

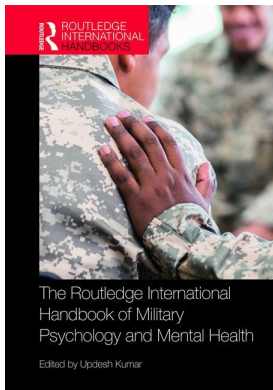
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SHAPING MILITARY LEADERS

Role of character strengths and virtues

Archana, Samridhi Ahuja, and Updesh Kumar

Leadership has been defined as a process through which an individual influences others to achieve a goal by equipping them with a purpose and course to help in realizing a common mission (Northouse, 2007). It is illustrated by varied demands that are placed on the leaders in multiple settings to bring forth their attributes, capabilities and experiences to exercise control over the unfolding of the vision and mission of an organization. Leadership then is considered one of the key components that predict and facilitate organizational success. The leadership effectiveness criterion depends on multiple factors that include the performance and growth of team members, their capability to deal with setbacks, accomplishment of set goals, contentment and commitment of group members to goals, psychological well-being of the team and the number of tasks performed and attained successfully by both the leaders as well as their followers (Yukl, 1989).

Leaders don't function in a void. They require a set of adherents who support them in leading towards a desired goal. They boost the confidence level of their followers, make them more creative and enhance their risk-taking ability. Such leaders are likely to bring changeover processes in the organization by providing vision, motivation and intellectual stimulation to the team members. The effectiveness of any leader depends upon the leadership style being followed by the leaders. Leadership is about managing people who bring change and compel transformations in organizations. According to Kotter (2001), both leadership and management are 'complementary systems of action' wherein management focuses on handling adversities and leadership relates to dealing with change. It is difficult to have a precise definition of leadership as the concept has been defined by varied researchers in their own ways. Kouzes and Posner (2002) stated that leadership is a process wherein an ordinary person generates the finest for themselves as well as others. They further suggested that leaders share certain characteristics like being reliable, enabling others to act and also appreciating the hard work put in by the followers.

Any organization, in order to flourish, requires a leader with the capability of inspiring and influencing people. However, when approaching the concept of 'military leadership', it becomes imperative to acknowledge that military leadership strategies qualitatively differ from leadership strategies in any other organization. Military organization operates in two exclusively different environmental conditions, i.e., peace and war. In peace conditions, the goals of the organization are different as the environment is stable and reliable. In the peace environment, the leadership is focused on providing training to the troops. The leadership then follows a standardized norm of rules and regulations and a systematic approach for resolving any organizational issues

(Kieser & Ebers, 2006). On the other hand, a war environment witnesses a different leadership model at play. Depending on the intensity of the conflict, the organization may become chaotic, which results in decreased compliance with the pre-defined bureaucratic organizational norms and standards. It is during this chaos that the personal style of the leaders emerges with spontaneity (Weber, 2009). Leadership remains the most important parameter that can turn the path of a conflicting situation and change losses into victory, be it in a conventional war or an operation. Leaders intend to channel the anxieties of the troops into passion to succeed and utilize the group energy to achieve the objectives of the mission (Rothkopf, 2012).

Military leadership demands certain attributes, which involves having an ability to judge situations, mental flexibility, creativity for doing something innovative, maintaining healthy interpersonal relations with others and possessing military-specific knowledge and skills for attaining organizational goals. The entire process of influencing subordinates builds morale and unit esprit de corps, improving facilities, training as a unit and enhancing resources that require a good amount of time on the part of leader. The time, effort and interest invested by the leaders towards their subordinates further add to developing hope, trust and confidence in relations.

Just as the concept of leadership is not restricted to a particular organization, so are the leadership theories. There are varied leadership theories that are in place at a given time in the organizations. The next section aims to explore some of these leadership theories.

