



The Chiefs

A Study of Strategic Leadership

Nicholas Jans

with Stephen Mugford, Jamie Cullens
& Judy Frazer-Jans

2013



AUSTRALIAN DEFENCE COLLEGE

VICE CHIEF OF THE DEFENCE FORCE

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The most important task in defense is the one most likely to be overlooked since it lies in the realm of values and character rather than in quantities which can be represented on charts. Before anything else, we must recognize that a functioning military requires bonds of trust, sacrifice and respect within its ranks, and similar bonds of support and respect between an army and the nation it represents.

(James Fallows, American scholar and commentator)

*We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive at where we started
And to know the place for the very first time.*

(T. S. Eliot, poet [from Four Quartets, "Little Gidding", 1942])

Life is like giving a concert on the violin while learning to play the instrument.

(Samuel Butler, poet)





Acknowledgments, thanks and disclaimers

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Thanks go above all to ACM Angus Houston, AC, AFC, who championed the study when he was CDF and then read and commented on the final draft while relaxing over summer after an extremely busy 2012.

The views presented in this report are those of the researchers and do not necessarily represent or reflect the views and policies of the ADF.





Foreword

It is not uncommon for military officers to read what others have written about their activities, successful or otherwise. They will usually read such commentaries after the event, when the “dust has settled and the smoke cleared from the battlefield”. Settled in retirement, be it happy and relaxed or contentious and restless, they read a commentary that is sharpened by 20/20 hindsight (at least in the opinion of that author!). Whether they are pleased by praise or stung by criticism makes no difference, for the events described are now history. And it will be for the next generation of leaders to consider and digest the practical relevance of any lessons that might be drawn.

Commonly, too, the discussion is invariably focused around “combat”, widely defined, be the focus fine-grained and tactical or sweeping and strategic. Moreover, the question is usually about individual or collective performance – whether a company commander managed troops well on a fateful afternoon, an admiral deployed carriers to best effect, or an air commander chose an appropriate bombing strategy in a campaign, or some such.

The present study is very different to this mainstream of military writing. In sharp contrast to the rear-view mirror approach, this work in progress examines a very recent and unfolding process of which many of us were, and today remain, a part. This study also has an unusual focus: namely, how we work together as a team in the nation’s capital, close to the Government we serve, and operating in a complex mix of competing interests, bureaucracy and politics.

The team that produced this study are unusually well placed for the task. Together, they have been able to meld the informed and nuanced insider’s view with sufficient objectivity to consider both what we do as much as what we say we do. By applying ideas from sociology, psychology, and organisational and leadership studies, they have created a framework that goes well beyond simple description to develop an overall conceptual model that makes sense of what they have described.

The commentary offered in this unusual study thus has a pressing relevance for me and my colleagues today and tomorrow. It will help us to shape how we think, work and cooperate at the senior levels of the ADF and help inform how we should think about and develop professional military education.

A number of lessons emerge from the study. To illustrate them and their relevance at the outset, let me simply dwell on two.

The importance of trust. The authors argue powerfully that in recent years the senior echelons of the ADF – the Service Chief level – have developed a “new





collegiality” that has underpinned a constructive and cooperative climate which has helped to manage sectoral rivalries and develop inter-Service synergy. This process, as they show, has been evolving over a period of time, brought to a peak recently by my predecessor as CDF, ACM Angus Houston. Developing an entity to which we gave the light hearted label “the Purple Seven” (which then seemed to stick and stay relevant), we built a team that genuinely worked and embodied and displayed collegial solidarity. In an important sense, this has been a type of “force multiplier” for our work.

The basis of this is trust. As an old cliché expresses it, *trust lowers transaction costs*. This is certainly our experience and this study shows why we need to continue to work at trust and collegiality in the senior team.

What got you here might not get you there. We pride ourselves in the ADF on giving our officers good training and experience. Yet it is easy to overlook the fact that, both by selection and training, we lean towards crisp decision-making and decisive action, attributes that are essential to survival and success in combat on (or under) the sea, on land or in the air. Ironically, however, at the highest levels such an orientation can at times be as much a hindrance as a help. After years of thinking and saying to ourselves and others, “Don’t just stand there, do something”, we may find ourselves confronted with the complementary maxim of “Don’t just do something, stand there and think about it”. And, while “... an 85% solution delivered with aggression may well be better than a 100% solution delivered tardily”, if you are a ship’s captain, a battalion or regimental commander, or an OC of an aircraft squadron this approach may be equally *unhelpful* in a Russell Offices context.

This in turn raises a series of questions for both Joint Professional Military Education and support staff composition. How do we educate for a wider and richer range of skills and responses as officers move up the hierarchy? How do we teach them which frame to apply and when? What are the best ways to form staff support teams with an appropriate balance between expertise in strategically related areas and institutional knowledge and understanding? And so on.

These are but some of the examples that arise from this detailed and timely study. As the ADF continues its journey of transformation, the challenges require that the education and development of leaders also evolve. To the fundamental skills of battle management and combat must be added cultural awareness and historical knowledge, as well as a firm foundation of ethical understanding. Leaders must be able to lead but they must also be ready to liaise, persuade and cooperate, however alien the protagonist or strange the environment.

I commend this study to my colleagues: read it, digest it, and help us to act on it.

General David Hurley, AC, DSC

Chief of the Defence Force



Preface

The Australian Moment : How We Were Made for These Times is the title of a recent book by George Megalogenis, senior political writer for *The Australian*. Its central argument is that Australia has (somewhat by default) become the “last developed nation standing” and is better placed than most to survive whatever happens next in the global economy.

But the book reaches a disturbing conclusion: that, because of timidity and lack of strategic acumen and skill, the country may fail to take full advantage of this opportunity.

The Australian military institution may well be facing an analogous situation. Tough, skilled, versatile and guided by the best traditions of the Australian military legacy, the ADF rightly prides itself on being able to “punch above its weight”. It will exit the Middle East in the near future as an experienced and respected institution, ready to tackle whatever the nation requires of it.

However, as with the nation as a whole, the ADF’s biggest danger is that it will continue to rely too much on the qualities that contributed to its earlier and current successes, and that it will fail to reach out for and master the skills demanded of a more independent, more resilient but still comparatively small military force operating in an increasingly volatile strategic environment.

All this, together with a number of contemporary challenges ranging from resourcing to reputation, will demand strong and skilled strategic leadership. And however good strategic leadership has been up to this point, it will need to become better.

The Chiefs is dedicated to the current and future senior teams who will shoulder this responsibility as the stewards of the Australian military profession.

Executive Summary

Objective

The objective of *The Chiefs* was to describe the leadership processes and cultural milieu at the most senior levels of the Australian military profession.

Studying work and culture at the strategic level

The Chiefs breaks fresh ground, not just in Australia but internationally. The vast majority of such studies cover the role as it applies in the operational context. In contrast, *The Chiefs* analysed the senior military leadership role as and where it actually is done in the Australian military institution.

The concept of “strategy” goes much more deeply than the activities associated with planning and running large scale and globally oriented military operations. Whether applied to senior leadership on operations, to running large programs locally or abroad or, as it is here, to work at the very top, strategy is fundamentally about making decisions and establishing policies and capabilities *today* with the clear intention of their being the instruments of performance *tomorrow*.

The study focused on the positions of Chief of the Defence Force, Vice Chief of the Defence Force, Chief of Capability Development Group and the Chiefs of Service: those who do their work mainly within the complex Defence bureaucracy in Canberra.

The Chiefs took a “sociologically-oriented” perspective on strategic leadership. It focused on the determining factors in the organisational situation rather than on the qualities of the individuals involved. It depicted strategic leadership in terms of a simple but meaningful “frame of reference” that can be used by researchers, practitioners and observers to enhance their understanding of the processes involved. Thus the analysis concentrated on *how* and *why* senior military leaders made decisions rather than on *what* decisions had been made; on *processes* and *relationships* rather than on *products* and *outcomes*; on the *roles* that individual Chiefs perform and the examples that they set rather than on the individuals themselves; and on the *thinking* and *enabling processes* that underpinned such decisions.

The study also took account of the cultural milieu in which the Chiefs and their staffs operate. Work at this level is characterised by a number of distinctive professional and organisational features that affect performance and efficiency. For



example, getting things done within a complex bureaucracy requires the ability to influence in the absence of formal authority, through coalition building, networking, negotiating and the exercise of “small p” political skills.

Being able to make sense of a complex external and internal environment requires “strategic acumen”, or the ability to discern and interpret broad longer-term issues and trends. It depends on being able to “think outside the square” and on having a big-picture understanding of the institution and its environment; and it’s almost as relevant to key staff members as it is to the Chiefs themselves.

The study was timely, for three main reasons. To begin with, elucidation on the topic is sorely needed. While the shelves of military libraries groan under the weight of accounts of senior operational maritime, field and air command, they are sketchy at best about what happens continuously at the most senior levels.

Secondly, the study was conducted during a period when a “new collegiality” was being established at the top of the ADF. The way that this was done and the benefits noted by the protagonists shed useful light on the strategic leadership process.

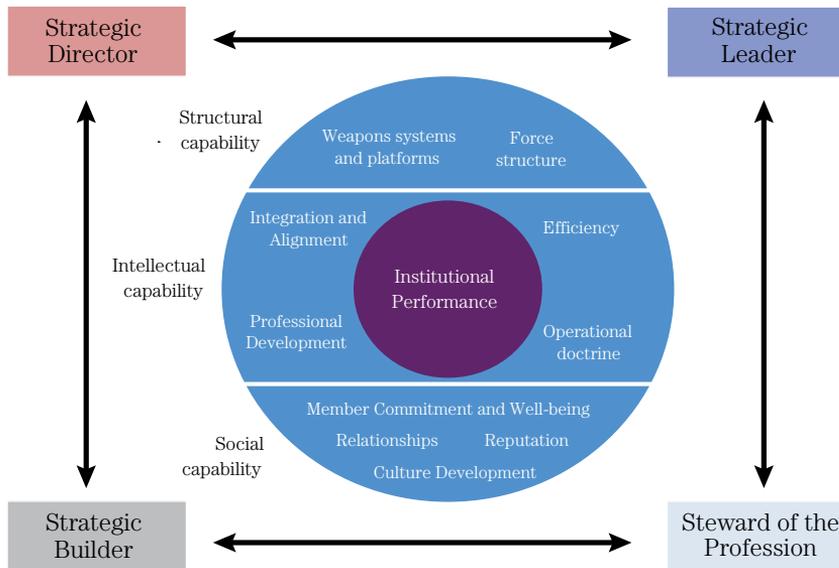
Finally, the ADF is on the verge of as profound a strategic transition as it has ever faced. It must realign its hard and soft capabilities in anticipation of the need to expand its approach to operations and conflict, while retaining the essential professional culture and capabilities needed by any military institution. It must adjust to what is likely to be a reduced share of the national budget. It must repair the damage to its reputation due to the fallout from a number of recent professional conduct incidents. And it must become more serious about its employment and career development systems, not least in the employment of women.

A framework for understanding strategic leadership

The analysis was built around a simple frame of reference, comprising a core outcome, three sets of enabling capabilities and a range of strategic leadership roles (see Figure Ex.1).



Figure Ex.1: The military strategic leadership process



A full range of capabilities

The Chiefs are responsible to Government for achieving the core outcome of “Institutional Performance”, as currently specified in the 2009 White Paper (p 13) and ADDP-D (pp 5.6 and 5.7).

The Chiefs achieve the core outcome largely by their development and use of a number of enabling capabilities. These include structural capability (such as weapon systems and platforms), intellectual capability (such as professional development and operational doctrine) and social capability (such as relationships and culture development).

The four roles of strategic leadership

Effectiveness at the strategic level depends on the Chiefs’ individual and collective ability to perform four complementary but subtly different roles in pursuit of the various capabilities:

- **Strategic Director** – the “Directive-Pragmatist”, who exercises command, tackles short-term crises and keeps the institution moving forward on a day-to-day basis.
- **Strategic Leader** – the “Expressive Explorer”, who is the central agent in the continuous process of aligning the institution with its evolving circumstances.

- **Strategic Builder** – the “Manager-Architect”, who develops and implements the mechanisms for the evolving structure of the institution.
- **Steward of the Profession** – the “Nurturer-Guardian”, who is the caretaker and top-level exemplar of the Australian profession of arms.

The roles require different approaches to exerting influence and authority. Strategic Director and Strategic Leader require the exercise of *direct* influence, through the active “leading-from-the-front” style with which military professionals are most familiar and comfortable. In contrast, Strategic Builder and Steward of the Profession rely more on the exercise of *indirect* influence (“leading-from-the-shadows”) by shaping institutional activities and structural features – such as organisational and career structures – through which members’ behaviour can be directed into practised and habitual patterns. Notwithstanding this, however, all four roles require some elements of both direct and indirect influence styles.

Most officers, even some who are quite senior, tend to see the Chiefs’ portfolio largely in terms of the two “direct-leadership” roles, particularly that of Strategic Director. Because of their essentially indirect and lesser-profile nature, the Strategic Builder and Steward of the Profession roles are less well understood and their importance can easily be overlooked. Consciously and unconsciously, this has affected the way that aspiring senior leaders think about professional development and team composition.

Each of the four strategic roles is subject to certain performance vulnerabilities. For example, performance will be adversely affected by a Chief:

- being too steeped in the directive role, because of the legacy of professional habits or temperament;
- who lacks strategic acumen or the ability to engage and influence a varied range of internal and external agents;
- who lacks an adequate understanding of how organisational and professional factors affect institutional behaviour, or lacks high level management skills; and
- is overly concerned for maintaining the status quo in order to avoid public exposure of deficiencies that would lead to professional or political embarrassment in the short term but to useful professional development in the longer term.

Importantly, these vulnerabilities apply also to the staff teams that support each of the Chiefs. A Chief should be able to draw on the talents of a carefully chosen and well-trained staff support team.

Conclusions

Three main conclusions emerge from *The Chiefs* study:

- for the ambitious officer, “what got you here won’t get you there”;
- for the Australian military institution, “what got us here won’t get us there”; and
- the principle that “leadership is a team sport” is just as valid at the senior level as it is lower in the organisation.

A major implication from the study relates to striking the right balance between “leadership” and “management” at the strategic level. Senior officers might make their professional reputation on the basis of their talent for leadership but their longer term success will rest at least as much on their ability to manage the people, the resources, the structures and the networks within their remit.

Recommendations

Strategic relationships. It is recommended that:

- The Chiefs consolidate and refine the constructive culture that now exists at the top of the Australian military profession.

JPME and career development. It is recommended that:

- The core joint professional military education (JPME) effort (or at least that from mid-career onwards) be oriented around the four strategic leadership roles of Strategic Leader, Strategic Builder, Strategic Director and Steward of the Profession.
- Such JPME be focused on preparing officers for future roles in both leadership and support for senior leaders.
- Officers from mid-career onwards be periodically exposed to, and engage with, contemporary and evolving issues at the strategic level, with exercises that require them to examine the responsibilities and skills needed for the Director-Leader-Manager-Steward forms within their own current and impending career roles. (For example, as part of preparation for ship/unit command, O4 and O5 officers could examine the application of these four roles to that level of command and the level of command immediately above it.)
- Such engagement uses active rather than passive modes of learner behaviour.

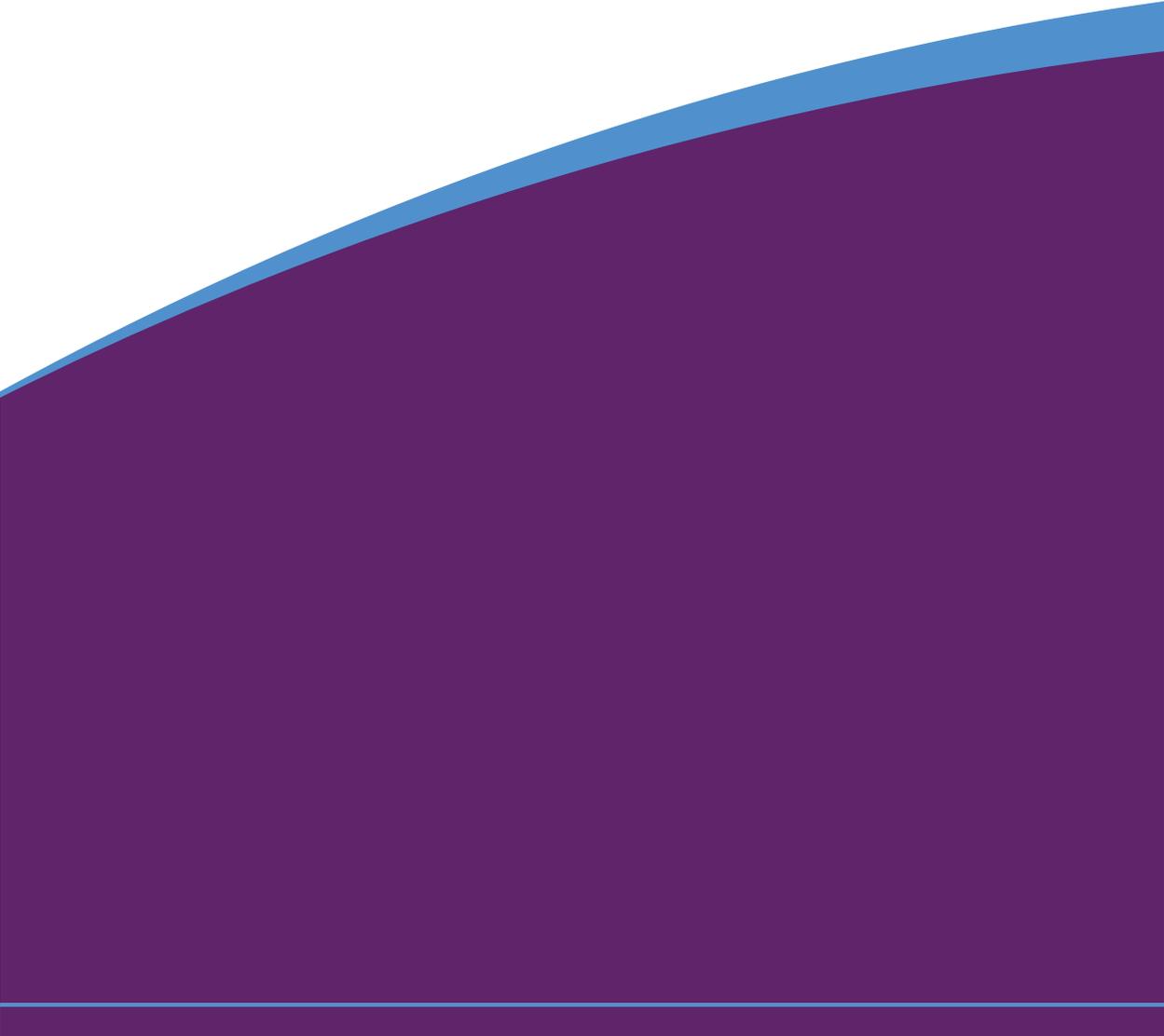
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- Each Service continue with the current encouraging trend of introducing career models that enable selected officers to develop in-depth specialisations within relevant fields – not just for “personnel management” and “project management/technology” roles but also those that could be enhanced by better understanding of economics, politics and military sociology.

Staffing. It is recommended that:

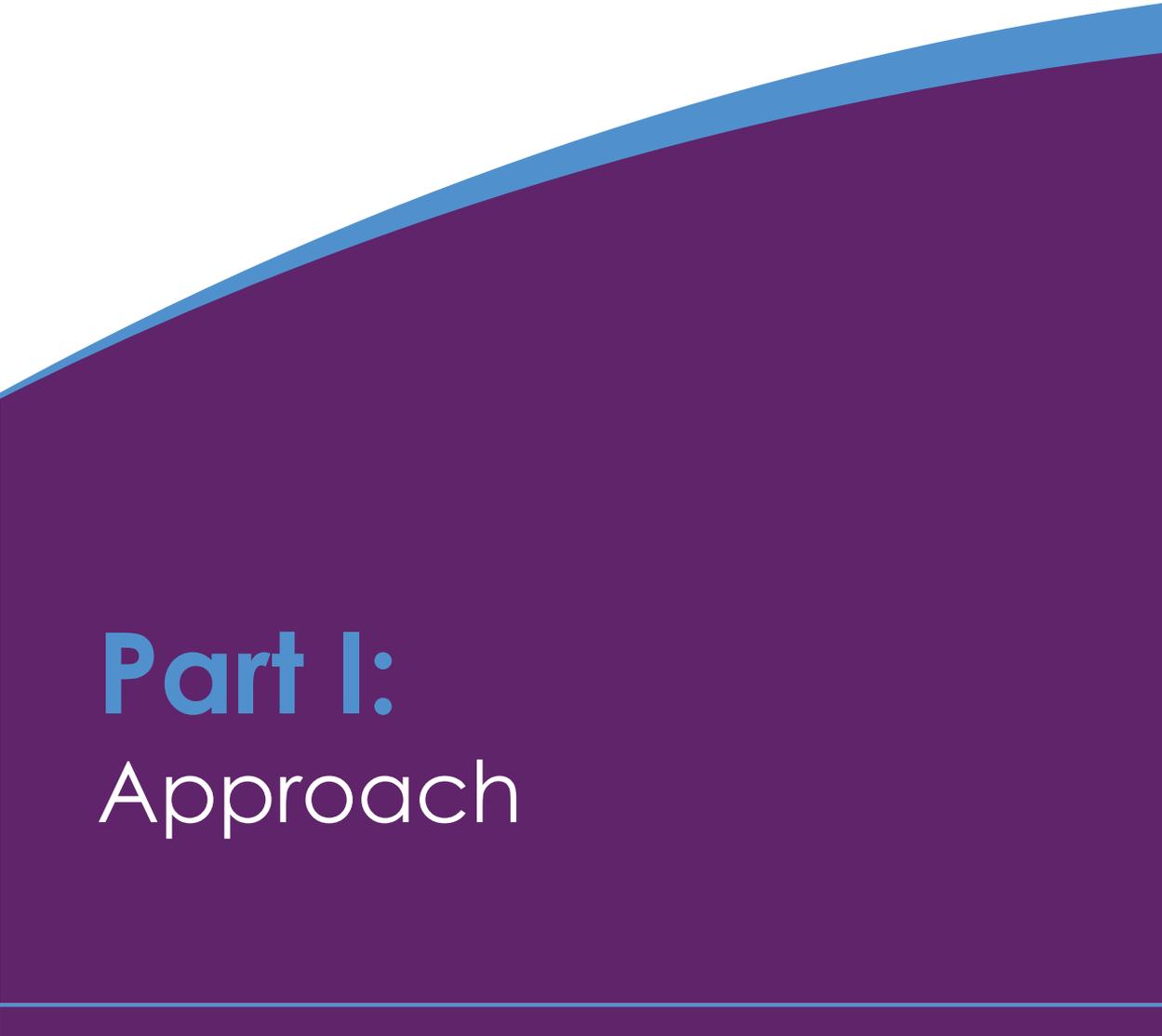
- The Chiefs consolidate the reforms to JPME and career development by ensuring that they are supported by diverse teams of professional generalists and staff specialists.
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Contents



Foreword	
Preface	
Executive Summary	
Part I: Approach	1
Chapter 1: A Timely Study	2
Chapter 2: Studying the Military Profession at the Strategic Level	11
Chapter 3: The Context and the Challenges	26
Part II: The Chiefs in Action	41
Chapter 4: The Chiefs in Action: Full Range Capability	42
Chapter 5: The Chiefs in Action: Roles	67
Part III: Implications	89
Chapter 6: Performance Vulnerabilities at the Strategic Level	90
Chapter 7: Where to From Here?	104
Illustrative case studies	
Chapter 1: CDF Chris Barrie and ADF operational reinvigoration	4
Chapter 2: CDF Angus Houston establishes a “new collegiality”	13
Chapter 3: Beginning the reform of Senior Leadership Group culture	28
Chapter 4: An embarrassing loss of Navy’s amphibious capability	44
Chapter 5: CA Frank Hickling puts his career on the line	69
Chapter 6: The Air Force tackles some chronic strategic issues	92
Chapter 7: Discerning who has got “it”	106
Annexes	
A. Interviewees	114
B. Questions used in the Interviews	115
C. A recent Ministerial Directive to the CDF and Secretary	116
D. Further reading on job rotation in the ADF	117
E. Attributes needed for effective performance at the strategic level	118
F. The authors	127



Part I:

Approach



Chapter 1:

A Timely Study

All men can see the tactics whereby I conquer, but what none can see is the strategy out of which victory is evolved.

(Sun Tzu, sage)

Military people are more enamored of leaders than of leadership... we concentrate – particularly in dissecting activity at the more senior levels – more on what happened than on how or why.

(Lieutenant General Walt Ulmer, Jr, US Army and former CEO of the Center for Creative Leadership)

It is vital for Defence to perform well in the bureaucracy. It may not be as glamorous as field command and may not fit the professional self-image and ideal, but the future shape of the organisation and its capability depends on how well the bureaucracy operates.

(General Peter Gration, former CDF)

The Chiefs study breaks fresh ground in the field of military studies, and will serve as a solid basis for guiding and evaluating senior performance and for developing JPME.

The main points in this chapter

- The objective of *The Chiefs* is to describe the leadership processes and cultural milieu at the most senior level of the Australian military profession.
- In contrast to the vast majority of studies of senior military leadership, which cover the role as it applies in the operational context, the focus is on the senior military leadership role as and where it is actually performed within the Australian military institution.
- The study is being concluded at a time when the ADF finds itself on the verge of as profound a transition as it has ever faced.
- In-depth interviews were conducted with 22 currently or recently serving senior ADF officers during the time frame 2007 to 2012. They included five current or former CDFs, four current or former VCDFs, three senior current or former public servants and one former Minister.

Case Study 1: CDF Chris Barrie and ADF operational reinvigoration

During 1998 CDF Chris Barrie began to worry about the ADF's unpreparedness for major contingencies outside Australia. The ADF could probably cope with one such significant event, but not with two or more concurrently. Barrie began by posing two key questions to those in his senior team: *"what do we do about this – if something happens in the Solomons, for example, how are we going to cope if something emerges elsewhere?"*. The main issue was Army's readiness. Barrie asked Army to look at what it would take for a second brigade to be readied for short-notice deployment, with the aim of having two ready brigades by mid-1999. Navy was asked to look at options for moving and basing ships closer to the areas where they would be used. For Air Force, the main aim was to keep the C130E in service for a buffer period, while the C130J was readied for service. All this depended on extra funding.

Barrie began to discuss this plan with government ministers and other officials in late 1998. It was a *"bit of a challenge"* because it required both significant additions to defence funding requirements and extra personnel. He was dealing with a relatively new government, so he needed to *"lead some of the Ministers up to it"*. In the early stages of his plan, he worked hard at establishing credibility with the government and relevant departments. He gave the government arguments *"based on commonsense"*, and networked intensively in the Whole of Government space (a relatively new idea at that time). He and his senior colleagues spent much time talking to their counterparts in other departments and agencies, especially Foreign Affairs, Attorney-General's/Police, Treasury and Industry.

The increased readiness for the 1st Brigade was publicly announced on 11 March 1999. Barrie remembers this date clearly, because he was in Jakarta at the time, leading the Australian contingent in a leadership workshop with the Indonesians. His Indonesian counterpart, GEN Wiranto, was leading the Indonesian side at the workshop, so he was able to give Wiranto the announcement before it became public. *"You'll probably want to do something with this news"*, he recalls hearing from Canberra, *"and how right they were! I was able to emphasise to Wiranto in person that this was being done without hostile intent, and was not to gainsay the outcome of the East Timor plebiscite."*

The rest is history. The enhanced capability established by the senior team was the basis for the successful INTERFET operation in East Timor in late 1999. The operation cemented the ADF's reputation with its allies within the region and gave it a quasi-mythical status with the public. However straightforward the operation might have seemed on the surface, its basis was the skilful and multi-faceted strategic leadership that had begun much earlier.

Getting a better handle on strategic leadership

Lessons for all circumstances and all eras

If “strategy” and “strategic leadership” are poorly understood, this is generally because, as Sun Tzu reminds us in the first epigraph, their most crucial elements tend to be largely invisible to most people.

This point is well brought out in the illustrative case study to this chapter. While the public and the media observed the ADF in East Timor and saw the splendid performance of the troops on the ground, its foundation was a diverse set of tangible and intangible capabilities. Arguably, the most important of these was the strategic acumen of CDF Chris Barrie and his senior colleagues, and the hard work behind the scenes that they and their predecessors had put into building institutional capability and solid working relationships within the Australian Defence Organisation and with Government, public sector agencies and allies. The overall product was a military institution with a justifiable reputation for competence and compassion, qualities that were the product of career development and training systems capable of producing professionals at all levels who could perform effectively even after years of little “match practice”.

The fundamental importance of these “softer” capabilities was brought out repeatedly in our interviews and discussions with those at the top levels of the ADF. And it will be seen that such capabilities underpin every one of the illustrative case studies that precede the various chapters in this report, even when a case ostensibly deals with weapon systems and platforms.

The characteristics of strategic leadership at this level are essentially constant and continual, regardless of the extent to which the ADF is engaged in local or overseas operations. Thus this study contains lessons for all circumstances and all eras.

Objective

The objective of *The Chiefs* was to describe the leadership processes and cultural milieu at the most senior levels of the Australian military profession.

Breaking fresh ground

The Chiefs breaks fresh ground, not just in Australia but internationally, with an approach that is distinctly different to that taken in any other previous study of senior military leadership.

Whereas the vast majority of such studies cover the role as it applies in the operational context, *The Chiefs* analysed the senior military leadership role as and where it is actually performed. The study took a sociologically oriented approach, by focusing on the determining factors in the organisational situation rather than on (or rather than just on) the qualities of the individuals involved. In this sense, it is a logical continuation of a series of leadership research projects conducted by the Centre for Defence Leadership & Ethics over the previous decade.¹

Method

The material used in the study was drawn from in-depth interviews conducted with 22 currently or recently serving senior ADF officers during the time frame 2007 to 2012. They included five current or former CDFs and four current or former VCDFs, as well as three current or former senior public servants and one former Minister. Some were interviewed more than once, with such sessions often a year or more apart.²

It became quickly apparent during interviews that the Chiefs tackle most major tasks by an interlinked set of core activities. Thus focusing too heavily on detailed task content would not only have concealed the richness of the various roles in question but also would have failed to show how most such tasks involve aligning and juggling a number of (often subtle) targets or outcomes.

Thus the approach sought to depict strategic leadership in terms of a simple but meaningful “frame of reference” that could be used by researchers, practitioners and observers alike to enhance their understanding of the process. This meant that the analysis was of *how* and *why* senior military leaders made decisions rather than of *what* decisions had been made; of *processes* and *relationships* rather than of *products* and *outcomes*; of the *roles* that individual Chiefs perform and the *examples that they set* rather than of the *individuals* themselves; and of the *thinking* and *processes* that underpinned such decisions. The analysis was particularly focussed on the decisions by which senior officers set in train plans and programs *today* with the clear intention of their being the instruments of performance *tomorrow*. In this sense, it was the social science equivalent of the sentiment expressed by the earlier-mentioned Sun Tzu epigraph.

