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Leading High-Performing Team Within U.S. Air Force Security Forces

September 2022

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ABSTRACT

U.S. Air Force Security Forces, commonly known as the “defenders,” is the primary organization responsible for integrated base defense, law enforcement, and installation security worldwide. Although defenders have proven themselves capable, the challenging “no-fail” mission of Security Forces requires strong leaders focused on developing an organizational culture that builds a more professional force driven toward excellence. This research investigated the following: What are characteristics of high performing teams? How can squadron commanders develop a high-performance culture within their organizations? What are potential strategic, operational, and tactical level impacts? What are potential areas of concern that leaders must be aware of when shaping their organizational culture? The research also examined and compared the U.S. Coast Guard Maritime Enforcement and U.S. Air Force Security Forces. The research discovered that leaders focused on developing an organizational culture that promotes and aligns with strategic objectives can expect to achieve greater success. Additionally, the research identified that both organizations have broad mission requirements that can benefit from promoting the following characteristics: flexibility, delivering a clear purpose, and building greater levels of motivation by promoting psychological safety. Collectively, this may improve the defender’s quality of life and strengthen the enterprise’s integrated base defense posture worldwide



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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Captain Delfino Martinez Trejo graduated from California State University, Fresno in Fresno, CA, in 2015 with a Bachelor of Science in Criminology – Law Enforcement. After graduation he entered the U.S. Air Force as a Security Forces officer and has served in Minot Air Force Base in Minot, North Dakota and Royal Air Force Alconbury in Huntingdon, United Kingdom. While serving in these assignments his roles included Security Forces flight commander, executive officer to the Mission Support Group commander, and Security Forces operations officer. After graduating from Naval Postgraduate School in September 2022, he will report to Kunsan Air Base Republic of Korea in Gunsan, Korea as the Security Forces Director of Operations.



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Figure 1. Representation of a Security Forces Squadron Organizational Chart.
Source: Elsea (2010).10



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I. INTRODUCTION

Leadership is the primary responsibility that U.S. Air Force Security Forces officers are required to excel in. In fact, it is at the core of everything that Security Forces officers and senior non-commissioned officers are expected to do. Beginning from the first day that a new Security Forces second lieutenant reports to their first duty station, they are expected to lead teams consisting of more than 70 “defenders” toward the execution of daily law enforcement and security operations. Leaders in this career field must ensure their teams are ready and capable of responding to a vast range of both non-emergency and emergency incidents. For this reason, it is imperative that leaders are focused on developing and maintaining high performing teams within their organizations. The diverse “no-fail” mission that defenders are required to perform may benefit from having leaders that possess a greater understanding of the impact that organizational culture has on a team’s ability to achieve higher levels of performance.

I have noticed that during my formative leadership years the concept of organizational culture and the impact it has on a squadron has often been overlooked when discussing leadership. On the contrary, most of the focus during my first several years was rightfully targeted on achieving the tactical daily objectives required to maintain law enforcement and security of the resources and personnel within the installation. I do believe that acquiring the tactical experience during this formative phase in a second lieutenant’s career is of utmost importance. This tactical experience ensures that they are capable of achieving the tactical objectives required of flight commanders, especially when they must remain ready to serve at a moment’s notice as on-scene commanders during times of crisis when there is no time to immediately elevate decision-making to their superiors. This is often the case for the flight commanders tasked as night shift or swing shift flight commanders. However, I also believe that instilling a greater understanding and taking the time to shape culture-focused leaders is an important aspect of developing a better prepared leader that can drive their team toward higher levels of success.



It is my belief that culture, when combined with the tactical experience acquired early in the leader's career is a critical component to developing a well-rounded leader and thus also better performing organizations. By providing greater attention to this area, young Security Forces leaders would greatly benefit in the long term as they progress throughout their careers to higher levels of responsibility where they lead large teams. In fact, according to the official Air Force website, the Security Forces enterprise is the largest career field in the U.S. Air Force (U.S. Air Force, n.d.). This observation supports the heightened importance of leadership within the Security Forces career field by validating that Security Forces is the largest enlisted career field in the Air Force. However, looking at the total Security Forces officer ascensions reveals that the Security Forces officer corps remains disproportionately smaller in comparison to the enlisted force that Security Forces officers lead. This finding supports the importance of having a strong leadership base within the "defender nation" because of the incredible responsibility and large teams that Security Forces officers are tasked with leading.

Providing early understanding of, and exposure to, the impact of organizational culture is a critical aspect of leadership development that is often overlooked. This study seeks to garner attention by conducting an analysis of the impact that culture has on strategic, operational, and tactical objectives, as well as the ability to produce high-performing teams. A portion of the research is focused on identifying characteristics of high-performing teams and then providing an analysis through literature reviews of research where organizations have been able to generate success within their organizations. The overall objective is to spread greater awareness of why culture matters and provide an approach that leaders can utilize toward establishing an organizational culture that drives increased performance within their own operating environments. Finally, I observe and discuss potential limiting factors and general areas of concern for leaders to remain aware of when setting their desired culture within their teams. Ultimately, by researching the value of organizational culture, I seek to build stronger leaders that lead high performing teams capable of generating a more successful organization.



A. PURPOSE

In this study, I examine the role that leaders have on developing their organization's culture and the impact culture has on developing high performance within an organization. I analyze the culture, mission, and organizational structure of the U.S. Air Force Security Forces enterprise and then compare it to another successful organization that has a similar mission to Security Forces, the U.S. Coast Guard Maritime Enforcement. One primary motivation behind conducting this research is to identify key characteristics displayed by high-performing teams and observe the leader's role on developing a culture of high performance. Through this analysis, I explore the level of impact that culture has on building a successful organization. In doing so, I strive to generate awareness of the importance that culture-focused leaders have on the development of high-performing teams by observing the impacts within all three execution levels: strategic, operational, and tactical. The desired outcome is to provide supporting evidence that addresses the need for the early development of culture-focused leaders and recommend an approach that assists leaders with achieving high performance within their organization. Additionally, I aim to cover how leaders can maintain an awareness of their limitations and the challenges that they may face when setting their organization's culture. Ultimately, observing the correlation between successful organizations and a leader's ability to establish a strong culture is the driving force of this study.

B. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following specific research questions are addressed in this report, beginning with the primary research questions:

1. What are the characteristics of high-performing teams?
2. How can squadron commanders develop a culture of high performance within their organizations?
3. What are potential impacts at the strategic, operational, and tactical levels?
4. What are potential areas of concern that leaders must be aware of when shaping their organizational culture?



C. METHODOLOGY AND LIMITATIONS

I use a qualitative data analysis approach that relies on case studies, literature review, and my personal experience as a Security Forces officer, having served in multiple capacities within Security Forces to establish a greater understanding of the impact leaders have on building a culture of high performance within their organizations. Specifically, the case studies and literature review focus on identifying trends and characteristics portrayed by high-performing teams. One important aspect of the case studies and literature review is to analyze an organization that is similar to the Air Force Security Forces enterprise, the U.S. Coast Guard Maritime Enforcement, while simultaneously performing a similar analysis on the Security Forces enterprise by utilizing a blend of my personal experiences and literature reviews on Security Forces. After completing the analysis of each organization, I compare the findings from both organizations with special attention given to the organizations' structure, mission, and culture to address major takeaways.

It is worth mentioning that the scope of the research is focused on two organizations that are assigned to perform primarily in high-stress environments to fulfill emergency-response duties. As such, the research may produce unique findings of characteristics that do not apply to the same degree when compared to other job environments where the stakes are not as high. Additionally, it is important for the reader to understand that I do not examine all leadership frameworks or all aspects of organizational culture, given the vast quantity of leadership frameworks and organizational culture data that exist. There exist many leadership approaches that are proven to work with varying levels of success under different situations. This means that researchers must be aware that when observing a leadership style or approach, there may be a leadership approach that is as, or more, effective when applied to that specific situation than another leadership style. This is another limitation that the research on leadership creates within this thesis and that the reader should bear in mind for the remainder of the study. Ultimately, it remains common knowledge that leadership is very much both science and art, and for these previously mentioned reasons, there exist many limitations throughout this thesis when discussing the topic of leadership.



Another noteworthy limitation within the research is the ability to conduct a full assessment of the Air Force Security Forces career field. For one, given the nature of the Security Forces mission, a discussion of some of the aspects of the career field may have detrimental effects on operational security. The thesis research does not rise above the established unclassified designation, and as such, the information contained within will be appropriately tailored to meet the prescribed requirements. Furthermore, the Security Forces career field encompasses an incredibly large operating environment with extensive mission capabilities. Capturing all of the positive contributions and impact the Security Forces enterprise has on the Air Force and Department of Defense would require writing an entire book that is solely focused on the career field. For this reason, the analysis of Security Forces is focused on the traditional Security Forces squadron while providing a brief discussion of a few special duties that exist within the enterprise.

D. CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter introduced the main purpose of the research and provided the four research questions that link back to the primary purpose. The following section, Chapter II, provides a background of the U.S. Air Force Security Forces enterprise. The research focuses on the organizational structure of Security Forces and identifies its strengths, weaknesses, and challenges. Additionally, the concepts of organizational culture and strategic management are introduced, and the research attempts to define both areas in order to establish a basic understanding of each concept. Chapter II concludes by analyzing the team-building process, which serves as the baseline prior to introducing specific characteristics of high-performing teams. Chapter III analyzes the organizational culture and strategic management of both the Air Force Security Forces enterprise and the U.S. Coast Guard Maritime Enforcement and compares both organizations. Chapter III concludes with a discussion of the characteristics of high-performing teams that the research identified. Chapter IV provides the analysis of the research and answers the four research questions discussed in the first chapter. Last, Chapter V includes the recommendations based on the findings and the areas that future researchers should focus on.



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II. BACKGROUND

The focus of this chapter is to provide the appropriate background information on the U.S. Air Force Security Forces. In this section, I analyze the mission capabilities and organizational structure, and I provide a general overview of the Security Forces career field. Additionally, elements of organizational culture, strategic management, and the process of building teams is introduced in order for readers to establish the desired baseline understanding.

A. U.S. AIR FORCE SECURITY FORCES

First, I seek to build the reader's understanding of the U.S. Air Force Security Forces enterprise by highlighting the broad duties and responsibilities that defenders must be prepared to carry out. The intent is to establish a greater appreciation for the dynamic operating environment that Security Forces members must remain proficient in—whether it be through fulfilling law enforcement duties, nuclear security, or flightline security—which are just a few of the many areas of responsibility for Security Forces. Furthermore, in the next section, I provide a detailed breakdown of the organizational structure, mission, capabilities, and composition of both the enlisted force and the officer corps. By establishing the required basic understanding of the Security Forces career field, the reader receives a foundation for better grasping the importance of leadership and culture in achieving high-performing teams within the enterprise.

Prior to beginning, it is important to note that the primary function and mission of Security Forces is to provide integrated base defense of Air Force installations, resources, and personnel worldwide. They can achieve this challenging objective of integrated base defense through different means but do so primarily by engaging in law enforcement and security operations. However, it is important to understand that regardless of the specific duties a defender may perform at specific installations, the focal point at the heart of what a Security Forces member does is to defend the base, its people, its resources, and all areas surrounding the installation. Maintaining a safe environment enables the rest of the force to focus on executing their specific missions and objectives to support the continuation of successful operations across the globe. Additionally, integrated base



defense provides a secure environment where military families can live comfortably. This is especially important in light of the high number of permanent changes of station undertaken by families where they are faced with “starting over” and establishing new routines at new locations with new people. Additionally, with high deployment tempos, dependent spouses may go extended periods without the support of their deployed spouse. These aspects combined can pose even greater challenges to the dependent’s ability to adapt to their new environments on their own. As such, integrated base defense produces a safe operating environment from which the total population can benefit.

Although integrated base defense is at the core of everything that Security Forces does, upon deeper assessment of the career field, it becomes evident how vast the roles and responsibilities truly are. In fact, one would be forgiven for thinking that Security Forces members always provide law enforcement and security at all installations, when on the contrary, it is common for defenders to fulfill quite different roles that vary across different installations. This means that there are certain duty locations in which a defender may be tasked solely with providing flight line security and safeguarding aircraft and air crew. Additionally, defenders may be tasked with providing security over nuclear assets within the missile fields without also being required to perform any law enforcement duties. In this capacity, they have the capability to certify as members of Convoy Response Groups and other specific nuclear-related roles. At another installation, they may be operating entirely in a law enforcement capacity while rarely engaging in flight line security or any other resource security functions. Finally, one other important mission within the enterprise is serving as a Security Forces Contingency Response Group member that exists solely to deploy and train to deploy. In fact, when they are not deploying, they are training and preparing for the next deployment and then repeating the process. Members assigned to these units can expect to attend Army Airborne School, Pathfinder School, or—on a limited basis—Ranger School.

Considering the high demands placed on the defender force, it is no surprise that a highly desired quality in a defender is the ability to adapt and operate within a dynamic environment. This is most heavily supported by analyzing the most demanding installations, where a defender’s duties in one base may encompass many of the previously mentioned roles. This poses a challenge mainly for the tactical level and the



enlisted force, which must remain flexible enough to perform in any of the previously mentioned capacities between one shift and the other at those unique installations with multiple Security Forces missions. This means that one day a member may be tasked with performing law enforcement duties, and the following day, the member may be assigned to operate in a security role within a controlled or restricted area. It is important to note that to be assigned in any one of these roles, a defender must remain current on weapon qualifications, meet the established arming and use of force requirements, and be certified in the specific duty position they are assigned to perform for that specific shift. What this means is that the amount of information the individual must learn and retain is considerable, which poses an even greater challenge when they are expected to recall the information during an emergency high-stakes response. It is likely that these challenges will persist in the long term, and the force must adapt to meet the challenges. Therefore, one important consideration to explore is to continue the early development of strong leaders that have the right tools for establishing a culture of high performance within their teams.

Additionally, an earlier research project from a graduated Security Forces commander supports the concerns of performing such a broad mission by identifying a potentially negative implication within the officer corps. In his thesis, Springer (2009) stated,

An officer weighted in ABD [Air Base Defense], for example, would be appreciably challenged in executing nuclear security duties. Similarly, an officer weighted in nuclear security would be unprepared to command an expeditionary ABD operation. Contributing to this trend are the limitations of the force's current professional development protocols.” (Springer, 2009, p. 5).

This is important because, in addition to the challenges within the enlisted force that I previously discussed, Springer (2009) identified the potential for developing critical knowledge gaps among the officer corps. These knowledge gaps become increasingly more concerning when the officer is selected to command in an organization for which they are lacking knowledge of that specific mission. Similarly, one incredibly important takeaway is Springer's belief that serious limitations exist within the professional



development of Security Forces officers, and there must be an approach to better prepare leaders within the Security Forces enterprise.

Although the broad mission capabilities of Security Forces may require the defender to shift their focus depending on the installation they are assigned to, one aspect that remains constant is the organizational structure of Security Forces squadrons. The traditional Security Forces squadron consists of five individual sections broken down into “S” functions, similar to the U.S. Army’s structure. These functions are appropriately numbered S1–S5 and cover the Commander’s Support Staff/Administrative section, Investigations and Anti-Terrorism/Force Protection section, Operations section, Logistics and Supply section, and the Plans and Programs section. The Security Forces organizational structure is represented in Figure 1, which was retrieved from the official Tyndall Air Force Base website (Elsea, 2010), although Tyndall Security Forces has inverted the positions, placing the leadership team at the bottom of the pyramid rather than above.



Figure 1. Representation of a Security Forces Squadron Organizational Chart. Source: Elsea (2010).

The S1 function is also known as the Commander's Support Staff and is responsible for performing all administrative tasks for the squadron. It is commonly staffed by Security Forces members that undergo an internal application process. However, if the unit is considered a large Security Forces unit, then it is common to have a force support lieutenant or at minimum, a personnel non-commissioned officer from the local force support squadron career field to serve as section commander or section chief depending on the individual's rank. Additionally, a subdivision commonly seen within the S1 section is the Standardization/Evaluation (Stan-Eval) section, which is always filled by Security Forces members. The role of the Stan-Eval section is to work with the installation's inspector general to conduct audits, assessments, and inspections of the unit. It is responsible for conducting training exercises and assessing the response of the S3 Operations section through simulated emergency responses. In doing so, they report on deficiencies and any observed improper use of procedures and establish a remedial plan to correct the deficiency. These efforts aim to prepare the organization for higher headquarter inspections and ensure the force is well equipped and trained to respond to threats. Finally, a critical task of the Stan-Eval section is to certify Security Forces members on respective duty positions through duty position evaluations. Several examples of duty positions include flight commander/chief, law enforcement desk controller, and patrolman.

The S2 section is also known as the Investigations and Anti-Terrorism/Force Protection (AT/FP) section. The investigations section, like detectives in civilian police departments, conduct follow-up interviews and assume control of cases after the initial law enforcement response deems further investigative actions are required. The investigations section is always filled by highly proven defenders or hired Department of the Air Force civilians. Meanwhile, the AT/FP office is responsible for conducting threat assessments and briefing senior leaders on AT/FP matters. Additionally, they brief the Operations section regularly on similar matters and when there are individuals to be on the lookout for that are recently published.

The S3 function is the Operations section, and they are the heart of the Security Forces squadron. The S3 is responsible for all daily law enforcement and security matters by maintaining the required amount of personnel within each flight. There are specific



posts and patrols that must be manned 24/7, and each one is critical to the security of the installation. Additionally, within Operations, there are military working dogs who work very closely with the flights to enhance the security posture of the installation.

