



ACQUISITION RESEARCH PROGRAM SPONSORED REPORT SERIES

Army Office of Enterprise Management Research Support: Individual Character and Acquisition Program Effectiveness

December 2024

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Prepared for the Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, CA 93943.

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ABSTRACT

The U.S. Army Acquisition Corps (AAC) has faced critical challenges in understanding how leader character links with effective acquisition program performance, particularly given its complex structure and high stakes for military readiness. This research aims to bridge the knowledge gap by exploring how leader character influences program outcomes within the AAC. Through a thematic qualitative analysis, interviews were conducted with 28 mid-career and senior AAC leaders. Key themes emerged, including the significance of ethical behavior, mentorship, empathy, and transparency. Findings indicate that leaders with strong character traits foster a positive work environment, encourage innovation, and enhance program accountability. This research contributes to understanding character links to the Army's readiness. Overall, this research may provide strategic relevance to the Army and offer recommendations for further research.



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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AAW	Army Acquisition Workforce
AAC	Army's Acquisition Corps
ACF	Acquisition Career Field
ADP	Army Doctrine Publication
ADRP	Army Doctrine Reference Publication
AI	Artificial Intelligence
CBRN	Chemical, Biological, Radiological, and Nuclear
DACM	Director, Acquisition Career Management
FA	Functional Area
FAR	Federal Acquisition Regulation
IQR	interquartile range
IRB	Institutional Review Board
LLM	large language model
OEM	Office of Enterprise Management
PM	Program Manager



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I. INTRODUCTION

A. BACKGROUND

Leaders are at the forefront of any organization, which is why the U.S. Army emphasizes the importance of leader character. A leader's character significantly influences their decision-making in their role. While character has been a well-studied subject for many years in a variety of domains, there is limited empirical research on character within the Army, particularly in the Department of the Army's Acquisition Corps (AAC). Additionally, there is a gap in the literature linking individual character traits—specifically, those of leaders—to organizational performance, especially in the AAC. Character strengths can significantly shape individual behaviors and attitudes in different social interactions and moral situations (Aluri & Li, 2022). This can be particularly important when addressing the complex challenges faced by the Department of the Army daily. Some of the known problems that may be linked to individual character include medical problems or physical illness; drug or alcohol abuse; behavior health problems and behavior health disorders; work-related problems and stress; bullying, hazing, belittling, and discrimination; financial problems; and social isolation and low self-esteem (U.S. Army, 2016).

Leader character is strategically relevant to the AAC because the success of the Acquisition Corps hinges on the behaviors and decision-making of its leaders. While this is not unique to the Acquisition Corps, the stakes are particularly high due to its critical role in defending the nation and protecting soldiers' lives, time, and financial resources. The Acquisition Corps consists of specially trained professionals—officers, noncommissioned officers, and civilians—tasked with equipping and sustaining warfighters. The relationship between warfighters and the Acquisition Corps is symbiotic: warfighters identify emerging tactical, operational, and strategic requirements, while the Acquisition Corps validates and addresses those needs with material solutions. Unfortunately, the Army's lack of emphasis regarding how leadership mechanisms influence acquisition-domain performance can severely impact its mission, potentially resulting in substandard equipment or delays in developing new weapon systems.



The Office of Enterprise Management (OEM) is a department dedicated to developing business strategies and policies, enabling governance, and promoting best practices to enhance efficiency and foster innovative solutions across the Army (Office of Enterprise Management, 2024). With the OEM sponsoring this research, the research team is committed to helping the Acquisition Corps improve its business s practices and gain valuable insights into how leader character strengths and traits correlate with organizational performance.

B. RESEARCH PURPOSE AND TARGET AUDIENCE

Our research focuses on examining the relationship between the leader character strengths and traits of AAC unit leaders and the performance of their units. The target audience for this research includes strategic Army leadership, AAC leaders, and acquisition professionals. We aim for the results of our study to help the institutional Army and AAC enhance its business practices and to develop a deeper understanding of how the character traits of AAC leaders correlate with organizational performance.

C. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Our research efforts will answer the following research questions:

1. According to U.S. AAC leaders, what role does leader character play in acquisition team mission performance?
2. How do U.S. AAC leaders apply leader character in their daily mission?
3. How has serving in the U.S. AAC changed their understanding and relevance of leader character?

D. METHODOLOGY

The research method used for this study was a thematic qualitative analysis of interview data. Our objective was to collect and analyze the interview data to describe the empirical relationship between the character strengths and traits of AAC unit leaders and their units' performance. One-on-one interviews were conducted between research team members and AAC leaders, using Microsoft Teams as the modality. The interviews were



recorded and transcribed. The participants were selected from our social network within the AAC, and we contacted them via email and phone.

Our team employed random sampling to ensure that every participant had an equal chance of being chosen. These participants were part of the AAC and came from various communities within the organization. In advance of the interviews, we informed the participants via email that they would be asked between 10 to 20 questions covering three research topic questions. Once the participants agreed to the study, we followed up with an embedded email link through Qualtrics, an online data collection platform used to capture electronic consent. The digital signature captured the participants' consent to be interviewed.

During the first few minutes of the interview, the interviewers provided a brief overview of the scope of the discussion. Following this overview, the participants were asked to verbally affirm their consent to continue before the interview questions could be asked. Additionally, the participants were reminded that the interview was voluntary and that they could end it at any time.

Once we collected the data, we used a large language model (LLM) artificial intelligence (AI) platform, specifically ChatGPT 4o, to assist with our coding efforts. All research data and recorded interviews were stored in the Naval Postgraduate School's secure cloud SharePoint. From the participants' responses, we were able to answer the research questions based on the data provided. Significantly more detail about our research approach is offered in Chapter III—Methods.

E. LIMITATIONS OF THIS RESEARCH

First, this research is focused on leader character traits within the military context in the U.S. AAC organization. Given the limited scope, the results may not be useful for the other branches of the military nor for other entities within the Army. Second, our efforts focused on gathering data from mid-career and senior leaders within the AAC and thus do not account for early career leaders. Note that the interview relies on the individual's own experience, which is subjective. Lastly, participants may be restricting themselves in reporting their experience which may limit the results.



F. ORGANIZATION OF THE THESIS

This thesis consists of five chapters. Chapter I introduces the research's background, purpose and target audience, questions, methodology, limitations, and organization of the thesis. Chapter II contains the literature review on how leadership and character are defined, nexus of leadership and character in relation to organizational performance and negative outcomes, and leader character within the U.S. Army and U.S. AAC. Chapter III contains the research method used for this study providing sample, interview's scope, and data collection procedures (hand code and ChatGPT). Chapter IV summarizes our analysis and findings from our interview questions and answers our research questions. Chapter V provides a proposal for further research.

G. SUMMARY

In this chapter, we introduced our research topic, which focuses on the role of character within the Army, particularly in the AAC. We then presented the research questions this study aims to answer and the methods we will employ. Additionally, we identified our target audience. Finally, we outlined the structure of all five chapters of our study.



II. LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review delves into the concept of character by integrating scholarly and military research. The Army emphasizes character within its organization, recognizing its importance for those who can influence and change lives. While scholarly discussions on character date back thousands of years, recent studies have applied the scientific method to explore the link between leader character and various organizational outcomes, including performance. The goal of this chapter is to examine and integrate scholarly and military research on leader character to set the conditions for the remainder of this study. We begin with a detailed review of how leadership and character are defined and contextualized. Next, we explore the nexus of leadership and character in relation to organizational performance and negative outcomes. Finally, we describe the leader character within the U.S. Army and U.S. AAC, concluding with a summary.

A. DEFINING LEADERSHIP

Leadership has been extensively studied and written about throughout history, emphasizing its importance. Strong leadership is crucial for cultivating successful organizations and fostering individual development among employees. Demonstrating effective leadership skills not only guides others but also instills confidence in leaders' decision-making, benefiting the entire team. Numerous studies on leadership suggest that people are keen to enhance their leadership abilities for personal development, business, education, and organizational success. In the following section, we define leadership from different researchers along with the distinction between management versus leadership. Lastly, we arrive at a practical definition of leadership within the context of our research.

Researchers define leadership as “a power-laden, value-based and ethically driven relationship between leaders and followers who share a common vision and accomplish real changes that reflect their mutual purpose and goals” (Gini & Green, 2013, p. 6). They also believe that leadership motivates and mobilizes people to get a task done whether the leader's action is done negatively or positively. In the end, they believe that “all forms of leadership are action-based and action-driven” (Gini & Green, 2013, p. 5).



Another researcher defines leadership in a different context, suggesting that it is a “process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal” (Northouse, 2001, p. 3). He identified the three components of “leadership: leadership involves influence, occurs in groups, and includes attention to goals” (p. 3). He contends that leadership involves influence when a leader’s action and behavior affect followers. When leadership occurs in a group, whether the group is small, large, or community sized, he claims they all share a common purpose. As leadership includes attention to a goal, the goal is to accomplish completing a task given to an individual (Northouse, 2001, p. 3). Thus, under this conceptualization of leadership, a follower needs a leader. Without a leader, a follower will choose their own path to accomplishing their goal, which may or may not align with the needs of the leader or organization.

Another topic that Northouse (2001) explores is the similarities between leadership and management; both require working and influencing people as well as accomplishing goals effectively. Wajdi (2017) concludes the same. Additionally, Wajdi argues that leadership and management are different. The major difference explained by Wajdi is that a management skill accomplishes missions and goals by planning, building, and directing organizational systems whereas a leadership skill focuses “on a potential change by establishing direction, aligning people, and motivating and inspiring” (p 1). Kotter (1990) also discusses the differences between leadership and management from a different perspective (see Table 1). Kotter suggests that management focuses on creating order and maintaining consistency, while leadership is centered on driving change and fostering progress.

Table 1. The Comparison of Management and Leadership Source: Kotter (1990).

Comparison of Management and Leadership	
<i>Management “Produces Order and Consistency”</i>	<i>Leadership “Produces Change and Movement”</i>
Planning/Budgeting	Vision Building/Strategizing
Organizing/Staffing	Aligning People/Communicating
Controlling/Problem-Solving	Motivating/Inspiring



While leadership has been explored extensively by both practitioners and philosophers, researchers highlight that its core concepts—such as influence, goals, and the presence of followers—are distinct from those of management. On the other hand, leadership and management have two different skill sets but are similar in their concerns with working and influencing people and accomplishing goals. This research combines the definitions of management and leadership to explore how the two intersect in influencing people, achieving organizational goals, and driving overall effectiveness in a military context. For this research, the most relevant definition of leadership is provided by Gini and Green, as it emphasizes the ethical relationship between leaders and followers in achieving meaningful change.

B. DEFINING CHARACTER

History is replete with philosophers' exploration of ethics and character for centuries. As one of the most well-known thinkers, Aristotle is one of the earliest to reason and teach this notion that focused on the idea of ethics and character. Through many works, Aristotle provided numerous ways to interpret ethics and character. One of Aristotle's works, in particular *Nicomachean Ethics*, was written in the fourth century BCE (Aristotle, 1999). Scholars have viewed and continue to argue that a person's character is shaped by their feelings and desires (Muller, 2019). Those desires are what gives the idea as to what a virtue here is as a sense of good and right (Muller, 2019). This idea of virtue relates directly with our focus on what is leader character and why it is good. Aristotle's work has laid a foundational perspective on understanding how ethics and character are intertwined through reason and virtue.

Building on Aristotle's foundational exploration of ethics and character, another significant figure in the discourse of moral philosophy is Marcus Aurelius. Aurelius scholar Brunt (1974) states that Aurelius "reminds himself that he has come into the world to be set over men, as a ram over a flock or a bull over a herd; he finishes with a warning against tyrannical conduct" (Brunt, 1974, p. 5). This further displays the view of character in a leadership position. Aurelius' reflections highlight the ethical obligations of a leader to exercise power with restraint and wisdom, a principle that has resonated throughout history



as a foundational element of just and ethical governance. Like Aristotle, Aurelius connects character as ethical leadership with the virtues of reason, restraint, and moral responsibility, with a relevance of character in guiding ethical behavior. We are beginning to envision how ethical behavior directly reflects character and leadership (Brunt, 1974).

Continuing the analysis on the importance of character and how that is related to ethical philosophy, Saint Thomas Aquinas offers another perspective on the intersection of character and virtue. According to Aquinas, our moral character is constituted by our habits toward good (Austin, 2017). This notion of character, discussed through the “virtues of morals,” is naturally tied to how one develops and cultivates “virtuous habits” (Austin, 2017). Through building these good habits, a good moral virtue is further developed (Austin, 2017). Like Aristotle and Aurelius, Aquinas emphasizes that the development of a virtuous character is central to ethical living, emphasizing how recurring actions and habits shape a moral sense. This theme reinforces that character, when grounded in virtue, remains a guiding force for ethical behavior. As character and virtue become more broadly understood as good, our research questions are better answered. The idea of what is character is brought forward. Themes persist, and further show the link between ethical behavior to character. Leader character and its relevance to these themes are synonymous.

Building on Aquinas’s emphasis on virtue through the cultivation of good habits, another significant perspective on the understanding of human character comes from the German philosopher Immanuel Kant. Kant’s view and writings on ethics and character are largely influenced by the period of Enlightenment in then Prussia (Dimmock & Fisher, 2017). Kant’s description is argued that through “rational reflection” a person can “establish the supreme principle of morality” (Dimmock & Fisher, 2017, p. 32). This perspective adds another dimension to the discussion on character by focusing on rationality as a foundation for moral principles tying in virtue and ethical behavior. Likewise, this view comports well with AAC work because leadership, and leader character more specifically, requires decisions made for the right reasons. To make the best choice, leaders must have a foundational understanding of what is good with strong morals in their daily lives.



