

The Managerial Culture of Sergeants in the Armed Forces: Decision-making under Uncertainty and the Weight of Responsibility

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This article delves into the managerial culture of sergeants in the armed forces, highlighting their unique position within the military hierarchy. Through a comprehensive examination, the study sheds light on sergeants' adaptive leadership paradigms, decision-making processes under uncertainty, the profound weight of their responsibilities, and the physiological influences on their behavior during high-stress situations. Drawing from empirical studies, the article offers a holistic understanding of the factors shaping the actions and decisions of sergeants, with implications for leadership development and training programs within the military.

Keywords: sergeants, managerial culture, military leadership, decision-making, transformational leadership, transactional leadership, moral efficacy, dopaminergic behavior, stress, military training.

Introduction

The role of sergeants in the military is often characterized by a delicate balance of leadership and followership. Situated uniquely within the military hierarchy, sergeants are entrusted with the dual responsibility of translating officers' strategic vision into tactical actions and ensuring the welfare of the enlisted personnel under their charge. Their managerial culture, thus, becomes a vital component in ensuring the effectiveness and efficiency of military operations. The dynamic environments in which military activities transpire, coupled with the inherent risks and uncertainties, further accentuate the importance of understanding the sergeants' managerial perspectives. In this context, various elements such as the organizational paradigms they operate

within, decision-making under conditions of uncertainty and life-threatening situations, the profound weight of their responsibilities, and the physiological underpinnings of their behavior come into play.

Objective

The primary aim of this article is to explore and elucidate the managerial culture of sergeants in the armed forces, focusing on their decision-making processes, leadership styles, and the challenges and responsibilities unique to their position. By drawing from empirical studies and relevant literature, we seek to provide a comprehensive understanding of the factors that influence sergeants' actions and decisions, ultimately offering insights that could enhance leadership development and training programs within the military.

Organizational Paradigm of Sergeants in the Military

Sergeants occupy a unique position in the military hierarchy. Serving as the link between commissioned officers and enlisted personnel, they play a crucial role in translating strategic decisions into tactical actions. According to Shamir et al. (2000), military leadership, especially among non-commissioned officers like sergeants, encompasses both transformational and transactional styles. Transformational leadership inspires subordinates through vision and charisma, while transactional leadership focuses on rules, tasks, and rewards. As sergeants engage with their subordinates, they often employ a blend of these styles, using inspiration and motivation, but also emphasizing discipline and the importance of completing tasks.

Decision-making under Uncertainty and Life-threatening Situations

The nature of military operations means that decisions often need to be made rapidly, with incomplete information, and under stressful conditions. Johnston et al. (2013) emphasized the importance of training for decision-making under such conditions. Their research highlighted how military personnel, including sergeants, are trained to reduce the effects of stress on decision-making, using techniques such as

visualization, rehearsal, and scenario planning. Moreover, the military instills a decision-making framework that emphasizes assessing the situation, considering options, predicting outcomes, and then deciding and acting—often in a matter of seconds.

The Weight of Responsibility

Leading in a military context carries a unique set of responsibilities. Not only are sergeants accountable for mission success, but they also bear the responsibility for the safety and well-being of their subordinates. A concept relevant to this is "moral efficacy," which Hannah et al. (2009) explored in their work. Moral efficacy is the belief in one's capability to mobilize motivation, cognitive resources, and courses of action to achieve moral outcomes. For sergeants, this means balancing mission objectives with ethical considerations, ensuring that decisions are not only tactically sound but also morally justified.

The Role of Dopaminergic Behavior

Understanding the role of neurotransmitters like dopamine is essential when considering the behavior and decision-making of individuals in high-stress situations, such as combat. Petzold et al. (2010) explored the influence of stress on feedback-based learning tasks and highlighted the role of dopamine. Under stressful conditions, an individual's dopaminergic system can be activated, influencing focus, decision-making, and behavior. For sergeants, recognizing these physiological responses and their potential effects on themselves and their subordinates is crucial, ensuring that decisions made under stress are still well-considered.

