-year enlisted EOD Airmen with multiple personal experiences of empowered enlisted leaders unable to accomplish organizational function due to an inability to cross the organizational role divide between enlisted and officer leader types.

Investigation Findings

From the beginning, both officer and enlisted leaders are indoctrinated to uphold the same set of Air Force core values. However, as these leaders are complimentary in design, each archetype is taught to value different individual manager (leader) traits.[84] Therefore, a sound understanding of management skill values specific to both officer and enlisted leaders will help determine the best-suited role in organizational design.

RQ1 Analysis: Management Skill Values
Prevalent for Enlisted and Officer Leaders

The alignment of organizational leader value with managerial skill determines the criticality of importance in fulfilling an assigned leadership role. The resulting US Armed Forces Managerial Skill Importance comparison (see fig. 5) offers similarities and differences between enlisted and officer leaders, while a comparison of differences between officer and enlisted scores (see fig. 6) offers insight into areas of strength for both leader archetypes. As a complimentary leadership team, relative gaps in skill importance between the two leader types indicate areas better organizationally aligned and suited for one leader type over another. Accordingly, enlisted leaders display skill strengths in managing interpersonal relationships and managing the development of others; whereas, officer leaders display skill strengths in managing teams, managing acculturation, and managing the future.
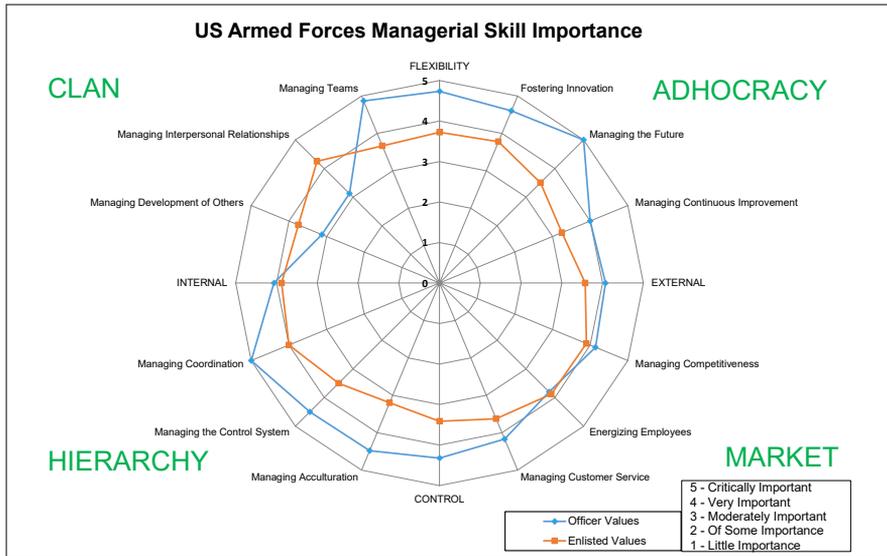
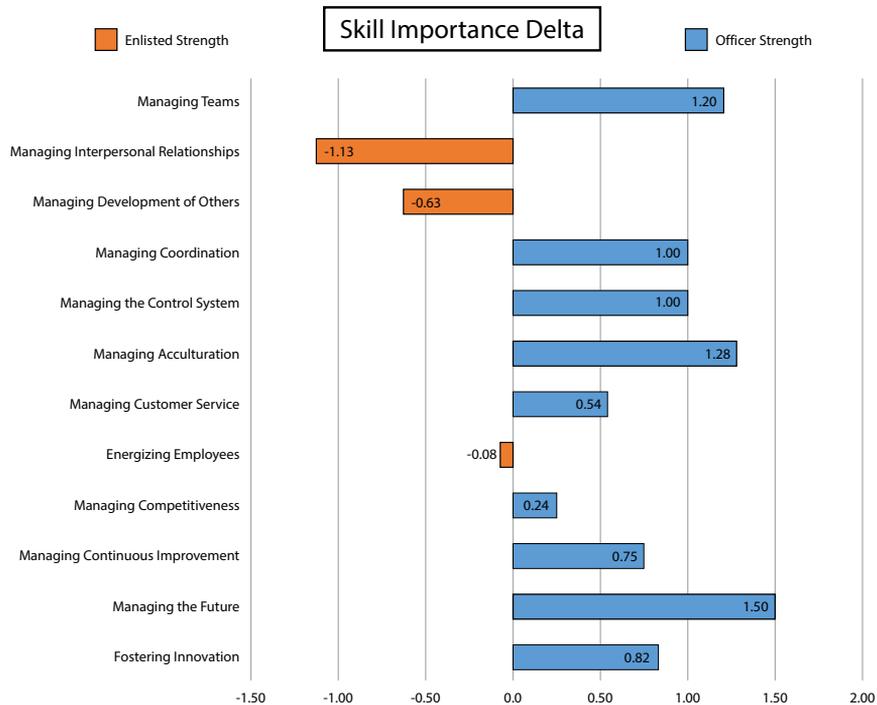**Figure 5. Enlisted and officer management skills (adapted from Cameron and Quinn, 2011)**