Kant's emphasis on rational reflection as the foundation for establishing moral principles provides a sharp contrast to the approach taken by another German philosopher, Friedrich Nietzsche. Nietzsche's idea of character changes the discussion on rules and consequences seen in "modern morality" and instead centers on "persons" and their inner qualities (Cameron, 1999, p. 73). Nietzsche's ethics is described as an "ethics of character," where the value is based on the individual's character versus their actions or how they adhere to laws (Cameron, 1999, p. 73). Brobjer argues that Nietzsche's ideas are more in line with older "virtue ethics," which emphasizes individual values over rules, noting that "Nietzsche's ethics possesses characteristics associated with the ethics of antiquity" (Cameron, 1999, p. 74). Nietzsche critiques traditional moral systems like utilitarianism and deontology for focusing too much on "acts" rather than the "agents" themselves (Cameron, 1999, p. 73). Nietzsche's view is more about fostering personal virtues and values, making it a more "person-oriented" ethics (Cameron, 1999, p. 75). His perspective shifts the focus from external rules to the development of individual character, highlighting a more subjective and personal approach to ethics. Nietzsche's focus on individual character ties directly to a leader's character, and how the individual uses their set of virtue ethics to rationally think through decision points daily within the AAC where rules cannot make decisions. A leader's own character plays a significant role and guides the decisions made.

Following Nietzsche's focus on individual character and personal virtues, the discussion shifts to more modern views of character, particularly in the realm of corporate ethics. This view was studied and rationalized by author and philosopher Geoff Moore, who looks at character in the view of corporate character. Moore emphasizes the importance of understanding character as distinct from corporate culture, highlighting that character is rooted in virtues essential for sustaining excellence within a corporation (Moore, 2005). Moore draws on MacIntyre's concept of "virtues-practice-institution" to argue that corporate character should focus on internal goods, like the integrity and quality of work, while managing external goods like profit (Moore, 2005, p. 660). He states that without a virtuous corporate character, companies risk becoming too focused on external rewards, potentially leading to ethical compromises (Moore, 2005, p. 661). Moore further



argues that a virtuous corporate character can help maintain a balance between these goods, thus preserving the integrity of the corporate practices (Moore, 2005, p. 662). The development of corporate virtues, such as justice and temperance, is critical to ensure that corporations do not submit to external pressures (Moore, 2005, p. 673). Moore calls for the development of a corporate character that not only supports ethical business practices but also contributes to the moral development of both the corporation and its employees (Moore, 2005). This approach brings the discourse on character into the corporate sphere, emphasizing that virtues are as essential to organizations as they are to individuals. Much like a corporation, the AAC must make similar decisions that revolve around internal goods. The ideas of justice and temperance further expand the importance of leader character in the AAC as they meet their daily mission requirements.

Expanding the discussion on character and virtues from both individual and organizational perspectives, Peterson and Seligman (2004) outline six core virtues that are fundamental for human well-being and moral development throughout various cultures and historical periods. These virtues are courage, justice, humanity, temperance, transcendence, and wisdom (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Character and virtue are closely related but are different concepts altogether. Character is a broad set of ethical and moral qualities, whereas virtues are specific qualities or a traits. The virtue of courage involves confronting fears and adversities, while justice revolves on principles of fairness and equality. Humanity looks toward compassion and kindness in relationships, temperance is about self-regulation and moderation, transcendence relates to connecting with something larger, and wisdom mixes knowledge with good judgment (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Collectively, these virtues offer a comprehensive framework for understanding the components of a well-lived and meaningful life, aligning well with both historical and contemporary views on character by providing a structured approach to cultivating virtues across personal and collective dimensions (Peterson & Seligman, 2004).

The virtue of courage is explored in greater detail. Peterson and Seligman (2004) emphasize its various dimensions and applications in life. Courage means facing fear, pain, danger, or even tough situations. Peterson and Seligman (2004) describe three types of courage: physical, moral, and psychological. According to Peterson and Seligman (2004),



“Physical courage involves overcoming the fear of physical harm or death, while moral courage is about maintaining ethical integrity despite social or professional risks” (p. 36). Psychological courage is about dealing with inner problems, like facing an illness or a harmful habit. Courage is not just about big brave actions. Courage can also include the decision to keep doing what is right even when it’s hard (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). As Cicero said, courage is “the deliberate facing of dangers and bearing of toils” (as cited in Peterson & Seligman, 2004, p. 36). This understanding of courage shows the importance of not only remarkable feats but also everyday choices that define ethical character.

Following the exploration of courage as a core virtue, justice is explored as another fundamental view that influences ethical behavior and well-being. Because justice makes life fair and treats people equally, it is important in all societies (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). In some cultures, justice is about fairness where people get what they deserve, while in other cultures, justice pertains to everyone getting the same or what they need (Peterson & Seligman, 2004): “Regardless of the specific interpretation, justice involves the principles of fairness, leadership, citizenship, and teamwork” (p 37). Justice helps communities through making resources and opportunities available and shared fairly. This virtue not only ensures equitable treatment but also fosters a sense of community and collaboration, highlighting its crucial role in maintaining harmony and collective progress (Peterson & Seligman, 2004).

Building on the virtue of justice, humanity offers a more personal and empathetic approach to character and ethical behavior. Peterson and Seligman (2004) define humanity as being kind, caring, and understanding toward others. The virtue focuses on helping and connecting with people. Unlike justice, which is about fairness, humanity means going beyond fairness to show generosity, kindness, and empathy: “Virtues of humanity are often reflected in altruistic or prosocial behavior, which can be driven by empathy and sympathy rather than self-interest” (Peterson & Seligman, 2004, p. 38). Acts of kindness are valued because they uplift both the giver and the receiver (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). This virtue underscores the importance of compassion in creating meaningful connections and promoting a supportive and nurturing environment in both personal and communal settings (Peterson & Seligman, 2004).



While humanity stresses the importance of compassion and kindness, temperance focuses on self-regulation and balance, ensuring that individuals do not go to extremes. Temperance means controlling oneself and not going to extremes, especially when it comes to pleasures like eating or drinking. Peterson and Seligman (2004) relate temperance to self-control. In their view, temperance is about managing emotions, motivations, and actions without influence from others. This virtue helps avoid too much of anything, which can lead to unknown problems; “Exercising temperance leads to personal and social benefits, such as better health, productivity, and successful relationships” (Peterson & Seligman, 2004, p. 39). Examples of temperance include self-control, being careful, and being humble (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). By promoting moderation and self-discipline, temperance supports a well-balanced life that fosters personal well-being and positive social interactions (Peterson & Seligman, 2004).

While temperance stresses self-control and moderation, the next virtue that Peterson and Seligman argue offers a different dimension by connecting individuals to something larger than themselves, bringing life a deeper meaning and purpose (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Transcendence is about experiencing a connection to something beyond oneself, offering a profound sense of meaning and purpose in life. (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Not always based on religion, it can be any belief or idea that makes people feel awe, hope, or thankfulness (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Peterson and Seligman (2004) state that “transcendence is what reminds individuals of their smallness in the grand scheme of things while simultaneously uplifting them” (p. 39). This virtue helps people see beyond everyday concerns and think about deeper questions, which can help them feel stronger emotionally. By encouraging reflection on profound concepts and experiences, transcendence helps individuals cultivate a sense of perspective, resilience, and emotional strength (Peterson & Seligman, 2004).

Lastly, the virtue of wisdom is a special kind of intelligence that involves knowledge, experience, and good judgment about important, uncertain matters of life. Unlike traditional concepts of intelligence, wisdom is not solely based on academic achievements or a measured intelligence quotient. It is often acquired through lived experiences, especially those involving hardship and reflection (Peterson & Seligman,



2004). Wisdom is characterized by the ability to apply knowledge in a way that benefits oneself and others. According to Peterson and Seligman (2004), “Wisdom involves exceptional breadth and depth of knowledge about the conditions of life and human affairs and reflective judgment about the application of this knowledge” (p. 40). They further explain that wisdom is “good judgment and advice about important but uncertain matters of life” (Peterson & Seligman, 2004, p. 40). This virtue is described as “a form of noble intelligence—in the presence of which no one is resentful and everyone appreciative” (Peterson & Seligman, 2004, p. 40). Wisdom includes strengths like creativity, curiosity, judgment, and perspective, which help people navigate life’s complexities with balance and insight (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). This virtue underscores the value of thoughtful deliberation and understanding, which enables individuals to approach life’s challenges with a balanced and empathetic mindset.

Wisdom is particularly germane to the military acquisition mission; it enables leaders to make sound decisions in complex situations, allows them to mitigate risks early on, and guides them in navigating bureaucratic challenges. The Army has one advantage in terms of wisdom due to how they recruit uniformed leaders into the AAC. Specifically, most uniformed AAC leaders are post-command Captains and Majors with 7–12 years of commissioned service (Department of the Army, 2021). Thus, they have gained wisdom through their experiences in the tactical Army and are expected to carry this wisdom into the new roles as acquisition leaders. We will explore this concept later in this chapter and again in Chapter IV.

Peterson and Seligman (2004) devise and measure the classification of character strengths and virtues. They believe that strengths of character represent a path to improve one’s life. For example, having the strength of courage helps accomplish one’s goals while having the strengths of humanity display kindness and concern for relationships. Peterson and Seligman’s (2004) linkage of classifications of character strength and universal virtues is shown in Table 2.



Table 2. Classification of Universal Virtues and Character Strengths.
Source: Peterson and Seligman (2004, pp. 29–39)

UNIVERSAL VIRTUES	CHARACTER STRENGTHS
1. Wisdom and knowledge- cognitive strengths that entail the acquisition and use of knowledge	Creativity, Curiosity, Open-mindedness, Love of learning, Perspective
2. Courage- emotional strengths that involve the exercise of will to accomplish goals in the face of opposition, external or internal	Bravery, Persistence, Integrity, Vitality
3. Humanity- interpersonal strengths that involve tending and befriending others	Love, Kindness, Social intelligence
4. Justice- civic strengths that underline healthy community life	Citizenship, Fairness, Leadership
5. Temperance- strengths that protect against excess	Forgiveness and mercy, Humility/Modesty, Prudence, Self-regulation
6. Transcendence- strengths that forge connections to the larger universe and provide meaning	Appreciation of beauty and excellence, Gratitude, Hope, Humor, Spirituality

Peterson and Seligman's (2004) research is important in this context because character strengths and universal virtues can shape an organization through an individual's actions.

The virtues of courage, justice, humanity, temperance, transcendence, and wisdom all play a significant role in shaping ethical character. Courage involves facing physical, moral, and psychological challenges through actions and challenges in everyday decisions. Justice focuses on fairness and teamwork, ensuring equitable treatment and fostering community. Humanity emphasizes kindness and empathy, going beyond fairness to create real, meaningful connections. Temperance involves self-regulation and moderation, promoting personal benefits. Transcendence brings individuals together to achieve something greater, offering a deeper sense of meaning and resilience. And wisdom is the application of knowledge and good judgment in life's complexities built through experience. These virtues highlight the varied aspects of character that contribute to ethical behavior and relate directly to leader character.



C. NEXUS OF LEADERSHIP AND CHARACTER

A leader's character significantly influences an organization, affecting subordinates both positively and negatively. Empirical studies have demonstrated both positive and negative relationships between a leader's character and organizational performance, so exploring the nuance within the empirical evidence is warranted.

1. Leadership, Character, and Organizational Performance

As a leader, one can significantly influence both subordinate behavior and organizational performance. Hendriks et al. (2020) surveyed employees working closely under their immediate supervisors. While Peterson and Seligman identified six universal virtues, Hendriks et al. (2020) focus on five, with temperance, justice, courage, and humanity being the common virtues between the two frameworks. The findings of the study demonstrate that subordinates' confidence in their supervisor's ethical leadership notably boosts their job engagement, satisfaction, and emotional connection to their work (p. 965). Thus, as Hendriks et al. (2020) indicate, a leader possessing the five core virtues—"prudence, temperance, justice, courage and humanity"—"positively influence work-related well-being" (p. 951).

Various scholars identify dimensions of organizational character differently. For example, Bridges (2000) uses eight organizational dimensions while Monzani et al. (2021) uses 11 organizational dimensions as shown in Table 3. The eight dimensions of organizational character Bridges (2000) used are extraversion, introversion, sensing, intuition, thinking, feeling, judging, and perceiving while Monzani et al.'s (2021) 11 dimensions of organizational character are judgment, transcendence, drive, collaboration, humanity, humility, integrity, temperance, justice, accountability, and courage. There is no set preference for which virtues to adopt; each organization is unique and should choose virtues based on what it considers most important, whether aligning with Monzani et al. (2021) or Bridges. Bridges' (2000) identification of dimensions was more frequently cited, but Monzani et al. (2021) is the recent conception of organizational dimensions.



Table 3. Dimensions of Organizational Character. Source: Monzani et al. (2021) and Bridges (2000).

