A British Army Followership Doctrine Note

ARMY
BE THE BEST

THE CENTRE FOR ARMY LEADERSHIP

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CONTENTS

<u>**A BRITISH ARMY 'FOLLOWERSHIP' DOCTRINE NOTE**</u>

'Leaders matter greatly. But in searching so zealously for better leaders we tend to lose sight of the people these leaders will lead.'
Robert E. Kelley (Academic and Author), 1988[1]

SECTION 1

FOLLOWERSHIP

1.   The British Army exists to fight and win wars on land. War is a collective endeavour and success demands the best from our people, both as individuals and, more importantly, as high performing teams. Effective teamwork underpins our philosophy of mission command. It requires leadership at all levels, inspiring and motivating others into action. It also requires values-driven, proactive, and professional followers, performing at their best to achieve the mission. All leaders are themselves followers and nearly all followers have the ability to lead. From Private to General, we all have a responsibility to follow.

Followership is the act of an individual or individuals willingly accepting the influence of others to achieve a shared outcome.

2.   **'Followership'.** If we think of leadership as a relationship, an interaction between two or more individuals, a leader must have someone to lead. Leadership and followership are, therefore, inextricably linked. They not only coexist but are mutually supporting and work together to achieve a shared goal, driven by a shared purpose.

3.   A 'follower', like a 'leader', is an assumed role not an assigned position of authority. In turn, followership refers to the actions of one person or a group of individuals in a reciprocal role to that of the leader. A follower, therefore, is a no lesser role to that of the leader, neither does it have to be preparation to become a leader. It is often the changing context that will dictate which role is assumed by whom. Within the Armed Forces, the relationship between leader and followers extends beyond the typical superior-subordinate relationship indicative of military hierarchy and command. Sometimes circumstances will arise that require those in a superior position of authority to follow those who hold a more subordinate appointment. No one, therefore, is a 'pure' leader or a 'pure' follower - it is a dynamic relationship that is often dictated by the requirements of the situation.

4.   Given the symbiotic nature of this partnership, many of the qualities associated with being an effective leader are mirrored by that of an effective follower. Both are committed to the same purpose, mission or task. Both have obligations to the team as well as the individuals within it. Both live by shared Values and Standards.[2] And both are expected to show behaviours consistent with, and complimentary to, the expectations of military service and the society we serve. Thus it is the respective responsibilities of each role that defines the difference.

5.   The relationship is one based on influence ('the act or power of producing an effect without apparent exertion of force or direct exercise of command').[3] Individuals in both roles can influence, though it is the leader who, given their assumed bases of 'social power' within a given situation, is the dominant source of influence within a group. In return, followers willingly accept the leader's influence.[4] In such a relationship, followers reciprocally influence both their leaders and their peers

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[1] Robert E. Kelley, 'In Praise of Followers,' *Harvard Business Review* 66, November 1988, 142-148.
[2] Ministry of Defence, Values and Standards of the British Army, 2015.
[3] Merriam-Webster, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/influence, accessed 25 April 2023.
[4] A comprehensive understanding of power was offered by American academics John French and Bertram Raven in 1959, suggesting there are five bases of social power: Reward; Coercive; Legitimate; Referent; and Expert. See John French and Bertram Raven, 'The Bases of Social Power,' in D. Cartwright (ed), *Studies in Social Power* (Ann Arbour, MI: Institute for Social Research, University of Michigan, 1959), 150-67.

by offering their skills, knowledge, experience, and perspectives for the collective benefit of both the team and the shared purpose.

6.   Followership is an act that requires the consent of those being led, whether consciously or unconsciously. A leader appeals to the wants and needs of an individual and, in return, the individual assesses whether it is in their interest to assume the role of follower. To follow effectively, therefore, is a choice.

7.   To get the best out of the leader-follower relationship, participants must believe it is a collaborative partnership in which both parties have agency, and both are actively taking part in determining the outcome. The central cog in this partnership, uniting both leader and followers, is a shared purpose, informed by common set of shared Values.
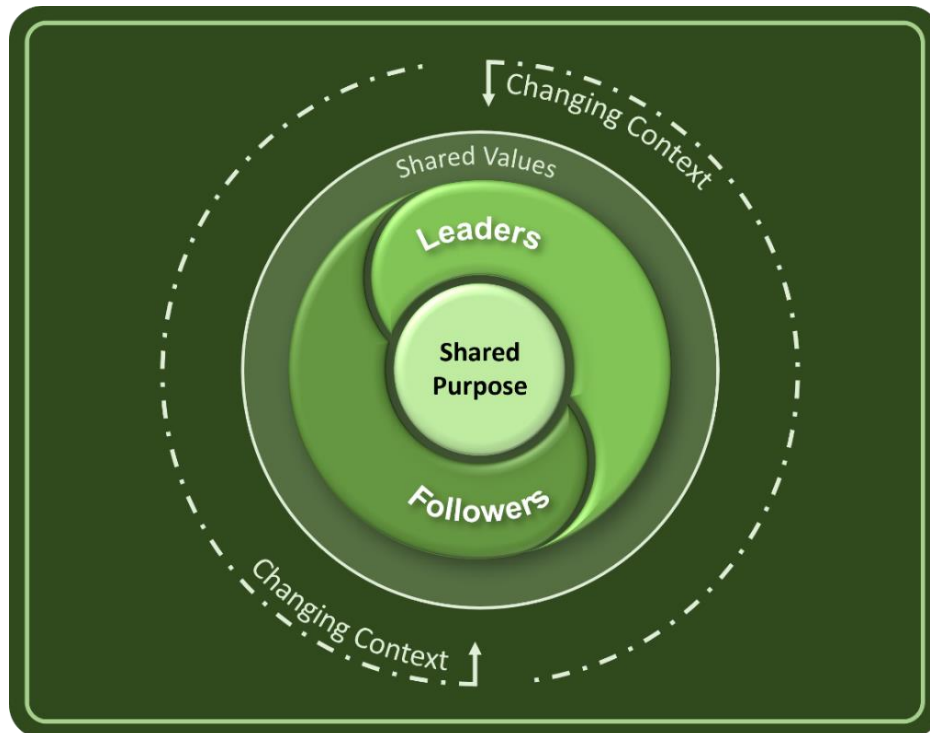

Figure 1 – The Leader-Follower Relationship Model[5]

8.   **'Followers'**. In the same way that 'leadership' (an act) differs from the 'leader' (an individual), so too is there a difference between 'followership' and the 'follower'. Much like leading, the act of following is a personal endeavour – given we are all, by our nature, individual. Nevertheless, there are distinct attributes and characteristics that are common to all effective followers. Foremost, followers take responsibility for themselves, for others, and the task or shared outcome. Effective followers are also proactive, self-reliant, self-disciplined, and intelligent team players who consistently strive to support others in the pursuit of shared goals. In a professional setting, effective followers are also technically competent, willing to take calculated risks, demonstrate disciplined initiative, and can think independently within their given freedoms and constraints towards the accomplishment of a specified intent. They are trustworthy, courageous, and willing to offer responsible and constructive challenge, as well as being committed to their team and the organisation, inspired by a shared sense of purpose and belonging.

