REALISTIC Leadership Behaviours Create Organisational Habits

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Author's Note

1.0. Introduction

"Leaders who fail to appreciate this fundamental precept of accountability must also fail to muster the profound commitment true leadership demands" (Cosgrove, 2009). Governor General Sir Peter Cosgrove, AK, MC spoke during his 2009 Boyer Lecture with regards to leadership being independent of position and with accountability at its core. Leadership behaviours inherently have a flow-on effect on the conduct of the people around them, and leadership hence has consequences. Research shows that 40% of a person's actions aren't cognitive decisions but autonomous habits and thus it can be seen that the unconscious behaviours of a leader are essential to understand (Verplanken and Wood, 2006). Habits can be positive or negative, small or large; importantly if the rules of habits are understood, they can be changed or ratified (Duhigg, 2012). There are individual habits, and organisational habits, the latter which is simply the sum of a group of individual habits; which are directly correlated with an organisation's culture. The Department of Defence's culture shifted in 2015 with the publishing of the *First Principles Review* (Andrews, 2015). One of the major themes of the review was "recurring issues with a lack of accountability, ill-defined authority, unclear allocation of responsibility and great difficulty measuring and monitoring real performance" (Department of Defence, 2015). The Department of Defence *2016-17 Annual Report* addresses the issue by implementing a leadership behaviour framework through the CLARITI acronym – Contributor, Learner, Accountable, Risk Manager, Inclusive, Team Builder and Innovator (Department of Defence, 2017). This essay will argue that Ethics and Safety should be included in the CLARITI acronym, as these two behaviours are exhibited by Defence leaders past and present. Additionally, forming the acronym REALISTIC and applying it to leadership behaviours will create organisational habits and in turn, lasting capability for the Defence enterprise.

2.0 Habits

"We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act, but a habit" (Durant, 1926). William Durant, in his research of great philosophers aptly sums Aristotle's insights on creating habits through repeated, thoughtful behaviours. Which, in turn, leads into the identity, reputation and character of a leader. "Character, as Aristotle taught, is a habit, the daily choice of right and wrong; it is a moral quality which grows to maturity in peace and is not suddenly developed on the outbreak of war" (Moran, 1987). Lord Moran was Sir Winston Churchill's Physician during the First World War. He puts forward the idea that thoughtful behaviours require a peaceful environment to develop. Furthermore, that stressful environments expose character traits but fail to build them. These two perspectives form the idea that habits need time, the right environment and thoughtful discipline to develop and become autonomous.

The central argument of Charles Duhigg's book *The Power of Habit* is that habits can be changed if we understand how they work (Duhigg, 2012). Duhigg's book is sectioned into individual, organisational and societal habits. This essay focuses on leaders behaviours within Defence and therefore, both individual and organisation habits. However, it is essential to note the same principles apply across the sections and that leaders behaviours can affect the wider community.

The Habit Loop shown is the crucial tool Duhigg uses to teach how habits form. Duhigg proposes that habits are made of a cue, routine and reward and are completed in that circular order repeatedly (Duhigg, 2012). An example of the loop is looking at your phone. The cue: your phone vibrates, routine: check your messages, reward: happiness due to receiving correspondence. By understanding and isolating the cue, it is possible to stop the habit. For the previous example, turning your phone off would stop the vibration cue and thereby prevent the habit. On an organisational level, a positive habit loop if structured effectively should develop the intended habits. For example, a non-competitive, performance-based reward system would create the guidelines for a habit loop that can pollinate throughout an organisation.

The Department of Defence is a top-down organisation where strategy, direction and executive decision flow from the Senior Leadership including Ministers. This idea of leadership behaviours and directives is echoed throughout the Defence initiative *Pathway to Change: Evolving Defence Culture*. Section 2 of the report argues that understanding the history of Defence culture is the key to future development. "We need to develop the instincts within Defence that always lead us towards the right judgements. Systems, processes and rules help, but we need to develop good habits of thinking and good reflexes in our actions so that we default to the most appropriate way of working with others and dealing with challenges" (The Defence Committee, 2012). An organisation's habits are made up of the sum of the individual's habits within the organisation. In that way, an organisation's culture is directly affected and guided by the personnel within it. "You can't order people to change. That's not how the brain works. So I decided I was going to start by focusing on one thing. If I could start disrupting the habits around one thing, it would spread throughout the entire company" (Duhigg, 2012). The previous quote was from an interview Charles Duhigg conducted with Paul O'Neill. O'Neill was the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Alcoa from 1987 to 1999 and was known for pushing worker safety over revenue. O'Neill used safety habits such as discussing safety first at all meetings which broke down communication barriers between managers and workers. The effect of O'Neill's safety leadership allowed innovation and contribution to occur all while Alcoa became one of the safest companies in the world (Duhigg, 2012). The lessons used by Paul O'Neill can be utilised and applied to the Defence Enterprise through leadership behaviours.