Leadership theories

Leadership behaviours or styles that relate to the basic psychological needs of followers tend to produce positive behaviour outcomes, whereas a lack of fulfilment of psychological needs is likely to produce negative outcomes (Baard, Deci & Ryan, 2004). A leadership style is considered healthy if it is able to promote the needs of autonomy, relatedness and competence within employees. Autonomy is when individuals choose to engage in a particular behaviour which is in accordance with their values and reflects an individual's interest. Relatedness is defined as a sense of connection with others, a feeling of belongingness to a group or an organization. Competence relates to a sense of effectiveness and proficiency in one's work (Ryan & Deci, 2002). After these basic psychological needs are satisfied, leaders are able to create an environment that enables employees to perform effectively and experience higher job satisfaction (Baard, 2002). Actions undertaken by leaders to promote satisfaction of basic employee needs make the organization a more conducive place for growth of employees and their well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2002). Leadership theories focus on ways to improve employee motivation and satisfaction. Several theories have emerged in the past. This section will look at various leadership theories that contribute to employee well-being and growth.

Charismatic leadership theory

According to the charismatic leadership theory, a charismatic leader portrays unorthodox behaviours relating to the status quo, expresses a clear vision for the organization and facilitates the employees to share and participate in achieving the vision (Conger & Kanungo, 1987). Over time, two theories of such leadership have been proposed; the attribution theory (Conger & Kanungo, 1987) and the self-concept theory (House, 1977). The attribution theory of charismatic leadership defines charisma as an attribution that employees or followers make based on the various behaviours the leader exhibits (Conger & Kanungo, 1987). The self-concept model focuses on the observed leadership behaviours that the leader exhibits rather than any attributions made (House, 1977). A charismatic leader motivates his employees through various strategies that

involve the leader's capability to boost the level of satisfaction of the employees, improve their levels of judgment and motivate the employees to let go of personal interests in favour of the interests of the organization (Gilbert & Kelloway, 2014). This type of leadership tends to understate the value of extrinsic rewards while applauding the idea of work being a reward in itself, thereby augmenting the intrinsic value of work. In order to enhance the intrinsic value of work, the leader sets forth goals that are consistent with the value of his employees and propels them to work towards realizing those goals. Charismatic leaders promote autonomy by setting goals that are in line with the value of their employees and by giving them a sense of purpose and meaning. When the employees perceive the goals of the organization as compatible with their own values, they are more inclined to self-regulate their behaviours, which in turn contributes to improving their self-concept (Shamir, House, & Arthur, 1993) and promoting a sense of connectedness with the group. Charismatic leaders also come across as sensitive to the needs of employees, leading to a positive relationship between the leader and the employee (Barling, Christie, & Hopton, 2010). The self-concept theory of charismatic leadership posits that charismatic leaders tend to have higher expectations for their employees and reflect a confidence in their employees to fulfil the goals that they set out to achieve, leading to an increase in employee self-efficacy and confidence.

Authentic leadership theory

Authentic leadership has been defined as 'a pattern of leader behaviour that draws upon and promotes both positive psychological capacities and a positive ethical climate. Authentic leadership fosters greater self-awareness and positive self-development' (Walumbwa, Avolio, Gardner, Wernsing, & Peterson, 2008). Authentic leadership is composed of four components: self-awareness, relational transparency, balanced processing of information and positive moral perspective. Self-awareness is defined as the leader's knowledge of their own weaknesses as well as one's views about oneself. Relational transparency refers to the ability of the leader to share their true self with the employees without any façade or frills. Balanced processing encompasses processing of the relevant information before reaching a conclusion to make a decision and examining information that is not consistent with one's perceptions. Internalized moral perspective talks about regulation of behaviour guided by the moral values of the individual (Walumbwa et al., 2008).