<i>Bridges's Dimensions</i>		<i>Monzani et al.'s Dimensions</i>	
1. Extraversion	5. Introversion	1. Judgment	7. Integrity
2. Sensing	6. Intuition	2. Transcendence	8. Temperance
3. Thinking	7. Feeling	3. Drive	9. Justice
4. Judging	8. Perceiving	4. Collaboration	10. Accountability
		5. Humanity	11. Courage
		6. Humility	

Our focus is more on the Monzani et al. (2001) study because it provides a contemporary perspective on leadership within complex organizations, reflecting current trends and challenges in organizational dynamics. Monzani's work offers a fresh and updated approach, integrating newer perspectives on leadership and organizational behavior while Bridges' work, though foundational, may not fully address the nuances of contemporary leadership challenges. Understanding leadership and organization dimensions is critical in everyday performance and decision-making in today's dynamic environment.

Monzani et al.'s (2021) 11 important character dimensions needed for good leadership are intercorrelated and more suitable than having a single factor. The connected structure of the leader character dimensions, with judgment in the center (see Figure 1), "showed that the leader character network was directly connected to follower positive outcomes through drive and judgement" (Monzani et al., 2021, Section Discussion). The report is useful in our research as it associates important character dimensions and associated character elements with how character influences a positive outcome in the organization and the leader effectiveness.





Figure 1. Character Dimensions and Associated Character Elements. Source: Monzani et al. (2021).

Using the same 11 character dimensions, another team of researchers—Seijts et al. (2015)—explored character role in business decisions. They consulted with professionals and students from six different fields, including business and education, all of whom had more than 10 years of leadership experience (p. 67). Their findings showed that performance-driven, accountable, and integrity-focused leaders were highly rated. The traits of drive, integrity, accountability, and judgment were deemed most beneficial (p. 70). For this study, Seijts et al. (2015) interpreted their finding that all 11 character dimensions positively contribute to leadership performance (effective leadership) and leadership outcomes (climbing the ladder for a better leadership career) (p. 70).

A positive link between leader character and organizational performance is not only studied in the United States but also in emerging economies. Yu et al.'s (2018) research explores the linkage between organizational character and organizational performance from the perspective of the Chinese people. Using the qualitative analysis method, the test used a multi-ordered logit regression analysis along with a survey of over 200 observations; exclusively in Chinese enterprises. Given the empirical analysis the researcher used, the results demonstrated that developing and nurturing organizational character can directly enhance a company's business performance and growth potential. The study also reveals that organizational character can sustain a competitive advantage if top managers develop the appropriate character traits (Yu et al., 2018). In the survey, one of the questions asked was to describe what organizational character is. Statistically, it found that the six organizational characters were used frequently. Figure 2 shows what Yu et al. (2018) derive in the analysis of the six dimensions of organizational character and two dimensions of organizational performance, along with defining what the six dimensions are. The study strongly suggests that organizational character and organizational performance can lead to a positive impact in other countries outside the United States.

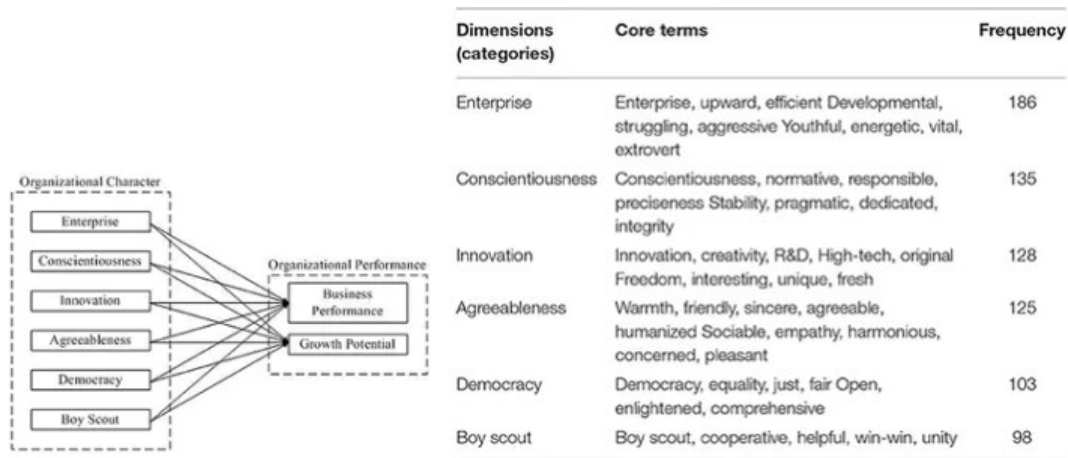


Figure 2. Conceptual Model (left). Definition of the Dimensions Categories and Core Terms (right). Source: Yu et al. (2018).

Based on these studies, leader character plays an important role in a range of organizational outcomes both within the U.S. and abroad. Indeed, research findings suggest

that a lack of leader character places organizations at risk in several ways, explored in greater detail in the next section.

2. Leadership, Character, and Negative Organizational Outcomes

The study by Cavazotte et al. (2012) suggests that a leader's transformational behaviors can significantly determine leadership effectiveness within an organization. The research explores the impact of nine factors on a leader's effectiveness within an organizational setting: "intelligence, the five personality traits (extraversion, conscientiousness, openness to new experiences, agreeableness and neuroticism), emotional intelligence, transformational leadership, and leader managerial performance" (p. 445). The study gathered data from midlevel managers at a Brazilian company and found evidence of a positive link between leadership effectiveness and transformational behavior. It also highlighted intelligence and conscientiousness as key predictors of transformational leadership. However, given the study's focus on a single organization, its applicability to broader contexts, such as the AAC, may be limited.

A leader's behavior can impact an organization both negatively and positively. When a leader's actions result in negative outcomes, they create a toxic workplace for everyone under their leadership; it can negatively affect an organization, job productivity, and the employees. The consequences of a toxic workplace are well documented, leading to increased turnover (Lee, 2018), reduced productivity (Anjum et al., 2018), and overall dissatisfaction (Rasool et al., 2021). For example, one study investigated the impact of toxic workplace environments through various dimensions, including workplace ostracism, incivility, harassment, and bullying. The research revealed that each of these factors directly and negatively affects job productivity. In addition, the study found that toxic work environments significantly increase employee burnout and stress levels, further compromising their performance and productivity Anjum et al. (2018). Likewise, other researchers have found that toxic leadership and negative workplace behaviors can lead to increased turnover and job dissatisfaction (Anjum et al. 2018). These studies emphasize the importance of cultivating a positive work environment where leaders exhibit constructive behaviors to enhance organizational effectiveness and employee well-being.



Toxic leadership produces harmful effects on turnover intention and employees' counterproductive work behaviors. Employees often avoid confronting their toxic leaders because their actions could be perceived as intolerant (Hattab et al., 2022). Even though employees may want to leave their organization due to a toxic environment, some tend to stay. Indeed, depending on cultural context, some employees hesitate to take action and instead cope with mistreatment.

Negative leadership behaviors, as shown in various studies, can have a detrimental impact on an organization through employee turnover, reduced productivity, and widespread dissatisfaction. Consequently, leaders with negative behaviors struggle to achieve their desired outcomes because their organization cannot function effectively. This finding is particularly germane to the current thesis as it highlights the critical role that leadership behavior plays in fostering either a productive or toxic environment, directly impacting organizational performance, employee retention, and overall mission readiness.

D. LEADER CHARACTER WITHIN THE U.S. ARMY

1. Defining Character and How It Applies

In the context of Army readiness, it is important to prepare soldiers to fight enemies on demand and in any type of military operation. As discussed in Chapter I, the Department of the Army is faced with problems that affect Army readiness: medical problems or physical illness; drug or alcohol abuse; behavior health problems and behavior health disorders; work-related problems and stress: bullying, hazing, belittling, and discrimination; financial problems; and social isolation and low self-esteem (Department of the Army, 2016, pp. 16–19). To help eliminate the issues the Army faces, we need to define the role character plays in a leader's daily work.

Like the academic literature, Army doctrine offers varied definitions of character, but they all tend to coalesce around authenticity and supporting the Army Values. The Army Doctrine Reference Publication (ADRP 1) defines character as “one's true nature including identity, sense of purpose, values, virtues, morals, and conscience” (Department of the Army, 2013, Sections 5–13). The Army Doctrine Publication (ADP) 6–22 defines character as “the moral and ethical qualities of the leader” (Department of the Army, 2019,



pp. 1–16). It also mentions that the importance of character in the U.S. Army’s leadership is that a “leader’s character, presence, and intellect enable them to apply the core leader competencies and enhance their proficiency” (pp. 1–15).

According to the Department of the Army (2017), America’s Army is dedicated to fostering character development among its soldiers and civilian personnel, emphasizing their accountability for all actions and decisions made. It concludes that each individual is considered an agent and a representative of the Army and nation. Thus, senior leaders in the Army have a significant responsibility for the welfare of their soldiers and establish policies and programs within their formation. Indeed, they are the key personnel in creating conditions that contribute to developing character.

Leaders in the Army are also expected to model high character. However, when the Army has multiple definitions of character, it becomes challenging for leaders to understand which definition to follow. Since the Army places a strong emphasis on character, having a single, clear definition will set clear expectations for how leaders should develop and model positive character in their job. Leaders with positive character traits have a high potential to eliminate problems that affect Army readiness.

2. Foundation of Army Character

The Army Leadership Requirements Model describes what a leader should *BE*, *KNOW*, and *DO*, regardless of what organization or echelon one is in. The model is divided into eight portions, half of which cover attributes and competencies. In the model illustrated in Figure 3, traits of character are part of the attributes section of the *BE* portion. Attributes and competencies are developed in different ways in the leadership model. Leaders develop competencies through skills and training, while attributes shape leaders through their work experience over time (Department of the Army, 2019, pp. 1–15).



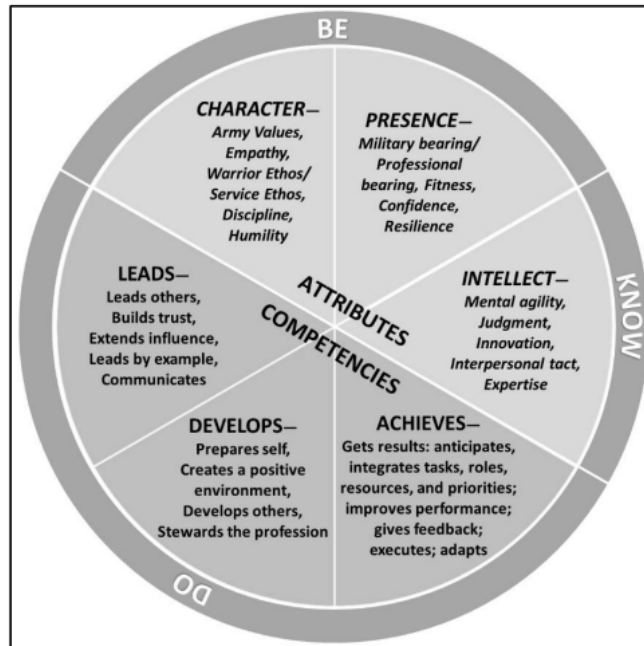


Figure 3. The Army Leadership Requirements Model. Source: ADP 6–22 Army Leadership and the Profession (2019).

The ADP 6–22 Army Leadership (2012), lays out the foundations of Army leader character: Army Values, Empathy, Discipline, Warrior Ethos, and Service Ethos. Soldiers memorize the Army Values using the acronym “LDRSHIP,” which stands for loyalty, duty, respect, selfless service, honor, integrity, and personal courage. Empathy is a crucial asset, enabling leaders to relate to their subordinates’ situations and feelings. Army leaders, having undergone similar experiences, are encouraged to connect with their subordinates. Empathy enhances leaders’ interactions by allowing them to grasp another person’s perspective and engage with their emotions and feelings (Department of the Army, 2012, p. 3-3). As our thesis focuses on character, the ADP underscores the critical role that character plays in effective Army leadership by laying out the foundations of Army leader character and its core qualities.

Discipline is another crucial asset in the Army. Soldiers are trained to control their actions and behavior, adhering to the Army’s stringent requirements. In the Army context, discipline involves obeying and enforcing “orderly practices in administrative, organizational, training, and operational duties” (Department of the Army, 2012, pp. 3–5).

This structured approach ensures that all activities are carried out efficiently and effectively. The Warrior Ethos embodies “a Soldier’s selfless commitment to the nation, mission, unit, and fellow Soldiers” (Department of the Army, 2012, pp. 3–4). This ethos extends not only to Army soldiers but also to Army civilians. It is cultivated through a deep sense of pride and commitment within the Army.

To maintain a high level of readiness, the Army must effectively prepare soldiers for combat and the management of military operations. Addressing challenges that impact readiness requires a strategic approach, recognizing that organizational issues often stem from deficiencies in training, education, and the mechanisms that embed and reinforce the Army’s culture. The complexity of this task is heightened by the expectation that leaders exemplify positive character traits—a standard that, while crucial, is often difficult to achieve in practice. Without a deliberate and sustained effort to address these issues, the Army’s ability to respond to threats and execute missions may be compromised. While the Army Leadership Requirements Model outlines the essential attributes and competencies for leaders; the ADP 6–22 lays out the foundations of Army leader character:

E. LEADER CHARACTER WITHIN THE U.S. ARMY ACQUISITION CORPS

The AAC has a unique structure within the Army. Within the AAC, there is a dedicated team of approximately 40,000 skilled professionals in the Army Acquisition Workforce (AAW), a team composed of skilled professional officers, noncommissioned officers, and civilians (The Department of the Army, n.d., p. 2).