Furthermore, it is common across many squadrons to see a confinement section where Security Forces serve as correctional officers maintaining responsibility over confined inmates. A subdivision within the S3 function, similar to the Stan-Eval, is the S3T Training section that operates in a staff capacity and prepares all newly in-processed personnel and works closely with the Stan-Eval section to train and prepare the force for specific duties at each installation.

The S4 function is the Logistics and Resources section, which also includes the Armory section and the Combat Arms Training and Maintenance section. The S4 maintains oversight of all tactical equipment, gear, and vehicles required to support and equip the S3 section to fulfill their duties. Additionally, the armory and Combat Arms Training and Maintenance shop maintain full control of all aspects related to the Security Forces' arsenal. However, the Combat Arms Training and Maintenance section is specifically responsible for conducting all weapon qualifications for both Security Forces and the entire base population. They remain current on all weapon systems and the latest Air Force Instruction updates, which helps them prepare appropriate courses of fire for weapon qualifications in accordance with the latest guidance.

Finally, the S5 function, or Plans and Programs, is responsible for reviewing proposed changes to Security Forces operating instructions, revising Air Force manual guidance, and ensuring that recommended changes are captured/presented to headquarters through revisions. Additionally, this office is responsible for processing all paperwork submitted through the execution of the Operations section's daily duties. Specific tasks include processing visitor pass requests, traffic citations, and the paperwork resulting from arrests/apprehensions. Finally, the S5 manages a pass and ID office that handles all requests related to base entry.

Overall, the squadron is capable of being self-sustaining, thanks largely to the incredible support provided across each "S" function within the squadron. However, the importance of leadership arises when observing the ratio of officer to enlisted within the



career field and when including the complete array of responsibilities contained within each section. The limited number of officers within each squadron providing oversight across all functions demands strong leadership, which can be achieved through early leadership development of young officers. This is especially important in developing organizational culture and understanding the larger objectives that the senior Security Forces leadership team is focused on achieving.

B. ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

In general, if leaders across the entire spectrum of organizations and industries were asked whether culture matters to an organization's success, I believe most would answer with a resounding, "Yes!" However, if one were to dig deeper and ask follow on questions—like "Why does culture matter?" or "How do we seek to implement a culture that drives success?"—the answers from many leaders would likely be quite different. I believe the varying responses would not simply be due to the differing objectives across the organizations, but rather because of the challenge of explaining what culture is and further connecting the direct impact created by culture. In fact, like leadership and strategy, organizational culture cannot be easily defined, and its effects cannot be fully grasped by using a simple approach, since there are many contributing factors to consider.

Another reason that defining and describing culture poses a challenge is because, like leadership, culture focuses on the people within the organization. People are unique, and many challenging variables contribute to not using a one-size-fits-all approach in every scenario. One thing that is undeniably clear about organizational culture is the important role that leaders play in shaping their organization. In fact, this belief is supported by Willink and Babin (2015) in their book *Extreme Ownership: How U.S. Navy SEALs Lead and Win*, which addresses the impact leaders have on teams by describing a situation during Navy SEAL training in which Willink switched the leaders of the best and worst performing teams. Willink and Babin (2015) described their findings: "It was a shocking turn of events. Boat Crew VI, the same team in the same circumstances only under new leadership, went from the worst boat crew in the class to the best. Gone was their cursing and frustration" (p. 49). This is a significant observation,



because it was conducted under a controlled training environment centered on analyzing leadership and team performance during one of the most mentally and physically difficult selection processes in the U.S. military. Furthermore, this example of leadership and team performance is critical for validating the impactful role that leaders have on their organization's success by showing how quickly a team's performance can improve when a leader who assumes command of a group can provide appropriate guidance. In Willink and Babin's (2015) example, they stated that all conditions remained the same, but the leader was replaced, and that single change was enough to reverse the outcome each team had been experiencing.

Schein and Schein's (2017) definition of organizational culture lists 12 separate aspects that they described as contributing to culture. Both Schein and Schein (2017) defined culture as

the accumulated shared learning of that group as it solves its problems of external adaptation and internal integration; which has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, feel, and behave in relation to those problems. This accumulated learning is a pattern or system of beliefs, values, and behavioral norms that come to be taken for granted as basic assumptions and eventually drop out of awareness. (Schein and Schein, 2017, p. 6)

The idea of shared learning is important because it shows that these actions occur in a group environment rather than in isolation and sets the manner for the teams to operate in. The second aspect discussed is that the chosen approach must have been viewed as effective to solving the issues, and if it is deemed effective, then it becomes adopted into the organization's process. Last, the aspect of taking a certain ingrained pattern for granted is the area where many organizations are at risk of slipping and drifting away from the established culture if leaders fail to maintain awareness of the direction the organization is going. Another more basic and concise definition of organizational culture comes from Flamholtz and Randle (2011), who described organizational culture as "a company's 'personality' that influences how people behave" (p. 6). Areas where leaders must maintain constant vigilance within their organization to ensure that the culture does not drift away from their operating environment are critical and are discussed in the next section.



As previously discussed, leaders play a major role toward shaping the culture of their organization by their actions and messaging. However, there are many other factors to consider that contribute to setting the culture within an organization especially since leaders are also shaped by organizational culture. Several noteworthy aspects that support the leader's ability to establish a culture that aligns with the strategic objectives of the organization are to connect the culture with the mission statement, vision, and core values, which are areas that leaders at all levels within the organization must continuously review. In doing so, leaders can observe whether the mission statement, vision, and core values are aligned with the desired culture or are drifting away from these objectives as the organization continues to grow and evolve. Their ability to notice a drifting away from the desired outcome allows the leader to make the appropriate adjustments and lead their organization back on the right path. Of course, everything relates back to the leadership team, and in this case, the level of importance the leaders of an organization place on culture dictates the ability of teams to operate in accordance with the desired culture. One of the most successful companies that greatly values organizational culture is Google Inc., which according to Steiber and Alänge (2013) Google is so focused on culture that they established a Chief Culture Officer (CCO) position. Steiber and Alänge (2013) describe the role of the CCO as ensuring that the organization is moving forward in concert with the culture and focusing on hiring assessments to ensure all aspects of the organization are moving toward the same goal. It appears that we generally tend to agree that organizational culture does influence the level of success an organization has but what isn't always clear is the implementation approach that guarantees success. However, one area that cannot be overlooked when setting organizational culture is the direct link that culture has with strategic management and strategy. The concept of strategic management was introduced during the earlier discussion of the mission statement, vision, and core values which are functions of strategy. The next section contains further discussion of strategic management and assesses the impacts that misaligned organizational culture and strategic objectives have on organizations.



C. STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT

There exist three separate levels of objectives, or what Pirnie and Gardiner (1996) describe as levels of war which include strategic, operational, and tactical. The three levels can be applied to organizations in civilian, military, public, private, for-profit, or non-profit since they refer to different management levels. In the case outlined by Pirnie and Gardiner (1996) each objective respectively falls in one of the following management levels: strategic management, operational management, and tactical management. While tactical and operational management most often focus on the immediate threats and concerns, the strategic management is at the highest level and focuses on the future long-term potential challenges that may arise. Additionally, the objectives of tactical and operational management are most often handled by the frontline employees and mid-level leadership/management teams. On the other hand, strategic management occurs at the higher leadership echelons with senior management/leaders focusing on its execution. Mintzberg and Waters (1985) support the idea that the most common characteristics of strategic management include the ability to look long-term to identify potential future challenges that may emerge over time. Next is utilizing the information gathered to develop a plan to rise above the challenges and emerge more successful.

It is important to note that although this thesis briefly covers the tactical and operational management levels, the main focus is on analyzing strategic management and its impacts. To begin, Augier and Marshall (2017) point out that there is no entirely agreed upon definition of strategy and strategic management across the full spectrum of industries. Instead, there are generally agreed upon concepts such as the ones I previously mentioned, but the exact definition does vary throughout individual industries. In fact, Khalifa (2020) analyzes definitions of strategy from previous researchers and suggests the following definition as a link across the various definitions observed: “Strategy, rendered as a cohesive core of guiding decisions, is an entity’s evolving theory of winning high-stake challenges through power creating use of resources and opportunities in uncertain environments” (p. 136). This proposed definition of strategy highlights the need for leaders to maintain a long-term focus on challenges and to establish a plan that prepares their organizations and people to meet those challenges. Additionally, Khalifa’s idea of uncertain environments can be characterized by those future unforeseen



challenges that may not be an issue now but may emerge many years later. One example that we see on a continuous basis in the present day has been the immense technological advancements and new competitors entering into markets. Furthermore, the mention of guiding decisions in this definition can be attributed to the mission statement, vision, and organization's core values that serve as the guiding light for the team to uphold. These items serve to define the organization and promote the characteristics that they hold in deep regard because they essentially become the organization's reputation. By utilizing this approach, it is clear that strategic management and strategy is the aspect responsible for taking an organization from its current operating state and thrusting the organization into continued growth and greater desired outcomes achieved.