One advantage of such an approach is that it minimises any bias towards reading the record in the light of a single decision, whether judged favourably or not. Even though a Chief should be evaluated in the context of the range and quality of the

¹ N. A.Jans with David Schmidtchen, *The Real C-Cubed: Culture, Careers and Climate and How They Affect Military Capability*, Canberra Papers on Strategy and Defence, No. 143, Strategic & Defence Studies Centre, Australian National University, 2002; N. A.Jans with Jane Harte, *Once Were Warriors: Leadership, Culture and Organisational Change in the Australian Defence Organisation*, Centre for Defence Leadership Studies, Australian Defence College, 2003.

N. A.Jans, *It's the Backswing, Stupid: The Essence of Leadership Culture in Military Institutions*, Centre for Defence Leadership Studies, Australian Defence College, 2007.

² Annex A has the list of interviewees and Annex B has the questionnaire. Transcripts were sent to interviewees within a day or two to be checked for accuracy of information. All quotes used in this report were cleared by the individuals involved.

many strategic decisions that were made during his term, the reality is that he is often remembered mainly for his handling of a single – often highly public – event.³ Thus ACM Angus Houston is remembered for his honesty and moral courage in the “children overboard” affair, GEN Peter Cosgrove for his skilful handling of the media during the major operational activities of the opening stages of INTERFET and Gulf War II, and VADM Don Chalmers for his “the buck stops with me” stance on the HMAS *Westralia* incident. In the same way, but less favourably, LTGEN John Sanderson is remembered for his reaction to the 1998 Black Hawk accident, and ADM Barrie also for his part in the “children overboard” affair. Unfortunately, in many cases an accurate evaluation may never emerge, because years may pass before a valid assessment of any high-level strategic decision is possible – by which time a host of other potential explanations will be available to account for its consequences (actual or supposed) and many people will already have judged that Chief on the basis of more visible, if less weighty, issues.⁴

While it cannot be pretended that the views gathered in the interviews are entirely “objective”, it is hoped that this has had little influence on the findings. To reiterate, the analysis was concerned with the processes and rationale underpinning top-level decisions and activities concerned with strategy, programs and policy outcomes, rather than with how people performed.

The study focused on the positions of Chief of the Defence Force, Vice Chief of the Defence Force, Chief of Capability Development Group and the Chiefs of Service – the majority of the so-called “purple seven”.⁵ The analysis quite deliberately did not include the Chief of Joint Operations (CJOPS), since the study was of the role of the military strategist rather than that of senior operational commander. The 22 interviewees included five current or former CDFs, four current or former VCDFs, three current or former senior public servants and one former Minister.

The responsibilities of the various appointments in the target group are broadly as follows:

- **Chiefs of Service.** Each Chief of Service – Chief of Navy (CN), Chief of Army (CA) and Chief of Air Force (CAF) – is the head of and spokesman for his particular part of the military profession in Australia. They have extensive professional strategic power in their responsibilities to Raise-Train-Sustain but no longer any formal operational command responsibility. (As “The

³ Given that the ADF has yet to appoint a woman at the 3-star level, the masculine pronoun will be used in reference to current and previous incumbents at this level, and the “he/she” form used more generally.

⁴ In this respect, many senior leaders suffer from a kind of “negative attribution effect”. Leadership attribution theory holds that many leaders, especially charismatic ones, are often given undeserved credit for the success achieved by their organisations. This is because it is usually difficult for someone without intimate knowledge of the way that the organisation works to analyse the reasons for its performance. The *negative attribution* effect arises when strategic leaders introduce programs that are uncomfortable to those within the organisation or that involve short-term costs, which are needed for strategic reasons. Any later success of such programs tends not to be credited to those who initiated the programs, in part because the process was a team effort in the first place, but also because such success effects usually take some time to become evident.

⁵ The nickname “Purple Seven” arose at a Blue Sky workshop at Goolabri for the then CDF ACM Houston and the six 3-star officers, including the Service Chiefs.

Foundations of Australian Military Doctrine” puts it, the “CDF *requests* the Service Chiefs to assign forces to CJOPS for operations”).⁶

- **Chief of Capability Development Group.** The CCDG is responsible for developing and delivering an affordable and extendable Defence Capability Plan. The Group runs the processes that take business cases to government, manages the defence capability program (projects and money), runs the trials and development unit, and manages the industry-defence think tank.
- **Vice Chief of the Defence Force.** The VCDF performs the major coordination task for the thirteen Groups in Defence, as well as commanding specific functions in his own right (for example, JPME and development).
- **Chief of the Defence Force.** Above them all, the CDF does most of this and more. The CDF commands the ADF. He is responsible for all of the ADF's operational activities, and is the Minister's major conduit into the ADF and as such is the government's main adviser on all things military. The CDF is the ADF's representative on the National Security Committee of Cabinet and his is the face most frequently seen in the media items that deal with important events in the military sphere.⁷

A timely study

This is a timely study for three main reasons.

To begin with, elucidation on the topic is sorely needed. As noted above, the topic of senior leadership away from the battlefield has been neglected in the scholarly literature. While the shelves of military libraries groan under the weight of accounts of senior operational command at sea, in the field and in the air, they are sketchy at best about what happens continuously at the most senior levels.

For example, although the latest edition of the classic *Military Leadership* has three chapters on US senior leadership, these essentially focus on the failures of senior officers to give appropriate advice to the President prior to the launching of Gulf War II.⁸ The book had no analysis of the routine, year-in and year-out processes that occupy the time of senior leaders within the defence bureaucracy.⁹

Similarly, the few autobiographies and biographies of senior officers of the Australian military profession are often marked by the tendency noted in this

⁶ ADDP-D, July 2012 (emphasis added).

⁷ Annex C shows a recent Ministerial Directive to the CDF and Secretary.

⁸ Robert Taylor, William Rosenbach & Eric Rosenbach (eds) *Military Leadership: In Pursuit of Excellence*, 6th edition, Westview Press, 2010. The three chapters that cover strategic leadership are “A Failure in Generalship” (by Paul Yingling), “Challenging the Generals” (Fred Kaplan), and “Bush and the Generals” (Michael Desch).

⁹ Even books about more general military organisational topics, such as the recent *Managing Military Organisations: Theory and Practice* (Routledge, London: 2010, edited by Joseph Soeters, Paul van Fenema, & Robert Beeres) fail to deal explicitly with strategic leadership at the most senior levels beyond the strictly operational sphere. Despite this omission, this book is otherwise extremely comprehensive and contains much that will be of significant interest to military professionals.

chapter's second epigraph (from experienced US military leader and leadership scholar Walt Ulmer, Jr) to focus excessively on individuals and the detail of their careers and to skim over the underlying sociology and psychology of the leadership processes.¹⁰

Former CA Frank Hickling was not the only interviewee to remark on this, in the same vein as the chapter's third epigraph from a former CDF. Hickling noted that *"It's intriguing to note the disproportionate volume of literature dealing with command in war versus senior leadership in peace. I guess senior leadership in peace is not particularly sexy!"* Nonetheless, he went on to say, the role *"offered a level of satisfaction beyond anything I had experienced anywhere else."*¹¹

The second reason for the study's timeliness is that it was conducted during a period when a "new collegiality" was being established at the top of the ADF. The process and benefits shed useful light on the nature of the strategic leadership process.

"It's intriguing to note the disproportionate volume of literature dealing with command in war versus senior leadership in peace."

Finally and most importantly, the study is being published at a time when the ADF is on the verge of as profound a transition as it has ever faced. Those who lead the ADF in the coming decade will have to deal with a number of major strategic challenges. Each would be complex enough in itself; they will be formidable in combination. Among the most pressing of these challenges are capability realignment, reputation management, personnel policy and practice, and Defence posture reorientation (Chapter 3 has more discussion on these). It is to be hoped that the analyses and recommendations in this report can be an important part of the intellectual foundation for meeting these challenges.

¹⁰ One notable exception is the recent re-examination of D-Day, by the British scholar Keith Grint (*Leadership, Management and Command: Rethinking D-Day*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

¹¹ Our study draws upon material from many interviews with current and past incumbents of these roles. It includes many direct quotations from the interview transcripts. In such cases, we refer to the officer by his or her then appointment title. For example, "CDF Hurley" refers to the current (2012) incumbent, GEN David Hurley, and "CDF Houston" refers to the former CDF ACM Angus Houston. Where an officer has been interviewed in different roles, the quoted material refers to the appointment that that officer had at the time of the interview, e.g., "VCDF Hurley" is a quotation from him when he was VCDF. First names are given on the first occasion that people are mentioned; thereafter, with a few exceptions, only their surnames are used.

An outline of what follows

The report is in three parts.

Part I (**Approach**) consists of Chapters 1, 2 and 3. Building on this chapter, Chapter 2 (“Studying the Military Profession at the Strategic Level”) discusses key concepts and terms and then presents a conceptual framework for understanding ADF strategic leadership. Chapter 3 (“The Context and the Challenges”) then describes the professional and cultural context in which the Chiefs’ work is mainly done, the performance implications, and some of the major strategic challenges that lie ahead for the ADF.

Part II describes **The Chiefs in Action**. Chapter 4 (“The Chiefs in Action: Full Range Capability”) outlines ten military capability groupings, under the categories of structural, intellectual and social capability, and describes the approach that various Chiefs are taking to their development and use. Chapter 5 (“The Chiefs in Action: Roles”) elaborates on and discusses the Chiefs’ four main leadership roles of Strategic Director, Strategic Leader, Strategic Builder and Steward of the Profession.

Part III deals with **Implications**. Chapter 6 (“Vulnerabilities and Opportunities”) discusses the performance vulnerabilities associated with each of these roles, both for the Chiefs and their supporting staff teams. Chapter 7 (“Conclusions”) brings the arguments together by discussing the issues of “so what” and “what next”. The report closes with recommendations for improvements to JPME, career development, and staffing practices, policies and programs.

Each chapter begins with an illustrative case study that brings out some of the relevant points in that chapter as well as building progressively on the general argument.

Chapter 2:

Studying the Military Profession at the Strategic Level

It is quite possible that the best way to improve practice is not by producing facts but by producing frames, or ways of organising and thinking about the world.

(Edward E Lawler III, scholar of management and leadership)

Leadership is one of the most observed and least understood phenomena on earth.

(John MacGregor Burns, one of the seminal figures in reinvigorating the conceptualisation of leadership during the last generation)

The purpose of studying economics is not to acquire a set of ready-made answers to economic questions, but to learn how to avoid being deceived by economists.

(Joan Robinson, Cambridge [UK] economist)

Strategic leadership is the process of getting things done through others, by engaging them and winning their commitment, and by building strategic leadership teams – and through these, building and leading the organisation.

The main points in this chapter

- The analysis aimed for a better understanding of a strategic leadership *frame of reference*: the mental model for organising and thinking about the work done at the most senior levels of the military profession.
- The framework includes definitions and discussion of the basic concepts that underpin the frame of reference.
- The definitions designate leadership as the influence method most appropriate for conditions of complexity, with management for conditions of relative predictability, and command for conditions of crisis.
- Although officers at all levels need to be skilled in all three methods of influence, those at the top require skills of a higher dimension.

Case Study 2: CDF Angus Houston establishes a “new collegiality”

The senior officers at the top of the Australian military profession currently think and act in an integrated manner and with a joint perspective in a way that represents a subtle but significant departure from past practices.

As one Service Chief put it, *“we fully accept that each Service doesn’t deliver its own form of military power by itself. Rather, the ADF exists to operate as an entity, so we should make strategic decisions with that in mind”*. Another remarked that *“all of us – the Secretary, the CDF, and the Service Chiefs – ‘get it’ regarding strategy. There has been a concerted effort in the last few years to develop this collegiality and we need to keep it solid”*.

Paradoxically, any junior officer would not regard this as remarkable. Strong teamwork is a normal feature at most levels of the military institution, and there are obvious benefits in thinking and acting in a unified fashion at the top. However, while close collegiality seems an obvious process goal for a senior team, it wasn’t always thus. In fact, until a short time ago, strong collegiality at the most senior levels could usually be taken for granted only in situations of crisis, when all three Services could be guaranteed to pull together. Despite continued exhortations to act corporately, most mid-level and even many senior officers had been inclined to think “tribally”: if not in terms of giving their Service an advantage, then at least by ensuring that it would not be disadvantaged.

Much of the credit for this change is due to CDF Houston. When he accepted a second term, he asked that he be able to select Chiefs who would be willing and able to work together as a unified team. He followed up on this by discussing shared perspectives of relevant issues with each new Chief prior to their appointment. Houston then had the new team spend time in a 2-day retreat early in its existence, to explore issues and to become used to working as a “team”. The benefit of this was attested to by one who confessed that, in his early days as Chief, *“I found the whole business quite daunting, because I was the new kid on the block, so the opportunity to relate closely to my new senior colleagues at an early stage was a huge benefit”*. Finally, to consolidate these initiatives, the Service Chiefs were co-located at married quarters in Duntroon, where, as one put it, *“we used to see each other across the back fence quite frequently”*.

The new team developed the habit of networking in advance of meetings. They quickly got to the stage, where as one put it, *“each Chief would be prepared to argue the projects of another Service even at the expense of his own”*. They had become institutionally rather than parochially or tribally oriented.

Studying the work at the top

The Chiefs focused on the performance-determining factors in the organisational situation rather than on (or rather than just on) the qualities of the individuals involved. This was consistent with the intention of gaining a better understanding of the strategic leadership process by developing relevant *frames of reference* or models of organising and thinking about work at the senior level.

The value of developing such frames of reference is emphasised in the chapter's first epigraph. It is the dictum of distinguished American scholar Professor Edward E. Lawler III: that the best way to improve practice is not by producing facts but by producing frames, or ways of organising and thinking about the world.¹² Lawler believed that the ability to develop and understand appropriate models of “how things happen” is among the more important skills in strategic leadership.

The ability to develop and understand appropriate models of “how things happen” is among the more important skills in strategic leadership.

In the spirit of the second epigraph – that “leadership is one of the most observed and least understood phenomena on earth” – the chapter begins by defining and briefly discussing a number of concepts that apply to strategic leadership. These include “strategy” and three basic methods of individual-to-individual influence within organisations (“leadership”, “management” and “command”), the core concepts of “strategic leadership”, and the need for a leader's self-identity to evolve as the individual passes through successive career stages. All these concepts are brought together with a description of the frame of reference.

¹² Specifically, the concept of “frames of reference” is used in a way similar to that advocated by organisational scholar Professor Ian Mitroff in a core chapter in Lawler's book. Mitroff argues that executive decisions are strongly influenced by the interactions between the needs of key stakeholders, and thus that the decisions they make are likely to be based as much on relevant but somewhat nebulous cultural considerations as they are on “rational” criteria. He urges researchers to get below what seems to be going on at the surface of organisations in order to understand the frames of reference and assumptions used by executives and leaders in coming to a decision. In this study, our concern was directed at understanding the roles of the Chiefs in respect to these kinds of interactions and these kinds of cultural considerations. See Ian I Mitroff, “Why our old pictures of the world do not work anymore”, in Edward E Lawler III, Allan M Mohrman, Jr, Susan A Mohrman, Gerald E Ledford, Thomas G Cummings (eds), *Doing Research That Is Useful for Theory and Practice*, Jossey Bass, San Francisco, 1985, 18-35.

Basic concepts in the study of strategic leadership

Strategy and “strategic thinking”

It is not surprising that military professionals typically think of “strategy” in terms of planning for and running large military operations. After all, “operations” is what the military “is about”, and most writing and discussion on strategy relates to preparing for and engaging in operations. The reality of “strategy”, however, is much deeper and broader than this. Most fundamentally, it requires skilful and

... skilful and imaginative short term action, in order to initiate and shape activities that will have a long-term payoff.

imaginative short-term action, in order to initiate and shape activities that will have a long-term payoff. Constant and continual, it is a process required regardless of the level of operational engagement.

Strategy is fundamentally about making decisions and establishing policies and capabilities *today* with the clear intention of their being the instruments of performance *tomorrow*. And because “tomorrow” is always uncertain, a crucial part of building strategic capability is to build the capacity to adapt to whatever the future actually brings. Further,

all major organisational functions – logistics, materiel development, personnel management, etc. – need to be based on a strategy, with all such strategies aligning in a mutually supportive manner in order to promote institutional efficiency as well as effectiveness.

Methods of influence

Before getting to the core topic of “strategic leadership”, we need – very briefly – to discuss and clarify the concepts of “leadership”, “management” and “command”. Table 2.1 has our definitions.¹³

First, however, we need to establish a few caveats. To begin with, although there is a clear conceptual distinction between the processes associated with leadership and management, the preferred mode of influence – command – tends to be an amalgam of the other two. The circumstances are important in this regard: sometimes it is appropriate to “lead” (as defined below) and in others it is more appropriate either to “manage” or to “command”.

Further, each method of influence tends to be associated with a particular way of thinking (mindset) or style. For example, leadership requires an “engaging”

¹³ A recent review of leadership identified over 200 separate definitions of “leadership”. The Harvard Business School’s recent *Handbook of Leadership Theory & Practice* (Nitin Nohria & Rakesh Khurana, eds., Harvard Business Press, Boston, MA: 2010) does not even attempt a consistent definition. In early 2013, Amazon.com listed over 90,000 titles on the topic of “Leadership”.

approach, in which those in charge work with others to explore problem definition and solution, because they accept that they do not readily have “the answer”. While in such situations the leaders will bring their own expertise to the process, leadership requires the person to resist being seen as the sole source of expertise and as having “all the answers”.¹⁴ In the process, however, they will also contribute something less tangible but arguably more important, in terms of the ability to bring to bear the interpersonal qualities and engagement skills needed to mobilise the commitment and spirit as well as the expertise of a range of followers, both as individuals and as groups or teams.

Table 2.1: The three fundamental methods of influence

Methods of influence	Definition	Appropriate for when...	Approach/style
Leadership	<i>A process of engaging others in concerted efforts to pursue a goal, in conditions of complexity and uncertainty or in anticipation of such conditions</i>	... the problem is “complex” or in conditions of uncertainty, or in anticipation of conditions of uncertainty ... it is necessary to establish a positive climate, in anticipation of future demands on the team	Engaging: Exploratory Inclusive Supportive
Management	<i>A process of solving problems by the application of standard methods or standard operating procedures</i>	... the problem is “complicated” ... conditions are relatively predictable ... efficiency is important	Analytic: Systematic Focused Methodical
Command	<i>An authoritative leadership style associated with crisis</i>	... the problem is chaotic or is a crisis ... time is pressing	Authoritative: Decisive Direct Resolute

In turn, management requires a more analytic or “systematic” and dispassionate approach, based on the assumption that the person in authority not only “knows” the right approach but also *knows* that he/she knows (this is because he/she recognises the problematic situation as being “standard” even if complicated). In contrast, while the commander also “knows” the right approach to tackle a “critical” problem (or *hopes* that he/she knows), whatever uncertainties he/she has need to be put aside in the interests of urgency. This is because a critical problem

¹⁴ Ronald A. Heifetz, *Leadership Without Easy Answers*, Cambridge MA, Harvard University Press, 1994; Ronald A. Heifetz, Alexander Grashow, & Marty Linski, *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership: Tools and Tactics for Change in Your Organisation and the World*, Boston: Harvard Business Press, 2009.

demands immediate resolution, with the uncertainties catered for by contingencies in the commander's plan.¹⁵

The final caveat is probably the most important. The reality of influencing others is much more complicated than these simple definitions and rules of thumb imply.¹⁶ Many activities carried out by officers require them to both lead and manage and, depending on their appointment and/or the prevailing circumstances, to command as well. The concepts, as concepts, are presented chiefly for the sake of clarification and discussion. However, this final caveat serves as a reminder that, in a multi-faceted organisation like a military institution, senior officers need strong

“Although ‘leadership’, in the sense of showing and encouraging the way, is something that a senior officer has to do only occasionally, the task of ‘management’ is continuous.”

skills in all ways of influencing. They must not only be open to ideas and to be skilled in engaging people in the exploration of uncertainty but also to be both competent managers and able to “take command” in crises. Underpinning all of these methods of influence is the foundation of appropriate character or “personality” and intellectual agility that helps a senior officer to be capable and comfortable with whatever method of influence is required.

Former VCDF Mueller points out one of the key distinctions between leadership and command on the one hand and management on the other.

He observes that although the task of “leadership” (in the sense of showing and encouraging the way) is something that a senior officer has to do only occasionally, *“the task of ‘management’ is continuous”*. Nevertheless, even if senior officers need to practise leadership only quite rarely, they need to do it skilfully and meet a higher order of difficulty than when they “led” in earlier career roles.

Strategic leadership

Strategic leadership is the process of guiding the process of making decisions and establishing policies and capabilities “today” in order that they be the instruments of performance “tomorrow”, by engaging people and winning their commitment and by building cohesive and productive strategic leadership teams – and through these, building the organisation and influencing it to perform in a particular way and move in a particular direction.

¹⁵ In certain types of chaotic situations, command effectiveness may be increased by training to develop familiarity, intuition, and the type of “commonsense” (known as “heuristics”) that comes from experience. Such training can also enhance quick reactions in complex situations, though here intuition and the application of principles may seriously mislead, causing the executive to proceed blithely but inappropriately. (See: Francesca Gino and Don A. Moore, “Effect of task difficulty on use of advice”, *Journal of Behavioural Decision Making*, 2007, 20: 21-35; and Daniel Kahnemann & Gary Klein, “Conditions for intuitive expertise: a failure to disagree”, *American Psychologist*, 2009, 64, 515-552.)

¹⁶ There is a broad literature on characteristic work and decision-making styles associated with the various methods of influence. This is linked to well-established personality traits (such as introversion/extroversion) which in turn may be connected to bio-physical matters such as hormone levels, neuro-transmitter levels, etc. See Robert Bolton & Dorothy Grover Bolton, *People Styles At Work*, Amacom, NY, 1996. For the temperament-chemistry link, see Helen Fisher, “We have chemistry! The role of four primary temperament dimensions in mate choice and partner compatibility”, *The Psychotherapist*, 2012, 52: 8-9.

CCDG Peter Jones expressed the concept neatly, in his observation that strategic leadership is the process of *“leveraging the advantages of an Australian military profession that increasingly sees itself in joint terms, is increasingly staffed by well-educated, clever and motivated people, and has a national industrial capability with the experience and imagination to support the new direction that we will take”*.

Because uncertainty is common at the strategic level, the strategic leadership process is bedevilled by a number of factors. Often the very first issue that will need to be unravelled is to reach agreement on the nature of the problem itself. Because it can be expected that no one person will have “the full picture”, let alone “the answer”, tackling a complex problem at the strategic level will invariably require collaborative effort, both at the top of and often across Services and Groups and, even more challenging, in other agencies or allies. Moreover, although a Chief cannot be expected to have the immediate answers on all aspects of the problem, he *will* often be expected to lead the processes by which such questions are explored and interpreted (with the process often extending beyond Service or Group boundaries), and of developing answers, options and solutions.

Another source of uncertainty relates to the way in which many strategic goals can be in tension, in the sense that each cannot be fully achieved except at some expense to another. For example, major shifts in technological approaches to warfare or to the political circumstances in which operations are conducted tend to have fundamental but often subtle consequences for the traditional roles that are central to military institutions. An instance that applies in the RAN is the shift away from large ships, commanded by CAPT or CMDR, to smaller ships commanded by LCDR, and the commensurate effects on the Navy’s command culture and hence its core institutional culture. Another example relates to the technological advances that led to the by-product of effectively de-skilling many of the Navy’s technical sailors, who, while they continued to receive intensive training across their respective professional functions to cater for worst-case contingencies, had seen the more challenging and thus interesting tasks in maintenance being routinely outsourced, with commensurate effects on their job satisfaction and professional development opportunities. Both these and other phenomena have fundamentally changed the career dynamic within the Senior Service, with subtle but significant consequences for career development arrangements and mid-career retention issues. Navy’s strategic leaders have had to devise fully satisfactory solutions to these consequences and to manage such solutions successfully from their early stages into maturity.

Strategic leadership needs to be exercised in a collaborative environment.

The illustrative case study to this chapter showed how CDF Houston implicitly applied these principles. Having seen what he called “destructive competitiveness” at the top levels, he was convinced that strategic leadership needs to be exercised in a collaborative environment. Just as importantly, Houston knew that strategic leadership includes building fully engaged followership at all levels, by painstakingly working on relationships, expanding perspectives, and building engagement and collaborative effort. By establishing a high level of collaboration at the top, he was thus also putting into place the beginnings of a mechanism to promote multi-levelled followership. He was “leading from the front” to establish this high level of teamwork at the top levels at the same time as he was also “leading from the shadows” by shaping the conditions that would encourage such collaboration to cascade down.¹⁷

The need to focus upwards and outwards introduces a further source of complexity at the strategic level. Former CA Hickling saw that *“the single greatest difference between leadership at the tactical/operational level and at the strategic level is*

“The single greatest difference between leadership at the operational and the strategic levels is the need to respond to requirements that are as yet unformed in the government’s collective thinking.”

the need to respond to requirements that are as yet unformed in the government’s collective thinking”. But both he and Houston drew attention to the opportunity to influence the outcomes of this process, with Hickling noting that, while *“this can be frustrating, it also provides opportunities to shape the mission by providing timely advice and by asking the right questions”.*

Any approach to strategy that is other than cautious must be managed with considerable “small-p” political skill, not least because bold thinking will often run counter to the short-term interests of one or more of the Services (even a Chief’s own) or of the Public Service. This means that a Chief needs to be tough enough to ignore any risks in terms of his short-term reputation and skilled enough to manoeuvre politically in the face of any such opposition. This is the logic behind CDF Houston’s assertion that *“at the end of the day, strategic leadership is not a program or a sequence but the ability to present ‘your plan’ in ways that will be acceptable to other stakeholders, especially political ones”.* Many of the activities of “strategic leadership” will entail what has been defined as management and command but many will require leadership as defined above.

¹⁷ Houston’s collaborative style as a senior leader was a continuation of the practice he began as CAF, where he would have lengthy sessions with each incoming CO, in which he outlined his expectations, likely challenges, advice, sources of support, and so on. And, while this seems an obvious thing for a Service Chief to do, it says much about the prevailing leadership culture at that time that the Air Force, under Houston, was unique in doing so.

To quote the rest of Houston's view on this:

*“... You need to be able to work in the same space as others in the room. You need to empathise with the various ‘tribes’: the three Services, the APS and the politicians. You need to be able to frame your arguments in terms they understand, focus on the key strategic issues, work them through, and present sensible options... **While the government will make the decision, you can influence the government to make the right decision. There is an art in influencing the government to make the right decision, and it requires skill, strategic appreciation and guile.**”*

Thus, like CDF Houston, a Chief will be often performing two fundamentally different styles of leadership simultaneously. While he will continue to “lead from the front” by getting out and being highly visible to members at all levels, he must

A Chief must necessarily simultaneously influence people both directly and indirectly.

be equally capable of understanding how to exert influence *indirectly* so as to “lead from the shadows”. Moreover, the policies and structures that are developed in response to the strategic issues are themselves important ways in which professional behaviour is shaped. (An obvious example relates to the policies and practices that apply within career development and career management.) From this perspective, therefore, senior officers must always to be conscious of the legacy effects of core policies.

In doing what is necessary to engage others in the problem, a leader needs to work in a way that ensures that the problem doesn't become bogged down in a kind of “paralysis by analysis”. This reinforces an earlier point: those at the top need to be as skilled in management as they are in leadership. Many problems encountered at the strategic level do not involve great *complexity* although they might be very *complicated*. In most such cases, the appropriate influence style is management. On the other hand, when a crisis arises, as it often will in the operational context and, not infrequently at the strategic level, then “command” is the appropriate influence style.

Leadership, self-identity and career stage

The final concept to be discussed in this chapter relates to “leader self-identity” and the extent to which it is appropriate to the leader's particular career stage.

Notwithstanding the need for officers at all levels to have appropriate skill in each of the three fundamental methods of influence, they are likely to place different levels of importance and different emphases on each at different career stages. This is partly because the perspective an individual brings to an organisational

problem, and their self-definition as a leader, is substantially shaped by their career experiences and their career circumstances up until then.

Self-identity relates to the perception of “who I am”, “what I believe in” and “how I should behave”. Executives need to adapt and deepen their self-identities as leaders as they advance within their organisations.

Having an adaptable self-identity was at the head of the list of “strategic leader meta-competencies” derived by the Strategic Studies Institute of the US Army War College in 2003.¹⁸ The War College study stressed that the development of a strong yet flexible core identity as professional and leader is an important foundation of the military career development system.

Most importantly, the study pointed out that leader self-identity appropriate to the earliest career stages – a sense of oneself as a direct, decisive and expert team leader, oriented towards contributing to short-term achievement – must give way to seeing oneself as a different kind of leader at the middle and senior officer stages.¹⁹ The War College study concluded that the earlier this process of identity-evolution starts in terms of officer career development, the better it will be for both the individual and the institution.²⁰

The professional self-identity that served well in the early career needs to give way progressively to a more complex self-definition.

In more cases than most of us probably realise, the approach we take to address a problem will be determined by psychological/subjective factors and habits as well as by those that are more objective. If, like most officers, leaders have been schooled to develop the skill, temperament and identity associated with a decisive, action-oriented, leading-from-the-front, “don’t-just-stand-there-do-something” leadership style, they will often find it uncomfortable in later career to adopt a more reflective, consultative and indirect approach when situations are more ambiguous. This will especially be the case when followers are used to having directive leaders, and hence project their expectations that this is the kind of approach that they want.²¹

¹⁸ Leonard Wong, Stephen Gerras, William Kidd, Robert Pricone, Richard Swengos, *Strategic Leadership Competencies*, US Army War College, September 2003; Leonard Wong & Don Snider, “Strategic leadership of the Army profession”, in Don Snider & Lloyd Matthews (eds), *The Future of the Army Profession*, 2nd edn., McGraw-Hill, 2005, 601-624.

¹⁹ The War College study concluded that the individual and collective consciousness for such identity evolution needs to start early in the officer career development process. Leaving it too late risks the important vulnerability of strategic-level leaders who persist in continuing to act as directive, out-the-front operational-level leaders.

²⁰ Future strategic leaders will undoubtedly benefit from the experience of having to think of themselves as members of an integrated service environment during their earliest career days at the Defence Academy.

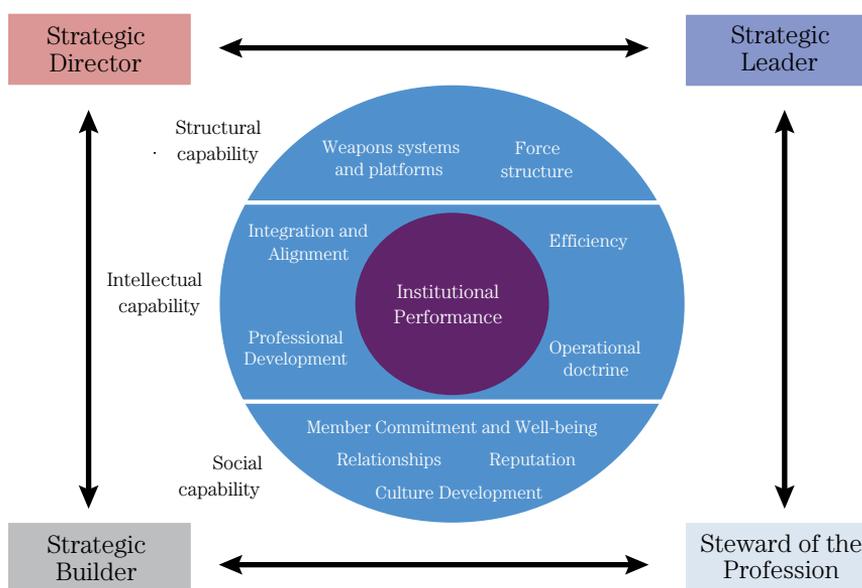
²¹ This is an illustration of a little-recognised truth about organisational culture: that many cultural features that are strengths in one situation will also be weaknesses in another. In a very simple – but hopefully not simplistic – way, this evokes the old cliché that “To a man with a hammer, every problem looks like a nail”; or, to put it slightly differently, “A man who identifies himself as a hammerer will approach every problem as if it were a nail”. Achieving the right professional developmental approach in such a case would – to extend the metaphor – take the person from seeing him/herself as a hammerer, then a carpenter, then a building site supervisor, then an architect, and finally perhaps a town planner.