Authentic leaders act as role models for the employees, which serves as motivation for them to exhibit authentic behaviours themselves (Ilies, Morgeson, & Nahrgang, 2005). Authentic leadership promotes organizational identification, as the employees tend to personally identify with the leaders. This personal identification tends to extend into organizational identification, as the leaders reflect the value of the organization. Identification with both the leader and the organizational values leads to establishing a sense of meaning for the employees. This type of leadership promotes relatedness as it strives to build open, trusting and cooperative relations among the employees and leaders. The trusting and cooperative relationship that is built between the employees and the leaders also helps in enhancing the competence of the employees by endorsing the unrestricted flow of knowledge and information that contributes to boosting the employee performance, thereby providing the employees with further opportunities to learn and enhance their skill sets (Walumbwa, Luthans, Avey, & Oke, 2011).

Leader-member exchange theory

This theory proposed by Dansereau, Graen, and Haga (1975) stresses the role of the interactions between the leaders and the employees, labelled exchanges. The relationship that each employee shares with the leader is characterized by a 'dyad' and therefore each employee shares a dyadic

relationship with the leader. Within this dyadic relationship, each member possesses the power to influence the behaviour of the other member.

Relationships that are shared amongst the members of the dyad determine the work outcome and environment. When the relationship is high quality, there exists mutual respect, trust and responsibility towards each other and the organization. A low-quality relationship is characterized by distrust, lack of respect and poor sense of responsibility (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). This theory acknowledges the autonomy needs of the employees by sharing a high-quality relationship with the employees, where they are trusted to manage and be responsible for their assignments and duties. High-quality leader-member exchange (LMX) relationships also tend to promote relatedness, as the relationship in itself is characterized by respect and trust towards each other, which encourages the partners to do well and go beyond their personal interests to meet the needs of the organization (Howell & Hall-Merenda, 1999). The supportive relationship that employees and leaders share with each other tends to facilitate the process of accomplishing the goals of the organization, thereby promoting competence among employees.

Transformational leadership theory

In the recent past, leadership paradigms have been broadened with the emergence of transactional and transformational leadership, which are considered the most effective styles of leadership. Bass (1985) categorized these two styles of leadership, proposing that transactional leadership depends upon a chain of exchanges and negotiations between both leaders and their followers. Although this kind of leadership focuses on individual as well as organizational objectives, it fails to enhance the capabilities of the followers. Transactional leadership is composed of two important dimensions: contingent reward and management by exception. In the case of contingent reward, the relationship between leader and follower is based on a kind of bargain between the two, where the leaders promote and support good work by their followers in the form of encouragement and promotions and rebuke their undesirable behaviour. Management by exception relates to the kind of relationship wherein leaders intrude by providing negative feedback to their followers only in situations when followers divert from their goals (Bass, 1985). On the other hand, transformational leadership is practiced more frequently in organizations, as it results in better, flourishing output at the workplace. It moves a step ahead of the basic principles of bargaining. Transformational leadership refers to a process which brings about key changes in attitudes of employees and builds a sense of commitment for the organization's goals and mission (Yukl, 2001). These leaders hold an optimistic outlook and motivate their followers to attain the goals of the organization. They foster positive changes at the workplace by moving beyond their self-interest and widening the scope of their followers' growth and development. Some of the traits unique to transformational leaders include: (i) idealized influence that reflects elevated levels of willpower, self sacrifice and a clear future vision, stating that the benefits of the group are much more essential than the benefits of an individual; (ii) inspirational motivation that offers challenges to the employees for working together as a team; (iii) intellectual stimulation, supporting resourcefulness and creativity in looking at things from different perspectives; and (iv) individualized consideration which relates to coaching, mentoring and guiding followers by understanding their feelings to prosper and grow in the organization (Pearce & Sims, 2002). All these traits contribute to a more vigorous, dependable and trustworthy leadership. Such leaders gain respect from their followers by fulfilling their need to feel significant and worthy towards the progress and advancement of the organization.

Research has shown that all these traits of transformational leadership are found to be associated with the objective as well as the subjective determinants of performance (Lowe, Kroeck, & Sivasubramiam, 1996). Scholarly views have revealed that although transformational leadership

is not a substitute for transactional leadership, it adds to it by motivating employees to give their best by working hard and executing more towards attaining their goal (Howell & Avolio, 1993). It takes into account the aspects related to role modelling, maintaining interpersonal relationships with the employees, work-directed approaches and critical thinking (Singh & Krishnan, 2007). It also focuses on enhancing the moral values of the followers. One of the prerequisites of transformational leadership is to provide a focused vision that enhances performance at the workplace and helps in sustaining motivation in the long run.