One aspect that is unmistakably clear regardless of which industry is being observed is the link between organizational culture and strategy. This link can best be described in the one-sentence quote that Kaul (2019) credits Peter Drucker as coining the phrase, which most in leadership both in military organizations and management departments are quite familiar with, "Culture eats strategy for breakfast" (p. 116). To me, this means that even if organizations have a strong, well-defined strategy that is easy to comprehend and execute, organizations will still fall short if leaders fail to account for the impacts of culture. In fact, because culture is the area that focuses on the people within the organization, I believe that failure to give culture its proper attention will result in impacting more aspects than just strategic objectives. If leaders are focused solely on developing "the perfect" strategy while dismissing the importance of culture, then the strategy is likely to not be accepted by the team. This failure to get buy-in from the team will result in an inability to adopt the strategy for long-term success and thus the team will not transform into a high performing team.

Another area worth considering is command climate which Schneider et al. (2006) define as: "The meaning attached to the focus of events, practices, and procedures and the behavior that gets rewarded, supported, and expected in a setting" (p. 116). Additionally, Schneider et al. (2006) view command climate as the mood of the environment which indicates that while organizational culture can be more difficult to assess, organizational climate is more visible. This means that leaders can assess their organization's climate in order to help them evaluate the effect the organizational culture



is having on the team. Overall, it appears that climate is more easily observable on a daily basis while organizational culture is more elusive.

D. BUILDING HIGH-PERFORMING TEAMS

To be able to affect strategy and command climate, organizations rely on high-performing teams. The first thing to consider before listing the characteristics displayed by high-performing teams is to begin by explaining the process of team building. The characteristics of high-performing teams are discussed in Chapter III, but first, an understanding of the process of team building must be established. According to Tuckman and Jensen (2010), the process of team building begins through the four traditional steps—forming, storming, norming, and performing—and continues with a recently discovered final step: the research has suggested the addition of adjourning. The traditional four steps begin with forming, which covers the initial meeting where basic discussions occur, such as individual introductions and a review of the objective the team is trying to complete. It is also at this stage where the team is most cautious and aware of what they are saying. In this phase, the team members are all trying to get a sense of what each of their teammates brings to the table. After the small talk of the forming stage ends, the storming phase begins, which is the phase where the team is establishing their processes and identifying the role each individual plays. The storming stage is generally where the team experiences the most conflict and frustration because there is a greater level of comfort to begin pushing back since the formalities experienced during the forming stage have started to dissipate. Once the team has successfully overcome their differences, they proceed into the final two stages: norming and performing. In these stages, the team is now working together toward their common goal with minimal conflict. Everyone has an established role and a clear understanding of what is required of each other to achieve success in reaching their objective. It is important to understand that not all teams in this stage would be classified as “high-performing” teams. As such, a critical aspect of this research is to examine what characteristics transform a team into a high-performing team. Last, the recently added stage is the adjourning stage, which Laiken and Mynors (1998) defined as the moment the team reaches its normal end where



no further action is required since the team has met its final objective or specific teammates have stepped down from their roles.

As previously mentioned in the above sections on culture and strategic management, it is no surprise that both matter to the success of an organization and to the development of high-performing teams. However, culture seems to be slightly more important because it decides whether a great strategic plan succeeds or fails. Basically, even with the best strategy outlined, if a team's culture is not embracing the strategy, then it will not achieve long-term success since the team will slowly begin to revert back to its old ways. Mattis and West (2019) captured the importance for leaders to focus on organizational culture. After Mattis visited a brigade headquarter team and saw conflicting messages where the Marine leaders tried to develop greater initiative in their Marines by encouraging their Marines to be wary of indecision however, Mattis observed a conflicting message,

It [the commanding general's division-wide order] prescribed the exact attire required for physical training that every soldier had to wear while working out—including the color of their safety belt. By prescribing such minutiae from the top down, the actual culture of the organization contradicted its own declarations and stifled any kind of real initiative.” (Mattis and West, 2019, p. 179)

The organization was conflicting their own guidance and creating confusion within their unit. This means that to truly be effective, a leader's words must remain consistent with their actions when driving their organization's culture toward a desired strategic outcome. By being consistent with the message leaders increase their chances of successfully implementing an organizational culture that exists long-term. Additionally, Mattis' example supports the idea that a leader's role through their consistent actions and messaging is a critical element to building an organizational culture and team that aligns with the organization's strategic objectives.

Last, understanding the process of team building is much easier than trying to capture all the characteristics of high performing teams. This is largely because it is impractical to build a full list of all possible characteristics that high performing teams possess because there are many different factors to consider such as situations, organizations, and personalities. Additionally, the subjective nature of the concept of high



performing, creates another barrier to answering a question of this magnitude. For this reason, the literature review focuses on identifying recurring characteristics that relate closely to first-responder and military organizations.

E. CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter provided a background of the U.S. Air Force Security Forces enterprise. The research focuses on the organizational structure of Security Forces and identified its strengths, weaknesses, and challenges. Additionally, the concepts of organizational culture and strategic management were introduced and defined. Another research area was the comparison between organizational culture and organizational climate. Finally, the chapter concluded with an analysis of the team-building process, which served as the baseline prior to introducing specific characteristics of high-performing teams.



III. LITERATURE REVIEW

In this section, I analyze the strategic management and organizational culture of the U.S. Coast Guard Maritime Enforcement and the Air Force Security Forces. The elements of strategic management analyzed include both organizations' mission statements, visions, core values, and overall organizational structures. Finally, this section concludes with an analysis of common characteristics that high-performing teams display.

A. U.S. COAST GUARD MARITIME ENFORCEMENT

In this section, I analyze aspects of strategic management and the culture of the U.S. Coast Guard Maritime Enforcement. By analyzing their vision, mission statement, core values, and overall structure, it is possible to develop a greater understanding of their culture and strategic management practices. These strategic communication tools are important to understanding the organization's health and ability to succeed. In fact, Matejka et al. (1993) attributed a lack of a mission statement to organizations being overcome by inertia and remaining stagnant: "Inertia can be deadly, especially when the environment and competition are being altered at a dizzying pace. Second, organizations without missions are like ships without clear destinations" (p. 35). This supports the belief that vision and mission statements are instrumental aspects for driving current and future growth and the success of a company, since they help communicate the strategic objectives throughout the organization. For this reason, I seek to assess the above-mentioned aspects of strategic communication and the culture that exist within the U.S. Coast Guard Maritime Enforcement career field and then compare the findings to the U.S. Air Force Security Forces enterprise.

1. STRATEGY

As previously mentioned, several important aspects that showcase the strategic management practices of an organization include their mission statement, vision, core values, and guiding principles. According to the official website of the U.S. Coast Guard, the U.S. Coast Guard Maritime Enforcement career field's mission statement is "to



protect and defend America's borders through the enforcement of maritime law" (U.S. Coast Guard and Coast Guard Reserve, n.d.). The Department of Homeland Security's official website identifies the four primary roles that the U.S. Coast Guard Maritime Enforcement is tasked to perform as:

- counter-drug operations,
- alien and migrant interdiction operations,
- prevention of human trafficking, and
- other general law enforcement duties within the U.S. exclusive economic zone (Department of Homeland Security, n.d.).

One example of general law enforcement duties within the exclusive economic zone is the enforcement of regulations pertaining to international fisheries. Like the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the U.S. Coast Guard Maritime Enforcement has responsibility to focus on the enforcement and prevention of illegal fishing activities within and around the U.S. bodies of water.

When comparing the U.S. Coast Guard Maritime Enforcement's mission statement to its four primary roles, there is an undeniably strong connection between the two. This strong link establishes a clear operating framework at the highest levels of the organization as well as for the newest Maritime Enforcement members. There is no question that its sole purpose and responsibility is to provide coastal defense to the United States. Furthermore, the four primary roles listed above support this mission by providing clarity on the most important areas that the U.S. Coast Guard Maritime Enforcement must remain proficient in. In fact, according to the official Department of Homeland Security website, in one of their assessments the Department of Homeland Security lauds the U.S. Coast Guard Maritime Enforcement as setting the standard across the world for being one of the best at executing the maritime law enforcement duties (Department of Homeland Security, n.d.).

On the other hand, the only vision and core values I was able to find were those of the overarching U.S. Coast Guard, but none specific to the U.S. Coast Guard Maritime Enforcement career field. However, although I was unable to find a specific vision or core values that are distinctly attributed to the specific mission of the Maritime Enforcement, I discovered on the official U.S. Coast Guard website that the Maritime



Enforcement career field does have eight unique guiding principles specific to its mission which are listed as:

- I will defend the nation and her maritime interests in peace time and in war by remaining ever vigilant, well trained, and physically fit
- I will conduct myself in a manner which brings credit to my unit, service and country by living and embracing our service core values and the guardian ethos, both on and off duty
- I shall only use that force reasonably necessary under the circumstances. I will never use excessive force
- I shall protect my team and treat them with respect, for no mission goes forward without the team
- I will be a conscientious steward, seeking new and innovative ways to complete my job and by maintaining my gear and equipment
- I will be the utmost professional, by never compromising safety, security or performance standards. I will take no shortcuts in my job
- I shall strive to be better than those that have gone before me and will set the bar high for those that follow
- I will serve proudly as a U.S. Coast Guard Maritime Enforcement Specialist (U.S. Coast Guard and Coast Guard Reserve, n.d.).