Developing a relevant frame of reference

The frame of reference for the military strategic leadership process comprises three main elements (see Figure 2.1):

- the core outcome of institutional performance;
- the various capabilities – structural, intellectual and social – that must be achieved in order to create the circumstances for the delivery of institutional performance; and
- the roles – Strategic Director, Strategic Leader, Strategic Builder and Steward of the Profession – that senior officers perform in working with these various capabilities.

Figure 2.1: The military strategic leadership process



The core outcome: delivering institutional performance

The “delivery of institutional performance” essentially means whatever the government of the day specifies it to mean. For example, the principal tasks of the ADF as given in the 2009 White Paper (p. 13)²² and ADDP-D (pp. 5.6 and 5.7) requires the ADF to:

²² The 2013 White Paper was released as this report was going to print.

- deter and defeat attacks on Australia by conducting independent military operations without relying on the combat or combat support forces of other countries (i.e., including being able to control air and sea approaches against credible adversaries in the defence of Australia, to the extent required to safeguard Australian territory, critical sea lanes, population and infrastructure);
- contribute to stability and security in the South Pacific and East Timor, including protection of nationals, providing humanitarian assistance or disaster relief, or stabilising the security environment. Given its size and resources, Australia and the ADF are expected to take a leadership role in this area, although operations will inevitably involve other agencies and often other countries;
- contribute to military contingencies in the Asia-Pacific region, spanning the full spectrum of potential military operations from high-end conflict in support of South-East Asian partners through to humanitarian assistance in disaster relief and the evacuation of nationals; and
- contribute to military contingencies in support of global security, in support of efforts by the international community to uphold global security and a rules-based international order, where national interests align and the nation has the capacity to do so.

The enabling capabilities

The Chiefs contribute to a core outcome of institutional performance by their ability to develop and use a range of capability assets, or “enabling capabilities”. To paraphrase the earlier observation of CCDG Jones, the essence of strategic leadership

Capability extends beyond its conventional meaning in terms of structural capability to include two other types of capability: intellectual and social.

is the ability to leverage these enabling capabilities, both separately and in concert.

Military capability is defined by the ADF as “the ability to achieve a desired effect in a specific operating environment”.²³ Both conceptually and practically, capability extends beyond the conventional meaning of capability in terms of “hard assets” (i.e., structural capability) to include two other types of capability: intellectual capability and social capability.

Structural capability includes the technology, platforms and hardware that are employed to have a specific military operational effect (firepower, manoeuvrability, etc.), the various patterns of force structure (in terms of the number, size and composition of military units), and levels of unit readiness to deliver or support relevant military effects.

²³ See Alan Hinge, *Australian Defence Preparedness: Principles, Problems and Prospects: Introducing Repertoire of Missions (ROMINS), A Practical Path to Australian Defence Preparedness*, Australian Defence Studies Centre, Canberra, 2000, p15.



While the development and management of these big ticket items consumes much time, money and public and political scrutiny, they are no more important to true capability than are the other two capability types.

Intellectual capability comprises the organisational thinking power used in both routine and novel situations. Intellectual capability has always been important within military organisations but, in the information age and with the growing prevalence of asymmetric warfare, operations-other-than-war and working with coalition/Whole of Government partners, thinking power is more important than ever. Modern conflict, with its complexity, immense costs and public scrutiny, requires guile, diplomacy and imagination, so commanders and their staffs have to be smart and have access to “smart” systems and decision support tools. Moreover, the need to be clever applies as much to the operations of base-area headquarters units as it does to those of formations in the field.

An important part of a military organisation’s intellectual capability depends on its approach to professional development in terms of career structures and employment systems, including all the mechanisms associated with recruitment, training, occupational allocation, promotion processes, career management and professional transition. Such structures and systems exert their influence both “upwards” and “downwards”. Building upwards, professional development is the wellspring of individual skills and experiences, operational processes and doctrine and, ultimately, of core organisational competencies – the intangible assets that allow a force to be deployed, staff its units, man its weapons and fight. Building downwards, professional development has an equally strong influence on social capability.

An additional and increasingly important aspect of intellectual capability is the thinking that lies behind its use of resources, including financial allocations. This includes both Integration and Alignment, and Efficiency. While Integration and Alignment relate to the process of coordinating and managing strategic programs for maximum focus and acceptable economy, Efficiency refers to ensuring that institutional tasks are performed at acceptable cost, and to the development and practice of an appropriate financial culture that will guide everyday behaviour.

The third set of assets in developing capability is the organisation’s **social capability**. As the least tangible of the three capability types, social capability is the most difficult to measure and to manage. Social capability refers to features of social organisation such as networks, norms and trust, and various other qualities that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit and for broadening people’s sense of identity from the “I” to the “we”. Social capability also has a strong external value. For example, the institution’s reputation shapes the level of trust that it is likely to receive from the various agents within its operational domain. Similarly, a strong culture is a major advantage in establishing a clear brand identity that tells the public and potential recruitment market what the institution is and what it stands for.



The foundation element of social capability is the institution's culture, or the ethos within each element of the ADF, and the various sets of deeply embedded norms and expectations in regard to professional practice that shape behaviour in different Services and in different parts of each Service. Culture acts “upwards” to shape other elements of intellectual and social capital, including career development practices, member commitment and well-being, relationships and reputation.²⁴

Strategic leadership roles

The Chiefs perform four distinctly different roles (discussed in more detail in Chapter 5) in addressing these various requirements:

- **Strategic Director** – the “Directive-Pragmatist”, who exercises command, tackles short-term critical problems and keeps the institution moving forward on a day-to-day basis.
- **Strategic Leader** – the “Expressive-Explorer”, who acts as the central agent in a continuous process of aligning the military institution with its present and evolving circumstances.
- **Strategic Builder** – the “Manager-Architect”, who develops and implements the process of designing and shaping the evolving institution.
- **Steward of the Profession** – the “Nurturer-Guardian”, who is the caretaker and top-level exemplar of the Australian profession of arms.

Discussion and summary

As a continual process and an imperative regardless of the level of operational engagement, strategy requires skilful and imaginative short-term action in order to initiate and shape activities intended to have a long-term payoff. The core outcome is the delivery of institutional performance, as required of the government of the day. Strategic leaders facilitate this by developing and using a range of enabling capabilities, conceptualised here in terms of structural, intellectual and social capability. This involves their performance of four major and subtly different roles.

Consistent with the third epigraph to this chapter, Chiefs and their staffs don't have to be scholarly experts in organisational behaviour but they do need sufficient understanding of the intricacies of the process to help them to detect and interpret a problem and then to understand and manage the organisational processes involved in tackling it.

²⁴ Like “personality”, culture provides a coherent view of the world and a way of thinking about and making sense of that world and, as with “personality” and “character”, culture is usually hard to describe, especially to people whose association with the organisation is superficial, and is even harder to measure. For a discussion of the Australian military culture, see Jans, *The Real C-Cubed*, op cit, Chapters 3, 4, 5 and 8.

Chapter 3:

The Context and the Challenges

Work at this level involves tasks that are unclear and ambiguous. And getting things done is a matter of influence rather than authority; of consensus building rather than exercising individual direction; of using organisational politics rather than tackling a problem directly. And in terms of the activities of organisational politics, you have to understand the drivers: the climate and the dynamics of the senior leadership people in all four tribes and for the Minister.

(2-star officer, interviewed in 2003 for **Once Were Warriors**)

Defence is a place where you've got to be passionate about something to try to change it in the Defence bureaucracy. Most see it as just too big to change. This is in stark contrast to the Defence Organisation outside Canberra, where innovation and teamwork are admired and supported.

(2-star officer, interviewed in 2003 for **Once Were Warriors**)

What made this frustrating was that many of the barriers to getting things done were actually within the system's control.

(1-star officer who subsequently rose much higher, interviewed in 2003 for **Once Were Warriors**)



Individual and team performance at the top levels depends in part on the working environment. If the environment has features that impede performance, these need to be understood and addressed.

The main points in this chapter

- This chapter describes the professional and cultural features of work at the strategic level and the significant strategic challenges that are facing the ADF.
- The more important features of the professional milieu are the organisational and role complexity associated with work in a large, integrated bureaucracy, and the practice of near-universal periodic job rotation applied to those in the military staffs. Both these features challenge the “know-how”, “know-who” and “know-why” of individuals and staff teams who have been developed for more operationally oriented roles, with predictable effects on performance.
- The significant strategic challenges that face the ADF include capability realignment, reputation management, personnel policy and practice, and Defence posture reorientation.

Case Study 3: Beginning the reform of Senior Leadership Group culture

The professional officer's habit of being decisive and leading "from-the-front" is an essential quality in a military institution. However, the tendency to use such a style when the circumstances call for something different usually results in stymied confusion and frustration.

Such was the case in the Australian military bureaucracy during the 1980s and 90s. As related by former CDF Chris Barrie, "*The culture of the military profession in Australia during the 80s and 90s was the true personification of what Secretary Dr Allan Hawke labelled 'learned helplessness'. This syndrome didn't simply mean that officers in authority felt powerless to get things done, but rather that the profession as a whole was dangerously complacent. Most people thought that, as long as we could deal with major disaster relief operations in Australia, we didn't really need to do anything more that was of importance*".

Attempts to improve the situation and to strengthen internal relationships within the top 200 uniformed and civilian officers (the Senior Leadership Group, or SLG) began in the late 1990s with the ground-breaking initiatives of CDF Barrie and Secretaries Barratt and Hawke. The process kicked off with CDF Barrie and then-Secretary Barratt with an off-site gathering of the SLG.

Barratt later observed that "*it was plain that most people in those days had little sense of interconnectivity*". He recalls inviting them to "*look around*" at the other people in the room; to note that they comprised the 200 people who control all of the important decisions in the Defence Organisation; and to realise that if there was any problem in Defence for which a solution could be found, then the people who can find that solution were there in that room.

Barratt (who later commented that he "*was surprised that this kind of activity had never happened before*") told the SLG that he and Barrie "*are not prepared to tolerate supposed leaders sitting in their posts chucking rocks at the people at the centre. We want leadership by the leadership group: we don't want senior people to see themselves as among the 'led'.*"

The Wollongong conference led to a concerted program, continued by Barrie and Hawke, to create enduring collegiality and a sense of cohesion in the SLG. A protracted program was launched, based on co-attendance at periodic conferences, workshops, internal and external executive leadership courses, and the like.

The program was successful, in the sense of improving collegiality and collaboration. Although there were regressions, particularly after the departure of its three champions, its legacy has been essentially enduring. One of its useful by-products has been the "new collegiality" at the very top echelons of the ADF.

The cultural and professional milieu in the Defence bureaucracy

This chapter describes the context in which the Chiefs' work is mainly done. Beginning with a description of the professional and cultural milieu in which the Chiefs operate and how it affects professional performance, it then moves on to a discussion of some of the major strategic challenges currently facing the ADF.

As expressed in the epigraphs to this chapter, two particular – and plainly related – characteristics of this cultural and professional milieu stand out:

- the organisational and role complexity associated with work in a large integrated bureaucracy; and
- the practice of near-universal periodic job rotation that is applied to the military staffs in all areas.

The organisational and role complexity associated with work in a large integrated bureaucracy is a consequence of a number of factors. Among the more important of these is that the functional network at the top of Defence – in the sense of how

The functional network at the top of Defence is diverse, pluralistic and complex.

business is really done, as opposed to how a structure might be depicted on paper – is diverse, pluralistic and complex. The military and civilian executives within and immediately below the SLG are representative of a wide range of disciplines and sources of professional expertise. They deal with a host of other external contacts and stakeholders, including government and other government

agencies, allies and major contractors, all of whom can also be expected to have varying perspectives on goals and priorities and varying preferences on how these should be pursued.²⁵

The illustrative case study to this chapter related how the Barrie-Barratt-Hawke initiative attempted to make this complex network more navigable for the senior members involved. The performance climate in which they worked was strengthened by their getting to know each other better, because people then felt more in control and more confident that they could get things done.

²⁵ The SLG is an example of the “network organisation” – a concept with intriguing parallels to the network-centric warfare concept that is being embraced by military thinkers. The network organisation model conceptualises an organisational structure as a system of political coalitions in which individuals and subgroups vie for power and influence, especially at the top of the organisation, where the executive has considerable room for manoeuvre. Within the broad confines of corporate strategy, organisational members autonomously work out relationships and action plans. (See: Rosabeth Moss Kanter, *The Change Masters: Corporate Entrepreneurs at Work*, London: Unwin Paperbacks, 1983; and Herminia Ibarra, “Structural alignments, individual strategies, and managerial action: elements toward a network perspective of getting things done”, in *Networks and Organisations: Structure, Form, and Action* (ed. Nitin Nohria & Robert G. Eccles): Harvard, MA: Harvard Business School Press, 1992, 171.)

The performance effects of this complexity are exacerbated by the career development practices that have most officers changing appointments at least every two years (and often between markedly different types of work). Many of the more junior officers come to the bureaucracy after serving in the ships and units that are the normal career context. In the bureaucracy, the familiarity with tasks, people and networks and purpose that were taken for granted in their usual professional contexts are all markedly lacking. They will have to deal with complexity of tasks, complexity of functions, complexity of networks and complexity of purposes. All such features challenge the “*know-how*”, “*know-who*” and “*know-why*” of individuals and staff teams whose career development has been focused on more operationally oriented roles.²⁶

Performance will be hampered by deficiencies in know-how, know-who and know-why.

Table 3.1 contrasts some of the major features of work in the “normal” career sphere and the work in the bureaucracy.

Table 3.1: Differences between working in units and working in the Defence bureaucracy

Work environment feature	In units: “Tightly-focused professionalism”	In the bureaucracy: “Dealing with the BIG issues”
Performance criteria	<i>Adherence to well-developed doctrine and skills</i> <i>Meeting tangible and usually measurable objectives</i>	Economic, political and “rational” criteria are given much weight Objectives are often somewhat intangible
Decision-making	<i>Decisive</i> <i>Based on professional judgement, traditions and doctrine</i> <i>Strong concern for doing the right thing by members at all levels</i>	Often protracted Often based on negotiation and small-p political factors People are simply one of many resources to be managed efficiently
Organisation and process	<i>Hierarchical but simple</i> <i>Most members well trained, experienced and committed</i> <i>The wheels of process are oiled by solid professional relationships, built up by frequent contact</i>	Hierarchical and complex Many staff unfamiliar with their functions and don’t expect continuity Solid relationships are more difficult to generate

²⁶ The importance of know-how, know-who and know-why is analysed in R. J. DeFillippi & M. B. Arthur, “The boundaryless career: A competency-based perspective”, *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 1994, 15, 307-324.

The high levels of job rotation applied to a majority of military staff effectively ensure that the corporate memory of many directorates and branches is wiped almost clean about every four years or so. And although most officers' performance progressively improves as they become more familiar with their work, they never reach the standards they achieve within their core professional function.²⁷

The work environment in the Defence bureaucracy requires leaders who are comfortable with novelty, who are alert to the possibilities presented by alternatives, can see a problem in terms of its broad dimensions and context, and can appreciate and take account of the perspectives of different stakeholders. Effective performance depends on being able to influence others even in situations where the individual cannot wholly rely on the formal trappings of authority, such as superior rank, greater experience and the legal authority to act unilaterally; it requires political sensitivity (both small "p" and big "P") and pragmatism. Given all these factors, it is an exceptional staff officer who quickly adapts and becomes effective.

"It took me 18 months to become effective in this role: to reach the point where I could say to myself 'this is what a VCDF does and I'm going to do it that way'."

Even the Chiefs themselves are not immune to this problem. For example, VCDF Gillespie remarked that *"it took me 18 months to become effective in this role: to reach the point where I could say to myself 'this is what a VCDF does and I'm going to do it that way'."*²⁸

These issues with individuals at all levels climbing steep learning curves contribute to a number of plainly undesirable features of the organisational environment. For example, it has the effect of

what CDF Hurley calls a tendency to *"excessive centralisation"*. Staff officers who are uncertain of their competence tend to push decisions upwards, and senior officers in a similar situation want as many details as they can so that they themselves can try to compensate for the know-how deficiencies of their staff. Hurley commented that *"many things get sucked up into the central maw, a situation that is unhealthy and a hindrance to speed and agility."*

Among other effects, this limits the time available to senior people for focusing on strategic thought. Many senior officers made similar comments. Even when they know that they should be spending more time on careful, imaginative and well-canvassed interpretations of "what is going on", they often have difficulty in finding the time to do so.

²⁷ Because statistics on job rotation rates are not officially gathered by the ADF, one has to refer to a number of scholarly and consultancy research projects conducted over the previous two decades. These show a consistent situation across that period. Annex D lists some relevant papers and reports.

²⁸ Gillespie was not the only one who has made this observation about their own situation, with another 2-star once remarking to us that it was only towards the end of his 3 year appointment that he "really worked out" what it was that he was supposed to be doing. The most recent analysis of SLG tenure was in 2003, reported in *Once Were Warriors*. This showed that the average tenure for military officers was 1.2 years, with only one in eight having been in their current appointment for at least two years. Even Defence's civilian executives were fairly mobile at that time, with a median time-in-current-job of 1.9 years, and slightly less than half having been in their current appointment for two or more years. The analysis further showed that this rate of job mobility at the top was inconsistent with then-contemporary business practices.

For example, the 1-star cited in the third epigraph also spoke of the need for greater depth in the expertise that was available in his staff team. He was running a multibillion dollar program that was *“being managed by people with no depth of professional expertise – and, until recently, not even an appropriate management information system”*. To cite the sources of his frustration in full:

“First, tenure: I was given only 18 months in the job. That is ridiculous. If you want people to be accountable for results, then for heaven’s sake leave them there for long enough for their accountability to become evident! Second, very few of my staff had been trained for their huge resource management role, because they were being career-managed as generalists. This meant that their career prospects plunged if they were not picked for command. I had a number of really useful officers working for me but then the ‘command list’ came out and some of them saw that they were not on it. Within 6 months, they had all left. What a waste!”

Time-in-role of the Chiefs themselves and the associated timing of their changeover are also relevant. The practice in recent years has been for most such appointments to change at around the same time, with all incumbents being appointed for a 3-year term. One Chief saw considerable merit in adjusting appointment terms to the degree of challenge involved in major roles. He suggested longer tenure in the immediate future for the Chiefs of Navy and Army, since both are leading major rebuilding and reorienting activities that are in their early stages.

CCDG Jones saw a similar benefit in having greater stability in the leadership of the materiel development process. He was concerned that its leadership and management had *“been in flux in recent years”*. He had taken the job because he believed that, especially after two appointments within that particular area and with an appropriate period of tenure, he could provide the stability and expertise necessary to make further improvements to its performance.

“A solid cooperative atmosphere in Russell Offices considerably lowers ‘transaction costs’.”

The picture is not completely gloomy. CAF Brown believed that the relationship situation at the strategic level is now very constructive. *“There is a solid cooperative atmosphere in Russell Offices”*, he said, *“with inter-Service differences invariably due to miscommunication rather than to anything more sinister”*. Brown saw this as *“considerably lowering ‘transaction costs’, in terms of saving time that you would otherwise have to spend on brief preparation, negotiation, responding to objections, etc.”* He went on to say that, although *“there is a problem with the civilian side, this has nothing to do with our dealings with our civilian counterparts, who are invariably people of goodwill”*. The problem

on the civilian side, Brown believed, *“is the organisational structure. There are 14 separate Groups, and they tend to align on non-output factors. This makes for stovepipes. And if there is a problem with the work in the stovepipe, the tendency is to try to make the stovepipe more efficient, rather than trying to reach outside its boundaries and make it more client-sensitive and effective”*.

Another issue is competence in applying “business management” processes to issues and projects. In respect to such competence, former VCDF Mueller commented scathingly on the inability or unwillingness of senior military officers to apply

“... big on warriors, big on ‘policy wonks’, and big on technologists and scientists – but weak on ‘management’.”

appropriate business management methods to technical and administrative problems. Mueller observed that *“the military profession that I experienced was characterised by sheer ignorance of contemporary management practice. Each of its various components was big on its particular distinctive sets of expertise – big on warriors, big on ‘policy wonks’ and big on technologists and scientists – but weak on ‘management’.”* (Chapter 2 has already

noted his comments on the relative balance between leadership and management requirements at the senior levels, in terms of the preponderance of the latter.)

Such features of work in the bureaucracy – diversity, complexity and staff who lack familiarity with the complexities of their work – are contextual challenges with which the Chiefs and their staffs must deal. However, while the first two of these factors – diversity and complexity – are essentially unavoidable, staff continuity and familiarity can be managed. To the Services’ credit, they are beginning to seriously address this issue. However, some residual effects will continue at least for the next few posting cycles.

Critical strategic challenges

Within this professional and cultural milieu, the Chiefs and their staffs are facing a number of major critical challenges. These include capability realignment, reputation management, personnel policy and practice, Defence posture reorientation, and improving the working climate within the Defence bureaucracy itself.

Capability realignment

While the main role of the ADF will continue to be an ability to engage in conventional combat against other armed forces, it will also have to incorporate emerging hard and soft capability demands. The Navy must lead as the primary element of a national maritime policy, together with its continuing responsibilities for border protection and conventional maritime operations. The Army must consolidate its newly found skills in asymmetric warfare and operations-other-than-war. The Air Force must continue its essential supporting role as well as providing conventional hard-edged combat capabilities, and embracing the benefits of the Unmanned Aerial Systems that will increasingly replace manned platforms.

All these developments will be accompanied by the need for significant adjustments to joint and single Service institutional culture and PME.²⁹

Reputation management

The second challenge is to “get on the front foot” in respect of institutional reputation and its management. The ADF’s reputation had been somewhat taken for granted, especially since the enormous credit gained as a consequence of the East Timor operation in 1999. Now the ADF badly needs to repair the damage as a consequence of the fallout from the so-called “Skype incident” of 2011. This quickly blew into a “perfect media storm”. It also struck a chord with the Minister for Defence, following on from a string of bad news from Defence, including the lack of readiness and seaworthiness of HMAS *Manoora*, HMAS *Kanimbla* and HMAS *Tobruk*, and periodic reports of sexual harassment and similar matters. This led to a strong public response by the Minister, the mass media and the public, unfavourable publicity for Defence, and several reviews into aspects of Australian military culture. While it is probably true that the effect was out of proportion in terms of the content of the trigger event itself, the whole furore did considerable and as yet unknown damage to the ADF’s reputation.

And this happened at a time when, because of the third and fourth challenges, the ADF needed all the help it could get.

²⁹ Hugh Smith & Anthony Bergin, *Educating for the Profession of Arms in Australia*, Australian Strategic Policy Institute, Issue 48, 2012 (<http://www.aspistrategist.org.au/how-are-we-educating-our-military/>).

Personnel policy and practice

A third and deeper challenge is to reorient ADF personnel policies and procedures to the realities of the contemporary strategic, social and economic environment. With the recognition of significant changes to the nature of operations for all three Services and for the ADF as a whole, the institution is in the middle of a fundamental shift in thinking about “soft capability”, including how this can be enhanced by appropriate human resource (HR) management strategies.

The issue of Personnel/HR was discussed by virtually every senior officer to whom we spoke. The general consensus is that the ADF is not handling its personnel responsibilities (or indeed its opportunities) well.

The general consensus is that the ADF is not handling its personnel responsibilities nor its opportunities well.

There are a number of separate but often loosely related issues related to this ADF-wide personnel challenge. They include being more attractive to and making greater use of women, strengthening functional integrations across the Services so as to enhance efficiency and flexibility, and improving recruitment and retention.

All three Services are becoming more concerned with the employment of women, including at senior levels. Most Chiefs explicitly intended to increase their female-to-male ratios, and most spoke – usually in the next breath – of the need to strengthen work-life balance procedures. For example, CAF Binskin and DCAF Davies spoke of the need to *“improve the flexibility of contemporary working arrangements, in terms of making it possible for individuals to have greater control over their work-life balance”*. All three Services see work-life balance procedures as being particularly important for improving the employment of women, with CA Morrison even conceding that Army *“cannot afford to have a ‘combat culture’ that impedes this goal. Our combat culture needs to continue to be appropriate to our role, but we need to define and understand the key issues around this and understand the positions of our left and right of arc”*.

The work leading to the second volume of the **Broderick Review** and Ms Broderick’s close work with the Service Chiefs has galvanised this area. Air Force, for example, had a full stand-down day in mid-2012 to consider the message from CAF on the Service’s issues in meeting this challenge.

While this represents a change even in very recent times, some believe that this encouraging trend must be further improved as a matter of priority. AVM Margaret Staib made the point that the ADF needs to move beyond a situation where it is *“not noticed that you are a woman to one where it ‘is noticed’*,

because you bring a distinctive perspective or set of competencies to the role". She went on to note that

"We have 'best-of-breed' female friendly policies but they are not used nearly sufficiently enough. And they won't be, until the ADF has a sufficient workforce reserve to accommodate the situations where people (men as well as women) are released from their duties temporarily but for significant periods of time, for family support reasons."

The Chiefs saw the need for a fundamental change in orientation in personnel/HR, because, as one said, the ADF is a *"changed institution"* in terms of skills, technology and numbers. VCDF Gillespie believed that people and workforce could very well be the ADF's *"major failure/fracture point for the future"*. He added that the ADF is *"too focused on people statistics versus what people issues really are; we seem unable to manage priorities. And, in situations where we are unable to meet a task requirement, we don't seem able to indicate the risk to capability."*

This was echoed by Staib, who related how a recent senior committee meeting

"... was presented with contemporary statistics for recruitment and retention but these were aggregated. When I asked why they did not show separate sets of numbers for men and women, the response was: 'well, of course we can get this for you, if that's what you want'. But this completely missed the point. Not only was the information not for me but for the team, but it showed that those providing the information and those for whom the information was provided simply don't comprehend what it is that they should be looking for, or even what the fundamental issues are".

The Chiefs are increasingly realising that the focus on people capability, particularly at the strategic level, needs to be in *qualitative* as much as in *quantitative* terms. They are also becoming aware that the institution should be continually alert for opportunities to get greater leverage from existing or potentially available human resources. This has implications for the recruitment, management and retention of an adequate proportion of women.

The impending period of strategic transition will give the ADF an opportunity, as one Chief put it, to *"take a long, hard look"* at the purpose and viability of all of the major employment groups, and a compelling need for the Services to cooperate better on a *"heartland issue"* like personnel. Hurley saw this as one of the ADF's primary challenges, as *"we rebuild a new ADF, by reshaping*

... a compelling need for the Services to cooperate better on a "heartland issue" like personnel.

ourselves after 10 years of war in a highly specific area". Many of the Chiefs spoke of this as an opportunity. For example, Gillespie saw major implications for trades and professional groups, where *"some are viable, others are transitioning out and the others are transitioning up"*. He gave an example from his time as VCDF when, although the Collins-class submarines plainly required an entirely different set of skills, *"it took us a long time to factor this particular issue into our capability planning and introduction"*. Similarly, there are opportunities for integration and alignment in a number of common-to-Service functions, such as Intelligence. Gillespie noted that *"each Service has a different approach to Intelligence and these are misaligned and mismatched. The Services would argue that they need such numbers because otherwise they would not be able to sustain viable employment structures. Somehow they don't see the solution in terms of an integrated Defence capability – as a joint solution"*. And that, he added, *"doesn't mean tri-Service"*.

Gillespie believed that a side-benefit of this is the opportunity to remove a layer of the workforce and thus save on people costs. His views were echoed in those of Secretary Duncan Lewis, who noted the tendency by the Services to *"resist the move towards shared services. They will run the line of, for example: 'Army must control its own clerks, its own drivers'. Though this is not true, they will argue vehemently for it, because they will interpret the removal of direct control of such resources from a single-Service perspective."* While Lewis singled out the Army in this particular example, he made it clear that a number of other Groups are not dissimilar. Another issue is in regard to examining the full-time/part-time service issue in terms of skill groups, as well as of numbers. One Chief observed that *"one of the hard questions is to ask ourselves about which of our capabilities should be full-time and which should be part-time. We might, for example, ask ourselves: which ones haven't been used very much in the last decade and, if they haven't, are they still valid capabilities for us to have? If so, should they be full-time or part-time?"*

The general consensus among the Chiefs was that the ADF is not performing as well as it should in terms of recruitment and retention. CDF Houston, for example, noted that, while *"recruiting is much improved, and while we can raise the battalions that we need, the ADF is still struggling for technically capable people; and the continuance of our shortfall in the critical categories, particularly in Navy, is deeply frustrating"*.

Retention involves much more than benefits and extends directly to career opportunities and job satisfaction; retention is also indirectly shaped by how a Service is run. *"In terms of retention"*, said CDF Houston, *"I have learned that how people are treated matters a great deal"*.³⁰

³⁰ Houston's assertion receives solid support from a series of consultancy projects that began a decade ago. These used sophisticated modelling techniques of the effects of various intrinsic and extrinsic benefits to test options for addressing the high separation rates in two dozen or so critical categories. See Sigma Consultancy, **HR DSS Project for Retention of Critical Category Personnel, Executive Report – Getting on the front foot in the war for talent: A four-step strategy**, April 2005; **HR DSS Project for Retention of Critical Category Personnel: Research Report**, April 2005; and **The Dynamics of Career Commitment over the Military Career Cycle: Insights from a Mega Database**, October 2006.

This “retention-beyond-benefits” approach extends into more fundamental areas, such as the quality of leadership and professionalism, professional identity and pride. For example, the values-reinvigorating “I am an Australian soldier” campaign program was aimed at all of these aspects. This stemmed from CA Leahy’s faith in the high quality of contemporary soldiers. Leahy saw them as *“passionate about what they are doing, and coming from a country whose educational system is sound and a society that values diversity, egalitarianism and the ‘fair go’”*.

Defence posture reorientation

The fourth challenge relates to the need to reorient Australia’s defence posture and to adjust to a lower share of the national budget. The implications of the fiscal issues alone would demand a strategic re-focus on reputation management and a reorientation of thinking about human and other resources.³¹

Ironically, however, the fallout from the second and third issues may well have given the ADF the kick-start it needs to examine the future with a fresh perspective and an innovative stance. The 2013 White Paper may serve as a further spur for action.³²

Improving the work climate in the bureaucracy

The final issue that demands to be addressed is something that – somewhat puzzlingly – very few Chiefs mentioned as a strategic priority. The discussion in Chapter 3 of the professional and cultural milieu in the Defence bureaucracy suggests that effectiveness and efficiency could both be improved by realistically facing up to the problems associated with Service career management practices.