Figure 6. Difference between officer and enlisted scores

RQ2 Analysis: Cultural Archetype
Alignment of Officer and Enlisted Leaders

The same MSAI managerial skill data (see fig. 5) allows enlisted and officer alignment with the four organizational culture archetypes (see fig. 7) found in the Competing Values Framework. This metadata indicates officer leaders favor adhocracy and hierarchy archetypes with a focus on creating and controlling respectively.[85] In compliment, enlisted leaders favor the clan and market archetypes with a focus on collaboration and competition.[86] Of note, there is a minimal variation between the four culture areas for both leader archetypes, which is attributed to the commonality of core values between both leader archetypes.
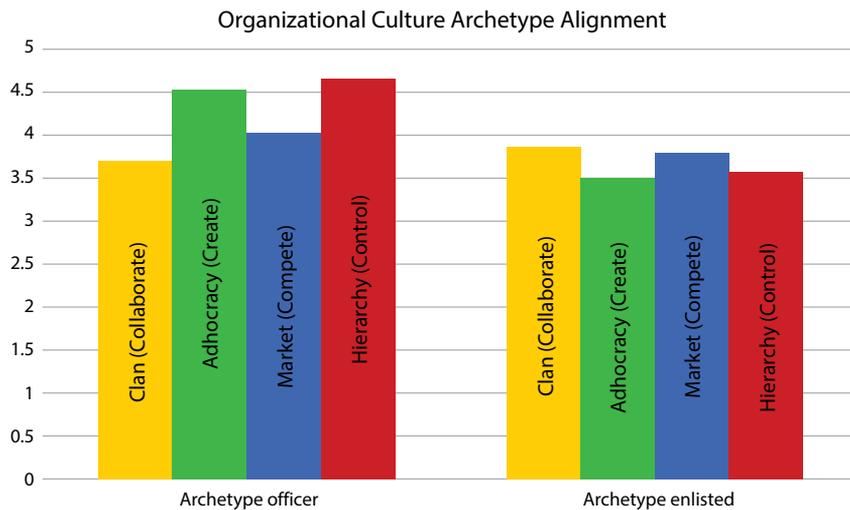

Figure 7. Organizational culture archetype alignment

Organizational Implications

There are three areas of organizational implication that directly impact empowered enlisted leader effectiveness: change management, organizational culture alignment, and leader value congruence with functional value needs. First, the data from this investigation indicates officers are best suited for managing the future, a task that involves leading change. Leaders are key to any change effort; however, successful change requires a thorough understanding of culture, context, issue complexity, and organizational communication factors.[87] Thus, any top-down directed change from an empowered enlisted leader will be rife with change management issues. From the other side, bottom-up driven organizational change

requires support from upper-level change leaders, conscious management in mature organizations, and according to the Lewin's model, must begin by creating a felt need for change to identify and reduce key points of resistance and "build internal support for change."[88] This five-point process requires effective communication to alter the perception of change from a "force to overcome or outlast" to an open search for "improvements to current change implementation plans."[89] To this end, change initiated from the lower ranks of the military hierarchy will reach a point of trade-off and require an organizationally sanctioned change champion to align values, reduce resistance, and build support in both parent and suborganizational members. This leads into the second area of organizational implication, the alignment of organizational culture.