9.   The mutually supporting interplay between command and leadership remains a defining factor that contributes to the operational success of military forces. Yet whilst the foundational principles of followers and followership endure, the unique nature of the profession of arms, and the specific demands of the British Army, place a high price on effective followership to guarantee our operational effectiveness and underpin our fighting power.

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[5] Adapted from Ira Chaleff, *The Courageous Follower: Standing Up To and For Our Leaders* (Oakland: Berrett-Koehler, 2009), 3.

SECTION 2

FOLLOWERSHIP IN THE BRITISH ARMY

'We need a model that helps us embrace rather than reject the identity of follower because the model speaks to our courage, power, integrity, responsibility and sense of service.'
Ira Chaleff (Academic and Author), 2009[6]

10.   A volatile strategic environment characterised by great power competition, climate change, the impact of globalisation and the proliferation of emerging technologies, presents significant challenges to our nation and our national interests. A modern British Army must be fit to meet such future challenges. As the character of war evolves, the modern battlespace demands a more professionalised Army which, in turn, demands more from our leaders and followers. If we are to fight and win against our adversaries, we must develop not only the best leaders, but the best followers.

11.   The British Army intuitively understands the importance of teamwork. It prides itself on operating as a high-performing team; cohesive groups of motivated individuals, with specialised ability, shared values, mutual trust, clearly defined goals, and focused on achieving outstanding results. Our operational effectiveness demands it. High-performing teams require leaders and followers to operate collaboratively together. Experience shows that when this symbiotic relationship works in unison it is a force multiplier that brings out the best in both the individual and the collective, even in the most demanding of environments.

12.   Whilst many of the characteristics, attributes and expectations of followers mirror that of leaders, they differ in their application. The principal difference is the mutual understanding of the leader-follower relationship, whether dictated by formal positions of authority or through informal dynamics influenced by individual competencies, experience, and knowledge within the demands of a given situation. It is necessary, therefore, to conceptualise Army followership through the same prism as Army leadership, in that it is values-based, servant in nature, and it underpins the effective application of Mission Command.

Values-Based Followership

'A truly effective follower is one who embodies the Army's Values.'
Army Leadership Doctrine, 2021[7]

13.   The British Army's Values and Standards provide the moral boundaries within which every individual is expected to operate. They are at the centre of how the Army defines how its leaders and followers act and behave, both as individuals and as a collective. When in the role of a *leader*, we are seen as the champions of the Army's Values, Standards and Behaviours, and have a duty to inspire, develop and reinforce them in others.[8] Similarly, when acting in the role of a *follower*, we have an equal responsibility as moral agents of the organisation to uphold and embody the Army's Values, Standards and Behaviours, both on and off duty. Collective adherence to a shared moral code and common standards of performance is what promotes mutual trust throughout the organisation and between leaders and their followers.

14.   Values-based followership, therefore, promotes unity and belonging. It is the foundation for high-performance cultures and is fundamental to the Army's operational effectiveness. Mutual trust is the glue that binds leaders and followers, as individuals, into high-performing teams. It enables greater delegation of responsibilities - both empowering subordinates and enhancing the application of Mission Command.

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[6] Ira Chaleff, *The Courageous Follower: Standing Up To and For Our Leaders* (Oakland: Berrett-Koehler, 2009), 1.
[7] Ministry of Defence, *Army Leadership Doctrine*, 2021, 3-3.
[8] Ministry of Defence, *Army Leadership Doctrine*, 2-2.

Servant Followership

'A critical part of being a good follower is practicing servant leadership. When acting with the intent to serve others, natural followership emerges and further builds the organizational team at every level.'
Lt. Col. Amelia Duran-Stanton and Col. Alicia Masson (US Army), 2021[9]

15.   We know that servant leadership speaks to the heart of leadership as a human endeavour.[10] Yet it is self-consciously paradoxical, in that it expects leaders to serve those that they lead.[11] As with leadership more broadly, it is a reciprocal relationship and there is an equal expectation on followers to serve.

16.   The commitment to serve exists at multiple levels. Primarily, both leaders and followers serve the shared purpose of the British Army, namely the defence of our nation and national interests. Perceptive of their role in the organisation, followers both directly and indirectly serve the needs of the wider group to which their team is a part of, whether Platoon, Regiment, Corps or Service. They also serve their leader, unburdening them, sustaining their energy, and allowing them to commit more fully to the responsibilities that can only reside with them. Finally, they serve their peers and teammates, supporting the coherence, performance and accountability of the team in its endeavours. Thus the notion of *service* is ingrained into every soldier and officer, whether leader or follower.

'Discriminating and determined servants as followers are as important as servant-leaders, and everyone – from time to time – may be in both roles.'
Robert Greenleaf (Academic and Author), 1977[12]

Followership in Mission Command

17.   Effective leadership and followership are fundamental to enhancing the application of Mission Command. Commanders provide clear direction and intent, set boundaries, and assign resources. Through their leadership, they galvanise the team around a shared vision or purpose, encourage creative thinking and risk taking, empower and support, and inspire by example. This allows subordinates in followership roles to be proactive and independent thinkers, applying disciplined initiative, judgement and respectful challenge. In so doing, followers do everything they can to achieve the task, turning the commander's intent into effective outcomes within the given context.

In a well-functioning Mission Command-oriented environment, a follower is as independent, influential and effective as their leader. Such followers create clarity and galvanise action, turning objectives and orders into concrete, achievable tasks for those around them.'
Langley Sharp, *The Habit of Excellence*, 2021[13]

18.   The British Army's command philosophy of *Mission Command* is guided by a fundamental principle: the absolute 'responsibility to act' to achieve the superior commander's intent. Hence the primary attribute of an effective follower: responsibility.[14] As with the enhancing effect of leadership, the principles of Mission Command are further benefited through the application of effective followership:

　　a.   **Unity of Effort**. Followers align to the purpose, mission, and intent of both the leader (including higher commanders) and the team, working collaboratively with superiors, peers and subordinates alike to achieve shared goals, enhanced further through an inspiring vision.