On the one hand, there is virtually nothing that can be done to ameliorate the complexity of the Defence bureaucracy: it is a given. The career management practices of officers in the three Services, however, are a different matter. So this is an important potential breakthrough area.

While these “commonsense” observations point to some fairly obvious principles that should guide staffing of important staff organisations, the ADF has not – until comparatively recently – shown any inclination to act on these. Nor do these factors seem to be taken seriously as explanations for inefficiency and poor performance within the bureaucracy.³³ The recent Black Review, for example, investigated a wide range of organisational factors that had the potential to adversely affect decision-making within the Department. Black didn’t confine

³¹ While US military spending is coming down from the unsustainable heights of 4.7% of GDP, Australia’s has hovered at 1.8% since 2001. Last year this was reduced to 1.56% of GDP, its lowest level since the 1930s.

³² In a presentation to the Australian strategic policy Institute on 21 January 2013, CDF Hurley gave his top three issues as strategic reconfiguration, the 2013 White Paper, and cultural reform in the context of *Pathway to Change* (2012).

³³ Rufus Black, *Review of Accountability and Governance in the Defence Department*, Department of Defence: Canberra, 2011. Ironically, Black’s recommendations for extra layers of organisation are likely to add to organisational complexity and thus further erode efficiency and performance.

himself to formal structures, stressing in his report that “underlying culture and skills issues will need to be addressed as thoroughly and as explicitly as the changes to mechanisms and processes”. However, like virtually every consultant and analyst who preceded him, Black neglected the job rotation factor.³⁴

Adding extra management layers to “supervise” simply and inevitably adds to complexity and inefficiency. Large teams are often slow teams, especially if their members lack know-how, know-who and know-why. It is almost certain that small teams of staff officers, comprised of a mixture of specialist and generalist skills, would be significantly more productive than teams largely made of generalists.

Discussion and conclusions

This chapter has discussed some of the characteristic features of strategic leadership as they apply at the top levels of the Defence institution and how the practice of such leadership at these levels is influenced by the cultural and professional milieu.

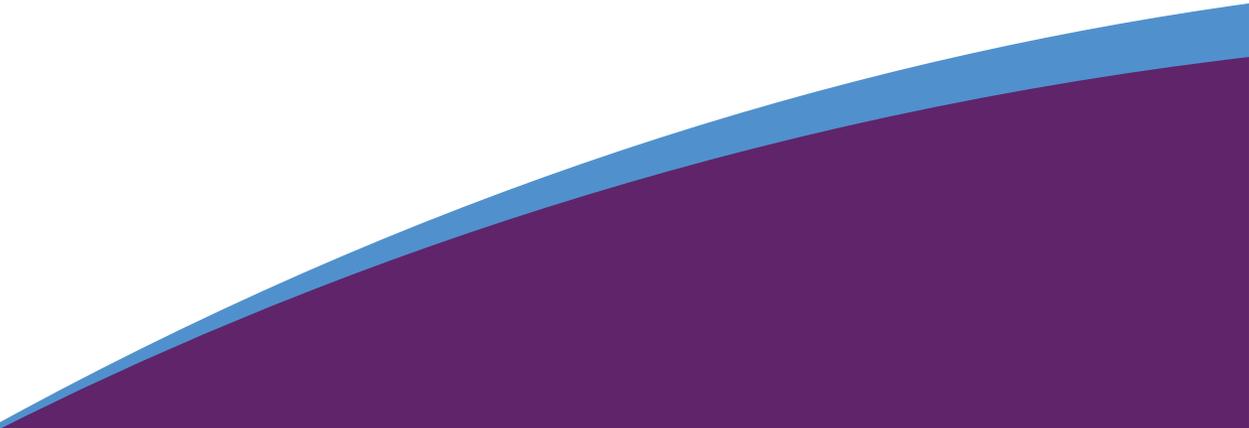
Many staff officers simply lack the know-how, know-who and know-why needed to be effective as individuals and team members. Further, it should now be becoming clear why failure to adapt self-identity as one rises within the military hierarchy is such a handicap to both individuals and their colleagues, and why particular focus needs to be placed on this particular element of strategic leadership performance.³⁵ Many of the features of this professional and cultural milieu are the consequence of a professional identity built by both temperament and training in the form of the career years.

While there is little question that contemporary military professionals are intelligent, well educated, worldly (at least in comparison with those in previous generations) and highly competent within their chosen fields, there is equally little question that the professional milieu within the Defence bureaucracy impedes individual and team performance.

We return to these issues in Chapter 6, in respect to the vulnerabilities associated with each of the four strategic leadership roles, and in the conclusions in Chapter 7.

³⁴ N A Jans, “From Black to Black’: a reform veteran’s perspective of the Black Review”, *Australian Defence Force Journal*, 2011, 186, 85-87.

³⁵ Walter F. Ulmer, Jr, “Military Leadership into the 21st Century: Another ‘Bridge Too Far?’” *Parameters*, Spring 1998, 4-25.



Part II:

The Chiefs in Action



Chapter 4:

The Chiefs in Action: Full Range Capability

Defence had a tendency to drag the chain when dealing with major capability decisions. They would often “look at the world through a straw” and forget that it is the Government that will make the decision. They would make up their minds that they wanted a particular capability from a particular country and all of their effort would go to convincing the Minister that this was the right choice. This is the case even when there are clearly other options.

(Dr Brendan Nelson, Minister for Defence in 2006-07)

What the men and women of the ADF do on our behalf is stunningly impressive.

(Dr Brendan Nelson, Minister for Defence in 2006-07)

The ADF’s reputation needs to be squeaky clean, in all arenas. Community expectations of ADF members are higher than they are for other industries and organisations.

(Ms Elizabeth Broderick, Sex Discrimination Commissioner)



Institutional performance depends on the Chiefs' individual and collective ability to build and use a full range of capabilities, from weapons systems and platforms through to reputation and culture.

The main points in this chapter

- The core outcome on which the Chiefs are focused is Institutional Performance, defined in terms of performing the key tasks set by the government of the day.
- The Chiefs contribute to the core outcome of Institutional Performance largely by the extent to which they are able to develop a full range of structural, intellectual and social capabilities.
- While structural capabilities (weapon systems, platforms and force structure) are the big ticket items that traditionally attract most public attention, Chiefs tend to spend most of their time attending to financial management and the development of a “financial culture”, and on the development and management of the various other aspects of intellectual and social capability. This particularly applies to the more nebulous elements of the latter, including relationships, reputation and culture development.

Case Study 4: An embarrassing loss of Navy's amphibious capability

Serious doubts about the sea-worthiness of already venerable Landing Platform Amphibious HMAS *Manoora* and HMAS *Kanimbla* surfaced in late 2010. With HMAS *Tobruk* also suffering age-related fragility, the Navy was unable to provide amphibious capability for the 2011 cyclone season. Following adverse media, Navy launched an in-depth investigation.

The investigation identified a collapse in naval engineering standards and expertise due to hollowing-out and systemic under-funding of ship maintenance over the previous decades. Its report sheeted the LPA unavailability home to a number of factors, noting further that their remediation requirements had been “well known” for some time.

In terms of materiel management, both ships had been purchased with an inadequate set of logistic support products. The inadequacies included insufficient documentation on significant modifications to both before their introduction into service. Defence and DMO had been unable to address this shortcoming because of lack of resources and the “can-do” pressure to keep ships running to meet operational requirements.

On the organisational front, the Navy engineering organisation had become under-resourced and fragmented, with complex lines of authority and accountability. Navy had not been able to perform its role as Capability Manager because of under-resourcing and ineffective reporting on the Fleet's condition up the chain of command. Nor did DMO and Navy have a business-like relationship based on formal, measurable agreements at multiple levels. And in terms of the professional factors, Navy and DMO had both lost critical professional skills to industry as a result of the drive to outsource maintenance.

Finally, and perhaps most significantly, longstanding cultural issues had contributed to the problem in the first place and then had prevented it from being addressed properly. As the report somewhat diplomatically put it, the risks involved in deferring maintenance “had not been fully appreciated by many non-engineering naval officers”. In essence, Navy had a Seaman Branch-driven “can do, make do” attitude, governed by an assumption that a ship was “safe to sail” unless proven otherwise. This was compounded by a “management of bad news” syndrome whereby, to avoid being seen to fail personally, there was a danger that staff would often choose to not raise bad news. Much such news remained at lower levels in the organisation, thereby increasing overall risk, becoming apparent only when recovery became expensive, difficult or even impossible.

In essence, as former CN Crane put it, “*Navy had lost its expertise and willingness to be self-critical*”. He noted the general relief among support organisations, sailors and junior officers when he directed that the LPA be brought alongside (“thank heavens you’ve finally made the right decision”). But, consistent with one of the issues mentioned above, he recalled some pushback from the COs, “*unhappy at the curtailment of their ‘command time’*”, and saw the whole episode as being yet another confirmation of the need for the “New Generation Navy” (NGN) program.

Full-range Capability Development

Capability Development is the process of identifying and developing the assets by which the ADF will perform its function.

An integrated view of Capability Development has implications for the range of capabilities in all three Services.

The Chiefs of the last half-generation or more have progressively moved towards an integrated view of Capability Development, as depending very much on the way that different Service elements fit and act together. This integrated view has implications for the full range of capabilities – structural, intellectual and social – in all three Services. Managing the full range of capabilities requires strong mutual understanding among the various Chiefs and across the three Services, in terms

of how a specific capability in one interrelates with those in the others. In this respect, the work that has gone into developing strong internal relationships within the military institution will be crucial.

The latter point is nicely brought out in the illustrative case study to this chapter. This shows clearly that successful outcomes in Capability Development require much more than just well-established staff procedures and a network of committees to oversee the work. The process was hampered by a number of other deeper factors. To begin with, the Navy engineering organisation had been allowed to become under-resourced and fragmented. Morale was low – as was well known within the Senior Service – and critical professional skills were being lost. Navy engineering-DMO procedures were deficient in terms of well-known “best-practice” methods. Underpinning all of this was the prevailing ethos in the Senior Service of “can do-will do-make do” and, at an even deeper level, the adverse consequences of deeply embedded problems in Navy culture.³⁶

In a similar vein, while former Defence Minister Brendan Nelson had nothing but praise for the performance of the operational elements of the ADF, his views of its

³⁶ Paul J Rizzo, *Plan to Reform Support Ship Repair and Management Practices: Report to the Department of Defence*, July 2011.

performance in the bureaucracy were much less favourable (see the first and second epigraphs to this chapter). Nelson didn't use the expression "situating the appreciation" but that's essentially what he meant.³⁷ He had seen frequent instances of senior officers who had decided on a particular capability in advance of

Nelson didn't use the expression "situating the appreciation", but that's essentially what he meant.

a proper evaluation of the full range of options against capability requirements and costs, and who then pitched their argument so that the preferred option was presented in the best possible light. In most cases, the capability in question was usually a weapon system or platform that was central to the core identity elements of the respective tribe, e.g., warships, tanks, or fast jets.³⁸

The ADF has frequently trodden a very fine line in terms of balancing capability between operational and support elements, most notably the "very near run thing" associated with INTERFET in East Timor in 1999 and 2000. Again, Nelson noted how *"the ADF was tested in East Timor in 1999 and barely passed"*. As a consequence, there is now a high priority on logistic capability development and the associated processes and skills. When he was VCDF, Hurley ran a lengthy joint seminar on senior level logistics and command and control, *"because we need to be as good at these functions at the higher levels as we are at the lower. In this respect, we are seeing an early example of network centric warfare, in which there is a compression from the strategic to the tactical. Fortunately we are developing good doctrine to help us here. And fortunately, even though we might have good doctrine, we are not doctrinaire."*

The Chiefs – particularly the Service Chiefs – seem very conscious of the importance of the full range of capabilities. While the pithily expressed trio of "Raise-Train-Sustain" responsibilities suggests a neat sequence of activities for the Service Chiefs, the reality is much more complex. Such a broad remit gives them considerable latitude to reshape their Services in line with government objectives, with prevailing doctrine (particularly in respect to inter-Service integration), and with their own visions. A second significant advantage is that this allocation of responsibilities separates the builders from the doers: it gives the opportunity for the Service Chiefs to concentrate on building capability and leaves the senior operational commanders (CJOPS and his team) with the task of using it.

Each past or current Service Chief to whom we spoke expressed a clear vision relating to his Service's contribution to the four defence tasks listed in Chapter 2, via their Raise-Train-Sustain charter. Moreover, all such initiatives were *progressive*,

³⁷ "Situating the appreciation" is an in-joke, derived from the process by which decision-makers at all levels conduct an "appreciation of the situation" by systematically thinking through how they will approach a problem. "Situating the appreciation" means that the decision maker has already decided on the decision, and is looking for supporting evidence to justify it.

³⁸ This resonates with the argument in Chapter 2, regarding the need for genuine leadership to confront the realities of situations, and to be open to a range of options, whether or not they challenge the status quo.



in the sense of their being designed and managed to build on previous or existing developmental strategy. Chiefs generally aim to build on the foundations established by their predecessors, rather than take a “new broom” approach. Under successive CAs, for example, the Hardened and Networked Army program morphed into Adaptive Campaigning, which in turn was the basis for Plan Beersheba and the Army’s function in the Maritime Strategy.

Just as importantly, the Chiefs plainly consider the full range of capabilities when talking about Capability Development. Most programs are aimed not just at acquiring hardware and materiel but also at developing appropriate organisational structures in which such assets will be used and the operational doctrine and professional competencies needed for such delivery. Such thinking extends to cultural considerations, in terms of the professional ethos, social systems and the general “spirit” within ships and units that are needed to leverage capability on operations.

For example, although some regarded Army’s Adaptive Campaigning program as “*just Forces Command dressed up*” as CA Gillespie put it, he intended it to be very much more. The driving point for the Adaptive Campaigning concept was the need for a sustainable program of people, trade and fleets, but the intention was also to change the operational culture via the reshaping process. Thus Adaptive Army was deliberately based on the concept of a large Forces Command with a very flat structure. As Gillespie explained, this was precisely to ensure that

“it wouldn’t work without strict adherence to mission command. Thus brigadiers are empowered more now than they have ever been. They have their boundaries and they are authorised to act autonomously within these. And they are strongly encouraged to do the same with their COs. As a consequence, the Army is becoming more agile and people are less frightened of the consequences of making a mistake.”

Navy has a different need and hence recent CNs have had a different agenda. The NGN cultural change program mentioned in the illustrative case study to this chapter is currently a primary focus for the Senior Service.

Developing capability is a very challenging issue within a military institution. There is a multitude of capability items; and many are extremely expensive and involve ongoing costs that are often difficult to estimate accurately. Additionally, the associated capabilities that the future ADF will use are decided not by the institution itself but by government, with professional military advice. Much of the responsibility for remaining objective and for taking cases forward falls to the CDF. Houston was very involved in debate and discussion with the Minister over capability, because

“Capability takes up a lot of time. There are many proposals to take to government. The Secretary chairs the relevant committee but the decision is made by both of us. We then take the decision to the Secretaries’ Committee of National Security (SCNS), before the Minister then takes the proposal to the National Security Committee, or NSC. The CDF and the Secretary are members of both committees, and support the Minister in achieving capability outcomes in the NSC.”³⁹

Intellectual capability

Integration and Alignment

Integration and Alignment is the process of coordinating and managing strategic programs for maximum focus and acceptable economy. This involves a host of activities and procedures, major and minor. These range from standardisation of equipment and support mechanisms, through to standard forms of tactical analysis and decision-making formats for orders, and even to developing a sense of “jointery” and overall Service and ADF professional identity. Many programs have both a functional purpose and a secondary subliminal purpose, in terms of creating an attitude and a perspective to the general activity as well as setting a standard for behaviour.

Because Chiefs operate at the organisational apex where so many functional stovepipes and programs meet, the implications of the interconnectedness of resources and activities are, as Gillespie put it, “*profound*”. Moreover, as stressed by a number of Chiefs, this is not simply a matter of declaring something to be “joint”. As one commented, “*the concept of ‘J’ is overused and misused, and many people think that putting a ‘J’ in front of an acronym is enough to make it strategically important*”. Gillespie believed in “*integration’ rather than jointery*”, adding that the ADF has some way to go in this area, in that it hasn’t yet properly understood what its contemporary experience means in an institutional sense as well as in a capability sense:

Because Chiefs operate at the organisational apex, the implications of the interconnectedness of resources and activities are profound.

³⁹ Service Chiefs rarely if ever attend the SCNS or NSC, and their capability development roles largely focus on their Raise-Train-Sustain responsibilities. This requires identifying relevant future capabilities, advising on their development and process of being brought into service, and overseeing the management and utilisation of such capabilities. In this, they support the CCDG, whose role it is to take business cases to government, manage the defence capability program (projects and money), run the trials and development unit, and manage the industry-defence think tank.

“For example, we need to understand how to achieve greater integration with and use of contractors. We should be drawing on the lessons we have learned from outsourcing, from activities with and requirements of the UN, and how all these activities are evolving.”

The contemporary Chiefs spoke of being conscious of not repeating past mistakes in respect to integration and alignment and other aspects of capability. The strong relationships within the Australian military institution are now seen as crucial in promoting understanding of integration issues at the organisational levels. Encouragingly, the current Chiefs are among the most cognisant of the implications. For example, CA Morrison noted how *“the Army saw its capability decline after Vietnam, albeit gradually”*, adding that *“to a certain extent this was our own fault, because we were too internally focused and too ready to adhere to self-imposed restrictions”*.

Similarly VCDF Hurley believed that the profession had not made as much of its Vietnam experience as it could have. Army had failed to absorb lessons in areas such as planning and conduct of operations and logistics and, as a consequence, *“had been unable to project our professional view of where we wanted Defence to go”*. He regarded the 1987 White Paper as a watershed, because

“We had allowed many lessons to be overlooked, in terms of our understanding of how to deploy and sustain and protect a force: in current terminology, many of the enablers of military capability. We had allowed many of the minor units that were part of the Regular Army in the 1970s to be relegated to the Reserve; and they had effectively been lost/become moribund. Then came the offshore experience in Cambodia, Rwanda and Somalia, and we found ourselves unprepared for sustained operational activity overseas. We had become captive to the principles that guided the 1987 White Paper—‘focus on defence of the mainland’ – and we had lost relevant elements of our capability. This was especially true of the Army at the expense of the other two Services: in many ways, the Army had allowed itself to become a kind of constabulary military force.”

The Service Chiefs contribute to Integration and Alignment in many ways. At a macro level, they oversee the development of specifications for materiel acquisitions, with a strong contemporary tendency to consider how a particular piece of materiel (e.g., vehicles, communication equipment, computers, etc.) might meet a number of needs across the Services. At a micro level, they must balance a downwardly focused message of Service identity with an outwardly and upwardly focused drive towards joint thinking.

Integration and Alignment has internal and external dimensions. Internally, it contributes to efficiency and flexibility. For example, the greater the extent to which procedures and equipment are standardised, the more easily they can be “packaged” for different operational tasks and the more easily personnel replacement will fit into new teams and situations. Externally, the ADF is increasingly involved in appropriate standardisation across Whole of Government activities and facilitating the extent to which Australian industry can play a significant part in capability development and maintenance.

Efficiency

Efficiency is the process of ensuring that institutional tasks are performed at acceptable cost and of developing an appropriate financial culture that will guide everyday behaviour. Efficiency and financial management (the two are not synonymous) were among the most consistently recurring topics raised in most interviews. There is strong pressure to be frugal, with one Chief asserting that *“We must recognise the political reality’ of budgetary details”*.

“We must ‘recognise the political reality’ of budgetary details”.

Efficiency and its twin, financial culture, take up a good deal of any Chief’s time. (This is probably all the more keenly felt because such would not have been the expectation when the various Chiefs were young and ambitious military professionals.) For example, as CDF, Houston spent *“more time on finance than anything else, and there is great pressure to be frugal”*. And DCA Paul Symon declared that *“Money is the most important enabler to sustaining capability, and a lot of my attention is therefore drawn to ‘money’. Money is king, money represents choice”*, adding perhaps ruefully that *“I am sure that this is different to how it was in the past”*.

The current emphasis on better financial management extends to commanders and managers at every level. In this respect, the deeper theme of “financial culture” runs through most aspects of efficiency and management at the top levels of the institution. Financial culture refers to the development of particular sets of habits and particular ways of thinking about financial resources, and to the distinction between “being frugal” and “thinking differently” about resource allocation and management.

The deeper theme of “financial culture” runs through most aspects of efficiency and management at the top levels of the institution.

DCAF Davies put this neatly with his remark that, *“while conceptually we have recognised the need for economies and greater fiscal discipline, culturally most*



people still look for ways to get around any restrictions to old habits". Davies gave the example of air travel but noted that the issue goes well beyond this, saying that it *"is not just a matter of accepting that some activities and costs have to be shaved; rather, it is that we need to get people automatically thinking about the relationship between finance, capability, and their own career and individual needs"*. In other words, until the military institution can find ways to get people to understand the individual implications of spending – in the same way as they might, say, see the individual implications for training and career development – it will be simply re-fighting the issue repeatedly on the surface.

Two particular challenges suggest themselves here as requiring a "financial culture" approach. The first is the need to develop a sensible and strategic approach to the practice of "corporate governance". Many of the Chiefs saw this as a significant issue. For example, while Hickling believed that the Army's operational excellence would continue to be solid at the core *"because the culture is good and because training and doctrine are sound"*, he warned that the biggest challenge *"is that officers and senior NCOs are choking in paperwork: in what has become known as 'corporate governance'."* Hickling went on to observe that

"One of the important things about this is that it is the perception that is critical. Dealing with this perception requires challenging it at the political level. Excessive corporate governance is corrosive of the culture: it inhibits boldness and innovation, when people are continually looking over their shoulder at occupational health and safety issues/requirements, etc. etc. I see this as the greatest challenge facing current and future leaders at all levels."

Hickling's sentiments were echoed by CCDG Jones and CAF Brown. The latter believed that although *"corporate governance is a very necessary thing, we are not managing it well"*, going on to say that:

"Look, here is the situation. Our Purpose is clear and our People are second to none, and our Platforms are the best in the world. The problem is with our Processes – why do we accept convoluted or complex processes that are an impost on people's time? We are currently operating with a 'belt and braces' approach to control of resources. We only need one of them. It is easy to make a process complicated – the challenge is to make it simple. With trust and good relations, we could do this."

However, the second challenge – and, essentially, resource management opportunity – rarely came up in interviews. This is the issue of staff churn and its management that was discussed in the previous chapter, which commented on the puzzling question about why the implications for efficiency – not to mention

effectiveness – of this issue are not higher on the agenda of those running programs such as the current Strategic Reform Program (SRP).

One of the features that makes “efficiency” and “resource allocation” so difficult – and incidentally gives further strength to the argument to build a financial culture mode of thinking – is the difficulty of accurately estimating costs in circumstances of strategic uncertainty. For example, as shown in the illustrative case study presented in Chapter 1, CDF Barrie and his senior colleagues began the process of realigning the ADF with what was happening in its strategic environment by careful consideration of their perceptions and what these perceptions meant. Barrie began by asking questions, rather than providing his own interpretations of what was going on and the implications. Then, after concluding that the institution needed to reorient itself, they set a new direction for the ADF, in terms of organisation and capabilities. Then they assiduously communicated this new direction, not just within the ADF but, just as importantly, with its constituencies, especially the Government. Senior ADF leaders worked hard on external relationships, with Government and with relevant agencies and allies, especially with Indonesia and the US. Finally, they gave appropriate attention to financial considerations and weaved a financial narrative into the process. And coalition building between the ADF and important external agencies, both national and international, was also crucial. It was not surprising that Barrie remarked that *“there are lessons from this case in respect to funding defence activities”*.

It is in the financial area that *“the diarchy comes into its own”*, asserted Houston. *“The military commands, and the military is accountable for the welfare of its people. But there are many shared functions (such as capability) where, even though I get the operational say, the Secretary has to check the investment wisely.”* Houston’s view was that *“you have to be professional about the relationship”*. He affirmed that the diarchy is the reality and the military has to work out satisfactory ways of working with, not against, its APS colleagues.

It is in the financial area that “the diarchy comes into its own”.

Houston dismissed as *“out-dated”* the propositions that the diarchy unnecessarily complicates the business of executive leadership, that the diarchy is an impediment to sound leadership and that the CDF should be supreme. (Such a view is still held by some senior officers, as the interviews revealed.) *“You have to be sensitive to making the partnership work – because if it doesn’t, it makes the whole business of the senior leadership, command and management much more difficult”*, he said, adding that a Chief must not only be prepared to make compromises but must also have the ability to discuss issues in a rational and sensible way.

All this has significant implications for how those at the top communicate with government. If the government thinks in dollars and personnel numbers, said Gillespie, “*we must do so too, and ‘recognise the political reality’*” of budgetary details. Gillespie instanced the example of expressing deployment capabilities. The deployment to Afghanistan having been announced as being 200-strong, “*the government was reluctant to budge from that number without ‘very good arguments’*”. Gillespie pointed out that, even if an extra 10 people would significantly improve the capability of that group – for example, if those 10 people represented a significant additional communication capability – and even if that number was trivial in the broader sense, chances were that the argument would be turned down. “*We would have been prepared to go to bat if we needed 250 but fighting for a marginal increase was pointless.*” Some planning staff officers don’t realise this, Gillespie said. Consequently, they take “*what seems to be a reasonable approach, in the sense of having an overall budget and then leaving commanders to work out what they can do within that budget*”. But such an argument is usually turned down because it is misaligned with the way that governments think.

Professional development

Many of the Chiefs expressed serious reservations about professional development processes beyond mid-career, especially in regard to leadership.

Professional development is an activity that is so well established within the military institution that it is often taken for granted. One of the consequences of doing so is that practices associated with conducting training, sequencing career development experiences, selecting people for particular roles and appointments and the like, can become so well established that they are difficult to change when adaptation is needed.

All the Chiefs are very active in respect to these activities, at least as they apply to operational functions. Each of the three Services has very well established and finely tuned systems of people development, especially at the lower and middle levels of the rank structure. However, many of the Chiefs and other senior officers, together with Secretary Duncan Lewis, expressed serious reservations about professional development processes beyond mid-career, and especially those oriented towards developing strategic competencies.

These reservations particularly applied to **leadership**, which remains the most fundamental competence within the military profession. As the ADF increasingly strides the world stage and takes on regional strategic responsibilities, there is a growing realisation in all three Services that mid-to-senior leadership competence

must be lifted beyond its current levels. The aim is to produce “corporate leaders” of equal competence to ADF senior operational commanders; and, as Gillespie put it, from a cohort other than *“just the best unit commanders”*. Operating at the higher levels in the technical and staff environments is *“incredibly ambiguous”*, and, as well as great operational tacticians, the ADF needs *“to develop people who are great logisticians, great personnel managers, great materiel managers”*. In Gillespie’s view, this demands a changed approach to career assessment. *“In the past, if you performed relatively poorly at unit or brigade command, you were considered to be a ‘failure’ and your career would be finished. Now, if this happens, we can create fresh opportunities for leading in the staff/strategic arena and put people where they can demonstrate their strengths, not be threatened for exposing their weaknesses.”*

Commander of the Australian Defence College (COMADC) James Goldrick was well placed to see the evidence of *“too many officers who are a mile wide and an inch deep”*. He saw this as a consequence of trying *“to apply an Anglo-American paradigm in a force not big enough to sustain it, hence requiring officers to be generalists much earlier in their careers than applies in either Britain or America”*. Similarly, VCDF Hurley perceived a number of *“worrying”* aspects of senior-level career development and the Australian military profession’s *“lack of a strong intellectual underpinning”*. He pointed to the ADF’s response to the 1990s Force Structure Review and Defence Efficiency Review, when *“we were challenged by the notion of outsourcing and commercialisation, and we were not intellectually able to counter these”*. In addition, Hurley was worried about an imbalance in the military concepts branch, which (at that time) was largely staffed by civilians. He added that, while *“of course, we don’t want to cut out the civilians, the military needs to retain ownership of the process and to provide leadership of the process”*. He saw this as a symptom of a major but subtle flaw in PME.

“Too many officers are a mile wide and an inch deep.”

Similarly, CN Griggs perceived that *“at the senior level, Navy is considered insular and conservative, and the talent pool of senior officers is shallow”*, adding that *“I get worried when I look down at certain parts of the organisation and ask myself ‘where are the future leaders?’”*.

DCA Symon echoed the above concerns, commenting that, although *“our junior people are great at the tactical level, we lack strategic talent”*. He pointed out the irony of how *“collective tactical excellence can be a strategic liability”*, in the sense of *“an excessive focus on thinking tactically at the operational and strategic levels of war leading to micro-management and just the opposite of*

mission command". Symon concluded that *"we have a lot of work to do in PME in terms of strengthening our strategic thinking capability"*.⁴⁰

Some are even more bluntly critical. For example, Secretary Lewis, commenting on the kind of career development experiences that career officers need to fit them for the senior levels, was

"in despair over what has happened out at Weston Creek, where the Centre for Defence and Strategic Studies has effectively become dumbed-down. The earlier courses were attended by brigadier-level service people and they attracted top-level outsiders. Now we have a course for colonels that attracts few top-level outsiders."

VCDF Hurley had a similar perspective, noting *"the major but subtle flaws with our professional military education"*, where *"we go through the steps, in terms of training/career development but we don't provide continuing education in this field, at least except for a select few"*.

Others commented on the PME process. For example, AVM Staib observed that

*"PME is currently too rigid – there is only one way through and it is very difficult to make up lost ground if you miss one of the gates (which of course is a situation in which many women find themselves). And, while I got a lot from doing the CDSS, it was not so much from the programmed material. I got much more from the contextual information that you can't read about, that often arises when listening to the perspectives of non-military or non-Australian participants."*⁴¹

Social capability

Member Commitment and Well-Being

Member Commitment and Well-Being includes the processes by which the institution develops member commitment and engagement and thereby promotes high retention, together with those associated with developing appropriate "duty of care" practices.

⁴⁰ Symon contrasts this with the New Zealand Defence Force, which had done a thorough strategic training needs analysis, from private to general (see Rob Hault & Peter Greener, "The New Zealand Army leadership framework – reinvigorating leadership", in Julie Bélanger & Psalm Lew (eds) *Developing the Next Generation of Military Leaders: Challenges, Imperatives and Strategies*, Kingston, Ontario: Canadian Defence Academy Press, 2011, 67-92).

⁴¹ The present Defence Strategic Studies Course is the result of a review and a report to COSC by former VCDF Des Mueller in 2004, to which was appended the very specific feedback from the Service Chiefs, (notably) CAF Angus Houston who was very clear on strategic leadership requirements and organisational effects. This then led to the curriculum design documentation which resulted in the new program being adopted in 2005 with a specific senior leadership focus. Apart from ongoing report and oversight by the ADC Advisory Board, there have also been the counterpart benchmarking evaluations against other higher defence colleges in 2006 and 2011.