Many of these eight guiding principles relate closely to the U.S. Coast Guard Maritime Enforcement's primary duties, but there also appears to be others that are indicative of the organization's desired culture. Specifically, the guiding principles that appear to be linked to their desired culture are Principles 2 and 4–8, which emphasize the individual's desired qualities and the U.S. Coast Guard's focus on teamwork and team-related performance. Overall, it is clear that the organization cherishes professionalism, excellence, and teamwork among its personnel by encouraging their members to exceed the standard both in the execution of their duties and the care of their equipment.

The high-level strategy depicted in the U.S. Coast Guard Maritime Enforcement's mission statement and eight guiding principles assist individual U.S. Coast Guard Maritime Enforcement units by providing a blueprint for leadership command philosophy and priorities. Specifically, individual units are able to shape their individual organizations to better prepare against the identified threats that are more likely to occur as well as the more damaging threats within their unit's area of operations while having the high-level strategy objectives to guide them. Ultimately, the overarching mission statement and guiding principles help individual units prepare and draft their standard



operating procedures as well as specific individual tactics, techniques, and procedures that they apply to operational and tactical responses.

2. CULTURE

Organizational culture may quite possibly be the greatest contributor to an organization's success and its ability to achieve its strategic objectives. In fact, Flamholtz and Randle (2011) asserted that organizational culture is most important to the success of organizations that they supported by measuring and comparing the ability of strong and weak organizations to achieve objectives. As expected, the research concluded that organizations with a stronger organizational culture reached more of their objectives than the organizations that were deemed to have weaker organizational cultures in place. Furthermore, Flamholtz and Randle (2011) credited strong organizational cultures as contributing to higher levels of motivation among the employees across the company. This higher level of motivation can be attributed to the strong connection the employees feel to the purpose of their work. Overall, the researchers conclude that the strong and clearly defined organizational culture and purpose produces more motivated employees, which unsurprisingly results in a better ability to reach organizational goals and objectives.

The eight guiding principles that were identified in the previous section provide a good insight into the U.S. Coast Guard Maritime Enforcement's culture. It is important to note that having guiding principles supports the creation of culture as long as the leader enforces and promotes them within the unit. Leaders create inconsistent messaging if they fail to promote the guiding principles either by engaging in actions that don't align with the guiding principles or not making them visible for all to see. When this occurs, the inconsistency creates confusion, and the recallability of what the unit values is lost for the members at all levels within the unit. As previously mentioned, several of the principles point to the Coast Guard's desire to have professional law enforcement officers that are driven to excel above the standard within its organization. This is clearly important, as its primary duties are centered around responding to situations where U.S. Coast Guard Maritime Enforcement Specialists apprehend individuals who may have been caught performing illegal acts and may be willing to engage in violence to prevent



apprehension. Furthermore, the professionalism and excellence standards that the Coast Guard seeks to instill within its officers even carry over into the care and maintenance that officers are required to place on their equipment. This is another important aspect of its culture that is relevant to the U.S. Coast Guard Maritime Enforcement's primary duties, because any first responder can explain that proper care and maintenance of their equipment can make all the difference during life and death responses. Furthermore, the fourth guiding principle relates to a desire to create a team-focused culture among their organization, which also has strong links to their primary mission since officers rarely respond alone during high-stakes situations. In these instances, officers must be able to trust that their team is competent and reliable to support them in times of crisis. Team building is critical in any environment but none more so than in emergency response situations where an individual must trust their team members' ability to respond and, if required, neutralize a threat.

Although on paper the eight guiding principles appear to align strongly with the strategic objectives that the U.S. Coast Guard Maritime Enforcement is focused on achieving, there appear to be some small inconsistencies in their application. Kelley (1990) analyzed the U.S. Coast Guard Maritime Enforcement's strategic management and culture and described several factors within the organization's culture that affect their law enforcement strategy. Kelley (1990) found that the organization's culture includes a "doing more with less" mentality while remaining a small organization, which he supports by stating there has been an increase to the additional duties outside of the four primary mission sets their strategy establishes. Furthermore, Kelly (1990) attributed their motto, "Semper Paratus," which means "Always Ready," as a reason for the organization's willingness to continue taking on more responsibilities outside of their four primary missions while still maintaining the same small total-force designation. Finally, perhaps one of the most important observations that is most relevant to this study is Kelley's (1990) observation on the Coast Guard's cultural leader: "The organizational culture has developed a Coast Guard leader who is a 'go-getter,' who can do 'more with less.' What the culture hasn't fostered is someone who is proactive rather than reactive, who is exciting rather than excitable" (pp. 20–21). This is significant to my research, because Kelley's analysis provides an insight into the negative effects that an inconsistent



organizational culture can create not only on the team but also the leader. In this case, the inconsistent messaging of remaining “Always Ready” appears to clash with the perceived actions from the U.S. Coast Guard senior leaders of fostering a reactive rather than a proactive leader. In doing so, this inconsistent messaging creates confusion within the U.S. Coast Guard Maritime Enforcement leader at the unit level, and because of the leader’s role, this confusion seeps into all aspects of the leader’s team. It is important to note that Kelley (1990) viewed the above stated challenges as something that the Maritime Enforcement senior leadership teams are aware of and have taken steps to correct.

A noteworthy example of the culture change is the willingness for U.S. Coast Guard Maritime Enforcement leaders to push back when tasked to perform in a function outside of their primary duties, as is highlighted by Kelly’s (1990) assessment of a quote from a former Commandant of the U.S. Coast Guard Paul Yost: “The Coast Guard has stretched itself as thinly as it can, no longer will it continue to do ‘more with less.’ It’s obvious the culture of yesterday won’t solve the problems faced today” (p. 22). This is an example of senior leaders seeking to drive change in their culture by directly going against the previously cherished quality of developing leaders that do more with less. This call to action sought to refocus the U.S. Coast Guard Maritime personnel to return to their law enforcement roots and be more selective on the other mission types they accept to perform.

B. U.S. AIR FORCE SECURITY FORCES

Similar to the previous section on the U.S. Coast Guard Maritime Enforcement, in this section, I analyze those same areas of strategy and culture for the U.S. Air Force Security Forces enterprise. However, considering the in-depth background already provided on Security Forces, the analysis is centered solely on the strategy and culture of the enterprise.

1. STRATEGY

The Security Forces Academy where both the Security Forces Officer Course and the Security Forces Apprentice Course for the enlisted force is headquartered in San



Antonio, TX. The responsibility to train and shape new Air Force ascensions into fully capable Security Forces defenders rests on the 343rd Security Forces Training Squadron. According to the 343rd Security Forces Training Squadron’s official website, the mission statement and vision of the USAF Security Forces is:

- **U.S. Air Force Security Forces Mission Statement:** “Security Forces Protect, Defend, and Fight to Enable Air Force Joint and Coalition Missions” (37th Training Wing, n.d.)
- **U.S. Air Force Security Forces Vision:** “Mission Ready, Resilient, and Air-Minded” (37th Training Wing, n.d.)

Like the U.S. Coast Guard Maritime Enforcement, the Security Forces enterprise also has a strong link between its mission statement and vision. When analyzing these pieces of strategic communication, the mission of Security Forces can be broken down into two areas. The first is protect and defend, which are two of the most utilized words across law enforcement organizations, and in the case of Security Forces, their mission statement and vision portray their tactical and operational objectives that are linked to the bigger strategic objective of the U.S. Air Force. Specifically, protect and defend is attributed to their role in providing law enforcement and security over Air Force installations, personnel, and resources—such as nuclear assets, aircraft, critical infrastructure, and all other mission-related capabilities. In the execution of their tactical and operational objectives they are capable of meeting the U.S. Air Force’s larger objectives tied to the final aspect of the mission statement, “enable[ing] Air Force joint and coalition missions” (37th Training Wing, n.d.).