3.0. Ethics

There are, and have been many definitions of ethics. This essay views ethics as the process of investigating, determining and justifying values, principles and purpose (The Ethics Centre, 2019). Ethical leadership focuses on commitment, acceptance and communication of ethics; while standing fast in the face of temptations, challenges and uncertainty (Brown & Treviño, 2009). Major General Fergus McLachlan in his essay on modern military leadership, articulates that "Ethical behaviour is the basis of our authority because without it we forfeit the right to give orders to our fellow citizens" (McLachlan, 2018). Major General McLachlan is conveying that authority and rank are hollow without ethical leadership; a leader must know what is right because they are accountable. It is important to note for clarity that in the Australian Defence Force (ADF) there is a direct correlation between rank and authority, which may not always be the case in a civilian context. Simon Sinek, a professor at Colombia University, argues that leaders do not necessarily require the authority to be influential. "Leadership is a choice. It is not a rank… I know many people who are at the bottoms of organisations who have no authority and they are absolutely leaders, and this is because they have chosen to look after the person to the left of them, and they have chosen to look after the person to the right of them" (Sinek, 2014). This idea of ethics through mateship put forward by Sinek is echoed in the Defence Enterprise, and It is shown through the Army, Navy, Air Force and APS values of teamwork or loyalty. The Chief of Air Force Air Marshal Leo Davies, AO, CSC reinforces the idea of leadership behaviours at all levels of the Defence Enterprise. "Whether you are a Leading Aircraftman, a Corporal, Australian Public Service, industry or contractor, a Commanding Officer or Force Element Group Commander or the Chief - we are all responsible for demonstrating the highest standards at all times" (Davies, 2019). Ethical leadership then comes from holding yourself to the values, principles and purpose of your morals, organisation and broader culture.

Colonel Ian Langsford, during his speech and reflection on ethical challenges, puts forward the idea that there are two types of ethical frameworks, situational ethics and strategic ethics. Strategic ethics are closer to morals, the difference between right and wrong. Situational ethics apply when we allow for an adjustment to a strategic, ethical perspective in a challenging environment. Colonel Langsford goes on to say that the challenge and drift occur when the group accepts the deviation as a strategic normative behaviour (Langford, 2016). Although Colonel Langsford develops these ideas within the context of military operations, they can be and have been applied to the civilian context in the form of organisational drift. Organisational drift is seen broadly as the slow erosion of the correct process and procedure. The difference between work imagined versus work completed. This essay correlates Colonel Langsford thoughts on strategic and situational ethics with organisational drift in the context of Defence. Organisational drift is a worldwide phenomenon which the Defence community is effectively disabling through the Submarine Safety Program (SUBSAFE), Airworthiness, Crashworthiness, Seaworthiness and Landworthiness. The result of the comparison conveys the idea that ethical drift is independent of the size of the moral challenge. Whether it be in an office or the field, the actions leaders take, set the normative behaviours of the group and in turn, the culture of the organisation.

4.0. Safety

Simon Sinek, introduced previously as a Columbia University professor puts forward the idea that people create and join groups to feel physical, emotionally and psychologically safe in their environment. Sinek describes this as a "circle of safety" which enables people inside the circle to perform at higher levels without external risks (Sinek, 2014). Sinek develops the idea further by arguing that the leader of the circle sets the tone. Whether it be a project team, regiment or organisation level; and in turn determines if it will be a circle of safety.

"The standard you walk past is the standard you accept… There is no place for you amongst this band of brothers and sisters" (Morrison, 2013). Lieutenant General David Morrison, a previous Chief of Army, spoke on proactively confronting negative behaviour, otherwise tolerating said harmful behaviour as the norm. Furthermore, such conduct does not fit with Defence values and should any member of Defence exhibit negative behaviours then they should be discharged. Lieutenant General Morrison's language is similar to Sinek's in creating a safety culture through leadership behaviours to enable physical, emotional and psychological safety. Safety propagates the Defence Enterprise, from those warfighters on an operation to the support staff in an office space. Warfighters and operators of capabilities have high levels of risk to their safety and have extensive training in safety practices. However, safety doesn't stop at the warfront, and it is involved in training, post-operation and organisational policy. Simulators for example, are used in Defence for aircraft pilot training and competency upkeep. Simulators allow pilots to practice emergencies and push aircraft to their limits without risk to their safety. Safety practices in the air domain are ratified by Airworthiness, which is a Defence initiative to put safety first and ground aircraft if they are unsafe to fly. There are also initiatives for Sea, Land and crash safety to ensure the safe operation of capabilities and return of the operators. There is an emphasis in Defence on the psychological safety of warfighters post-deployment for physical rehabilitation and psychological wellbeing. After the USS Thresher submarine tragedy in 1963, the United States of America started the Submarine Safety Program (SUBSAFE), which is followed by Australia and other coalition countries. No SUBSAFE certified submarines have been lost since 1963, and adhering to SUBSAFE is critical for Australia's Future Submarine Program.