Member Commitment and Well-Being is fundamental to the performance of the military institution in a number of ways. To begin with, consistent with Napoleon's dictum on the relationship between the moral and the material, an engaged, healthy and robust workforce is an essential operational asset. Secondly, military institutions rely heavily on strong levels of "social capital" and the development of a strong sense of duty.⁴² Thirdly, feelings of career commitment and a sense of well-being are important factors in retention. Finally, the increasing importance of "duty of care" means that the long-term psychological health of members is as important as their short term physical health. One of the major projects in the NGN program was to improve respite and recovery mechanisms for junior sailors, in light of evidence of how excessive time at sea contributes to high stress levels. And CA Morrison emphasised that one of his contemporary high-priority issues is *"the care for our wounded and injured, including both the overt situation (physical wounds/injuries) and the more subtle situations of psychological casualties and people who are at psychological risk"*.⁴³

Relationships

Relationships involve the process of building robust formal and informal relationships with key agents and stakeholders across and beyond the military institution. Because the Chiefs see this as being important in shaping the agenda and understanding and being understood by the internal and external environments, they give considerable emphasis and time to this aspect of capability.

For example, CCDG Jones sees this as an important aspect of his job, because a supportive and collegial leadership style at the very top levels pays off in terms of *"efficiency, effectiveness and assisting people to cope with the considerable pressures of their roles without cracking"*. And CA Morrison considered solid relationships to be so important that he commissioned a consultancy study early in his term, for a 360° evaluation of Army HQ performance as perceived by the staff and its key stakeholders.

The development of strong relationships inside and outside the military institution has become one of the more time-consuming of the Chiefs' enabling

"In order to get strategic direction you must have headway, and to get this you need to sell the policy. You need to sell it internally and you need to sell it externally."

⁴² The sense of duty across the ADF is commendably strong at present, at least as was indicated by a study a decade ago. In a survey of nearly 11,000 members across a wide range of professional categories, more than 80% of both officers and OR rated "Serving my country" as an important or very important reason for continuing to serve. (N. A. Jans & J. M. Frazer-Jans, "Still the 'pragmatic professional'? Pre- and post-9/11 professional orientation in the Australian military", *Armed Forces & Society*, 2009, 35 (2), 241-265.) Similarly, the title of the seminal work in the study of "Organisational citizenship" used the metaphor "the good soldier" to express the spirit of organisational citizenship (see Dennis Organ, *Organisational Citizenship Behaviour: the Good Soldier Syndrome*. Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1988).

⁴³ The issue of well-being is likely to receive prominence, at least for the foreseeable future, because of retired Major General John Cantwell's recent book, *Exit Wounds: One Australian's War On Terror* (written with Greg Bearup; MUP, 2012). Post Traumatic Stress Disorder will be an increasingly important issue for the ADF.

outcomes. Although it is also one of the more nebulous, the time spent is time invariably well invested.

A Chief can achieve much on the basis of strong relationships with the bureaucracy, government, industry and the community. As CAF Binskin put it, *“In order to get strategic direction you must have headway, and to get this you need to sell the policy. You need to sell it internally and you need to sell it externally.”* Binskin regarded internal/external selling as complementary processes. *“I aim to get local commanders talking about the same sort of issues that I do, so that we can reinforce each other.”* His method of doing so involved working through his subordinate senior officers and “re-engaging” his senior leadership team in the field. Binskin had his senior officers visit Air Force establishments in groups of three to engage with local commanders and individuals at the squadron level. *“Their job was to talk to people and find out: what they like; what they don’t like; what they have too much of; and what we can do to help them do things better.”* At the same time, he and his senior leaders would be subtly indicating an appropriate form of the overarching Service narrative. Importantly, Binskin stressed the importance of distinguishing between what the Chief wants to hear and what he needs to hear in these exercises.

The “new collegiality” amongst the Chiefs (see the illustrative case study to Chapter 2) is actually the most recent development in a long, sometimes-stuttering series of reforms at the top level aimed at improving relationships and hence the effectiveness and efficiency of strategic decision-making within the Defence bureaucracy.

The benefit of strong collegiality is illustrated by the speed in which the Army’s Adaptive Campaigning program was achieved. Although Gillespie gave himself three years to achieve this, it was done in half that time. Gillespie believed that this was largely because:

“I had assembled the right team with an aligned group of generals, and empowered them by giving them ready access to me and allowing them the leeway to make decisions that they thought were necessary. My generals and I frequently discuss our future and how we are going to reach it, and there is strong debate when we do so. I would make the final judgement and then we commit to ‘cabinet solidarity’. But I encourage frequent subsequent communication. I get a bit apprehensive when they haven’t spoken to me for three weeks; and I encourage them to feel the same way. By talking frequently about what is going on and where we want to go, we all understand the common agenda.”⁴⁴

⁴⁴ Gillespie related how *“I was discussing this with Frank Hickling once and he told me how former Chief of the General Staff Phil Bennett had told him that ‘I wanted to do that but I couldn’t get my generals on side’”*.

This was reiterated by his DCA, Symon, who spoke of how, *“after three years working together, the Chief and I are ‘inside each other’s brains’, so that each knows how the other thinks”*. Symon went from being opposed to what he had initially called *“all this process”* to becoming *“a convert”*. One of the main ways he did this was by a process of frequent and open communication, whereby

“Every morning, the Chief and I meet with the RSM and the Chief of Staff, to consider threats to the brand and reputation of the Army and similar issues. Then, every Monday morning, the Chief and I and the five major generals would communicate by video teleconference. There were no staff present: the aim was to achieve accord among the generals. The quality of discussion is the best I have seen across the years. We have blunt and frank conversations, with plenty of criticism and concerns aired. This is supplemented by a Wednesday late morning VTC conference, involving a slightly wider audience, much more operations-focused, with staff present.”

A similar habit has arisen in Navy. The Senior Service had been traditionally reluctant to institute regular senior-team leadership meetings but this is now changing. CN Griggs sees it as important for his senior colleagues (particularly those outside Navy Group) to have access to him; not just important for them but important for him as CN. Griggs related how he has further

“... expanded the level of consultation with my admirals ahead of key decisions. CNs in the past, particularly in relation to senior personnel appointments, have often kept these decisions very close to their chests, even on things that they could and should have consulted about, e.g., senior staffing and promotion decisions. The latter decisions especially have resulted in some glaringly poor personnel decisions, which often genuinely surprised the senior leadership group – and quite unnecessarily, because they could have been avoided. Regular senior leadership group meetings were one of the important things that Russ Crane instituted. The SLG meets regularly to kick around a range of issues. It is star-ranked attendance only with no staff attending.”

The promotion of Service or sectional interests at the very senior level is generally acceptable as long as it is not overdone. All parties, including Secretaries Barratt and Lewis, saw the strong promotion of Service interests as a natural and indeed a desirable thing to do. What senior public servants find irritating is any tendency *“to not accept the umpire’s decision”* and to continue to lobby for a particular Service position after a decision has been collectively made by the appropriate senior committee. However, Secretary Lewis had some sympathy for the Chiefs’ position in such cases, recognising that one of the main challenges of the Chief of Service role is its *“duality”* – the sense of divided loyalties between one’s Service

and the corporate whole. Lewis noted that, although all those who have occupied these roles in the last seven years *“have struggled manfully with such divided loyalties, none have found it impossible”*.

In any case, said one Chief, *“while conformity of leadership style is not necessary, consistency and communication are vital. And there are different approaches to change in each Service because they are communicating to three different audiences”*. It must be realistically accepted, said another, that *“Defence is a confederation”*. This also helps in the situations when an individual Chief makes a decision that is ostensibly against the interests of his Service; he then has the challenge of having to return to his own constituency to explain why he did not represent the proposed policy on which his staff may have worked diligently. (It is here that a strong, consistent narrative, as discussed in the next chapter, is of considerable assistance.)

The style of the committee chair is a crucial factor in ensuring a good balance between robust debate, collegiality and imaginative outcomes. For example, Griggs consults with his fellow admirals on significant personnel selection decisions (noting that this is a marked departure from traditional RAN practices) and then invites the group to make the decision, with him as just one vote (although he added that *“at the end of the day, mine is the vote that counts!”*). He finds this practice to be beneficial, not only in terms of ensuring that there is diversity of views but thereby encouraging his colleagues to get such decisions right in the first place.

The Chiefs are not blind to the risks associated with such strong collegiality. The main such risk is what has become known as “groupthink” – the development of excessive solidarity and the avoidance of “robust debate” because of reluctance to challenge the prevailing view within the group. However, the new Purple Seven team recognised this and tried to minimise the risk of groupthink. They did so by, for example, extensively “stress-testing” various options with their own staffs before engaging at the tri-Service level. In any case, as one pointed out, the risk of groupthink is realistic, and *“life is a bit of a compromise, with collaboration usually the best chance for a win-win outcome. The minute you get into an oppositional approach, you go*

“... in many ways such a head-banging approach might be safer than both sides being too cosy with each other.”

backwards”. He and other Chiefs also emphasised the considerable benefits of increased trust between senior colleagues and the extent to which this reduced the “transaction costs” traditionally associated with work at this level of Defence.

VCDF Hurley commented that, *“although we had a lot of head-banging between the two sides [military and civilian] a generation ago, such a head-banging approach might be safer in many ways than both sides being too cosy with each other. In particular;*

the military would then still have a strong incentive to keep itself up to the mark in terms of understanding and promoting the distinctive military perspective.”

However, many believe that the new collegiality doesn't always work as well as the current incumbents say it does. The Chiefs, said one senior officer, are too concerned with being aligned, on-message and coherent. Picking up on a theme raised by Barratt and discussed in Chapter 3, this officer spoke of how the fairly standardised career paths taken by the Chiefs results in their being *“too homogenised in their thinking”*. (It is certainly incontestable that senior military Service committees, comprised as they are of a large majority of men of a certain age and from a certain professional background, are the most homogenous of any organisation in the country.) One result is that the committee process inhibits the contested advice that enables it to test policy options thoroughly before they become policy. *“Too collegial, too cooperative”*, said another, seeing it as an overreaction to the divide-and-conquer syndrome that prevailed in the 1970s to 1990s. In any case, said Hickling, one should *“be wary of creating a ‘purple coloured’ monoculture; and, while there is no question that the future lies in jointery, not everyone needs to be joint”*. Very often, he said, the most valuable team members are those who bring to the table a distinctive professional mastery and a distinctive perspective from their parent Service. *“Protect your mavericks”*, Hickling advised.

The final point in terms of this discussion on strong collegiality is to note that it cannot be taken for granted. Secretary Lewis regarded it as near-inevitable that the new collegiality will be placed under severe pressure in the near future. He was one of a number of interviewees who speculated on the strain on collegiality that might be experienced if and when the military budget is trimmed and budget pressures inevitably arise, when *“there will then be a tendency for more trading and even more self-protection”*. Griggs, however, was optimistic on the issue, commenting that *“like all these things there is a pendulum effect but I do think that the intent of CDF Houston is being preserved by the current team. The way we worked through the budget cuts of last year is a testament to the new collegiality”*.

On the international front, each Chief gives significant attention to the international stage, particularly to the region and the US. CA Morrison commented that, within the region, *“I have put considerable effort into our relationships with Indonesia and have made more visits to Indonesia during my time as a senior Army officer; than I have to the USA”*. Similarly, with the US remaining the major international partner, Davies noted that *“there has been a very important strategic-relationship development with the US in recent times, although many have not properly grabbed this yet. In essence, the US genuinely needs us to support them in this part of the world. We have become virtually as strategically important to them as they are to us”*.

Much effort has gone also into building relations with industry and the community. Thus Morrison speaks at many community engagement functions, because *“although there is a deep general interest in and sympathy for the ADF, the public is poorly informed regarding security issues. My aim is to increase their level of awareness and thereby increase the level of public support for the Army in general and for the kinds of programs that we are in the process of establishing for the next phase of the ADF’s existence.”*

Of all a Chief’s tasks, the process of dealing with government probably takes the most skill and finesse. As Barrie explained, work at the senior level is increasingly shaped by the need to work closely with Government elements in order to fulfil government policy, and doing so often requires an approach to getting things done that is quite different to that which served well in the early career. A number of Chiefs spoke of the importance of treading the fine line between advancing the aims of government and advancing the aims of the political party that holds

The process of dealing with government probably takes the most skill and finesse.

government, and of being alert to the possibility that politicians from all sides will want to use the military for their own ends and to manipulate policy to pursue a purely political agenda. One implication of this is that, as Hickling put it, *“most challenges faced by senior leaders are moral and ethical”*. As a consequence, he said, it is important to be politically aware but not to become politically engaged, stressing that *“you need to leave yourself room for manoeuvre”*. A Chief should use his political capital wisely. Political capital is there to be used, Hickling said, but *“its expenditure must be deliberate and well-considered – and don’t waste your shots on targets of marginal importance”*.

Nevertheless, the military-political relationship should not be feared, said Davies. He noted that the Australian military profession had been *“slow to grasp that it cannot remain outside pure politics and that politicians will not and cannot be entirely objective and insensitive to the needs of the Services”*. Davies went on to comment that there will always be a gap between the politician pursuing his career and the Minister serving his portfolio, so *“if we accept that the gap is inevitable and that politics will therefore always be at least a latent, lurking factor, we can professionally, actively and constructively engage in playing our part”*. One of the ways that Davies did this was by *“an active program of getting the ministerial staff across the lake, getting them into my office late on a Friday afternoon with some drinks and nibbles and just getting to know them and helping them to know us”*.

Reputation

Past generations of leaders have essentially taken institutional reputation for granted but, as Davies put it, that's a mistake: *"Reputation matters because trust matters"*.

"Reputation matters because trust matters."

Davies regarded the maintenance of institutional reputation as his *"most important challenge"*, because reputation is a major factor in the level of trust that society and government are prepared to extend to the military institution. Reputation directly and indirectly affects the levels of support and autonomy given to the organisation; and similarly affects recruitment and retention and probably much else besides. As Davies noted (also see above, in respect to ADF-government relationships), one of the most important practical effects of a strong reputation is how *"it facilitates meaningful and frank communication with ministerial staff. If they trust me, I can telephone them to discuss ways that we can meet our mutual objectives. Without the trust, I can't even make the call."*

Reputation matters even in terms of institutional performance. Taking a strong reputation into a military operation can be a combat multiplier, and in disaster relief the arrival of a Service contingent will provide a major morale boost to a beleaguered community. A vivid example is the consequence of the Air Force's program of developing stronger international relations with its overseas counterparts. As Binskin explained, *"we had been actively exercising with Japan for some time, and the measure of trust that we developed is shown by the fact that Australia was the only country to have been granted internal flying rights as part of Operation Japan Assist following the tsunami"*.

The military profession's responsibility to its host society requires that it conducts itself in ways consistent with the values and expectations of that society. The expectations of the host nation have changed during the last generation, from a situation of general indifference following Vietnam into a period of somewhat uncritical adulation (immediately after INTERFET and Australia's early involvement in the Middle East Area of Operations), which has been tempered slightly in the wake of the so-called Skype incident in 2011. CA Morrison pointed out how

"the post-Vietnam Australia understood the Army as National-Service dependent, and there were many members of the populace who were hostile to what the institution did and therefore were hostile to the institution. As well as that, we had the oil crisis, political turmoil and so on. All of this resulted in a general lack of interest in the military."

Now, as DCA Symon put it, with the ADF still struggling with perceptions of adverse behaviour,

“... we have to work hard to deliver the message that we are doing much better than what the media presents. We also need to ask the fundamental question, about whether we are central to, and integrated with, society, or are we – unhealthily – a society apart.”

The ADF has always been aware of the importance of maintaining and projecting an image of high professional standards, if only because of its importance in establishing the right cultural benchmarks and presenting itself as a potential employer. However, the reputation crisis that erupted in 2011 should have changed all that. As expressed by the Australian Sex Discrimination Commissioner Ms Elizabeth Broderick, who chaired one of the major inquiries into professional behaviour and standards of that year, the expectation of behaving to a standard higher than that expected of normal society presents an additional challenge to strategic leaders and to leaders and members at all levels.

To expand on the third epigraph, Broderick went on to remark that

*“We needed to examine the underlying culture and structures that might be contributing to women’s marginalisation, while looking at the failure of the ADF to keep pace with workforces across Australia. Not only because the way the ADF conducts itself internally and treats its members, particularly women, has implications for other large and influential male-dominated workplaces across Australia, but also for the reputation of the country itself ... **The ADF’s reputation needs to be squeaky clean, in all arenas. Community expectations of ADF members are higher than they are for other industries and organisations.**”⁴⁵*

This, however, is a challenge that also presents an opportunity. If there is one institution in the country capable of rising to such expectations, it should be the

“It shows what the ADF must and can do is be a truly global leader, a role-modelling organisation...”

ADF, with its sound professional career development programs, solid leadership culture and strong ethos of service. As Ms Broderick goes on to say, it shows the ADF what it must – and can – do *“to be a truly global leader, a role-modelling organisation for both the public and private sectors and for other militaries across the world”*.

Respect and reputation are constantly at risk to evolving circumstances. An example was given by CDF Hurley, when he stressed that

⁴⁵ Elizabeth Broderick, “A review would help the ADF”, *The Canberra Times*, 30 October 2012 (emphasis added).

“The curve is going in the right direction, even though it has a few ups and downs. It is important for us to realise the implications of being so closely tied with the Americans. There are many benefits but I worry about many of the risks, especially in regard to how things are going to turn out in Iraq and Afghanistan. A strategic failure for the Americans would be a strategic failure for us. We need to think carefully about how much we need to do to make those operations successful.”

Culture Development

Culture development is the process of building an appropriate ethos within each element of the Australian Defence Organisation, and a set of inherent and deeply embedded norms and expectations in regard to professional practice. For many reasons, both direct and indirect culture is a crucial element in institutional performance.

Service Chiefs have always been responsible for establishing cultures that are appropriate to their tasks and circumstances. Until quite recently, however, the Services tended to take “culture” for granted. This was not because there were no obvious problems in the Australian military culture development or expression but because very few people really understood (or were even genuinely curious about) the nature of culture, let alone how it might be managed. The term “culture” is now used so frequently that it is sometimes hard to believe that this was the case. The term is now in continual use and the topic is now treated much more seriously, not least because there have been no fewer than 13 major inquiries into ADF behaviour, sexual harassment and the like since 1995.⁴⁶ But the term and the concept are still not well understood; and it would be a mistake to equate “culture” with how service personnel are treated, especially in respect to “gender relationships”. (Public officials and journalists repeatedly made this mistake during 2011 and 2012, following the “Skype scandal” and other incidents.) While gender relationships and a masculine, heroic-leadership sense of identity are part of the make-up of military culture, they are far from being its most important elements.

Until quite recently the Services tended to take “culture” for granted.

There has been a commendable trend towards taking the initiative in cultural development, rather than waiting to take “corrective action” after evidence of a supposed “flawed culture”. The Services’ current culture development programs are positive and proactive, as opposed to being negative and reactive, aimed at getting on the front foot to shape culture in desired directions.

⁴⁶ The common response to such inquiries has been to issue a fresh set of regulations and instructions and training programs. Their most obvious consequence has been a huge volume of paper. However, not only do such regulations, instructions and training programs usually fail to hit the mark at which they were aiming, but their very quantity often contributes to undesirable cultural tendencies, such as scepticism, risk aversion, and the erosion of initiative. And such an approach ignores the fact that habitual behaviour and codes of practice are rarely changed by edict, but rather by the consequence of a large number of factors within the institutional and social environment.

These strategies are based on the sensible understanding that an organisation can shape the habitual behaviour of its members (i.e., “culture”) only through substantial change to the structures and institutional and social arrangements that affect such behaviour. The planned forms of such arrangements include changes to career structures, reward systems (including promotion policies and practices), leadership styles, social and physical spaces, performance modelling, reinforcement and behaviour shaping.

Again, very sensibly, the cultural change programs of all three Services depend on embedding forms of organisation and practice that will then exist independently of the individual styles and objectives of present and future commanders and other leaders. Thus NGN targets culture change as one of its major objectives. This was to be achieved by, amongst other strategies, being more explicit about Navy Values and the related “signature behaviours”, enhancing leadership at all levels, and improving working conditions for sailors and junior officers (e.g., for respite and recuperation). In the Army’s case, the “I Am an Australian Soldier” program was aimed at similarly reinforcing the values and codes of behaviour for soldiers, and its Adaptive Campaigning/Adaptive Army concept was designed to promote the

The cultural change programs of all three Services depend on embedding forms of organisation and practice that will then exist independently of the individual styles of present and future leaders.

practice of mission command, in order to make the Army more agile and less risk averse. Similarly, the Air Force Adaptive Culture program (described in the case study in Chapter 9) began at its very top levels and is being spread progressively throughout the Service.

The overarching program for all such programs is now the recent **Pathway to Change** initiative.⁴⁷ Consistent with the indirect-shaping strategy discussed above, the program also amends policies and processes that do not align with its cultural intent.

But the ADF will be mistaken if it believes that the process of changing the visceral reaction of some elements of the ADF on female employment can be left to **Pathway to Change**. As Ms Broderick emphasises in the third epigraph to this chapter, culture is not so much a matter of “programs”. It is shaped fundamentally by structural factors, including organisational features, such as groupings of teams and duties that affect the work done in particular roles and the relationships between them. Such factors also include promotion policies and the other reward structures that influence perspectives on what is considered to be important and what will be noticed. As many argue, as long as women are limited in their opportunities to enter the

⁴⁷ *Pathway to Change: Evolving Defence Culture*, 2012.

direct-combat-related career categories that are central to the Services' collective identities, they will be regarded – at least at an unconscious level – as being of marginal importance and will be treated in a discriminatory fashion. Moreover, Ms Broderick makes it clear that she sees the ADF as lagging the best contemporary practices within Australian workplaces in general: an observation that will (or at least should be) be uncomfortable to most senior leaders.⁴⁸

If – as there certainly should be – there is an intention to improve this situation, this will have significant implications for officer career development and decisions about career management and staffing.

Discussion and summary

Most of what a Chief does on a day-to-day basis and most of their thinking over the longer term is concerned with the full range of capabilities, structural, intellectual and social. None stands alone, and they are all intertwined inextricably. It is through their development and use – especially in terms of intellectual and social capability – that a Chief exerts the kind of strategic influence that is possible from the lofty heights of such large and complex organisations.

Many of the intellectual and social capability elements discussed here were taken for granted or were seen as being comparatively minor issues by previous generations. For instance, a previous generation could, with what it saw as little risk, be somewhat complacent about reputation. No more. However, while the 2011 furore took the ADF by surprise, soaked up the time and attention of its senior officers and posed serious threats to its recruiting base, the ADF may yet look back on that year as being the time when “the penny dropped” regarding the realities of social change and missed opportunities, and the year in which it began to stride the path of significant “soft capability” reform. There is even less room for complacency in the capability area of Culture Development, where, as discussed in Chapter 2, it is unlikely that many senior officers have appropriately grasped the relationships between leadership and career development on the one hand and institutional culture and unit climate on the other.⁴⁹

The one thing that the Chiefs can be sure of is that any significant weaknesses in intellectual and social capability will manifest themselves at the very time when they are most needed.

The next chapter discusses the roles that the Chiefs need to perform in order to build and use these capabilities. Each of these roles demands a certain style of leadership and each confronts a certain set of issues. It is in the performance of these roles that reveals the public face of each Chief and of the senior leadership team collectively.

⁴⁸ CN regards the Navy as an exception since it was the most advanced Service in terms of the employment of women in direct-combat roles and command.

⁴⁹ A full discussion of these links, in terms of “C-Cubed thinking”, can be found in Jans, *The Real C-Cubed*, 2002, op. cit.

Chapter 5:

The Chiefs in Action: Roles

In show-jumping there is a moment before the jump where the rider momentarily hesitates and pulls the reins in and the horse tenses up for the spring; and then it is the horse, not the rider, that takes the jump. In the same way, a senior leader has to build a constituency of change so that the people demand change, a mechanism for building the desire to “go”.

(1-star officer, interviewed in 2003 for ***Once Were Warriors***)

Life is the art of drawing sufficient conclusions from insufficient premises.

(Samuel Butler, poet)

Strategy is a living organism, where one never starts with a blank sheet of paper.

(LTGEN Des Mueller, former VCDF)

Effectiveness at the strategic level requires the versatile performance of four complementary but quite different roles. These four roles, and the performance vulnerabilities associated with each, are explored in this and the next chapter.

The main points in this chapter

- In the performance of their duties, each of the Chiefs must perform four main roles:
 - the “doer” who deals with crises and gets things done in the short term (**Strategic Director**);
 - the energiser and central agent in the continuous process of aligning the military institution with, and preparing it for, its tasks and circumstances (**Strategic Leader**);
 - the overseer of designing and developing the evolving institution (**Strategic Builder**); and
 - the caretaker and nurturer of the institution, and a top-level exemplar of professional standards and values (**Steward of the Profession**).
- These roles are highly intertwined, and a Chief will advance a number of outcomes both within the bounds of a single role and by their activities across a number of roles.
- The Strategic Leader role is arguably the most challenging of the four. This is because it not only demands cognitive and interpersonal skills and deep professional knowledge of the highest order, but also involves activities that tend to be more novel than those associated with the other roles, particularly Strategic Builder and Strategic Director.
- The Steward of the Profession role also involves significant challenges at the senior level. This is partly because of the Australian military profession’s unfamiliarity with the challenges and nuances associated with the “leadership and management of a profession”.

Case Study 5: CA Frank Hickling puts his career on the line

In 1998-1999, CA Frank Hickling gambled with his career in order to prevent the Army from – as he saw it – becoming a subsidiary, bit-role player in overall Defence strategy.

Hickling took over as Chief of Army 25 years after Vietnam. As he put it, it *“was a long time since the locusts ate”*. Because the strategic scenario had no framework in which Army was relevant, it had no real sense of purpose and was *“regarded as little more than a strategic goal-keeper”*. His main concern was that Army *“was poorly matched to the nation’s strategic needs. If its development would continue along the path of being restricted to continental defence, it would become even less relevant to the emerging policy of global engagement and regional activism.”*

Not surprisingly, morale was suffering. Hickling recalls visiting units as Land Commander and seeing materiel that was shabby and carelessly maintained. While discipline was outwardly normal, *“there was a sense of hopelessness”*. *“To make matters worse”*, the Army 21 study proposed to integrate units, dilute expertise, and impose a doctrine *“in which no-one (no-one in Army, anyway) believed”*. All-in-all: *“a blind alley: for the Army, for the ADF, for Australia.”*

But Hickling’s timing was lucky. Around the time he took over, the government was beginning to enunciate a more outward focus (the so-called “Deputy Sheriff” role). He saw the seeds of his opportunity. He believed that Army was unsuited for this role, so he and his senior team had to develop a role/mission for it that was both realistic and acceptable. The intellectual ground had been sown when a team led by Dr Michael Evans produced a paper called *The Army as Part of the Maritime Strategy*. This was a seminal document in expressing the expeditionary Army concept. The new doctrine that was published around that time in the form of *Land Warfare Doctrine 1: Fundamentals* leaned heavily on the paper by designating Army as the hard component of the deployable joint force.

“My concern”, Hickling recollected, “was that the entire concept of an expeditionary army as a vital part of a combined force would be blocked, delayed and eventually destroyed in the committee system. I therefore decided to bypass the process by publicly releasing LWD 1, by addressing the National Press Club and by directly engaging my colleagues in the Defence Organisation. This was very much a ‘crash through or crash’ policy! Of course, the Minister was furious but I had nothing to lose. Even if I was sacked, I still would have achieved my purpose; and I assessed, correctly, that CDF Barrie wouldn’t stand in my way.”

Hickling was able to develop a compelling narrative that lifted morale as well as fuelling a program for the development of appropriate capability. *“Then I got lucky again because the Army deployed to East Timor. The rest is history ...”* Hickling now recalls that *“although people say that we were ‘lucky’ in East Timor, that ‘luck’ was a function of good training, and leadership, especially in the form of Peter Cosgrove, who presented himself to the media as being calm and dependable. As well as that, of course, the Army was dying to do something that was both substantial and public.”*

The four roles that comprise “strategic leadership”

In the performance of their duties, each of the Chiefs must perform four main roles:⁵⁰

- **Strategic Director**, the “Directive-Pragmatist”, who exercises command, tackles short-term critical problems and keeps the institution moving forward on a day-to-day basis.
- **Strategic Leader**, the “Expressive-Explorer”, who is the central agent in the continuous process of aligning the institution with its present and evolving circumstance.
- **Strategic Builder**, the “Manager-Architect”, who develops and implements the means by which the evolving institution is shaped.
- **Steward of the Profession**, the “Nurturer-Guardian”, who is the caretaker and top-level exemplar of the Australian profession of arms.

In terms of the activities and time involved, these roles are highly intertwined. Each Chief will advance a number of outcomes both within the bounds of a single role and by their activities across a number of roles. However, the four roles are conceptually distinct and thus form a useful framework by which we can view what a Chief does.

Table 5.1 provides detail on the interpretation of each of the four roles.

⁵⁰ The framework originated from a US Army War College publication that defines “the strategic art” as the skilful formulation, coordination, and application of ends, ways and means to promote and defend the national interests, and sees it as comprising three main roles: the **leader** or energiser, the **theorist** or thinker and planner, and the **practitioner** or doer (see Richard A. Chilcoat, *Strategic Art: the New Discipline for 21st Century Leaders* (Carlisle Barracks: US Army War College Strategic Studies Institute, October 1995).

Table 5.1: The four strategic leadership roles: Director, Leader, Builder and Steward

Role	Core activities	Primary method of influence	Approach	Profile
<p>Strategic Director: the Directive-Pragmatist</p>	<p><i>The “commander”, who is authoritative where appropriate, deals with crises, and keeps the institution moving forward on a day-to-day basis</i></p>	<p>Focuses strongly on results</p> <p>Makes decisions based on professional expertise and judgement</p>	<p>Authoritative: <i>Decisive</i> <i>Tough-minded</i> <i>Aggressive</i></p>	<p>Leading from the front</p>
<p>Strategic Leader: the Expressive-Explorer</p>	<p><i>The central “change agent” in a continuous process of aligning the military institution with its evolving circumstances</i></p>	<p>Leads the process of interpreting and making sense of the evolving context</p> <p>Defines an imaginative and appropriate “vision”</p> <p>Communicates a compelling narrative</p>	<p>Engaging: <i>Curious</i> <i>Wide-thinking</i> <i>Reflective</i></p>	<p>Leading from the front</p>
<p>Strategic Builder: the Architect-Manager</p>	<p><i>The “senior manager” who develops and implements the means to realise strategic goals</i></p>	<p>Develops and manages programs and policies</p>	<p>Analytic: <i>Systematic</i> <i>Focused</i> <i>Methodical</i></p>	<p>Leading from the shadows</p>
<p>Steward of the Profession: the Nurturer-Guardian</p>	<p><i>The “caretaker and nurturer” of the institution, and top-level exemplar of professional standards and values</i></p>	<p>Focuses on values, standards, continuity, and member well-being</p> <p>Balances internal needs with external realities</p>	<p>Empathetic: <i>Conservative</i> <i>Ethical</i> <i>Community-oriented</i></p>	<p>Leading from the shadows</p>

The illustrative case study to this chapter is an example of an individual Chief who brought to bear the full range of capabilities discussed in the previous chapter by his performance of the four strategic leadership roles. When Hickling took over as CA in 1998, he recognised that his Service’s capability was seriously deficient. This applied not only to the elements of structural capability but equally to its intellectual and social capability elements, as exemplified by inappropriate operational doctrine and low morale in units. In pursuit of this mission, Hickling skilfully juggled his performance across all four of the strategic leadership roles. As **Strategic Director**, he seized an opportunity and confronted his political masters with a new doctrine and an associated new stance for the Army; as **Strategic Leader**, he presented this new stance in terms of a compelling strategic narrative and worked hard to win the support of all the necessary stakeholders; and as **Strategic Builder**, he oversaw the process by which the elements of the fresh strategic doctrine would be translated into tasks and organisational arrangements. Finally, an additional motive for doing all this was what he saw as his obligations under the role of **Steward of his Profession**.