The second area is the fight objective, which encompasses both the ground combat role that the U.S. Air Force demands every Security Forces member be able to execute as well as the ability to neutralize any threat if required through the execution of their law enforcement and security duties. The ground combat role is often the lesser-known aspect of the Security Forces mission, which was supported by Caudill et al. (2014), who explained the Security Forces’ heavy involvement in combat operations starting from their formative years in Vietnam and continuing into the current overseas engagements. A few examples include convoy operations, military working dog teams that are assigned to conduct sweeps and patrols, and units embedded with Air Force special operations teams. One specific example of the ground combat role was discussed



by Caudill et al. (2014), who also highlighted the immense responsibility Airmen are entrusted with: “Task Force 1/455 at Bagram, Afghanistan (commanded by an Airman), coordinated ground patrols and synchronized BSZ operations at key times to deter attacks when larger transport aircraft were being launched and recovered at the expeditionary airfield” (p. 18). For clarity, BSZ refers to Base Security Zone, the surrounding area outside of an installation that if not accounted for and secured may prove advantageous for the enemy to initiate an attack. The previously used reference, in addition to the earlier discussed aspects of the Security Forces mission statement, support the air-minded component of the Security Forces vision, ultimately contributing to the ability to execute the overall strategic objectives of the force by ensuring every defender is focused on providing integrated base defense for the U.S. Air Force. Through this approach, Security Forces personnel ensure the security of strategically significant air operations.

2. CULTURE

There are many contributing factors that promote the current organizational culture of Security Forces. The first contributing factor is the fact that Security Forces is one of the few career fields in the U.S. Air Force in which Airmen are authorized to wear a beret in place of the traditional cap. The other career field in the U.S. Air Force authorized to wear a beret is Battlefield Airman, which are also referred to as Special Operations units. There are many reasons why the use of the beret is authorized for Security Forces, but the leading reason appears to be so they can be easily identified as a law enforcement entity while responding to a crisis. By wearing the Security Forces beret, responding patrols are set apart for individuals requiring assistance to easily identify and reach out for support during times of crisis. Furthermore, one thing that is certain is that the beret is deeply engrained in the Security Forces culture and holds a special place in every defender’s heart because of the long-established history. Additionally, the beret instills a sense of pride, authority, and confidence in defenders who wear it.

Another driving force behind the culture of Security Forces is the widely recognized “defender” nickname given to every Security Forces member that has earned the coveted title. This moniker is important to promoting a culture focused on the



strategic objectives of the Security Forces enterprise because of the relevance it has on the primary role of integrated base defense. I relate this term to the U.S. Marine Corps; when a Marine is asked what they do, they don't tell you they are in the Marines, but rather they tell you they are a Marine. Similarly, when a Security Forces member is asked what they do they are likely to respond that they are defenders. Ultimately, both the beret and the term defender contribute greatly to a sense of belonging, pride, and commitment to duty that clearly links the primary strategic objectives to the desired culture. Of equal importance, both the beret and the term defender contribute to building a close-knit team of professionals that fosters a unified force.

Another important contributing factor to the culture of Security Forces is the Security Forces Creed which shares many similarities to the US Coast Guard Maritime Enforcement's eight guiding principles. According to the USAF Police Alumni Association (n.d.), the Security Forces Creed is:

I am a Security Forces Member. I hold allegiance to my country, devotion to duty, and personal integrity above all. I wear my badge of authority with dignity and restraint, and promote by example high standards of conduct, appearance, courtesy, and performance. I seek no favor because of my position. I perform my duties in a firm, courteous, and impartial manner, irrespective of a person's color, race, religion, national origin, or sex. I strive to merit the respect of my fellow airmen and all with whom I come in contact (USAF Police Alumni Association, n.d.).

As previously mentioned, there are many similarities between both organizations, whereby both greatly revere the values of professionalism, excellence, and fairness in the execution of their duties. The creed supports the need for defenders to maintain a high standard when interacting with base populace, engaging the threat, or encountering any other aspect of their professional environment. Additionally, one final area they place a high value on is the importance of fairness and integrity by remaining impartial and not violating their ethics—emphasizing the importance to never accept special favors. Overall, both the Security Forces Creed and the eight guiding principles of the U.S. Coast Guard Maritime Enforcement highlight common themes seen across many military and civilian law enforcement organizations because of the nature of the work.



Although the previously mentioned areas indicate a well-established culture that is strongly linked to the strategic objectives of the force, there are a few observed factors that may create confusion and detract from the strategic objectives. The broad Security Forces mission, in conjunction with the multiple moves a Security Forces member makes throughout their career, means they may not always be performing in a law enforcement capacity or a nuclear security capacity, or preparing for a ground combat role. These continuous changes can leave the defender never fully embracing the overall enterprise's organizational culture and detracts from the ability to build greater understanding of the primary role. More concerning is the fact that those assigned to a specific mission capability may lose sight of the primary purpose for which Security Forces exist: to defend the base and provide integrated base defense above all else. Additionally, another challenge of the broad Security Forces mission is the mindset that each specific mission requires. Specifically, whereas the law enforcement mission involves a greater degree of officer discretion in how they respond to incidents, the nuclear mission requires a strict adherence to established protocols and procedures. Basically, there is rarely a gray area in the nuclear and resource security aspect of the Security Forces mission; however, the human factor of law enforcement allows greater flexibility in how an officer can respond. This is a significant challenge for defenders who have spent a large part of their career in one of the above missions and then are required to adjust and possibly lead personnel in a different role that requires a drastically different approach. Springer (2009) illustrated this risk to an officer's development by stating that it is hard to reach a level of specialization in a certain area when the mission is incredibly broad, and often leaders may find themselves leading in a capacity new to them.

The earlier assessment of the U.S. Coast Guard Maritime Enforcement's culture yielded a similar finding where both organizations appear to be doing "more with less." This poses a risk to both organizations because of the possibility of detracting from their primary objectives and losing proficiency in those critical areas. Ultimately, the development of junior members may be limited because of the degree of broadness identified within the capabilities and mission sets that exists within these organizations, which has the risk of creating a conflicting organizational culture.



One organization worth mentioning is the Air Force Security Forces Center which is a detachment within the Air Force Installation and Mission Support Center, whose primary role is to support the operational Security Forces units. The Air Force Security Forces Center shapes its vision statement and mission to meet the strategic objectives of the overarching Security Forces enterprise through policy, training, and logistical support to operational units accomplishing the mission. The official website of the Air Force Installation and Mission Support Center lists the mission and vision statement of the Air Force Security Forces Center as follows:

- **Air Force Security Forces Center Mission Statement:** “Air Force Security Forces Center develops, delivers and executes Security Forces capabilities and associated programs for AF and joint mission sets and enabling a safe and secure operating environment.” (Air Force Installation and Mission Support Center, n.d.)
- **Air Force Security Forces Center Vision:** “Driving integrated protection for the Air Force through innovation and deliberate program execution.” (Air Force Installation and Mission Support Center, n.d.)

The above is an example of an organization that, although it serves in a support capacity, remains capable of meeting the strategic objectives of the Security Forces enterprise by listening to the needs of the warfighter defenders in operational units and delivering capabilities the field requires to execute the role of integrated base defense. The innovative focus of the Air Force Security Forces Center indicates the need to be long-term thinkers focused on future threats and through their mission prepare training plans, policy reviews, and logistical delivery.

C. CHARACTERISTICS OF HIGH-PERFORMING TEAMS

The earlier section focused on the process of building teams, while this section seeks to identify specific characteristics to transform a team into a high-performing team. However, as previously mentioned, there is not only one specific set of characteristics that high-performing teams possess. In fact, there is a wide spectrum of characteristics and even differences across different career fields that contribute to building high-performing teams. For the purposes of this research, the focus is primarily on high-performing teams within first responder and military organizations. Two notable studies identify several specific characteristics that the researchers viewed as most noteworthy.



Nelson (2010), in his article “Creating High-Performing Teams,” identified the most notable characteristics as purpose, empowerment, relationships and communication, flexibility, and morale. These characteristics have a high degree of relevancy and applicability to the Security Forces enterprise. First, any organization benefits from having a clear purpose because it improves the effectiveness of the unit by getting the entire team focused on the same path. Furthermore, the applicability that empowerment, relationship and communication, and morale have within the Security Forces enterprise is important because of the impact it creates on the human aspect. This impact returns to the topic of organizational culture and, when applied correctly within the team, helps build the psychological trust throughout the team. This is significant because it is no surprise that teams with low levels of morale across any organization will not be committed to the success of the team and are more likely to put forth the minimum amount of effort required. In fact, low morale is a team killer that must be addressed when it emerges. In fact, one of the most effective methods of combatting low morale levels is focusing on building a team’s connection to the “big picture” and developing greater levels of trust by focusing on establishing psychological safety and defining a clear purpose to strive to reach.