According to the Department of the Army (2010) publication, the officers in the AAC are designated as functional area (FA) 51 officers. FA officers in the AAC can hold any of the five Acquisition Career Fields (ACFs): Program Management (PM); Contracting; Systems Planning, Research, Development and Engineering-Science and Technology Management; Information Technology; and Testing & Evaluation. Additionally, the publication it also states that an officer in the AAC is responsible to “develop, acquire, field, test and evaluate and sustain materiel by leveraging domestic, organic, commercial and foreign technologies, and capabilities to meet the Army’s current



and future mission requirements” (Department of the Army, 2010, p. 404). Finally, if the officer chooses PM as their career field, their job encompasses the following: managing materiel systems development; managing the efforts of the life cycle of a program; and writing and defining system requirements (Department of the Army, 2010).

The skill set of an Acquisition Corps officer is unique and complex, involving the management of contracts and programs worth millions and billions of dollars. They are entrusted as stewards of taxpayer dollars, ensuring compliance with the Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR), known as the “Bible” of government contracting. In addition to their primary duties, they must lead a workforce to accomplish their mission and build customers rapport. When an officer chooses a job in the acquisition field, it is understood that their character and leadership affect a program that they are working on. For example, if an officer had to navigate complex ethical dilemmas or competing priorities during an acquisition program, how a leader character guided their decision-making process is crucial in the success or failure of their program.

No matter what position a person holds, the AAW works alongside government officials, stakeholders, contractors, the joint force, industry, and foreign governments; their character in acquisition work significantly impacts their overall team’s performance. As the Army relies on its Acquisition Corps personnel for their expertise, the “organizations will be judged by the performance of leaders serving in areas where critical thinking skills are essential” (The Department of the Army, 2017, p. 6).

Critical thinking skills are part of leadership in the AAC. In the field, the AAW will likely encounter fraud schemes from contractors, instances of fraud, waste and abuse, conflicts of interest, and gifts from prohibited sources. Holding an official position increases the likelihood of facing these challenges. While these issues can create significant problems, the AAW’s sound decisions and right characteristics will justify their actions. The choices leaders make will reflect on their character and when critical thinking is used in their decision-making process, leaders can detect right from wrong.

As outlined in Chapter I and referenced throughout this chapter, our first research question is “According to U.S. AAC leaders, what role does leader character play in



acquisition team mission performance?” Based on scholarly work dating back to antiquity, we anticipate that AAC leaders will embody the qualities a leader should be, know, and do within the Army. The Army Leadership Requirements Model, which covers attributes and competencies in eight areas, while somewhat limited in its generalizability across contexts, should still reflect similar outcomes among AAC leaders, who serve as the business leaders within the Department of the Army. Given the Army’s emphasis on character, we also expect AAC leaders to describe their experiences in alignment with these foundational principles.

Our second research question is “How do U.S. AAC leaders apply leader character in their daily mission requirements?” Drawing from long-standing scholarly work, we expect AAC leaders to use similar language when discussing character dimensions and associated elements. Empirical research indicates that leaders who are performance-driven, accountable, and integrity-focused are highly regarded. While the generalizability of these findings across contexts is somewhat limited, we anticipate similar outcomes among AAC leaders, considering their roles as business leaders within the Department of the Army. Furthermore, given the Army doctrine’s focus on character—including identity, sense of purpose, values, virtues, morals, and conscience—we expect AAC leaders to articulate their experiences in a manner consistent with these doctrinal principles, as these qualities enable them to apply core leader competencies effectively.

Our third research question is “How has serving in the U.S. AAC changed their understanding and relevance of leader character?” Based on their leadership roles in previous Army positions and their transition to the AAC, we expect AAC leaders to define and understand leader character from a new perspective.

There are countless studies of aspects of Army character found in published journal articles and technical reports, but nothing to date has been published on character in the AAC organization. Because of this gap, this research will examine the concept of leader character and how it applies within the “Big A” Army acquisition circles.



F. SUMMARY

This literature review examines the concept of leadership, integrating scholarly and military research, with a particular focus on character within the U.S. Army and the U.S. AAC. The review begins by defining leadership through various scholarly perspectives, emphasizing the distinction between leadership and management.

These scholarly works, in Chapter II, discuss the historical exploration of ethics and character by philosophers, starting with Aristotle, who laid the foundation through his works, including “Nicomachean Ethics.” Aristotle emphasized the connection between virtue, reason, and ethical behavior. Marcus Aurelius, in his “Meditations,” extended this discussion to ethical leadership, highlighting the moral responsibilities of those in power (Brunt, 1974). Saint Thomas Aquinas further developed the idea by focusing on how virtuous habits shape moral character. Immanuel Kant added a perspective on the role of rational reflection in forming moral principles, contrasting with Friedrich Nietzsche’s focus on individual character and personal virtues over rigid moral rules. The discussion then transitions to modern views, where Geoff Moore emphasizes the importance of corporate character rooted in virtues for ethical business practices. Finally, Seligman and Peterson (2004) outline six core virtues—courage, justice, humanity, temperance, transcendence, and wisdom—essential for moral development and well-being across cultures and historical periods. It then explores character drawing on Seligman and Peterson’s (2004) classification of character strengths and virtues. These virtues offer a structured approach to understanding character in both personal and collective dimensions.

The relationship between leadership, character, and organizational outcomes is examined, highlighting studies that demonstrate both positive and negative impacts of leader character on organizational performance. In the context of the U.S. Army, character is defined through multiple doctrinal sources, though the review suggests that a unified definition would better support Army leadership. The Army Leadership Requirements Model and the ADP 6–22 outline essential attributes and competencies, including Army Values, empathy, discipline, and the Warrior Ethos.



The review also discusses the unique structure and responsibilities of the AAC, where character plays a crucial role in decision-making, ethical dilemmas, and overall program success. Despite the critical importance of character in the AAC, there is a notable gap in research specifically focused on character within this community. The review concludes by emphasizing the need for further exploration of leader character in the AAC, particularly regarding its impact on leadership effectiveness and organizational outcomes. As the Army strives to promote best business practices within the AAC and improve its current methods, it is crucial to establish an understanding of which Acquisition Corps leader character traits correlate with organizational performance.



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III. METHODOLOGY

The research method used for this study is a thematic qualitative analysis of interview data. Our research team applied a grounded theory approach, which consists of planning our methodology process, and collecting and analyzing data (Kaiser & Presmeg, 2019, p. 82). Part of the systematic methods used for this research included coding procedures. Our objective was to collect and analyze interview data to describe the empirical relationship between the character strengths and traits of the AAC unit leaders and their units' performance. Interviews were conducted one-on-one between research team members and AAC leaders. The modality used for the interviews was Microsoft Teams. The interviews conducted on the platforms were recorded and transcribed. This research project was reviewed and approved by the Naval Postgraduate School's Institutional Review Board (IRB), NPS-2024-0177-DD-N, and was determined to not meet the Federal definition of Human Subjects Research based upon the methodology employed.

A. SAMPLING

Our team reached out to the U.S. Army Acquisition Support Center's Director, Acquisition Career Management (DACM), to request sample acquisition support. The DACM emailed participants on their distribution lists—automatically managed by personnel systems—requesting their voluntary participation in an interview. The identified participants were Army acquisition leaders in the grades of O4-O6 or GS13-GS15 (or equivalent). Out of the 100 volunteers, only 28 were selected for our study through random sampling methods; however, 28 participants represent a sufficient sample size for our research needs. Our team used random sampling when selecting individuals from the population to ensure every participant had an equal chance of being chosen. These participants were part of the U.S. AAC and within the organization, they came from various communities such as the following: Aviation; Electronic Warfare and Cybersecurity; Chemical, Biological, Radiological, and Nuclear (CBRN); Army Watercraft Systems; and Airspace.



B. DATA COLLECTION

Data collection for the research began with three teams. Once a participant was selected from our sample group, the interviews were distributed among the three researchers. If a volunteer agreed to be interviewed, they would email our team with their intent to participate in the study. Our team then contacted the participant to schedule the interview. In advance of the interview, we informed the participant via email that they would be asked between 10–20 questions covering three broad topic questions: (1) According to U.S. AAC leaders, what role does leader character play in acquisition team mission performance? (2) How do U.S. AAC leaders apply leader character in their daily mission requirements? (3) How has serving in the U.S. AAC changed their understanding and relevance of leader character? See Appendix for the full 20 questions.

Once a participant agreed to join the study, we followed up with an email containing an embedded Qualtrics link, Qualtrics is an online data collection platform used to capture electronic consent. The digital signature recorded the participant's consent to conduct the interview.

C. INTERVIEWS

Our team followed a scripted guide, using the questions outlined in Appendix A. At the start of each interview, participants were given a brief overview of the interview's scope. After the overview, participants were asked to once again verbally confirm their consent to proceed with the interview. Additionally, participants were reminded that participation was voluntary and that they could end the interview at any time. The researchers also took notes as needed throughout the session.

D. DATA ANALYSIS

All our research data and recorded interviews were stored in the Naval Postgraduate School's secure cloud SharePoint. Combined, the interviews comprised of over 35 hours recorded. From the participants' responses, we were able to answer the research questions with the data given.



E. HAND-CODING

Using the data we collected, two research team members – the thesis authors – manually hand-coded the themes identified from the interviews. One team member randomly selected six interview questions from the interviews she conducted. The second team member followed the same process for his interviews. Each member independently hand-coded six key themes from their respective interviews without discussing or sharing their findings with one another. Afterward, the thesis authors compared their results and collectively chose the six final themes to input into a LLM AI platform, specifically ChatGPT. The first hand-coded key themes were identified using concepts from Peterson and Seligman’s (2004) Universal Virtues and Character Strengths. The second through sixth hand-coded key themes were derived using sentiment analysis to interpret the interviewer’s perspective. Please see Table 4 for details.



Table 4. Hand Code Key Themes

	6 Hand Code Key Themes	Hand Code (Action Taken)
1	Defining leadership for the Army Acquisition Corps correlates and complement the classification of Universal Virtues and Character Strengths from Peterson and Seligman-Integrity, creativity, love of learning, bravery, humor, social intelligence	Keyword search from Universal Virtues and Character Strengths from Peterson and Seligman from all 6 interviews. For exact word not found, use of nomological network (thesaurus and dictionary) to find words that are substitutes or closely correlated with the word/ synonyms
2	Leaders are valued for their ability to delegate tasks to their subordinates while trusting their team members to execute them. This delegation fosters a sense of ownership and empowerment among subordinates, contributing to higher performance	Theme found using sentiment analysis to determine participant's perspective
3	Strong emphasis on formal and informal mentorship with their subordinates where leaders are expected to guide and support the career development of their subordinates	Theme found using sentiment analysis to determine participants' perspective. Look for sentiment indicators in the text by word choice and tone (word expressed through context). Code for content of responses
4	The need for leaders to understand and care for their team members which include being knowledgeable of personal lives, and showing empathy, which helps build trust and balance to improve team dynamics	Theme found using sentiment analysis to determine participants' perspective. Look for sentiment indicators in the text by word choice and tone (word expressed through context). Code for content of responses
5	Emphasizing the importance of transparency and authenticity in their leaders. Leaders are expected to do the right thing even when it's difficult, and their behavior should be in line with Army Values	Theme found using sentiment analysis to determine participants' perspective. Look for sentiment indicators in the text by word choice and tone (word expressed through context). Code for content of responses
6	Effective and clear communication is contributed to successful program performance	Theme found using sentiment analysis to determine participants' perspective. Look for sentiment indicators in the text by word choice and tone (word expressed through context). Code for content of responses

F. CHATGPT (AI CODING)

ChatGPT is an LLM AI platform that assisted the team in extracting codes for our analysis more quickly. The Chat GPT-4o engine was utilized in the analysis; this engine was built on the previous GPT-3 engine. The language model itself was built through analysis of large data sets of books, texts, articles, websites, and other broad sources of publicly available information. The LLM was trained through recognition and training (OpenAI, 2024). The training process was methodical. Information was preprocessed, with clean, fixed terms and structures, allowing the model to process a wide vocabulary (OpenAI, 2024). Next-word prediction was a next step in the learning process of the LLM, in which the model would attempt to predict the next word in a sequence in order to refine the language process. Once the dataset was created, the LLM was scaled, optimized and



tested. The LLM continues to adjust with user feedback from each iteration (OpenAI, 2024). When prompted with ‘What is a large language model (LLM) and how do they work?’, ChatGPT generated text explaining that LLMs process and generate human language using deep learning techniques. It explained that during the training process, the model is exposed to extensive text data, which is later used to teach the model to predict words that follow in a sentence, eventually leading to pattern recognition. It highlighted that LLMs are very versatile and can perform tasks such as text generation, language translation, text summarization, and question answering (OpenAI, 2024). The reasoning behind incorporating ChatGPT’s coding effort after hand-coding was to explore its potential benefit—for example, increasing both speed of analysis and improving analysis precision—and to determine if it could align with the six hand-coded themes. The use of ChatGPT was supplementary and exploratory.

The interviews, recorded and transcribed via Microsoft Teams, served as the foundation for this narrative analysis. Once the transcripts were loaded into ChatGPT, the researchers applied a systematic approach to qualitative coding and thematic analysis. This involved an initial phase of coding to identify key themes, patterns, and sentiments related to leadership and character. Through this process, recurring themes emerged, providing deeper insights into participants’ views on these topics. The six final themes were input into ChatGPT to assess its ability to effectively support the qualitative analysis our team is conducting.