As the case study shows, performance of the four roles requires a range of different working styles and temperaments. A Chief performing the role of Strategic Director needs to be pragmatic and decisive, whereas the role of Strategic Leader requires an exploratory approach, an engaging style, the capacity for skilled risk management and a fine sense of when *not* to be decisive. Similarly, the role of Strategic Builder requires an analytic and systematic approach, while the Steward of the Profession must be aware of and concerned for institutional values and practices.

While the activities involved in the four roles include what people conventionally think of as “leadership”, they take a distinct form at this top level, compared to the styles appropriate to the tactical and operational levels. As Table 5.1 shows, the influence exerted at this level is both direct and indirect.⁵¹

Although some things that a Chief does are quite obviously focused on either the short or the longer term, most activities have implications for both timeframes. Moreover, the way a task is tackled in the short term will often have significant implications for the longer term state of the institution. For example, although CA Gillespie nominated his major short term priority as being “*to ensure that the troops on operations have everything that they need to do their jobs*”, his intention was broader and longer ranging than this, i.e., more than just the “Sustain” part of a Chief of Service’s charter. His aim was not only to sustain military capability on the ground but to send a deeper message to the troops on the ground, their comrades at home and the Australian government and public that the Army would do what was needed to support those in combat. His successor has a similar approach. CA Morrison expressed his short term strategy as “*supporting*

⁵¹ Annex E has full details on the attributes identified by the Chiefs as indicators of a person’s strategic leadership ability.

our troops on operations” but he additionally intended to build on the past decade, particularly in the impending transition from Afghanistan, in order “*to ensure that the Army after Afghanistan is robust and relevant for the future*”.

Similarly, many of the major Army programs have aimed also to re-invigorate the Army Reserve. This process was begun more than a decade ago by CA Leahy. During his term, Leahy initiated a “*quiet revolution*” in the Reserve. Now he sees that with “*the Rum Corps gone, there is a strong sense of hope*”. Early in his term, Leahy was apprehensive about the chances of maintaining the Reserve, given the economic and societal working-hours pressures of the contemporary lifestyle, but his programs successfully overcame these problems.

Strategic Director: the Directive-Pragmatist

As Strategic Director, a Chief is the “doer” who deals with crises and keeps the institution moving forward on a day-to-day basis. This role involves professional behaviours that are well grounded in every senior officer, and thus is very familiar within the military profession. The Strategic Director role is the closest approximation to the traditional role of “Commander”.

Only two members of the Chiefs’ cohort – the CDF and the CJOP – are what the ADF defines as being a “Commander” (in terms of the NATO definition of “command” as the legal authority to direct military forces for the accomplishment of assigned missions). Although one implication of this is to assume that such “assigned missions” are associated with military operations, a broader reading suggests that all such senior officers exercise “command”. They do so at least in the sense of having “the authority and responsibility for effectively using available resources and for planning the employment of, organising, directing, coordinating and controlling military forces” for the accomplishment of objectives in preparation for or in association with military operations. Thus, even though much of their activities will involve exercising indirect influence (“leading from the shadows”, particularly in the function of management), all Chiefs still need to step out of the shadows occasionally and apply direct influence in an active and public way.

A topical example of Strategic Director activity is in regard to the personal conduct issues that arose from the 2011 Skype incident. As the early stages unfolded, each Chief needed to make a number of short-term decisions in response to political and public demands for “action”. Important decisions were needed quickly, allowing

The Strategic Director is the closest approximation to the traditional role of “Commander”.

little time for contemplation and consultation; and in this particular case, as in many others, the Chiefs were able to do so.

Another example of Chief as Commander was seen in the illustrative case study for this chapter. Hickling led-from-the-front at a time of crisis, putting what he believed was “right” for his Service ahead of any considerations of potential career risk and damage to Ministerial-military relationships. An important thing to note here is the deliberateness with which Hickling chose this particular course of action. He *chose* to be directive because he judged that this was the appropriate influence method in the circumstances; he was not being directive because of any “natural tendency” to continually put himself forward based on a mistaken sense, carried over from earlier career roles, of what a strategic leader should be.

As befits their responsibilities, the Chiefs have a wide range of influence or power mechanisms, giving them considerable inherent authority. At this level, people are dealing with an officer who has been judged to be essentially “the best of the best”, who is authorised to make important decisions about resources and their allocation, and who additionally has substantial influence over the processes in which people are posted and promoted.⁵²

Because the role of Strategic Director is the most action oriented, it is likely also to be generally the most time-consuming and distracting. This particularly relates to the CDF. As CDF Houston put it, *“The CDF is the Minister’s first call. As Chief of the Air Force, I was never called at home; but, as CDF, I am frequently called. It never stops. This may be the biggest difference between being a CDF and being a Service Chief.”*

It will usually prove to be a mistake for a Chief to over-play the Strategic Director role.

The very familiarity of the quasi-Commander role, together with the successful military professional’s instinct for taking charge, will be seductively attractive for many ambitious military professionals. They – and their staffs and constituencies – will usually find that it is a mistake for a Chief to over-play the role. This is because to do so would be contrary to, and would interfere with, the distinctive influence styles needed for each of the other three roles.

⁵² In theoretical terms, they possess strong **position power**, in terms of their control over important intrinsic rewards, such as career opportunities, and over disciplinary measures. They possess strong **personal power**, because their expertise in understanding and managing the organisational and professional environments attracts feelings of respect, friendship, admiration, and the desire to gain their approval (each of which contributes to that individual’s “charisma”). And an additional source of influence, particularly applicable within military organisations, comes from their **professional power**. Professional power is conferred in the military through a series of symbolic means, including the award of rank, decorations, formal qualifications and appointment to high status positions, such as operational command. Advancement to high rank is an unambiguous signal of the esteem in which an officer is held by those with the authority to make such appointments, and this alone creates a powerful reason to respect the holder of that position. At the highest levels of each Service, all of the sources of power come together, and give the Chief the official and implicit authority to make decisions and initiate actions to get things done quickly.

Strategic Leader: the Expressive-Explorer

As Strategic Leader, a Chief acts as the central agent in a continuous process of aligning the military institution with its circumstances.

The Strategic Leader role not only requires a distinctively different style to that associated with Strategic Director, but also demands a subtly different approach to the function of “leading” as this might have been done in earlier career roles. The first epigraph to this chapter, of the show-jumping metaphor, expresses this nicely. The process of engaging people, teams and agencies requires an encompassing and subtler approach to engaging in building commitment, still essentially direct but not as much as it would have been in earlier career roles such as CO or formation commander.

The Strategic Leader role involves a number of distinct functions, most notably:

- **sense-making** – observing and interpreting what is going on in the strategic environment;
- **direction-setting** – reacting to such interpretations by confirming or redirecting organisational goals and activities;
- **communicating** – framing and expressing all of this in terms that will be meaningful and compelling to a range of constituencies; and
- **coalition building** – engaging the support of a variety of agents across and beyond the organisation, in part by developing and maintaining a network of supportive resources and relationships through which action can be directed, as fast as is necessary, in the absence of traditional sources of professional authority.

As an illustration of the way that this can be done at the strategic level, consider the process described in Chapter 2, by which CDF Houston engendered strong top-level collegiality and collaboration. This helped each of the Chiefs make sense of the strategic environment, if only in respect to the relationship between their particular bailiwick and those of the other senior colleagues. It plainly assisted in direction setting, because of the clear thinking that flows from good sense-making. Communication was facilitated, again because of the flow-through from the first two functions, so that each Chief could then frame his particular objectives and activities in the wider context. This was not only useful within the various stovepipes but also would have had great utility in communicating across stovepipes and to the political class. Finally, this is an excellent example of coalition building.

Sense-making

Effective performance in the Strategic Leader role demands a range of comparatively rare talents. As was shown in the illustrative case studies to this and the first chapter, among the most desirable – and distinctive – are those that enable a Chief to read and interpret the currents of change within the strategic environment, and to discern their implications for the institution and how it should react. Such talents depend very much on having “strategic acumen”.

Strategic acumen is the ability to make sense of a complex external and internal environment and to discern and interpret broad longer-term internal and external issues and trends. It depends on being able to “think outside the square” and on having a big-picture understanding of the institution and its environment; and it’s almost as relevant to key staff members as it is to the Chiefs themselves.

Sense-making is one of the important elements in the Observing-Orienting processes of the Boyd “OODA loop” (Observe-Orient-Decide-Act), to draw on one of the more popular conceptual models used within the ADF at the moment.⁵³ And, as Boyd made clear, “Orientation” is not just about or even primarily about the reorientation of resources to deal with a problem. An important part of the

Although the task of sense-making is best led by the Chief, the sensible senior officer will have people in the staff team with whom they can discuss and “chew over” issues.

Orientation process is for decision makers to be willing and able to re-orient, in terms of “re-think”, their frame of reference as necessary. Such a mental model or mind map assists in interpreting what is being seen and analysing its implications.⁵⁴

An important point to keep in mind here is expressed in the second epigraph to this chapter. As expressed by the poet Samuel Butler, strategy, like life, requires the ability to draw sufficient conclusions from insufficient premises.

This is why, although the task of sense-making is best led by the Chief, the sensible senior officer will have people in the staff team with whom they can discuss and generally “chew over” issues. As the person at the top of the institutional pyramid, the Chief is

⁵³ For scholarly discussion of the orientation process, see for example: Alan Okros, *Leadership in the Canadian Military Context*, The Canadian Forces Leadership Institute, 2010; Benjamin E. Baran & Cliff W. Scott, “Organizing ambiguity: a grounded theory of leadership and sense-making within dangerous contexts,” *Military Psychology*, 22:(Suppl. 1) S42–S69, 2010; Keith Grint, *Leadership – A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford University Press (2010); Ronald A. Heifetz, Alexander Grashow, & Marty Linski, *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership: Tools and Tactics for Change in Your Organisation and the World*, Boston: Harvard Business Press, 2009; Gary Klein, *Sources of Power: How People Make Decisions*, Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1999; and Russ Marion & Mary Uhl-Bien, “Leadership in complex organizations”, *The Leadership Quarterly*, 2001, 12, 389-418. And for a summary of the ideas of USAF COL John Boyd, see John Boyd, “Organic Design for Command and Control” in *Defense and the National Interest*, (edited by Chet Richards and Chuck Spinney), February 2005 (http://www.ausairpower.net/JRB/organic_design.pdf).

⁵⁴ This is the crucial ability that decision-making expert Dr Gary Klein, who has spent his career studying the decision-making process in critical situations within the military institution and in similar fields such as firefighting, singles out for this role. Klein has concluded that “experts” have a superior appreciation of the various factors involved in an unfolding situation, and the relationships between these factors.

likely to have the total appreciation of all of the threads within the organisation, as well as what is happening outside. The Chief also is responsible for ensuring that the institution responds appropriately.⁵⁵ However, a Chief should not do this in isolation. Many, if not most issues will be so complex that no one person could be expected to have the full perspective and understanding. CA Peter Leahy, for example, found that *“it was important to find someone who was prepared to argue with me and take a contrary point of view. I enjoyed the intellectual challenge but also enjoyed the way that it would spark ideas and challenge the norm. There were few who were prepared to argue but, when I found them, I sought them out and really valued their contribution.”*

Because sense-making is such a subtle but pivotal activity, it demands deep and sophisticated knowledge and understanding of broader military, political and social factors within the environment and how these relate to the institution.⁵⁶ And it requires often a subtle approach. For example, Harvard Professor Ronald Heifetz advocates an approach based on asking questions rather than providing answers, as a means for both engaging colleagues and stakeholders and for tapping the lateral thinking ability of others.⁵⁷ This is equally applicable to the sense-making process.

Direction-setting

If strategic leaders perceive that major shifts are happening within the environment or within the institution, they then have to decide what to do about it. This will often require a change of organisational direction, with commensurate profound implications for strategic and operational doctrine, capability development and many other functions and activities.

The process will be complicated by usually being subject to significant uncertainty. The Strategic Leader will often find it difficult enough to determine what is happening presently, let alone how this might develop as the situation unfolds – and then to deal with the implications of all of this by developing an appropriate direction for the institution.

While all this would be challenging for any chief executive, those in the military profession have to deal with a further issue that is reflected in few other walks of life: namely, that the strategy and associated direction they formulate are not, strictly speaking, within their purview. Strategic military policy is officially the responsibility primarily of the government of the day. The government might be

It is difficult enough to determine what is happening presently, let alone how this might develop as the situation unfolds ...

⁵⁵ *Sense-making* is what the CEO of one of America's biggest companies called “defining the meaningful outside” (see A. G. Lafley, “What only the CEO can do”, *Harvard Business Review*, May 2009).

⁵⁶ Wong and Snider, op cit, 602-603.

⁵⁷ Heifetz, op cit, 1994.

advised by the senior military professionals but national policy comes from the very top. Similarly, the associated capabilities that the future ADF will use are decided by government, with professional military advice. This is a complicated and time-consuming process; and, as noted by CDF Houston in an earlier quotation, requires great skill in the “*art of influencing the government to make the right decision*”.

An important feature of all of this relates in particular to organisations like military institutions. Strategy serves as the mechanism for beginning to move in a particular direction but, as VCDF Mueller has observed (see the third epigraph), “*strategy is an evolutionary process; and although a stable, long-term strategy is desirable, it is seldom achieved*”. There is always the need to build on past successes, address past failures and exploit legacy characteristics. Thus, because the situation “out there and/or in here” is almost certainly in flux, the strategy and the way it is expressed and communicated need to be flexible enough to adapt to situational changes. Mueller went on to say that

“The implementation of strategy is complicated by different time-scales – one year money, two/three year people, three year governments, five year budgets (current year, next budget year and three year forward estimates), timeframe of Defence plans, five to 20 year capital procurement projects, 30-plus years in-service times for platforms and systems Of itself, strategy achieves nothing and, although a stable, long-term strategy is desirable, it is seldom achieved.”

Communicating

Effective communication at the strategic level is vital in terms of the orientation and engagement of the various constituencies with which a Chief deals. In this sense, strategic communication has both informative and psychological dimensions. A well-crafted message, delivered powerfully, can have an enormous effect on engagement and collaboration.

One of the important elements in this process is the development of an appropriate **narrative**. A narrative is a compelling and relatively simple (sometimes

“At the most senior levels, you have a complicated story to tell and it will be your responsibility to make that simple, direct and clear.”

deceptively simple) account or “story” that links past, present and future, i.e., “where we have come from, where we are now, and where we want to go”. At the strategic level, the narrative might usefully include some reference to the Australian military legacy, in order to link contemporary and past challenges, activities and accomplishments.

A compelling narrative is useful not just for facilitating communication. The development of



such a narrative is one of the acid tests for a senior leader's true understanding of what they have seen and interpreted. Communicating “where we are going” becomes increasingly challenging at the higher organisational levels, if only because constituencies become broader and more diverse as one advances. Hickling stressed the importance for senior leaders to develop themselves as good communicators because *“at the most senior levels, you have a complicated story to tell and it will be your responsibility to make that simple, direct and clear”*.

In the contemporary setting, for example, CA Morrison intends to show how the Maritime Strategy narrative is relevant to the past, as well to the present and the future. The Army narrative will show that it has always been a part of a maritime strategy, he said, *“at least at the implicit level, and this will give coherence to what was lacking until quite recently and certainly was lacking in the post-Vietnam years”*. No less importantly, it will also provide a strong rationale for consistency and coherence for those who will be Morrison's successors.

A narrative needs to be couched in contemporary and meaningful language, according to the constituency at which the message is aimed. Morrison noted that senior officers need to be conscious that they are talking to an essentially youthful institution (the large majority of soldiers are in their early 20s), so the culturally related messages must resonate with them and, as one Chief put it, *“reflect the natural synergy between them and those of my generation”*. DCA Symon advocates *“working really hard at senior levels just to sustain an impression to outsiders that the organisation is performing satisfactorily; so you have to roll up your sleeves and get involved; you have to be very careful of complacency”*. A good communicator will usually develop slightly different versions of the narrative for different audiences. For example, a Chief might have a “strategic narrative” for communicating to fellow senior leaders, a “professional narrative” for communicating to the Service members at middle and junior levels, and a “fiscal narrative” for communicating within the Defence bureaucracy.

The “new collegiality” at the top of the ADF has contributed significantly to effective and shared sense-making and communication processes. To begin with, a greater level of trust and communication results in more opportunities to share information and then to consider alternative interpretations of and conclusions arising from that information. In the same vein, collegiality contributes to the development of an overarching ADF narrative, which will be all the more compelling because it is shared by and emanates from each of the Chiefs (or, in the case of each of the single Services, from each member of the senior leadership team within that Service).

The strategic coherence emerging through the greater Whole of Government approach to national security planning and strategy development is all the more useful because it does not focus on a single Service but rather promotes tri-Service

operations. For example, as DCAF Davies remarked, *“the development of the amphibious capability is going to be a vehicle for the transition – culturally and organisationally and doctrinally – from Afghanistan and [this Service] is right on-side, because it presents a meaningful function through which to transition. The worst thing that could happen is another long period of being operationally inactive and functionally unfocused such as happened after Vietnam.”* The Maritime Strategy also provides a continued rationale for service that was strikingly absent in the decade or more following the withdrawal from Vietnam. (Most of the Chiefs were very conscious of the malaise into which the ADF sank in that period, when it was lacking a compelling rationale and progressively losing its spirit, and were determined not to let this happen again.)

Strong collegiality also helps to communicate the narrative by creating a consistent message coming from a variety of sources. A major consequence of the healthy practices at the top of the Army, said Symon, is not just the development of a robust and relevant Service strategy but also the development of a consistent and reliable vehicle for communicating this strategy across the Army’s various constituencies.

Each Service has its own particular “narrative variants” to prevailing strategy. Often these relate to a particular Service-specific capability. In the contemporary context, said Davies, *“we need to avoid the erosion of Air Force’s core combat focus. Whatever the short term apparent imperative for scaling down, it represents – as it has always represented – a capability that is extremely difficult and costly to regain. Once gone, it is almost permanently gone.”*

Coalition building

Building an effective coalition is another crucial element in energising and directing the institution. Coalition building is important because of the complexity of the web of relationships that exists at the senior levels of any military institution (as discussed at length in Chapter 3).

... one of the payoffs for a process that each would have begun probably more than a decade or so earlier.

The social capability of Relationships was discussed in the previous chapter. One of the major benefits of strong Relationships is the relative ease with which a coalition can be built at short notice to respond to and support a particular issue. Coalition building is important if only because a Chief will often not have direct authority over individual officers and executives in Groups and agencies that are important in formulating and advancing a strategy. As noted earlier, a sensible Chief assiduously builds contacts and working networks within the organisation at a number



of levels and across a number of stovepipes. This will be one of the payoffs for a process that each would probably have begun a decade or more earlier, as they moved into the middle and higher ranks of their Service and gained cross-Group experience.

Another important strategy in building and leveraging coalitions is to approach the network by “asking the right questions”, rather than providing what conventional wisdom says are “the answers”. (A sensible Chief will do the same with his own team.) Such an approach is more likely to enlist the creative energy and collaboration of the individuals and teams involved than simply presenting a plan or a decision and requiring other individuals and elements to align themselves with it. In any case, those in the network may have useful perspectives and information to contribute to the problem-solving process.⁵⁸ (This is the approach advocated by Heifetz, as noted earlier.)

To assume that, as the most senior person present, one has all of the knowledge and can have all of the answers is to commit what is called the “fallacy of centrality”.⁵⁹ Providing the right answer, rather than asking the right questions, is the approach we would expect to get from taking a directive approach in a chaotic situation, such as is done in exercising command. This, however, is usually not a wise approach to take at the strategic level, unless the problem is genuinely critical in respect to time frames. In contrast, the explorer seeking to exercise leadership in a complex context will ask more questions and offer fewer answers. In any case, those in the network may have useful perspectives and information to contribute to the problem-solving process.

Strategic Builder: the Manager-Architect

As Strategic Builder, a Chief develops the means to realise strategic goals. This encompasses the design and development of the institution as it evolves consistent with the strategic and the fiscal narratives.

In this role, the Chiefs “lead from the shadows” by building institutional structures and systems that shape behaviour in line with desired standards and values.

Some of these institutional attributes will be in the conventional area of capability (in the sense of what we have discussed as “hard capability”). This will include the appropriate weapon systems and delivery platforms, organisational structures, base locations and the like. But many will be in the form of “soft capability”, encompassing activities that are associated with most of the other enabling outcomes discussed in the previous chapters.

⁵⁸ Incidentally, “the right questions” are not simply “how can we address this problem and what are the possible solutions?” The right questions are much more to do with issues such as what sources of information can be tapped, how different opinions will be weighed, the possible ways in which different factors will be related and how such relationships might be moderated by variability in other factors, and so on. “Asking the right questions” essentially means engaging the problem-solving abilities of others as well as oneself.

⁵⁹ Ian Robertson, “Power is the ultimate high”, *New Scientist*, 2872, 12 July 2012.

For example, as was shown in Chapter 1, CDF Barrie and his fellow Chiefs worked hard at the role of Strategic Builder in the period following the realignment of the ADF in 1998-99, in order to prepare the institution for whatever challenges would be thrown up by the changing dynamics within the region. Similarly, as was shown in Chapter 3, Barrie and the Secretaries during his tenure initiated wide-ranging reform aimed at the working culture and relationships at the top levels of Defence, with the intention of creating at least semi-permanent cultural changes that would facilitate decision-making and action within the Department.

Another example of the kind of sophisticated outlook and skill set needed by the Strategic Builder is in respect to fundamental business management. Many programs will be complex and costly and will demand management skills of the highest order. Most Chiefs will not have had the chance to develop the appropriate expertise in such skills, and they will therefore rely heavily on members of their staff and/or subordinate-but-still-senior leaders in related programs.

Like the role of Strategic Leader, the Strategic Builder role requires a different mindset and approach to the leadership role than was characteristic of early career stages. At earlier career stages, the behaviour that is rewarded is generally that of outwardly oriented, decisive, confident and competent leading from the front. The more senior one becomes, the less appropriate is this particular stance and outlook. Adapting to this different style requires much conscious reflection and imagination: reflection not just about the effects of one's leadership behaviour on others but, even more importantly, about the effects of institutional features on others.

Many Strategic Builder activities are directed at changing the organisational or personnel structure. However, the Chiefs always need to keep in mind the fact that many such structural factors will have significant second- and third-order effects on behaviour, values and attitudes. For example, the location of operational bases

... many such structural factors will have significant second- and third-order effects on behaviour, values, and attitudes.

has significant ramifications for quality of family life, particularly as the demographics of the Australian military family continue to evolve in line with those of society at large (including features such as the growing importance of dual-career couples and educational requirements for children, and the increasing incidence of service personnel owning and wanting to live in their own homes). The Strategic Builder who lacks the appropriate understanding of how such factors work and interact will be prone to developing policy that inadvertently degrades both effectiveness and efficiency. Ironically, the problems that this causes will be worn by their successors and middle-level leaders and members, sometimes a decade or more later.

Encouragingly, the attributes required for the Strategic Builder role will have been practised by most Chiefs at the senior levels as part of earlier career development experiences. Being responsible for the development of large programs in their Service will have introduced them to this outlook and the associated skills. For this reason alone, most Chiefs find that the Strategic Builder role, although challenging, is not nearly as challenging as the role of Strategic Leader.

Steward of the Profession: the Nurturer-Guardian

The obligations involved in being a “profession” and a “professional”

As Steward of the Profession, each Chief acts as the caretaker and nurturer of the institution and top-level exemplar of professional standards and values. This is another of the significant ways in which the work at the top of the institution differs from that at subordinate levels.

The military is a prime example of a “vocational profession”, i.e., regarded by its members and by society as a “calling” of trust and dedication and more than “just a job”. Vocational professions are built around distinct sets of *values*, as much as distinct sets of *skills*.⁶⁰ The implications of this are discussed further below.

The military profession is unique among vocational professions in that its autonomy is totally subject to the supervision of Government. Government has the authority and obligation in exceptional circumstances to override the internal regulation processes and demand adherence to certain instructions.

The ADF does certain things extremely well. Its members at all levels consistently display a strong commitment to performance, it has systematic training and progressive career development programs in all employment categories, and it is strongly resilient under pressure.

However, being a profession and continuing to be recognised as one, implies much more than having certain basic institutional qualities. Although these serve the ADF very well at the operational level, the concepts of “profession” and “professionalism”

Being a profession, and continuing to be recognised as one, implies much more than having certain institutional qualities.

⁶⁰ The key characteristics of a profession are that it is expected to: (1) develop and nurture a distinct body of knowledge and expertise that requires continuous, across-life learning to develop and maintain; (2) apply its expertise with discretion and consideration to novel situations within recognised jurisdictions; (3) comprise members whose motivation is essentially intrinsic and altruistic, based on a fundamental service ethic; and (4) be granted autonomy by society to practice and self-regulate, according to professional ethics that are explicitly and implicitly agreed to by society. See for example Don Snider, “The US army as profession”, in Don Snider & Lloyd Matthews (eds.) *The Future of the Army Profession*, 2nd edn, McGraw-Hill, 2005, 3-38; Leonard Wong & Don Snider, “Strategic leadership of the Army profession”, *ibid.* 601-624.

need to be understood just as profoundly at the strategic level, and certain implications need to be more strongly articulated at all levels of the institution.⁶¹

The implications of all of this for strategic leadership and for professional stewardship include the following:

- Although the designation of “profession” to the military institution confers significant status and benefits, it also brings obligations. One of these is that the institution will ensure that its members at all levels “behave professionally” even when placed under demanding and high-stress situations.
- The development of human capital is more important than the development of structural capital or technology. Expert knowledge and its application are essential for a vocational profession’s continued existence. Appropriate, timely, valid and comprehensive professional development is fundamental to its distinctiveness and capability.
- The demarcation between “what the ADF does” and what one of its partner agencies “does” is becoming increasingly blurred. The military institution increasingly performs its functions in conjunction with a number of other institutions and organisations: not just within the Whole of Government sphere but also with the support of private sector contractors and quasi-autonomous non-governmental organisations and other agencies. There has been scarcely an ADF operation in the last decade where this was not the case. At the least, this will require strategists, planners and operational commanders at most levels to understand enough about the functioning and purpose of such partner agencies to work collaboratively with them. At a deeper level, this implies the potential for military elements to be embedded within civilian elements and vice versa. It also underlines the need for the military institution to be conscious of and, to a certain constructive extent, protective of its functional and competency boundaries or jurisdiction.

In the last few years, the ADF has been troubled by a series of ethical incidents associated with personal and professional conduct, abuse of command privileges, and interpersonal relationships (especially inter-gender relationships). In part, this can be attributed to the inadequate understanding of the obligations of a profession collectively and of its members individually. For example, in comparison with other professions, the military profession asks much of its most junior members; but, being young, many lack the moral maturity for self-regulation in the absence of the right guidance (in the form of appropriate and explicit values, codes of conduct

⁶¹ The US Army recently conducted a “campaign for the professional ethic”. Its aim was to promote awareness of the nature of professionalism and its obligations at all ranks within the service. A number of important policy issues were identified as part of this process, such as the need for certification of commanders at all levels prior to their assuming command, and the development of programs to encourage ethical behaviour. The US Army is taking steps to address all of these issues. Two of the members of the writing team participated in the process, at the US Army’s invitation. Their report recommended that the Australian Army and indeed the ADF should seriously consider a similar activity. However, these recommendations were never even officially acknowledged, let alone acted upon.

and ethical leadership).⁶² Arguably, appropriate understanding of this would have been the trigger for an even stronger emphasis on ethical leadership than has been the case in the last decade: not just in terms of education and training but also in respect to regular and sophisticated monitoring of ethical standards. (This is discussed further in the next chapter.)

Given the comparatively cursory treatment that the concepts of “military profession and military professionalism” receive in important career courses, it is not surprising that they are taken for granted and not fully understood within the Australian military institution. The Australian military institution tends to treat the concept of “profession” in the same way as it treats that of “culture”: a mildly interesting concept and a good word to use in certain kinds of arguments; but not as something requiring thoughtful study. This reflects the ADF’s pragmatic understanding of “professionalism”, framed as it is largely around the imperative for consistently high performance of a distinct set of skills by people with a value set that embraces the notion of service and “unlimited liability”.⁶³ Such an understanding is “necessary but not sufficient”. While it is more than adequate for those at the middle and lower levels of the institution, those at the higher levels need to achieve a more sophisticated level of appreciation.⁶⁴

It is not surprising that the topics of “military profession and military professionalism” are essentially taken for granted and not fully understood.

One key issue in the management of a profession relates to the correct rights e.g., ethics and obligations of self-regulation. With appropriate strategic oversight from government, professions generally are allowed to govern themselves, regulate their own behaviour and those of members, control entry and exit to the profession, and impose appropriate rewards and sanctions. The profession, not the market, sets and regulates the standards. However, their host society must trust them to do this with diligence and probity. A profession whose public actions put this trust at risk risks losing some or all of its autonomy for the process of self-regulation. The current public, media and government concern over the ability of the ADF to regulate its own behaviour is a public expression of doubt about the ADF’s ability

⁶² The topic of how cognitive development unfolds over time, including in “adulthood” is discussed in Robert Kegan, *The Evolving Self: Problem and Process in Human Development*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982; Anne Colby, L. J. Gibbs, M. Lieberman & L. Kohlberg, *A Longitudinal Study of Moral Judgment: A Monograph for the Society of Research in Child Development*, The University of Chicago Press, 1983; George B. Forsythe, “Identity Development in Professional Education”, *Academic Medicine*, 80 (10), October 2005 Supplement.

⁶³ While the concept of “profession of arms” is understood within the ADF in a general sense, there are important gaps in such understanding. Most of the discussion of the profession of arms concept in the ADF focuses on notions of mission, expertise, service, ethical conduct, and the individual obligation for unlimited liability. The principal reference for such discussion is often the classic treatise by General John Hackett, in which military life is described as “the ordered application of force under an unlimited liability”, with this latter term seen as the distinctive feature of the military profession vis-à-vis other professions. It is scarcely surprising that there is an inadequate understanding in this matter. It is a generation since the last systematic review of the Australian military profession, which was the Army’s RODC review, conducted in the late 1970s. The RODC made a thorough examination of the “military profession” concept and recommended that it be studied in higher levels of professional military education, but this was among the core sets of recommendations that were not taken up by the Army.

⁶⁴ The ADF Personal Conduct Review of 2011 recommended that the minimum starting point for addressing these deficiencies is to require appropriate treatment of the topic in PME. The Review commented that the refinement of Service codes of ethics may benefit from clarifying and highlighting the four meta-roles that are associated with being a “professional”. These four meta-roles were designated as Expert, Steward, Representative, and Servant of the State.

to learn from its mistakes, to impose appropriate sanctions, and to implement procedures for more reliable regulation. This factor alone may be sufficient to emphasise the Steward role as part of the Chiefs' obligations.