Transformational leadership is found to be positively related to job satisfaction and organizational commitment. Within the literature, it has been observed that there are certain variables that tend to moderate the relationship between transformational leadership and followers' organizational commitment. These include culture, structural distance between transformational leaders and followers and psychological empowerment (Avolio, Zhu, Koh, & Bhatia, 2004). Leaders serve the base for organizational success, express a compelling vision for the followers, operate as a captivating role model, promote goal-setting behaviour and motivate performance by offering individualized support and intellectual stimulation to the employees (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Moorman & Fetter, 1990). These leaders make their employees understand the importance of the desired goals along with the need to shift their focus from self interest to collective interest. They also provide intellectual inspiration to their followers by boosting their thinking processes and encouraging them to solve problems in an innovative manner.

Transformational leaders tend to depend on intellectual stimulation which encourages autonomy among the employees as they learn to take decisions for themselves and strategize according to the needs of the situation (Barling et al., 2010). It also fulfils the need for relatedness of the employees by promoting leader-employee relationships marked by mutual respect, support and care. Communication of a shared vision also plays an important role in creating a sense of connectedness. Transformational leaders tend to present their employees with challenges and goals that are achievable so as to satisfy their need of competence (Gilbert & Kelloway, 2014). Transformational leaders, then, play an important role in influencing employee behaviour so as to facilitate the achievement of organizational goals and values. However, leadership behaviour is not limited to employee motivation; it extends to the ethics and values of the leader which contribute to creating an authentic workplace and flourishing organizations.

Ethical leadership at workplace

Every organization is composed of both external and internal good (MacIntyre, 1985). External goods are observed in the form of wealth, possessions, assets or status, and internal goods take into account things like seeking pleasure at work, feeling of pride in achievements and job satisfaction. A leader giving immense importance to external goods builds immoral organizational character (Moore, 2005). In contrast, valuing internal goods leads to a virtuous organizational character that contributes to flourishing organizations (Wright & Goodstein, 2007).

Leaders engaging in ethical leadership behaviour serve as virtuous agents in enhancing an ethical climate (Flynn, 2008). Ethical leadership relates to 'the demonstration of normatively appropriate conduct through personal actions and interpersonal relationships, and the promotion of such conduct to followers through two-way communication, reinforcement, and decision-making' (Brown, Trevino & Harrison, 2005, p. 120). Ethical leadership promotes an ethical climate, influences the attitude of members of the organization towards work, creates job satisfaction and builds attachments and commitment towards the workplace.

Leaders following an ethical code of conduct in organizations serve as role models and attachment figures for encouraging character among subordinates. According to social learning

theorists, individuals' behaviour is strongly swayed by observing role models, as they learn suitable behaviour by discerning what is being rewarded and what actions are discarded (Bandura, 1986). Power and status are two factors that promote credibility and attractiveness. Leaders high on these factors strongly influence members within organizations. The attachment theory of leadership proposes that leaders promote relational attachments between themselves and organizational members. Relational attachments relates to the emotional connection formed between the members of an organization wherein the members interact in close association with each other, thereby satisfying each other's needs (Davidovitz, Mikulincer, Shaver, Izsak & Popper, 2007). Leaders also stimulate relational attachments through thoughtful and honest aspects of ethical leadership behaviour.

Ethical leaders operate keeping in mind the best interests of their subordinates which involves displaying faithful behaviour, taking care of employees' needs, making reasonable decisions and avoiding violations of ethical standards (McCloskey, 2008). The ethical climate at the workplace is mainly shaped by organizational leaders (Schminke, Ambrose & Neubaum, 2005). Organizations also support leaders in ascertaining and upholding an ethical climate, putting into practice ethical codes, audits and standardized procedures (Weaver, Trevino & Cochran, 1999). Ethical codes and principles are mostly revealed in actions rather than words.