The process unfolded as follows:

1. **Familiarization:** We first familiarized ourselves with ChatGPT’s capabilities for thematic analysis. We searched for themes that ChatGPT could recognize and process effectively.
2. **Brainstorming Prompts:** Next, we brainstormed words and phrases to use as prompts in ChatGPT. After several iterations of trial and error, we identified the prompts that effectively generated the responses we were seeking. These prompts were then used to produce codes, which were further analyzed for theme development.



3. **Providing Instructions (Prompts) to ChatGPT:** We uploaded the six hand-coded transcripts into ChatGPT, using the prompt shown below. Please see Table 5 for details. We then analyzed the themes generated by ChatGPT and compared them with our hand-coded results to ensure they were relevant to our research.

Table 5. Hand Code and ChatGPT Key Themes

6 Hand Code Key Themes	Themes Emerge from ChatGPT 4o	Hand Code (Action Taken)	ChatGPT 4o (Prompt Used)
Defining leadership for the Army Acquisition Corps correlates and complement the classification of Universal Virtues and Character Strengths from Peterson and Seligman-Integrity, creativity, love of learning, bravery, humor, social intelligence	An analysis of which of the specified words were mentioned or referenced: Integrity, leadership, humor, love of learning, humility/modesty, bravery/courage, citizenship, kindness	Keyword search from Universal Virtues and Character Strengths from Peterson and Seligman from all 6 interviews. For exact word not found, use dictionary to find words that are substitutes or closely correlated with the word/ synonyms.	Prompt used: From the transcript provided, what words were mentioned? The words are Creativity, Curiosity, Open-mindedness, Love of learning, Perspective, Bravery, Persistence, Integrity, Vitality, Love, Kindness, Social intelligence, Citizenship, Fairness, Leadership, Forgiveness and mercy, Humility/Modesty, Prudence, Self-regulation, Appreciation of beauty and excellence, Gratitude, Hope, Humor, Spirituality
Leaders are valued for their ability to delegate tasks to their subordinates while trusting their team members to execute them. This delegation fosters a sense of ownership and empowerment among subordinates, contributing to higher performance	Trusting team members and delegating responsibility emerged as key elements of effective leadership. This trust must flow both ways—leaders need to trust their teams, and team members need to trust their leaders' judgment	Theme found using sentiment analysis to determine participants' perspective. Look for sentiment indicators in the text by word choice and tone (word expressed through context). Hand code for content of responses.	Prompt used: First, I'd like to start by extracting latent themes across all questions/responses. What are the primary themes that emerge across responses?
Strong emphasis on formal and informal mentorship with their subordinates where leaders are expected to guide and support the career development of their subordinates	Mentorship and development of leadership skills in others were frequently mentioned as critical components of leadership in the Acquisition Corps. Leaders who invest in their teams' growth foster long-term success	Theme found using sentiment analysis to determine participants' perspective. Look for sentiment indicators in the text by word choice and tone (word expressed through context). Hand code for content of responses.	Prompt used: First, I'd like to start by extracting latent themes across all questions/responses. What are the primary themes that emerge across responses?

6 Hand Code Key Themes	Themes Emerge from ChatGPT 4o	Hand Code (Action Taken)	ChatGPT 4o (Prompt Used)
The need for leaders to understand and care for their team members which include being knowledgeable of personal lives, and showing empathy, which helps build trust and balance to improve team dynamics	Selfless leadership, where leaders prioritize the mission and their teams over personal ambition or recognition, emerges as a major theme. Empowering others to make decisions and fostering autonomy are seen as crucial for effective program performance	Theme found using sentiment analysis to determine participants' perspective. Look for sentiment indicators in the text by word choice and tone (word expressed through context). Hand code for content of responses.	Prompt used: First, I'd like to start by extracting latent themes across all questions/responses. What are the primary themes that emerge across responses?
Emphasizing the importance of transparency and authenticity in their leaders. Leaders are expected to do the right thing even when it's difficult, and their behavior should be in line with Army Values	Maintaining ethical standards in decision-making is vital in ensuring the long-term success of acquisition programs. Ethical behavior ensures accountability and mitigates risks to program integrity	Theme found using sentiment analysis to determine participants' perspective. Look for sentiment indicators in the text by word choice and tone (word expressed through context). Hand code for content of responses.	Prompt used: First, I'd like to start by extracting latent themes across all questions/responses. What are the primary themes that emerge across responses?
Effective and clear communication is contributed to successful program performance	Successful leaders are those who foster open communication and collaboration within their teams, creating environments where individuals feel valued and empowered to contribute	Theme found using sentiment analysis to determine participants' perspective. Look for sentiment indicators in the text by word choice and tone (word expressed through context). Hand code for content of responses.	Prompt used: First, I'd like to start by extracting latent themes across all questions/responses. What are the primary themes that emerge across responses?

4. **Cross-Comparison:** Afterward, we compared and analyzed the six hand-coded themes with those generated by ChatGPT, aiming for a 90% alignment. If inconsistencies arose, the thesis authors collaborated to re-evaluate and refine the key themes.
5. **Final Analysis:** We uploaded all 28 interview transcripts into ChatGPT, along with the six hand-coded themes, to verify if ChatGPT could replicate the analysis. The set of prompts provided to ChatGPT, as shown in Table 6, represented the starting point of the iterative process. The effort to make sure that ChatGPT's token limits did not inhibit its effective interaction with the transcripts required upgrading the ChatGPT plan to the Plus. The research team then used ChatGPT to identify key themes and patterns found in all 28 interviews; the resulting themes represented the themes that



emerged from the data. The final step involved converting the qualitative data into quantitative data, as detailed in Chapter 4, “Analysis and Results.” This iterative process helped improve our team’s hand-coding effort.

Table 6. ChatGPT Prompts

	ChatGPT Prompts
1st prompt	I would like you to assist me in coding themes from interview transcripts. The participants were military and civilian members. We asked participants the following questions: (added the 20 questions)
2nd prompt	Let’s start here. I am going to upload numerous documents, each with one interview script. The interviewer’s name is either Tram Nguyen, Adam Klawitter, or Paul Lester. Respondents are labeled N*, L* or labeled differently. Some transcripts will be only with Adam Klawitter, but the questions listed above are only asked by him, and the participant responded with their answer. Not all interviews asked all 20 questions. One transcript is name file saved includes “part 1” and “part 2”-- consider these two documents as one transcript within one interview. What I would like you to do is collate the respondents’ responses to each of the 20 questions. Does that make sense?
3rd prompt	I will upload the transcripts through multiple prompts. Do not begin to evaluate until I type in a response “evaluate.” Can you do this?
4th prompt	evaluate
5th prompt	First, I’d like to start by extracting latent themes across all questions/ responses. What are the primary themes that emerge across responses?
6th prompt	Can you calculate, list and graph the frequencies of the 10 latent themes across all respondents?

G. CONCLUSION

This study employed a thematic qualitative analysis using a grounded theory approach to explore the relationship between leader character and performance in the U.S. AAC. By conducting 28 one-on-one interviews with Army acquisition leaders from various functional areas, the research team collected valuable insights into how leader character influences mission performance, daily operations, and professional understanding within the Corps.



Using both manual coding and ChatGPT for thematic analysis, we were able to identify recurring themes related to leadership character. The systematic approach to data collection and analysis, including the integration of ChatGPT for qualitative coding, allowed us to extract deeper patterns and sentiments from the interview data, providing a robust narrative on how character shapes leadership effectiveness within the AAC. The next chapter explores findings that suggest that character remains a central component in guiding ethical decision-making and fostering strong leadership in complex acquisition environments.



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IV. ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Using a qualitative research approach, the study team collected data to analyze leaders' attitudes and opinions, aiming to understand how these relate to leader character and the performance of the Army Acquisition Corps (AAC) program. The identified themes reflect consistent patterns in leadership traits and behaviors among leaders within the ACC, both military and civilian.

A. OVERVIEW OF CHATGPT

We found that ChatGPT's capabilities are effective in supporting qualitative analysis. We are not examining ChatGPT based on existing studies that validate its performance, but rather we are utilizing ChatGPT to explore its potential and assess how it can be applied to our specific work. The potential benefit of using ChatGPT from leveraging AI was its ability to extract codes for our thematic analysis more quickly, given the time frame the research team had to analyze the data. Additionally, ChatGPT is a useful counterbalance to researcher bias when reviewing qualitative data.

ChatGPT coding processed the recurring themes during the coding process. The themes in the manual (hand code) and ChatGPT's identification were robust and aligned with the research objectives. These themes not only highlight the importance of character in driving team success but also underscore the relevance of leader character in achieving acquisition mission objectives.

B. OVERVIEW OF EMERGING THEMES

We identified 10 emerging themes identified across all responses, including 1) trust and transparency, 2) effective communication and influence, 3) integrity and ethical leadership, 4) empowerment and delegation, 5) risk management and decision-making, 6) adaptability and innovation, 7) team development and mentorship, 8) vision and strategic thinking, 9) accountability and responsibility, and 10) stakeholder relationships. We expand on each of these themes below.



1. Trust and Transparency

Mutual trust between leaders and teams was emphasized in the interviews. One participant stated, “from a leadership perspective...having that trust in the organization...being willing to listen to others...not thinking that your idea is the best and having an open mind.” Another participant noted that when leaders foster trust among team members, it leads to program success. Conversely, a lack of trust can result in issues such as low team morale. Additionally, the participants stressed the importance of transparent communication. For example, one participant shared, “I am committed to transparency...ethics...and trust,” explaining that these commitments helped “build bridges to all types of people.”

Referring back to the literature, Hendriks et al.’s (2020) empirical study indicated that when subordinates trust their supervisor’s leadership, positive outcomes occur. This suggests that leaders who foster trust and transparency are more effective in achieving organizational success, which comports with the findings from our qualitative analysis.

2. Effective Communication and Influence

Effective communication is a critical skill for leaders, as emphasized by the participants. One respondent highlighted its importance by stating, “We are here to be partners. We’re here to be teammates, so really prioritize that again, just through communication.” The participant also noted that leaders with strong communication skills are better equipped to navigate ethical dilemmas. Additionally, other participants emphasized the significance of maintaining open communication throughout the chain of command, explaining that it can influence both internal and external stakeholders.

The responses suggest that communication plays a pivotal role in leadership within the AAC. This focus on communication ties back to the broader concept of leadership. As Kotter’s (1990) work comparing management and leadership highlights, leadership is about producing change and movement, and communication is key to achieving those goals.



3. Integrity and Ethical Leadership

Within the foundational theme of integrity and ethical leadership, many participants emphasized the importance of ethical decision-making and how a leader's moral compass contributes to the success of programs in the AAC. For instance, one participant discussed an issue they encountered as a program manager. When a significant problem arose, the program manager halted the program, stating, "I did feel it was a moral and ethical issue, and it was definitely the right call on that one." Ethical behavior in uncomfortable situations is critical for maintaining integrity, as doing the right thing and making the correct decisions are essential for leaders.

Integrity underscores the central role of ethical leadership, as reflected in the words of another participant, "ethics, integrity, like those things are important to me, and I still hold on to those as much as I can, even though it is very difficult sometimes." The word 'integrity' is closely linked to one of Peterson and Seligman's (2004) character strengths and aligns with Marcus Aurelius's (Brunt, 1974) discussions on moral responsibility for those in positions of power. This highlights that integrity and ethical leadership are crucial within the AAC.

As suggested by Michalos and Poff (2013), managers' choices to act ethically or unethically in a work environment are heavily influenced by key factors within that environment. The three factors that often conflict with individual managers' decisions are "corporate goals, stated policy, and corporate culture" (p. 105). Based on these factors, they argue that managers tend to make decisions influenced by the factor with the most dominant characteristics. In organizations, training courses often address unethical conduct, and this is particularly true for the AAC. Each year, the acquisition workforce is required to complete ethics training or refresher courses. These training programs assert to reinforce the critical importance of ethical standards within the AAC. Lincoln and Holmes (2008) explains that the ethical decision-making process consists of four key steps: moral awareness, moral judgment, moral intention, and moral action (p. 43). The first step, moral awareness, involves recognizing that a situation presents a moral issue. The second step, moral judgment, requires evaluating potential options and considering their possible outcomes. The third step, moral intention, focuses on the individual's decision to act based



on their moral judgment. Finally, the fourth step, moral action, reflects the individual's behavior as they follow through on their decision.

4. Empowerment and Delegation

Several participants emphasized their commitment to supporting their teams by empowering them to take ownership of tasks from a person supervising them. Delegation is crucial during complex programs, as one participant noted: "I would just say delegation and trust are probably two of the biggest character traits that my boss and I demonstrated on the team...we are not experts, and we just had to trust the team in what they were really doing." When fostering innovation within an organization, leaders empower their teams and create an environment where the team can thrive. This approach aligns with Gini and Green's (2013) definition of leadership, highlighting a power-laden relationship between leaders and followers—where leaders and their subordinates share a common vision to drive real change. These quotes from participants suggest that empowerment and delegation are critical in leadership decision-making within the AAC.