Being a strategic “Steward of the Profession”

The leaders of the military profession, particularly those at the strategic level, have five major obligations in terms of performing this role.⁶⁵ They must:

- understand the critical distinction between the military as a profession and the military as a bureaucracy or even as “an organisation”, and understand what a profession and its component professionals must do to fulfil their side of the bargain with their host society;
- analyse environmental influences that could affect the nature of the profession's expert knowledge or situations in which it is to be applied (e.g., its jurisdictions);
- negotiate the institution's current and future jurisdictions of professional practice, i.e., those situations in which it does, or does not, practise its expert work;
- maintain the profession's expert knowledge and adapt it to changing demands of the external environment and the client, usually up to a decade forward; and
- conform and align the institution's professional development systems with its evolving expert knowledge so as to produce professionals and units with the right expertise at the right time.

Encouragingly, the contemporary leaders of the ADF are increasingly likely to embrace these responsibilities. A more sophisticated understanding at the top levels is needed, however, and the final chapter discusses some ways in which this might be done.

Attending to Member Commitment and Well-being

As Chapter 6 showed, many of the Chiefs saw their record in respect to Member Commitment and Well-being as somewhat mixed. There are encouraging trends, with strong and consistent attention to physical health for at least a generation, and an increasing focus on psychological health. On the other hand, the institution is not performing well in terms of retention. As was discussed in Chapter 6, some of this performance deficiency can be attributed to a poor understanding of the importance of intrinsic factors and retention, and the strategies by which such intrinsic factors can be managed and enhanced. (This poor understanding is equivalent to and, in many ways is closely associated with, the poor understanding of the notion of “profession”.)

⁶⁵ Wong & Snider, “Strategic leadership of the army profession”, op. cit., 601-604.

Acting as internal and external figurehead

At the highest levels of each Service, all of the sources of power – position power, personal power and professional power – come together. At this level, people are dealing with an officer who has been judged to be essentially “the best of the best”, and who is authorised to make important decisions about resources and their allocation. This confers considerable status on each Chief. They are seen as people of significance by their fellow professionals and the public. This is a powerful factor in their success in acting as internal figurehead and in representing the Australian military profession to the public as an external figurehead.

This is arguably one of the more important reasons for maintaining the convention in each Service that the Chief is drawn from the combat elements, with significant command experience.

Discussion and summary

Leadership at the strategic level is subtly but powerfully different to leadership at earlier career levels. Those at the top deal with numerous competing pressures and objectives. All this requires a set of professional skills and, just as importantly, a professional outlook of a very high order.

Of the four roles that the Chiefs perform, the Strategic Leader role is arguably the most challenging. This is because this role demands cognitive and interpersonal skills and deep professional knowledge of the highest order. It also involves activities that, in a number of ways, are more novel than those associated with Strategic Director and Strategic Builder. And, of the four, it is the most different to the “leading from the front” task that is a basis for the military professional identity.

The Steward of the Profession role is also comparatively novel and it too involves significant challenges. This is partly because of the novelty of specifying this role as a formal set of responsibilities, but it is also a result of the Australian military profession’s unfamiliarity with the nuances associated with the “leadership and management of a profession”, and the reluctance of the three Services to think of themselves as members of a single “profession”.

Not surprisingly, given the complexity of each of these roles and the even greater complexity of performing them in concert, they contain many pitfalls. The next chapter discusses these in terms of the performance vulnerabilities for each of the four roles.



Part III:

Implications



Chapter 6:

Performance Vulnerabilities at the Strategic Level

Experts simply don't know more. They know differently. The breadth and depth of their knowledge allows them to "see the invisible" and to perceive what is missing in the situation along with what is present.

(Dr Gary Klein, researcher on decision-making)

I would be wary of experts' intuition, except when they deal with something that they have dealt with a lot in the past.... One of the problems with expertise is that people have it in some domains and not in others. So experts don't know exactly where the boundaries of their expertise are.

(Daniel Kahnemann, another researcher on decision-making)

If they do not understand clearly the nature of the entity they are to lead, how can they possibly lead wisely?

(Leonard Wong and Don Snider, soldiers and scholars)

Senior leaders and their supporting staffs can help themselves avoid the potential performance vulnerabilities at the strategic level by understanding such vulnerabilities and adapting their behaviour and perspectives accordingly.

The main points in this chapter

- This chapter deals with potential performance vulnerabilities that can subtly but significantly degrade the performance of senior leaders and their supporting staffs.
- The broad approach to avoiding performance vulnerabilities for each respective role is as follows:
 - As **Strategic Director** – to keep the traditional “heroic leader” identity in perspective and be conscious of avoiding over-playing the directive function.
 - As **Strategic Leader** – to mentally “shift gears” and think about leadership with a different perspective.
 - As **Strategic Builder** – to acquire broader skills and a more sophisticated understanding of professional and organisational behaviour.
 - As **Steward of the Profession** – to “think institutionally” so as to balance pursuit of short-term objectives with the maintenance of long-term social capability elements (such as an appropriate ethical climate).

Case Study 6: The Air Force tackles some chronic strategic issues

During the 1990s and beyond, the Air Force experienced a series of major problems ranging from safety and health issues with the F-111 deseal/reseal program to difficulty in retaining skilled personnel. It had dealt with each of these with what seemed like (at the time) adequate administrative programs. Frustratingly, however, the problems continued.

The breakthrough came when the senior leadership team started looking closely in the mirror. Instead of blaming other Defence elements for organisational problems, the senior leadership team examined what it was and wasn't doing about such matters. Its conclusion was that **“We have seen the enemy and it is ourselves”**.

So, with little fuss, RAAF senior leadership team began doing a number of things differently. The primary vehicle for this was a program that became known as “Adaptive Culture”. This aimed to attune the Service to its environment so it could act more strategically on its objectives. More fundamentally, the program represented a comprehensive effort to tackle issues that had defied conventional solutions.

From the start, the process was not easy, but CAF Errol McCormack quickly came to see it as an imperative in terms of maintaining the institution's long-term health.

Air Force began by improving the quality of communication within the senior leadership team itself. It established a program of frequent meetings with mechanisms aimed at encouraging open communication and candour.

Next, it tackled the issue of support for major staff functions. It developed an over-arching and interlocking set of strategic plans for each major support function, with appropriate indicators on performance for each. It took steps to ensure that staffing for key support functions had the same kind of skill and commitment levels as those that support operational commanders. In the personnel field, for example, it appointed a Director General from the mainstream aircrew career category with a solid background in personnel. Just as importantly, he was supported by a leavening of mid-level subordinates with a similar blend of experiences, some of whom had had long-term experience and continuity in the personnel function.

Thirdly, it improved top-down and bottom-up communication. A major feature of this was the Chief's practice of frequently visiting the troops, so that he could talk to them – and, more importantly, so they could talk to him.

Finally and not least importantly, when a problem was recognised, Air Force usually did something about it. For example, when the ADF was having trouble retaining engineers in the late 1990s, Air Force senior leaders went to talk to engineers and quickly developed and implemented programs to address the issues. Such prompt action probably went some way in preventing what were initially essentially “tame” problems from becoming wicked or critical. The prompt action almost certainly saved a considerable amount of time and money.

It is probably no coincidence that the development of a more constructive Air Force strategic leadership culture was closely followed by a marked improvement in the Air Force’s retention and recruitment situation. In 1999, the separation rates of all three Services were in the double-digit range, but four years later, while Navy and Army rates remained essentially unchanged, Air Force separation rates had fallen to and remained at around or below 8%. A 2006 attitudinal analysis of nearly 11,000 ADF officers and OR found that, all other factors being equal, those in Air Force tended to have stronger career commitment than their counterparts in the other two Services. The key issue turned out to be **trust**: RAAF personnel had greater levels of trust in their senior officers to look after members’ interests.

Avoiding performance vulnerabilities at the strategic level

The previous chapter discussed the Chiefs’ four main strategic leadership roles. In total, these require advanced executive skills and a broad and sophisticated professional outlook. This chapter discusses some of the vulnerabilities associated with each of these roles.

Performance vulnerabilities at the strategic level are all the more risky because their adverse effects are rarely readily evident. It usually takes time for those at the senior level to realise – and accept – that performance degradation is occurring,

Performance vulnerabilities are all the more risky at the strategic level because their adverse effects are rarely readily evident.

just as it takes time to diagnose the reasons. By that stage, much damage may have been done; and, in any case, the clues for the original problems may lie buried too deeply in the past.

An example of this relates to the insidious degradation of ADF logistic capability and expertise in the 1990s. This particularly affected the Army. It is now generally agreed that the logistics operations associated with the INTERFET operation in 1999-2000 was a “very near run thing”. However, it was a degradation that



had been occurring incrementally across many years, so insidiously that it was not detected at the strategic level until it almost became a crisis. The Army did not set out in the post-Vietnam period to forget or neglect important lessons from its past; but that's what happened. And a subtle but fundamental reason for this lies in the strategic performance vulnerabilities that are discussed in this chapter.

The illustrative case study to this chapter presents an example of a set of strategic vulnerabilities and how they were recognised, accepted and tackled. Even though the Air Force had been experiencing problems across a number of areas, its senior officers had been slow to “join the dots”. Moreover, an initiative along the lines of the Adaptive Culture program was not the solution that readily sprang to their minds, just as the ongoing NGN program was very much an initiative of last resort for the Navy after a long series of incremental problems. In both cases, it took a long time for senior leaders to recognise and concede that the fundamental problem lay in their own performance: that they were not “leading strategically” and that the capacities of their support staff were also deficient. Nor, having reached this conclusion, was it easy for either senior leadership group to discern how they should tackle the underlying issues.

Avoiding these requires development of advanced competencies and different ways of thinking about strategic leadership and its necessary attributes. However, part of the reasons for not thinking strategically is a consequence of the characteristics of the Defence bureaucratic working environment. For example, when there seems to be only a limited time frame in which to address complex issues, people tend to focus on the “possible” and on those tasks that are within the team’s ambit and that can be done within a time frame of two years or less. The practice of doing this for two or three rotations through unfamiliar staff environments can easily lead to this becoming the habitual approach to any such role – for both leaders and support staff members. This will have the further adverse effect of ensuring that the fundamental issues are never properly addressed.

The broad approach to avoiding performance vulnerabilities for each respective role is as follows:

- For **Strategic Director** – to keep the traditional “heroic leader” identity in perspective and be conscious of avoiding over-playing the directive function.
- For **Strategic Leader** – to mentally shift gears about the nature of “leading” and think broadly and imaginatively about what is likely to happen in the longer term and about how influence can be exercised in intra- and inter-organisational networks.
- For **Strategic Builder** – to acquire broader skills and a more sophisticated understanding of professional and organisational behaviour.

- For **Steward of the Profession** – to “think institutionally” so as to balance pursuit of short-term objectives with the maintenance of long-term social capability elements (such as an appropriate ethical climate).

Rather than discussing each of these in detail, the chapter confines itself to a broad coverage of the essentials in terms of each of the following general aspects:

- talent and temperament,
- situational effects in respect of the Defence bureaucracy,
- role pressures and stress, and
- staff team issues.

Talent and temperament: The side-effects of highly focused professional development

The downsides of being “an expert”

By temperament and training, senior military officers are active and decisive decision makers, who “lead from the front”, “set the standard” and “show the way” and, in all likelihood, were chosen for senior rank for their superior performance in such aspects. Most of their time as leaders in the first two decades of their careers will have seen them quickly assessing the issues around a problem, formulating and enacting a plan, and generally leading from the front.

Ironically, the strong and effective military early-career development system often results in performance difficulties within the “non-military” environment. Not surprisingly, many newly arriving 1-stars bring the habits they learned as junior commanders with them, and they are either too task-oriented or become subject to paralysis by analysis. Habits of decisiveness are extremely difficult to put aside, especially after decades of being required to demonstrate decisiveness. Thus many stumble when they are confronted with problems that require a different approach: an approach better suited to a more reflective approach.

This is something that Defence Minister Brendan Nelson found particularly frustrating. Nelson commented that because people in uniform “*always had the desire to please*” and a “can do” culture, they often attempted to project an image of being on top of the problem when it was fairly plain that they were not. Nelson “*would have preferred a simple ‘I don’t know Minister’*”.

Although the literature on strategic decision-making is clear that this is an issue across all organisations, it would not be surprising to find that the military

profession – with a talent pool developed and selected on the basis of professional expertise and decisiveness under pressure, and with a fundamental professional self-identity based on this very quality – is particularly vulnerable in this respect.

CN Griggs neatly expressed this, observing that, because:

“Navy culture is essentially about ‘command at sea’, all the stories tend to be about ships. The organisational structure of the ship is a very neat structure, which we have tried to replicate ashore – with limited success at best. It is not working properly for us. When we need more collaboration, we feel that it is not a natural thing, because of the centralised command system through to the CO when at sea.”

This tendency may be all the more powerful when leaders are reluctant to pose questions, as opposed to provide solutions. A problem-solving approach that begins by posing questions and thereby engaging the energies and abilities of others is in marked contrast to the lead-from-the-front style. If you are “the expert”, why use valuable time to canvass the views of others?

The paradox of expertise is neatly captured in the first and second epigraphs to this chapter. On the one hand, having strong expertise often leads to a breadth and depth of perception that allows the expert to see what others don’t. (This can apply both in terms of “what is present” in a situation and “what isn’t but should be”.) On the other hand, expertise can lead people to view problems in stereotyped ways – the “to the man with a hammer every problem is a nail” syndrome. This is especially likely if the expertise is deep but not broad.

One inadvertent and insidious consequence of overplaying the role of “decisive leader” is the effect it has on subordinates’ willingness to engage with the problem-solving process and to offer their contribution and even their feedback. When leaders present themselves as people who are in control of the situation and who already have the answers, they will inevitably send subliminal signals to their junior colleagues – the signal that additional information is unwelcome and contrary views even more so. Subordinates in such situations tend to become increasingly reluctant to avoid wasting their time and risking their superior officer’s ire. This is reinforced further when – as often happens – the leader notices that very few people “seem to be capable of coming up with any good ideas”, and consequently loses confidence in his/her staff.

It requires a significant shift in a senior officer’s self-identity to overcome this tendency. This is all the

One inadvertent and insidious consequence of overplaying the role of “decisive leader” is the effect it has on subordinates’ willingness to engage.

more so because a Chief *does* have to be decisive and resolute in a number of circumstances. Moreover, when he does so, he will be doing not only what he feels more comfortable with but will be acting in a way in which most subordinates expect their senior leaders to behave. And situations where a senior officer feels more competent and confident and his staff subtly signal their approval of his behaviour serve to further reinforce any tendency to over-play the decisive leader role. The irony is that a senior officer who neglects the possible contribution that can be made by subordinates might meet their expectations for decisiveness but disappoint them in respect to the degree to which he draws on and develops the skills and perspectives of the same junior officers.⁶⁶

Thinking skills

Effective performance at the strategic level requires, above all, the ability to think differently. A number of analysts and scholars have discussed the attributes needed, in more or less different ways; but all of these are linked to the attributes of strategic acumen and mental agility.

The US Army War College report noted that

*“Strategic leaders must learn how to scan the environment, understand their world from the systems perspective, and thus envision different futures and directions for their organisation. Such scanning involves a constant search for information to test current assumptions, particularly those associated with the future of the organisation. Those with **mental agility** spend more time searching for information and spend more time interpreting it”⁶⁷*

“Mental agility” helps an individual to be alert to incoming information, including information that challenges or confronts one’s existing assumptions. It helps them

“Mental agility” helps an individual to be alert to incoming information, including that which challenges existing assumptions.

to develop a style of thinking that is more concerned with the definition and analysis of problems, rather than with the refinement of solutions. It helps them keep their minds open for additional information associated with the problem, even during the solution-development stage and even when such additional information includes material that challenges current assumptions.

Strategic acumen is the ability to think broadly and “outside the square”. Such a way of thinking contributes to strategic performance by allowing the individual to

⁶⁶ See for example Marshall Goldsmith, *What Got You Here Won't Get You There*, Hyperion, 2007.

⁶⁷ Wong et al. 2003, op. cit, emphasis added.

get quickly to the nub of an issue and to discern connections, consequences and second and third order effects. At the strategic level, this generally requires an understanding of how situational and organisational factors shape individual and group performance, which can be gained by studying fields such as history, politics, economics and military sociology.

Communicating compellingly

The previous chapter emphasised CA Hickling’s advice to senior officers to develop themselves as communicators because of the challenge of making a complicated story simple, direct and clear to their constituency.⁶⁸

Australian military leaders have rarely been noted for their compelling communication skills, and far too often address a crowd by standing at a lectern and reading from a script. For example, national television audiences have recently seen a senior officer reading his address to the troops in the Middle East Area of Operations on Anzac Day, and another reading from a prepared script on Remembrance Day. All these were situations where it did not seem to be appreciated that the symbolism was at least as important as the content.⁶⁹

This is all the more puzzling because, in individual and small-group discussion, very few senior officers are other than articulate, forceful and compelling. The classic example of what can be done and the effect that it can have was the compelling media performance of the then-MAJGEN Cosgrove as part of the INTERFET operation in 1999. Cosgrove’s engaging style was probably one of the major factors why the ADF’s stocks with the Australian public rose immediately and, until 2011 at least, remained impressively high.⁷⁰ However, behind a lectern and reading from a script, Cosgrove was often just as wooden as others.

Projecting the ethical dimensions of the figurehead/exemplar role

An important but subtle vulnerability concerns moral courage and ethical standards. The projection of a strong service ethic is at least as important at the top as it is in lower levels of the institution. If the top person is seen to be wanting in ethical behaviour, the consequences cascade throughout the organisation.

The projection of a strong service ethic is at least as important at the top as it is in lower levels of the institution.

⁶⁸ A refreshing example of doing this was a recent session at the Wheeler Centre think tank in Melbourne in early 2012 by CA Morrison, in his spirited and free-ranging discussions with two senior journalists in front of an audience. Morrison’s candour and strength of delivery impressed the crowd and, no doubt, the podcast audience that would have subsequently downloaded and listened to the session.

⁶⁹ Ironically, in all of the examples cited here, after several decades of practice, all those officers were very capable of speaking extemporaneously.

⁷⁰ The unwillingness to develop superior public speaking skills seems to be a national trait, seemingly based on fatalism – “it’s not what Australians do”. Military professionals comment admiringly on the widespread presence of such ability in senior officers across the Pacific, but apparently believe that such an ability is either inherent or is associated with the American culture in the way that cannot be replicated in Australia.



Even though the ADF has a very sound record in respect to its senior leaders projecting a powerful positive example of ethical behaviour, this is arguably a “zero tolerance” issue.

It could be argued that this should extend beyond the period of full-time service, into the realm of post-service employment. The ADF needs to avoid scandals such as the “cash for access” scandal that recently broke in the UK, in which former generals were taped boasting that they could help secure defence contracts by unreasonably taking advantage of personal relationships that had been developed whilst they were in uniform.⁷¹ And the spectacular fall from grace of GEN David Petraeus, forced to resign as CIA chief, acts as a warning about private morality.

This issue arguably extends to the kinds of appointments that retired senior officers take up immediately after retirement. For example, there are currently no guidelines that stipulate a “cooling off period” for former senior officers to join boards or become senior executives within defence contracting companies. It seems obvious that there is a need for this, particularly for those who will have had official dealings with these companies during their time in service. It is important for ethical standards to be *seen to be* imposed as well as *actually* imposed.

Understanding the full implications of being a “profession” and a “professional”

The Australian military institution has never shown a particular interest in the concepts of and the principles associated with “military profession” and “military professional”. While these notions are understood at a “working level”, as they apply to the junior levels and even the mid-levels of the institution, the profession as a whole has a very weak understanding of the strategic implications of “being a profession”.

A proper understanding of these concepts, in an increasingly complex world, is fundamental to the ability to perform as Steward of the Profession. For, as expressed in the third epigraph to this chapter by two distinguished American military sociologists, if leaders do not clearly understand the nature of the entity they have to lead, how can they possibly lead wisely?

⁷¹ See Rosa Prince, “Cash for Access: Former Generals Broke Rules, Says Philip Hammond” (telegraph.co.uk/news/UKnews/defence/9607480/).

The work situation within the bureaucracy

A number of features of military work in the bureaucracy and features of the Chiefs' roles inadvertently limit the amount of awareness, focus and time that senior officers can give to interpreting issues, considering options, making decisions, and enacting solutions and supporting mechanisms by which solutions can be effected. Many of these features have been discussed in previous chapters, so the discussion that follows confines itself to three core points.

The sheer size and complexity of the working environment in the Defence bureaucracy impose significant challenges for individuals to acquire the know-how, know-who and know-why needed for effective performance, and for staff teams to balance themselves in terms of both subject matter expertise and broad generalist experience.

Mid-level staff officers who feel that they lack the expertise or political acumen to make a decision on a complex issue often “delegate upwards”. This contributes to creeping centralisation of decision-making and a further situational factor that eats into a Chief's time.

Finally, high rates of turnover among senior officers and their supporting staff act to put a brake on innovation. This has the additional inadvertent effect of making senior officers reluctant to push for a change in policy or practice because of the limited time needed to initiate and establish major changes within the time frame allowed by the job tenure of those involved (including themselves). Radical plans thus get shelved for “later consideration”; and quite often such later consideration never happens. This is especially likely to be the case when a policy proposal runs counter to a long-standing institutional practice.

... not as a result of the supposedly inherent conservatism of the so-called “military mind” but rather because of features of the career or work situation.

All these features create impediments to performance. These arise, not because of the supposedly inherent conservatism of the so-called “military mind” but rather because of subtle and powerful features of the career or work situation that create pressures for maintaining the status quo.

Avoiding burnout

Chiefs have a hectic working schedule, and it would not be surprising to find that this sometimes will degrade their clarity of thinking and decision-making performance.

A typical account of a Chief's description of his working day was *"0530: into my home office; 0720: arrive at Russell; 1830: go home; 2200: finish work at home; go to bed"*. And this does not factor in the nights when the Chief goes to some official function. One remarked wryly that *"I am constantly abusing the people-management skills I know are important, because my day is so full of activity. I only get away with it because the staff know that I've got no choice"*. Hickling remembered that his average week would involve around four nights spent at official social functions, adding that this will be a significant issue for the next generation of Chiefs, who are drawn from a cohort in which a career-oriented partner is the norm.⁷²

Such a schedule not only creates an accumulated stress effect that must inevitably tell on performance but also limits the amount of time available for reflection and for mentally working through various issues. Creative thinking is enhanced by time and opportunity to think, especially the opportunity to physically and mentally distance oneself from the workplace. Many of the Chiefs mentioned the beneficial side effects of a regular exercise routine in this respect: as CA Leahy put it, *"I used to get my best ideas while I was jogging"*.

An equally significant issue is the pressure on a busy leader's time. Hickling noted that *"demands on commanders' time have expanded in response to the 24 hour news cycle, as has the tendency to manage incidents at the highest level. Both trends must be managed cleverly, because resisting either is impossible"*. He emphasised that *"it is vital that the strategic leader creates time and space to think, to rest and to care for family and self, because it is impossible to maintain a high level of performance when constantly tired or distracted"*.

A related factor is the agenda pressures placed on senior decision makers to work quickly through a comparatively long agenda comprising a number of complex issues. The perception that the decision needs to be made "now" is often a reason why it is rushed, both in terms of its consideration and analysis.

⁷² Jans, *Careers in Conflict 2007*, op cit.

And most of this applies not just to the leaders ...

Tellingly, the above senior officer vulnerabilities tend also to apply to their support teams. This is especially the case when many in the support team are comparatively new to the strategic level, or to the function on which they are offering advice. Such vulnerabilities can be all the more damaging because they often tend to be multiplied by the “groupthink” factor – when those in a group feel an implicit social pressure to close on a solution to a problem that presents the least disruption to an existing social order; and, further, to coalesce around the common stance in order to avoid threats to group solidarity/cohesion.

It follows that strategic leaders need the support of teams comprised of competent and articulate people with a range of perspectives and skills. It helps significantly if even a few of those in the support team have significant levels of expertise and understanding in the relevant function. The management of the team decision-making process also needs to be carefully handled. For example, to minimise the risk of groupthink, a chairperson might appoint a team member to play the role of “devil’s advocate” when the team is considering controversial options, or have team members occasionally act as “process observers” to detect early warning signals for processes that risk flawed decision-making outcomes.

We can see good examples of this way of thinking in respect to both Adaptive Culture and NGN. The strategic solution in each case was not simply to improve the capacities of those at the top levels but also to address a range of organisational and staffing issues in order to improve the capacity of the various intellectual and social capabilities on which a strategic leader relies.⁷³

Discussion and summary

The first step in avoiding potential vulnerabilities to performance is to be aware of them.

The chapter has discussed vulnerabilities in terms of a number of factors. These include Chiefs’ and staffs’ talents and temperaments, situational factors arising from the work in the bureaucracy, the stress of the role and the risk of burnout, and the staff team composition and design implications.

A point made earlier in this chapter needs to be repeated and reinforced. Drawing attention to these potential vulnerabilities is not meant to imply criticism of the present or recent incumbents. The discussion here simply posts an alert regarding both awareness and complacency, and an alert about the way that performance

⁷³ The importance of varied team composition is increasingly being realised in the corporate world, where company boards are commonly drawn from people with a range of professional backgrounds and life experiences (as well, of course, having the appropriate experience and competencies for the directorship role).



deficiencies can insidiously establish themselves over time when the assumptions on which they are based are not consistently and robustly tested.

Ironically, many of the vulnerabilities to which senior officers may become subject arise from the justifiable sense of self confidence that comes from successfully negotiating the early decades of the career journey. Individuals who come to believe that they are capable of “handling anything” may shy away from the reflective, consultative and engaging working style that is required at this level, especially when there is an overwhelming focus on getting the job done within the limited timeframe that the job rotation schedule might allow.

This is yet another example of the powerful paradox of organisational culture – that what is a cultural strength in one area or time often is a cultural weakness and a performance vulnerability in another.

The risks associated with such vulnerabilities can be substantially reduced by appropriate attention to improvements in PME and to career development structures. These are discussed in the final chapter.

Chapter 7:

Where to From Here?

Today's as well as future military leaders will need to be able to balance unconventionally between conventional managerial behavior applicable in conditions of peace and authentic military leadership in threatening circumstances.

(Paul van Fenema, Joseph Soeters and Robert Beere, European scholars of the military)

The more you cut force structure, the more vital your professional military education system becomes.

(Bill Taylor, Center for Strategic and International Studies, Washington DC)

If the ADF is not to miss the opportunity to take full advantage of its current strong situation, it needs to take prompt action on several fronts.

The main points in this chapter

- The study shows that there are three key factors in effective strategic leadership. These relate to the Chiefs' individual and collective ability in:
 - developing and imaginatively using the full range of capabilities, by
 - performing four complementary but quite different roles, while
 - avoiding the performance vulnerabilities associated with each such role.
- The report reaches three major conclusions, relating respectively to individual development, organisational development and leadership style. These conclusions are that:
 - for the ambitious officer, “what got you here won’t get you there”;
 - for the military institution, “what got us here won’t get us there”; and
 - the principle that “leadership is a team sport” is just as valid at the senior level as it is lower in the organisation.

Case study 7: Determining who has got “it”

When people are asked to consider the attributes of those who will be their successors in the next few years, their responses often reveal much about the distinctive way they think about their current roles.

And this was the case with the Chiefs.

During the interviews they were asked to respond to the following question:

Consider two groups of current 1-star officers: three who show particular potential for advancement to the highest levels; and another three who have the potential to reach 2-star but not 3-star. What distinguishes the first group from the second?

Responses fell into four main categories. The first three – strong communication skills, resilience, and “small-p” political sense – were predictable enough, though nonetheless valuable for having been independently confirmed.

It was the fourth category that contained the most important clues as to how and why the Chiefs’ work is so subtly but profoundly different to that done in earlier roles, and why it is such a challenge to perform well at this level.

This fourth category related to a distinctive method of thinking – what some of the Chiefs called “strategic acumen”. It concerned abilities that go well beyond deep professional knowledge and expertise (important though these might be). It relates to having a broad range of intellectual interests outside normal professional confines; being able to think broadly and “outside the square”, balancing contradictions, quickly getting to the nub of poorly structured problems; and being open to unconventional and novel options for action.

The importance of these observations is not so much for the design and conduct of JPME (although those responsible for such activities will find it useful) but for what it reveals about the way that the Chiefs think about their roles. It is plain that they feel, at least implicitly, that they rely on much more than simply advanced professional skills in the performance of their duties.

To quote Dr Gary Klein, long-time researcher on decision-making in conditions of uncertainty: *“those with the capacity for strategic leadership don’t simply ‘know more’ – they ‘know differently’”*.

What this study set out to explore

This chapter briefly summarises what this study shows to be the key factors in strategic leadership and then finishes with three major conclusions in respect to the implications of this study's findings.

The time is ripe for an examination such as this. The ADF is currently in a strong position – perhaps its strongest for many decades – with a respected national and international profile, a capable and adaptable professional workforce, and strong relationships with its allies and Australian industry. If it misses the opportunity to take full advantage of this opportunity, this will be mainly because of lack of imagination, largely stemming from a lack of understanding, in its approach to and application of strategic leadership.

Many readers will be familiar with the famous remark by Basil Liddell Hart, relating to the relative difficulty of getting a new idea into the mind of the military as opposed to getting an old one out. One imagines that he didn't mean this as a cheap shot, but rather a simple statement of fact based on long-time observation: so-called institutional reluctance to change within militaries across the world can be seen at every hand. For example, many “inconvenient truths” were identified within the ADF many years before they were finally addressed. (NGN is a prime instance.) However, while it is easy to “do what you've always done”, this usually means that you will “get what you've always had”. And, in changing and challenging times, “what you've always had” may not be good enough.

The process of achieving institutional performance is considerably more complex than it was in the days of classic state-on-state warfare. Contemporary missions now encompass a wide range of activities, many not directly concerned with the application of force *per se* and involving social as well as martial objectives, and such missions are now usually performed in partnership with international allies as well as with non-military and Whole of Government partners.

The importance that the Chiefs give to “Efficiency” will be one of the more surprising findings for those without familiarity with the work at the top. The issues of money management, resources management and efficiency were repeatedly discussed in interviews, and all interviewees were clear that this involves very much more than “trying to save around the margins”. Contemporary Chiefs give much thought to resources and efficiency, and try to think strategically as much as they can about these. However, developing a sound financial culture begins with sensible strategic policy. Without the latter, all of the marginal cost cutting in the world will be of little longer-term benefit.

The illustrative case study to this chapter raises some interesting questions. For example, why is strategic acumen so important for performance at the strategic

level? And why is it so comparatively rare such that some 1-stars have got “it” and others haven’t, even though they have ostensibly passed through much the same career development learning experiences and have presumably been selected for promotion into the higher levels of their Services on similar criteria? The answers to these questions and others will emerge in the discussion that follows.

Three key factors in strategic leadership

The strategic leadership frame of reference developed in the analysis of the Chiefs’ work is a useful model for understanding the strategic leadership processes. Used imaginatively, it can be the basis for relevant PME and a genuinely strategic approach to career development down to quite junior levels.

A major implication from the study relates to the balance between “leadership” and “management” in the overall function of “strategic leadership”. A Chief might make his reputation on the basis of his talent for leadership but his longer-term success will rest at least as much on his ability to manage the people, the resources, the structures and the networks within his remit.