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[9] Amelia Duran-Stanton and Alicia "Ali" Masson, 'Lessons in Followership: Good Leaders Aren't Always Out Front,' *Army Magazine*, June 2021, 32.
[10] Ministry of Defence, *Army Leadership Doctrine*, 2021, 1-8 and 1-9.
[11] Julian Stern, 'Do you follow? Understanding Followership Before Leadership', *Management in Education* 35 (2021), 59.
[12] Robert Greenleaf, *Servant Leadership: A Journey into the Nature of Legitimate Power and Greatness* (New York: Paulist Press, 1977), 4.
[13] Langley Sharp, *The Habit of Excellence: Why British Army Leadership Works* (London: Penguin, 2021), 94.
[14] Ministry of Defence. *Army Doctrine Publication: Land Operations*, 2017, 6-5 and 6-6.

b.   **Freedom of Action**. Self-reliant, self-disciplined followers have the courage and confidence to take responsibility for the freedoms granted to them. Operating with disciplined initiative and decisiveness, and within an established climate of psychological safety, followers will innovate to overcome challenges and take risks to exploit opportunities, operating within the boundaries set to achieve their leader's vision or intent.

c.   **Trust**. Followers feel and believe in the imperative of mutual trust in both the leader-follower and commander-subordinate relationship. As much as they expect their leader to trust them, they ensure reciprocal trust by being loyal, selflessly committed, reliable and values-driven, as well as consistently delivering to the highest standards.

d.   **Mutual Understanding**. Effective followers not only understand their roles, responsibilities and assigned tasks, but they also understand the evolving context in which they are operating, as well as the demands placed upon their leaders. Supporting the needs of both the leader and the team through responsible challenge, coupled with effective communication, helps nurture this mutual understanding.

e.   **Timely and Effective Decision-Making**. Followers who are independent, critical thinkers, and able to apply judgement and act decisively within a given context support the effective decision-making of their leaders. In turn, individuals who communicate, share and invite contributions to their decision-making reinforce mutual understanding and unity of effort between all members of the team.[15]

19.   As much as the credibility of British Army is defined by the effectiveness of its leaders through their leadership, it is also enhanced by that of its followers through their followership. The foundations lie in the distinctive qualities, principles, and enduring characteristics that define an Army follower.

SECTION 3

WHAT BRITISH ARMY FOLLOWERS ARE – 'CHARACTER'

'Curiously, counterintuitively, what it takes to be a good follower looks a lot like what it takes to be a good leader.'
Barbara Kellerman (Author and Academic)[16]

20.   Effective Army followership requires effective Army followers - individuals who embody the Army's Values, are driven by a sense of responsibility, positively influence others, and set the example. Army followership also requires individuals to consistently perform, balancing a breadth of competencies and behaviours that meet the competing needs of the task, team and individual.

'Our values decide our character. Our character decides our value.'
James Kerr (Author), 2013[17]

21.   **Values**. A value is 'one's judgement of what is important in life.'[18] The most successful organisations understand the imperative of determining, articulating and embedding a core set of shared values across their workforce. In turn, these values shape decision-making, behaviours and culture, all of which drive organisational performance. Whilst leaders are expected to be exemplars of such values, there is an equal imperative to do so when in the role of a follower. Effective followership is values-based, and effective followers are values-driven.

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[15] For US analysis of the application of followership theory to US Mission Command doctrine see, Ted Thomas and Paul Berg, 'Followership: Exercising Discretion,' *Journal of Leadership Education*, Special issue, 2014.
[16] Barbara Kellerman, *Followership: How Followers Are Creating Change and Changing Leader* (Boston: Harvard Business Press, 2008), 236.
[17] James Kerr, *Legacy: What the All Blacks Can Teach Us About the Business of Life* (London: Constable, 2013), p.12.
[18] Oxford Languages, 2023.

a.   **Courage**. The importance of courage, both moral and physical, is intuitive to Army leadership. It must be considered equally as intuitive to followership. Courage is about doing the right thing; standing up for what one believes in within a given situation. It exists on many levels: the courage to hold others to account; to confront difficult or sensitive issues; to display humility when one is wrong or lacking understanding; to challenge authority whether in pursuit of a better outcome or to prevent unnecessary harm; to serve and to be led. In a military context particularly, physical courage is also required of followers, those committed into the fight and who must ultimately put their lives on the line.

b.   **Discipline**. Disciplined followers take ownership and responsibility for themselves. They maintain the highest standards in their professional competencies, mental and physical fitness and resilience without needing to be directed to do so. They actively seek betterment, are resourceful and dependable, and seize opportunities to learn and develop. Although the leader-follower relationship differs to command authority, it is inevitable that they often align within a military context. Thus, in any hierarchy, the superior-subordinate relationship often requires the same disciplined compliance of its followers; it remains a healthy necessity for an effective high-performing military team dynamic.

c.   **Respect for Others**. Mutual respect is essential in building high performing teams. All leaders and followers, therefore, have a duty to foster an environment of mutual respect and inclusivity, in which diversity – in its broadest sense, is valued and appreciated. Team members may hold different ranks or represent different regiments – have greater or less experience or competency. They may be new to the team or stalwarts of the organisation, yet they are all respected for who they are and what they contribute to the team's shared goals.

d.   **Integrity**. Integrity means staying true to one's moral principles. It means doing what is right, regardless of the situation. Without integrity, whether from the perspective of the leader or follower, the ability to foster trust will be fatally undermined. Thus, being a reciprocal relationship, both leaders and followers have a responsibility to maintain mutual trust. Followers do so through their professionalism, competencies, consistency, loyalty and, above all, integrity – the moral courage to act according to their own moral principles and the Army's stated Values, Standards and Behaviours.

e.   **Loyalty**. Loyalty refers to a powerful sense of allegiance to an individual or a group. It creates a sense of identity, cohesion and belonging. When appropriately aligned, loyalty exists not only mutually between leaders and followers, but also horizontally amongst peers and spanning the breadth of the organisation. Loyalty acutely complements a shared purpose; in the case of the British Army - serving our nation. Yet loyalty requires considered judgement in its application. Misplaced or misguided loyalty will undermine an individual's integrity and negatively affect trust both within the team and the wider organisation.[19] If a follower believes their leader's direction to be immoral, unlawful or unjust, a follower's loyalty to the organisation and their own beliefs must prevail. It is also incumbent upon the leader to see the offer of challenge by a follower as being loyal, centred upon the unifying purpose of successful attainment of a shared objective.

f.   **Selfless Commitment**. Military service is the embodiment of selfless commitment. It prioritises the needs of others over individual desires. It is intuitive to the role of a follower, where motivation is derived from supporting the needs of others. The choice to follow is, itself, an act of selflessness, which is the foundation of servant followership. Ultimately, it is the notion of *unlimited liability* – to follow others and potentially give one's own life for a greater purpose

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[19] The killing of Baha Mousa in 2003 provides a stark example of misplaced loyalty. The Aitken Report into unlawful killings in Iraq spoke of a 'wall of silence' from troops involved who sought to protect each other. The report stated that such actions were, 'not forms of loyalty, but rather a lack of integrity.*'* British Army, *The Aitken Report: An Investigation into Cases of Deliberate Abuse and Unlawful Killing in Iraq in 2003 and 2004*, 25 January 2008, 24.