5. Risk Management and Decision-Making

Balancing risk in decision-making was a theme mentioned by several participants. Navigating the tension of making timely decisions often carries inherent risks. As one participant from the test and evaluation community explained, testers "want 99.9999% confidence in something before they let it go, which makes balancing risk difficult," yet there is "some inherent risk." Furthermore, leaders who effectively manage risk within their organizations can make informed decisions while remaining open to risk. Applying risk in decision-making is often linked to a leader's behavior, which, as suggested by Cavazotte et al. (2012), can influence leader's effectiveness within the organization.

6. Adaptability and Innovation

Adaptability was a key theme frequently mentioned by participants, particularly in the context of changes in technology and acquisition processes. Leaders emphasized that organizations fostering a culture of innovation and adaptability tend to experience higher success rates when navigating the evolving acquisition environment and advancements in



technology. They highlighted that leaders who are open and flexible to new ideas possess essential qualities for success. However, one participant expressed concern that “the government can be fairly close-minded,” pointing out that, despite its long-standing successes, it is crucial for the government to “stay abreast of trends.” A leader who embraces change aligns with the leadership definition provided by researchers Gini and Green (2013), who describe leadership as the collaboration between leaders and followers to achieve a shared vision and bring about real change. This underscores the idea that the AAC should promote innovation where feasible. For example, consider the AAC advocating for the adoption of AI to streamline acquisition processes and enhance decision-making. Implementing AI can help the AAC improve efficiency and remain competitive in the fast-evolving landscape of technology.

7. Team Development and Mentorship

Mentorship and leadership development were highlighted by the participants as critical assets of the AAC. According to participants, leaders who invest time in developing their team members not only strengthen their own leadership but also contribute to the success of their programs. When leaders provide guidance, feedback, and growth opportunities, their subordinates can flourish. For example, one participant was praised by a team member for being a good mentor after telling a subordinate, “You need to grow. You’re ready to grow. Go take on new opportunities.” This statement aligns with Northouse’s (2001) definition of leadership, which emphasizes the role of influence. It suggests that leaders should prioritize team development and provide mentorship to their subordinates, enabling them to grow and become future leaders within the AAC. Additionally, mentorship aligns with the findings of Lester et al. (2011), which revealed that exposure to mentorship significantly enhanced protégé leader efficacy. This increased efficacy, in turn, had a positive and measurable impact on independently assessed performance over time.

8. Vision and Strategic Thinking

Vision and strategic thinking were consistently highlighted throughout the responses as essential qualities. One participant emphasized the importance of



understanding strategic implications in decision-making, stating, “You have to understand the environment around you... understand the implications... of all these political aspects outside your program, outside your main day-to-day job, and how they affect what’s going on and how to navigate those because you can get there.” The same participant also stressed that, as a strategic leader, there is a need to focus on broader impacts beyond immediate responsibilities. Another participant discussed future challenges, pointing out the lack of forward planning and strategic conversations, saying, “I think just taking time... to look forward and to have those conversations and those thought exercises... it’s something that’s missing.” These responses underscore the critical need for strategic planning and related conversations within the AAC. The benefit of having a strategy is that it fosters coordination and alignment of activities, while the absence of a strategy leads to disorder and causes people to move in conflicting directions (Mintzberg et al., 2020).

9. Accountability and Responsibility

The theme of accountability and responsibility is discussed in various contexts by the participants. It highlights that when leaders and team members make decisions, they are accountable for those decisions. The interviews emphasize the need for consistent accountability, with everyone adhering to the same standards. One interview subject underscored the importance of consistent rule application, stating: “What we don’t have is consistent application of [guidance policy directives] ... as a leader... applying the same rules, policies, and guidelines equally to everyone. No one is exempt.” Another interview stresses that accountability and transparency in decision-making are achievable when team members share common goals and clear communication is maintained, leading to improved program outcomes. Accountability is one of the eleven dimensions of organizational character from Monzani et al. (2021), and responsibility for one’s actions or decisions is discussed extensively. These responses suggest that accountability and responsibility are critical aspects of leader character in the AAC.

10. Stakeholder Relationships

Building strong relationships with both internal and external stakeholders is critical to the success of any program. Character plays a fundamental role in establishing trust with



stakeholders. As one participant mentioned, “there was a tremendous amount of trust with those [stakeholders] outside the government by, you know, being upfront, honest, and doing things... it was best for the government holistically to do it that way, and once people saw that, it built trust.” The same participant also emphasized that maintaining trust ensures continued effective engagement with stakeholders. Other participants agreed that stakeholder relationships are especially critical for program managers. These statements suggest that having strong stakeholder relationships with the AAC team are essential for effective acquisition management.

In summary, the 10 latent themes identified are considered important for leadership success in the AAC. These 10 latent themes suggest a potential area for future study, which will be further explored in Chapter V, the recommendation section.

C. RETURNING TO THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In this section, we address our three focal research questions. The first is: “According to U.S. Army Acquisition Corps leaders, what role does leader character play in acquisition team mission performance?” The second is: “How do U.S. Army Acquisition Corps leaders apply leader character in their daily mission requirements?” The third is: “How has serving in the U.S. Army Acquisition Corps changed their understanding of and perspectives on the relevance of leader character?”

1. Research Question 1

Participants described leader character as an essential component of mission performance, particularly through themes like Trust and Transparency, Accountability and Responsibility, and finally Integrity and Ethical Leadership. The responses consistently highlight that leader character serves as the foundation for building strong, cohesive teams capable of executing complex acquisition tasks effectively. Participants associated trustworthiness with mission success, explaining that trust allows teams to work collaboratively and openly, which enhances decision-making and program outcomes. For instance, a participant shared how their leader’s openness in setting clear objectives and accountability practices instilled a shared commitment to project goals, directly contributing to the successful completion of a major acquisition. Another participant



explained that trust built through transparency enabled faster, more coordinated responses during a project delay, which helped the team meet a critical deadline.

Integrity was another frequently mentioned aspect, with participants emphasizing that ethical leadership instills a sense of purpose and commitment to the mission. Responses indicated that leaders who act with integrity inspire trust and respect from their teams, fostering an environment where team members are motivated to contribute to mission goals. One participant described a specific instance where a leader faced a difficult decision on awarding a contract. Despite external pressures, the leader insisted on a transparent bidding process, showing that ethical standards would not be compromised. This decision, according to the participant, set a strong example for the team and reinforced the importance of maintaining high ethical standards, even when faced with challenging circumstances.

Risk Management and Decision-Making emerged as important in linking leader character to mission performance. Participants explained that leaders with strong character are skilled at balancing the need for decisive action with thorough consideration of potential risks. One participant cited an experience in which a project deadline approached, and the team faced pressure to proceed quickly without complete data. The leader's insistence on obtaining all necessary information, despite the time constraints, led to a decision that prevented a costly error. This example underscores that a leader's character shapes their risk management approach, promoting careful decision-making that aligns with mission success. Together, these themes reveal that leader character plays a multifaceted role in supporting mission performance by fostering trust, modeling ethical behavior, and enabling effective risk management.

2. Research Question 2

Participants consistently relayed that leader character is applied daily in ways that enhance team effectiveness and adaptability, particularly through empowerment and delegation, mentorship and leadership development, and adaptability and innovation. Empowerment was a key theme, with participants explaining that leaders with strong character enable their team members to take ownership of tasks, thereby increasing team



agility and confidence. A participant recounted how their leader entrusted them with a project that required coordinating with multiple stakeholders. By delegating responsibility, the leader allowed the participant to develop problem-solving skills and experience in stakeholder management, which ultimately benefited the project's outcome by fostering a proactive, engaged team.

Mentorship also featured prominently in responses, as participants described how leader character is reinforced through consistent coaching and guidance. Many participants reflected on how leaders who embody strong character take time to mentor their teams, helping them navigate the complexities of acquisition work while instilling a commitment to high ethical standards. One participant described a mentor who regularly provided feedback on how to handle ethically sensitive decisions, emphasizing that each choice should align with both mission goals and ethical standards. This guidance encouraged the participant to consider the broader impact of their decisions, reinforcing a sense of responsibility aligned with AAC values.

Another important aspect of applying leader character in daily requirements is adaptability, with participants highlighting the role of character in promoting flexibility and innovation. Leaders who foster a culture of adaptability and openness to new ideas are better able to meet the demands of the dynamic acquisition environment. Participants cited leaders who encouraged team members to propose innovative solutions to challenges, reflecting a commitment to growth and improvement. A specific example involved a leader who, rather than following a rigid process, encouraged their team to look for alternative suppliers to mitigate cost increases. By valuing and acting on these innovative solutions, the leader not only managed project expenses effectively but also instilled confidence in the team's capacity to address challenges creatively.

3. Research Question 3

Serving in the Acquisition Corps has profoundly shaped participants' understanding of leader character, particularly through themes such as accountability and responsibility, stakeholder relationships, and vision and strategic thinking. Many participants shared that their experiences in the Corps have deepened their appreciation for



accountability, with one stating that “taking responsibility, especially when outcomes fall short, is essential for building trust.” For instance, one participant recounted a situation where a major acquisition effort fell behind schedule due to unforeseen vendor delays. The leader took full accountability, both internally and in discussions with stakeholders, which preserved trust and allowed the team to re-focus efforts on solutions. Such experiences reinforce that holding oneself accountable, even when facing setbacks, has become integral to participants’ leadership approach, strengthening their sense of character and responsibility to the mission.

Working closely with stakeholders, both internal and external, has also influenced participants’ perceptions of leader character. Participants discussed how the acquisition process requires balancing the Army’s needs with the capabilities of contractors, often requiring diplomacy, patience, and a strong commitment to ethical standards. One participant shared an instance where they had to renegotiate contract terms with a vendor, prioritizing both mission objectives and a fair partnership. Maintaining transparency and ethical clarity throughout the negotiation led to a more constructive relationship, and the participant noted that experiences like these reinforced their belief that ethical leadership directly supports effective stakeholder engagement.

Finally, the theme of vision and strategic thinking emerged as participants reflected on how their time in the Corps has influenced their long-term perspective on leadership. Participants noted that effective acquisition leadership requires not only meeting immediate objectives but also considering the long-term implications of decisions. The complexity and high stakes of acquisition work have led many participants to develop a strategic mindset, allowing them to anticipate challenges and adapt their approach to align with broader mission goals. One participant explained how observing their leader’s approach to strategic planning had reshaped their own understanding of leadership. The leader routinely emphasized the future impacts of decisions, especially regarding long-term vendor partnerships and sustainability. This forward-looking approach, grounded in a strong sense of character, demonstrated the importance of strategic thinking for fostering a vision that supports both immediate mission needs and future Corps objectives.



D. QUANTITATIVE THEMATIC ANALYSIS

This section encompasses the finding for theme frequency analysis, participant-level theme count analysis, emerging theme co-occurrence analysis, latent theme saturation analysis, and alignment of latent themes with research questions.

1. Theme Frequency Analysis

The quantitative analysis of themes among participants reveals how AAC leaders perceive leader character. As shown in Figure 4, the theme frequency analysis highlights the prominence of specific character traits, with effective communication and influence appearing most frequently at 26 mentions. This emphasis suggests that participants view communication as foundational to effective leadership, stressing that communication and ability to influence displays the importance participants place on transparency and clear communication in building rapport and ensuring mission success. Additionally, trust and transparency appeared at 25 mentions along with risk management and decision making. Trust and transparency among teams suggest that it is just as crucial to success as managing risk and making decisions appropriately.

In contrast, several themes were mentioned less frequently (22 mentions): stakeholder relationships, accountability and responsibility, vision and strategic thinking, mentorship and leadership development, empowerment and delegation, and integrity and ethical leadership. These lower frequencies may indicate that while these traits are valued, they are seen as more situational or supportive rather than essential to the core of leader character. For example, vision and strategic thinking may be viewed as context-dependent qualities, relevant in long-term planning scenarios but perhaps less critical in day-to-day interactions. Similarly, empowerment and delegation are likely seen as beneficial in fostering team autonomy and growth but may be applied selectively based on team dynamics and mission requirements.

Overall, this theme frequency analysis helps to clarify participants' beliefs about leader character. Traits like trust and communication are regarded as central themes, foundational for effective leadership, while other traits, such as strategic thinking and empowerment, serve complementary roles. This structured view of responses reflects a



balance between essential ethical standards and situational leadership qualities, demonstrating how participants prioritize traits they perceive as essential for building trust and accountability in their roles.