Leaders play a vital role in shaping ethical climate, and this is illustrated in their behaviour and interactions (Dickson, Smith, Grojean & Ehrhart, 2001). Due to the power and status in the organization, leaders contribute to enhancing ethical behaviour by communicating ethical expectations, highlighting and adhering to policies and practices that strengthen ethical behaviour and holding subordinates responsible for ethical actions (Brown & Trevino, 2006). Leaders also promote interpersonal relations in terms of forming strong associations and bonds with members (Davidovitz et al., 2007). Leaders displaying ethical leadership behaviour tend to model suitable behaviour in a consistent, reasonable and honest manner. Such behaviour diminishes the level of anxiety associated with uncertainty in ethical situations by being thoughtful, understanding, truthful and reliable and by holding high ethical values and principles (Trevino, Brown & Hartman, 2003). The culture and climate of any organization influence the ethical decision-making, behaviour, perception and attachment of the employees towards their jobs. Research findings support the influence of ethical climate on organizational commitment and job satisfaction (Martin & Cullen, 2006). Organizations characterized by ethical conduct, trust, care for each other's needs and social bonds tend to keep employees happy and committed to their jobs.

Understanding military as an organization

Military life is physically, mentally, psychologically and socially challenging. Military personnel are often exposed to numerous operational stressors that involve a wide range of traumatic incidents, extended deployments, fellow soldiers' injuries and death, unpredictable working conditions, high levels of uncertainty and harsh environmental conditions. These stressors can lead to long-term psychological problems like post-traumatic stress disorder, depression or anxiety, which are likely to influence the well-being and productivity of soldiers. Bliese and Castro (2003) have proposed the Soldier Adaptation Model (SAM) that presents an array of potential effects of stressors on military personnel. This model takes into account three elements: stressors, strains and outcomes. Stressors are those factors in the environment that produce demand on the soldiers. These stressors include factors like operating in extreme conditions, separation from family, physical threat and extended working hours. Strain refers to the collection of negative responses to stressors and includes aspects related to memory dysfunctions, frustration, emotional fatigue,

sleep disturbance, alcohol dependence and withdrawal. Outcomes relate to the end result of strain resulting in illness, diminished performance and lack of motivation.

The military is a high-risk organization and the soldiers serving in this organization have to face unpredictable, difficult and stressful situations in routine life. That means these soldiers are required to deal with situations occurring unexpectedly, with unknown content, where the outcomes of actions are unforeseen (Torgersen, Steiro & Sæverot, 2013). Quality of life for military personnel largely resides in their ability to adjust to multiple demands in the organization. Military life demands soldiers respond to stressors effectively, and this promotes their level of adjustment and operational effectiveness. The basic training imparted to the soldiers emphasizes making them physically, mentally and psychologically resilient in order to withstand constant pressures. Military operations also require their leaders to be well equipped with skills and abilities to cope with dangerous and difficult situations. Such leaders play a vital role in developing soldiers' morale and character. The foundation of military leadership relies on basic pillars of values, beliefs, character and ethics. Developing these pillars requires robust training which brings success and achievement in the organization. Military leadership is a process of applying these core beliefs, values and knowledge to attain military-specific operations.