– the defence of our nation, that is the epitome of selfless commitment, and is unique to the profession of arms.[20]

> *'I've lived my life in the belief that life has meaning through service to others. It is not about oneself but it's using oneself and one's abilities to benefit others.'*
> Denis Goldberg (Anti-Apartheid Activist)[21]

22.   **Enduring Characteristics**. Mirroring the characteristics of Army leaders, as codified in the Army Leadership Doctrine 2021,[22] followers are also Responsible, Influential and The Example:

> *Followers have got to own the problem also. Followers have got to say 'Our leader's got this mission. It's not their mission, it's our mission and we have got to be as loyal to that mission as we do to our leader. So, whatever we can do to make the organisation successful in that, is our responsibility.'*
> General (Retd) Stanley McChrystal[23]

   a.   **Responsible**. Followers are responsible. Responsibility underpins everything that an effective follower is expected to be and do: to be responsible for their decisions, actions, and behaviours; to support, challenge and think critically; to take risks, solve problems, and show initiative; and, above all, responsibility for the power and agency they have as 'exemplary' followers.

   b.   **Influential**. Leadership and followership are acts of *influence exchange.* Although leaders are the principal source of influence, effective followers are by no means passive recipients. Whilst acknowledging, permitting, and enhancing the principal influence of the leader, followers also seek to exercise their influence for the benefit of team success.

   c.   **The Example**. Paradoxically, those who demonstrate the attributes of an effective follower show leadership in their followership. They have a positive influence on those around them - subordinates, peers and superiors alike - which in turn positively affects the outcomes of the team's endeavours. An effective follower's behaviours become infectious and set the standard for others to follow. Effective followers set the *followership example*.

> *'The ultimate measure of a man is not where they stand in moments of convenience and comfort, but where they stand at times of challenge and controversy.'*
> Martin Luther King, Jr.[24]

23.   The unique nature of warfare pushes individuals to the extremes of human endurance. It places arguably unparalleled demands on an individuals' judgement and decision-making. It is in such environments that our values are most tested. The importance of character, therefore, cannot be underestimated, and it must form the bedrock of our actions, both as leaders and followers.

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[20] The study of human behaviour also suggests that selfless acts are often motivated by self-interest (e.g., to reputation, honour or self-esteem). 'It is only when self-interest prevails over selfless commitment to the group that I am failing in my duty.' (Ira Chaleff in interview with author). Also see, Edward. O. Wilson, *On Human Nature* (London: Harvard University Press, 2004), pp.150-167.

[21] Denis Goldberg in conversation with Jeremy Snape, 'From Mandela to Mars: Lessons From Isolation,*' Inside The Mind of Champions* Podcast, Episode 8, 20 Apr 2020.

[22] Ministry of Defence, *Army Leadership Doctrine*, 2021, 2-9 and 2-10.

[23] Centre for Army Leadership Podcast, General (Retd) Stanley McChrystal, Episode 10, 18 May 2021.

[24] Martin Luther King, *Strength to Love* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963).

SECTION 4

WHAT BRITISH ARMY FOLLOWERS DO – 'ACTION'

24.   As with Army leadership, followership can also be conceptualised by an action-centred model, which includes *Task, Team,* and *Individual* components, framed within an understanding of the wider context and operating environment.

Figure 2 – Adapted Action Centred Leadership Model (Adair 1979) with Follower Overlay[25]

Understanding the Context and Operating Environment

25.   For followers to contribute effectively, their understanding of the wider context and factors affecting the environment in which they are operating, should complement that of the leader. This requires an appreciation of the leader's vision and of the origins of the shared purpose: 'the why'. In a command context, this means understanding the mission and higher commanders' intent. More broadly, it includes social, cultural, and other factors that may affect team dynamics, as well relevant political and operational issues. Responsible followers understand that they are more than passive actors. They take ownership of the collective understanding of team, proactively offering their own perspectives, often providing additional information or insight from a unique standpoint.

Individual Considerations

26.   **Self-management**. If followers are to sustain their individual performance and maximise their contribution to the team, like leaders, they need to first manage themselves. This requires the freedom to think for themselves, accept responsibility, and evaluate their own personal and professional needs. This requires self-awareness, a principal facet of *Emotional Intelligence,* and requires an understanding of one's own strengths, weaknesses, competencies, and emotional responses. In turn, self-awareness supports self-care. Followers who prioritise self-care take pride

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[25] Based on the Army Leadership Model. See Ministry of Defence, *Army Leadership Doctrine*, 2021, 4-2.

in their physical fitness and mental wellbeing, ensure a balance of life commitments, and maintain healthy personal and professional relationships. They also recognise when there is an imbalance across these areas and seek support where necessary.

27.   **Motivation**. By its very nature, service in the Army demands a great deal of its people. It requires them to prepare for and operate in the most challenging of environments. To compete and win in such environments requires elevated levels of individual willpower and motivation. Driven by a powerful sense of purpose, core values and effective leadership, followers maintain high energy to perform, an unshakeable determination to overcome, and an indomitable will to win.

> *'The greatest motivation is contributing to success.'*
> Patty McCord (former Chief Talent Officer, Netflix)[26]

28.   **High Professional Standards**. Motivation drives high performance. It provides a mindset that expects excellence rather than accepts mediocrity. Effective followers understand their role, responsibilities and expectations, and consistently demonstrate professional knowledge and competencies. Disciplined and self-aware, they capitalise on their strengths, identify and improve areas of development, and seek out further blind spots. High performance requires individuals to accept that only through pushing personal boundaries will genuine growth and development occur. Failure is inherent in such growth, but the right approach, including accepting feedback and critique from others, allows followers to see failure as an opportunity to learn and return stronger.

Team Considerations

29.   **Collaborate**. Leader-follower relationships rarely occur in isolation, but form as part of a team or 'team of teams'. Followers, therefore, have a responsibility to help sustain and enhance relationships with others. For teams to operate at peak performance, it is of equal importance that team members work effectively together, as they do for the leader. Everyone has a role in maintaining a sense of inclusion and belonging - essential psychological factors enabling high performance. Beyond the immediate team, followers actively seek opportunities to build wider partnerships that will support the interests of the extended group. For an Army whose capability depends on operating alongside others, whether in the Combined, Joint, Inter-agency or Multinational environment, every leader and follower alike has a responsibility to collaborate.

30.   **Build and Sustain Trust**. Hard won and easily lost, followers understand the imperative of maintaining trust within the team. Integrity, reliability and sustained high performance are key to achieving this. Trust is also fundamental at the institutional level. If society's trust in the Army in undermined, its license to operate is at risk. Both leader and follower alike have a responsibility to sustain trust.

> *'Trust is the most important basis for human coexistence and comradeship and is the key attribute of responsible leadership.'*
> Federal Ministry of Defence, Germany, 2017. [27]

31.   **Support**. A central responsibility of any follower is to support. Effective followers support their leader, giving them space to think and act, and unburden them of some of the stresses and pressures of being in a leadership role, allowing them to be more energetic, focused, and productive. Followers also fill their leaders' blind spots, mitigate their shortfalls, and support decision-making. Followers provide added context and understanding, particularly if the leader is mis-informed or lacks complete information. The most productive leader-follower partnerships are those in which individuals intuitively know one another and can instinctively anticipate each another's requirements and actions. In the Army, the best NCO/Officer partnerships epitomise this kind of deep mutual support and understanding. As effective team players, followers also support their peers and work collaboratively to achieve shared goals.

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[26] Patty McCord, *Powerful: Building a Culture of Freedom and Responsibility* (Silicon Guild, 2017), Chapter 1.