Discussion

The pivotal role of sergeants in the military cannot be understated. As our exploration reveals, their position at the juncture of strategic leadership and ground-level execution demands a managerial culture that's both adaptive and robust. The multitudinal responsibilities they

bear and the unique challenges they face necessitate a deeper examination of their leadership paradigms.

Shamir et al.'s (2000) perspective on the dichotomy of transformational and transactional leadership styles provides a lens through which we can understand the diverse expectations placed on sergeants. While transformational leadership is crucial for motivating and inspiring troops, especially in challenging circumstances, the inherent structure and discipline of the military require transactional leadership, emphasizing order, procedure, and task completion. The sergeants' ability to seamlessly shift between these styles, sometimes within the span of a single operation, underscores their versatility and the depth of their training.

Military operations, by nature, are shrouded in uncertainty. The emphasis on decision-making under these conditions, as highlighted by Johnston et al. (2013), is of paramount importance. Sergeants are not just making decisions for mission success; they are making choices that directly impact the lives of their subordinates. The rapid, yet calculated, decision-making process they employ is a testament to their rigorous training and their profound understanding of the complexities of warfare. Furthermore, their ability to make these decisions while managing their own stress and the stress of their subordinates speaks to their resilience and psychological fortitude.

The moral implications of leadership within the military sphere are vast. As discussed by Hannah et al. (2009), the concept of moral efficacy is especially relevant for sergeants. Beyond tactical decisions, sergeants often grapple with ethical dilemmas where they must balance mission objectives against the potential harm to civilians or even their own troops. This moral balancing act, coupled with the responsibility for the lives under their command, adds another layer of complexity to their role. Recognizing and addressing this weight is crucial for the psychological well-being of sergeants and for ensuring ethical conduct on the battlefield.

The role of dopaminergic behavior in high-stress situations offers a fascinating intersection of neuroscience and military leadership. The insights provided by Petzold et al. (2010) indicate that there are biological factors at play that can influence decision-making under stress. For sergeants, understanding these physiological responses can be

invaluable. Recognizing when they or their subordinates might be under extreme stress and making decisions influenced by heightened dopamine levels can be the difference between a successful operation and a costly mistake.

In analyzing the managerial culture of sergeants in the armed forces, it becomes evident that their role is multi-faceted and demanding. From navigating complex organizational paradigms to making split-second decisions under extreme stress, sergeants exhibit a blend of tactical acumen, moral fortitude, and psychological resilience. Enhancing our understanding of these elements not only honors their service but can also provide insights to refine leadership training and support structures within the military. Future research could delve deeper into each of these aspects, drawing from interdisciplinary fields to further enrich our understanding of this pivotal military role.

Conclusions

Sergeants in the armed forces serve as the linchpin between strategic leadership and ground-level execution, a position that carries with it significant responsibilities and challenges. From our exploration, several key conclusions can be drawn:

- **Adaptive Leadership Paradigms.** Sergeants must seamlessly navigate between transformational and transactional leadership styles, striking a balance between motivating their troops and ensuring discipline and task completion. Their ability to do so is crucial for both mission success and troop morale.
- **Decision-making Under Uncertainty.** The unpredictable nature of military operations necessitates that sergeants develop a robust decision-making framework. Their training prepares them to make rapid, calculated decisions, often under extreme stress, considering both the mission's objectives and the safety of their subordinates.
- **Moral Responsibility.** Beyond tactical and strategic considerations, sergeants grapple with profound ethical dimensions in their roles. Their decisions often carry moral

implications, where they must weigh mission objectives against potential harms, emphasizing the importance of moral efficacy in their training and support.

- **Physiological Factors.** Understanding the biological underpinnings of behavior and decision-making, particularly under stress, can offer valuable insights for sergeants. Recognizing and managing the effects of neurotransmitters like dopamine during high-stress situations can be pivotal for operational success and the well-being of sergeants and their subordinates.

In essence, the managerial culture of sergeants in the armed forces is multifaceted, encompassing organizational, psychological, ethical, and physiological dimensions. Recognizing and addressing these elements is vital for enhancing leadership development programs, providing adequate support for sergeants, and ultimately ensuring the effectiveness of military operations. Future endeavors in this field should continue to examine the interplay of these factors, drawing from interdisciplinary studies to further refine our understanding and support of this critical military role.

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