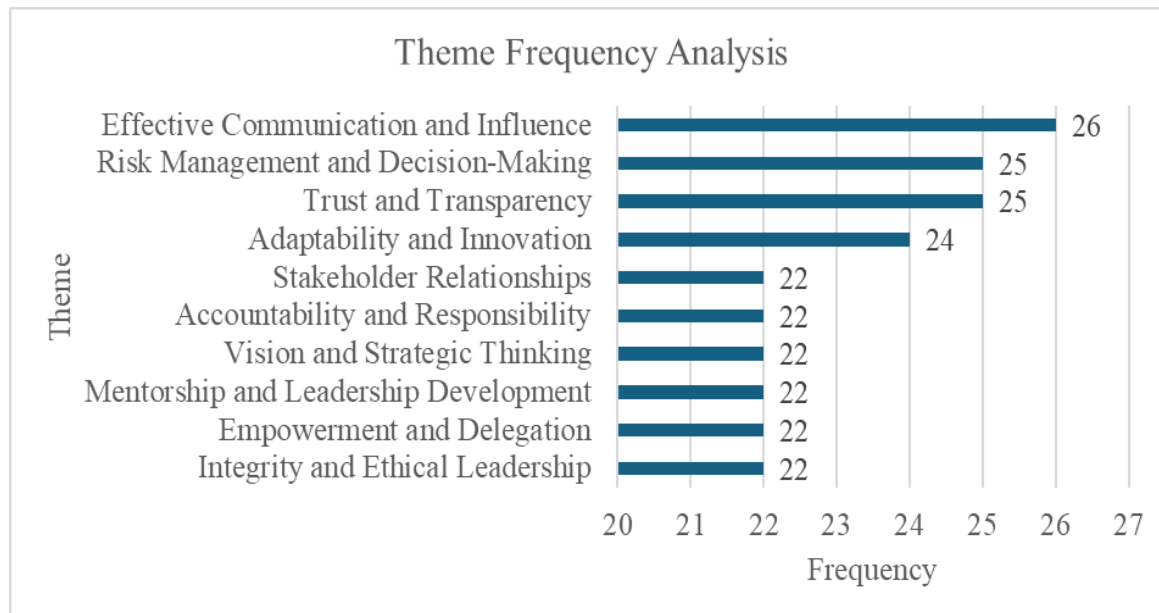


Figure 4. Theme Frequency Analysis

2. Participant-Level Theme Count Analysis

In the Participant-Level Theme Count Analysis, the number of unique themes mentioned by each participant was examined to understand the breadth of their perspectives on leader character. The average theme count of each participant was 8.3, with some participants focusing on just seven key traits, while others addressed all ten. The box and whisker plot (Figure 5) provides a visual summary of this distribution, revealing that the median theme count is around 8, indicating that half of the participants discussed 8 themes or fewer, while the other half covered nine or more. The interquartile range (IQR) spans from approximately eight to nine themes, showing that the middle 50% of participants discussed a most range of themes, suggesting a shared understanding of core leadership attributes.

Notably, 40% of participants addressed at least nine of the 10 themes, suggesting a broader perspective on leader character. Those with higher theme counts provided comprehensive responses, referencing multiple aspects such as trust, effective communication, and risk management. In contrast, participants at the lower end of the range tended to focus on specific attributes, like accountability. The whiskers in the plot extend from about seven to 10 themes, capturing the full range of responses without any extreme outliers, indicating a general consistency in participants' theme coverage. This analysis displays a moderate variability in participants' understanding of leader character, with few displaying a narrow focus while others exhibit a more holistic perspective by addressing a wider array of themes.

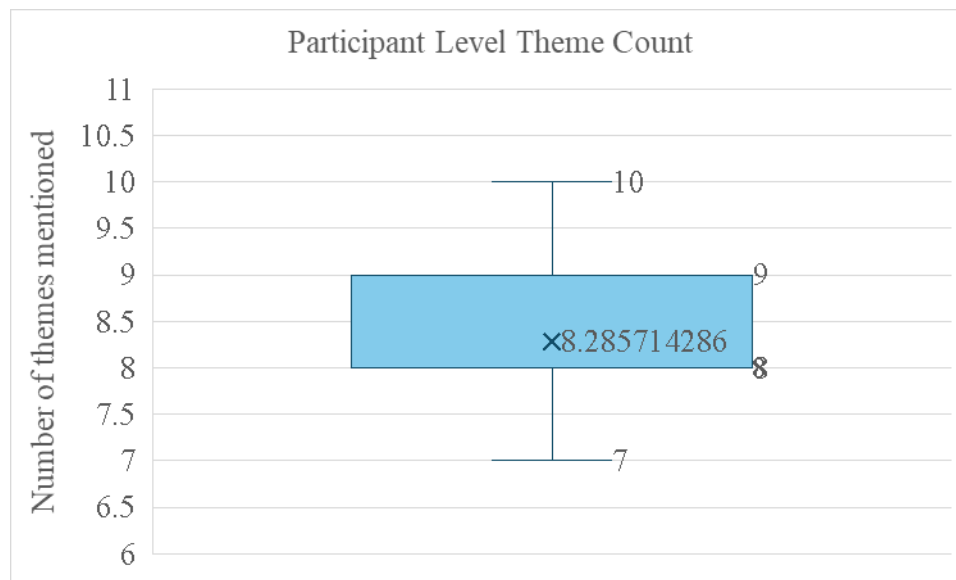


Figure 5. Participant Level Theme Count

3. Emerging Theme Co-Occurrence Analysis

The Emerging Theme Co-Occurrence Analysis presented in Figure 6 illustrates patterns in how frequently different themes were mentioned together by participants, revealing significant relationships among leadership qualities. In particular, accountability and integrity co-occurred nine times, suggesting that participants view these qualities as closely intertwined, with accountability closely aligned with integrity. This indicates that

participants perceive both accountability and integrity got hand-in-hand within acquisition teams. Unsurprisingly, both integrity and ethical leadership along with accountability and responsibility have the highest co-occurrences with the other themes at 57 each. This further suggests that both integrity and accountability are foundational points for a successful team.

Similarly, integrity and effective communication were mentioned together eight times, indicating a strong connection between ethical behavior and clear communication. This co-occurrence suggests that participants see ethical leadership as requiring openness and clarity, reinforcing the idea that leaders who communicate honestly are likely to be trusted and respected.

Risk management and decision making co-occurred with empowerment and delegation eight times. Participants likely see delegation of responsibility and empowerment as critical to decision making and reliance on team members. Risk management and decision making also co-occurred with trust and transparency eight times as well. These separate themes aligning with decision-making suggest the importance of trust and empowerment with managing risks. Likewise, this result underscores the importance of trust across themes; indeed, our assessment is that trust is ubiquitous across a range of themes and topics related to AAC work.

The matrix also includes lower-frequency pairs, such as trust with vision (two occurrences) and communication and stakeholder relationships (three occurrences). These less frequent connections may reveal that these themes are related, but they are perhaps considered less important to the focus on leader character. Overall, Figure 6 reveals that participants see certain themes, such as integrity and accountability, as fundamental pairings in effective leadership, while other qualities, such as adaptability and vision and strategic thinking are valued for their specific contextual benefits.



Theme	Trus	Comm	Intg	Empwr	Risk	Adapt	Ment	Vision	Accnt	Stake
Trust	0	7	5	6	8	3	4	2	5	6
Effective Communication	7	0	8	5	7	4	6	5	8	3
Integrity	5	8	0	6	7	6	7	4	9	5
Empowerment	6	5	6	0	8	5	7	6	4	7
Risk Management	8	7	7	8	0	6	5	7	8	6
Adaptability	3	4	6	5	6	0	4	6	7	5
Mentorship	4	6	7	7	5	4	0	5	6	8
Vision	2	5	4	6	7	6	5	0	4	5
Accountability	5	8	9	4	8	7	6	4	0	6
Stakeholder Relationships	6	3	5	7	6	5	8	5	6	0

Figure 6. Emerging Theme Co-Occurrence Analysis

4. Latent Theme Saturation Analysis

In the Latent Theme Saturation Analysis, participants were evaluated based on the number of unique themes they mentioned in their responses, with the threshold for low saturation calculated at 7.36 (one standard deviation below the average of 0.92), as shown in Figure 7. This threshold helps identify participants with a more limited perspective on leader character by pinpointing those who mentioned fewer than six themes. According to the analysis, only six participants were flagged as low-saturation, indicating that their responses covered a narrower range of themes compared to the rest of the group.

These low-saturation participants predominantly focused on core themes such as integrity and trust, suggesting a more specialized understanding of leader character. This narrower focus may indicate that these individuals prioritize foundational traits essential to ethical leadership but may lack engagement with a broader array of themes that support versatility in dynamic environments. By concentrating on a limited set of core values, these participants may demonstrate a solid foundation but may also benefit from exploring other complementary leadership qualities.

Identifying participants with low theme saturation allows for targeted development opportunities. By encouraging these individuals to expand their understanding to include less emphasized themes like adaptability and empowerment, they can enhance their leadership toolkit and be better prepared to navigate the complexities of acquisition roles. This analysis, supported by the data in Figure 7, provides valuable insights for tailoring

training and professional development initiatives to foster a well-rounded approach to leader character within the AAC.

Participant	Number of Themes Mentioned	Low Saturation (< 1 std dev below average)	Participant	Number of Themes Mentioned	Low Saturation (< 1 std dev below average)
P1	8	No	P15	10	No
P2	9	No	P16	9	No
P3	8	No	P17	9	No
P4	8	No	P18	10	No
P5	8	No	P19	7	Yes
P6	7	Yes	P20	9	No
P7	7	Yes	P21	9	No
P8	7	Yes	P22	8	No
P9	8	No	P23	9	No
P10	8	No	P24	7	Yes
P11	8	No	P25	10	No
P12	8	No	P26	9	No
P13	8	No	P27	9	No
P14	8	No	P28	7	Yes
Average		8.285714286			
Std Dev		0.920292766			
Threshold		7.36542152			
Below Threshold Total		6			

Figure 7. Latent Theme Saturation Analysis

The Alignment of Latent Themes with Research Questions analysis examined how each theme aligned with the study's primary research questions. Figure 8 provides a detailed view of how participants aligned each theme with the study's primary research questions, highlighting the role of leader character in different contexts. For research question 1, which focuses on the role of leader character in mission performance, themes such as trust and transparency (15 mentions) and accountability and responsibility (20) along with integrity and ethical leadership (22) are strongly represented. This suggests that participants consider trust, accountability, and integrity as foundational for achieving successful mission outcomes, reinforcing the idea that these traits are essential for team cohesion and reliability in acquisition tasks.

Question 2, which examines the daily application of leader character, risk management and decision-making, stands out with the highest alignment (19 mentions).



This high frequency highlights the importance of adaptability and sound decision-making in the AAC's everyday operations. Participants appear to view character traits that support flexible and thoughtful responses to challenges as crucial for effective leadership on a daily basis. Themes like effective communication and empowerment and delegation align well with this question, suggesting that leaders need to communicate effectively and empower their teams to navigate routine tasks successfully.

Lastly, question 3 explores participants' overall understanding of leader character, shows a strong association with integrity and ethical leadership (20 mentions). This alignment reflects participants' belief that ethical conduct forms the backbone of leader character, shaping their overarching view of what makes an effective leader in the AAC. Other themes, such as stakeholder relationships and vision and strategic thinking, also align with this question, indicating that participants see the ethical and strategic dimensions of leadership as central to their roles in acquisition. The responses indicate that while some themes are consistently valued across all contexts, specific traits are prioritized for mission performance, daily operations, and overall leadership philosophy. This similar alignment demonstrates how AAC leaders apply different character traits based on situational demands, reinforcing a well-rounded approach to leadership.

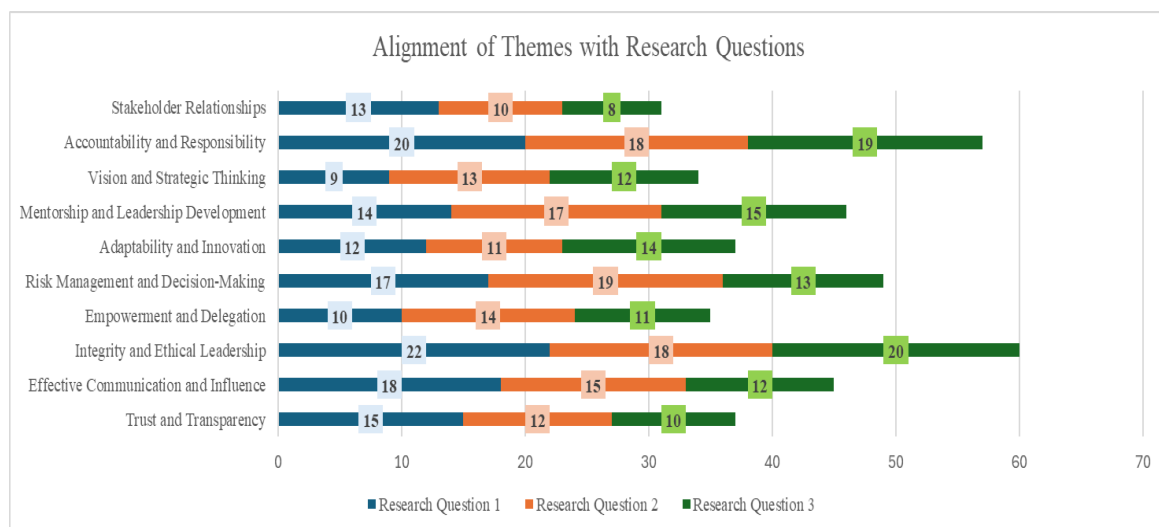


Figure 8. Alignment of Themes with Research Questions

E. INCONSISTENCIES IN THEMATIC ANALYSIS

Across the data set from the interviews, a few inconsistencies were observed in participants' perspectives on leader character. While certain core themes, such as integrity, trust, and effective communication were widely regarded as essential, the emphasis on these traits and their perceived relevance varied among participants. Some consistently prioritized these core attributes across different leadership contexts, while others mentioned them selectively, applying them primarily to specific aspects of leadership, such as mission-critical scenarios or strategic decision-making. This variation suggests differing views on what constitutes foundational leadership qualities, reflecting the diverse backgrounds and experiences within the participant group.

Additionally, there was an inconsistency in the depth of responses regarding the range of leadership themes discussed. While some participants provided a broad perspective on leader character by addressing multiple themes, others focused on a narrow set of attributes, often leaving out themes such as adaptability or stakeholder relationships. This difference indicates a possible misunderstanding of definitions or differing prioritizations of leader character qualities. Such diverse views underscore the lack of a universally shared framework for leader character, showing potential areas for alignment in understanding leadership priorities.