[27] Federal Republic of Germany, Ministry of Defence, *Innere Führung,* A-2600/1, Version 2, 2017, 11.

32.   **Challenge**. Effective Followers have a duty and responsibility to challenge. Challenge exists on a spectrum, ranging from *valued feedback* which helps improve performance or refine a plan, to *intelligent disobedience*, making a calculated judgement to deliberately contravene an order when unique or emerging circumstances require it. Many organisational failures, from safety breaches to toxic cultures and failed operations, have in part been influenced by individuals lacking the courage to challenge. Leaders have a responsibility to enable and set the conditions for challenge to be intuitive, whilst followers must have the moral courage to speak up when necessary. Thus fostering of a healthy challenge culture is a moral obligation of both leaders and followers. (See Section 6).

33.   **Adapt to change**. A world characterised by the pace of change demands not only leaders who can guide through turbulence and uncertainty but also followers who can embrace it. Acting as agents of change, effective followers acknowledge and help mitigate the inherent barriers and difficulties that arise, whilst understanding the opportunities that may be presented if change is aligned to the purpose and vision of the group. Using their own experience, judgement, and insight, they contribute to the collective understanding of what endures, what evolves, and what changes.

'You earn your followers as a leader but equally followers must actively lend their followership to the leader, they must make conscious active choices.'
Richard Hytner (former Deputy Chairperson, Saatchi & Saatchi)[28]

Task Considerations

34.   **Communicate**. If trust bonds the leader-follower relationship, communication is the medium that enables it to function. Followers must excel in the art of communication, appreciating when and how to communicate their own knowledge, perspectives and opinions, whilst actively listening to the views and direction of others. They must also be mindful of the impact of non-verbal communication in any exchange and consciously regulate their behaviour accordingly. A raised eyebrow or disapproving look on receipt of a leader's direction can not only undermine the credibility of the leader but sow dissent amongst the team.

35.   **Independent critical thinking**. The collective performance of any team is reliant on individuals thinking for themselves, as well as offering critical thought in pursuit of the shared goal. In so doing, effective followers actively support problem-solving and decision-making, drawing on their knowledge, skills and experience, as well as their understanding of the situation. Critically, effective followers must apply appropriate judgement and balance within a given context.

36.   **Disciplined initiative**. Initiative is a fundamental of effective followership. The leader provides the vision and direction, but it is followers who turn this into action. The followers understand the context as well as their role and responsibilities. As such, they anticipate what is needed of them within their own level of competency and authority and are proactive in maximising the value they add to the team's outcomes. They identify problems and challenges, actively seeking creative solutions. In the Army, disciplined initiative is a fundamental product of Mission Command.

37.   **Take risk**. Followers who seize the initiative are also willing to take risk. Indeed, they have an appetite for it. They have an intuitive sense of the risk boundaries in which they are expected to operate (or actively seek clarification from superiors if not) and push themselves and others to operate at the limit of these boundaries to maximise opportunities. This is particularly relevant amongst land forces given that the environment of a soldier is inherently one 'of uncertainty, risk, discomfort and torment.'[29]

38.   Whilst the principles of followership and the requirements of a follower can be defined, its application is personal. Whether in a leader or follower role, we are all, by nature, unique. It is the

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[28] Centre for Army Leadership Podcast, Richard Hytner, Episode 6, 21 Jan 2021.
[29] École Spéciale Militaire de Saint-Cyr, *ESCC 2030: Affronter demain ce qui n'a jamais été*, 2020, 11.

combination of our individual character, personality, skills, and experience that dictate not just *what* actions are taken but *how* we behave.

SECTION 5

FOLLOWERSHIP BEHAVIOURS

Followership Behavioural Styles

39.   An individual's character, motivations, and experience, coupled with the environment they are working in (leaders, peers, climate, culture and task), all influence their behaviours.[30] A model that has dominated academic thinking for over 30 years, provides a credible conceptual understanding to assess follower effectiveness across the British Army.[31] Using a two-dimensional framework, it illustrates the dominant behavioural styles of followers. One dimension represents the level of a follower's engagement, from *passive* to *active*. On the other, their ability to exercise *independent, critical thinking*. The result is a presentation of five followership behavioural styles.

 a. **Exemplary Followers (Stars)**. Exemplary followers are fundamental to mission success. Responsible, motivated, and professional, they engender trust. They encourage delegation and devolved responsibility. Proactive and independent in thought, they demonstrate disciplined initiative within the boundaries of a leader's intent. They are risk-takers and problem-solvers who undertake their work with energy and enthusiasm. Critically, they have the courage and judgement to challenge for the betterment of the team and the mission. They are the most effective enablers and executors of Mission Command.

 b. **Alienated Followers (Cynics)**. Alienated followers are independent and critical in their thinking but passive, or even destructive, in carrying out their role. They can often be cynical and work against the collective efforts of the team. In the worst cases, alienated followers will undoubtably undermine the efforts of the leader, seeking to recruit passive or disruptive consensus from others within the group to rationalise their own position.

 c. **Passive Follower (Sheep)**. Susceptible followers with no sense of responsibility. They are passive, lack initiative and independence of thought, and blindly conform to others. Exploitive or toxic leadership cultures that repress individual contributions and challenge will undoubtably encourage such obedient compliance.

 d. **Conformist Followers ('Yes' People)**. Followers who are more proactive than the passive followers but still lack initiative and critical thought. They are colluders - eager to please and can be aggressively deferential, even servile. In a destructive leadership environment, such subservience, or collusion, can magnify the power of the leader, thus enabling a toxic climate.

 e. **Pragmatist Followers (Survivors)**. Pragmatist followers act not out of loyalty to the leader, the team, or to the mission, but according to their own self-interests and preservation. They continuously assess their own situation and immediate environment and adapt their approach accordingly to achieve the best personal outcome or advantage, often basing their self-serving decisions and actions on an assessment of personal risk verses reward.