Another critical study conducted was Project Aristotle, which was Google’s initiative to identify what makes the perfect team and how to build it. Duhigg (2016), in his article “What Google Learned From Its Quest to Build the Perfect Team,” listed three important findings from the research: (1) who is in the team appears to not be a significant factor to the success of the team, (2) what matters most are the norms and organizational culture established by the team, and (3) another characteristic of equal importance is psychological safety. Duhigg (2016) discussed that Project Aristotle further identified the specific qualities associated with psychological safety that contributed to the success of teams as everyone feeling free to share ideas equally and being able to pick up on emotional cues, thereby sensing how others are feeling. This study is critical because it supports the idea that the norms and culture of the team are more important than the individual members’ intelligence, level of knowledge, or other desirable qualities unique to each team member. Overall, Project Aristotle is a significant study because of the immense amount of data and the specificity of everything it observed by not only



simply supporting the importance of organizational culture but also going several steps deeper to identify key characteristics that result in creating a high-performing team. Psychological safety was listed as the key characteristic that the research discovered, which was also supported in Nelson (2010). Ultimately, both studies concluded that when organizations focus on building a culture of psychological safety in all aspects of their operating environment above all other characteristics, they are more likely to experience greater levels of motivation and success in reaching their objectives.

An example of a large Security Forces unit that has applied several of the teamwork and motivation concepts previously discussed is the 55th Security Forces Squadron located at Offutt Air Force Base in Nebraska. The 55th Security Forces Squadron was awarded the 2021 Air Force Security Forces Squadron Outstanding Large Unit Award. Cunningham's (2022) article, published on the official Offutt Air Force Base website, lists the team's focus, motivation, and flexibility as contributing factors. Cunningham (2022) identified the unit as having 615 Security Forces defenders that are focused on maintaining flightline security, resource protection over Strategic Command's National Airborne Operations Command, deployments, and higher headquarter inspections as the team recovered from the 2019 base flooding that resulted in a mass evacuation event. This is an example of a unit that is able to manage broad mission capabilities and remain prepared to respond to crisis situations, as was the case during the 2019 flood incident. Additionally, it supports the idea that a team-focused organization can create higher motivation and thus greater positive impacts.

D. CHAPTER SUMMARY

This section analyzed the organizational culture and strategic management of both the Air Force Security Forces enterprise and the U.S. Coast Guard Maritime Enforcement in order to compare both organizations to each other. Additionally, this section examined specific characteristics of high-performing teams which the research identified. Finally, this section concluded by providing an example of a study led by Google to identify characteristics of high-performing teams, and two specific Security Forces units were examined.



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IV. ANALYSIS

In this section, I seek to answer the four primary questions initially discussed after a thorough analysis of the literature review. Utilizing the findings garnered through the research provided supporting evidence for recommended actions. The analysis also addressed and highlighted critical areas for team leaders and commanders to focus their efforts on.

A. FINDINGS

This section answers the four research questions discussed in the first chapter which were:

1. What are the characteristics of high performing teams?
2. How can squadron commanders develop a culture of high performance within their organizations?
3. What are potential impacts at the strategic, operational, and tactical levels?
4. What are potential limiting factors and areas of concern that leaders must be aware of when applying the concepts discovered through this research regarding building an organizational culture that is focused on high performance?

1. PRIMARY RESEARCH QUESTION AND ANSWER

The primary research question was, “What are the characteristics of high-performing teams?” and “How can squadron commanders develop a culture of high performance within their organizations?”

The research indicates that the first thing to consider prior to focusing on building a high performing team is to acknowledge and understand the traditional four-step process of building a team. Each step was described in greater detail earlier in the thesis, but—as a brief overview—the four steps include (1) forming, (2) storming, (3) norming, and (4) performing. By having a greater understanding of the four-step team-building process, individual members are able to better account for the many challenges they may encounter as they progress through each step. This enables teams to better prepare for each trial they face, and this preparation may facilitate their ability to transition into the performing stage much more quickly. Additionally, there is no one-size-fits-all list of



characteristics that make or define a team as a high-performing team, but there appear to be several recurring themes based on the literature that was reviewed. Both studies that were analyzed listed psychological safety as a critical factor to creating a high-performing team. Duhigg (2016) identified the specific elements of psychological safety—every team member having an ability to speak freely with an equally measured amount of time—and a team member’s ability to read emotions and determine how their team members were feeling. Of course, the second aspect of being able to read emotions is addressing the negative emotions through the action the team members take to support each other when a team member is displaying frustration or anger. Additionally, the principle that every member should feel comfortable speaking up and sharing ideas was also supported by Nelson (2010) and is achieved through empowerment, relationships, and communication, which also align with and support the importance of psychological safety in ensuring a team’s success. Nelson (2010) further identified morale, flexibility, and purpose as important characteristics of high-performing teams. First, morale and flexibility can be created in an environment that fosters psychological safety. Additionally, it is important for the team to have a clear purpose established because it provides the direction the team is working toward. By establishing a clear purpose, the team is able to create short-term goals that are measurable, and as they progress closer toward achieving the primary purpose, they can assess their performance and receive critical feedback.

The literature indicates that for leaders in any organization to create high-performing teams, they must first understand the process of team building. As the team is going through the forming stage, it is imperative that leaders establish an immediate culture centered on psychological safety rather than focusing on identifying who the “superstars” of the group are. This does not mean that positive behavior is not reward, but it does mean that all team members are allowed to speak and contribute without the “more qualified” individuals overpowering conversations. It is important for leaders to reward their personnel but to also create an environment in which any of their team members have an equal advantage. Furthermore, while setting the culture of psychological safety, leaders should simultaneously be focused on developing a clear purpose in order for the team to be charging towards the same objective in the same



direction. Duhigg (2016) validated the importance of having an off-site in which a leader can get the employees out of the work mindset, which is a great way commanders can encourage a culture of psychological safety. Additionally, it allows leaders to get a pulse for the status of the organization and identify any underlying trends that may not otherwise be as visible in the work environment. This is even more effective when an agenda is planned that contains round-table discussions, followed by lunch, and concludes with an optional fun activity such as bowling or an afternoon at an arcade. It is important that during the round-table discussions leaders encourage an open and honest dialogue where everyone feels comfortable speaking and sharing a little about themselves by setting the example and participating in the sharing. Through this leadership by example and this vulnerability, the team is more open and more likely to accept the desired culture the leader seeks to establish. Additionally, in the work environment, taking time early and often during meetings to remind the team that everyone's opinion matters and following up with actions consistent to that message will contribute to establishing the building blocks of a culture of psychological safety, which produces high performing teams.

The research supports the belief that many similarities exist between the U.S. Coast Guard Maritime Enforcement and the U.S. Air Force Security Forces' team-building process, desired characteristics, and organizational culture. To begin, the eight guiding principles of the U.S. Coast Guard Maritime Enforcement and the Security Forces Creed clearly establish the importance of the team. This is indicated by one of the principles from the eight guiding principles listed on the official U.S. Coast Guard website: "I shall protect my team and treat them with respect, for no mission goes forward without the team" (U.S. Coast Guard and Coast Guard Reserve, n.d.). Similarly, the USAF Police Alumni Association (n.d.) listed the last line of the Security Forces Creed as, "I strive to merit the respect of my fellow airmen and all with whom I come in contact." Both organizations value teamwork and teambuilding, which is a commonly known attribute between law enforcement and security organizations and is an indicator of the close-knit community that revolves around the first responder organizations.

Additionally, there appear to be several desired characteristics that U.S. Coast Guard Maritime Enforcement members and U.S. Air Force Security Forces members



share. Considering the nature of their law enforcement, security, and emergency response duties during high-stakes situations where there is potential of engaging offenders or assisting victims that may not be in the right frame of mind requires personal restraint. This means that personnel in both organizations must remain prepared to use the appropriate amount of force to neutralize any threat yet remain in control of their emotions, and so they do not use excessive force. The need for emotional restraint is a critical quality as well as integrity, professionalism, and excellence. Integrity and professionalism are important for both organizations because they serve to remind the teams to never accept special favors and to maintain the standard of fairness with all people they engage with. Last, excellence is important to both organizations because the operating environment of both organizations is such that any lapse in standards can result in fatalities or elevated danger to the public.

Although many similarities exist between both organizations, a major difference between the two is their primary operating environment. Where the U.S. Coast Guard Maritime Enforcement focuses their law enforcement response on U.S. shores and waterways, the U.S. Air Force Security Forces can be found on air bases across the world protecting high-value leaders, aircraft, and storage facilities; conducting ground combat operations; and even providing limited ocean and beach patrols.

Overall, if leaders want to build a culture of high performance in both organizations, it is important that they shape their organizational culture with the overarching guiding principles, creed, and mission statements of their respective career fields. Additionally, they must promote the concept of psychological safety and understand that the previously identified characteristics of high-performing teams—flexibility, morale, and purpose—can be used in conjunction with the characteristics each organization holds in high regard.

2. SECONDARY RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

The secondary research questions are “What are potential impacts at the strategic, operational, and tactical levels?” and “What are potential areas of concern that leaders must be aware of when shaping their organizational culture?”