Positive psychology of character strengths and virtues

Positive psychology emphasises making our lives worth living (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). According to Peterson (2006), positive psychology takes into account: (i) positive subjective experiences, including happiness and satisfaction; (ii) positive individual traits covering character strengths and virtues; and (iii) positive institutions involving families and organizations. Positive institutions facilitate positive traits, like character strengths and virtues, which in turn cultivate positive experiences (Peterson 2006). Character can be thought of as, 'those impenetrable and habitual qualities within individuals, and applicable to organizations that both constrain and lead them to desire and pursue personal and societal good' (Wright & Lauer, 2013, p. 27). Researchers have argued that behaviours stimulating high character assist in attaining greater products and profits (Peterson & Park, 2006). Peterson and Seligman's (2004) concept of character strengths offer a strong theoretical platform for shaping characters and virtues in military populations. The authors suggest that all these virtues must be present at above threshold levels for a person to be deemed to have a 'good character'. Good character does not denote having a single attribute; rather, it takes into account a collection of positive strengths. Peterson and Seligman (2004, p. 74) propose that character strengths 'embody values when the behaviour they organize and direct becomes habitual'. Values are the 'conceptions of the desirable that influence the way people select action and evaluate events' (Schwartz & Bilsky, 1987, p. 550).

The work environment is one of the most important places for fostering application of character strengths (Park & Peterson 2007). Character strengths represent varying components of good character. Peterson and Seligman (2004) have established a classification of 24 such character strengths divided into six virtues: (i) wisdom and knowledge, including creativity, curiosity, love of learning, open-mindedness and perspective; (ii) courage, covering bravery, integrity, persistence and vitality; (iii) humanity, taking account of love, kindness and social intelligence; (iv) justice, involving citizenship, fairness and leadership; (v) temperance, composed of self-control, prudence, forgiveness and humility and (vi) transcendence, incorporating spirituality, hope, appreciation of beauty and excellence, gratitude and humour. Each of these character strengths has strong linkages with emotional, psychological, physical, moral, spiritual and organizational outcomes. Research findings by Gentry, Cullen, Sosik, Leopold and Tonidandel (2013) assert that some character strengths like integrity, bravery and social intelligence reflect organisational effectiveness

and prosperity. A few other researchers have established an association between self-control and dynamic interpersonal relations. According to Peterson and Seligman (2004), a majority of people have between three and seven core or 'signature' strengths. Signature strengths are possessed by individuals and are found to be related to overall positive experiences like life satisfaction, well-being and meaning in life (Wood, Linly, Maltby, Kashdan & Hurling, 2011). Such positive experience at the work front is enhanced when individual signature strengths are applied in the organization.

Military leadership demands robustness in order to cope effectively with complex and tough situations. That means these leaders have to be resilient to perform in military combat operations. Since it is possible to develop resilience, the same is applicable for character strengths as well. The principles of positive psychology are very much pertinent to the military organization as they focus upon the culture that promotes personal growth. Personal growth can be enhanced through developing character strengths. To this end, a military leader plays a significant role in influencing a soldier's morale and character.

Role of character strengths and virtues in shaping military leaders

There has been very limited research that has examined the role of character strengths in military organizations. In one of the studies conducted by Boe, Bang and Nilson (2015), nine character strengths, namely leadership, integrity, persistence, bravery, citizenship, open-mindedness, social intelligence, self-regulation and creativity, have been observed to be the most important character strengths for military officers. According to Gayton and Kehoe (2015), people high in character strengths reflect integrity, a strong work ethic, an innovative and intelligent bent of mind and the ability to work in a group.

Strength refers to a 'natural capacity for behaving, thinking and feeling in a way that allows optimal functioning and performance in the pursuit of valued outcomes' (Linley & Harrington, 2006, p. 39). In other words, psychological strengths relate to the 'ways of behaving, thinking or feeling that an individual has a natural capacity for, enjoys doing and which allows the individual to achieve optimal functioning while they pursue valued outcomes' (Govindji & Linley, 2007, p. 143). According to Zenger and Folkman (2002), successful leaders are defined not by the absence of their weaknesses, but rather by the presence of their clear strengths.