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[30] For a distinction between climate and culture, see Ministry of Defence, *Army Leadership Doctrine*, 2021, 1-8.
[31] Robert E. Kelley, *The Power of Followership: How to Create Leaders People Want to Follow and Followers Who Lead Themselves*, New York: Doubleday, 1992.
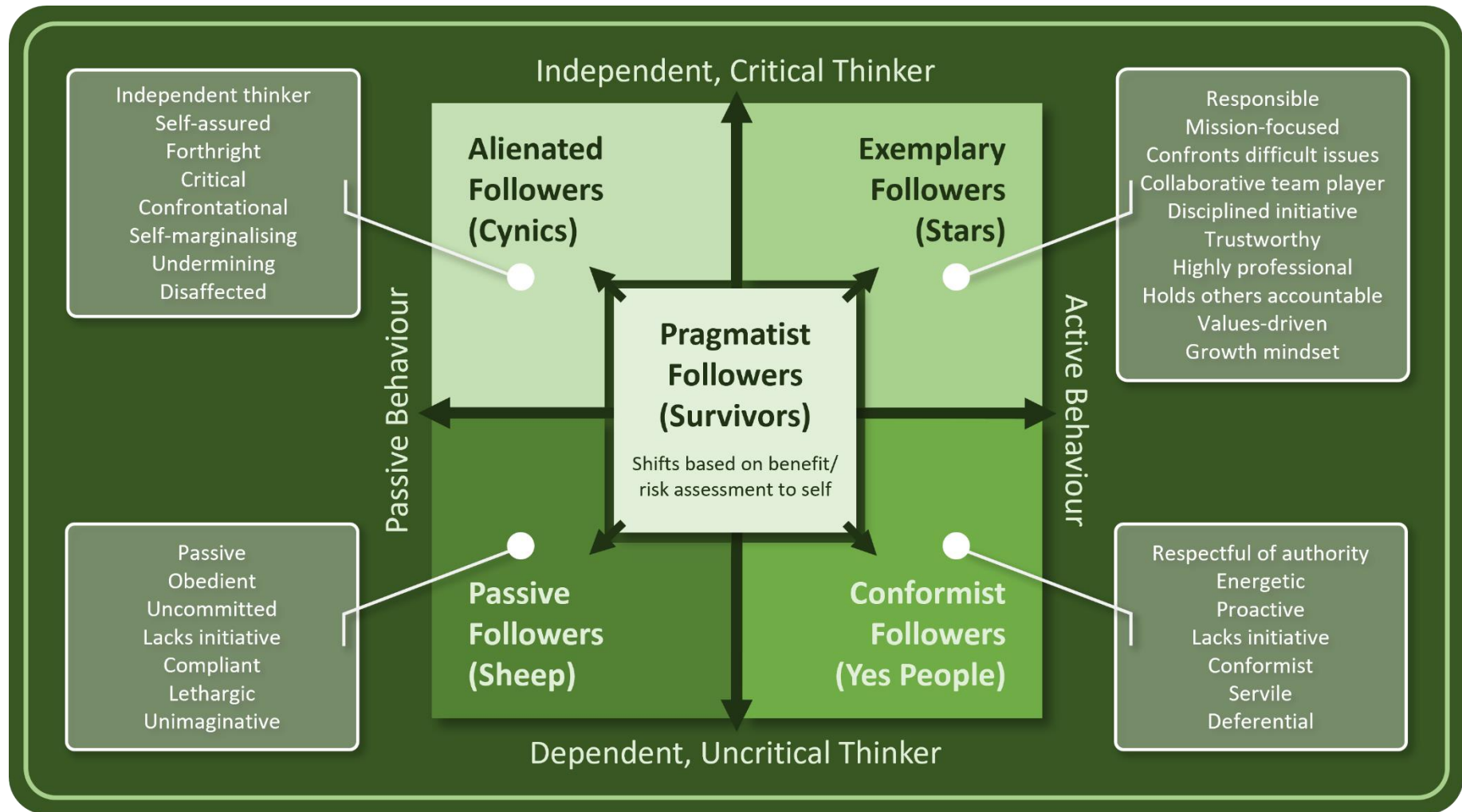
Figure 3 – Followership Behavioural Styles[32]

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[32] Based on Robert E. Kelley, *The Power of Followership: How to Create Leaders People Want to Follow and Followers Who Lead Themselves*, New York: Doubleday, 1992.

Negative and Toxic Followership

'Leadership of any type springs from the interplay of an individual's motivation and ability to lead, subordinates' desire for direction and authority, and events calling for leadership.'
Art, Padilla and Hogan (Academics and Authors)[33]

40.   As leadership and followership can influence positive action, the same forces can also develop negative outcomes. Much of what drives effective team relationships (power, influence, choice, purpose, and the environment) can, if not guided by moral motivations, be deliberately or inadvertently used to ill-effect. As the Army's Leadership Doctrine explains, whilst British Army leadership is selfless, values-driven, and action-centred, there are occasions when such fundamentals are not applied, thus leading to negative behaviours. Followers who are motivated by selfish desires, or are disengaged, can have a corrosive effect upon team cohesion by misplacing their loyalties and by undermining both the leader and their peers. If such follower behaviours are identified, they can be mitigated by a healthy challenge culture. However, if left unchallenged, these disruptive followers can vastly contribute to the emergence of a toxic climate.

'You need to be a good follower. You need to make sure when the Commanding Officer gives you a direction, if you don't agree with it, take the opportunity to voice your concerns in a professional manner. But you can't go back to the team room and roll your eyes and tell everybody how screwed up this guy is. That's not good followership. That doesn't create the teamwork you need to create in any organisation.'
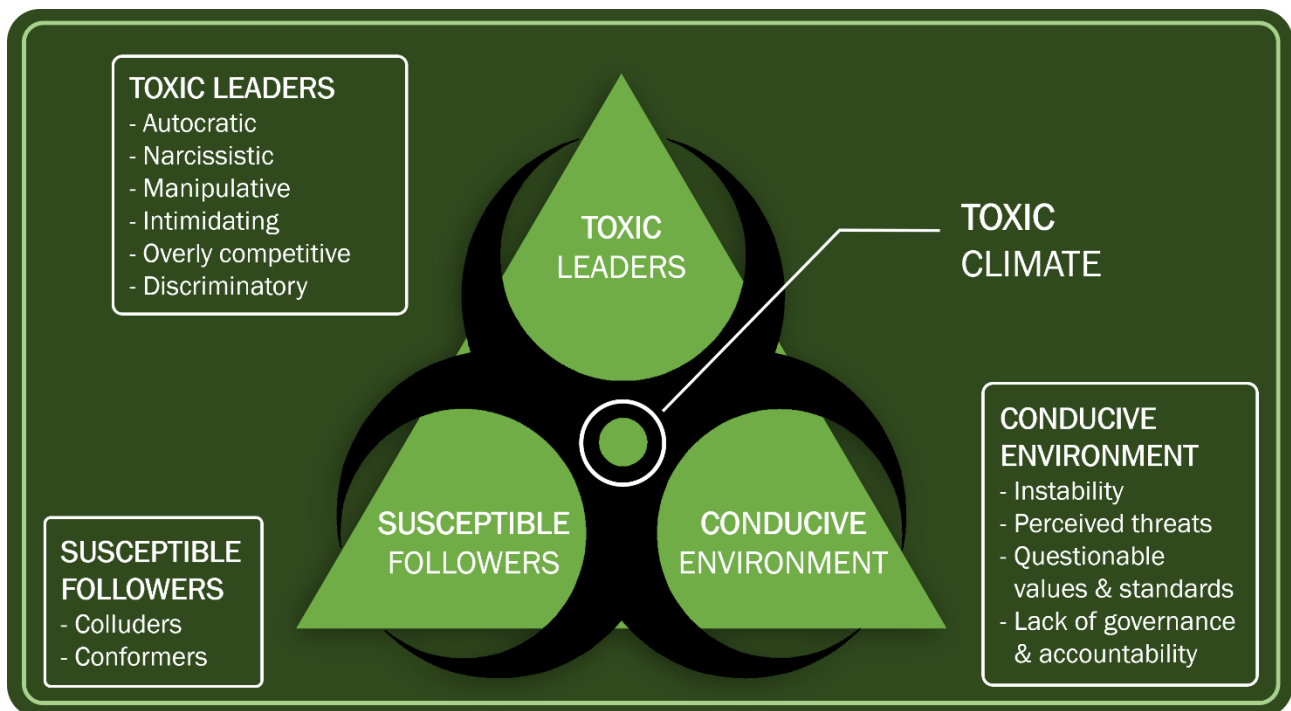Admiral (Retd) William McRaven[34]

Figure 4 – The Toxic Triangle.[35]

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[33] Art Padilla, Robert Hogan, and Robert Kaiser, 'The Toxic Triangle: Destructive Leaders, Suspectable Followers and Conducive Environments,' *Leadership Quarterly* 18/3, 2007, 179.