Every piece of literature analyzed throughout this research has supported the importance that culture has on organizations to achieve greater levels of success. In fact, most of the literature reviewed lists organizational culture as an important factor to not overlook if leaders want to build more successful organizations, specifically stating that even if an organization has the most ideal strategy, it will still likely result in failure—or at a minimum, diminished levels of success—if the organizational culture is conflicting. A culture that is inconsistent to the strategic objectives of the company will create a compounding effect, and the impacts will be felt throughout all aspects of the organization, including the operational and tactical levels. For this reason, it is important to develop culture-minded leaders early in their careers, because understanding the negative consequences of getting culture wrong will encourage leaders to make organizational culture a priority. In doing so, leaders can expect to see an organization driven to achieve greater success.

There are many limiting factors to consider when discussing organizational culture, but the first is understanding the amount of time it takes to establish or adopt a new culture. This is another reason that supports the importance of developing culture-focused leaders early in their career, because through this development leaders are able to understand the effort it takes to change the culture of an organization. Through this understanding, the leader can prepare for the high commitment that is required to implement and sustain a desired culture. With this commitment, leaders must remain cognizant of their actions, words, and undertone messages to ensure that they are in line with the desired culture. Otherwise, employees will pick up on the inconsistencies, which will result in confusion throughout the ranks. Furthermore, other limitations for leaders to be aware of are failing to solicit feedback from the team and failing to properly message the desired outcome to the team. This is important because failure in these categories can lead to the team refusing to adopt the desired organizational culture. If this refusal is not acknowledged, there exists the possibility that the leader creates more harm, loses control, and risks being removed from command for a loss of confidence.

The strategic messaging of both the U.S. Coast Guard Maritime Enforcement and the U.S. Air Force Security Forces enterprise share many similarities when analyzing their unique mission statements and vision. First, the Security Forces enterprise's vision



focuses on remaining always ready, and the U.S. Coast Guard Maritime Enforcement has a similar focus through their motto, “Semper Paratus” which literally translates to “Always Ready.” Both link to the previously mentioned identified characteristic of remaining flexible. Similarly, the focus of the mission statement of the U.S. Coast Guard Maritime Enforcement is to protect and defend America’s shores while the focus of the U.S. Air Force Security Forces mission statement is to protect, defend and fight. Overall, both are strong law enforcement and security organizations with small differences in their primary operating environments.

The most notable strategic difference between the U.S. Coast Guard Maritime Enforcement and the U.S. Air Force Security Forces enterprise is the air-minded aspect of the Security Forces enterprise. The air-minded focus of Security Forces enables the safe execution of strategic air power and air operations across the world, while the shore security and law enforcement of the U.S. Coast Guard Maritime Enforcement secures the oceanic borders of the United States.

B. CHAPTER SUMMARY

This section answered the four research questions discussed in the first chapter which were:

1. What are the characteristics of high performing teams?
2. How can squadron commanders develop a culture of high performance within their organizations?
3. What are potential impacts at the strategic, operational, and tactical levels?
4. What are potential limiting factors and areas of concern that leaders must be aware of when applying the concepts discovered through this research regarding building an organizational culture that is focused on high performance?

Last, this section provided an analysis of the U.S. Coast Guard Maritime Enforcement and U.S. Air Force Security Forces enterprise.



V. RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

In this section I seek to provide recommendations based on the previously discussed findings that were discovered through my analysis. Additionally, I address areas that require further research in order to implement the proposed changes.

A. RECOMMENDATIONS

The analysis and comparison of the U.S. Air Force Security Forces enterprise and the U.S. Coast Guard Maritime Enforcement identified the level of broadness that exists between both organizations' missions. The U.S. Coast Guard Maritime Enforcement's mission primarily centers around law enforcement through drug interdiction, alien and migrant interdiction operations, preventing human trafficking, and other general law enforcement duties within the U.S. exclusive economic zone. The U.S. Air Force Security Forces' mission centers on integrated base defense yet must maintain proficiency in airfield security, law enforcement operations, nuclear security, ground combat operations, and many more mission capabilities. As previously stated, the incredibly broad mission of Security Forces poses a risk of reduced proficiency, especially when considering personnel rotations across different installations throughout the Security Forces members' careers. I concur with several proposed recommendations addressed by Springer (2009)—most notably, the need to send new Security Forces candidates to the schoolhouse prior to sending them directly to their first duty station as well as mandating that every Security Forces candidate receives an early exposure to the Air Force Security Forces Center. Both initiatives could succeed by relocating new Security Forces officers directly to the Security Forces Center while they are awaiting a training date. This is feasible since both the Air Force Security Forces Center and the Security Forces schoolhouse are located in San Antonio, TX. While awaiting a training date, new Security Forces candidates would remain on casual status, similar to the Initial Flight Training portion of Undergraduate Pilot Training for U.S. Air Force pilot candidates. The difference would be that while they may help with administrative or general duties during their casual status, they are also required to attend a pretraining course, or Phase Zero course. The Phase Zero course would serve to immerse the



candidates in the history, culture, structure, and broad mission capabilities of the Security Forces career field. In doing so, Security Forces candidates can expect to attend the official Security Forces Officer Course with greater confidence and more knowledge of every aspect of Security Forces. Additionally, implementing this change would remove the bias toward Security Forces members favoring a specific mission capability that they were first assigned to perform. This bias would be removed because Security Forces candidates would receive a complete immersion of all aspects of Security Forces while at the Phase Zero course rather than having a single exposure to a mission capability such as a single exposure to law enforcement, or nuclear security, or whatever mission they conduct at their first duty station. This proposed change is likely to produce a Security Forces officer that understands the core purpose of what defenders do and may improve the appreciation for every aspect of their mission capabilities. Overall, immersing the new Security Forces officer into the organizational culture of Security Forces and developing a culture-focused officer while at the Security Forces Center can create an even stronger Security Forces enterprise than currently exists.

It is certainly not enough simply to develop a culture-focused leader but rather educate the leader on the limitations that exist. Doing so serves to highlight areas that young leaders must be aware of while blending the strategic objectives of Security Forces with those characteristics identified as contributing to building high-performing teams. For this reason, instilling elements of psychological safety in conjunction with the mission and purpose of the Security Forces enterprise during the normative stage, which is when candidates are most moldable, is the ideal milestone in an officer's career. This can be accomplished by introducing these topics if candidates are placed on casual status at the Security Forces Center and proceed to a Phase Zero as indicated in the previous section. Overall, the literature and the research indicate that implementing both recommendations listed above would likely contribute to greater levels of success across all aspects of the enterprise.

B. AREAS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The two recommendations have been provided as a baseline for future researchers to use as their starting point for continued analysis. The recommendations serve as the



overall objective for future researchers to strive to achieve and would enable them to focus their research efforts on identifying specific tasks and milestones required to successfully implement the proposed changes. For example, future research should focus on identifying funding requirements while the candidates are on casual status. Of equal importance, future research should focus on working with the Air Force Security Forces Center to ensure they are capable of successfully employing dozens of casual status officers throughout the year while the casual status officers are awaiting a Phase Zero training date. This is important because if the facility is currently not capable of sustaining the increased personnel, then additional research will be required to create the capability and space necessary to allow for the increase in personnel. Additionally, future research should include the 343rd Security Forces Training Squadron to build a detailed Phase Zero training plan that captures the recommended objectives and changes that are previously listed regarding the history, mission, organizational culture, and elements of psychological safety.

C. CONCLUSION

Through this research, I have discovered that many factors contribute to the success of organizations. Several noteworthy factors include well-defined strategic management objectives, an ability to build an organizational culture and organizational climate that supports the strategic management objectives, and elements of psychological safety. These are key ingredients that, if dismissed by leaders, can have detrimental effects across the entire organization. Additionally, simply focusing on culture is not enough, but rather one must take the time to pay attention to the details because doing so will improve the likelihood of the desired organizational culture being adopted over the long-term. Leaders should focus on ensuring that the culture they are setting aligns with the organization's strategic objectives. This can be achieved by establishing a clear purpose immediately after a new team is formed or by validating the purpose after a new leader assumes command. Additionally, leaders should promote traits that are consistent with psychological safety, such as getting the team involved in important decisions by encouraging all members of the team to speak up while simultaneously being able to understand how the team is feeling and continuously striving to address any concerns that



arise. This is important since the literature reviewed indicated that the above elements were critical to developing high performance within teams and organizations.

The research supports the above as being applicable across the wide spectrum of organizations, and the U.S. Air Force Security Forces enterprise is one specific organization that can benefit from implementing these aspects of culture and elements of psychological safety. The broad “no fail” mission of Security Forces demands high-performing teams and leaders that contribute to establishing a culture of high performance. For this reason, a recommended change for the enterprise is to delay sending newly commissioned officers to their first duty station until after they have completed training at the Security Forces schoolhouse. The proposed change is to instead send new officers on casual status to the Security Forces Center where they perform general and administrative tasks while attending a Phase Zero training that focuses on educating new officers on all aspects of the broad Security Forces mission and simultaneously builds leaders focused on culture and an organization supported by elements of psychological safety. Ultimately, I believe that implementing the proposed changes would contribute to making an already close-knit and successful organization into an even stronger and more prepared force.



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