The alignment of themes with the study's research questions revealed some inconsistencies in how participants applied specific traits to different leadership settings. Certain themes, such as trust and risk management, were linked to different research questions by various participants, indicating either a lack of consensus on the situational application of these traits, or an over-broad view of those same traits. While there was general agreement on the importance of core leadership qualities, the varied ways in which participants linked these themes to daily operations, mission performance, and overarching leadership principles suggest a wide interpretation of leader character's definition and the role it plays. These inconsistencies highlight areas where training and education may lead to a better alignment of AAC leader understanding of character attributes.



F. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

This qualitative analysis investigated the perspectives of AAC leaders on the role of leader character in driving program performance. Using qualitative data from participant interviews, our analysis identified 10 core leadership themes, including trust, integrity, effective communication, and adaptability. These themes reflect consistent patterns in leader behaviors and attitudes, underscoring the importance of character traits that promote ethical decision-making, clear communication, and team cohesion. By incorporating ChatGPT in the thematic analysis alongside manual coding, the research team was able to identify and organize recurring themes, which aligned well with the research objectives and highlighted the central role of leader character in achieving acquisition mission success.

This analysis found that AAC leaders apply leader character in various ways across different contexts. For instance, themes like trust and accountability were particularly valued for their role in mission performance, while adaptability and delegation were more relevant in daily operations. Additionally, integrity and ethical leadership emerged as fundamental to participants' overarching understanding of effective leadership. However, some inconsistencies were evident in how participants applied specific traits to different leadership settings, with certain qualities, such as risk management and stakeholder relationships, being prioritized differently by each individual. This variation reflects a diverse range of views on what constitutes effective leadership and how leader character should be applied in different contexts, and this conceptual diversity is not a problem per se, but it may be an intervention point should AAC leadership wish to pursue it.

While there was general agreement on the importance of core themes, the varied emphasis on certain traits highlights differences in interpretation based on individual experiences and situational demands. The analysis revealed that some participants focused narrowly on a few core attributes, while others took a broader approach, covering a wide range of qualities. Such variability underscores the importance of developing a more unified framework for leader character within the AAC, one that balances core ethical standards with situational adaptability, ensuring all leaders have a shared understanding of the qualities necessary for effective leadership in acquisition roles.



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V. CONCLUSION AND AREAS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

In this chapter, our thesis presents the findings and recommendations, explores areas for further research, and concludes with a final summary.

A. FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In this research, our team answered the following three research questions: (1) According to U.S. AAC leaders, what role does leader character play in acquisition team mission performance? (2) How do U.S. AAC leaders apply leader character in their daily mission requirements? and (3) How has serving in the U.S. AAC changed their understanding and relevance of leader character?

1. Research Question 1

Army Acquisition Corps leaders consistently emphasized that leader character is vital for mission performance, particularly in high-stakes and complex acquisition tasks. Participants noted that traits like trust, transparency, and accountability are foundational for creating a positive team culture, where open communication and ethical behavior are valued. Leaders with strong character inspire trust and encourage collaboration, enabling their teams to make coordinated and timely decisions. For instance, some participants shared that when leaders set clear expectations and communicate transparently, team members feel more empowered and committed to the program's success. These findings indicate that leader character is not only important for team cohesion but also for instilling a shared sense of responsibility and mission alignment.

We offer three recommendations related to these findings. First, the AAC should consider developing a targeted leadership development programs that focus on cultivating key character traits such as trust, transparency, and accountability. These programs could include real-world scenarios from complex acquisition tasks, allowing leaders to practice ethical decision-making while fostering open communication. Second, the AAC should continue to promote a culture of ethical leadership by equipping leaders with resources to effectively navigate ethical dilemmas during high-stakes decision-making. Finally, the AAC senior leadership should reinforce the importance of mission alignment by



encouraging leaders to clearly and consistently communicate the organization's mission and goals, ensuring that all team members understand how their individual contributions support overarching objectives.

2. Research Question 2

Participants described how leader character is consistently applied in daily operations to foster adaptability, accountability, and resilience within teams. Empowerment and delegation emerged as central practices, with leaders intentionally entrusting team members with responsibilities. Participants shared examples of leaders who routinely mentor their subordinates on handling ethically challenging situations, ensuring that every decision aligns with the Corps' values. Adaptability and innovation were frequently mentioned, with leaders encouraging their teams to propose creative solutions and approach problems flexibly.

We identified three recommendations based on these findings. First, the AAC should enhance ethical decision-making training and education. This can be achieved by integrating scenarios involving ethically challenging situations into leader development programs, thereby helping to strengthen decision-making that aligns with the Corps' values. Second, the AAC should implement a structured feedback mechanism. For instance, establishing feedback loops between leaders and their teams would enable continuous assessment and refinement of practices such as empowerment, mentorship, and adaptability. Third, the AAC should promote a culture of innovation by encouraging regular brainstorming sessions and hosting innovation labs where team members can propose and evaluate ethical yet creative solutions in a low-risk environment.

3. Research Question 3

Serving in the AAC has significantly influenced participants' understanding of leader character, deepening their appreciation for accountability, stakeholder relationships, and strategic thinking. Participants explained that their experiences in acquisition have reinforced the importance of taking full responsibility for outcomes. Many shared instances where they had to balance internal mission objectives with the needs and expectations of industry partners, highlighting that ethical and responsible behavior is essential for building



long-term relationships. This underscores the idea that leader character is shaped by experience, and that a strategic, accountable approach is crucial for sustained success in acquisition roles.

Our three recommendations based on the findings are as follows. First, the AAC should implement stakeholder analysis and engagement training and education. This could include targeted programs focused on building and maintaining ethical, long-term relationships with industry partners, featuring workshops on communication strategies, conflict resolution, and stakeholder alignment. Second, the AAC should prioritize continuous professional development by establishing periodic workshops or refresher courses that reinforce key aspects of leader character. Additionally, as part of the education and training program, leaders should be both encouraged and taught how to reflect on their experiences and identify areas for growth through structured self-assessments.

B. AREAS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

In this study, we focused on military and civilian leaders within the Army Acquisition Corps. While the research has shed light on important aspects of leader character, further study is needed to fully understand the complexities of leadership in acquisition and the varying definitions and uses of common terminology. We suggest the following areas for additional research:

1. Comparative Studies Between Military and Civilian Acquisition Leaders

This research focused on AAC leaders, but further research could explore character differences between military and civilian leaders within acquisition programs. Our research team interviewed six uniformed-military leaders and the remaining 23 were civilians. By comparing leadership traits across these groups, researchers could identify unique qualities or common challenges in acquisition leadership. This comparison could enhance understanding of how military training and civilian experience contribute to leader character, which could improve training and recruitment practices for acquisition roles.



2. The Impact of Specific Character Traits on Program Outcomes

Future studies could examine how specific character traits, such as risk management or adaptability, directly affect program performance. By measuring the impact of individual traits on acquisition outcomes, researchers could pinpoint which aspects of character have the most influence on success. This knowledge would allow AAC to tailor its leadership training to emphasize the traits that specifically drive performance, ensuring that leaders are better equipped to handle the demands of the acquisition community.

C. SUMMARY

This study underscores the critical role of leader character within the Army Acquisition Corps, revealing that character traits such as integrity, effective communication, and adaptability are key to mission success. Through analyzing leaders' perspectives, the research highlights how these traits contribute to building strong, cohesive teams, fostering ethical decision-making, and achieving reliable program outcomes. Leaders who consistently demonstrate trustworthiness and transparency not only create a supportive and accountable work environment but also instill a shared commitment to the program's goals. These findings emphasize that leader character serves as the foundation for successful leadership in acquisition, where complex tasks and high-stakes decisions require both individual and collective integrity.

The research shows that leader character is not a fixed set of traits found on a poster, but rather a dynamic quality shaped by experience and situational demands. AAC leaders apply character traits flexibly, adapting their approach to meet both daily operational needs and broader mission objectives. For example, through mentorship and empowerment, leaders foster a culture of responsibility and innovation, encouraging team members to take initiative while upholding high ethical standards. This adaptability in applying leader character allows AAC leaders to address the evolving challenges of acquisition work, supporting both immediate problem-solving and long-term strategic planning.



APPENDIX. INTERVIEW SCRIPT

Interview Script – Army Acquisition Corps character project

Greeting: Good morning / afternoon NAME, thank you for participating today. I have a few administrative things to go over with you first, starting with me recording and transcribing the conversation. Are you OK with that?

*****Press record in Teams*****

*****Turn on live transcriptions in Teams*****

So, the first thing I need to go over with you before we start the interview is to remind you that participation in this study is completely voluntary and you may choose to end our interview at any time. Additionally, you have the option to direct me to not include your responses in the study at any time between today and October 1, 2024. To do so, all you must do is email me and I will ensure your responses are removed from the study.

The interview today will take about 30–45 minutes to complete, and I'll be asking you between 10–20 questions. We are interviewing approximately 30 other people on this project for a report we are writing for the Army. We will not include your name in the study, but even so there is still a slight risk that someone will figure out that you participated in the study. Likewise, it is possible that the research team may be required to divulge information obtained during the interview to your chain of command or other legal body, but we will do so **only** if ordered by the NPS President or someone with legal authority to compel the research team to do so. Also, I am obligated to make all mandatory reports regarding sexual assault, substance abuse, suicidal ideations, conduct unbecoming and threats of bodily harm to self or others.

You already consented to participate in the study when you scheduled the interview, but I want to ask again before we get into the questions: **Do you consent to participate in this study?**

OK great, let's get started with the first question.

Must ask



1. In your experience, how would you define “leader character” within the context of the Army Acquisition Corps, and why is it important for acquisition program performance?
2. Can you share a specific example from your career where you observed leader character positively impacting an acquisition program’s performance? What qualities did the leader exhibit in that scenario?
3. Conversely, have you ever encountered a situation where a lack of leader character negatively affected an acquisition program’s performance? How did this manifest, and what could have been done differently?
4. What specific character traits do you believe are most crucial for leaders within the Acquisition Corps, and how do these traits contribute to successful program management?
5. How do you balance the need for decisiveness and agility in decision-making with the requirement for thoroughness and diligence in acquisition processes, and how does this balance affect program performance?
6. Looking ahead, what do you believe will be the most pressing challenges or opportunities related to leader character and acquisition program performance in the future, and how do you plan to address them?
7. Can you discuss the role of mentorship and leadership development in shaping leader character within the Army Acquisition Corps, and how this contributes to program success?
8. How do you ensure accountability and transparency in decision-making processes within your team or unit, and what impact does this have on acquisition program performance?
9. How do you foster a culture of innovation and adaptability within your team or unit, and what role does leader character play in promoting innovative solutions to acquisition challenges?



10. Can you discuss a time when you had to navigate complex ethical dilemmas or competing priorities during an acquisition program, and how your leadership and character guided your decision-making process?
11. In what ways do you prioritize the development and well-being of your team members, and how does this contribute to the overall success of acquisition programs under your leadership?
12. Can you share insights into how you build and maintain strong relationships with industry partners and contractors, and how these relationships influence acquisition program performance?
13. Looking back on your career, what lessons have you learned about the importance of leader character in driving successful outcomes in acquisition programs, and how do you apply these lessons in your current role?

If time allows:

14. How do you prioritize fostering a culture of integrity and ethical behavior within your team or unit, and how does this influence the outcomes of acquisition programs?
15. How do you approach building trust and rapport with stakeholders both within and outside of the Army when leading an acquisition program, and how does this impact program performance?
16. Can you discuss a time when you faced significant challenges or obstacles during an acquisition program, and how your leadership and character traits helped you navigate and overcome those challenges?
17. How important is diversity of education or experience to the effectiveness of acquisition programs? In what ways?
18. How do you handle situations where there is a conflict between personal integrity and organizational pressures or expectations within the acquisition process, and how does this impact program performance?



19. What strategies do you employ to effectively communicate the vision and objectives of an acquisition program to your team members, stakeholders, and other relevant parties, and how does this influence program outcomes?
20. How do you approach risk management and mitigation within the context of acquisition programs, and how does your leadership style impact the identification and resolution of risks?

Thank you NAME, I thought that was a great interview and I appreciate your time. You probably figured out based on the questions I asked that the main focus of our study is looking at the link between Army Acquisition Corps leader character and organizational performance. We will analyze the data and write up a report that will be shared with the Army's Office of Business Transformation and with the Acquisition Support Center leadership

Do you have any other questions of me?

Once again, please don't hesitate to contact me if you later have a concern about the interview. Have a great day!



DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

Professor Lester agrees with Capt Klawitter's and SSG Nguyen's decision to use generative AI in a limited capacity to identify themes, patterns, and sentiments related to leadership and character for our research paper analysis. Additionally, we utilized AI to define the concept of a large language model. Specifically, we employed Chat GPT-4o, using various prompts as outlined in Chapter III.

As our team used ChatGPT for thematic and sentiment analysis, we took steps to minimize the risk of the tool introducing unapproved language into our thesis paper. To ensure quality, we reviewed each suggestion individually before adopting it, validated sentiment categorizations against our own understanding, and cross-checked themes with the interview data to ensure accuracy. For added quality control, we held numerous discussions with our coach from the Graduate Writing Center.



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