[34] Centre for Army Leadership Podcast, Admiral (Retd) William McRaven, Episode 27, 2022.

[35] Adapted from Art Padilla, Robert Hogan, and Robert Kaiser, 'The Toxic Triangle: Destructive Leaders, Susceptible Followers and Conducive Environments,' *Leadership Quarterly* 18/3, 2007, 176-194. See also Ministry of Defence, *Army Leadership Doctrine*, 2021, 2-24 and 2-25.

41.   The 'Toxic Triangle' illustrates that such climates need not only toxic leaders and a conducive environment, but susceptible followers.[36] Susceptible followers willingly accept the authority of the leader due to a range of self-serving motivations. Some feel a need for safety, security, group membership, and predictability in an uncertain world. Others see it in their own self-interest to actively align with the toxic vision of the leader. The result is two types of detrimental followers:

a.   **Conformers**. Followers or subordinates who have a need for an authority figure, a desire for security and certainty, and a compulsive need to be part of the team. They lack confidence in their own ability and are focused on self-preservation. They are unlikely to challenge toxic leaders and instead seek the path of least resistance, demonstrating behaviours akin to 'Passive' and 'Pragmatist' followers.

b.   **Colluders**. Followers or subordinates who willingly comply and accept toxic leadership. They are more ambitious and are likely to be motivated by personal advancement. They may imitate or align to the toxic leader's behaviour thus becoming toxic themselves. By acting in this way, akin to 'conformist' followers (i.e. yes people), colluders fail to reflect and undermine the Values, Standards and Behaviours of the British Army.

42.   It is also important to note that where authority and leadership are weak and the environment conducive, a vacuum of positive influence may be filled by destructive followers. If such followers are self-serving and lack a strong moral compass, they themselves may be the primary catalyst for toxicity, rather than the weak leader. In such cases, the follower is not just susceptible but are themself a perpetrator.[37]

43.   Within any group, social order, cohesion, and identity are central drivers and motivators. There is a natural tendency to obey those in positions of authority, and we are often conditioned to conform to group norms.[38] Such social conditioning is particularly acute in organisations like the British Army which actively reinforce an authoritative command hierarchy, as well as promote strong cohesion through regimental identities. Effective leadership and responsible followership are required to mitigate the potential destructive effects of these forces. As a key principle of both roles, it remains the responsibility of effective followers to challenge, and of leaders to create the necessary environment for such challenge to occur and for critical thinking and judgement to be applied, for the benefit of the mission.

SECTION 6

THE RESPONSIBILITY TO CHALLENGE

'Followers cannot abdicate their courageous conscience by outsourcing it to the leader. Rather, followers need to learn how to blow the whistle effectively, how to combat groupthink, how to avoid the dispersion of responsibility so often found in groups, and how to advance institutional integrity.'
Robert E. Kelley (Academic and Author)[39]

44.   The chain of command is fundamental to how we operate as a cohesive fighting force. It provides clear lines of authority, responsibility and accountability, when critical decisions are being made that, whether directly or indirectly, put lives at risk. It also ensures clarity and alignment of effort throughout the organisation. However, if this is not combined with good leadership, an overtly reinforced hierarchy and rank structure can have a negative impact upon organisational climate and culture. It can magnify power inequalities and perceptions of difference. In turn, it can consciously or unconsciously suppress open dialogue and challenge, as well as stifling initiative and agency. The

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[36] Adapted from Art Padilla, Robert Hogan, and Robert Kaiser, 'The Toxic Triangle: Destructive Leaders, Suspectable Followers and Conducive Environments,' *Leadership Quarterly* 18/3, 2007, 176-194. See also Ministry of Defence, *Army Leadership Doctrine*, 2021, 2-24 and 2-25.
[37] Major Ben Martinez Jr., 'U.S. Army, Toxic Followership and the Balance of Responsibility,' *Military Review*, 2021.
[38] See the ground-breaking experiment by Stanley Milgram in *Obedience to Authority*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1974).
[39] Robert E. Kelley in, Ronald E. Riggio, Ira Chaleff and Jean Lipman-Blumen, *The Art of Followership: How Great Followers Create Great Leaders and Organizations* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2008)*,* 15.

need for obedience and conformity has its place in a high-stakes environment but, if left unchecked, it can subdue the very attributes needed for effective followership.

45.   Mitigating such risks requires exactly the leadership that the British Army advocates: values-driven; servant in nature; and professional leaders who create environments that allow the best of followership to flourish, whilst also maintaining a distinction in the chain of command that promotes order, discipline and accountability. All Army units work within the same hierarchical structure, but only the best performing will encourage more decentralised command and empowered followership.

46.   The ability to enable followers (and specifically subordinates in an Army context) to offer a spectrum of challenge, from *feedback* to *intelligent disobedience*, is critical to optimising operational effectiveness. It requires integrity and moral courage on the part of the follower, and humility on behalf of the leader. Without challenge, failures do not become lessons, groupthink is reinforced, safety compromised, cognitive diversity suppressed, initiative stifled, and homogeneity fostered – all enemies of an adaptable and high-performing team.

'A challenge culture can be seen an anathema to us in a highly hierarchical organisation,
but also it can be seen as a key driver to improve decision making and operational effectiveness.'
Army Inspector, 2022[40]

The Challenge Spectrum

Figure 5 – The Spectrum Challenge

a.   **Valued Feedback**. Feedback relates to the provision of information or a perspective on an action, event, or performance. The ability to give and receive feedback is key for growth and improvement, whether on the part of the individual concerned or for the collective benefit of the group. High performing teams thrive on regular and collaborative feedback in which every individual is willing and able to provide valuable input to support achievement of the shared goal or mission. Feedback must be purposeful (given with an intent to improve), actionable (results-driven and able to be implemented) and communicated with empathy (mindful of the individual receiving the feedback).

b.   **Constructive and Responsible Challenge**. To challenge is to question, to hold to account, or to present an alternative view to the norm. Responsible challenge allows followers to put forward innovative ideas, to question established views and priorities, and to point out mistakes and shortcomings. It is responsible and constructive when it is conducted for the betterment of the team or the task, when it enables, builds, advances and accelerates. Challenge thrives in environments in which leaders give permission to think differently and contribute productively. It is a process that relies on high *intellectual friction* and low *social friction*.[41] Responsible challenge requires moral courage, judgement, and the application of skill, knowledge, and experience. A guide to responsible challenge is at Appendix 1.