The organizationally sanctioned change champion, the military officer, is uniquely equipped to align suborganizational change efforts with parent-organization desires. Additionally, the power of a trusted officer leader who stands tall and says follow me, "build[s] internal support for change" that includes altering existing cultural norms in both the parent and suborganizational cultures.[90] Moreover, as suborganizational officers are the organizationally sanctioned members to bridge the "power gap" between lower suborganizational levels and upper-level leadership they minimalize value tensions or conflicted feelings of gains and losses between cultural levels.[91] In this manner, officers serve to smooth cultural differences while improving organizational effectiveness and focus.

The third area of organizational implication, leader value congruence with functional value needs, refers to the improvement in leader effectiveness when leader values align within organizational function and form. If the desired function of the leader is change management (adhocracy) and acculturation (hierarchy), then assigning a leader with strengths in managing interpersonal relationships, developing others (both clan) and energizing employees (market) will create a dissonance between leader value and organizational value best suited to accomplish the assigned task. Returning to the Air Force EOD vignette, until 2017 the strategic vision was charged to a steering group comprised of 13–15 EOD chief master sergeants while officers, organizational leaders with strengths aligned with change management, fulfilled a limited oversight role with minimal direct involvement in creating strategic vision and change. In 2017, this construct was restructured with three EOD-qualified Civil Engineer field-grade officers to serve as final recommendation approval authority and fill three primary roles: policy generation, resource control, and program execution.[92] As the EOD strategic decision-making model begins to shift away from a reliance upon empowered enlisted leadership, it makes a step in the right direction; however, due to functional structure, there are no EOD-qualified organizationally aligned leaders (of-

ficers) at the four levels of decision-making panels above the tactical, field-level EOD Strategic Advisory Council. As such, this places a uniquely high-risk, high-demand career field with no direct suborganizational input during successive strategic decision deliberation at the senior leader (O-6) level, or above. This outcome inhibits the transition of expertise to higher levels of leadership while limiting the ability to implement, or even greatly sway, final decision outcomes; a slightly lesser variation of the situation that wholly nullified previous empowered enlisted model strength and in the current construct significantly degrades decision-making.[93] This is a fact that if left unchanged, will remain a detriment to any change effort inside the EOD program, especially any large-scale, evolutionary change efforts with known resistance from parent-organization change sponsors. In these ways, the use of improperly empowered enlisted leaders stemming from a failure to employ organizationally aligned officer leadership roles creates a point of ineffectiveness due to a mismatch between assigned organizational function and overarching organizational form.

Recommendations

This work offers four recommendations to improve the function of empowered enlisted leaders inside Air Force organizational form:

- Ensure officer leader placement in roles requiring alignment with the organizational form.

- Create a leadership development plan to ensure culturally-aligned officer leaders are equipped and directed to fulfill key strategic organizational functions inside small career fields.

- Determine the required leader skill set to best fulfill function inside the Air Force hierarchy.

- Clearly define organizational limits to enlisted empowerment inside the organizational form.

The first two recommendations are pragmatic and aim to improve leader effectiveness by aligning leader archetype strength with leader archetype function assigned, an alignment of particular importance for small career fields without holistically-aligned commissioned officer leadership. Inaction in these two areas will result in the continued hobbling of suborganizational performance with severe detrimental resistance to large-scale, evolutionary change efforts. The last two recommendations are theory and policy shortfalls needed to clarify functional limits of enlisted empowerment. Inaction in these areas will serve to perpetuate

the continued trial-and-error method of enlisted empowerment, a frustrating outcome for extremely competent and capable enlisted leaders who are unable to successfully fulfill assigned functions solely due to misalignment of organizational form. In closing, this study did not establish archetype superiority or compare individual member competency or capability across archetypes. Rather, this study reinforced the vital importance of both leader types to accomplish the common defense of the nation and stressed the importance of mutually-complimentary employment vice assignment of organizational functions at odds with assigned organizational form. ✪

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