The White Ribbon Campaign supported by Defence aims to prevent men's violence against women. This campaign is especially crucial for Defence where, according to the *2017-18 Annual Report* under 45% of the APS are women and in the ADF, 17.9% are women (Department of Defence, 2018). "Within Defence, we have our own campaign where we're committed to creating a workplace culture free from bullying, discrimination, bias, and inappropriate behaviour, through our programme *Pathway to Change - Evolving Defence Culture*" (Harrod, 2015). Commander Rod Harrod spoke at the White Ribbon Defence flagship event in 2015 to show and grow support for the campaign and promote it in Defence. The Chief of the Defence Force, General Angus Campbell, AO, DSC banned certain paraphernalia that showed images of death or violence when he was the Chief of Army. In an interview with Brendan Nicholson on *Talking to the Chiefs*, General Campbell discusses the rationale for his decision. "The symbols we project are a message of who we are to everybody around us… I saw the emergence of symbols that were at odds with the relationship between a military and a democratic society which it's duty-bound to defend… it can be very easy to get into a comfortable popular-culture norm that's quite at odds with the responsibilities given to persons" (Nicholson, 2018). Proactive leadership brings organisations back to their core values. The Defence Enterprise leaders behaviours have far-reaching effects on the organisation, nationally and internationally, so the safety of Defence stakeholders is paramount.

5.0 REALISTIC Leadership Behaviours

This essay has argued so far that Ethics and Safety should be included in the CLARTI Leadership Behaviours acronym. If the new acronym is REALISTIC, it allows the application of realistic leadership behaviours. Which this essay argues is critical to create individual and organisational habits. "It is my total conviction that all the trappings of good leadership are generic and widely applicable whether you are standing in a khaki queue with your mess tins or on an automobile production line" (Cosgrove, 2009). Governor General Cosgrove is correct that good leadership comes from the same source but how a leader applies the principles realistically is different. A leader on operation may require higher safety behaviours than someone in an office space, whereas a leader in a diverse office team must seek out ideas that people could be holding back to innovate effectively.

Furthermore, unplanned events may require the leader to make ethical decisions that affect others with no clear answer. "The profession of arms is unique because of the importance of its task, the moral and ethical dedication required to achieve it, and the lethal nature of its capabilities. Soldiers have many tasks outside combat operations but, ultimately, the core purpose and reason the Army exists is to protect the nation through the application of lethal force. If required, soldiers kill – and may die – to achieve the mission. The moral implications could not be greater, and thus, they are compelled to dedicate themselves to a constant re-examination of what it means to be a professional soldier" (Commonwealth of Australia, 2014). Leaders in the profession of arms must be held to achievable and realistic leadership behaviours that are strategically possible without risking the safety of their group and the goals of an operation. General Campbell, in his interview with Brendan Nicholson on Talking to the Chiefs, further discusses the significant effect of the ADF on operations. "They project to local communities, villages, people in desperate circumstances, the weak, the wounded and the vulnerable, who are the norm of the operational areas in which we are active, a message that we are Australian, we stand for law, and we stand for the protection of the innocent, and the vulnerable, and indeed, the care for the wounded" (Nicholson, 2018). Being a leader can require going against a norm for the greater good of many and requires realistic decisions.

Pathway to Change: Evolving Defence Culture is Defence's guidelines for modern organisational culture. "Our work in implementing this strategy starts with accepting individual responsibility for one's behaviour, assisting others to live the culture, and putting the onus on leaders to be exemplars of positive and visible change at all times" (The Defence Committee, 2012). Part of the initiative aims to stop victimisation from reporting harmful behaviour, align values and practices to articulate the core intent of Defence, as well as developing appropriate habits for unplanned situations. How to apply realistic leadership behaviours in every workplace across Defence is beyond the scope of this essay. However, it does argue that realistic leadership behaviours need to be used dependant on the leaders situation to create organisational habits. This could be achieved through a discussion about what leadership behaviours from the acronym are most applicable their workplace, and then how the leaders could exhibit those behaviours.

6.0 Conclusion

This essay has argued that Ethics and Safety should be included in the CLARITI Defence Leadership Behaviours acronym. It has discussed habits, importantly considering time and environment when developing habits. The essay has argued that ethics is established throughout the Defence enterprise and through Defence policy initiatives. The essay discusses safety in Defence and the broad effect safety considerations have on operators, capabilities, the organisation and the wider community. Finally, the essay has put forward the idea of applying the REALISTIC acronym to create realistic leadership behaviours to suit the environment of the leader. Ingoing Governor General David Hurley, AC, DSC, FTSE on his definition of the ANZAC legacy "When you give us a job to do, we'll do our best whether we succeed or fail. When you give us a job to do, we'll do it in a manner that will make you proud. When we're doing that job, we'll look after our mates, and in particular, when we come home, we'll continue to look after them" (Hurley, 2019). REALISTIC Leadership behaviours are exhibited by Defence leaders past and present, and those leaders are continuing to exhibit those behaviours in the broader community.

7.0 References

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