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[40] Army Inspectorate, *Evolving the Challenge Culture within the Army* (Andover: Army Headquarters, 2022), iv.
[41] Timothy R. Clark, *The Four Stages of Psychological Safety*, 2020, accessed 3 May 2023.

47.   **Intelligent disobedience**.[42] Intelligent disobedience entails the potential need and reasonable freedoms to contravene a direct order or instruction. This may be necessary where a follower is presented with new or conflicting information, or a moral dilemma of which the leader is unaware or unable to be informed. In extremis, it can also relate to the actions of a follower who judges an order to be immoral, unethical, or unlawful. In such instances, the follower has an obligation to challenge such an order. This is not a case of simply wilful disobedience to orders – which would constitute a serious Service Offence. But by using one's intellect, judgement, and own freedoms of authority as a subordinate commander and leader in their own right, to act and make decisions based on changes to the immediate situation. The application of intelligent disobedience, therefore, requires the highest degree of trust between leader and follower - knowing that a follower will act in accordance with the overall commander's intent even when this may contravene a lawful order. It requires a high degree of courage and an intuitive understanding of the Army's Values, Standards and Behaviours, coupled with a strong moral compass and sound ethical decision making.

48.   **Application of Judgement**. As with all aspects of leadership and followership, judgement is required in the application of challenge.[43] It is necessary for the follower to make a judgement on the level of challenge that is appropriate and considered. Inappropriate challenge risks being seen as deliberately disruptive, leading to relationship frictions or a breakdown in team dynamics. Unconstructive or disrespectful challenge could also be viewed as insubordinate and an attempt to undermine the trust and credibility of the leader. Therefore, challenge must always be approached with careful consideration. It is this that makes such challenges *responsible.*

49.   **Psychological Safety**. For respectful and constructive challenge to be most effective, it requires leaders to foster an environment which enables challenge to occur. It requires psychological safety, which, as leading authority Amy Edmondson describes, is 'a shared belief held by members of a team that the team is safe for interpersonal risk taking. […] A team climate characterized by interpersonal trust and mutual respect in which people are comfortable being themselves.'[44] Psychological safety promotes an environment in which all group members, regardless of rank, seniority, or ability, feel safe to speak their mind, ask questions, and to start challenging conversations. The result of effective challenge is more effective decision-making, improved group relationships, greater innovation and creativity, and reduced risk of failure.[45] According to Timothy R Clark, the development of psychological safety with a group comprises of four stages:

a.   **Stage 1** – Inclusion Safety: informal social acceptance into the team.

b.   **Stage 2** – Learner Safety: confidence to ask questions, experiment & make mistakes.

c.   **Stage 3** – Contributor Safety: the autonomy to contribute to the team within accepted boundaries based on an individual's competencies.

d.   **Stage 4** – Challenge Safety: allows individuals to challenge the status quo without retribution, reprisal, or the risk of damaging one's personal standing or reputation.[46]

50.   A true challenge culture, enabled by psychological safety, gives an organisation its competitive advantage. Enabled by self-assured leaders, courageous followers, and safe environments, challenge culture speaks to the heart of the British Army's command philosophy of *Mission Command*. For the Army, competing in an ever-changing and unpredictable operating environment, with often imperfect information and communications, feedback, responsible and constructive challenge and, in extremis, intelligent disobedience, is critical to our operational effectiveness.

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[42] See Ira Chaleff, *Intelligent Disobedience: Doing Right When What You're Told to Do Is Wrong* (Oakland: Berrett-Koehler, 2015).

[43] Ministry of Defence, *Army Leadership Doctrine*, 2021, 2-10.

[44] Amy Edmondson, 'Psychological Safety and Learning Behavior in Work Teams', *Administrative Science Quarterly* 44, 1999, 350-354. See also Amy Edmondson, *The Fearless Organisation: Creating Psychological Safety in the Workplace for Learning, Innovation and Growth*, (New Jersey: John Wiley and Sons, 2019).

[45] For an understanding of challenge at the operational and strategic level see Ministry of Defence, *The Good Operation*, 2017.

[46] Timothy R. Clark, *The Four Stages of Psychological Safety*, 2020.

Appendix 1 – Constructive Challenge: A Guide [47]

1.   The following guide to challenge was published by the Ministry of Defence in the aftermath of the Iraq Inquiry (Chilcot) Report. The report highlighted the importance of avoiding 'groupthink,' the best antidote to this being constructive challenge.[48] An environment in which challenge is expected and accepted is important. People should be receptive to constructive challenge and assume that it is provided with the best of intentions, while those offering challenge should know how to do so effectively. Challenge isn't about proving someone right or wrong; rather it's about highlighting and exploring alternative options, thus reflecting a healthy organisational cultures and behaviours. This guide provides advice on delivering and receiving challenge, as well as options you can take if you feel your challenge isn't being listened to, including making a report to the MOD Confidential Hotline.[49]

For those **receiving constructive challenge**, you should:

- Not take it personally - the challenge isn't about you, it's about the issue at hand.
- Make it known that you welcome constructive challenge and create space in the way you run your business to receive it. Recognise that challenge might result in change.
- Seek real diversity of thought, not just shades of mainstream thinking.
- Give staff the opportunity to fully articulate different views and give them credit for doing so. And remember that the person challenging shouldn't be expected to have a solution there and then.
- Demonstrate that you are giving serious thought to the challenge being offered - do not dismiss it out of hand and make sure people aren't just telling you what you want to hear.
- Respond respectfully - never belittle someone's view, and never (even after the event) side-line those offering it.
- If you do not accept the challenge, explain your reasoning, including supporting evidence when necessary.
- Encourage the use of evidence from beyond the immediate organisation, think tanks, academia and other sources.
- Support both junior colleagues and peers to raise a challenge with more senior colleagues.

For those **offering constructive challenge**, you should:

- Make challenge with courtesy and politeness.
- Be prepared to explain the logic and reasoning behind your alternative view and provide evidence. Keep your challenge concise and relevant to the issue at hand.
- Think about the interpersonal dynamics. Keep it professional - it's the issue you're challenging, not the person. Be respectful to the approach from which you are differing.
- Choose your moment and your medium. A one-to-one discussion or a smaller team meeting may be more appropriate than a big meeting at which positions are being taken and decisions are expected; a gently probing conversation or email is better than a confrontational one.
- Raise issues in a timely manner. Don't leave your challenge too late in the process, when changing course could be too difficult.
- Accept if the eventual decision remains unchanged - a decision has to be taken once all reasonable challenge has been considered. Only in cases where regularity or propriety have not been observed should you need to turn to the Department's whistleblowing process.

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[47] Ministry of Defence, *The Good Operation*, 2017.
[48] The report referred to this as *reasonable challenge.*
[49] To make a submission to the MOD's Confidential Whistleblowing Hotline, you can email confidential-hotline@mod.gov.uk or complete the electronic submission form here.

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