Consistent with the first epigraph to this chapter, the study shows, in essence, that effective strategic leadership depends on the Chiefs’ individual and collective ability in:

- developing and imaginatively using the full range of capabilities, by
 - performing four complementary but quite different roles, while
 - avoiding the performance vulnerabilities associated with each such role.

Developing and imaginatively using a full range of capabilities

As fundamental as weaponry and hardware are, a military institution’s most important assets are its intellectual and social capabilities. This is not just a matter of having the right professional skills and intellectual capital. Such capabilities also

A military institution's most important assets are its soft capabilities. And this is not just a matter of having the right professional skills and intellectual capital.

include *efficient management of resourcing and resources*, internal and external *relationships*, and *culture* (in its various complementary forms). Significantly, the development of intellectual and social capabilities occupy much of the Chiefs’ time.

At a time when the ADF is envisaging drawdown of operations, a reduced budget, and trimming of its personnel and resource



asset base, the chapter's second epigraph reminds us that a reduction in structural capability can be compensated for, at least in part, by stronger intellectual and social capabilities. The epigraph mentions professional military education but other factors – such as stronger relationships, senior and staff team building, and more attention to developing “financial culture” and a strong ethical climate – are all no less important.

The benefit of these factors is illustrated in virtually every one of the case studies that precede each chapter. Chapter 1 presented the example of preparing the ADF for what became the INTERFET operation, which resulted in part from the strategic acumen of CDF Chris Barrie and his senior colleagues (together with their predecessors) and the hard work behind the scenes spent on building institutional capability and solid internal and external working relationships. This emerged even more clearly with the case of the “new collegiality” in Chapter 2. CDF Angus Houston built fully engaged followership at all levels of the ADF, initially by establishing this different way of collaborating at the top, with the intention that this would flow down to practices at lower levels.

The case study in Chapter 3 is another example of how strategic leadership can fine-tune the context in which strategic work is done. CDF Barrie and Secretaries Paul Barratt and Allan Hawke used a macro teambuilding activity aimed at giving those in the top echelons of the Defence Organisation the confidence and opportunities they needed to get things done even when circumstances were complex and uncertain.

A further illustration of how “hard” capability depends very much on a “soft capability” foundation came from the case study in Chapter 4. Features of Navy culture that were strengths on operations – of “can do-will-do-make do” – had created subtle but fundamental weaknesses in the bureaucratic context.

The case study in Chapter 5 of a Chief grasping a decisive moment to act boldly in the interests of his Service showed how strategic leadership requires both political acumen and a strong ethical stance for what is “right”, as well as skill in juggling performance across all four of the strategic leadership roles.

Chapter 6 presented an illustration of how all these things come together. The example of ongoing Service-wide cultural change in the Air Force illustrates the imperative of engaging with and bringing along a disparate set of stakeholders in complex and often ambiguous circumstances. It also shows that the strategic solution must be not entirely focused on those at the top and that it should equally address support staff team building and design. Tellingly, Air Force is now reaping the benefits of its Adaptive Culture change program but this has come more than a decade after the program began. It serves as an example to the Navy to be patient with its NGN program and to continue to work on cultural change, particularly in terms of the perspectives of mid-level and senior officers.

The illustrative case study for this final chapter highlighted the quality of “strategic acumen” as a key attribute for strategic leadership. Strategic acumen appears to be one of the foundations of the mental agility and versatility needed for consistently high performance at the top levels. The example highlighted the importance of the Strategic Leader role in the strategic suite of skills and how the Strategic Leader role depends on breadth of thought and mental agility of the highest order.

Performing four complementary but subtly different roles

Effectiveness at the strategic level depends on being versatile enough to perform four complementary but subtly different roles, in pursuit of a number of quite different enabling outcomes. Again, the case studies that preceded the chapters each clearly brought out this principle.

Although the four strategic leadership roles are equally important in terms of overall contribution, they have acquired differing degrees of prominence and emphasis

The four strategic leadership roles have acquired differing degrees of prominence and emphasis within the profession of arms as a whole.

within the profession of arms as a whole. Unsurprisingly, most members’ perception of strategic leadership is in terms of the two high-profile roles. This applies particularly to the first of these, that of Strategic Director: the commander, the “doer” and “executive”. This in turn has coloured the perspective of strategic leadership as viewed from the middle levels of the profession and – consciously and unconsciously – continues to affect the way that aspiring senior leaders are prepared for their roles.

Avoiding the performance vulnerabilities associated with each such role

The complexity of each of the four strategic roles makes them subject to a number of performance vulnerabilities. These apply also to the staff teams that support the various Chiefs as to the Chiefs themselves.

Drawing attention to these potential vulnerabilities does not imply criticism of present or recent incumbents. The discussion here simply posts an alert regarding both awareness and complacency, and how performance deficiencies can insidiously establish themselves over time when the assumptions on which they are based are not consistently and robustly tested.



The illustrative case study of Air Force cultural change in the previous chapter presented an excellent example of how a Service faced up honestly and accurately to its vulnerabilities in strategic leadership and showed how the task was tackled by Air Force's senior leaders with its Adaptive Culture program. Tellingly, the remedial strategies in both Adaptive Culture and NGN that were eventually adopted were not even on the earlier shortlist of options for either Service.

That case study also shows how performance vulnerabilities at the strategic level can be minimised by appropriate design and staffing of such teams and by enhanced PME and career development for their feeder groups.

Three major conclusions

All of the above gives rise to three major conclusions, relating respectively to individual development, organisational development and leadership style. These conclusions are that:

- for the ambitious officer, “what got you here won’t get you there”;
- for the Australian military institution, “what got us here won’t get us there”; and
- the principle that “leadership is a team sport” is just as valid at the senior level as it is lower in the organisation

What got you here won’t get you there

The ADF prides itself on giving its officers good training and experience. Both by selection and training, it leans towards officers capable of crisp decision-making and decisive action, attributes essential to success – and often to survival – in combat at sea, on land or in the air. Ironically, however, such an orientation can at times be as much a hindrance as a help at the highest levels. Well-grooved habits can be hard to break when “Don’t just stand there, do something” needs to give way to “Don’t just do something, stand there – and think and engage others in thinking”.

This raises a series of questions for both JPME and support staff composition. How should the profession educate for a wider and richer range of skills and responses as officers move up the hierarchy? How should such officers be educated regarding which frame to apply and when? What are the best ways to form staff support teams that will be well balanced between expertise in strategically related areas and institutional knowledge and understanding? Such questions need to be central to any consideration of JPME, especially in light of the next conclusion.

What got us here won't get us there

The ADF may have performed to its satisfaction over the past fifteen years but, as this report has shown, it faces a number of important strategic challenges that are likely to test its structural, intellectual and social capabilities to the full. Continuing to be the kind of institution that was satisfactory for the first decade of the century will be insufficient to meet the challenges of the second and subsequent decades.

Significant changes are needed in a host of areas, including strategic and operational doctrine, force structures, collective and individual competency sets, employment streams and personnel structures, personnel policies, conditions of employment, and relationship building. Moreover, because changes to these factors will have inevitable consequences for the various expressions of core institutional culture, an appropriate understanding will be needed regarding their possible second and third order effects.

Even at the strategic level, leadership is a team sport

The final conclusion concerns the basic process of leadership. A team-based approach to leadership has always been one of the ADF's strengths at the operational level. This study shows that, even at the strategic level – perhaps especially at the strategic level – leadership continues to be a “team sport”.

The report has given many examples of the benefits of effective teambuilding at the strategic level, for both the Purple Seven and the staff teams that support them. The “new collegiality” which was discussed earlier needs to be embedded and extended, and then practised in a sophisticated form that takes advantage of group processes while avoiding some of their subtle pitfalls (such as “groupthink”).

Recommendations

Of the many recommendations that could be derived from this study, the report confines itself to just three distinct categories: strategic relationships, JPME and career development, and staffing.

Strategic relationships

It is recommended that:

- The Chiefs consolidate and refine the constructive culture that now exists at the top of the Australian military profession.

JPME and career development

It is recommended that:

- The core JPME effort (or at least that from mid-career onwards) be oriented around the four strategic leadership roles of Strategic Leader, Strategic Builder, Strategic Director and Steward of the Profession.
- Such JPME be focused on preparing officers for future roles in both leadership and support for senior leaders.
- Officers from mid-career onwards periodically be exposed to and engage with contemporary and evolving issues at the strategic level, with exercises that require them to examine the responsibilities and skills needed for the Director-Leader-Manager-Steward forms within their own current and immediate-future career roles. (For example, as part of preparation for ship/unit command, O4 and O5 could examine the application of these four roles to that level of command and the level of command immediately above it.)
- Such engagement use active rather than passive modes of learner behaviour.
- Each Service continue with the current encouraging trend of introducing career models that enable selected officers to develop in-depth specialisations within relevant fields – not just within “personnel management” and “project management/technology” but also within economics, politics and military sociology.

Staffing

It is recommended that:

- The Chiefs consolidate the reforms to JPME and career development by ensuring that they are supported by diverse teams of professional generalists and staff specialists.

Annex A: Interviewees

Interviewees	Appointment when interviewed	When interviewed
ADM Chris Barrie	Former CDF	May 03; May 12
VADM Russ Crane	Former CN	Apr 12
VADM Ray Griggs	CN	Jul 12
VADM Peter Jones	CCDG	Apr 12
VADM Russ Shalders	VCDF	Mar 03
RADM James Goldrick	COMADC	Apr 11
GEN Peter Gratton	Former CDF	Apr 04
GEN David Hurley	GOC Field Force Command; VCDF; CDF	Sep 03; Aug 08; Apr 12
LTGEN Ken Gillespie	VCDF; CA	Oct 08; Apr 11
LTGEN Frank Hickling	Former CA	May 03; May 12
LTGEN Peter Leahy	Former CA	May 08
LTGEN David Morrison	CA	Mar 11
LTGEN Des Mueller	Former VCDF	Mar 12; Apr 12
MAJGEN Liz Cosson	FAS, DVA	May 12
MAJGEN Ash Power	Commander Training Command	Nov 08
MAJGEN Mark Kelly	Commander Land Command	Nov 08
MAJGEN Craig Orme	COMADC	Mar 12
MAJGEN Paul Symon	DCA	Apr 11
ACM Angus Houston	CDF; former CDF	Jun 08; Aug 08; May 12
AM Mark Binskin	CAF; VCDF	Sep 08, Feb 09, Apr 12
AM Geoff Brown	DCAF; CAF	Apr 11, Apr 12
AVM Leo Davies	DCAF	Mar 12
AVM Margaret Staib	CJLOG	May 12
Dr Brendan Nelson	Former Minister for Defence	Jun 12
Mr Paul Barratt	Former Secretary of Defence	Apr 03; Apr 12
MAJGEN Duncan Lewis	Commander Special Forces Command; Secretary of Defence	Jul 03; May 12

Annex B: Questions used in the interviews

1. What have been the defining events and issues you have encountered in this appointment (strategic, operational, political, organisational, cultural and managerial)? Please briefly describe each, the degree to which it was anticipated or unexpected, and the context in which it emerged and unfolded.
2. Comment on your challenges and achievements in this appointment.
3. What legacy do you hope to leave when you move on?
4. What are likely to be the major issues with which your successor will have to deal?
5. The ADF is in its tenth year of continuous operations in the “long war” with no end in sight. At the same time, ADF transformation is continuing along a number of dimensions (organisational, cultural, locational, personnel, technological, materiel, etc). Given this context, what do you see as the future major steps, particularly in terms of exiting/transitioning/scaling down the current 3500 operational commitment to the Middle East?
6. The issue of excessive corporate governance continues to be a “burr under the saddle” for many officers at all levels and in all functions. Although some accept it as a reality that can be beneficial if managed properly, others feel that it constrains initiative and creative/bold thinking in respect to realistic training. What are your views in this respect, and what can be done about any associated problems at the Chief level?
7. Consider two groups of current one-star officers: three who show particular potential for advancement to the highest levels; and another three who have the potential to reach two-star but not three-star. What distinguishes the first group from the second?

Annex C: A recent Ministerial Directive to the CDF and Secretary



MINISTER FOR DEFENCE MINISTERIAL DIRECTIVE TO

MR NICK WARNER, PSM
Secretary of the Department of Defence

AIR CHIEF MARSHAL ANGUS BOUSTON, AO, AFC
Chief of the Defence Force

Preamble: In accordance with my powers under section 8 of the *Defence Act 1903*, acknowledging the joint responsibilities of the Secretary and the CDF under section 9A of the *Defence Act 1903*, and recognising the roles and responsibilities and authority of the Secretary as defined by the *Public Service Act 1999* and *Financial Management and Accountability Act 1997*, I give you strategic direction to achieve the Government's defence outcomes.

Accountability: You are accountable to me for Defence's performance, having regard to our statutory responsibilities. Any authorisation or delegation of my authority with respect to Defence is through you, within the limitations below.

Results: I expect you to deliver:

- a. under the sole command of CDF, operational deployment of the ADF to enhance our national strategic interests and our alliance relationships, to strengthen regional security and to successfully conduct joint military exercises and operations;
- b. identification, development and provision of current and future capability to enable our armed forces to defend Australia and its national interests;
- c. enhanced intelligence, strategic policy, scientific and information capabilities, responsive to whole-of-government requirements;
- d. timely, accurate, coordinated and considered advice to the Minister and Government;
- e. proper stewardship of people, through developing and maintaining workforce skills and career structures, building and maintaining Defence's reputation and providing a living and working environment that attracts and retains people;
- f. sound management of financial and other resources, operating within budgeted financial performance, meeting statutory requirements for preparing financial statements and optimal management and use of the Defence estate; and
- g. appropriate planning, evaluation and reporting documents, including an annual Defence Management and Finance Plan, the Defence Capability Plan, and periodic Strategic Reviews and White Papers, incorporating the above.

Guidance: You should pursue these results through effective leadership and management; and should ensure that:

- a. your actions are prudent, lawful and ethical;
- b. your actions are consistent with
 - (i) Government policy,
 - (ii) the Secretary's role as principal civilian adviser and with his statutory responsibilities and authority, particularly under the *Public Service Act 1999* and the *Financial Management and Accountability Act 1997*,
 - (iii) the CDF's role as principal military adviser and his statutory responsibilities and authority as commander of the Defence Force under the *Defence Act 1903*; and
- c. you make decisions, and offer advice, considering
 - (i) the impact on relationships with others who contribute to national security, including with the leadership of foreign Armed Forces and other Australian agencies with national security interests,
 - (ii) my separate Directive to the Chief Executive Officer of the Defence Materiel Organisation,
 - (iii) the risk to the sustainable delivery of Defence outputs; and
- d. the CDF's proposals for promotions to Brigadier equivalent and above are made in consultation with the Secretary, VCDF and the Service Chiefs.

JOEL FITZGIBBON
MINISTER FOR DEFENCE

DATED THIS DAY OF DECEMBER 2007

Parliament House, Canberra ACT 2600. Tel: (02) 6277 7800 Fax (02) 6273 4118

Annex D: Further reading on job rotation in the ADF

N. A. Jans, “Main findings of the Services Officers’ Careers Study”, *Defence Force Journal*, July/August 1987, No 65, 4-12.

N. A. Jans, *Careers in Conflict: A Study of Services Officers’ Careers and Families in Peacetime*, Canberra College of Advanced Education, Canberra Series in Administrative Studies, No. 10, 1988.

N. A. Jans & J. M. Frazer-Jans, “Job rotation and military capability: benefits, certainly – but is anyone counting the cost?” *Australian Defence Force Journal*, Jan/Feb, 2001, No. 146, 47-59.

N. A. Jans with Jane Harte, *Once Were Warriors? Leadership, culture and organisational change in the Australian Defence Organisation*, Centre for Defence Leadership Studies, Australian Defence College, 2003.

N. A. Jans & J. M. Frazer-Jans, “Career development, job rotation and professional performance”, *Armed Forces & Society*, 2004, 30 (2), 255-278.

N. A. Jans, “Careers in Conflict 2007: The six factors that have been reshaping the Australian military profession – and how they have created the ‘commitment paradox’”, Interim Report, Centre for Defence Leadership Studies, Australian Defence College, 2007.

Sigma Consultancy, *Facing up to the Future*, Consultancy report, 1989.

Sigma Consultancy, *AHQ Canberra and DPE high performance culture factors*, Consultancy report, 2001.

Sigma Consultancy, *The Defence Staff Organisation High Performance Culture Project: Lessons Learned and the Way Ahead*, Final Report, 2002.

Annex E: Attributes needed for effective performance at the strategic level

Identifying relevant attributes

For the purposes of this study, an attribute is defined as a broad bundle of skills, capacities, methods of thinking and values that contribute to high levels of individual and team performance. As already noted, focusing the discussion on such broad bundles avoids the difficulties that are inevitably thrown up by the generation and discussion of detailed lists of competencies and other attributes that are the basis for effective performance of any skilled role.

The study drew on two main sources for the identification of such attributes:

- the Chiefs themselves, in terms of their response to a question that probed their perceptions of what they look for when assessing an individual's potential for future strategic leadership; and
- a detailed examination of the literature, including the general literature on executive performance, to see what meta-competencies have been identified broadly in recent years as being the foundation for executive effectiveness.

As it turned out, there was some overlap between information from the two sources. The discussion that follows begins with the Chiefs' perceptions and then moves on to the findings from the broader literature.

The responses from the Chiefs fell into four main categories and the literature review identified five. These are listed and defined in Table E.1.

Table E.1: Attributes needed for effective performance at the strategic level

Attribute	Meaning	How this contributes to strategic performance
From the Chiefs		
Strategic acumen	Think broadly and “outside the square”	To get to the nub of an issue, to discern issues and connections, consequences and second and third order effects that are obscure to others
Communication skills	Present a complex issue in a compelling, meaningful and consistent way to a range of constituencies	To succinctly help others to understand complicated issues – and thereby not only to improve their comprehension but also to use this as a subtle form of interpersonal influence
Resilience	Tolerate the pressure of work at the strategic level	To ride with or even thrive within the intense pressure, stress and ambiguity of the strategic working environment
“Small p” political sense	Work across influence networks	To exert influence in the absence of authority
From the broader literature		
Identity	Take a “strategic” perspective to one’s role	To adapt one’s level of thinking to that required at the strategic level
Mental agility	Think broadly and “outside the square”	To get to the nub of an issue, to discern issues and connections, consequences and second and third order effects of issues
Cross-cultural savvy	Understand cultures beyond one’s professional and national boundaries	To work effectively with those in other institutions and organisations, often across national boundaries
Interpersonal maturity	Work effectively with others across organisational levels and boundaries	To influence others through the exercise of personal authority whatever their organisational identity or level
Professional astuteness	Understand the military profession beyond its bureaucratic and structural characteristics	To be dispassionate about professional issues and needs, and accurately to identify those needs and work towards them

What the Chiefs looked for in terms of strategic leadership potential

During the interviews, the Chiefs were asked the following question:

Consider two groups of current one-star officers: three who show particular potential for advancement to the highest levels; and another three who are likely to reach two-star but not three-star. (You need to have specific individuals in mind, even though you should keep that information to yourself as we discuss the issue.) What distinguishes those in the first group from those in the second?

The Chiefs' responses reveal much about the distinctive way they think about strategic leadership, as well as about what they look for in identifying who has got "it".

Further, their reflections are revealing, as much about what they don't say or mention. For the most part, these are qualities that were not at all important in the early and middle parts of the professional military career. The attributes that make for success in early and mid-career relate more to professional knowledge and expertise, decisiveness, looking after subordinates' interests, and using initiative.

Plainly, such attributes are not unimportant at the strategic level but there is not a strong overlap between the two groups.

This presents somewhat of a problem for the Services' promotion systems. As one Chief remarked, "selecting people for promotion is a real challenge. It is axiomatic that you will select them on the basis of their potential for the next rank beyond that for which they are being selected, because virtually all of them are competent to go to the next level". And another observed that "some – but not all – of these qualities get noted in annual reports; and, where this is so, this helps in selecting people for important career gates". He went on to say that "I find it useful to keep notes on the capabilities of subordinate commanders. (This helps in dealing with disappointed expectations!)"

Strategic acumen

Strategic acumen relates to the ability to think broadly with a strong facility for thinking "outside the square". The Chiefs describe such officers as those who

... are intuitive thinkers and who have been prepared to experiment with different ways of doing things; who tend to be strategic thinkers: agile, flexible, pulling ideas in from a number of sources

... can get to the nub of an issue.... Strategic thinkers: agile, flexible enough to operate at this level

... are the ones you never have to push in terms of their intellectual understanding and appreciation of how things work

... are also the kinds of people who have an intelligent grasp of the key Political/political issues associated with strategic issues.... Some people still have to have this explained to them; so it is very useful to have supporting staff who don't have to have this explained to them, and who may even be a step or two ahead of me in some respects

... are willing and able to look ahead, further and differently to others

... have a breadth of interests: are actively engaged outside their narrow professional confines; are well-educated and well-read.

Communication skills

Communication skills essentially relate to the ability to take a complex issue and present it in a meaningful and essentially consistent way to a range of constituencies. This is important for sense-making and for asserting personal influence. The Chiefs describe such officers as those who have

... the ability to take on ambiguous issues and make them comprehensible to subordinates: crisp and clear – because the higher you go, the less such issues become “crisp and clear”

... the ability to relate to other people, to communicate and work effectively, regardless of that other person's background, in a very challenging environment; to be adaptive and flexible and able to handle the pressure

... superior communication skills, particularly in terms of being confident in arguing a point—often a controversial one—before a group

... the quality of being great with soldiers and junior leaders, which is crucial in terms of output and retention.

Resilience

Resilience relates to the capacity to ride with or even thrive within the intense pressure, stress and ambiguity of the strategic working environment. The Chiefs describe such officers as those who

... stand out as those who think and work strategically, and who are capable of working in the bureaucracy at the highest levels – which really amounts to the same thing

... can work effectively outside their comfort zone, in particularly difficult circumstances, finding ways to make things work, as opposed to continually butting their head against the wall

... seem to be doing their current jobs with comparative ease

... have a calmness in their style and the way that they project it – for example, beware of the officer with an ungovernable temper

... can ride with the uncertainties, the setbacks and the unexpected twists and turns that occur at the highest levels.

“Small-p” political sense

“Small-p” political sense relates to the ability to work across and leverage influence networks. The Chiefs describe such officers as those who

... have political acumen: they know when to push, when to hold off

... can and do network, inside and outside their Service.

From the broader literature

The main external study on which this discussion draws was done a decade ago at the US Army War College, discussed earlier.⁷⁴ The summary that follows borrows the framework that was used to report the findings of this study, supplementing these findings with additional important research findings and arguments.⁷⁵

Identity

The first of the five broad attributes identified in the US Army War College study relates to the ability to think in the mode required of a “strategic” leader, so as to adapt one’s level of thinking to the strategic level. The War College discussion framed this in career development terms, with an officer being required to progressively expand their level of thinking from the tactical, to the operational, to the high-level operational and to the strategic as they progressed up the career trajectory.

⁷⁴ Wong, et al. *Strategic Leadership Competencies*, 2003.

⁷⁵ A recent account of a very influential US Army strategic leadership team noted General George Marshall’s three major criteria for strategic potential: the ability and willingness to solve their own problems and tell Marshall later what they had done; the ability and willingness to dissent from Marshall’s views and to be “completely frank” with him when it came to expressing their own opinions; and being as good a diplomat as they were a soldier. See Mark Perry, *Partners in Command: George Marshall and Dwight Eisenhower in War and Peace*, Penguin, 2007.



The War College concluded that the earlier this process of identity-evolution starts in terms of officer career development, the better it will be for both the individual and the institution.⁷⁶ This is because the development of such an identity depends very much on the nature and content of key career educational and learning experiences. The large majority of senior officers will be well versed in the military-political context and all will have had extensive experience in successive command appointments and senior staff positions of high authority. But, in part because of this focus, they often will not have had the opportunities to develop an appropriate understanding of global and regional politics, economics, society and organisational sociology – all of which contributes to a sophisticated understanding of “how the world works”.

There are a number of reasons why this might occur. It might be because an insufficient foundation had been laid in early adult-life learning experiences, such as at university and ADFA, with early career learning experiences too narrowly focused on core professional content, with little attention given to subjects that seemed to have little professional relevance at that time. Similarly, this might be because of insufficient coverage of these topics in the important mid-career and senior-career PME courses at Weston Creek. Or perhaps such coverage is not only too little but is also too late. Is it unreasonable to expect that potential strategic leaders can be given an appropriate grounding in economics and the social sciences in the few short years before they move into demanding senior roles? Whatever the answer, the strategic sense-making role requires strong ability in comparatively rare qualities: not just situational awareness or contextual knowledge/understanding but also the ability to discern trends, to pick out patterns and to build “mental models” or “mind maps” to interpret, to test assumptions, to explain and to monitor the internal and external environments.

Mental agility

Effective performance requires, above all, the ability to think differently. A number of analysts and scholars have identified this quality, in more or less different ways, most of which tend to be similar to what the Chiefs called “strategic acumen”, as outlined above.

Mental agility, or cognitive adaptability, requires two related but distinct qualities or ingredients:

- thinking ability, in terms of being able to recognise changes in the environment, to determine what is new and what must be learned to be effective; and
- the associated learning process, i.e., the skill and the will to learn from and adapt to, and to continue to monitor, changes within the environment, rather than clinging to potentially out-dated interpretations.

⁷⁶ Future strategic leaders will undoubtedly benefit from the experience of having to think of themselves as members of an integrated service environment during their earliest career days at the Defence Academy.

The US Army War College report summarises these two qualities in the following way:

“Strategic leaders must learn how to scan the environment, understand their world from the systems perspective and thus envision different futures and directions for their organisation. Such scanning involves a constant search for information to test current assumptions, particularly those associated with the future of the organisation. Those with mental agility spend more time searching for information and spend more time interpreting it.”

The highest level of mental agility is the ability to consider a problem independent of one’s own ego needs and routine context (i.e., to get away from “what’s in it for me?”). One of the most popular business books on strategic leadership refers to this quality as evidence of a “Level 5 leader” – someone who can channel their ego needs away from themselves and into the larger goal of building a great company.⁷⁷ It’s not that Level 5 leaders have no ego or self-interest. Indeed they are incredibly ambitious – but their ambition is first and foremost for the institution, not themselves.

Another leading thinker on executive processes called this the quality of “opposable mind”: the capacity to hold and reconcile potentially contrary interpretations of a situation. Such a thinker can not only readily make sense of contradictions but is also comfortable with holding those contradictions during the process of sense-making. It is a mental style that is alert to incoming information, including information that challenges or confronts one’s existing assumptions, and is much more concerned with the definition and analysis of problems, rather than the refinement of solutions. Those with this ability are able to keep their minds open, even during the solution-development stage, for additional information associated with the problem, even when such additional information includes information that challenges and tests current assumptions.⁷⁸

A third writer worthy of mention here is Robert Kegan and his notion of the “self-transforming” mind. This can be best understood in the context of his various levels of mental complexity and maturity, ranging from the “instrumental” mind, through the “socialised” mind, into the more strategic “self-authoring” mind and, most desirably for strategic thinkers, the “self-transformational” mind. This is summarised in Table E.2.⁷⁹

Kegan’s research has shown Level 4 thinking applies to very few people – and is strongly associated with organisational performance.

⁷⁷ Jim Collins, *Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap and Others Don’t*, New York: Harper business, 2001, 21.
⁷⁸ Roger Martin, *The Opposable Mind: How Successful Leaders Win through Integrative Thinking*, Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press, 2007.

⁷⁹ Robert Kegan & Lisa Lahey, “Adult development and organisational leadership”, in *Handbook of Leadership Theory and Practice*; and Robert Kegan, *In Over Our Heads: The Mental Demands of Modern Life*, Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press, 1998.

The relevant career stage for each of these styles of thinking can be readily identified, as shown in Table E.2.

Table E.2: A summary of four levels of executive thinking

Level	Kegan's label	Meaning	Adapted label	Relevant career stage
1	<i>Instrumental</i>	Attracting rewards and avoiding sanctions	<i>Must do</i>	O1 and O2
2	<i>Socialised</i>	Adhering to given principles, rules and norms	<i>Should do</i>	O3 and O4
3	<i>Self-authoring</i>	Thoroughly exploring options within existing boundaries	<i>Could do</i>	O5 and O6
4	<i>Self-transformational</i>	Thinking "outside the box", in a markedly different way to those suggested by conventional norms and models	<i>What if?</i>	O7+

It seems clear that Levels 3 and 4 thinking are what the Chiefs had in mind when they were identifying strategic acumen as probably the most important attribute they look for in identifying future strategic leaders. Levels 3 and 4 thinking described mental styles that are alert to incoming information, including information that challenges or confronts one's existing assumptions. They are styles of thinking that are much more concerned with the definition and analysis of problems, rather than the refinement of solutions. Those with such a method of thinking naturally see solutions as important but are able also to keep their minds open, even during the solution-development stage, for additional information associated with the problem. Importantly, such additional information will include material that challenges and tests current assumptions.

Cross-cultural savvy

Cross-cultural savvy is the ability to understand cultures/social structures beyond one's organisational, economic, social, geographical and political boundaries – to see other cultures in the context of and in relation to one's national and institutional values, and to make workable assessments of the appropriate adaptations to plans, policies and practices in order to achieve the appropriate interaction. Cross-cultural savvy facilitates the ability of strategic leaders to work with a diverse group of people and organisations, both within the national and the international strategic and operational contexts.

Interpersonal maturity

Interpersonal maturity is the ability to work effectively with others across organisational levels and boundaries. It is a function of both self-awareness and other-awareness and other “emotional intelligence”-related abilities needed for adjusting behaviour in a wide range of relationship situations. It relates also to the ability to influence others through the exercise of personal authority whatever one’s organisational identity or level.

As such, interpersonal maturity is at least partly related to the quality that the Chiefs identified as being “small-p political sense”. It probably also has some implications for “communication skills”, another important attribute that the Chiefs identified.

Professional astuteness

Professional astuteness is the ability to understand the military profession beyond its bureaucratic and structural characteristics, the ability to be dispassionate about professional issues and needs, and to accurately identify those needs and work towards them.

The most fundamental level of professional astuteness is an appreciation of how one’s own role relates to and contributes to the performance of other roles, both within the current ship/unit and beyond its boundaries.

The next level of professional astuteness is an appreciation of the concept of “officership”. This relates to the obligations to the profession as a whole of each person commissioned to lead within the profession of arms. In the contemporary context, and in the era of the “strategic private”, the concept arguably applies to the non-commissioned category as well.

The highest levels of professional astuteness relate to understanding the Australian profession of arms and its unique role within Australian society: its privileges, its obligations, its challenges and its relationships to other institutions and other professions. This is the level of understanding required for those who lead at the strategic level.

In one sense, these highest levels of professional astuteness relate to the kind of view of the world associated with Levels 4 and 5 thinking, as discussed above.

Annex F: The authors

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Judy Frazer-Jans is a co-principal of Sigma Consultancy. She has consulted widely to government, business, law enforcement and the Australian and US militaries. A highlight was a multi-project activity for the ADF, involving the application of discrete choice modelling to retention issues across all three Services (the "HRDSS" series of projects from 2000 to 2006), culminating in her leadership of a project that led to significant improvements in the Defence Service Home Loan scheme.



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