Today military organizations have been very focused and attentive in shaping the character of the leaders, since they serve as a foundation element for combat operations (Michelson, 2013). Several military doctrines in different countries, including the United States, New Zealand, Australia and Canada, have emphasised the role of character strengths in leadership. Military organizations all over the world share certain basic core military values. For instance, the U.S. Army focuses on core values of honour, respect, selfless service, courage, loyalty, duty and integrity in its leaders (Exum & Coll, 2008). Among British forces, the six core values of loyalty, integrity, courage, discipline, respect for others and selfless commitment are considered vital for effective leadership. The Norwegian Army focuses on the core values of respect, responsibility and courage (Dyrhaug Moe, 2015), whereas Argentinean military doctrine emphasises specific traits like consistency, audacity, composure, energy, initiative and honesty in its leaders. Peterson and Seligman's (2004) character strengths reveal that most of the military core values mentioned above are shared among the 24 character strengths as put forth by them. The Australian Defence Force highlights that leadership is based on character and competence. It states that 'character, built on an individual's values and attitudes, includes things like social capacity, interpersonal skills, personal integrity, conscientiousness, self-assurance and trustworthiness' (Australian Defence Doctrine Publication, 2012, p. 14). The U.S. Army's leadership doctrine places emphasis on three

qualities of leaders: character, presence and intellect (Army Doctrine Reference Publication, 2012). According to this doctrine, 'character' is described as 'a person's moral and ethical qualities, [which] helps a leader determine what is right and gives a leader motivation to do what is appropriate, regardless of the circumstances or consequences' (p. 15).

In modern-day society, the media is flooded with news that shows lapses in ethical standards, alterations of truth and diminishing humanity and value systems, causing moral, emotional and psychological damage to people's well-being. Under such circumstances, it becomes important for the military to take the initiative in empowering subordinates to build character and core values. Placing character strengths into practice in military organization reflects successful accomplishment of a mission in a positive direction. Military leaders exhibiting character instil strengths, passion, motivation, zest and ethical principles in their subordinates. In recent years, researchers have shifted their interest to character-based leadership processes that portray the role of leaders in lifting the level of moral, emotional, social, psychological and spiritual development of employees, thereby strengthening the ethical climates in organizations. Recognising one's character strengths, promoting them and living in harmony with them to attain a higher purpose leads to attaining meaning in life. Character strengths at work result in job satisfaction, pleasure, engagement and meaning at work (Littman-Ovadia & Steger, 2010). At times the prevailing norms at the workplace may not promote behaviour that matches with individuals' traits. Therefore, under such circumstances, the applicability of character strengths of an individual depends upon the situational factors.

Excellent leadership is all about influencing the members of the organization in a positive direction. The way leaders present themselves leaves a huge impact on members. Leaders transmit character through their actions, behaviours and ethical code of conduct. Among all styles of leadership, transformational leadership has been found to be most effective in influencing the members of any organization, be it an industrial organization, military establishment, educational setting or any religious organization all over the world (Sosik & Jung, 2018). Transformational leadership involves four kinds of behaviours: inspirational motivation, idealized influence, intellectual stimulation and individualized consideration. These behaviours strengthen faith and confidence among subordinates, promote them to work efficiently on missions, increase their work output and provide happiness, contentment and satisfaction with the leader (Bass, 1985).

Research scholars have proposed that the character strengths of bravery, social intelligence, integrity and self-control can be attained by exhibiting behaviours associated with transformational leadership (Gentry et al., 2013). Bravery relates to not giving up during threat, challenge or any complexities; having the courage to raise one's voice for what is right even when others show resistance and operating on one's belief system even if it does not match with others. This definition looks beyond physical courage and accounts for courage at the moral level, laying emphasis on what is right and acceptable in one's professional and personal life (Park, Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Bravery underlies the significance of being fearless and bold for successful attainment of mission-specific goals. Bravery is exhibited through idealized influence and intellectual stimulation behaviours. Bravery facilitates leaders to operate constantly with their values and a strong belief system and motivate others to attain organizational expectations. It inspires subordinates to contribute willingly and enthusiastically in producing high-quality performance in the organization.

Social intelligence relates to understanding one's emotions, taking care of others' feelings and intentions, holding respect for self and others and valuing and treating others with humility and dignity. Social intelligence is transmitted through the display of idealized influence, inspirational motivation and individualized consideration behaviours. Leaders high in social intelligence are highly equipped to understand the emotions, sentiments and feelings of their subordinates. These

leaders also have the knack of better identifying the potential and aptitude of their subordinates. Such personal involvement of leaders inspires subordinates to put in more efforts towards the attainment of goals.

Integrity refers to the real projection of oneself without any deception and assuming responsibility for one's emotions and behaviour (Park, Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Integrity means having coherence in one's words and actions and being honest, clear and genuine in behaviour and trustworthy in establishing human bonds. Integrity is transmitted through the display of idealized influence behaviour. Integrity relates to sincerity, truthfulness and authenticity. Leaders high in integrity have strong moral principles and are trustworthy, honest and kind. They take responsibility for their actions. Idealized influence reflects high core values like being true to oneself and others, and leaders' integrity can be manifested to subordinates through the display of idealized influence.

Self-control refers to regulating one's emotions, cognition and behaviour in a socially acceptable manner, thus resulting in adaptive coping. It also involves modulating the emotional reaction that depends upon the way the emotions are experienced and expressed. Self-control serves a regulatory function with respect to our traits emphasizing who we are, emotions pertaining to how we feel, cognition focussing on what we think and behaviours resulting in what we do (Baumeister & Exline, 2000). Self-control as one of the character strengths is also displayed through the idealized influence and intellectual stimulation behaviours.

The reason character strengths are important for military leaders is that they are based on values. According to Gayton & Kehoe (2015), values have been found to play an important role in leadership, adaptability and achievement. Military organizations demand their leaders possess good character to bravely encounter their enemies. Character is determined by the core values and strong belief system. A leader's belief is a driving force that strengthens the willpower of their subordinates in attaining any mission or duty. Character as one of the most important assets of an individual is built with dedication and hard work. Leaders high on character live by strong value systems. Military leadership demands robustness for thinking clearly and dealing effectively with one's feelings while encountering difficult and challenging situations. In the present-day scenario, leaders in high-risk military organization are being selected based on their measurements of personality (Picano & Roland, 2012). According to Biswas-Diener, Kashdan & Minas (2011), personality is about differences between individuals in terms of how one reacts to situations, whereas character is about the values that govern actions and behaviour. Military leadership focuses on individuality and intellect of the leader, which are considered vital to lead. Military leaders are required to be equipped with skills and abilities to face and cope with demanding situations. A sound character, a firm presence and a dedicated intellect help the leader perform with greater impact in the military organization.

Concluding remarks

Military leadership begins with a leader having values and attributes that shape character. These attributes are internal, as they make up a leader's identity. Having a good character translates into effective military leadership. The quality of character is established by a strong belief system and the values one holds towards others. These beliefs are the facts that allow a person to use their strengths in the best possible way. A leader's belief helps in strengthening the willpower to accomplish military-specific missions. Values, on the other hand, place importance on people and things around them. Military requirements are very specific as they demand sacrifices during military operations. It is essential for leaders to understand that qualifications are just a tool for establishing a good profession. They fail to develop an individual as a whole. A complete person

is symbolised by character, discipline, a positive attitude and a strong value system. Character is built with dedication and hard work. It is a combination of numerous attributes that include trustworthiness, high morals, self discipline, honesty and integrity. Military operations require their leaders to be well equipped with skills and abilities to face adversities. A strong leadership develops soldiers' morale and ethics. Building upon character strengths and virtues in military leaders will go a long way towards enhancing the growth, prosperity and effectiveness of the organization as a whole. Although there is a vast body of literature that indicates a strong association between personality traits and job performance, the need of the hour demands development of tools that focus on measuring the character strengths of personnel in order to facilitate the process of developing better military leaders. Inclusion of these character strengths in selection will be an asset for identifying the most resilient leaders for military operations. Applying the principles of positive psychology for strengthening and educating military leaders will contribute to shaping leaders who do not just govern with effective leadership styles but also have a strong hold on various character strengths.

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